A Sailing Family Story: Two Lives As One

A Sailor's Wife

There is nothing more functional, and dysfunctional, than a sailing family. Theresa Noble lives comfortably in her East End of Superior home, widowed since the loss of her husband Don, who was an engineer in the Great Lakes fleet of the Wilson Marine Transit Company. While Don was away on the boat, from mid-April until mid-November, Theresa ran the household. She raised three of their four children pretty much on her own. She had a system, and it worked, for the most part. "I sent him a telegram to let him know his first son was born." She did that three more times. Mrs. Noble says to call her Theresa.

In the fall of 1953, Theresa Hololik, from Manistique, Michigan, would meet Donald Noble, from Superior, Wisconsin. "Theresa met Don through a rather **** route," explained her son Steven. It was a story that had gotten confused over time. "After she graduated from nursing school in Marquette Michigan she came back to Manistique and found herself working what she considered a dead-end job at a medical clinic. A friend of her sisters, Lenore Hokkala, who lived in Manistique during the shipping season to be near the port where her husband Gene's ship came in to load limestone. Lenore invited her to seek better employment in Superior, WI, where she and her Gene lived during the winter. She took her up on the offer and moved in with them until she could strike out on her own. She was introduced to Gene's sister, whose husband William (Bill) Cashman had a nephew and great lakes sailor named Donald Noble, whom was back in Superior for the lay-up season."

Theresa on the *Ben Moreell.* Photo from 8mm film footage.

We dated for the whole winter, and he went to the ship in the spring of the year, back in March; always by Easter he was gone, recalls Theresa of their brief courtship. "He let me have his car, because I didn't have a car. He let me use his car, so his mother said, "This must be serious.""

Theresa was 20 or 21 years old when she told her sister she was going to marry a sailor. "She just shook her head," said Theresa. "They didn't have the best reputation. But we ended up getting married the end of November, 1954 at Cathedral (The Cathedral of Christ the King); a big wedding. [Don's boat laid up for the winter in Superior two weeks earlier]. And on the 19th of October of the following year, we had Steven. They didn't have cell phones. I sent a telegram to the *Ben Moreell* telling him that his first child was born. Steven was six weeks old before Don ever laid eyes on him." Theresa's life soon settled into a familiar pattern while the children were young.

Wilson had a vessel agent at Duluth who the wives and girlfriends could call to get the estimated day and time of arrival. "This agent would tell us, okay, for instance, the name of the ship was the

Ben Moreell, Don's ship. So, the *Ben Moreell* should be up in Allouez on Tuesday the 14th, at two o'clock in the afternoon. Even with the agent telling you that, you also had to look in the newspaper to find out when *Ben Moreell* went through the locks. Then you had to determine, okay, I now know it takes x number of hours for it to get up to wherever it's going, whether it's Allouez, whether it's Silver Bay, wherever, and then when it did come in, if it was loading iron ore, you had exactly two to two and a half hours. So, you better be there when the ship got in."

Theresa wasn't from Superior, so she didn't have a group of lifelong pals and family to babysit when Don's ship came in. "There was no built-in babysitter coming over to watch the kids. You either made arrangements for a babysitter or you couldn't go," said Theresa, matter-of-factly. She still has that tough sailor's wife determination in her voice. "I was usually a driver, and there were a couple girls that always came with me, their husbands were deck hands or something," Theresa recalled. "And many times, especially in the fall of the year, we would get into the office and say, "Okay, we're waiting for the *Ben Moreell*." "Well, the *Ben Moreell* is sitting out. There's a boat loading ahead of her. She won't be coming in until tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock." Theresa laughed at the futility of it. She then had to turn around, go back home, and then made the arrangements again, either with the same girls or other friends, to go again.

Theresa with chocolates on the *Ben Moreell*. Photo from 8mm film footage.

If everything went smoothly, you usually only had a few hours before the boat would be done loading. The docks were fast loading, continued Theresa. The ships typically carried less than 10,000 ton of ore. "When they came in the docks were ready for them, both places. A lot of times Don had to work his shift when he came in, but he usually had somebody work for him so he could spend some time with me alone, or with the children. Whatever happened, that was your period of time."

The loosely structured children/family exchange, where various women took turns watching other sailor's children created a bond between the women. "Naturally, you gravitate towards the women, and of course, their husbands all didn't work for Bethlehem Steel or Wilson company. There were different lines," explained Theresa of the babysitting network. "The girls that I especially knew, I would babysit for them. I would have their children over at my house, and then when I took a trip, then they took my children."

