

## **The Man in the Front Window: Captain George Eskolin**

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### **The Vessel Agent**

During the Second World War shipping on the Great Lakes boomed as the flow of iron ore from the northern reaches of Lake Superior moved at a frenzied rate. The demand was so great during the war that ore reserves, once thought to be nearly inexhaustible, were being seriously depleted. Along the industrialized corridor of the Great Lakes little thought was given to what the future might hold. The demand for steel products was good news, particularly for the many fleets of vessels plying the lakes.

Throughout the Great Lakes vessel agents worked doggedly to fill orders from the steel companies. It was imperative that the iron ore move as efficiently as it could, from the mining ranges of the upper lakes, to the steel mills on the lower lakes. It was the agent's job to make sure that when the mill gave the order he could deliver

the cargo for his company. Making sure that a boat made it to the dock on time was only a small part of the overall formula for a vessel agent. He had to be sure that the mine could fill his order with the correct grades of ore, and that the railroad could supply the dock before the boat arrived. Above all that, mother-nature could throw a wrench into it by churning Lake Superior into a wind swept cauldron of ice cold water. The agent's job then became a logistics nightmare, pitting nature against men and machine, fueled by a relentless demand for the red ore to power a wartime economy. If he couldn't do the job he knew that there were a few dozen other fleets competing to take his business away.

The war also seriously depleted the labor pool that fleet operators drew upon to man their vessels. Ships sailed short-handed more often than not and an increasingly younger, inexperienced group of sailors manned the vessels. Agents concerned with moving cargo and boats found their offices pressed into service as hiring halls in remote locations along the iron coast. More often than not the applicants were young; high school kids looking to get away for a few months of adventure, or college boys looking to make a quick buck and then get off when August's warm rays still smiled on the mariners. They came asking for a season on the lakes but most headed back onto the streets still looking for a job.

Kent Davis worked in Duluth as a vessel agent for one of the Cleveland based steamship companies. Shipping men out of his downtown office to fill positions for the boats had become just another part of the job, and one he didn't especially like. Kent was a handsome man and a sharp dresser, but his demeanor was gruff and to the point. The job kept him so busy he didn't have the time of day to spend with someone wet behind the ears. He had a way of making even the most self confident person feel uncomfortable in his presence. Kent had seen more people come and go looking for work on the boats in the past five years than he could count. Almost as a matter of survival he had developed a pretty good sense about those he could depend upon to fill a slot on a shorthanded steamer.

## The Ordinary Seaman

Growing up in rural Douglas County, near the south shore of Lake Superior, George Eskolin was almost as familiar with the lake boats as he was with the family farm. During the winter months talk among the neighboring farm families would often turn to the steam boats. Almost every family around George's home in rural Maple had at least one son who had tried sailing. Not many of them had made a career of it, but over time they had given George an earful of talk about life on the boats.

After the war had ended it became more difficult for the Eskolin family to keep the farm going. Bigger farms with newer, modern machinery were edging ahead of smaller family run operations. For a father and a son it was a time when dreams changed hands, and a way of life changed forever. George's father, slowly crippled by arthritis, looked back on his dreams of the family farm being handed down to the next generation, while George stood looking to the future; his future, away from the farm. George had no choice but to tell his father that when the next summer's haying season was over he would need to move on.



George with his family.  
Eskolin family photo

Over the long winter months George planned for what he thought his future would be. Already several years beyond high school with no plans to attend college George intended to get an interim job on the boats at the end of summer and then set his sights upon a full time job with the railroad the following spring. To get on the boats George

would need to have a Coast Guard issued ticket certifying him as an "ordinary" seaman. A letter of recommendation was needed from the Lake Carriers Association, or from a vessel captain, before the Coast Guard would issue a seaman's card. With the help of a sailor from the Maple area George obtained his letter from a vessel captain living in Duluth during the off season and after some difficulty with a prickly Coast Guard officer he was issued his card to sail on the lakes.

That August, after haying season, George went to the Lake Carrier's hall in Duluth to apply for work. At that time there were no organized labor unions on the lakes and most of the hiring was done through the Lake Carriers Association based in Cleveland. The Lake Carriers were an organization representing a majority of the American Great Lakes fleets. They had offices in all the major ports on the lakes and controlled a large percentage of the hiring, particularly for skilled level positions. George quickly learned that there were many others already in line for work on the boats, and returned home to Maple somewhat discouraged about his prospects. He soon found that having the certification didn't guarantee work and his was just another name on a long list of men looking for the same job.

