

Worthy of Our Heritage



**A Brief History
of
America's Oldest Maritime Union**

Published in Commemoration
of the Centennial Anniversary
Marine Engineers Beneficial Association
1875-1975



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Worthy of Our Heritage
A Centennial Anniversary Publication
of the
National Marine Engineers Beneficial Association
AFL-CIO
1875-1975

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Printed in U.S.A.



Introduction

'In the Forefront of the Struggle'

The 100 years which have passed since the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association was created by the hard-pressed engineering officers of ships on the Great Lakes have indeed constituted a century of progress and a century of success.

Through these five score years, the men of MEBA have maintained their faith in their organization and in the principles of American labor unionism. And in return their union has served them well.

A hundred years ago the engineering officer lived an uncertain existence. Exploitation and poor working conditions were the accepted norm. Today, through the collective bargaining process and the essential strength of the union, the engineering officers of the American merchant marine have achieved a status commensurate with the greatly increased responsibilities of their position.

But through this century so often marked by turmoil and trouble, MEBA has not been content to work only for the immediate economic concerns of its own members. We have been in the forefront—as indeed it is our duty to be—of the struggle to improve the quality and the strength of the American merchant marine. For altogether too many years, too many Americans have been content to accept the propaganda that

this country need not have a strong merchant fleet, that the men and women who serve the merchant marine are overpaid, and that the quality of service offered both by licensed officers and crew were inferior. The propaganda is false.

Fortunately, in recent years, we have begun to overcome that hostility. With the passage of the Shipbuilding Act of 1970 long overdue changes began to take place. Perhaps we can hope that as our country moves towards the almost inevitable crises of the last quarter of this twentieth century, we will at last have a merchant marine worthy of our heritage as a great trading and seafaring nation. The tradition of the Yankee Clipper must once again be revived under the American flag on the high seas of the world.

MEBA proudly presents this very brief history of our union—proudly because of our accomplishments, yet with humility for our shortcomings and with renewed hope and optimism for our future.

We dedicate this volume to the brave men of MEBA and the American merchant marine who through toil and sacrifice have served their country well during this past century. They have left us an enduring heritage for the years that lie ahead.



Jesse M. Calhoun
President
Marine Engineers Beneficial Association





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Steam Pressure Forms A Union

The idea of a Marine Engineers Beneficial Association was born—more than a century ago—amid the explosion of steamboat boilers along the Mississippi and its tributaries, and on the Great Lakes.

Steam to power ships had been developed in the East in the early 1800s. Robert Fulton's "Clermont" had shown young America and the world that the age of sail was ending. But it was on the great inland rivers that the American steamship first came into its own. There, the great wave of exploration and settlement created a heavy, excited demand for faster river transportation for both people and goods.

What resulted was the hectic, romantic, shortlived "Golden Age" of the river paddlewheelers.

America's ocean fleet, in contrast, continued to be dominated by sail. Although the USS Savannah was the first steamship to cross the Atlantic—May 22, 1819, the day the historic voyage began, is now celebrated as National Maritime Day—America's traders and shipowners maintained their affection for the fast "Yankee Clippers" whose handsome sails, when

expertly managed, could produce 18 to 19 knots with a favorable wind.

The early inland boats were built for speed and, unfortunately, not for long lives. They were hastily and slightly constructed, powered by cheap engines. The supply of engineers for the new craft of "marine engineer" came from the shore-side engine shops and saw mills. But because the demand was so heavy for this new service and because the bare rudiments of operation of the simple engines were so quickly learned, the river vessels were too often manned by untrained or incompetent persons.

A Dangerous Occupation

The need was for speed to meet the competition; so, river steamboat engineers worked with higher and higher boiler pressures. Results both predictable and disastrous ensued. Boilers blew up, frequently and spectacularly, with considerable loss of life. Working close to the boilers, the marine engineers were almost guaranteed to suffer painful accidents or a terrible death.

Faced with such intolerable working conditions, the engineers began pressuring Congress for some sort of protection. And because the explosions were so numerous and so visible, public pressure was added to the engineers' efforts demanding new safety regulations. In 1838, Congress passed the first Steamboat Act. However, it merely required shipowners to employ "a competent number of experienced and skilled engineers." A provision sought by the engineers manning the

OUR FOUNDING FATHERS

These were the delegates to the first convention of the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association. It took place in Cleveland, February 23-26, 1875.

Front row: Rodolphus Doty, Cleveland; Garret Dow, Buffalo, who was elected MEBA's first president; Abner L. Foote, Baltimore; J. W. Shea, St. Louis.

Rear row: William Kennedy, Cleveland; Thomas Buchanan, Detroit; James V. Hayes, Buffalo; William Sheffer, Baltimore; William Ponsonby, Chicago.

THE 1889 CONVENTION
In 1889 the MEBA delegates—
each with a derby and a
moustache—met in Baltimore
and were greeted by Mayor F. C.
Latrobe, who posed with them
for this picture on the steps of
City Hall.



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vessels which would have required examinations and licensing was dropped.

Although the Steamboat Act of 1838 was superficial, it did at least establish the principle of federal regulation. And it gave the marine engineers a focal point for the organizational and legislative efforts they were to develop successfully during the decades which followed.

Law or no law, the rash of steamboat explosions and burnings continued, demonstrating again and again the weakness of the initial Steamboat Act. Thus it was no surprise that engineers along the rivers began to form associations to bring pressure for stronger legislation. Most of these early associations proclaimed themselves to be nothing more than "professional societies" with no interest in the setting of wage

rates; some even had constitutional prescriptions against such overt trade union type action, or even "discussions of them" at local meetings. By 1848, it was estimated that engineer associations were functioning in almost every city along the Ohio and the Mississippi. Despite their early claims of "professionalism only," they proved themselves able to become quite militant in later years as circumstances required.

Following some particularly spectacular steamboat explosions, Congress in 1852 passed the most important of the early Steamboat Acts. This required the licensing of not only engineers but also pilots on passenger steamboats, and it established an inspection system for steamboat machinery. Further, the engineer, along with the pilot, was empowered to order the anchoring or the mooring of a vessel whenever either

believed navigation to be unsafe. Clearly, the 1852 legislation took the engineer out of the “hired hand” category by vesting in him major decision-making responsibilities.

A Spur to Organizing

The new law had another, perhaps unforeseen result: it provided a spur to organization and militancy. In 1853, additional associations of engineers appeared in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and Louisville. Some of these early associations not only drew up wage schedules, but resorted to strikes.

The local river associations, however, did not unite with those in other cities. Furthermore, they tended to dissolve rather easily. So when the gold rush in the Pacific West began attracting engineers with higher wages, the declining economic conditions along the inland rivers, plus growing railroad competition and the Civil War caused the influence of the engineer groups to wane.

More important to the future of MEBA was the formation, in 1854, of the Buffalo Association of Engineers; this and other Lake associations played the leading role in the formation of the Union, and provided its major strength for the first 35 years.

From the beginning, wages were the concern of the Buffalo association. In the year of its formation, the association fought off an anticipated wage cut—but then disbanded in 1857 because the members didn’t think the organization was needed any more! The predictable result was that in 1858 and 1859, the vessel owners successfully reduced wages.

Profiting by the experience, the engineers soon reorganized the Buffalo association. Some five years later, Congress passed the Steamboat Acts of 1864 and 1866 which added engineers working on ferryboats, tugs, towboats and freighters to the ranks of licensed engineers. The association’s example set by the Buffalo engineers began to spread; additional organizations appeared in the Lake cities of Cleveland, Chicago, and Detroit.

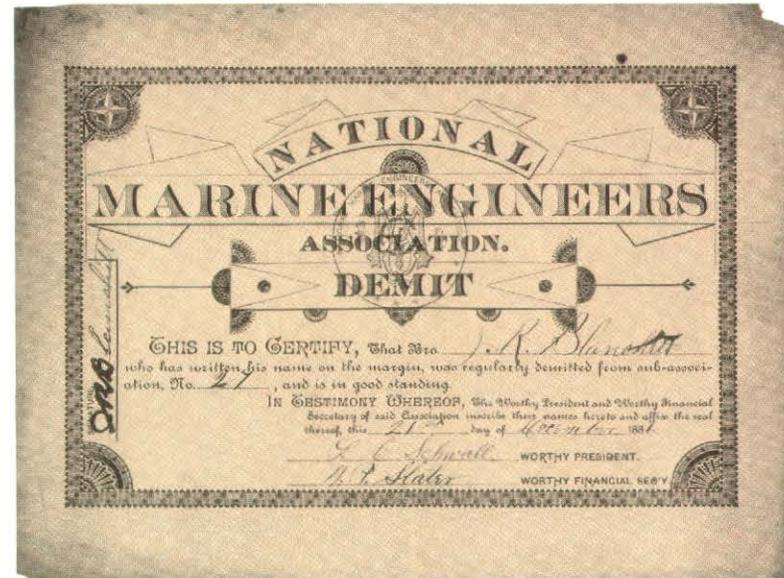
But the one-city associations were not enough. It wasn’t long before the Buffalo association and the others began to think in terms of a broader and more effective organization. At first, they managed to federate as the International Association of Marine Engineers of North America. But the vessel owners also were learning the benefits of organization; they

began to blacklist the leaders of the engineer associations. So, after suffering defeat in the wage struggles on the Lakes in 1866, the new International Association subsided as an effective force on the Lakes.

But the idea would not die. In 1874, the Buffalo association of engineers began corresponding with other marine engineer associations around the country, proposing the formation of a national organization of licensed steamboat engineers. Later, the *American Marine Engineer* was to offer this report on the events that followed:

“Mr. Charles J. Clark, of Buffalo, in the latter part of 1874, sent a letter to some of the marine engineers of the United States, in which he set forth . . . the necessity for concerted action on the part of the Marine engineers of the country, if they expected to remove the existing wrongs that made their trade so inferior from a wage earning point of view. . . .

“The American shipping industry is divided into three dis-



EARLY MEBA DOCUMENT

On December 21, 1886, MEBA member J. R. Blanchett was “demitted” from Local 27 and gained the status of good standing.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

To the Officers and Members of **Marine Engineer's Beneficial Association,**

No. 100

Whereas, Desiring a favorable impression of your Association, I hereby make application for membership, promising, if elected, to faithfully obey the Constitution and By-Laws, and to conform to all rules and usages of the Order. I have never been expelled or expelled from the Association in any other city.

My age is 32 years. My class of papers are Chief
 My residence is 124 street, City of Buffalo State of N.Y.
 I am a citizen of the United States by birth naturalization (applicant will state whether native born or naturalized), as the following citizens can testify:
 Signed G. W. Wise

Witness:

Knowing the person whose name is signed above, we propose him for membership in this Association.

J. H. Hughes President
Brown Second
Nolan Committee

Hall of Marine Engineer's Beneficial Association No. 5
December 19 1889

Mr. President: Your Committee, to whom was referred the application for membership of Mr. G. W. Wise beg leave to say that we have performed the duty required of us, and therefore make a favorable report and recommend his election

J. H. Hughes President
H. Nolan Committee
Chas. R. Egg

Elected. Dec 19/89

SUCCESSFUL APPLICANT

George Wise, of Buffalo, was a chief engineer; on December 19, 1889, he was elected to membership in MEBA Local #1.



tinct sections, the oceans, the lakes and the western rivers, and the engineers in each section had, from time to time, been organized, and while there were in existence prosperous local organizations, there . . . never had been any solidifying of these into a national organization. . . .

"As a result of the correspondence, Messrs. G. Dow and J. W. Hayes, of Buffalo, R. Doty, Wm. Kennedy, and J. L. Lord of Cleveland, T. Buchanan of Detroit, Wm. Ponsonby of Chicago, J. W. Shea of St. Louis, A. L. Foote and Wm. Shaffer of Baltimore met . . . in . . . Cleveland, Ohio, on February 21,

1875 . . . Not only did the gentlemen . . . represent no constituency, but some of them attended the meeting at their own personal expense."

A Union Is Born

Thus, unofficially representing the marine engineers of three Lake associations, one river association and one ocean port, the ten founders established at the first convention February 23, 1875, the National Marine Engineers Association. (The word Beneficial was not added until 1883.)

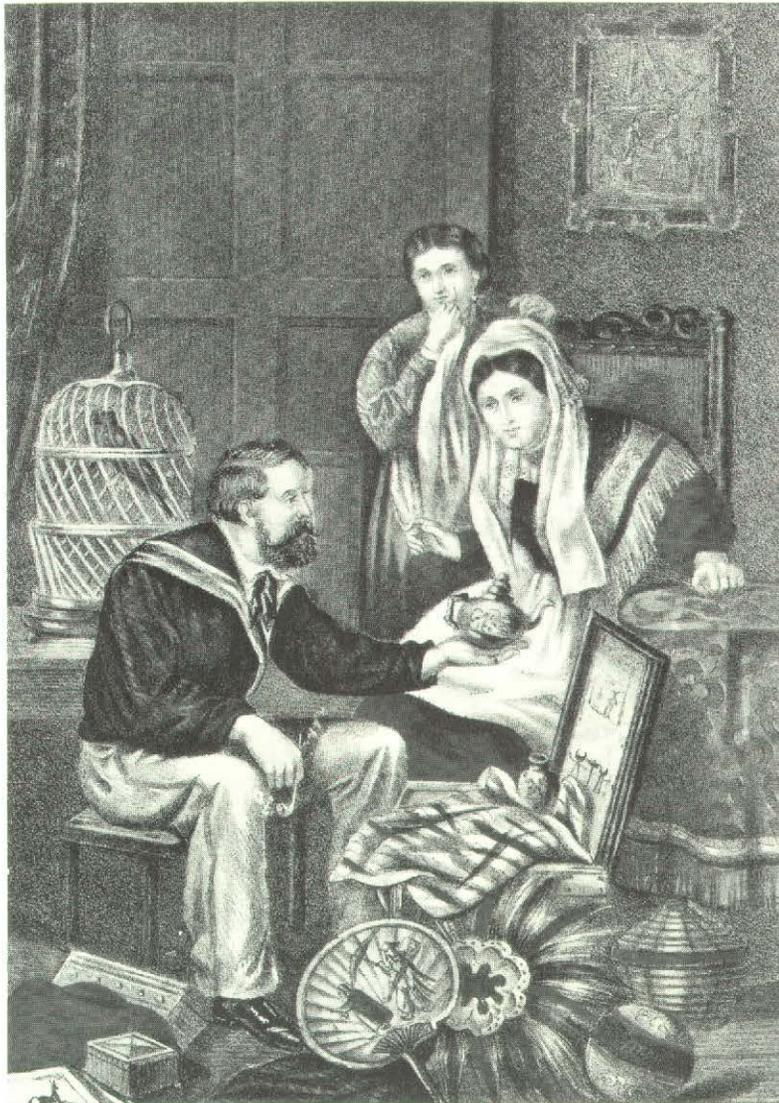
The official objective designated for the new organization was "the elevation and maintenance of the rights of the craft and the regulation of all other business matters in which the engineer . . . may be interested."

It was a bold venture. Not only was it the first group of maritime workers to organize nationally, but it was among the earliest crafts of the American wage earners to reach this stage of development. There were few precedents available for the guidance of marine engineers in that period; and in view of the depression conditions of 1874-75, the seeming odds against its success were great.

