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The subscription rate of $49.00 annually, includes membership in the Society and admission to the Inland Seas Maritime Museum, Vermilion, Ohio. Single copies are available at $6.00. For information regarding subscriptions and membership in the Society, please write or phone:

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Printed by BookMasters, Inc.
30 Amberwood Parkway
Ashland, OH 44805

Second-class postage paid at Vermilion, Ohio.

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Front Cover:
Canada Steamship Lines’ 712’ Frontenac from the rear in the St. Marys River.
Herm Klein photo

Back Cover:
Edgar B. Speer bathed in “Alpine Glow” at Mission Point.
Carol Johnson photo
MY LIFE AS A GREAT LAKES METEOROLOGIST  
by William E. Kennedy  
194

FOUR BOATS NAMED CHIPPEWA!  
A PICTORIAL HISTORY  
by Al Hart  
206

THE DEATH OF LT. WILLIAM S. EVELETH IN LAKE MICHIGAN  
by Le Roy Barnett  
210

COOPER’S ARK: A FAILED EFFORT OF THE WAR OF 1812  
by Richard F. Palmer  
215

THE LAST LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER OF MAIN DUCK ISLAND  
by Brian Johnson  
224

SAVING THE U.S. LIFE-SAVING STATION ON PLUM ISLAND  
by Matt Foss  
229

BOOKS  
251

GREAT LAKES CALENDAR  
by Greg Rudnick  
252

GREAT LAKES HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
278

FINANCIAL STATEMENT  
284

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP  
285
MY LIFE AS A GREAT LAKES METEOROLOGIST

by William E. Kennedy

My story starts with a brief history of how the marine program started on the Great Lakes and how I came into the picture.

The son of Captain T. Howard Saunders was lost when the Str. W. B. Davock sank in Lake Michigan during the severe storm of November 1940. Saunders’ son was only one of many Great Lakes sailors lost in this massive storm which tossed Lakes freighters around with near-hurricane force winds for three days and nights. Yet this storm pummeled the Lakes for more than 20 hours before any warning was given by weather forecasters.

Captain Saunders was understandably upset with the warning system and went to Washington to complain. He received splendid cooperation from the officials at the Weather Bureau. They agreed that something should be done and called upon C. S. Andrus (also known as Clarence George Andrus), Meteorologist in Charge of the Cleveland, Ohio, Weather Bureau Station and Bernard L. Wiggin, Meteorologist in Charge of the Buffalo, New York, Weather Bureau Station, asking the men to collaborate on a new system.

Born in Meriden, Connecticut, in 1894, C. S. Andrus was a charter member of the American Meteorological Society. Andrus was a pioneer in the evolution of weather aviation, working with kite stations and pilot balloons which recorded temperature, humidity and wind up to 20,000 foot elevations. He came to Cleveland in 1929, working with National Air Transport, American Airways, Stout and Pennsylvania Airlines. It was at this time that aeronautical meteorology evolved, replacing kites and balloons with airplane observations (APOBS). Another project he influenced was the Teletype Weather Map developed in 1931. This map was transmitted from three points and pieced together at receiving ends: Cleveland in the east, Kansas City in the center and Oakland in the west. This system enabled pilots and dispatchers to review analyzed weather maps just one hour after observation time. Andrus worked for the U.S. Weather Bureau for 41 years. He died in 1980.

This was quite a challenge for C. S. Andrus, as the responsibility of running the Cleveland station was already a full-time job. Devising a new system would be just as demanding. But Andrus examined the problem. His first conclusion was the necessity to equip certain vessels with wind equipment. To do this, Andrus called on other weather sta-
tions and other units to see what equipment might be on hand and
found a unit called the Ferguson Bearing. He determined that this
bearing could be welded on top of a two-inch diameter, 12-foot-long
pipe, which would be welded to the deck on top of a freighter’s pilothouse. Then a 3/8 inch aluminum rod would run down inside the pipe,
project through the deck and into the pilothouse, where an arrow was
attached. Around the rod on the ceiling of the pilothouse was a circular
piece of masonite on which was painted 360 degrees. This was the wind
direction finder to be installed on about 40 Great Lakes vessels.

