

Chapter Three: The Ann Arbor Railroad

sheet ice. Accordingly, she took on *SAINTE MARIE (II)*'s extra provisions, and went on alone. She suffered further damage to her starboard screw working through the Straits, but made the rest of the trip without exceptional difficulty. She lay off the Leelanau peninsula for the night of the 31st, and at 9:00 A.M. on February 1st steamed into Frankfort for the first time, amid general rejoicing.

On arrival, it was discovered that *ANN ARBOR NO. 6*, as a consequence of not being designed for the Ann Arbor, was too broad aft to fit the slips. Minor alterations had to be made in a slip, after which she was brought in. Again, her hopper cars, now empty, were taken off and replaced with full so that her stern could be tipped up for repairs of her screws. By February 5th, this had been accomplished and the ship was ready for service.

Her troubles were by no means over, since on arrival at Kewaunee on the following day, her tracks proved to be an imperfect fit for the apron. A car was derailed during unloading, but quickly re-railed. During loading, however, the cut of cars being put on the starboard center track was derailed with considerable damage to the stern of the ship, particularly to the emergency steering gear, which was put out of commission.

Since the winter of 1917 was one of the few years when Lake Michigan has been frozen solidly from shore to shore, the first few months of service of *ANN ARBOR NO. 6* were a continual chain of involvements with the ice. By spring, she had broken 33 propeller blades. The company concluded that her screws were too weak for the service and replaced them with heavier propellers, after which she had no particular difficulty.

The second trip of *ANN ARBOR NO. 6* was one of her worst. On her return from Kewaunee about 1:00 A.M. on February 11th, she became mired in a windrow and could not extricate herself. After about two hours, *ANN ARBOR NO. 5* arrived to help her, but was also frozen in. After noon, the wind shifted and *ANN ARBOR NO. 3* arrived to begin working the ships out of the ice. The three ferries, led by *ANN ARBOR NO. 5*, proceeded slowly through the ice toward Frankfort. Their officers had high hopes of making it, but they encountered another windrow about two miles off the pierhead. *ANN ARBOR NO. 5* worked for about another mile until she was unable either to advance or reverse. The other two ferries, which were following her single file, could not advance around her, and were also made fast by the ice. There in windrowed ice piled to heights of 40 feet in spots, they remained for more than a week. Windrowed ice shifts very easily with changes in the wind, and when the westerly winds abated on the 19th, *ANN ARBOR NO. 4*, inbound from Manistique, was able to work *ANN ARBOR NO. 5* free. *ANN ARBOR NO. 6* made it back to Frankfort the next day, ten days after she had sailed for Kewaunee.

In spite of her troubles in her first year, *ANN ARBOR NO. 6* turned in more than 40,000 miles. Figures of well over double this magnitude were eventually to be turned in by the car ferries, but for a 14-mile-per-hour ship, beset with technical problems, it was a creditable performance. By 1922, she was turning in over 55,000 miles per year, and in 1927 and 1931 racked up over 65,000.

As traffic increased in the 1920's, the railroad decided to rebuild the *ANN ARBOR NO. 3*, which was now the senior member of the fleet. In 1922, she was sent to Manitowoc to be lengthened 48 feet and be re-engined. She had inherited two horizontal compound engines from the two wooden ferries, but she was now given instead a pair of triple expansion engines, plus two new Scotch boilers. When she appeared in 1923, she had 1400 horsepower, still barely half of what the later Ann Arbor ferries could produce. She could make 13 knots, one less than *ANN ARBOR NOS. 5* and *6*. Her low speed was particularly a problem on the long Manistique run, on which she required eight hours, instead of the seven of the later boats.

As *ANN ARBOR NO. 3* was being lengthened, *ANN ARBOR NO. 4* had what was, with the exception of the loss of *ANN ARBOR NO. 1*, the railroad's greatest disaster. On February 13, 1923, *ANN ARBOR NO. 4* left Frankfort at 8:20 P.M. for Kewaunee in a light snow, but on calm seas. About an hour and a half out, a gale blew up, from almost dead ahead, reaching velocities of around 80 miles per hour. Waves reached the hurricane deck and the ship rolled severely. Meanwhile, the temperature fell quickly, sinking lower than 20

The Great Lakes Car Ferries

degrees below zero. As the ferry rolled and pitched, her cargo of 19 cars began to come free. By this time, **ANN ARBOR NO. 4** had been equipped with a wooden sea gate, far less substantial than the steel ones built originally on the later ferries. The one box car loaded with automobiles came free and pitched over the stern at about 2:30 A.M., carrying the sea gate along with it. The captain, Charles Frederickson, was in a nice dilemma. The sea was so enormous that he could no longer make any headway into it, and his stern was now unprotected if he put about to head for Frankfort. In addition, putting about required him to put his broadside to the storm, which was sure to loosen his cargo on the car deck even further.