There was little doubt that the call from Cleveland would be well received. For instance, the minutes of the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association No. 5, organized on February 19, 1875, reflect the hopes that were vested in the new organization. President Joiner, the official minutes noted, reported the receipt of a letter "relating to the National Convention of Marine Engineers to meet in Cleveland, Ohio, February 22, 1875 and requesting the Baltimore engineers to send a delegate to said convention." The minutes reported sentiment that "the convention to be held in Cleveland was for the benefit of engineers, (and) it would be necessary for all the associations to be governed by the same laws." Since Baltimore's constitution might "conflict with such laws as might be adopted by the national convention to which he hoped that the (Baltimore) marine engineers now in its infancy might be represented," it was proposed that the Baltimore local hold up action on its own proposed constitution.

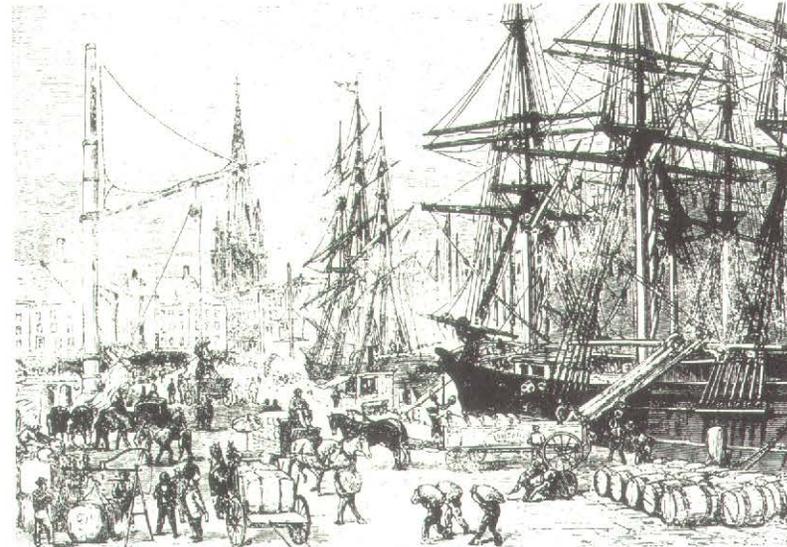
A prime concern of the new national organization of engineers was to counter the distressing trend of federal legis-

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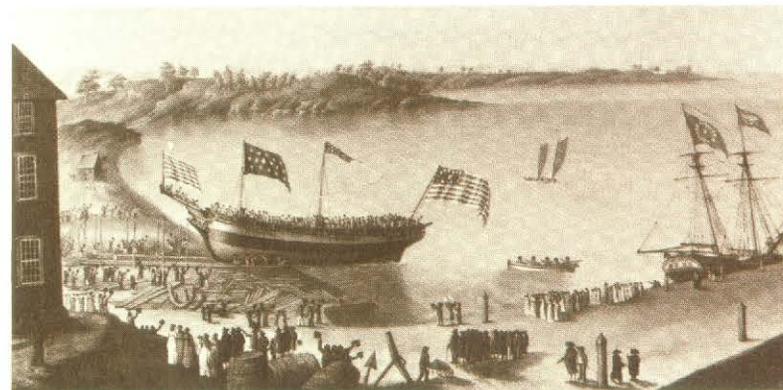
SAILOR'S RETURN

Back from the Orient came gifts for the mariner's family, as portrayed by a 19th century American artist. This was a not uncommon scene a century or more ago.



BUSY NEW YORK HARBOR

In the days before steam, the packet ships swarmed into New York harbor. Trinity Church, now surrounded by tall office buildings, then was a port-side landmark.

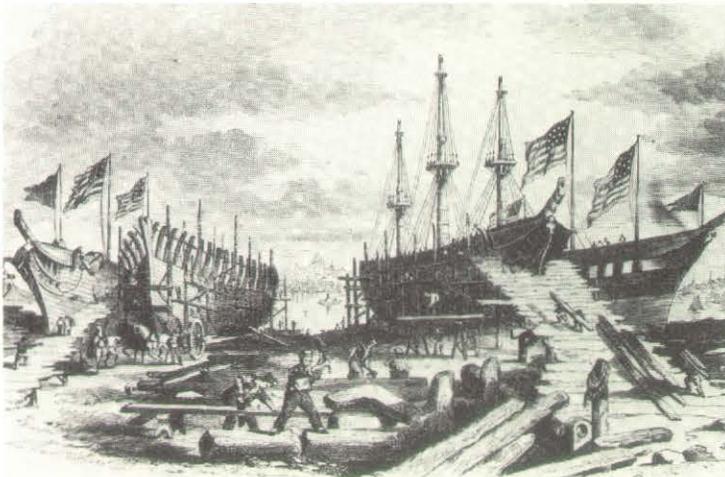


AN AMERICAN TRADITION

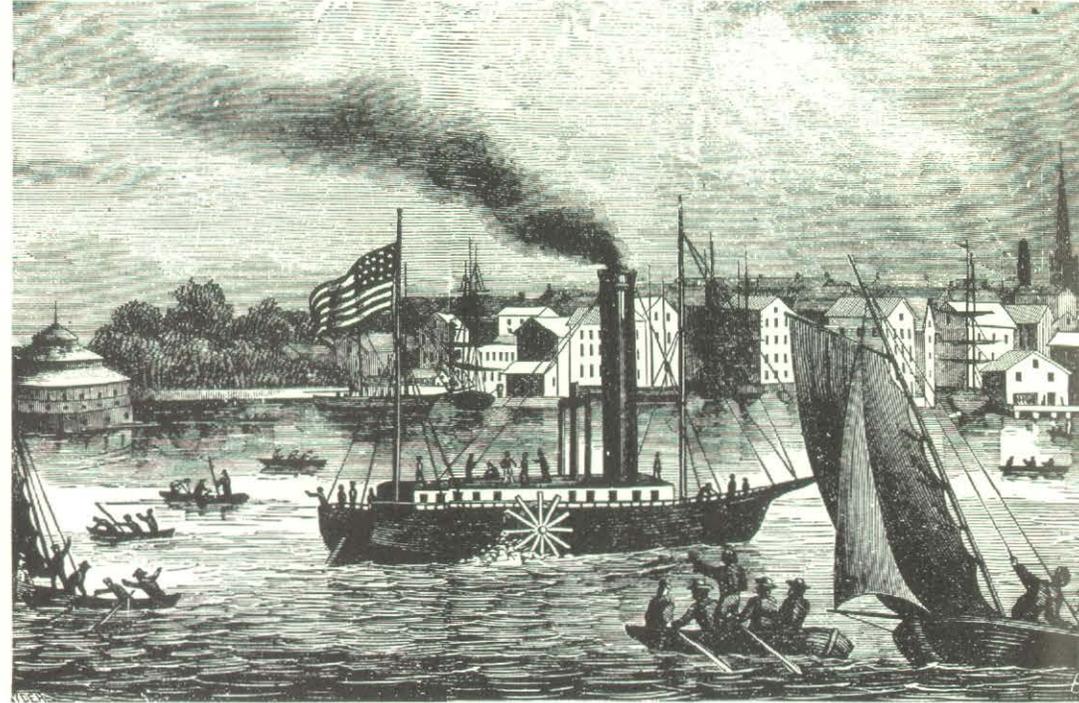
The young United States kept its focus on the seas. In 1802, the launching of the ship "Fame" at the Crowninshield Wharf in Salem, Mass., was an event of importance. Its spirit was captured by the painter, George Ropes.



THE BUSY EAST SIDE
New York's East Side was also a busy port area early in the 1800s. The scene is South Street at Maiden Lane.

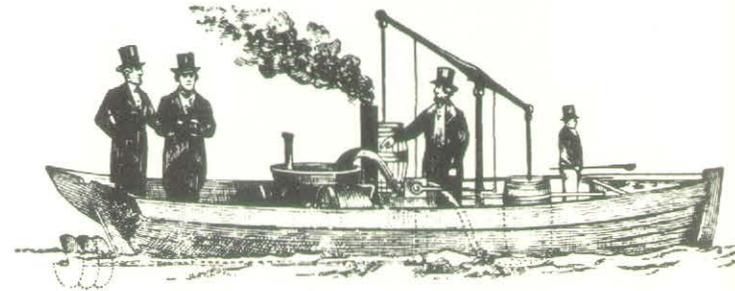


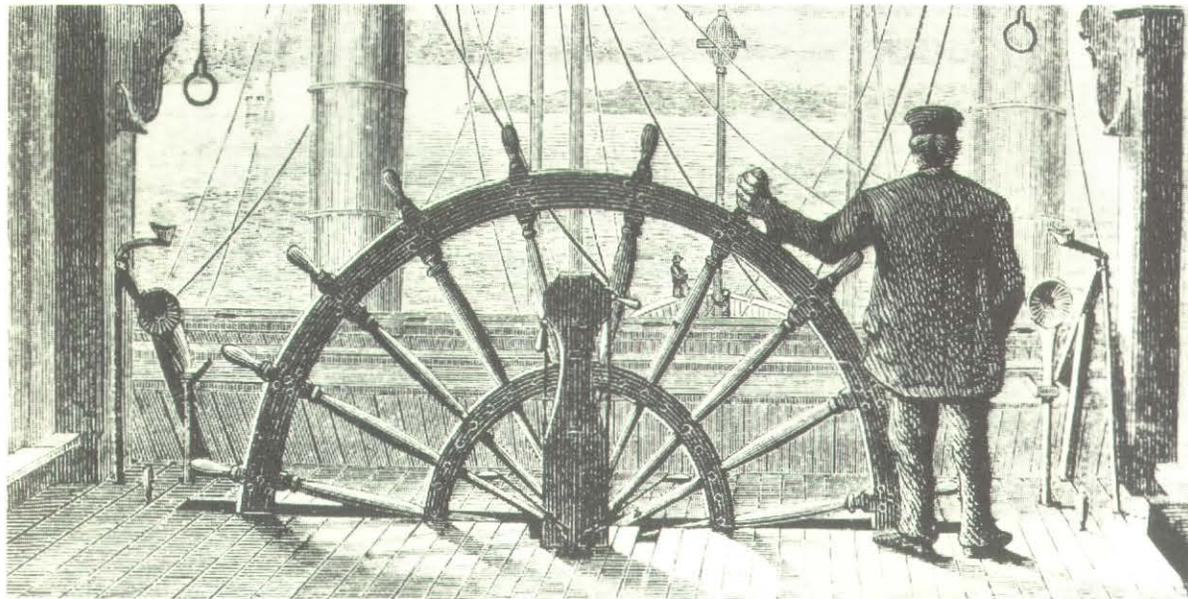
EAST BOSTON SHIPYARD
An unknown artist depicted this shipbuilding scene in East Boston, Mass., shortly after the turn of the 19th century. It was an era of hand-built ships.



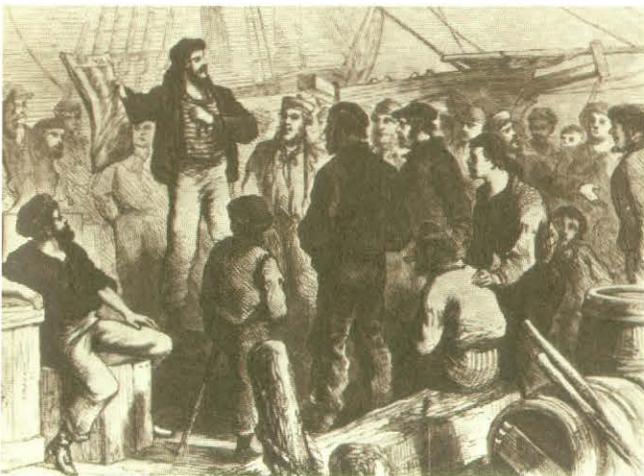
ROBERT FULTON'S 'CLERMONT'
Robert Fulton, whose ship, the "Clermont" is shown here, is perhaps incorrectly described as the "inventor" of the steamboat. His real contribution was to design the first commercially successful steamboat.

FITCH'S STEAMBOAT
John Fitch made this trial run of a steamboat with screw propeller on Collect Pond in lower Manhattan, now the site of the Tombs prison. His passengers are Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston. The boat, about 18 feet long and five foot beam, went about six miles an hour. He received a New York State patent for it, but eventually abandoned it on the shore of the pond.



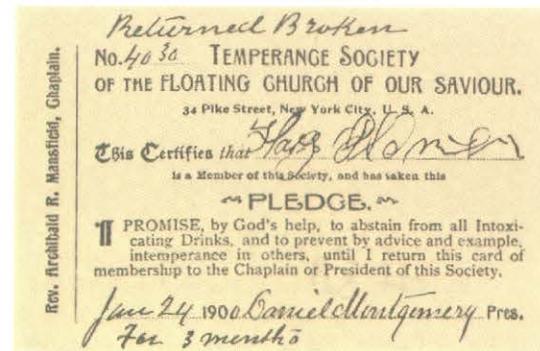
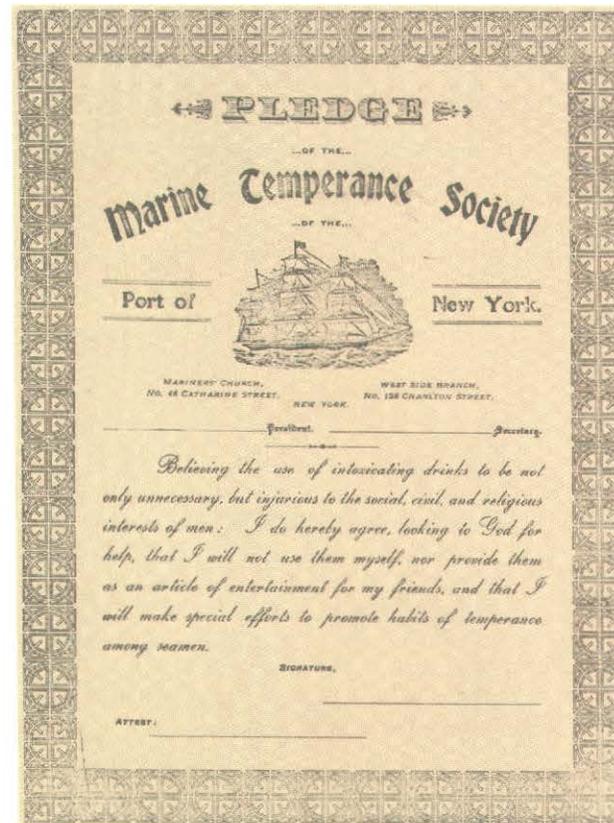


WE'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY
 The wheelhouse of this 19th century ship is a reminder of how far the technological revolution in the merchant marine has taken us.



STRIKE SCENE
 The spirit of protest ran high in the years after the American Civil War. An artist captured this scene of a sailors' strike meeting on the Peck Slip Wharf in New York. It appeared in Leslie's Weekly in 1869.

AS NIGHT FOLLOWS DAY
 With regularity, through the years, where one finds the merchant marine one also finds those who would elevate us and improve us!





'YOU DRESSED UP TO TRAVEL'
 Travel was an important and stylish occasion; early photographers caught these scenes of shipboard finery. (At right) Ship masters and their families and retainers pose in the sunlight, tophats and all. (At left) Passengers, including one ardent fisherman, strike their poses on the decks of the good ship Ocklawaha, a river boat on regular schedule on the inland rivers after the Civil War.