Don and Theresa's oldest son Steve, remembers visiting a lot of different homes throughout the city. "She didn't know people, so we all hung around with other sailing families. You never met anybody's dad. There were no dads around. It was just these mothers with kids, and you just didn't think anything different about it. It didn't register because you were raised that way."

On occasion, once per season, an opportunity would come for Theresa to take a trip on the boat. It was her turn to have the kids stay with another sailing family. A trip for a spouse was one of the perks usually reserved for ship's officers. For Theresa, it would mean getting on board at Allouez,

or on her first trip, Silver Bay, where her first climb up the ship's ladder was very scary. "Don was always reassuring," recalled Theresa.

It was all very exciting, especially that first trip. "Just the level of the ship going up or going down at the Soo Locks. It was very, very interesting, and to be freed from the responsibilities of children and a job." Theresa recalled one of the best parts of the trip was sleeping in late, and eating chocolates. "My God, I'd sleep in late before I'd go down in the engine room when he was working to visit. It was a full week that I was gone." It only took a few days for Theresa to adjust to the 24-hour rhythm of the ship.

Theresa noted the sailors were always pleasant. "I can't say that I ever met any of those fellas that worked the boat that weren't pleasant. They loved to see a woman and talk and converse. Some were starved for a woman's attention, or just regular old talk." For a bunch of sailors, if you didn't know better, Theresa said you would think they're rough and tough talking. "The lay person would think that, but it was just the completely opposite," Theresa recalled. "I was always greeted when they knew I was there. The cook had a box of candy, a bottle of wine, a dinner that you would just be amazed at when you came into the officer's dining room at dinner time." The Chief Steward on the *Ben Moreell* was Irving Mossberger, of Superior. "I can't say enough nice things about a whole crew. Whatever ship I went on with Don I was treated very nicely, very great."

"When we were first married they used to carry cars, on deck, up here," said Theresa, meaning to the Twin Ports. After unloading ore at a port on Lake Erie the ship then loaded cars at Detroit, roughly a day into the upbound trip. Occasionally on hot summer days, if they could get away with it, the deck crew would sit in a car and run the air conditioner full blast until the gas tank was almost empty. On cold days they'd do the opposite, sit inside with the heater going. "They'd load them off in Duluth, and then they went to load ore. It was either up to Silver Bay or up to Allouez."

Crew of *Ben Moreell* checking out the new cars. Photo from 8mm film footage.

Looking back, "When you live that kind of life," reflected Theresa, "you congregate with people that are the same thing, that do the same thing. Us girls got together. We'd spend our year, our summers, or falls, whatever, us girls went on picnics. Us girls got together for kids' birthdays, stuff like that. There were very few times that Don was not home for Christmas, but there were times he did not make it home for Christmas. Because he was an engineer, they were the last ones to leave the boat. They had to make sure that everything was intact before they left. And of course, he could be up in Buffalo, New York, laying up. Who knows?" Don usually missed everything. There was one chance for Theresa to change that.

When their daughter Aimee was born, Theresa asked the doctor if the baby could stay in the hospital for a few extra days until Don's ship got in, so Don could be there to pick her up at the hospital and take her home. "Don had never been home when any of his children were born. With

Aimee, who is nine years behind Craig, the third child, we were able to do that." Theresa knew the sacrifices Don had made with his line of work. She had made sacrifices too. She told Don she was not going to raise this child alone. He needed to get off the boats.

At home, Theresa ran the household. "Don's checks were sent directly to me, and I always cashed them. Then, he got paid once a month. It was big money to begin with, but by the end of the month, you're thinking a house payment, get an envelope for groceries, get an envelope for whatever, and that's what it was like for all of us girls. We didn't know any better. You just had a bunch of envelopes, and one was marked utilities, one was marked groceries, one was marked water, light or whatever, and sometimes you robbed Peter to pay Paul to get by."