A neighbor of George's who had sailed a few seasons on the lakes suggested that George bypass the Lake Carriers and go directly to some of the steamship companies. He told George that most of the fleets had vessel agents in Duluth who handled their business and that they could often get you onto a boat. George headed back to Duluth, this time staying with some friends of his fathers near Lake Avenue. After an encouraging visit with the vessel agent for Hanna (M. A. Hanna Co. - National Steel Corp.), George felt he had nothing to lose as he headed over to Duluth's Sellwood building to see the agent for Pickands-Mather's Interlake Steamship Company, a Mr. Kent Davis.

Their meeting would be brief and the answer was a simple "No." In his no nonsense vernacular Kent Davis explained to George that he only filled jobs for "experienced" positions. If George was looking for "ordinary" work, for a deckhands berth, he'd best talk to

Lake Carriers rather than waste his time with him. Responding with a simple "Thank you" George left and the encounter was over. As the door to hallway closed Kent Davis paused a moment before returning to his work. Kent had shipped enough guys during the war to trust his instincts. Under all of the bluster and thunder of Kent Davis he was the kind of man who would help you if he could. Something about this guy was different. There might still be time thought Kent as he got back up from his desk.

George was nearly to the end of the hallway when the agent's gruff voice shouted after him. "Hey, come back here!" Kent Davis summoned George back for a second round of questions, inquiring first about George's work experience, and then about his long term plans. "Are you going back to school when college starts?" asked Kent. "No," answered George, "I've been out of school for four years now and I don't have any money to afford to go to college. I thought I'd try sailing," explained George. Kent looked anxiously back toward the notes piled on his desk. 'Alright,' acquiesced Kent, 'AMASA STONE will be in Allouez tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. They need a deckhand.' Kent headed back to his desk. 'Be there!' he thundered at George.

George began his first day on the lakes early the next morning standing on a dusty dock as the AMASA STONE arrived in Allouez for a load of iron ore. "I guess I can get a ride on one of them myself when I get signed on," thought

George as he watched the deckhands lower themselves from the ship on the landing boom. It would have to wait for a while anyway as



Riding the Bosun's chair on Amasa Stone  
Ken Thro Photo

George was immediately put to work handling cables, closing hatches, and taking orders.

When the STONE cleared the Superior entry for Lake Erie later that day George looked out across the Wisconsin shoreline and imagined his parents and friends back on the farmland beyond the woods. For a moment he could see them plain as day. George shook his head and smiled to himself as the shoreline slid past. In a few short days he'd see first hand some of the places he'd only heard stories about.

## **The Beginning**

There were probably more boats that sailed the Great Lakes that no one has ever heard of than the handful of well known ones whose notoriety embodies much of the myths and legends that make up Great Lakes lore. The steamer AMASA STONE was such a vessel. The STONE was built in 1906 at the Detroit Shipbuilding Company yard in Wyandotte, Michigan. An average load for the 545 foot vessel was just over 6,000 tons. At that time, ships like the AMASA STONE filled ports all over the lakes. They were the going thing. When George stepped onto the riveted deck that early June morning it was almost as if he had stepped between a crack in time, wedging himself between an era of older, smaller boats, while the frames of newer, larger boats were ready to go up in shipyards around the lakes.

On the AMASA STONE George roomed with two other deckhands and one of the watchmen. On the smaller boats sharing space was not only common, but necessary. Private quarters even for officers were considered a luxury. Traditional berthing arrangements on the straight decked lakers placed the deck crew forward and the engine crew aft, thus ensuring a close proximity to the chain of command for each department. On the STONE however, George and his room mates were placed in the after cabins because the STONE was fitted with guest quarters which took up the space in the forward spar deck usually allotted to the deck crew. Looking back on his first vessel this unusual berthing arrangement was one of George's most vivid memories of his early days on the AMASA STONE. While the

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AMASA STONE downbound in St. Clair River  
W. J. Taylor photo: Dossin Museum collection

George sailed on the STONE until the boat laid up for the season the first part of December. While George filled an empty slot at the start for a deckhand's job he also had some chances to move up, working part of the time as a watchman when the STONE became short of AB's to fill that position. It was a common practice for many unlicensed sailors to have their tickets rated for coal passing as well as deckhand. When the weather began to turn cold many of the AB's switched to coal passing so they didn't have to work out on deck in the cold weather.