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lation and to oversee the proper enforcement of the new Steamboat Act of 1871. A special area of concern was the license tax. The Steamboat Act of 1852 had imposed a \$5 tax on an original engineer's license and a \$1 renewal fee; in 1864, both fees were increased as part of a Civil War revenue-raising measure. The license fees were highly controversial among the engineers, and proposals for eliminating them proved an effective argument for organization. The campaign for removal of the fees was successful—but not until 1886.

Another wartime measure also proved troublesome to the new engineer organization. An 1866 law had provided that any licensed officers "who shall to the hindrance of commerce

wrongfully or unreasonably refuse to serve" at the request of a vessel owner should be fined \$300 and have his license revoked. The immediate reason for this language was to curb the militant activities of some engineer's associations of the time. But the provision also had become incorporated in the Steamboat Act of 1871, and while it never was invoked in any wholesale manner, for decades there were enough reminders of it to prove an effective inhibitor against strikes by the engineers. Later, the U.S. Treasury went so far as to rule that this language could be applied to cases where commerce was even hindered by a "conspiracy" of union members who refused to serve with non-union engineers.

Struggles on the Great Lakes

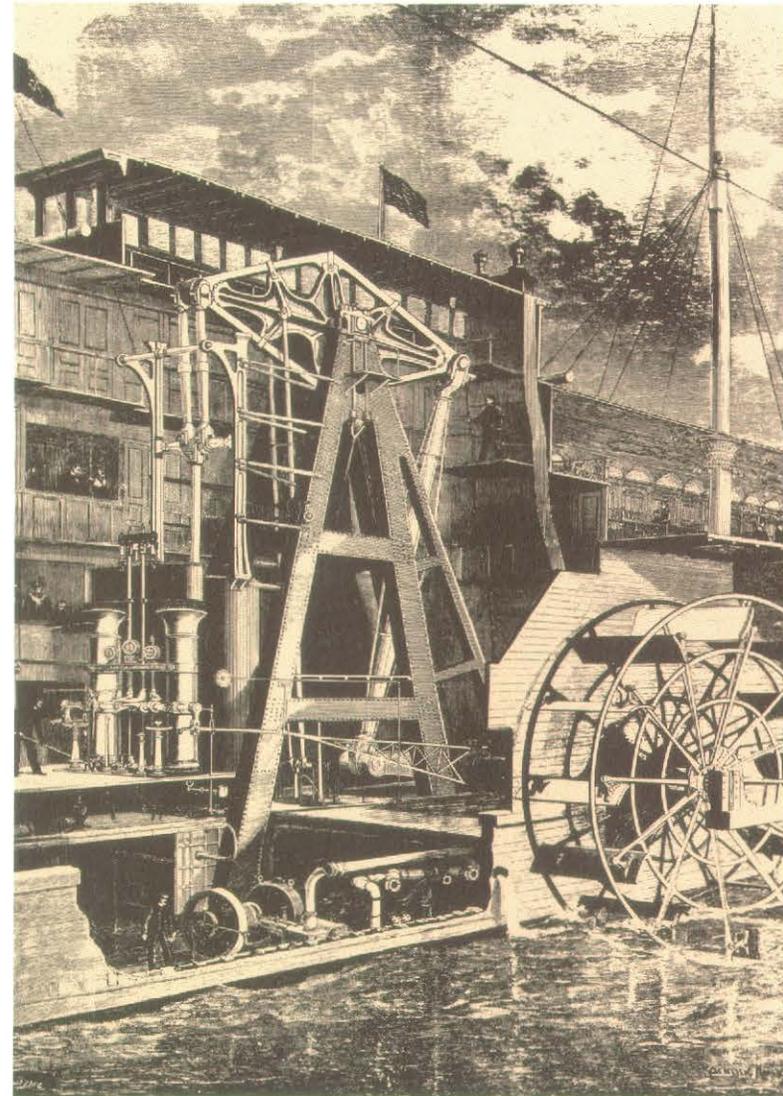
But the major legislative battle fought by MEBA in its early days was to win repeal of the Alien law.

The presence of and competition from Canadian engineers aboard American vessels on the Lakes had long been a source of bitterness among the U.S. engineers. The 1864 Steamboat Act had contained a provision that required all licensed officers to be American citizens. But the 1874 Alien Act permitted aliens to obtain American engineer licenses after six months residence and a declaration of intention to become American citizens. By 1884, the practice had grown so common that the MEBA convention that year received a report stating that between a fourth and a third of all officers on the Great Lakes licensed by the U.S. Steamboat Inspection Service were “birds of passage”—the name derisively given by the engineers to the men from Canada.

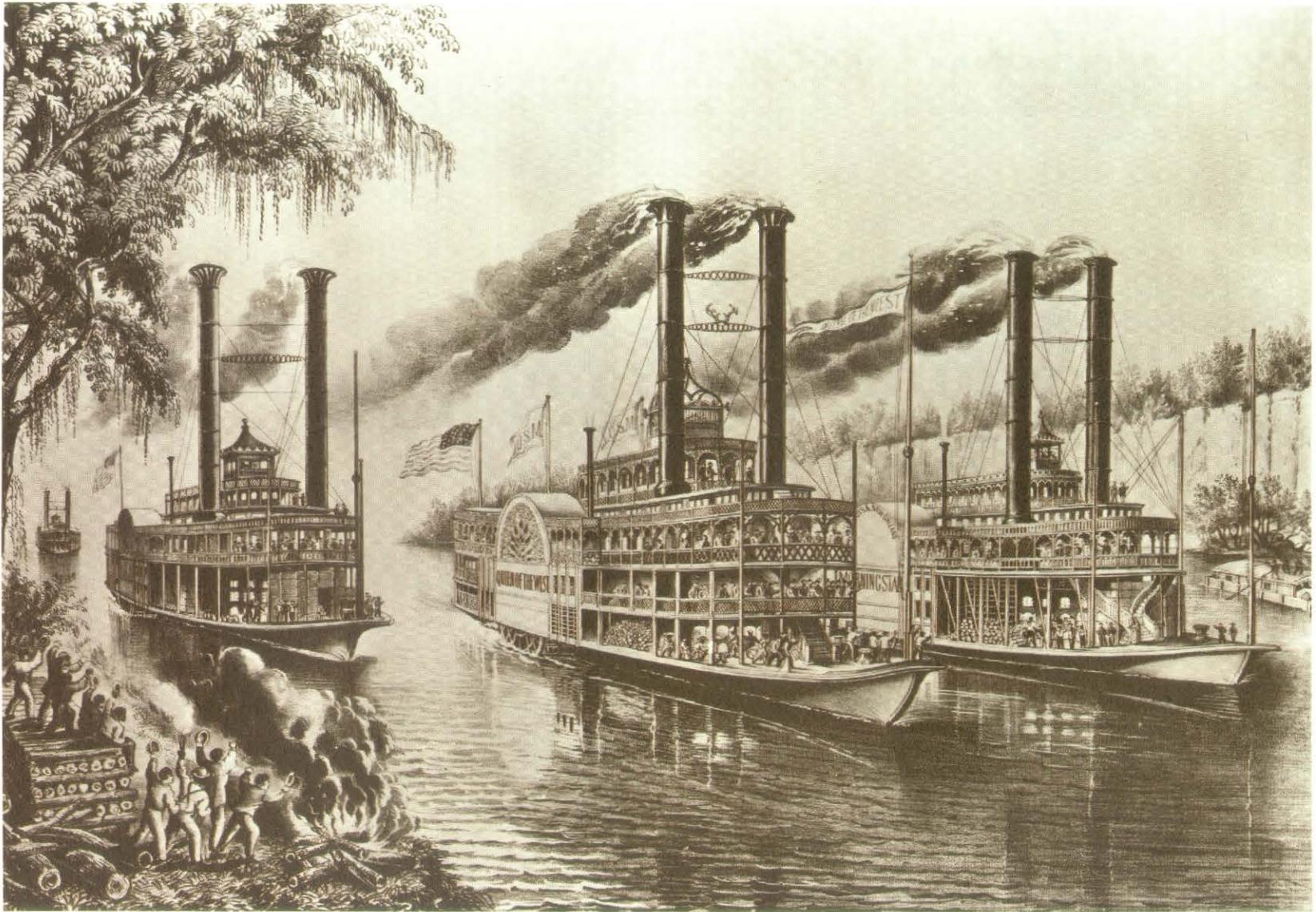
That same year, Congress passed a shipping bill which provided that “all officers of vessels of the U.S. shall be citizens of the U.S.” MEBA thought that this clear language finally and fully protected its members against the inroads of the alien engineers. But just four years later, in 1892, the alien engineer controversy reopened with a bang.

Congress in that year had decreed that two foreign ships—the City of Paris and the City of New York—should be admitted to American registry. Secretary of Treasury Charles Foster issued an order, as a result of this, that British engineers employed aboard the ships “shall be licensed as American marine engineers.” The ruling, in the eyes of MEBA, had a three-point effect: it dredged up the threat of cheap alien labor which the union thought it had defeated; it questioned the engineers’ shipboard status once again; and it both cast a reflection on the ability of the American engineer and diminished his professional status.

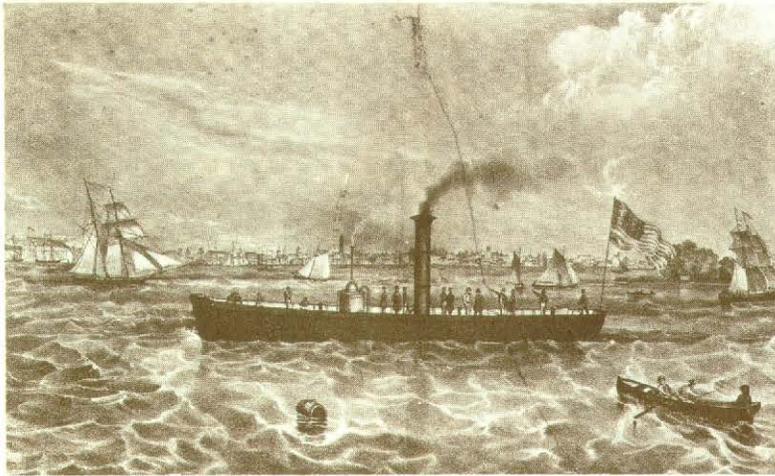
Protests by the able MEBA President, George Uhler, to the Treasury Department brought no relief. Then, in 1894, Secretary Foster went further: he ruled that “licenses were granted to said unnaturalized aliens on the grounds that marine engineers were not ‘officers’ ” within the meaning of the 1884 Act. In 1895, this ruling was confirmed, in a tortured opinion, by Attorney General Richard Olney.



HOW IT WORKED
This cut-away drawing, which appeared in the *Scientific American* in 1896, gives the reader a view of a simple condensing beam engine on the side-wheeled S.S. Adirondack.



CHAMPIONS OF THE MISSISSIPPI
Currier and Ives, the great print makers, produced this dramatic picture of three—
or is it four?—handsome side-wheelers in a race on the Mississippi. Champions all!

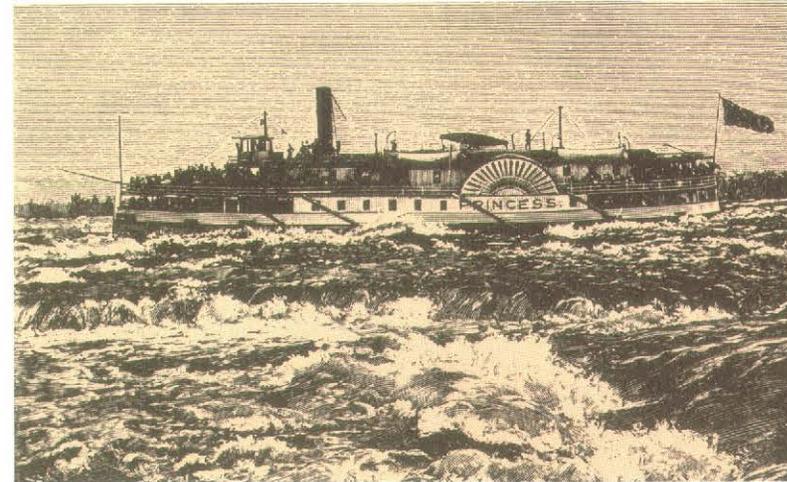


THE 'R. F. STOCKTON'

This iron steamboat, built in England, crossed the Atlantic in 45 days from Liverpool to New York, to enter the service of the Delaware & Raritan Canal Co. The 1839 lithograph noted that the Stockton's boilers are "high pressure, carrying from 50 to 60 pounds steam." Its length of timber was 70 feet, its breadth of beam 10 feet, and it drew about 6½ feet of water.

MEBA marshalled its forces for an all-out campaign against this attack on the status of the engineers. It was during this period that the union solidified its early tradition of holding its conventions in Washington, D.C.; indeed, nearly all of the first 35 years of conventions were held in the nation's capital, with Presidents, Congressmen and officials of the Steamboat Inspection Service as regular guests.

As a result of the leadership of President Uhler, the attack was turned back; a bill was passed on May 28, 1896, which finally granted the engineer the legal standing of an officer, and which prohibited aliens from obtaining licenses from the Steamboat Inspection Service. With the enactment of this law, Uhler told MEBA's membership, came a feeling of security "resulting from the permanent establishment of our standing as marine engineers and officers; a feeling that has never been enjoyed since the first inception of the profession."



RIDING THE RAPIDS

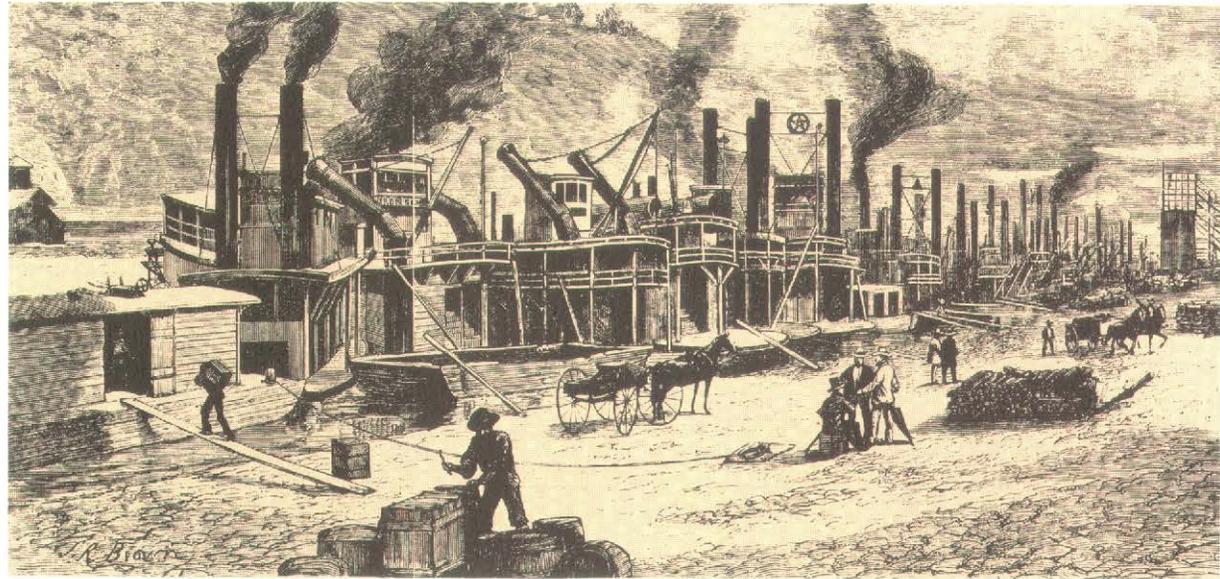
The S.S. Princess was one of the side-wheelers that gave passengers a thrill as it rode the rapids of the St. Lawrence River.