Whenever there was talk of a steel strike, tensions would also rise in the Noble household. "It seems like every cotton pickin' October his boat would come in somewhere and I'd meet him and he'd say, "Well, Theresa, you got to tighten up. There's talk of a steel strike." There was always talk of a steel strike in October. So, then you've gotta be careful how you spend, and or what you do," said Theresa. "I think it was about two years before he decided he could retire, when he said we're going to have to start writing down every penny that we spend. "Not that you're on a budget, but just start making notes of everything daily that you spend," Don says, When I retire, I have to look for a job that at least will pay the expenses of our daily living. And so that's just exactly what he did. He looked for a job and got a job."

Theresa recalled the first time Don actually took a check to the bank. "He had to prove who he was before he could sign his own check. He came home and he said, "They did not know me at the bank," and I said "Yep, they've never seen you. You were a ghost."

Donald Noble

Donald Joseph Noble was born in a third-floor room in the New York Block, an old Romanesque Revival style apartment in Superior, Wisconsin, in October, 1925. The Superior Post Office stood facing it from across the street at the same height. The walk-up apartments and retail block had anchored the northeast corner of 14th and Tower Avenue since 1890. Don Noble entered the world in the heart of downtown Superior.

His father Omer was a mechanic, his mother Dorothy Cashman, a housewife who was related to and associated with several men who sailed on the Great Lakes, known casually as working on the boats. "When the war broke out, I believe he was sixteen years old, so he's sixteen years old, he's eleventh grade," says Don's oldest son Steve. Steve has a deep appreciation for the path his father chose. "Every able-bodied man joined the service. The railroads were short of men, the Great Lakes merchant marine were short of men, grain elevators were short of men. And it's the Depression. Dad said almost everybody he knew at Central High School quit school and went to work. How he ended up on the Great Lakes, as opposed to somewhere else, is anyone's guess."

Steve Noble believed his father's path to the boats came through his mother's connections. Theresa explained how the husband of her sister's friend, Jean Lenore Hokkala, sailed. "Lenore came to Manistique, where I was from, because her husband Gene's boat came in to Gulliver all the time.

She was there the whole summer of 1951. Bill Cashman, Don's uncle, was married to the sister of this sailor. Uncle Bill was a steward with Wilson Marine Transit, and the Wilson line had a lot of boats."

A common means of getting a job on the boats was having someone vouch for you, a person who was a licensed officer, who could guarantee you a spot on a ship when one came open. In years prior to the maritime academies, it was a way to filter out some of the less desirables looking for work, and do a favor for someone. Most lake fleets adhered to this ad hoc policy, or hired out of the Lake Carriers' Association and hiring halls. It was a very blue-collar approach to labor. "Omer contacted his friend Charles "Tug" Howey", a First Assistant Engineer on the Wilson boats. His ship was looking for a coal passer." Tug agreed to vouch for Don and hold a spot until he had his merchant papers, recalled Theresa from her conversations with Don.

Officer's dining room on the steamer *A. W. Osborne*. After-end lay-up dinner, Thanksgiving Day, 1943. Left: First Captain Bill Birdsell, Center: First Engineer Charles "Tug" Howey, Oiler Don Noble. (2nd Cook or porter not identified) Photo courtesy of Theresa Noble.

Don signed onto the steamer *A. W. Osborne* in Milwaukee, on March 15, 1943. He was starting as a coal passer, the lowest rank in the engine room; where the men are called the Black Gang. In July, Don sailed roughly one week as a fireman, a rung up from the bottom in the engine room, before advancing to the position of "oiler" in the engine room of the *Osborne*. By staying on board the ship the entire season, and through lay-up, Don would earn an end of season bonus.

That fall, in October, 1943, Don turned eighteen on the *Osborne*. He also received a letter at the Soo. "It's from Uncle Sam," says Don's son Steve. (It says),"Go to your draft board," and he doesn't want to go to the draft board yet because he wants to finish out the season, right to lay up, because there's a bonus at lay-up. He wanted the money to give to his mom and dad so they could make a down payment on a home," recalls Steve. "He told me he approached the chief engineer to tell him his dilemma. The chief engineer said, "You know, mail isn't that reliable at the Soo. You might not have gotten this letter." So, dad ignored the letter and stayed till the end of the season, which could have been another two months from then. I believe they laid up the ship in New York somewhere." [1]

[1] Thomas Wilson. P. 194. Ahoy and Farewell II, Detroit: The Marine Historical Society of Detroit., p. 194.
Note: The year prior to Don joining the ship, the *A. W. Osborne* and the *Capt. Thomas Wilson* were traded in to the U.S.M.C. as part of the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, to facilitate the construction of the first maritime class vessel for Wilson, the *Thomas Wilson*. When Don Noble sailed his first season, the *Osborne* operated under a bare boat charter to Wilson until the new ship was completed. Don laid up the vessel in Ogdensburg, New York, on November 30, 1943. Historically, on November 3, 1932, the *A. W. Osborne* became the first Wilson Marine Transit vessel to transit the Upper St. Lawrence, and also reputedly the largest U.S. "upper lake" vessel at the time, when the *Osborne* carried a cargo of corn loaded in South Chicago. Four years after Don helped lay up the *Osborne* in New York, the vessel was scrapped at Hamilton, Ontario.