Andrus found that using an SA anemometer along with his
Ferguson Bearing design, they could get the true wind speed and
direction. Mr. Andrus developed a plotting board, 12 by 12 inches, on
which the ship’s direction and speed were each indicated with a dot.
Then the apparent wind speed and direction were indicated on the
board. When all these dots were lined up, true wind direction and speed
were determined.

Once the wind equipment he designed was manufactured, installa-
tion began. By the end of the 1941 navigation season, Mr. Andrus had
installed the wind equipment on about a dozen boats. The ship officers
were trained to take a simple 3 groups of 5 numbers that was the
weather observation and in code.

The fall season of 1941 came with the expected fall storms. The
ships that had the wind equipment and personnel trained to take the
special and regular observations were sending them to the Weather Bu-
reau in Chicago. This system proved very valuable.

Mr. Andrus attended the January 1942 Ship Masters’ Convention.
Several captains asked why they couldn’t receive the reports from all
the weather ships so they would know what was going on in other parts
of the lake they were on and the other Lakes. Mr. Andrus suggested
something like a bulletin that would include the ship reports on the
different Lakes, giving their location and their weather reports. How-
ever, since latitude or longitude was not in use on the Lakes, how could
they report the locations of the ships? Much discussion was given to
this problem and they came up with a simple location and one that
could be given in code. Mr. Andrus came back to his office and the
LAWEB was born (meaning Lakes Weather Bulletin). The LAWEB
was started in the spring of 1942. There were not many ships at the
time taking the weather observations but enough to help the Cap-
tains guide their ships.

Mr. Andrus was very busy during the 1942 navigation season trav-
elling from Toledo, Ohio, to Buffalo, New York, installing weather equip-
ment, training the ships’ officers, all the while serving as Meteorologist
in Charge of the Cleveland Weather Office. It was not until the end of
the 1943 season that most of the selected ships were fully equipped
with weather instruments, although some ships were still equipped with old barometers and thermometers. Mr. Andrus handled most of the installations and repairs until the late 40s when he trained several of the Cleveland office staff to do this work.

Great Lakes captains felt this equipment was so valuable, that when they transferred from one vessel to another, they requested that the weather instruments be transferred also. These requests put a heavy drain on the Cleveland office.

In the late 40s and early 50s, some problems arose and the weather reports started to dwindle. Some of the weather people did not like to go aboard the vessels and some of the ships’ officers did not like to take the observations. The captains had assigned the task of taking the weather observations to the third mates or the ships’ officers (first officer, second officer and third officer). Working four hours on and eight hours off meant different officers were taking observations and not all of them were happy with the assignment.

This was about the time I came into the picture.

The Weather Bureau decided it was now time for them to hire a full time man to visit the ships and take care of all marine matters related to the Great Lakes. I was hired for the position. I transferred to Cleveland, Ohio, from my duties as Meteorologist in Charge of the Weather Bureau office on the top of Bear Mountain, New York. I was told my selection was due to my service in the U.S. Navy (World War II, 1940–1945; the Korean War, 1950–1953). I had also been assigned to the Ocean Weather stations and spent time on the Coast Guard vessels that were assigned to those patrols (1939–1940). The fact that I had owned boats and liked the water was another plus.

I reported for duty at the Cleveland office on May 15, 1953. Thus began my 30 years as a Great Lakes Meteorologist, beginning as a Marine Assistant and retiring as the Port Meteorological Officer. I was lucky enough to train under Mr. Andrus, although he retired shortly after I arrived. Andrus took me to several ships and introduced me to captains and officers. I remember visiting my first ore boat at Conneaut, Ohio, in June 1953. It was a memorable experience, especially because the captain had invited me to dinner. What a meal! The food was excellent.

There were definitely challenges in the beginning. For example, the budget did not provide for a government vehicle and I had to use my own car. After Mr. Andrus retired, Mr. Harold Burke was selected to be the new Meteorologist in Charge. He didn’t know much about the Great Lakes or the marine weather program and was happy to have me as his marine assistant. When he learned I was using my personal car for business, he went to the regional office in New York and came back with an old jeep. Anyone who has ever lived in this area can imagine
For many years early cartographic representations of southern Michigan included a note just south of New Buffalo that read, “Lieut. Evileth’s grave” (the maps consistently misspelled his name). It is almost unheard of for a small-scale, large-area map to show the burial site of one individual. Who was this person and why was his place of interment noted on delineations of the Lower Peninsula?