In view of its legislative victories, the union could now boast with little exaggeration that "our association is a very influential body . . . in fact the most influential one connected with commerce."

A Question of Identity

Partly because of its legislative role, MEBA in its early years tended to minimize its trade union aspect. In 1881, in fact, the union took the unusual step of adopting a provision which barred "wage actions" of any sort—or even discussion of them! But there was always a militant minority among the membership which argued that there had to be efforts to raise wages by direct action. Indeed, the prohibition against circulating wage schedules led to the formation of the Brotherhood of Lake Marine Engineers by an angry and frustrated group

RIVER BOAT TERMINAL
The junction of the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers at Pittsburgh made the Pennsylvania city a major port for the river boats. In December 1876, the *Graphic*, a British publication, published this rendition by its traveling artist of the line-up of river vessels at the Pittsburgh wharves.



of men for the purpose of raising wages by direct action. Shortly thereafter, MEBA's leadership perceived that the trend of sentiment among its membership was running in a different direction. The restricting provision was repealed, and the BLME rejoined the parent group.

But if the engineers were finding benefits in organizing, so were the vessel owners.

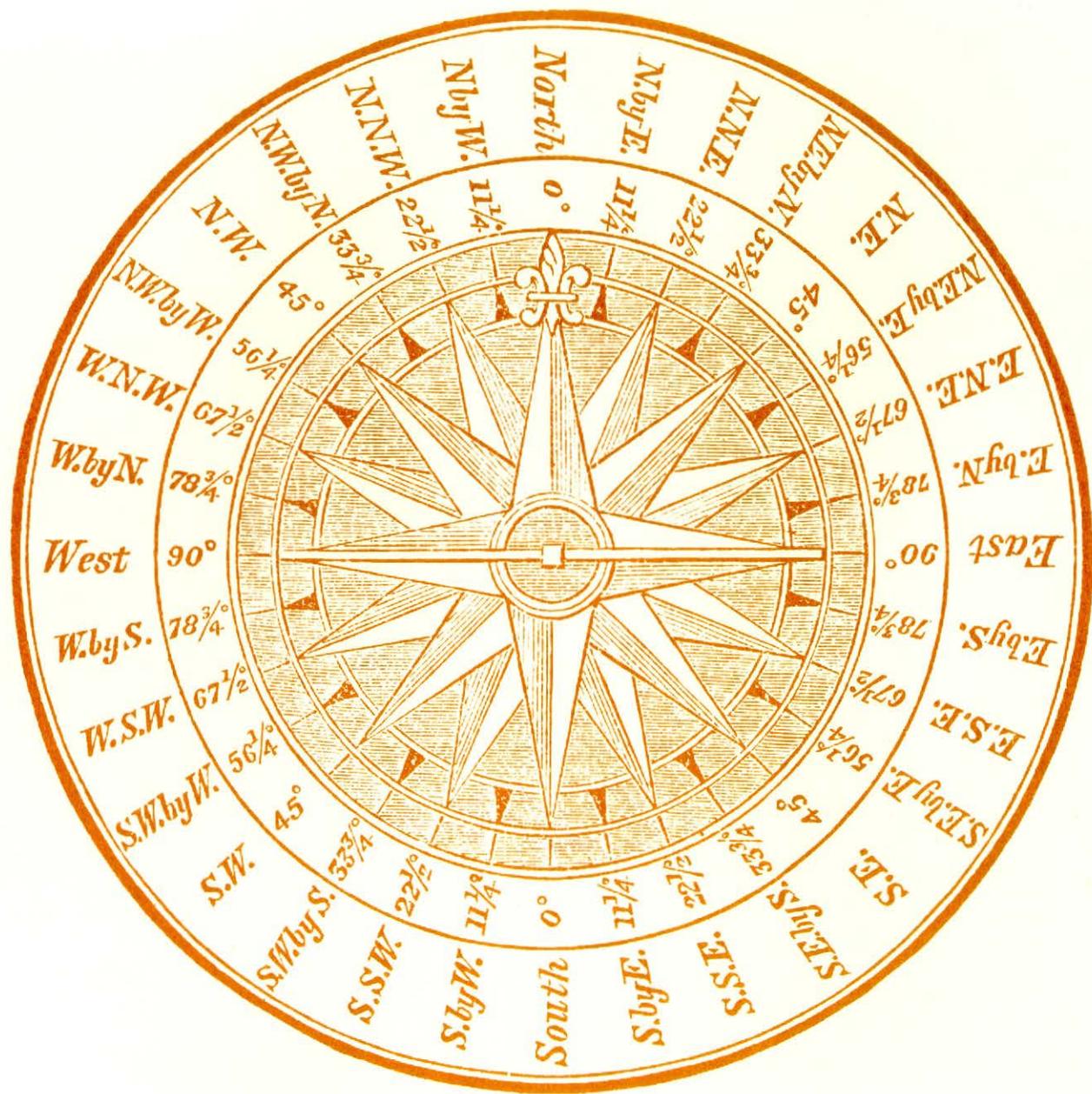
In 1880, the Cleveland Vessel Owners Association was formed, followed by the Lake Carriers Association in 1885. While the two operated independently for a time, as did other smaller owners' associations, in 1892 the Lake Carriers Association was reorganized to include all of the vessel owners on the Great Lakes. And it was to be this organization which was to be the major foe of all maritime organizations on the Lakes for many years.

It was during this period that MEBA began to take decisive steps to make the transition from a professional society toward full trade unionism. In 1891, MEBA called a strike on the Lakes to resist a wage reduction proposed by the vessel own-

ers. Although the strike was called off after six days when it became apparent that the vessel owners could obtain enough engineers to man their ships for the sailing season, the action enhanced the prestige of the union. And it had an effect on the owners; the Cleveland Vessel Owners Association took enough notice of the show of militancy to restore wages in 1892 to their pre-strike levels, and to grant MEBA its long standing demand that wage rates be related to the size of the vessel.

In 1895, President Uhler—in response to proposals from shipowners to set the same wages as the year before—made a tour of the Lakes talking to engineers to “obtain from them a clear . . . understanding as to just what they were willing to do should aggressive measures be decided upon.” The show of force resulted in wage increases from the Lake Carriers Association.

But the Lake vessel owners were not to be so reasonable in the future; heavy troubles lay ahead for the union.



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MEBA Comes of Age

Navigating the first third of the new century was to prove an exceedingly perilous passage for the new union. From what one historian described as MEBA's "days of glory," the union passed through and was beset by a number of problems which reduced it to a state where, as another historian noted, it was "pitifully weak and almost completely demoralized."

It was, in short, a period to which MEBA could look back and say with justifiable pride that it had survived; that was an achievement in itself. At the end of the period, its membership, after swiftly soaring to a peak of 22,500, almost as swiftly had fallen back to where it began, at about 5,000.

The maritime industry during this period was to travel much the same roller coaster road as the union. The merchant fleet in the early years of the century was small and hardly modern; as late as 1911, over one third the tonnage was in coastwise trade. In 1915, a year after war broke out in Europe, only about 10 percent of the nation's ocean-bound commerce was carried by American vessels. American capital—then as now—did not seek to participate in the opportunities provided by shipping enterprises, but "invested in the more profitable foreign flag companies", according to one historical account of the times.

The American merchant fleet increased from about 6,000,000 tons to 17,000,000 tons between 1915 and 1921—only to see the greater portion of the ocean fleet consigned to lay up once the wartime boom was over.

MEBA began the new century in a seemingly strong position. Its locals numbered more than 100, and although some of them contained only a few members, there were sizable and solid associations of growing strength and importance on

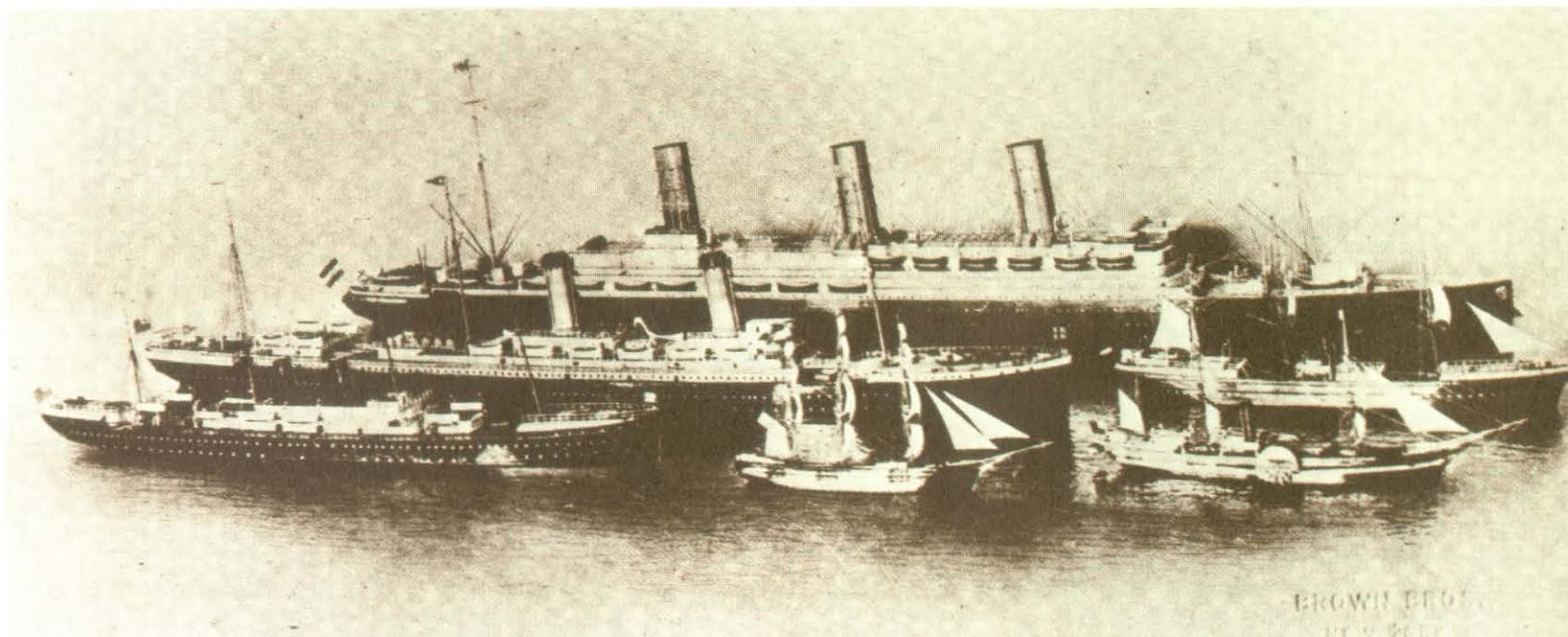
the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific Coasts as well as on the Great Lakes. Union membership was more than 4,000 and growing rapidly; by 1908 it was to total nearly 11,000.

Employers, after a period of testing the fledgling union, found it a force to be reckoned with. Now, when the union spoke, its voice was listened to—if not always heeded—in the halls of government. MEBA President George Uhler, who had distinguished himself in some sharp legislative battles on behalf of the union, was personally chosen by President Theodore Roosevelt to head up and reorganize the lax U.S. Steamboat Inspection Service. The Service, established by the Steamboat Act of 1838, was a result of pressures brought by the marine engineer associations which were the forerunners of MEBA, provided for the annual inspection of vessels and the semi-annual inspection of ship's boilers by federal inspectors; it also required safety equipment for passengers and crew.

Later Steamboat Acts provided the licensing of engineers by the Service, and set up a board of nine supervising inspectors who were appointed directly by the President with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. Then, in 1871, the Service was brought under the Department of the Treasury, which gave the Office of the Supervising Inspector General control over the work of the Service. (Later, the Service was attached to the old U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor.) It was to this position that MEBA President Uhler was appointed.

A Maritime Disaster

What triggered the Uhler appointment was one of the nation's worst marine disasters, involving a loss of life comparable to the sinking of the Titanic.



A PANORAMA OF SHIPPING

In 1920 the New York photographers, Brown Brothers, published this picture of a century of ocean shipping development—from the early square-rigger to a three-stacker trans-Atlantic passenger vessel.

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On Wednesday, June 15, 1904, some 1,300 passengers—many of them children and their parents from New York City's St. Marks Lutheran Church Sunday School—boarded the excursion liner, *General Slocum*, a three deck, 250-foot sidewheel steamer, for a cruise up the East River and into Long Island Sound. Shortly after the liner left its dock a fire, started either in a maintenance closet or a galley forward, was discovered. The breeze from the *General Slocum*'s 12-knot pace began to fan the fire along the decks aft. The crew rushed hoses to the fire; rotten with age and neglect, the hose split under the water pressure. Soon, the length of the ship was in flames as the captain kept her headed up the East River.

Panic swept the vessel. People began jumping from the

ship; some mothers threw their children overboard, only to see them swept under the paddlewheels. Passengers tore at the life jackets stored along the decks; many of them crumbled in their hands, and those that were intact proved useless in the water.

Tugs raced after the *Slocum*, but were unable to overtake the ship until the captain finally ran her aground, where she burned to the water line. One tug, the *Goldenrod*, was the first vessel to manage to come alongside; the passengers began leaping from the decks in frantic last efforts to save themselves; many died of broken necks as they crashed to the deck of the tug. It was, as a deckhand described it, "a rain of bodies" from the dying excursion liner. In all, more than 950 people perished.

Action on the Coasts

The strong beginning years of the century for MEBA were, however, deceptive. Within a few years, the solid organization the union had built on the Great Lakes was shattered. Indeed, the Lakes became, as one historian put it, a "vast unorganized wasteland" where the employers' Lake Carriers Association reigned supreme.

MEBA's history, after 1910, was written in terms of what the engineer associations on the East, Gulf and West Coasts were doing and becoming.

The growth of the coastal engineer associations was slow and somewhat hesitant at the start; in part this was because, as noted earlier, steam was slower in coming to America's ocean fleet. But once underway, the rise of these locals in size and influence as a part of MEBA was steady and strong.

A few engineer associations had been organized on the coasts prior to the formation of MEBA in 1875; most of their members were "inside engineers," employed on harbor craft. As on the rivers, many of these associations formed for a short period and then disbanded for one reason or another, only to reorganize later. It took until 1885 to establish a local in the Port of New York, but it wasn't until three New York port locals combined in 1895 that MEBA became a real port force. On the West Coast, MEBA's local in San Francisco was established in 1882 and grew vigorously, helped considerably at the turn of the century by the Alaskan gold rush and by a unique geographical position which enhanced its economic power.

Too, the coastal associations grew and gained because of the absence of any powerful and organized shipowners associations such as that on the Great Lakes, in spite of the emergence during this period of large steamship companies and the growth of substantial shipping combines. The ability of the coastal locals to survive employer offensives provided MEBA with centers around which future growth could take place after the defeat on the Lakes.