The Navy Years

Years after retiring from the boats, Don told Steve what really happened after he left the *Osborne* that first season in Ogdensburg, New York. “He went to the draft office. The guy he talked to read him the riot act. “Where the hell have you been?” and so on, and Don said, “Well, I didn't get my draft notice, you know. I was sailing the Great Lakes.” And the guy said, “You report tomorrow” to wherever. And Don said, “I haven't been home in months, could I at least go back to Superior and say goodbye to my folks?” And this guy said, “Absolutely not, this is serious business, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” So, dad said he walked out of the office and passed an open door where another guy was sitting at a desk, and as he went past, the guy at the desk signaled him in and asked dad, “What was all that about?” When dad had explained himself, the guy said, “I tell you what. I'll give you seven days to report to your draft board in Superior, Wisconsin. That gives you time to get home by train and visit your folks and enlist then.” So that's what he did. He ended up enlisting in Superior.”

Don was sent to the Great Lakes Naval Academy for basic training. Unlike most recruits, however, Don rarely attended a class, and joked that he “never saluted anybody” either. Don’s experience with boilers was flagged immediately and he was recruited to help run the heating plant at Great Lakes. Don spent almost all his time tending boilers before graduating with his class. “I never saw any of them, or never did nothing with them,” dad told me. He said, “All I got was a piece of paper that said, you're in the amphibious; you're going to Norfolk, Virginia, for amphibious training.”

Don learned the engine plant on his new ship by working with a mock up. The actual ship, LSM-187, was still under construction, which meant learning the ins and outs from a fake engine. Don’s only experience with engines was working on a steam plant, this engine was diesel.[2]

When the ship was completed, they took it out on sea trials and then through the Panama Canal, stopping in San Diego, before shooting across to Honolulu, where they did some maneuvers with the Marines, on to Saipan, and then the invasion of Okinawa in April, 1945. It was always breaking down said Don. One engine or the other. There was only one officer who had any knowledge of navigation, and most of that was from his participation in the Sea Scouts, but he got them there!

Don Noble in the U.S. Navy on the *LSM-187*. (shirtless, with cigarette).

All the time before and until Don got out of the Navy six years later, his old sailing pals on the Great Lakes were trying to lure him back on the boats. “He was determined he was going to rejoin the Navy. He had six years in. He had a good time. Saw a lot of country, a lot of whatever,” recalled Theresa, but Don chose to resign from the Navy to be closer to home.

[2] Note: LSM-187 was powered by twin General Motors, reversible with hydraulic clutch, diesel engines; direct drives with 1,440 BHP (brake horsepower) each.

Return to the Great Lakes

Don returned to the Great Lakes, signing aboard the *Robert L. Ireland* as a coal passer on May 2, 1950. He stayed on the boat the entire year, laying up the boat as an oiler in Ashtabula, Ohio, on the first of December. Being back on the boats was anything but being closer to home. Other than a few hours at a dock, he was gone for pretty much seven months until lay-up. He was also back at the bottom of the seniority list in the fleet.

1950 was the only year Don ever sailed aboard the *Ireland*. The following season he fit out as an oiler on the *James MacNaughton,* a job he held for two years. Encouraged by several fellow engineers, Don began studying prior to attending winter school at Kings Point in preparation for getting his Third Engineer's license.

Over the winter of 1952-53 Don earned his Third Assistant Engineer, Steam, rating. On March 24, he fit out the steamer *Charles S. Hebard*, sailing for the first time on his Third's license. He joined the *Hebard* in Buffalo, leaving it eight months later in Cleveland. Not home in time for deer hunting, but home for Thanksgiving.