The explanation for this strange phenomenon began in 1813, when William Sanford Eveleth was admitted to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The cadet graduated two years later and, because of his outstanding performance as a student, he was immediately made an assistant professor of engineering at the Academy.

Eveleth’s tenure as an instructor ended near the end of 1816, when he was assigned to service in the western Great Lakes region, stationed at Detroit and Fort Mackinac. During the summer of 1818, Eveleth was ordered to inspect military sites along the shores of lakes Huron and Michigan, a task that brought him to Chicago in late September of that year.

The Lieutenant busied himself for a few days about Fort Dearborn, in what is now the “Windy City,” and by October 2 he was ready to end work for the season and return to his home base of Detroit. As the
double-masted craft *Hercules* was leaving port for the evening voyage to Detroit, Eveleth hitched a ride on the sailboat as its only passenger besides a crew of five.

Carrying a cargo of whiskey, the *Hercules* was the “first decked vessel to operate on a regular basis on the lake” west of the Mackinac Straits. Within a day of the time the boat departed Chicago, it also became the “first documented vessel to be destroyed on” Lake Michigan. The story of this disaster appeared in the Detroit *Gazette* of 13 November 1818, as related by Major Daniel Baker, commandant of Fort Dearborn. His letter of notification to people in Detroit read as follows:

“I have to communicate the painful intelligence of the loss of the schooner *Hercules*, with every person on board. She sailed from this port on the evening of the 2d instant, and was wrecked near the head of the lake, during one of the most dreadful gales of wind within the recollection of the oldest inhabitants of this country. It came on early on the morning of the third, and continued to rate with unremitting violence until the evening of the fourth, when it in some measure subsided and the lake became more calm.

“But no information of the schooner could be obtained until the evening of the ninth, when her untimely fate was communicated by a party of Ottawa Indians from [the lower] Grand River and confirmed by the production of several articles they had picked upon their way [to Chicago], known to have belonged to her, together with a scale, recollected as the property of Lieut. Eveleth, of the Corps of Engineers, the only passenger on board.

“On the morning of the 10th, I detached Lieut. Dean, in company with Mr. Dean, agent for the contractor at this post, in search of the dead bodies, and to obtain, if possible, a more circumstantial account of the melancholy event. They returned last evening [October 18] and reported that they found the remains of one of the unfortunate sufferers only, and that in a situation not to be identified; that the shore was literally strewn with the fragments of the vessel, from twelve to fifteen miles in length; that the main-mast must have been cut away during the gale and remained entire; and the fore-mast broken in several pieces.

“But no information could be gained of the hull, nor could they recover any of the lost property, except an old uniform coat of Lieut. Eveleth’s, two handkerchiefs, and a part of his flute, and some articles of no value belonging to the vessel, which they took from an Indian canoe.

“The Ottawas, who are the only Indians that have made any report on the subject, state that the Potawatomies, a band of whom reside near the fatal spot, carried off every article of value they could lay their hands upon, that one party loaded with the spoil, have gone down the Illinois [River], and another in the direction of the Wabash. This statement is corroborated by the fact that the Potawatomies from that
quarter were previously in the habit of visiting us almost daily, and not one of them has since made his appearance at this post.”

Nearly two years later, the esteemed Michigan explorer, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, was a member of a party that canoed along the south shore of Lake Michigan. As this flotilla proceeded from west to east (according to pages 258–259 of his Narrative Journal of Travels), it “passed the spot, on the beach of the lake, where the schooner Hercules was wrecked in the fall of 1818, and all on board perished. The mast, pump, and some fragments of spars, scattered along the shore, still serve to mark the spot, and to convey some idea of the dreadful storms which at certain seasons agitate this lake.

“The voyageurs also pointed out to us, the graves of those who perished, who appear to have been buried at different places, along the shore, where they happened to be washed up. Among these was Lieutenant William S. Eveleth, an intelligent and promising young officer of engineers, whose death has been much lamented. He had been employed in the re-building of the military works at Chicago, which were burnt down by the Potawatomies, during the late war [of 1812], after the massacre of the garrison; and had embarked the day previous to the shipwreck, at Chicago, to return to his friends, after a summer spent in arduous and useful service.