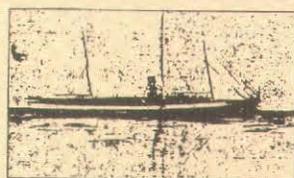
In the early years of the century, MEBA began to look at the possibility of taking more direct action both to lighten the workload of its members and to increase their pay commensurate with the added responsibility of greatly more sophisticated on-board technology and equipment.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, MONDAY EVENING, JULY 22, 1907. Price 5 Cents. Newsstands and Train 5 Cents.

151 MEN AND WOMEN ON STEAMSHIP COLUMBIA ARE LOST

STEAMSHIPS COLLIDE AND 151 PERSONS DROWN

Columbia Is Struck by San Pedro Off Mendocino Coast and Sinks Within Five Minutes—All Except Officers on Which Are Adrift in Their Berths—Captain Drowns Remains at Post and Goes Down With His Vessel—No Time to Get Out the Life Preservers



STEAMSHIP COLUMBIA, SUNK IN THE SEA

The steamship Columbia, which was struck by the San Pedro, sank in the water off the Mendocino coast of California. The Columbia was carrying 151 passengers and crew. The San Pedro was carrying 100 passengers and crew. The collision occurred on the night of July 21-22, 1907. The Columbia sank within five minutes of the collision. The San Pedro was damaged but did not sink. The Columbia's captain, J. A. Drown, remained at his post and went down with the vessel. The Columbia's crew and passengers were rescued by the San Pedro and other nearby vessels. The Columbia's wreck was located on the Mendocino coast of California. The Columbia's wreck was one of the worst maritime disasters in the history of the United States.

SAFETY MANY LIFE PRESERVERS

The Columbia had on board 151 life preservers, but they were not used. The Columbia's crew and passengers were rescued by the San Pedro and other nearby vessels. The Columbia's wreck was located on the Mendocino coast of California. The Columbia's wreck was one of the worst maritime disasters in the history of the United States.

DEATH AT SEA

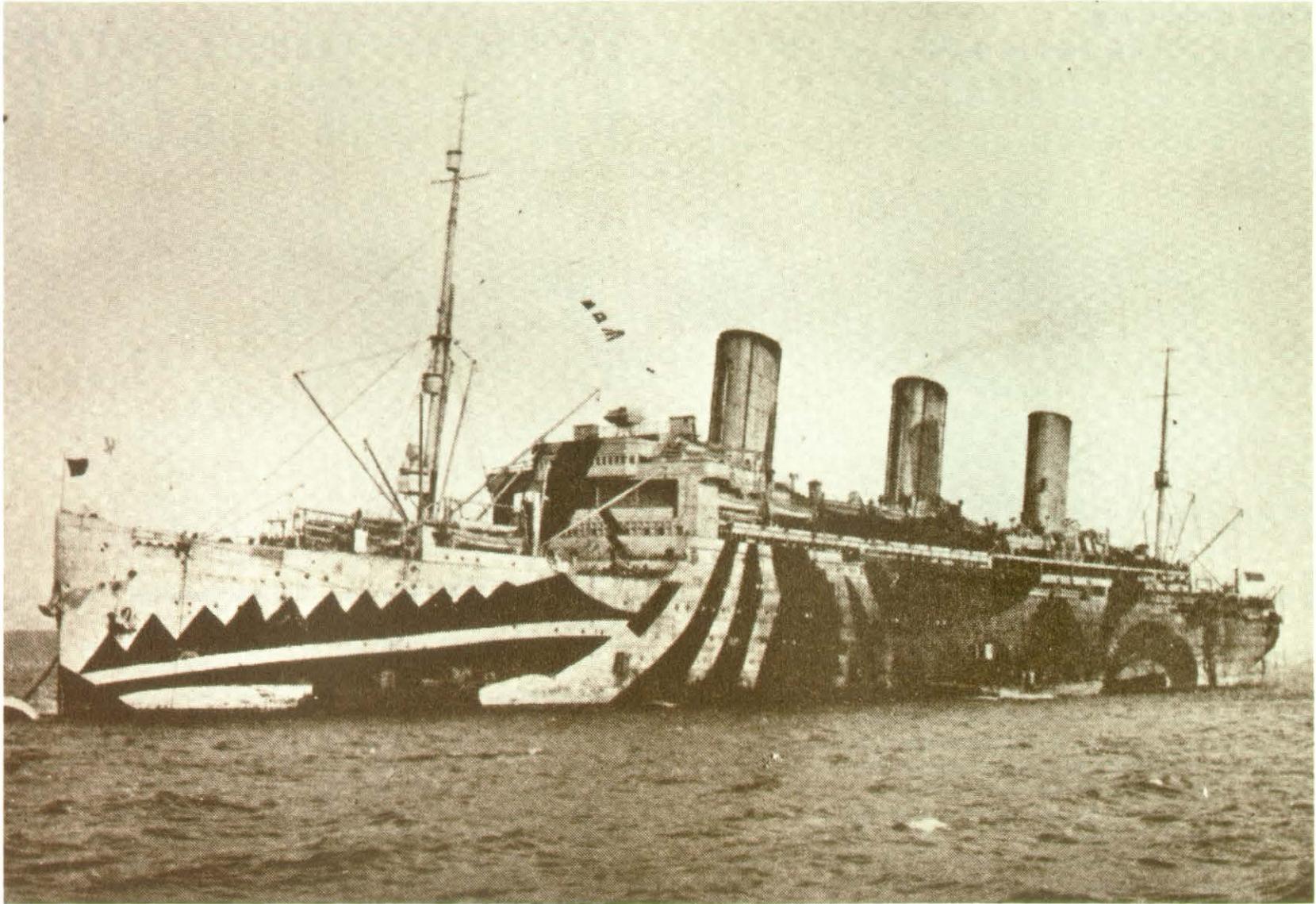
There were accidents and collisions. The Seattle Times of July 22, 1907, used its biggest type to tell of the collision of the S.S. Columbia and the S.S. San Pedro. The Columbia sank in the water of Shelter Cove, on the Mendocino coast of California.

As a result of tremendous advances in marine engineering and shipbuilding, engines had become far more complex and bigger, the engine room auxiliary equipment had multiplied, and additional equipment had been added for steering, mooring, heating, ventilation, sanitation, lighting, cooking, safety, cargo handling and navigation.

MEBA locals on the Great Lakes had begun to despair of achieving their objectives through the U.S. Steamboat Inspection Service, which had grown less and less attentive to their appeals. The union's militants, who had now grown to a majority, pushed for more direct action.

New Century, New Directions

President George Uhler's report to the 1900 MEBA convention reflected the challenge and signaled a major change in direction. He noted that the union's "low profile" approach had



IT WAS A DIFFERENT AGE

It was the age before radar and sonar technology, and humans had to rely on their own imperfect vision. So the camouflage of World War I was developed to fool the eyes. Now it wouldn't make much difference.

outlived its usefulness, and the policy of conservatism and reserve is no longer sufficient to meet the conditions that have succumbed to "an arrogant spirit of selfish presumption." To counter this, he said, requires "defiant courage by a body of men who have not yet forgotten that we have as much right to name our price as the great trusts of the present day have to offer remuneration that henceforth can only be spurned as not worth of consideration. . . .

"The Marine Engineers of this country have discarded the swaddling clothes of timidity, humiliation and fear . . . and henceforth will work under conditions that will in a sense guarantee some adequate return for the responsibilities, dangers and discomforts, and distress of our profession."

Hardly the language of a professional society!

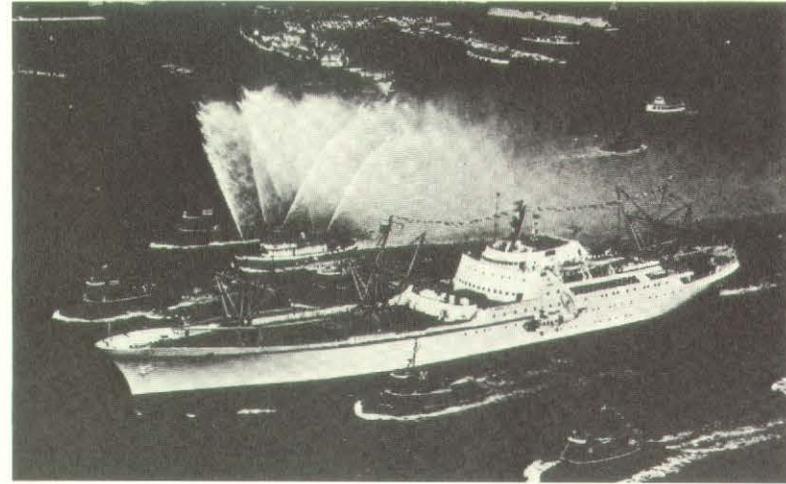
Economic conditions had brought boom years to the Great Lakes, and the union sought to make the most of them. In 1901, on the rumor that the Lake Carriers Association intended to reduce wages, MEBA presented both wage and manning schedules to the employers which were unprecedented in scope. When the LCA refused to even consider the proposals, the union struck. The strike ended a few days later, with the LCA accepting the proposals—but claiming a measure of victory in its refusal to recognize the union.

From now on, it was constant guerrilla warfare on the Lakes between the employers and the union. All during the years they had given in to the union's proposals, the vessel owners never surrendered the idea of smashing the union; they constantly held out the lure of individual contracts in order to separate MEBA's members from the organization.

The panic of 1907 set the stage for full-fledged action against the union. For the 1908 shipping season, the LCA adopted an "open shop" policy and thrust "yellow dog" contracts under the noses of engineers seeking work on their ships; these contracts required the individual to repudiate the union and to promise to stay outside it.

It quickly became clear that a strike that year—under economic conditions which heavily favored the employers—would be a disaster, so MEBA abstained to wait for better times.

A year later, in 1909, the union decided to meet the LCA head on. It ruled that any member signing LCA's individual "yellow dog" contracts would be suspended from the union.



GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

New York's fire boats gave the traditional salute to the S.S. Savannah, an experiment in the use of nuclear power.

MEBA's decision set the stage for a strike or a lockout. As the season began, neither MEBA nor the LCA backed down. The employers' lockout began, and within a short time the action was extended against every seaman's union on the Lakes.

It was a disaster. Wages were cut, and manning schedules previously established were abandoned. In the words of *The American Marine Engineer*, the official magazine the union had begun in 1906, "1,200 members were lost to the organization" as a result of MEBA President William F. Yates' order that all engineers signing the open shop agreements be suspended.

"The Lake Carriers Association has reduced their employees to practical serfdom through a so-called welfare plan of diabolical efficiency," the magazine said. Strikebreakers—sad to say some of them were MEBA members from the East Coast—invaded the Lakes. MEBA's membership plummeted. After the 1909-10 shipping season, maritime unions had practically ceased to function on the Lakes. Indeed, it was not until relatively recent times that MEBA once again established itself as a formidable factor on the Lakes.

Fortunately for MEBA's survival, the robust early years of the



CORPORATE JUGGLING ACT

The phrase “conglomerate corporation” came into vogue in the mid-20th century—but this 19th century reminds us monopoly controls have been with us for a long time. The cartoon shows the capitalist Jim Fisk—one of the notorious ‘robber barons’ of the age of industrialization—juggling his ships and trains. He owned a lot of them!

century had brought substantial benefits to the union’s locals on the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts. Improved wage and manning schedules had occurred year after year at the beginning of the century. Thus MEBA’s locals on both coasts were in such a strong position by 1907 that most of them could weather the economic disaster of that year and those which followed.

Indeed, in the wake of a request from the combined steamship interests in the Port of New York that MEBA accept a wage cut in the winter of 1907-08, the union was able to maintain the prevailing rates for that and succeeding years. And although the San Francisco local suffered a sinking spell in its fortunes in the 1907-08 panic and depression it was healthy enough to completely recover within a few years.

It was during this period that MEBA, watching itself grow in a somewhat scattered and haphazard manner which made central control increasingly difficult, took steps to establish a structure which would not only help unify the union but at the same time strengthen it. A National Advisory Board was created; the board members, elected annually by the convention, met quarterly with the national president to map policy and review the union’s progress. All strike calls and wage demands had to be submitted to the Advisory Board.

To Affiliate or Go It Alone

Throughout this period, MEBA had been involved in a long internal debate over the merits of affiliation with the American Federation of Labor. The question of affiliation with the young AFL had first arisen in 1896 but was rejected. One reason cited was U.S. statute language providing that any licensed ship officer “who shall to the hindrance of commerce wrongfully or unreasonably refuse to serve” could have his license revoked. The U.S. Treasury, which had jurisdiction over the Steamboat Inspection Service at that time, had previously ruled that this language would apply in cases where the “hindrance of commerce” was a “conspiracy” involving trade union action. Faced with this formidable threat to its members’ job security, MEBA had tended to shy away from any sort of formal alliance with other trade unions for fear of inviting official retaliation as part of a “conspiracy.”

Continued on page 29

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

One of the first actions of the first U.S. Congress was to emphasize the importance of the merchant marine to the American nation. Yet from the beginning it was a continuing battle to save and to strengthen the maritime industry—as these varied 19th century cartoons and posters testify so eloquently.

The CHILD OF AMERICAN INDUSTRY called "AN ORPHAN,"
AND MADE
A GALLEY SLAVE.

LET LOOSE OUR SHIP!
"DISADVANTAGES TO AMERICAN INTERESTS—1st. Loss of the Mediterranean markets. 2d. Exclusion from the markets of our neighbors. 3d. High duties in those of others. 4th. Bounties to individuals in competition with us."
THOMAS JEFFERSON, Secretary of State.

Lo, THE POOR SAILOR!
Like the Indian—driven West.

Among the Breakers!!

I prefer that your Congressmen
for the support of our Sailors,
vote appropriations for
utes on the High Seas,
tation of seamen for defence in war as for
race—even though called
NTY?

SENATORS AND MEMBERS, how have you treated our people and
our Industries by
"FALSE ECONOMY"
towards American Shipping, while listening to the interests
of
Foreign Shipping Agents.
1850
"Burden! Burden! Burden!"?

"FREE SHIPS!"
LABOR STRUCK DOWN!
"Clyde Shiprights wanted on 9 day's notice."
"No American Seaman nor Shiprights need apply."
Shall the Birthright of American Industry be sold out?
The Question of the Campaign in 1854.

WORKMEN OF AMERICA—of ALL Industries—will you submit to
your Congressmen giving away your Honest Labor
and AMERICAN HONOR, to
The Demand of Foreign Capitalists
OR
FOREIGN BOOTY?

MANHATTAN ISLAND.

OLD - BY NEW YORK, WHICH?

The Grand Uplifted Asylum for Tramp Orphan Ships
NEW YORK HARBOR AND BULKHEAD
SOLD OUT TO FOREIGN AGENTS!