If Don wasn't sailing, or attending engineer school he'd either be working as a ship keeper on a boat in lay-up, or as a janitor at a local school after hours. "There was no unemployment," recalled Theresa. "A lot of winters, even if he didn't lay up the boat here, if there was a boat that the company had here in the dry dock, he would work winters. He not only sailed for nine months out of the year, or ten months, he was ship keeping. And of course, the boat at the shipyard was not heated. There was very little that was heated. So, by time he'd come home after eight hours, he was frozen."

Don sailing for the first time on his Third Assistant Engineer license on the *Charles S. Hebard* in July, 1953. Photo from 8mm film footage.

After his year on the *Hebard*, Don would find a permanent home on the *James MacNaughton* as a Third Assistant and later as Second Assistant on the same ship, renamed the *Ben Moreell (2)* in 1955. In his spare time on the boat, Don was an avid reader. Socially, he played a few years' worth of Smear with his engine department mates over his career. "He wasn't a big drinker, and he wasn't a smoker, but in saying that, we got married in November and for Lent he gave up smoking; so he was not a smoker anymore," remembered Theresa about Don's ship board habits. "He took only a little money with him. I cashed his check but all he ever wanted was enough money to buy the newspaper at the Locks. He was a reader of books, of magazines."

Life on the *Moreell* was good for Don. It was home. He sailed as Third and Second Assistant throughout the 1950s, with an occasional relief First Assistant for a week in the mix. He was on board when the ship's pilothouse was replaced over the 1955-56 lay-up in Cleveland, and the following year when the *Moreell* collided with the *Champlain* in the St. Marys River in May, 1957. The year after that, on September 18, 1958, Don was Second Assistant on board when the *Ben*

Moreell struck the railroad car ferry *Ashtabula* as both vessels were maneuvering in Ashtabula harbor. The accident resulted in the untimely demise of the *Ashtabula* and the company that operated the ferry. In 1964, the *Moreell* became the first ship on the Great Lakes to have fully automated boilers.

The Final Decade

When Don first started sailing, the Wilson boats weren't unionized. He did not belong to any union until he joined the National Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (NMEBA) in August 1960, after receiving his union book in late April. Before that he sailed over ten years with no retirement plan. The Nobles could now put aside a little money toward a retirement. Theresa was still basically a single mom to a house full of teenagers. It was challenging. "Some of those years went by the side," said Theresa. "Once they got a union in there, and when it got to where he could retire after x number of years, we had to hang on. Don said "Hang on, we've only got just 18 more months. We've got to hang on.""

"I know he was pro union. I can remember him telling me years ago, before Wilson folded, there was a union vote. Wilson sent everybody letters saying, basically, "Hey, we're a family. We don't need a union. We're a family," recalled Steve Noble. "Dad said if they hadn't unionized, when Wilson went under, there would have been nothing for any of them." There had been no pension before the union, nothing.

In 1959, a massive steel strike did put Don at home, for over three months. He got off the *Ben Moreell* in Fraser Shipyard in Superior on July 26, and didn't return to work until November 10, only to lay up less than a month later. Don was rarely home during the summer.

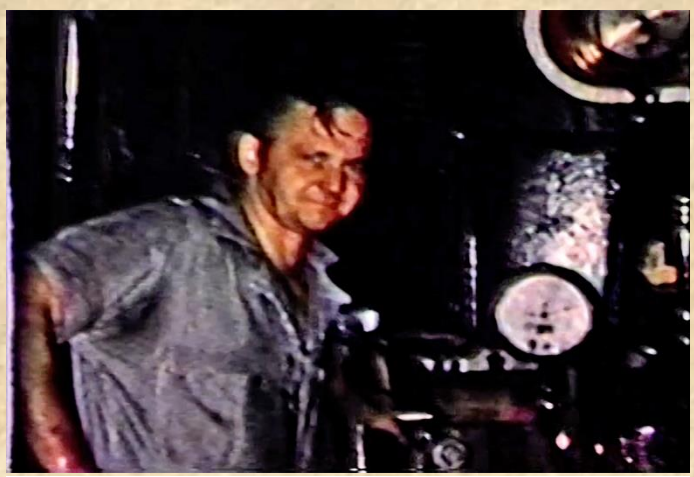
Steve Noble on the *A. T. Lawson* in June 1970 with a part of the unloading boom on deck for the new ship being built at Erie, the *Stewart J. Cort*. Photo courtesy of Steve Noble.