“It was late in November [actually early October], when the navigation is attended with so much peril; and the first intelligence of the fatal catastrophe was communicated by finding the wreck of the vessel, and the bodies of the passengers, strewed along the shore. Several days had however elapsed before this discovery was made, and the bodies were so beat and bruised by the spars of the wreck, that the deceased could not be recognized by their features. The wolves had gnawed the face of Lieutenant Eveleth in so shocking a manner, that he could not have been recognized had it not been for the military buttons of his clothes.

“His grave is situated beneath a cluster of small pines, on the declivity of a sand bank, and is marked by a blazed sapling. His memory would appear to deserve some tribute of respect, more grateful to the feelings of humanity, from those with whom he was formerly associated; and perhaps this suggestion has not occurred to the officers, stationed at the neighboring garrison.”

Following Eveleth’s death, his fellow officers at his home-base in Detroit agreed to “wear the usual badge of mourning for one month” in memory of their lost comrade-in-arms. But, as Henry Schoolcraft noted, something more seemed appropriate by way of tribute to this highly respected soldier whose promise was cut short by a foe armed with nothing but wind and water.
One person who may have responded to Schoolcraft’s suggestion to somehow honor Eveleth was the famous Detroit cartographer, John Farmer. Farmer engraved and published many maps showing the “Surveyed Part of the Territory of Michigan,” and prior to 1837 nearly all of these productions included a note identifying “Lieut. Evileth’s [sic] grave” near the lakeside Michiana border.

In a sense, John Farmer kept Eveleth’s memory alive into the late 1830s, but there was one last, later and much belated recognition of this man’s contributions to our country’s Old Northwest. On 3 March 1843, the United States Congress finally got around to paying Eveleth’s heirs the “sum of money as is due for his services and emoluments at the time of his death.” Financially speaking, if not through appropriate recognition, America had finally squared accounts with one of its most outstanding soldiers.

About the Author: For a quarter-century, Le Roy Barnett, M.A., M.L.S., PhD., was the head of reference at the Archives of Michigan (now retired). He is the author of 170 books and articles, nearly all relating to Michigan and the Great Lakes.
Chief Shingwauk departs the Soo for the Thousand Islands. Photo by Greg Rudnick

Milwaukee Clipper is looking for a new dock. Photo by Greg Rudnick
Murals depicting significant historical events are becoming increasingly popular seemingly everywhere. In New York state this has become known as “Mural Mania.” It started with a series of murals depicting scenes along the Erie Canal and then spread to other topics.

This one was recently completed by James Zeger to commemorate the Battle of Sodus Point that occurred on June 19, 1813. Zeger, a resident of Sodus Point, received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Rochester Institute of Technology in 2008. He is currently pursuing his Masters in Art Education at the New York State University at Oswego. “I’ve been fascinated with local history since I was very young,” he said.

Artist James Zeger spent many hours researching and painting the mural depicting the Battle of Sodus Point.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Membership Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>$2,500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron</td>
<td>$500.00 annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefactor</td>
<td>$200.00 annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing</td>
<td>$100.00 annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining</td>
<td>$70.00 (U.S. Resident) or $86.00 (International Resident) annually</td>
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<td>Family</td>
<td>$54.00 (U.S. Resident) or $70.00 (International Resident) annually</td>
</tr>
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In This Issue:

My Life as a Great Lakes Meteorologist 194
By William E. Kennedy

Four Boats Named Chippewa! A Pictorial History 206
By Al Hart

The Death of Lt. William S. Eveleth 212
in Lake Michigan
By Le Roy Barnett

Cooper's Ark: A Failed Effort of the War of 1812 217
By Richard F. Palmer

The Last Lighthouse Keeper of Main Duck Island 226
By Brian Johnson

Saving the U.S. Life-Saving Station 231
on Plum Island
By Matt Foss

Books 253

Great Lakes Calendar 254
By Greg Rudnick

Great Lakes Historical Society 278

Financial Statement 284

Statement of Ownership 285