Captain Frederickson had no choice but to put about around 4:00 A.M. and try to reach Frankfort. That he did so at all was a feat of seamanship, and the ship came within an ace of going the way of **MARQUETTE and BESSEMER NO. 2 (I)**, being lost with all hands. First mate Axel Frederickson ordered the gates on some of the 17 hopper cars aboard opened to prevent any more cars going over the stern. Although the coal on the tracks cut down movement of the cargo, most of the cars were derailed, and one broke through the deck, narrowly missing the escape valve of the port engine. Had it put the engine out of commission, the ferry would almost surely have been lost. The crew managed to bring the car wheels away from the valve and kept both engines in operation. Either the waves, which now poured in at the stern, or the loose cargo, broke many of the stanchions, ruptured the steam connection to the whistle and loosened the stack.

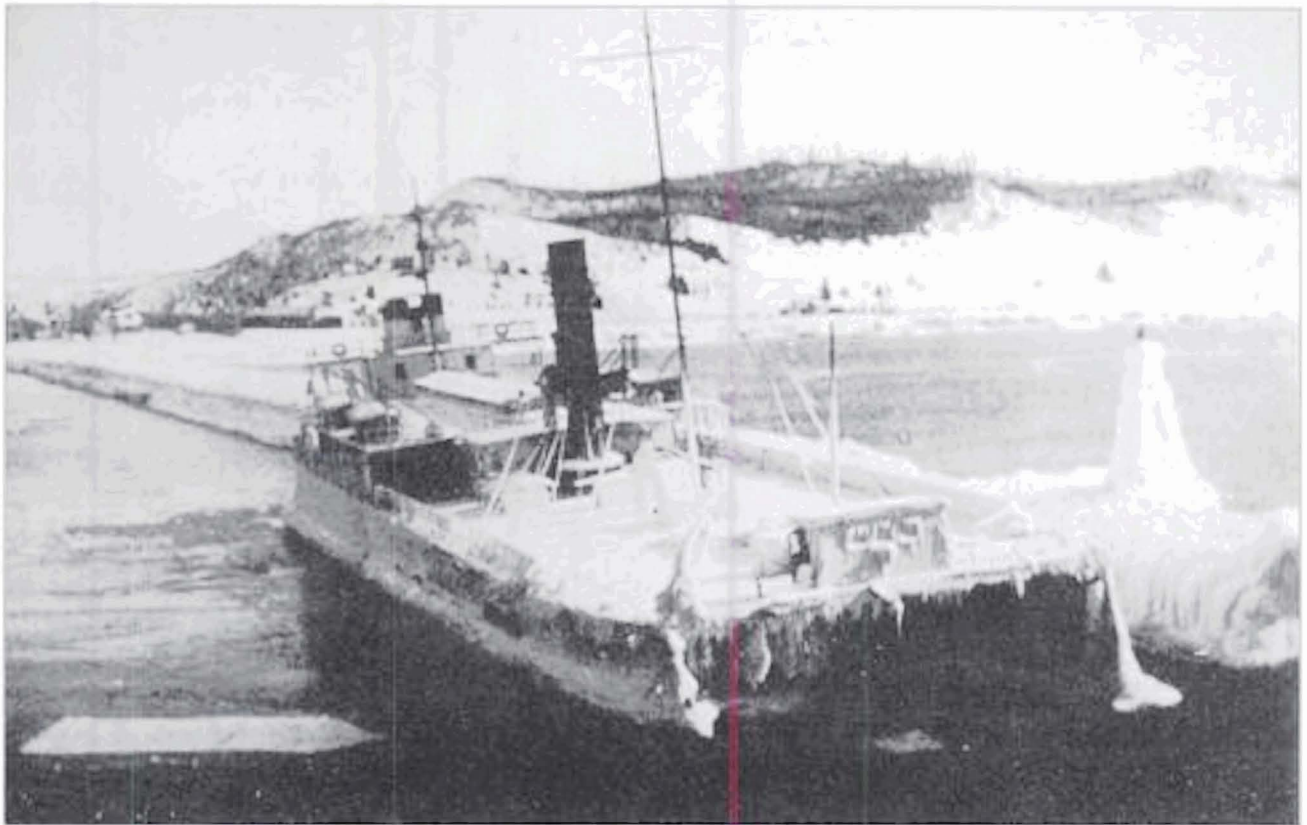
From 5:00 A.M. Purser Ferris McKesson sent out an S.O.S., and maintained radio contact with Frankfort. The extreme cold had caused fog to rise from the water, and visibility was now very limited. The ferry had been so tossed about that her position was doubtful, but Captain Frederickson believed that he had her on course for Frankfort. He was right, and at 7:00 A.M. he found himself bearing down on the south pier. He ordered the ship hard to port to make the harbor entrance. She had taken so much water that she was about five feet lower than normal, particularly at the stern. She had, by this time, so little way that she did not respond well to the wheel. As she reached the pierhead, a wave took her up and then plunged her to the bottom, breaking off her starboard screw entirely, and damaging her rudder badly. The captain ordered her full speed ahead and managed to bring her just inside the pierhead. The sea drove her hard on the south pier, just as a monstrous wave swamped her completely. She settled within minutes in 22 feet of water in the channel alongside the south pier. Engineer Morris Dahlgren and his crew emerged from the engine room seconds before it was flooded.