"I think I only remember him being home in the summertime only one time, for vacation," recalled his son Steve. "He bought a little boat and motor, and we never used it again. That little six horse Johnson sat on a rack in the basement until we were adults. Everything we usually did with dad was in the winter. Our life with him revolved around winter activities. We would go out to Moccasin Mike Road, and he'd put wire snares on rabbit trails, and we go there next day and shoot rabbits and go ice fishing. That was our winters."

In June, 1970, with Don's son Steve aboard for a trip, the *Lawson* loaded a large portion of the new shuttle boom in Duluth for the super ship (*Stewart J. Cort*) under construction at Erie. The *Lawson* off-loaded the shuttle section in Erie before proceeding to Ashtabula to unload its cargo of iron ore. Don sailed on the *A. T. Lawson* in its final

year as a Wilson vessel. The ship was sold the following year to the Kinsman Marine Transit Company, of Cleveland.

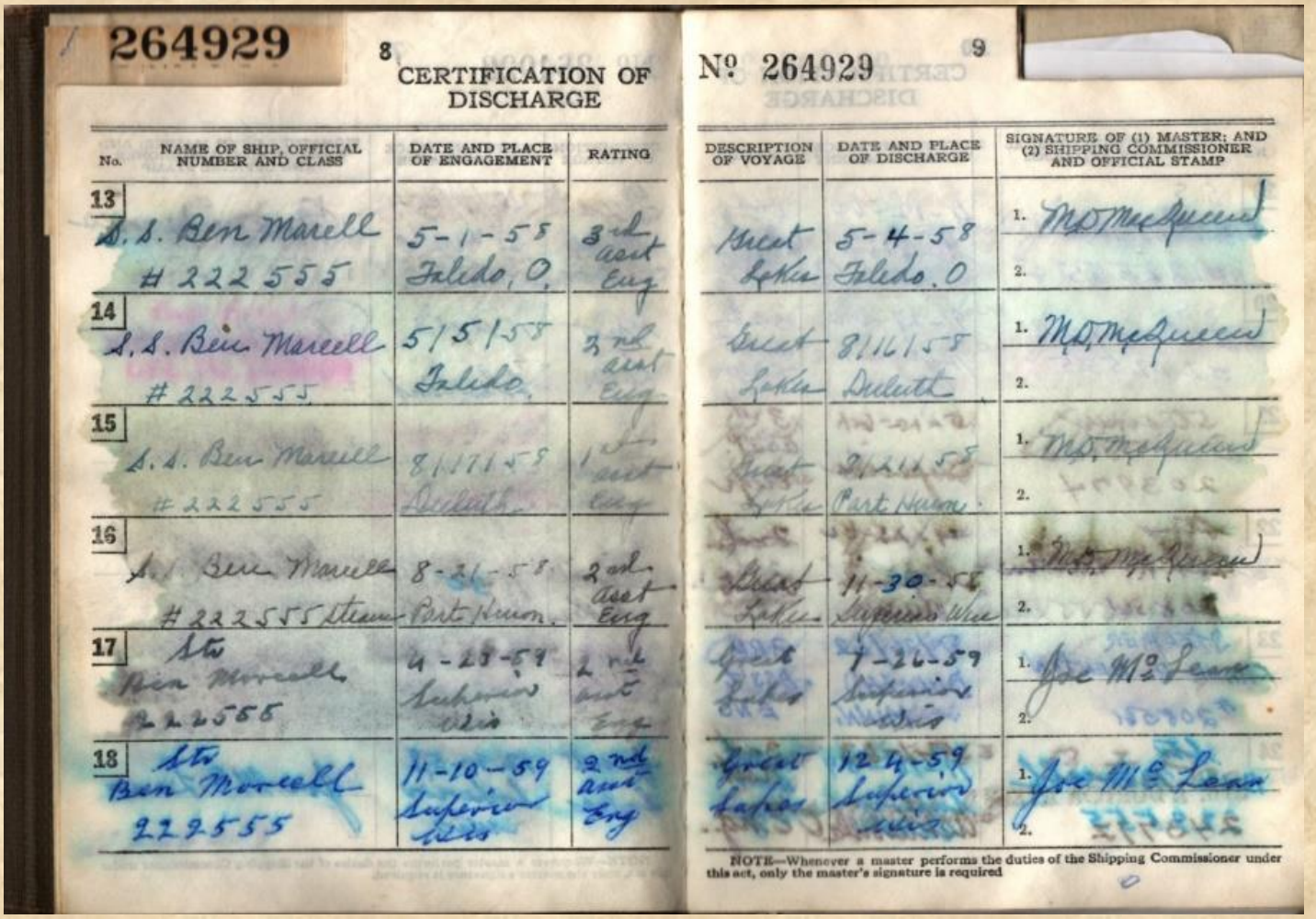
A Farewell to Steamboats at Sea and at Home



Don in engine room of the *Ben Moreell.* Photo from 8mm film footage.

