

## Rookie ship runner gets his career off to an auspicious start

At about 1:15 on the blustery afternoon of May 3, 1959, Captain Joseph Meade entered the Duluth ship canal, and at that precise moment the British-flagged *Ramon de*

ship. Oh, what a learning curve lay ahead.

As a ship runner, Grandmaison's job was to meet the vessel, handle any requisite paperwork and be the

energy on the emerging saltwater trade.

Grandmaison remembers the excitement of the first ship's arrival. "They had the mayor and all the Seaway Port Authority representatives," he said. And they had an anxious moment. "The unfortunate thing, it could have been unfortunate, was when the ship came in, it had two tugs on it," Grandmaison said. "But there was a marine leg on the Peavey elevator, as I recall, and when the ship was moving into the dock it got a little bit kattywompus. The bow almost hit the marine leg to knock it down. Fortunately, the tugs corrected that ... but it was close."

With history made, and the *Larrinaga* gone a few days later, Grandmaison got on with the business of building a career. The rest of his first season was a whirlwind, one not without its share of frustration.

"Well, it was really a lot of just trial and error," he said. "There were no classes that you could take to really give some idea of what was going to happen."

He had had some maritime experience while in the service that gave him some familiarity with the equipment and the language of what would become his trade. "So I knew some of the nomenclature of this ship and this sort of thing, but as far as the paperwork on board," he said, "we just learned this as we went."



The *Ramon de Larrinaga*, here gingerly approaching the Peavey Elevator, was Jerry Grandmaison's first assignment.

*Larrinaga* became the first vessel to have transited the St. Lawrence Seaway and make her way to the Twin Ports. And into the history books.

Awaiting the vessel was Jerry Grandmaison, an employee of the shipping agency S.A. McLennan & Company. It was Grandmaison's third day in the employ of McLennan, and the *Larrinaga* was his first

waterfront rep for his boss, Stuart McLennan, and the vessel's owner. McLennan had been employed off and on as a vessel agent since the 1930s, but almost exclusively for lakers, and had just recently purchased the business of longtime vessel agent Gordon Noyes. In May 1959, McLennan opened an office in Duluth's Board of Trade Building and focused his new company's

Maritime Collections, Jim Dan Hill Library, UWS



Making sure that the vessel was cleared to load was the foremost job of the ship runner. That meant taking numerous documents from the vessel's captain to the customs house. That and other tasks kept Jerry busy on an endless string of errands.

"There are different documents you have to fill out on saltwater ships that don't have to be completed for Great Lakes ships," Jerry said. "One of them is a statement of facts, which is an itinerary of what the ship does every day, every hour.

"We kept the owner advised on a daily basis what a ship is doing, when it might get out, projecting costs if the ship loads on overtime to let the owner decide whether he wants to load or not.

"Another document we prepared in the early days of the Seaway was a lay time statement. This document represented the accountability of the vessel's time in port according to the charter party terms and conditions. These things are presented to the owner all the time, keeping him fully informed of his ship and what they're doing."

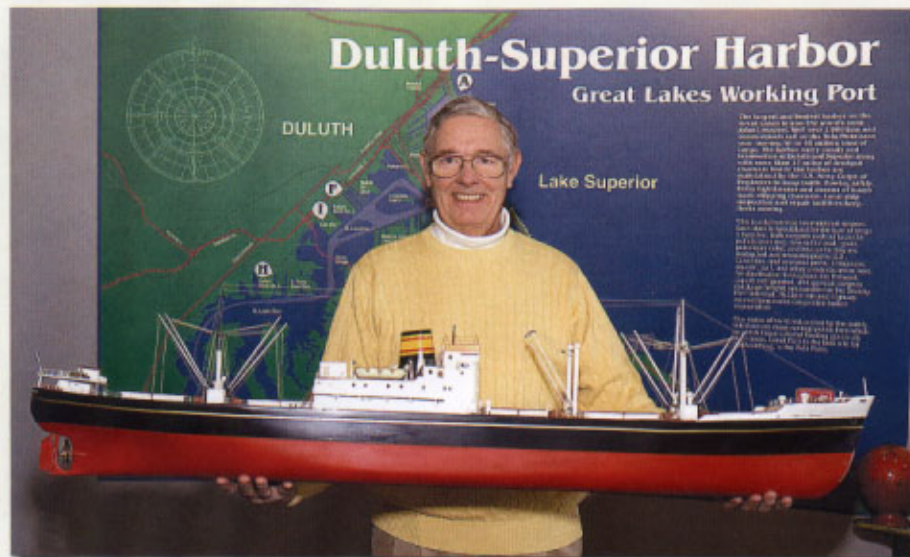
Jerry's on the job training meant relentlessly long days for the rookie ship runner. He vividly remembers being "12, 14 hours on the waterfront without a break."

In that first season, McLennan would have three to five ships in Port at one time, all season long. "I used to start at like six in the morning," Grandmaison said. "I go down to the docks and board all these

ships, and every time I went on board there was a problem.

"We didn't have bulk carriers so much," he says. "A lot of them were tankers or 'tween deck vessels."

Loading 'tween deckers meant working between and around rigging, cargo cranes, cabins and bulkheads, which slowed the loading process.



Former ship runner Jerry Grandmaison, with a model of the *Ramon de Larrinaga*. The model was built by Bill Galinski of Duluth and is on display at the Lake Superior Marine Museum.

And the tankers! "You had to drill holes into some areas to get to certain parts of the ship, and they had to be cleaned from the oil, and that was a big problem," Jerry said. "Some of the other ships — of course they were smaller ships in those days from what we see today — carried like eight, to ten, eleven thousand tons. That was about all. Of course, in the early days, in '59, we had a restricted draft of 21 feet, 3 inches, so if you got 8,000 to 9,000 tons on board, that was about it."

Somehow, the rookie managed to find a solution to every problem. And over the next four decades his

experience broadened to include virtually every aspect of the S.A. McLennan Company's work.

When Grandmaison retired, in March 1998, his career was celebrated by a large number of friends and family at a party hosted by his employer.

With his career behind him, he is still greeted warmly by friends

and colleagues at social gatherings around the Twin Ports.

And he can still tell the story of the Twin Port's first Seaway visitor.

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"Looking back over 50 years," Grandmaison said recently, "the arrival of the *Ramon de Larrinaga* was a great event and one of the highlights of my 39 years in the shipping business."

**Editor's note:**

This article is a shorter version of a story by Pat Lapinski that originally appeared in the *Nor'Easter*, the newsletter of the Lake Superior Marine Museum Association, in January-February 1999.