"I don't think they ever had any problems getting coal passers in the fall of the year, whereas on deck, especially like a watchman, and deck hands some of the time too, they just didn't have men available," recalled George. "Nobody wanted to be out on deck, and I really didn't blame anybody either!"

The following spring George renewed his attempt to find work on the railroad, but ran up against the same dilemma he'd faced the year before. Until the boats began sailing the grain didn't move, and if the grain wasn't moving the railroads didn't have as much work. George had no guarantee of work on the railroad so when the

telegram arrived from Cleveland notifying George that he had a job for the upcoming season he accepted the offer and shipped out again on the AMASA STONE.

George remained on the STONE throughout the 1948 sailing season, earning about a dollar an hour as a deckhand. Similar to his experience the season before a shortage of AB's allowed George to move up to a watchman's position for most of the season. "Nobody really wanted that outside lookout and stuff in the fall of the year so there were vacancies," remembered George. "I wound up as a watchman, which is... you're supposed to be an AB to hold a watchman's job, but there were no watchmen available, and I got promoted to watchman." More important than the experience, George was also accumulating the time needed to write for his AB ticket and a permanent watchman's job. A minimum twelve months of sailing were required before an "ordinary" could write for his ticket to become classified by the Coast Guard as an "able bodied" seaman.

## Second Season

As the spring of 1949 arrived George already had one and a half seasons in on the lakes and once again faced the prospect of no permanent work on the railroads. Remembering his first few seasons on the boats George didn't find the work all that difficult. Making the decision to go back out again an easy one. "It was a heck of a lot easier than the farm work doing without all of the modern equipment," recalled George. "It was a vacation. I could hardly see some of the deckhands complaining how hard they had to work. On the farm there was no such thing as a, only an eight hour day."

Working his second full season George followed the STONE's First Mate to the steamer E. A. S. CLARKE, a vessel constructed shortly after the turn of the century in the northern port of Superior. In those days, before the unions came on board, it was common for the Captain to choose his wheelmen, and the First Mate to hand-pick his deck crew. This avoided the company randomly placing someone on a ship that the officers didn't like, for whatever reason. It assured



the Mate of having a crew he knew he could work with. Over the winter George had obtained his AB ticket after earning his minimum twelve months and started out on the CLARKE as a watchman.

The E. A. S. CLARKE was similar in size and tonnage to the AMASA STONE, and like most vessels of the era she was fitted with telescoping hatch covers. During the spring and fall, when the seas were



E. A. S. CLARKE  
University of Detroit Marine collection

heavier, all thirty of the hatches were required to be covered with tarpaulins, which the deck crew

battened to the hatch combings. Stretching the tarps was a labor intensive job that could be made all the more difficult in cold, wet weather when they would become as pliable as a sheet of tin. There were very few complaints when ships with one piece hatch covers and iron deckhands came on the lakes.

By May of that year George had moved up to a full time wheeling job under the tutelage of the vessel's captain. The Captain placed George on the Third Mate's watch, wheeling from six to ten. "The Third Mate was new on his license. He was from Superior too. The wheeling job was open on the First Mate's watch, but the captain said he's gonna put me on the Third Mate's watch. He said 'Then I can watch both of you at the same time.'"

George liked the new responsibility and worked hard to please the sometimes impatient captain. "I tried almost too hard to do a good job. You can over-steer too and I know I was guilty of some of that, trying too hard. Heck, the captain he was pretty good about

trying to teach me on learning to steer properly, and I had no problems with him that year." Under the captain's guidance George caught on quickly and learned that the only real trick to wheeling a boat was to have good sense and pay attention. "You gotta have some sense of judgment. Of course, the man in the front window, the mate or the captain, he's the one that's still fully responsible, but he can tell you to take off the wheel or to put so many degrees against it if you're coming too fast. It's up to him if the wheelsman doesn't have the brains to do it."