Don stayed true to his word, retiring from the ships so he could be home to help raise his youngest daughter. Wilson Marine Transit was sold in 1972, so Don sailed a half of the 1973 season for Bethlehem Steel, retiring on June 27,1973, from the steamer *Johnstown* as Second Assistant Engineer. At dinner, as they crossed Lake Superior, Don was toasted in the officer's mess and presented a ship's clock to commemorate his retirement. It was a nice gesture, but Don had been with Wilson his entire career. His heart wasn't in it among people he didn't really know as well. When the *Johnstown* reached Taconite Harbor, Theresa was there as always, like she had been when they first met, like she had been whenever his ship arrived, in every extreme of weather, with children in tow, or alone. As their car turned south on Highway 61, Theresa knew she would never make one of these long, solo drives in the dead of the night again. Don Noble had paid his dues in the engine rooms. He had a new job waiting on shore and a chance to start a new life. Over time his alabaster skin would darken from years of soaking up the desert southwest sun on yearly trips to Arizona. If there is any indication of a life well lived, when Don passed away, he didn't own a pair of dress shoes, or a pair of long pants, and he never missed crossing Lake Superior on a cold November day.

Boat Talk: Notes On Some of Don's Ships



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CERTIFICATION OF DISCHARGE

No.	NAME OF SHIP, OFFICIAL NUMBER AND CLASS	DATE AND PLACE OF ENGAGEMENT	RATING
13	S.S. Ben Morrell #222555	5-1-58 Toledo, O.	3rd asst Eng
14	S.S. Ben Morrell #222555	5/5/58 Toledo	3rd asst Eng
15	S.S. Ben Morrell #222555	8/17/58 Duluth	1st asst Eng
16	S.S. Ben Morrell #222555 Steam	8-21-58 Port Huron	2nd asst Eng
17	Stw Ben Morrell 222555	4-23-59 Superior Wis	2nd asst Eng
18	Stw Ben Morrell 222555	11-10-59 Superior Wis	2nd asst Eng

№ 264929 9

DESCRIPTION OF VOYAGE	DATE AND PLACE OF DISCHARGE	SIGNATURE OF (1) MASTER; AND (2) SHIPPING COMMISSIONER AND OFFICIAL STAMP
Great Lakes	5-4-58 Toledo. O	1. M.O. McQueen 2.
Great Lakes	8.16.58 Duluth	1. M.O. McQueen 2.
Great Lakes	8/24/58 Port Huron.	1. M.O. McQueen 2.
Great Lakes	11-30-58 Superior Wis	1. M.O. McQueen 2.
Great Lakes	4-26-59 Superior Wis	1. Joe McLean 2.
Great Lakes	12-4-59 Superior Wis	1. Joe McLean 2.

NOTE—Whenever a master performs the duties of the Shipping Commissioner under this act, only the master's signature is required

Pages eight-nine from Don's Continuous Discharge Book, which he called his "Fink Book."

"Old Home" the steamer A. W. Osborne. Photo collection of Theresa Noble

The *A. W. Osborne* was built for Wilson Marine Transit as Hull 27 by the Cleveland Ship Building Company in 1897. The vessel was originally named in honor of steel tycoon *Andrew Carnegie*. It was a stout 403-feet long with a trim 48-foot beam. The ship was powered by two scotch boilers and a three-cylinder-triple expansion steam engine capable of producing 1,425 ihp.

Abner Wallace Osborne was born in Ohio in 1851. Abner and his brother worked in the coal industry after graduating from college, rising into management positions. In 1900 they went to Cleveland, where two years later they helped found the Youghiogheny and Ohio Coal Company. Abner was vice president of operations at the time of his death in 1930. Mrs. A. W. Osborne, wife of the vessel's namesake, was an original member of the board of The Wilson Transit Company in 1890. Her older sister was the mother of President McKinley.