Even then, her crew's troubles were not finished. Reaching shore in the storm was still ahead of them. The Coast Guard offered to put a breeches buoy aboard and get them off on the north pier, but they preferred to string a line along the south pier and work their way through the anchor ice to the shore. Many of them had frozen extremities, and at least two had broken bones from accidents on the car deck. All doubtless accounted themselves lucky to be living, as indeed, they were.

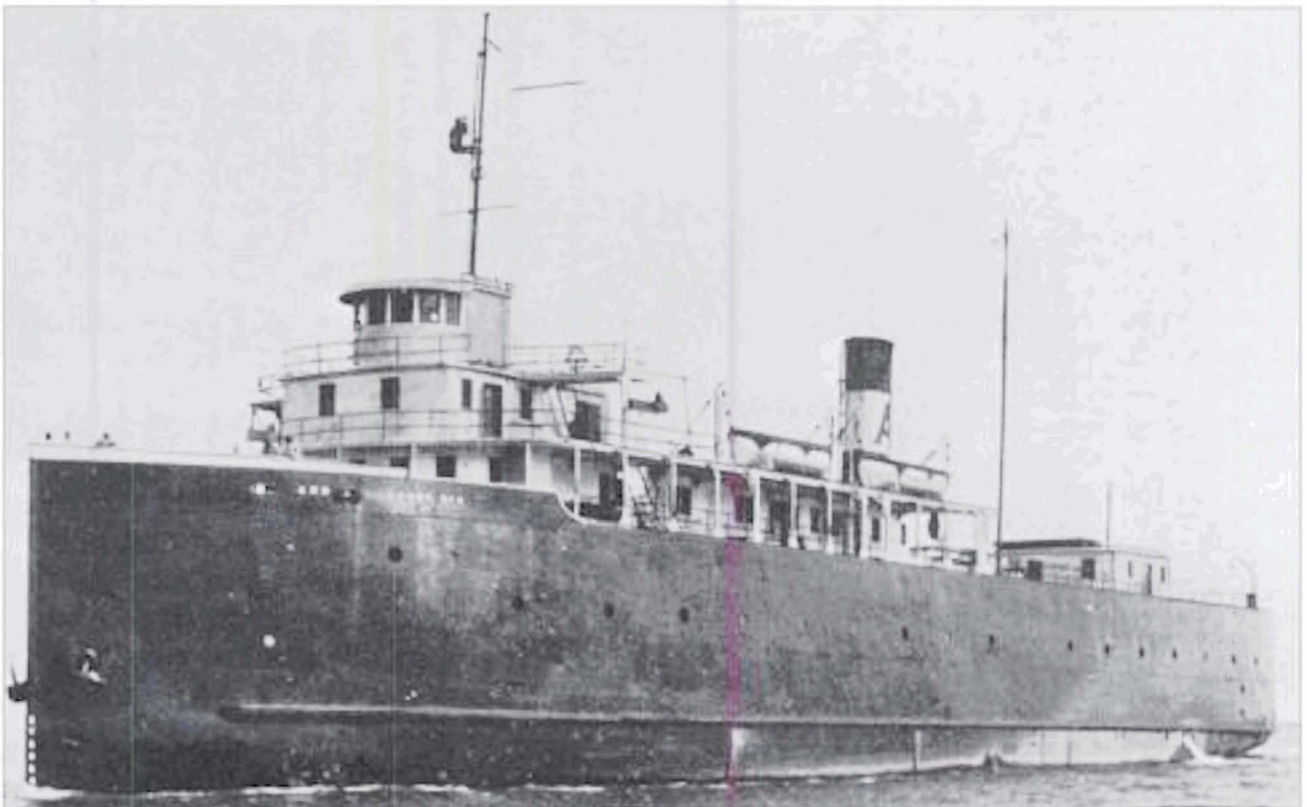
Both the Pere Marquette and the Grand Trunk had cancelled their sailings in the storm, although the Crosby Line operated. The interference with car ferry sailing caused a brief coal famine in the Wisconsin ports.

The winter of 1923 was so severe that nothing could be done to raise **ANN ARBOR NO. 4** until spring. In fact, between March 19th and April 4th, the Ann Arbor had to suspend even normal operations by rail and ship because of the severity of the weather. The railroad commissioned the Reid Wrecking Company of Port Huron to raise the sunken ferry. A cofferdam had to be built across the stern, and when it was completed, the ferry was refloated on May 21, 1923. Five days later, after minor repairs in Frankfort, **ANN ARBOR NO. 5** and the tug *Arctic* towed her to Manitowoc for drydocking. She could hardly have been in worse condition, and had to be rebuilt extensively. She was given entirely new cabins, and a new pilot house, raised a deck above the former one. She was not ready for service again until October 7, 1923. In the interim, the railroad chartered **PERE MARQUETTE 17** to fill in for her.

The Great Lakes Car Ferries



ANN ARBOR NO. 4 ended her worst disaster sunk by the south pierhead at Frankfort in 1923 (*Dowling collection*). Once again, she was repaired, and emerged, below, with a new superstructure (*McDonald collection*).





WRECK of
AA-No 4