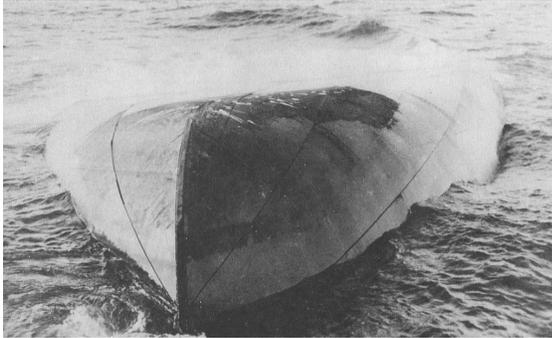


# *Whistles on the Water*

## *2019 Featured Freighter*



*CHARLES S. PRICE floating upside down in Lake Huron after the November 1913 storm.*

Each year we strive to feature a steamship whistle with historical significance especially to the Great Lakes. This year we have selected the steam whistle from the venerable freighter WILLIAM H. DONNER. This ship has a most unlikely beginning since her owners had really never intended to build her. But, were it not for the Great Storm of November 1913, this ship would have never existed at all! You see the steamer CHARLES S. PRICE was a tragic loss in that storm, having capsized and sank in the lower end of Lake Huron with a loss of all hands.

Her owners, the M. A. Hanna Company, needed a replacement ship. They quickly contracted with the Great Lakes Engineering Works of Detroit to build an exact replacement as soon as possible. Ships were already under construction at the Ecorse, Michigan yard, so the hull pieces were fabricated at Detroit, shipped, and assembled at their Ashtabula, Ohio yard. The new hull was launched May 7, 1914, less than six months after the loss of the CHARLES S. PRICE. The unfinished hull was then towed to the Ecorse yard for installation of boilers, engine, winches, and even the smokestack with its whistles.

The newly finished WILLIAM H. DONNER sailed from Ecorse on her maiden voyage on July 7, 1914, to load coal in Cleveland, Ohio. She was in every detail an exact duplicate of her ill-fated sister and was created in less than eight months' time!

The DONNER would have frequently delivered iron ore to Detroit in her early days. However, with the deepening Great Depression, M. A. Hanna divested itself on several ships to the Bethlehem Steel Corp.



*WILLIAM H. DONNER 1914 maiden voyage*



*WILLIAM H. DONNER 1968 in the Detroit River*

She remained in the iron ore and coal trades with Bethlehem Steel Corp. until 1956. It was decided to start a partnership with the folks at Boland & Cornelius. The DONNER was converted to a crane ship for the delivery of finished steel products around the Great Lakes. She was very often seen passing by in the St. Clair River as the mills of Detroit were her primary customer. I remember her very well during this time.

In 1970, she became a stationary floating dock, using her traveling deck cranes to load and unload ocean-going vessels in the Port of Milwaukee. Later, she did the same duty in the Port of Marinette. Other than getting rusty and needing a good coat of paint, her appearance stayed the same. In 2016, she was finally retired and is slated to be scrapped sometime in the future.

Few ships have kept their name for their entire life, and none have had their same name for nearly 105 years! That's quite an exceptional history for any ship!

This unique whistle has not tasted steam in nearly 50 years and on September 28<sup>th</sup>, it will bring back the historic voice of the WILLIAM H. DONNER once again.

*Dave Michelson*

Great Lakes Historian and Steam Whistle collector



*WILLIAM H. DONNER ready to be scrapped*  
Picture taken December 2018