The *Robert L. Ireland* was also powered by a triple expansion steam engine, with slightly more power at 1,600 ihp, than the *A. W. Osborne*. Not much had changed in the six years Don was away. The *Ireland* was built in 1914 in Lorain, Ohio, at the American Ship Building Company yard. The ship was 504-feet long, an additional 100 feet-one-inch longer than the *Osborne*. It sailed from 1936 to 1958 under the Wilson house flag after Wilson purchased the vessel from the Kinney Steamship Company in 1936. After its final sale to Fraser Shipyards in Superior the hull was

repurposed into a floating dry dock. The pilothouse from the Ireland was transferred to the *John B. Cowle* over the 1958-59 lay-up season. Later, sailing under the name *Harry L. Allen*, it would be destroyed in the Capitol 4 grain elevator fire in Duluth in 1978.

The *Charles S. Hebard* had a new engine and new boilers installed over the winter of 1948-49. The centerpiece of the engine room was a 2,500 ihp, 5-cycle Skinner Compound Unaflow Marine Steam engine; "the first one to be installed in a Great Lakes bulk carrier." In his history of the Wilson fleet, *Master of the Inland Seas*, Alexander Meakin wrote, "The vessel remained part of the Wilson fleet until 1964 when a blown cylinder head and broken connecting rod put the costs of repair higher than the scrap value of the vessel." The ship's hull became part of a breakwall in Charlevoix, Michigan, and its pilothouse graced the roof of the Goldfine's store on Garfield Avenue in Duluth for many years.

The *James MacNaughton* was the newest ship Don worked on, built in Detroit at Great Lakes Engineering Works in 1922. The *MacNaughton* was 587.5 feet long, by 60 wide and a record setter, setting seasonal tonnage records as early as 1923, with three records by 1927. Years later, as the *Ben Moreell (2)*, the vessel became the first oil-fired Great Lakes bulk carrier.

Postcard photo of the Ben Moreell (2). collection of Patrick Lapinski

As a point of distinction, there was briefly a first *Ben Moreell (1)*, the former *William C. Atwater* and then *E. J. Kulas*. It only sailed as the *Ben Moreell (1)* for a couple years before becoming the *Thomas E. Millsop* in 1955. Don did not work on this particular ship.

Ben Moreell the man was a career economic consultant until he joined the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation as president in 1947. He stayed with the company, later serving as chief executive officer and chairman of the board. In 1952, Wilson Transit bought the J & L fleet, including the *B. F. Jones*, which Don would sail only briefly, in 1961.

During the early 1960s Don sailed aboard the *B. F. Jones* in 1961, the *Frank R. Denton* in 1962, the *J. Burton Ayers* in 1963, before returning to the *Ben Moreell* in 1964. The following year Don was appointed as permanent Second Assistant on the *A. T. Lawson,* which he held from 1965 until 1971. During this time, Wilson was sold in October, 1966, to Litton Industries. Litton created a subsidiary, Litton Great Lakes Corporation, to operate the fleet using the Wilson management team.

The *Frank R. Denton* was another old ship, built in 1911, launched as the *Thomas Walters* of the Interstate Steamship Company, of Cleveland. They were a subsidiary of Jones & Laughlin Steel, a big customer of Wilson. Wilson Marine Transit bought the vessel on May 24, 1952, and renamed it as the *Frank R. Denton*. The season the Don sailed on the *Denton* was the season the ship had come out of lay-up with new oil-fired burners and automated boiler controls, and a new tail shaft.

Don would spend the years 1965 through 1971 on the. *A. T. Lawson.* It would be his final Wilson boat. When he first came aboard, the *Lawson* was recently purchased by Wilson in 1964 from the American Steamship Company. At that time the vessel was named the *B. W. Druckenmiller.* The company put a lot of work into the vessel at Fraser Shipyards that winter; a bow thruster was added and the boilers were automated. Two years later, in January 1967, Don was still at home during layup when the *Lawson* came under the ownership of Ingalls Shipbuilding Corp., Pascagoula, AL (Wilson Marine Transit Co., mgr.), and in July, 1968 the owner became Litton Systems, Inc., Baltimore, MD, still managed by Wilson Marine.

Don Noble photo of ferry Ashtabula, struck and sunk by McNaughton on Sep 18, 1953

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