George Eskolin  
Eskolin family photo

That fall, a miner's strike slowly shut down shipping on the Great Lakes. One by one the boats stopped running. Those with seniority held their job while others, like George, were bumped back until they were either laid off or their boats were idled. In October of 1949 George went home and wouldn't return to work until December. When George rejoined the CLARKE in Toledo he was a watchman once again, but happy to be back at work. After taking a load of coal to Ashland the CLARKE shifted to Superior to load iron ore for a wintry run to Lake

Erie. The trip down below proved to be the season ending trip for the CLARKE and would mark the last time that George would ever step foot on the venerable freighter. That last winter of the decade would also mark the turning point for George in his decision to stay on the lakes. With two and a half seasons of time invested George decided over the winter to stick with his job of sailing on the lakes.

## Seasons of Change

The decade of the fifties ushered in an era of change on the lakes and a decade of change for George as well. George's captain and mentor on the E. A. S. CLARKE was promoted to master of the steamer CHARLES M. SCHWAB and George followed him there as a full time wheelsman for the 1950 shipping season. George would spend the next two seasons learning on the job. He studied the rivers, the harbors, the docks, observed the mates and learned from the captain. With his feet firmly placed part way up the ladder the next logical step for George was upward. During the winter of 1951- 1952 George attended classes in Duluth and received his Third Mate's license.

It would be a year of new responsibility and the master of the vessel expected his mates to carry their full weight of the duty handed to them. "I was with the same captain for four years and with Third Mates, or any mate, he didn't hesitate to give you a piece of his mind. He was real good to me when he was breaking me in as a wheelsman, but once I had that piece of paper I was supposed to know everything." George remembered how hard-nosed and incorrigible the captain could be that year, but without exception he would always start the day on polite note. "In the morning, like when I was six to ten watch, if we were out on the open lake when he'd come up to the pilot house he'd always say 'Morning.' You know, kind of growl it out at you, and then a little later he'd proceed to chew your hind end out for something. But he'd always say 'Morning.'"

George's first season as Third Mate came to an abrupt halt that summer when the boats were idled by a long steel strike. Instead of going home this time the crew was kept at work aboard the boat, grouped with a half dozen other boats from the Interlake fleet, behind the break wall in South Chicago. By the time they weighed anchor there wasn't much rust showing on any of the boats.

Along with the older boats that had been home for George in the early years of his career a number of new boats were being

added to the fleet. A genuine boom in lakes shipbuilding was taking place with the launching of vessels twice the size of the likes of the SCHWAB. Beginning with the ELTON HOYT 2ND and the J. L. MAUTHE, and followed by the SHERWIN, the JACKSON and the BEEGHLY, it was a decade that saw new ships added to an already impressive fleet.

Along with the new ships came long anticipated changes in technology. Ship to shore communication was now standard. The gyros that replaced the radio direction finders were now being supplemented by a new thing called radar. George recalled how no one really knew quite how well it worked, and as mates they were given little practical chance to use it. The use of the radar was strictly controlled by the captain. He alone would determine when and how to use it. It resulted in an almost comical atmosphere in the pilot house early on. "When it gets that you can't see enough put it on standby and come and call me," were the orders George received about the captain's radar unit. The three minutes needed to warm up the unit gave the mates time to summon the captain to the pilot house,

recalled George. "The captain would then come up, and if he decided that we would need the radar, well then he'd turn it on from the



Launching of the ARTHUR B. HOMER in Detroit  
Corp of Engineers Photo: LSMMA

standby where we had put it." That season George and the mates became experts on warming up the radar unit on the SCHWAB.

The next ten years would be busy ones for George as he found

himself changing to a new ship every year while moving between a Third Mate's job and that of a Second Mate. It was a time when George would find his heels firmly entrenched in a ship's pilot house as the years rolled beneath. In the spring of 1959 George was assigned to the crew bringing out the brand new HERBERT C. JACKSON, but delays in finishing the vessel detoured George to a few other ships that spring until the JACKSON was finally ready. After joining the boat that May George worked on the JACKSON until another steelworkers strike idled the boat and sent him home that August. This strike would last a couple of months, until November, when George fortuitously returned to the JACKSON to have a second chance at the fit out he'd missed that spring. Standing in the pilot house of the new HERBERT C. JACKSON in the shipyard of the Great Lakes Engineering Works in Detroit George was about to witness one of his most memorable days on the lakes, the launching of a giant new steamer, the ARTHUR B. HOMER. "We were in a slip, oh, I don't know, two or three hundred feet away from the HOMER," recalled George. The next few moments would stay with George for a lifetime. "I remember being up in the pilot house, laying on that whistle as she slid down the ways. That HOMER, that was quite a sight to see, that sideways launching, which I had never, never seen you know. You see a seven hundred footer sliding down sideways; it was a sight!"