U.S. MAIL

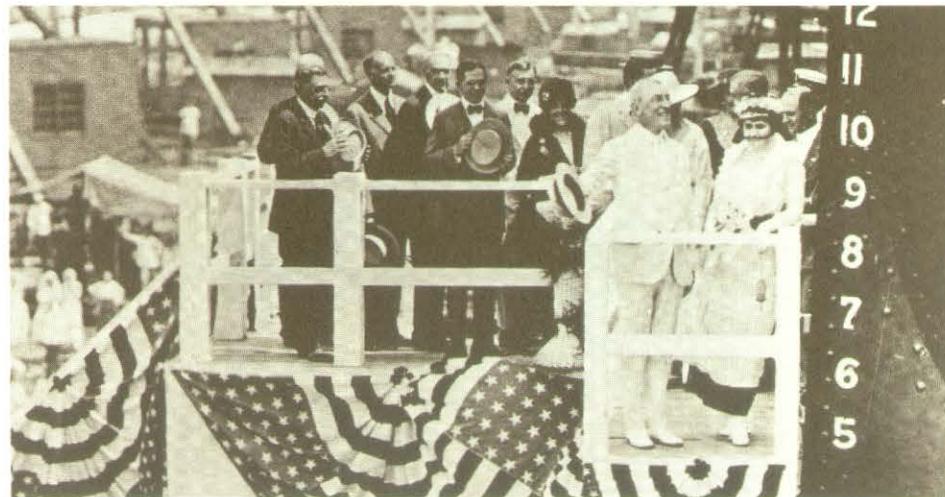


President Benjamin Harrison raises the house flag of the American Lines on February 22, 1893 . . . as it was seen by an artist of the times.

Presidents and Ships



President Grover Cleveland, with top hat in hand, talks to the crowd at the launching of the S.S. St. Louis of the American Line. The year was 1894.



President Woodrow Wilson, elegant in white suit and shoes, launches a new ship at the Hog Island Yards in August 1918.



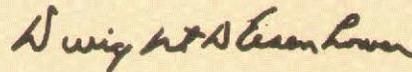
President Franklin D. Roosevelt—happy as always when near the sea—greeted the throng at a launching of the S.S. Joseph Teal at the Kaiser Shipyards in Portland, Oregon, in September 1942. Henry J. Kaiser, with arm over the front seat, was FDR's host.



President Richard Nixon, chatting with MEBA Pres. Calhoon, at the National Steel & Shipbuilding Yards in San Diego, at launching early in January 1972 of one of first ships built under the Shipbuilding Act of 1970.

EVERY MAN in this Allied Command is quick to express his admiration for the loyalty, courage, and fortitude of the officers and men of the Merchant Marine. We count upon their efficiency and their utter devotion to duty as we do our own; they have never failed us yet and in all the struggles yet to come we know that they will never be deterred by any danger, hardship, or privation.

When final victory is ours there is no organization that will share its credit more deservedly than the Merchant Marine.

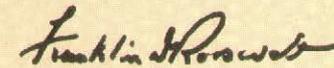


GENERAL DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

MANY THOUSANDS of patriotic men and women are toiling through the long hours of the day and night in the construction of the great fleets of vessels that carry the goods of victory to the distant battle fronts of the United Nations.

Our ships, sailing every ocean, have been manned by courageous officers and seamen all of whom have left the security of their firesides and many of whom have given their lives for the land of their allegiance.

The American people are looking forward to the days of lasting peace when the merchant fleets of the Nation, wisely used and vigilantly maintained, shall sail the seas freed from the perils of war.



FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

IN WAR AS IN PEACE

President Roosevelt and General Eisenhower attested to the great contributions of the men and women of the merchant marine during the hazardous years of World War II.

But beginning with the turn of the century, MEBA had begun to be involved increasingly in jurisdictional disputes with other unions, which forced it to abandon its “go it alone” policy and seek to protect itself. In view of the government’s policy and the actions of other unions, this process of affiliating with the AFL was to prove lengthy and torturous—and once accomplished, generally uncomfortable.

In 1911, under instructions from the union’s convention, MEBA President William F. Yates informed the AFL that “a part of this membership are in favor of affiliating and it is possible that a majority . . . would vote in favor . . . if absolute autonomy and jurisdiction over marine engineers were assured.”

But overtures at that time were blocked by the International Union of Steam and Operating Engineers, which had been seeking to assert jurisdiction over the marine engineers. Four years later, in 1915, the affiliation move was revived. The outbreak of war in Europe had sent the demand in the U.S. for merchant marine manpower soaring as the American fleet expanded to aid its allies. In this atmosphere, it seemed possible that some other unions might seek to solidify a claim of exclusive jurisdiction over all engineers through contracts with the U.S. government and private shipping concerns.

In 1916, MEBA’s convention stipulated that any AFL charter must not only guarantee “jurisdiction over all engineers sailing on self-propelled vessels of the U.S.A.,” but must also assure MEBA of jurisdiction over “all other engineers holding a license issued by the U.S. Steamboat Inspection Service, employed in the operation of boilers, engines, and other machinery used on the waters of the U.S.A.” Half a dozen of the unions posed objections—and about the only immediate result was the defeat of one MEBA president, A. Bruce Gibson, who had in effect put his job on the line on the affiliation issues.

About this time, however, a competing organization in the Port of New York made its appearance and influenced MEBA’s leadership to seek and accept the AFL charter even without all the safeguards the union had sought. The new organization was the Ocean Association of Marine Engineers, made up solely of engineers on ocean-sailing vessels. MEBA feared that favoritism by the United States Shipping Board, set up in 1916 to handle the affairs of the growing government-built merchant fleet, for the new organization during the period when war-

time demand was creating jobs for thousands of new marine engineers, would damage its own status.

Affiliation with the AFL, however, failed to end MEBA’s jurisdictional differences with other unions. It was the continuance of these difficulties, which, coupled with a difference of opinion over a ship subsidy bill, in the main, led MEBA to depart from the AFL four years later, in 1923.

War Boom, Post-War Slump

But by that time, MEBA and all other maritime unions were involved in a far greater trial of strength. This one had to do with survival in the wake of the post-war shipping slump.

The onset of World War I had brought boom times to the maritime industry. The American merchant fleet increased from about 6,000,000 tons in 1915 to 17,000,000 by 1921. *The American Marine Engineer* noted that the U.S. Shipping Board, as part of its gearing up for the war, acquired some 4,000 steamships. As a result, MEBA’s membership increased rapidly; the union successfully returned to the aggressive trade unionism which had sparked it during the first years of the century.

This massive involvement of the federal government into maritime affairs was designed to assure not only that the necessary vessels were built and acquired, but that the necessary manpower to man them be attracted—and that work stoppages on the waterfront be prevented. So the government, as one historical account noted, “for the first time adopted a policy of collective bargaining in the maritime industry.” Later when it appeared that bargaining between maritime workers and the private shipowners might break down, the government convened a National Maritime Conference in May 1918 which resulted in the agreement that all maritime labor problems would be submitted to the U.S. Shipping Board for the duration of the war.

These extraordinary wartime arrangements were a bonanza for MEBA. The *American Marine Engineer* noted that membership soared from just over 10,000 in 1916 to more than 22,000 by the end of the war period.

But with the conclusion of the war, the winds of change began to blow. Soon it became increasingly evident that the shipowners had by no means given up their open-shop men-



TURNING OUT THE SHIPS

When America decides we need a merchant fleet, we know how to turn out the ships in quantity. These two photographs tell the story of the mobilization of manpower and resources during World War I to build up our fleet. After the war, the merchant marine withered again.



tality; they had merely put it in storage. The Shipping Board's withdrawal in mid-1919 from the labor-management harmony programs it had fostered during the war was an ominous sign.

As one historian of the time noted: "Late in 1920 there were definite indications that the Shipping Board could no longer be counted as an ally of the unions, nor as a neutral party, but had deserted to the shipowners' camp and was preparing to launch with them a great anti-union crusade as soon as the shipping slump provided sufficient unemployment among the seamen to guarantee failure of any resistance."

By the start of 1921, the stage was set for the most stunning defeat in the history of American maritime labor. The shipping slump which followed the wartime boom had forced the lay-up of nearly half the government's fleet as well as about 15 percent of the privately-owned vessels. The owners flatly informed the unions that drastic reductions were necessary in

wages and all other working conditions. Quite naturally, the unions were unwilling to see the gains they had come to enjoy abandoned so quickly.

'The Question of Wages'

Thus, in early 1921, both management and labor took increasingly hard-line positions into the collective bargaining sessions. At the center of the battle was the now-turned-hostile U.S. Shipping Board, under the command of Admiral William S. Benson, the former Chief of Naval Operations. Howard A. Thor in his "Trade Unions of Licensed Officers in the Maritime Industry," wrote: "Admiral Benson's position in the controversy involved more than a desire to cut the cost of operating the shipping fleet."

His aggressiveness during the negotiations, his position with regard to the elimination of overtime and night relief

engineers, his opposition to the right of union representatives to visit the ships, and his threat to withdraw USSB-owned ships from any company which acceded to the unions' demands, give credence to the belief that the Admiral harbored strong anti-union biases.

"That Benson's chief concern was the elimination of trade unions rather than the reduction of wages is further revealed by his admission . . . that the 'question of wages is always a little exaggerated, because under any system it is not much over ten percent of the total cost of (ship) operation.' "

Indeed, later historians have called into severe question the whole premise that the cost-cutting binge in the maritime industry to "meet foreign competition" was truly realistic. Even after the powers of the unions had been destroyed, wages cut to the bone, manning scales slashed and overtime work without compensation reimposed, U.S. ships found it difficult—and often impossible—to compete with foreign vessels for reasons only slightly related to labor costs.

Study after study has come to the conclusion, as did the House Merchant Marine Committee in a 1955 report, that the deficiencies of the U.S. Merchant Marine are "the result of a combination of factors, and that neither labor costs nor labor relations are the sole causes." The world wide maritime industry is highly competitive. Other nations take their merchant marine more seriously than does the U.S., and hence are more understanding when it comes to subsidies. Ship construction costs in the U.S. also are a factor; many foreign-built ships do not include all of the safety equipment found to be necessary on American vessels. And many of the foreign ships now plying the high seas are long overdue at the junkyard.

On May 1, 1921, the biggest maritime strike on record began. During the first few weeks, it looked successful. But it soon turned ugly. Some 300 union pickets were arrested on charges of vagrancy in Gulf and Atlantic ports in the second week of the strike. Strikebreakers, mainly students, were widely recruited, and wrecking crews were sent out. Those strikebreakers who attempted to man the ships were beaten and assaulted. Ships were damaged. It was a full-fledged marine war as the maritime workers fought to defend their living and to maintain their unions.

Early in the strike, government authorities decided that

reaching agreement with MEBA was the key to ending it, because the license requirements for officers on U.S. vessels made it difficult if not impossible to replace ship engineers with scabs. Great pressure was placed on MEBA to isolate it from the rest of the striking unions.

Intensive negotiations began—but even as they did, it was apparent that the strike was failing; more and more ships began to move without contracts. The result was that every time an agreement seemed firm, Admiral Benson chipped something more out of it. MEBA President William S. Brown was constantly frustrated by the demands of the membership not to give in, the increased sailings of U.S. ships, and the constant cutbacks in terms offered by the government. Even U.S. President Warren Harding was brought in to urge MEBA to accept a settlement—but the President's proposal, perhaps symbolic of his hapless Administration, turned out to be inferior to a tentative agreement reached just a few days earlier!

MEBA's President Brown, faced with heavy and conflicting pressures, finally overrode the objections of his membership and signed an agreement in June of 1921, a move that brought strong demands for his resignation. (Brown was to remain president until 1926 when he retired for health reasons, but returned to head the union again in 1935.) The San Francisco local went so far as to defy Brown and continue the strike—until it discovered that other MEBA members, recognizing the strike to be over, were coming West to man Pacific Coast vessels.

These were unhappy times for the men of MEBA, and all the other maritime unions. A full-force depression had hit the merchant marine, years before it swept the entire nation. Morale was low, unions had lost strength and effectiveness. MEBA in two short years plummeted to 11,000 members, only half of what they had been two years earlier. And it was to become worse. Thor, in his study of licensed engineers in the maritime industry, comments on the desperate status of the union thusly:

"With the deepening of the national economic crisis . . . (MEBA) membership declined rapidly until only 4,848 members were in good standing by January, 1934 . . . After thirteen long years of retreat, most of the MEBA locals were pitifully weak and almost completely demoralized."



3

Out of the Depths

The depression which swept the maritime industry in the twenties was but a harbinger of the 'Great Depression' into which the nation plunged in the thirties. It was not to lift until the world was swept by another global conflict in the forties.

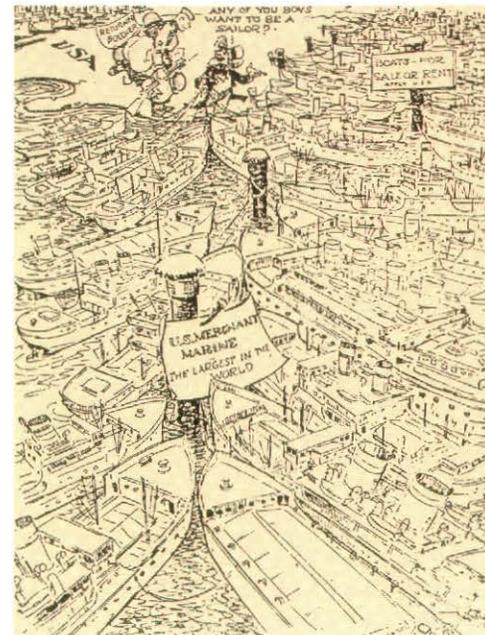
In the opening months of 1933, an estimated 12,000,000 men and women, about a fourth of the entire labor force were unemployed. But the business community thought it to be "just another panic." President Hoover was assuring the nation that "We have passed through no less than 15 major depressions in the last century . . . We have come out of each . . . into a period of prosperity greater than before . . . We shall do so this time." But unemployment kept on rising, to 15,000,000. Nothing seemed to have a lasting impact, not even the revolution of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal; during FDR's first term, joblessness declined to 8,000,000—but in the business tailspin which began early in his second term in 1937 it again shot upward to 12,000,000. Fortune magazine in a 1940 issue noted that in 1939, unemployment still stood at 9,000,000.

The maritime industry was a disaster area. By 1933, the volume of cargo carried by American ships dropped 55 percent from 1929. Job control—for those jobs which were available—was effectively in the hands of the employers. What it was like for the individual seaman was described by Joseph P. Goldberg in "The Maritime Story":

"Recruits could be obtained to sign on as workaways at one cent a month in order to have a berth and food . . . To obtain employment, men were accepting jobs below their qualifications; men with officers' licenses were sailing as able seamen or oilers . . . Hiring practices in the industry were chaotic."

Another problem for the industry was the fact that many of the ships built on an emergency basis for World War I were not suited for peacetime use. By 1936, America's merchant fleet was fourth among the six leading maritime nations in tonnage, sixth in vessels 10 years of age or less, and fifth in vessels with speeds of 12 knots or over.

