

The steamer *J. B. Ford* is undeniably one of the most historically significant vessels afloat on the Great Lakes today. In a career that spanned over a century, this grand old lady of the Lakes survived the worst storms the region has ever seen, and hauled the raw materials that helped the United States and her allies win two World Wars. From the iron ore that built the first Model T Fords to the cement that built the interstate highways, she carried the goods that fed the industrial might of our nation. Over the years, her hull was painted black, then red, then green, and beige, while her masthead flew the house flags of some of the Lakes' most storied fleets; Hawgood, Pittsburgh, Kinsman, and finally Huron Cement and LaFarge.

A typical Great Lakes bulk carrier of her day when she first met the water in December of 1903, the *J. B. Ford* (then named the *Edwin F. Holmes*) began her career plying her trade among tall-masted schooners, side-wheel passenger ships, wooden-hulled steamers, and whalebacks. When her classic triple-expansion engine steamed its last miles more than eighty years later, she was sharing

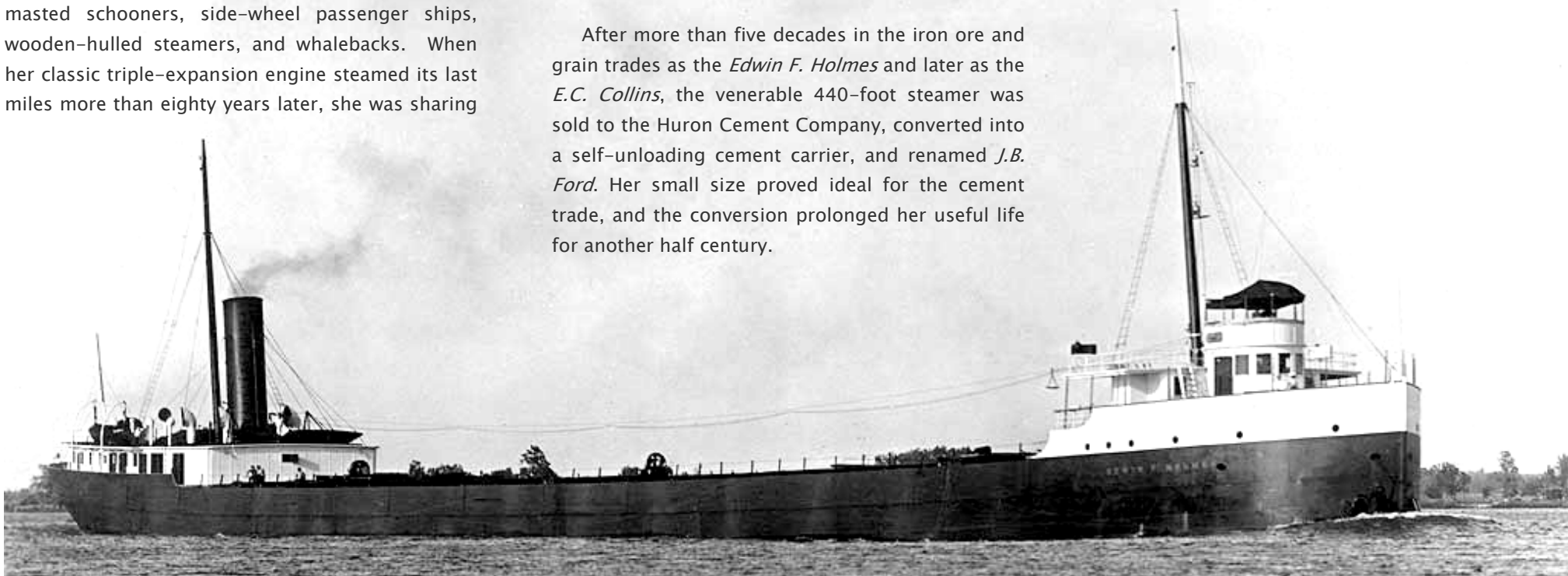
the waters with modern 1000-footers able to fit two complete *J.B. Fords* within their lengths, and two wide with room to spare. She never set any records for size, speed, or cargo haulage. However, the very same traits that made her unremarkable back in 1903 make her special today. The *J.B. Ford* is now the most complete, original example of a classic Great Lakes freighter from the early years of the 20th Century.

Perhaps the *Ford's* greatest claim to fame is as a survivor of two horrendous storms that pummeled the Great Lakes region in the first decade of her career. The 1905 "Mataafa Storm" and the 1913 "White Hurricane" both claimed many ships and many lives, and unlike the handful of other surviving vessels from that era that were safe in port when these storms struck, the then-*Edwin F. Holmes* was out in the thick of it both times, and both times she and her crew made it safely to port.

After more than five decades in the iron ore and grain trades as the *Edwin F. Holmes* and later as the *E.C. Collins*, the venerable 440-foot steamer was sold to the Huron Cement Company, converted into a self-unloading cement carrier, and renamed *J.B. Ford*. Her small size proved ideal for the cement trade, and the conversion prolonged her useful life for another half century.

Despite being rebuilt several times during her long career, the *J. B. Ford* of today is still very recognizable as the *Edwin F. Holmes* of 108 years ago. Her classic hull lines remain unchanged. Her turret-style forward cabin is the original structure, complete with interior woodwork. Her engine room is a collection of vintage steam machinery, and at its heart, the massive triple-expansion steam engine. In short, the *J. B. Ford* is a time capsule spanning the American Century; a remarkable survivor with an amazing story to tell.

Today, the *J.B. Ford* faces an uncertain future. Her final years of service were as a stationary storage vessel in Superior, Wisconsin, but by 2008 her service no longer needed, and this historic steamship faces the very real prospect of a one-way trip to the scrapyards. However, we at the Great Lakes Steamship Society envision a new role for her as a floating marine museum in a Great Lakes port.

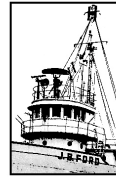


Edwin F. Holmes as built. *Louis Pesha photo, Paul C. LaMarre III collection.*



Above: Gauge board on J.B. Ford's triple expansion steam engine. *John Belliveau photo*

Below: J.B. Ford upbound in the St. Mary's River, early 1960s. *Tom Manse photo, Roger LeLievre Collection*



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The Great Lakes Steamship Society, Inc. (GLSS) was formed in 2010 for the purpose of preserving one of the dwindling number of historic Great Lakes steamships of the pre-World War II era, and specifically the *J. B. Ford*. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization consisting of Great Lakes shipping industry professionals and maritime historians who share a common love for our rich maritime heritage. Our board members have extensive experience in the fields of vessel repair, maintenance, and operation, and historic preservation.

The Steamship *J. B. Ford* is the consummate survivor. She survived those terrifying storms early in her career. She survived obsolescence in the 1950's to find a new career as a cement carrier, and she survived the end of her operating career in the 1980's. It's truly remarkable that this sturdy old steamship is still with us today. She now faces another turning point in her long existence, and we have the opportunity to help her survive once again, and save her as a museum for future generations to enjoy. Please consider joining us, or making a tax-deductible donation in support of our efforts.

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HELP SAVE THE STEAMER
J. B. FORD



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