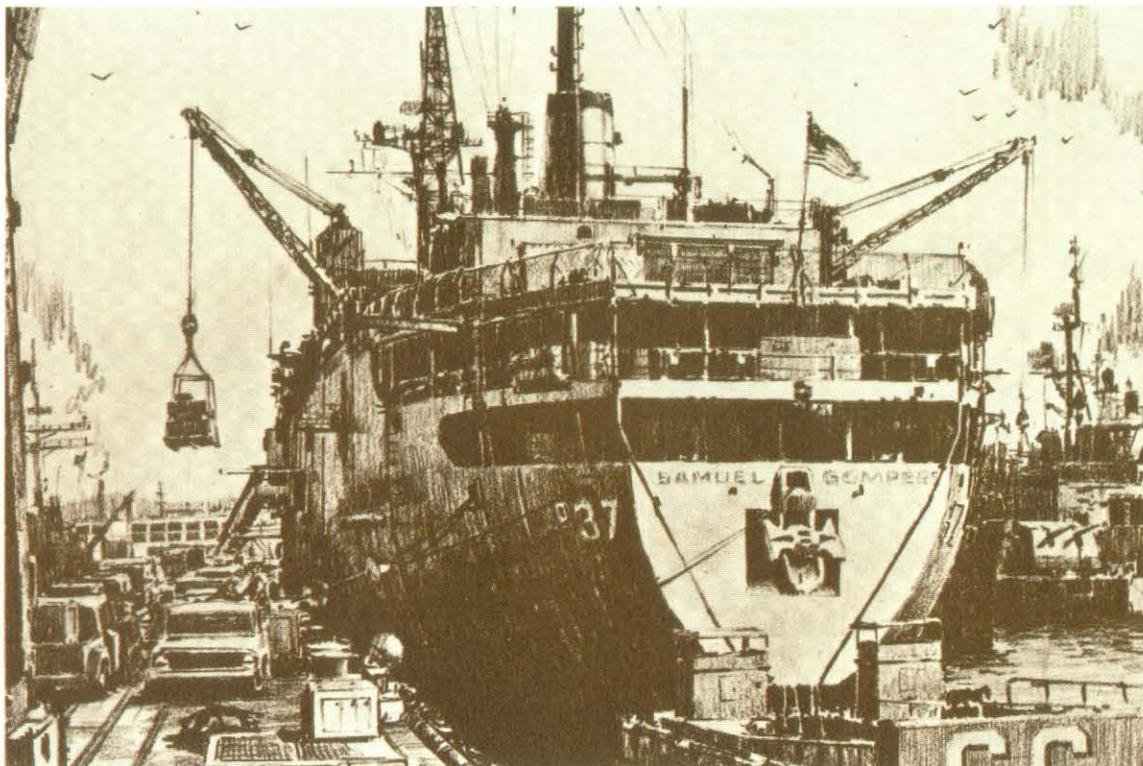
Several attempts were made by the government to assist



THE BIGGEST FLEET
America closed World War II with the world's biggest fleet, as this cartoon in the old New York Herald Tribune reminded its readers. But the nation permitted it to decline rapidly in the post-war years.

TRIBUTE TO GOMPERS

In recognition of the great role played by American labor during World War II, the government named this freighter the "Samuel Gompers" in honor of the immigrant cigar maker who became the founding president and philosophical guide of the American Federation of Labor.



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merchant shipping through mail contracts and construction loans. But the mail subsidy program, which amounted to some \$187,000,000 over the years, collapsed in scandal when it was discovered that the contracts—let without competitive bidding—had resulted in the money being siphoned off by a few shipowners.

To rescue what was left of the merchant fleet, Congress in 1936 passed the Merchant Marine Act, which set up a program of subsidies for ship construction and operation. The program called for the building of 500 new ships over a period of ten years. This finally committed the federal government to a conscious policy of government support of a merchant fleet which has in greater or lesser degree been continued to this day.

The Growth of Unionism

In the midst of this gloom—and because of it—new forces came into play which thrust the labor movement into a period of explosive growth and gain. Soon after entering office, the Roosevelt Administration committed itself to a pro-collective bargaining policy in its National Industrial Recovery Act. Although the Act was declared unconstitutional, it was followed in 1935 by the National Labor Relations Act, which not only revitalized the National Labor Relations Board but made collective bargaining a cornerstone of public policy in labor-management affairs.

American labor, impoverished, exploited and desperate,

was now ready for mass organization. Within a period of months in 1934, the United Mine Workers added 300,000 to its ranks, the International Ladies' Garment Workers 100,000, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers 50,000. The Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor in 1934 reported: "Workers held mass meetings and sent word they wanted to be organized."

But while the pent-up frustrations of the workers were being sounded from the workplace, management dug in; employers reacted to the demand for union recognition with increasing violence. Thomas R. Brooks, in his book "Toil and Trouble," described the period thusly:

"Barbed wire fences and sandbag fortifications began to ring the plants of some of America's industrial giants. Citizens' Law and Order Associations sprang up, liberally financed by employers and well-armed. Through the streets of company towns swaggered hoods and thugs, sworn in as special deputies to uphold the law. From January 1934 to July 1936 General Motors spent \$994,855.68 on an industrial spy system." From testimony before a Senate subcommittee came the estimate "that American industry spent at least \$80,000,000 on labor spies and anti-union agents in 1936 alone."

But while the workers were ready for mass organization, the trade union movement was not. The AFL of that day was, in the words of one historian "just plain suspicious of the appeals for organization from auto, rubber, and steel centers." But in the argument at the AFL convention in the summer of 1935 over whether the Federation would take on industrial organization, the craft union bloc won—and as a result the CIO was born.

The day after the convention closed, John L. Lewis and a handful of other union leaders met to form the nucleus of the CIO, and when the AFL the next year suspended the offending unions, and then ordered its city and central bodies in 1937 to expel all delegates from the suspended unions, the split was complete.

Industrial workers flocked to join the CIO, as well as some of those unions which had become unhappy in the AFL. MEBA, which had been in and out of the AFL in the early years of the thirties, had applied almost annually—and unsuccessfully—for another charter from the Federation. But in the spring of 1937,

the marine engineers union turned to the CIO and was welcomed. The new labor organization's membership had jumped, but the conflict and separation seemed also to have revitalized the AFL; from 2,800,000 in 1937, its membership leaped to 4,500,000 in 1941. This was to be just the beginning, however; by 1943, the CIO claimed nearly 6,000,000 members—but the AFL membership rocketed to 9,000,000. A decade earlier, less than 3,000,000 American workers had been union members!

A Time of Excitement

Some of the excitement and drama of those days in the mid-thirties is recounted by Thomas Brooks in "Toil and Trouble: A



PROTESTER
When government policy in 1954 favored the transfer of American flag ships to Liberian registry, MEBA and other maritime unions protested.

History of American Labor" as the sit-down strike ran through American industry like a fever.

"'You'd be sitting in the office any March day of 1937,' Myra Wolfson, an AFL Hotel and Restaurant Employees' business agent recalled, 'and the phone would ring and the voice at the other end would say: 'My name is Mary Jones; I'm a soda clerk at Liggett's; we've thrown the manager out and we've got the keys. What do we do now?'"

From September, 1936, to May 1937, Brooks recounted that sitdowns directly involved 484,711 workers. A General Motors sitdowner recalled that "it was like we was soldiers . . . I remember as a kid in school readin' about Davy Crockett and the last stand at the Alamo . . . That's just how I felt. Chevy No. 4 (plant) was my Alamo."

A vast new force was making itself felt. Walter Galenson, in his study of the AFL and CIO rivalry, "The CIO Challenge to the AFL," concludes that "the expansion of trade unionism from 1936 to 1941 had one overriding characteristic: it extended the power of labor into new and strategic sectors of the economy."

On the water front, the organizational explosion centered on the unlicensed seamen and the longshoremen. Before the thirties were over, a completely new union, the National Maritime Union, had been formed and was dominating maritime affairs on the East Coast. In 1937, it affiliated with the CIO. The old International Seamen's Union, which for decades had unsuccessfully sought to pull together a national seamen's union, at last was buried and in its place the AFL chartered the new Seafarers' International Union. On the West Coast, Harry Bridges and his International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union were at the center of a series of bitter but largely successful battles with employer groups; but Bridges was to prove too much for first the International Longshoremen's Association, which expelled him in the mid-thirties, and later the CIO, which cast him out in 1950.

Conflict within the maritime industry was often sharp and frequently prolonged during the mid-thirties; the battles often were as much between conflicting combinations of maritime unions and union leaders as they were against employers.

But the war which had been rapidly spreading in Europe

was destined again, as it had twenty-five years earlier, to involve the industrial might of the U.S. In 1940, America dropped its neutrality and proclaimed itself the "arsenal of democracy." Lend-lease generated a huge outpouring of goods and other material from the U.S. bound for its allies. Again the U.S. launched a shipbuilding program which was to double American tonnage on the seas; when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor made the U.S. a full participant in the global war, that tonnage was to redouble.

By the end of 1942, President Roosevelt's demand for 8,000,000 tons of merchant shipping had been met; the next year, this mounted to more than 19,000,000 tons, and by the end of the war, better than 55 million tons were afloat—more than 5,500 ships.

As before, the maritime unions rose to the support of the country. So much so that, in 1946 the War Shipping Administration could report: "There was not one strike in the maritime industry during the war. With the exception of a few minor and isolated misunderstandings, there were no delays in the sailing of vessels as a result of a labor dispute . . ." A key to this was the working out of "Statements of Policy" between the maritime unions, the employers and the government.

As Joseph Goldberg noted in his book, "The Maritime Story": "Once the continued function of the union hiring halls had been guaranteed by the 'Statements of Policy,' the key-stone for cooperation with the maritime unions had been set."

That cooperation was a vital ingredient to the success of the maritime industry's ability to cope with the incredible demands upon it during World War II. Between 1941 and 1945, expansion of the merchant marine had increased the number of available jobs from about 55,000 to about 200,000.

As a result of the increasingly strategic position it came to occupy as a result of and during the war, the trade union movement came out of the war greatly strengthened. Union membership soared from about 10,500,000 at the beginning of America's entry into the war to about 14,800,000 when the war ended. As well as becoming a firm fixture in the maritime industry, unions were also solidly established in the industrial sector, and the craft unions of the AFL were not only firmly entrenched but were beginning to also organize on an industrial basis.

4

The One Hundred Year Young Union

Maritime unions emerged from World War II in a sound condition. They were established. Through their long struggles, they had achieved "first class" status for their constituencies.

They were again to face tough years, however, as the decline in shipping coupled with the American government's off-again on-again interest in maritime affairs produced a steady slippage in job opportunities—and in their membership.

For MEBA, however, the two decades following the end of the war were marked by impressive gains:

- * From a level of about \$4,000 in 1946, annual earnings for marine engineers rose to levels commensurate with the responsibilities and skills of the work.

- * The union enjoys an industry-wide pension and welfare plan which is rated the best in the maritime industry.

- * MEBA has established national contract patterns. From the package increases won in bargaining, the union has the right to allocate the amounts among wages, pensions, and other benefits.

- * MEBA has established a series of diagnostic health centers for members throughout the country.

- * The union has established the Jesse M. Calhoun Engineering School, the only industry-sponsored marine officer cadet program. Now in its 10th year, the school has graduated thousands of fledgling marine engineers, and given up-grade training to large numbers of MEBA members.

- * MEBA, through launching an organizing effort in the 1950s, re-established the union as a force on the Great Lakes for the first time since 1908.

- * The union over recent years has repeatedly proved itself

a formidable legislative force on Capitol Hill with regard to maritime affairs.

The union's gains in its collective bargaining agreements over the last two decades have not been accomplished under the easiest of circumstances. At the time of Japan's surrender in 1945, the War Shipping Board had control of a fleet of about 43,000 vessels with job opportunities for about 200,000 seamen. By mid-1948, the active fleet had dwindled to 1,813 ships with jobs for 90,000. In 1950, before the Korean crisis, active ships numbered 1,150 with jobs for about 62,000. The demands of the Korean war pushed the total of ships and jobs up somewhat; but it was followed by a steady decline until the Shipbuilding Act of 1970 began to turn the trend upward again.

Despite the battle of the maritime unions to force an increase of trade carried in American ships, the figure has been steadily decreasing since the end of World War II. By the beginning of 1975 less than 10 percent of American trade is carried in U.S. bottoms.

A Period of Substantial Gains

In the face of this gloomy situation, however, MEBA in the post-World War II era was able to mark up substantial gains in both wages and working conditions. Much of the collective bargaining confrontation during the period immediately after the war centered on achieving the 40-hour week at sea and attaining the hiring hall. Predictably the union encountered strong employer opposition on both counts.

But in July 1951, MEBA reported to its members that it had



AN HISTORIC REPORT

The President's Shipbuilding Commission, which functioned in 1971 and 1972, produced an historic report spelling out the need for a vastly improved American merchant marine. MEBA Secretary-Treasurer Charles A. Black (second from right, standing) played a prominent role in the Commission's deliberation and report writing.

won a “smashing victory” in a new collective bargaining agreement which called for a reduction of the work week first to 44 hours, and then to 40 hours while at sea. The next year saw the completion of hiring hall agreements with shipowners which began with the breakthrough on the West Coast in 1949.

Many of the union’s gains during this period could be traced in considerable measure to the work of Lee Pressman, who was totally signed on as the union’s general counsel in 1948 and continued in that post until his death in 1969. In many respects, Pressman—working closely with MEBA’s officers—was the legal architect of the union’s spectacular gains over the previous 25 years. At his death, MEBA President Jesse Calhoon praised Pressman as the “guiding spirit and intellect” of the union.

It was during this period that the union made a concentrated effort to win back its former position of a strength on the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes drive, financed by a \$10-a-member assessment, was approved by a referendum, and at the 1957 convention, MEBA President H. L. Daggett reported that the drive had made “outstanding gains” in the first year of operation.

With the signing of an agreement with the Pittsburgh Steamship Division of U. S. Steel after a strike, the *American Marine Engineer* noted, the union had “broken the back of the open shop movement in the Great Lakes fleet.” Within a short time, President Daggett could report that 81 Great Lakes vessels were under MEBA contracts, and the victories “marked the return of MEBA as the collective bargaining representatives (on Great Lakes vessels) for the first time since 1908.”

In reporting contract gains to the membership over these years, the union’s leadership characterized them as ranging from “substantial” to “spectacular.” President Daggett, summing up five years of progress since 1948, reported to the 1953 convention that “basic wages have been increased by 41 per cent, while the cost of living has gone up only 10 per cent.” Welfare plan payments amounted to 60 cents per man per day—all financed by employers. Later that year, the union could report that a 60-day vacation had been won in the Pacific tanker agreement. In March of the following year, the *American Marine Engineer* reported that the medical benefits

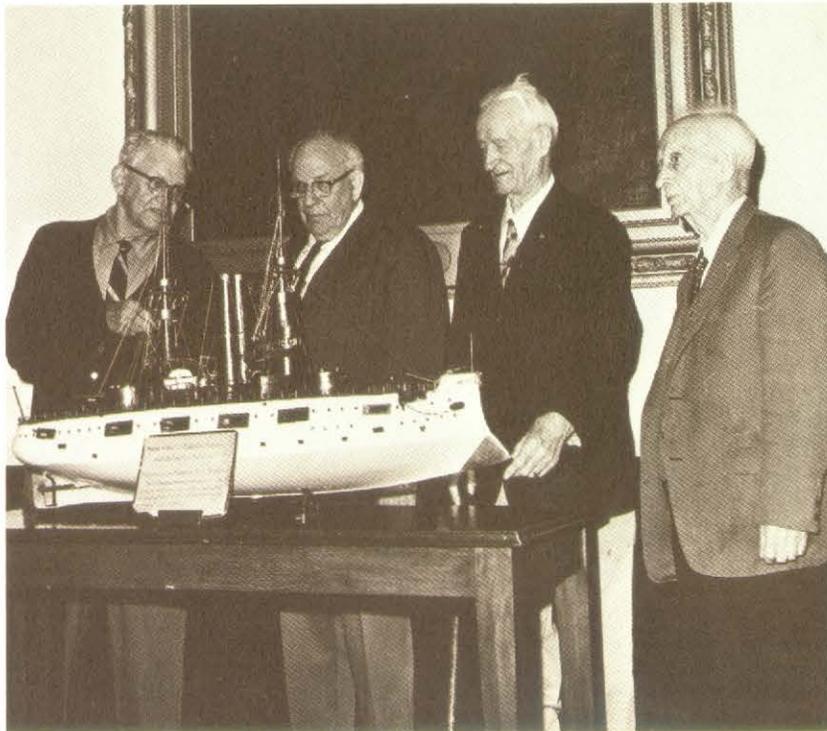
PRESIDENTS OF MEBA

1875	Garret Dow
1876-1881	Abner L. Foote
1881	Thomas H. Nelson
1882	Edward D. Bateman
1883	James H. Reid
1884	William E. Russell
1885	Andrew Ritter
1886	Andrew Payne
1887-1888	Aspinwall Fuller
1889	Ambrose L. Boyce
1890-1892	John H. Galway
1893-1903	George Uhler
1904-1906	Frank A. Jones
1907-1914	William F. Yates
1915-1916	A. Bruce Gibson
1917-1926	William S. Brown
1926-1930	William F. Yates
1930-1934	C. M. Sheplar
1935-1936	William Brown
1937-1949	Samuel J. Hogan
1950-1959	Herbert L. Daggett
1960-1963	E. N. Altman
1963-	Jesse M. Calhoon

MEBA'S OLDEST MEMBER

For the union's centennial, it was appropriate to get a picture of MEBA's oldest member. He is Anton Husberg, who was born in Finland in 1879, just four years after the union was created. With a long history of seafaring in his family, Husberg came to the United States, becoming a citizen in 1909. He acquired the tenth renewal of his Chief Engineer's license in 1964.

Pensioner Anton Husberg, who lives at Sailors' Snug Harbor at Snug Harbor, N.Y., looks over a model of the old battleship Alabama with three other MEBA old timers: Ole Johnson, David Buris, and, at right, Robert MacCullick.



for dependents of members which had been established on the Pacific Coast had been extended to the Atlantic and Gulf Coast agreements.

In mid-1955, the union could claim that “sweeping gains” had been scored in a new contract, followed by “impressive new wage gains” in 1956 and “whopping gains” in 1957, including achievement of our industry-wide fully integrated pension plan completely financed by employers. By 1958, in a 10-year review of improvements, President Daggett told the convention that wages had increased 58 percent over 1949.

In 1959, MEBA managed to resolve to its favor a problem with a rival marine engineers’ organization which had plagued it in greater or lesser degree over a 10-year period by merging the Brotherhood of Marine Engineers, which had been chartered by the Seafarer’s International Union, into its Great Lakes organization.

In 1960 MEBA members decided on a change in the union’s leadership; in a referendum, they elected E. N. Altman as President in a close contest over Daggett, with Jesse Calhoon elected as the new Secretary-Treasurer.

From 1963: ‘The Calhoon Era’

But it wasn’t long before the union was in for still another change in its leadership personnel. Early in 1963, Altman resigned to become Executive Vice-President of the American Maritime Association. After a special convention, Jesse M. Calhoon was elected to fill his unexpired term. In 1965 at the next regular election, Calhoon was re-elected, with Charles A. Black being named as Secretary-Treasurer. They have been returned to office in every election since then; in 1973, both officers were named to five-year terms.

Under Calhoon’s leadership, the mid-sixties opened the period in which the union began to mark up some of its most significant gains. In 1965, the union could announce to its members a “historic” contract, in which it had won the right to allocate among wages, pensions and other benefits the economic package won in negotiations with the employers.

Early in 1966, the problem of a shortage of engineers began to plague the industry. The union moved swiftly to meet the challenge. Under the planning of President Calhoon, the union launched a study of a training program designed to help

ease the shortage, and eventually it came into being as a result of the union’s initiative and persistence in collective bargaining. In March of that year, District 1 had approved an apprentice training program, and the following month the program was outlined to the national convention. By June 1966, Operation LEAP (Licensed Engineer Apprentices Program) was under way.

The program came to win wide support from the industry and the federal government. The Coast Guard, in response to the program, established the rating of apprentice engineer. By spring of the following year, a single East and West Coast apprentice program had been established, and the school set up in Baltimore under the directorship of Roy Luebbe, an MEBA member. In October 1968, the first class of 19 graduates of the Calhoon MEBA Engineering School was honored at a ceremony at the school. Since then, some 845 additional cadets have been graduated from the program, the only marine officer cadet program jointly sponsored by labor and management and funded by the maritime industry. It is the prime source of supply of engineering personnel for the merchant marine.

The year 1968 also marked another significant occurrence in the union’s history. Faced with new and challenging problems within the maritime industry, MEBA had long chafed under the organizational inadequacies of its old structure. Starting in the decade of the sixties, a series of moves was made to make the union more responsive to the needs of the time. In 1960 the membership approved the consolidation of the union’s locals into three main districts—an Atlantic and Gulf District, Pacific Coast District, and Rivers and Great Lakes District. Then in 1968, on the overwhelming approval of the membership, the deep sea districts, District 1 and the Pacific Coast District, were merged into a single, all-coast unit.

MEBA in these years also began to show itself as a potent legislative force on Capitol Hill. In 1966, with other maritime unions, it launched a determined fight to keep the Maritime Administration out of the newly-formed Department of Transportation, fearing that the submersion of the administration in the broad sweep of that department would mean that maritime affairs would fail to get the knowledgeable attention they deserved from the government. While the unions won the fight

Continued on page 45

MEBA on the Washington Scene



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Representative Leonor K. Sullivan was honored by MEBA and other maritime unions when a painting of the influential Congresswoman was unveiled in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington.



A conversation between MEBA's President Calhoun and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. The picture was taken when Rockefeller was seeking re-election as governor of New York.

Signing by President Nixon of the historic Shipbuilding Act of 1970. Behind the President stands Helen Bentley, head of the Federal Maritime Commission; and behind her, MEBA President Calhoun.





to keep the Maritime Administration out of the new Department, they did not succeed in the second step of their effort to establish it as an independent agency.

In 1970, MEBA and the other maritime unions, with the backing of other AFL-CIO and the Administration of President Nixon, helped win Congressional approval of the most sweeping maritime legislation in more than a third of a century. The legislation—the Merchant Marine Act of 1970—provided a government subsidy program for the construction of 300 ships for the American-flag merchant fleet over the next 10 years.

President Nixon, at the signing ceremony, termed it a “happy occasion,” pointing out that fully three-fourths of the nation’s shipping fleet was at least 20 years old. Mr. Nixon’s support of and signature on the Act fulfilled a campaign pledge in which he declared that “the time has come for new departures, new solutions and new vitality for American ships and American crews on the high seas of the world.”

MEBA President Calhoon hailed the new law as a “significant beginning” toward the rebirth of the American merchant marine.

“Government and labor have done their part,” he declared. “Now it is up to management to fulfill its obligations.” He pointed out that if management utilizes the full benefits of the legislation, “the Merchant Marine Act could reverse the deterioration of American flag shipping.”

In addition to providing for ship construction subsidies, the Act broadened the definition of applicants for the subsidies; established a Commission on American Ship Building to review the industry’s progress toward achieving the goals of decreasing subsidy levels, and created a new position of Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Maritime Affairs, combining it with the position of Maritime Administrator. Another provision of the Act increased outstanding federal mortgage insurance on ship construction to \$3 billion from \$1 billion.

Creation of the Act has been followed by solid progress.

THE CALHOON MEBA SCHOOL

MEBA’s training school in Baltimore has won national renown for the excellence of its curriculum and the quality of its students, who come from all parts of the country and, when they graduate, score very well on the Coast Guard tests. In addition many long-time MEBA members return for upgrading and training in new technology.

In January 1972, the federal government announced the award of a \$54.5 million contract for three tankers to be built by the National Steel and Shipbuilding Co. At a ceremony in connection with the signing, President Nixon asked 2,000 of the company’s employees to “make sure that America is going to be Number 1 insofar as its merchant marine is concerned.”

In July of that year, President Nixon announced contracts for 16 ships totalling \$660,000,000. Of the ships contracted for, 16 were to be advanced-design merchant vessels, and three 265,000-ton tankers—the largest ever to be built in the U.S.

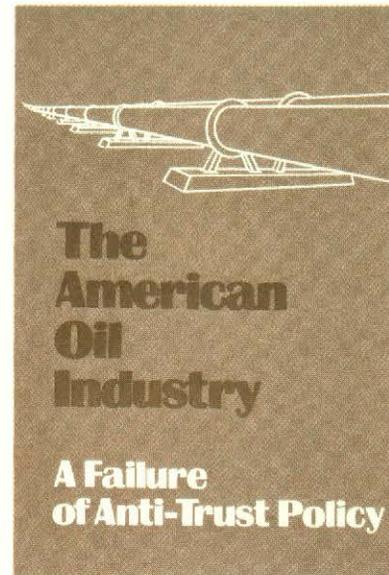
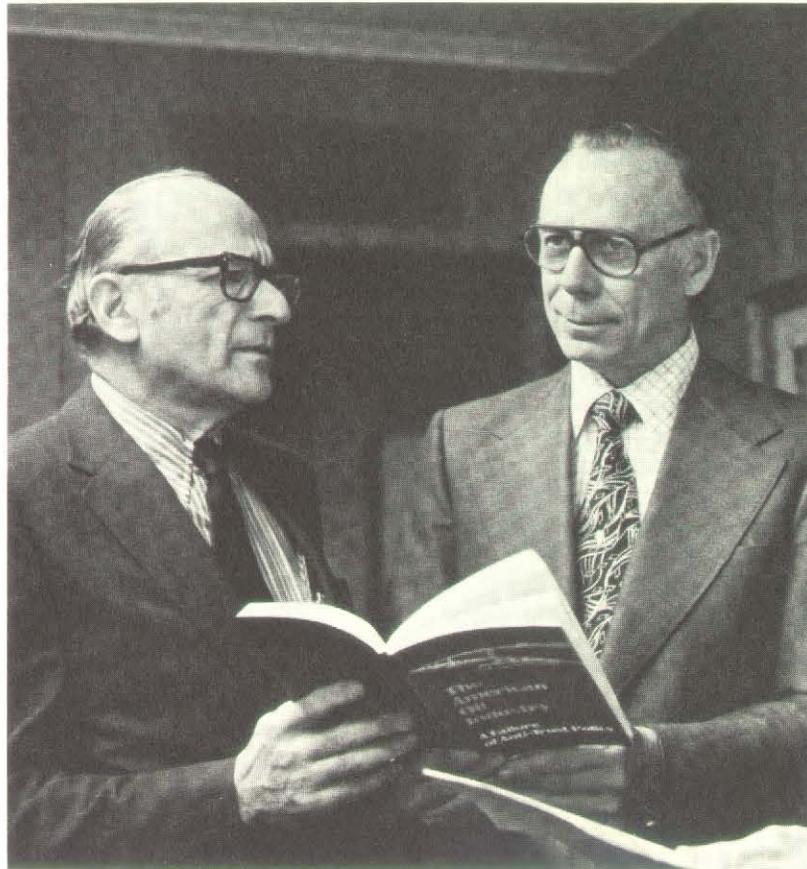
At the end of 1974, and on the eve of MEBA’s celebration of its 100th year, the union was able to claim what MEBA President Jesse Calhoon described as “yet another legislative milestone” in the union’s history: the approval by Congress of the Energy Transportation Security Bill of 1974 which the union hoped would “break the oil industry’s unrestricted power to use foreign-flag tankers to import petroleum to the U.S.” The bill provided that by 1977, 30 percent of all U.S. oil imports would have to be shipped in American flag tankers.

On December 30, 1974, however, it was announced that President Ford would not sign the bill. His “pocket veto”, occurring after Congress had adjourned, killed the measure. His refusal to place his signature on the bill and convert it into law was a “lamentable decision,” Mr. Calhoon declared. He said that time would show the pocket veto “served the interests of the oil cartel, which profits from keeping its fleets under foreign flags”. This is “a dark day for the merchant marine and thus for the nation,” President Calhoon commented, but he promised that MEBA and other maritime unions would renew the effort in the future.

Thus MEBA closes out its first century pledged to carry out the campaigns to which it had pledged its resources and its efforts. Despite occasional setbacks, MEBA demonstrated at the end of its first century that it had not lost the courage which had marked its founders 100 years earlier. MEBA meets its anniversary as an important and influential factor in the maritime industry; as a highly successful practitioner of the collective bargaining process on behalf of its members; and as an increasingly significant force in the mainstream of the American trade union movement.

EXPOSING THE OIL CARTEL

In recent years MEBA has devoted considerable attention to exposing and publicizing the harmful effect on the public of many practices of the international oil cartel, and has campaigned for legislation that would close the tax loopholes through which oil companies derive massive benefits. With President Calhoun is Stanley H. Ruttenberg, Washington economist, who produced for MEBA a widely read study—*The American Oil Industry—A Failure of Anti-Trust Policy*.



5

MEBA Today

The Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, as it moves into its second century, is an organization particularly skilled in the practice of collective bargaining for men and women in positions of professional responsibility.

In the merchant marine, some 10,000 members enjoy the benefits of that collective bargaining skill. MEBA is recognized for the great advances it has brought about not only in basic pay but in health care, pensions, vacations and other aspects of the working condition.

VICTORY FOR THE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

It was a day of celebration when the Professional Air Traffic Controllers—an affiliate of MEBA—won a nationwide government representation election. Sharing in the mutual congratulations were PATCO's President John Leyden and Executive Vice President Bob Poli, and MEBA Pres. Calhoon.

The National Marine Engineers Beneficial Association has two major districts covering members in the merchant marine. District #1—Pacific Coast District, the result of a merger some years ago, represents licensed engineers working out of the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific Coasts. District #2 represents engineers on ships in the Great Lakes, and in addition has membership on the east coast.

Other groups of professional employees have affiliated with MEBA in recent years in order to gain benefits from MEBA's strength and expertise.

The largest of these is the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization, which represents some 15,000 employees of the Federal Aviation Administration concerned with guiding airplanes in and out of the nation's airports and along the channels of air traffic.

PATCO—which is headed by John Leyden—has headquarters in Washington, D.C. In a series of legal actions and elections, PATCO emerged as the sole bargaining agent for the traffic controllers, and since then has conducted negotiations with the government agency on a number of issues related to the work of the controllers and to the safety of the nation's air transport fleet.

Various other professional groups are affiliated with MEBA. Typical of these affiliates are the Engineers & Scientists of California; the Florida Association of Professional Employees; and the Federation of Public Employees of Broward County.

Produced and Edited by: Maurer Fleisher Zon & Anderson, Inc.,
Washington, D.C.
Design and Layout: C.E. Behrens
Historical Research: John A. Grimes
Photographic Research: M.B. Schnapper
Printing: Creative Printing, Inc.

Picture credits: The Smithsonian Institution; the Library of Congress; the Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.; The National Archives; The American Marine Engineer; the Scientific American; The Guide; the Seattle Times; Merkle Press; Irv King; Del Ankers; Brown Brothers; J.H. Mittendorf; Henry J. Kaiser Historical Library; The Calhoun MEBA School; Sedgewick Archives; Museum of the City of New York.