George aboard the HERBERT C. JACKSON  
Eskolin family photo

## The Scare

The memory of that long blast on the whistle during the launching of the ARTHUR B. HOMER lingered well into the shipping season. It was a special moment that carried a certain amount of luck and good fortune with it for those who were there to witness the event. Vessels like the SHERWIN and the HOMER were the talk of the lakes. The next few years would see many of the vessels that were plying the lakes when George began his career go to the scrap yards. For those ships lucky enough to be saved from the wreckers the welding torches were still put to their sides to lengthen them or convert them to awkward looking self-unloaders. These modifications were designed to squeeze a few more years out of their aging hulls while keeping them competitive with the newer vessels sailing the lakes.

It would be the conversion of a vessel he was as familiar with



CHARLES M. SCHWAB, earliest laker with salt water stern.

photo: Historical Collections of the Great Lakes, Bowling Green State University

as any of the boats he'd sailed on that would provide George with one of the greatest scares of his career. The summer of 1961 George was back on the CHARLES M. SCHWAB as Third Mate. This was the

same vessel he'd broken in on as a wheelsman, and later as a mate. Ten years later George was back, only this wasn't quite the same boat that it had been when he was last on board. During the winter lay up the SCHWAB and been cut in two and lengthened by seventy two feet. In addition to the lengthening a salt water stern was put on the SCHWAB while they were in the shipyard.

After taking a load of pellets at Taconite Harbor the SCHWAB followed the north shore because of strong east, north-east winds. When the winds veered out of the south, south west, the SCHWAB was forced to take shelter in Thunder Bay until the lake settled down. This unexpected shift in the wind caused the SCHWAB to go to anchor, while ships following the south shore were now able to get across the lake. In this instance playing the percentages by hauling to the north turned out to be the wrong move. After two days of playing cat and mouse with the wind the captain decided it was finally time to make a move when the forecast now called for winds to come from the northwest. He would use Isle Royale as a huge wind block to get them out into the open lake.

George remembered the ominous start the SCHWAB had after clearing the sheltered waters of Thunder Bay. "There was a big sea running behind Isle Royale even when we came out, and anyway, I was on watch. I told the captain, 'Hey, we're in the lee of the island here, we're taking blue water on deck.'" "What am I supposed to do about it?" answered the captain. "I just thought I'd mention it to you; that we are taking blue water, and we're still in the lee here." George knew there was no hope of him reasoning with the skipper and steadied himself for the remainder of his watch. At ten o'clock when the Second Mate came on watch he too expressed immediate surprise at their situation, but was also unable to persuade the captain to change his mind.

George knew it would be a rough ride and that they would probably make it, but there was something else in the back of his mind that worried him more than whether the vessel could withstand the heavy seas. The SCHWAB had been plagued with occasional black outs that year where they would lose all their electrical power. The engineering department still hadn't been able to find the cause and

up until now the black-outs hadn't happened at a time when the ship absolutely needed everything up and running. If you were superstitious it had to do something with that new salt water stern. George kept his thoughts to himself as the SCHWAB began to thread the needle between Isle Royale and Passage Island. The fun was only just beginning.

The forecasted change in the wind direction didn't happen. It continued to blow out of the south, southwest. "We went out into the lake at Passage Island," recalled George, "and oh boy, when that wind hit us we couldn't steer south of east, the way I remember. We were steering about ninety. We couldn't come down more than that and we were drifting too and rolling. It looked like, if we'd keep going the way we were, we'd wind up on Bateau Rocks."

Close to meal time the captain decided he'd finally had enough too. As courageous as he was he knew that staying on this course could place his crew and vessel in deadly peril. The captain ordered George to call the cook and have him secure everything because he was going to turn the ship.

"As soon as I hung up the phone with the cook he called the engineer, told the engineer that were turning, or will be, and then he give the hard over, right wheel order and boy did that thing ever roll." George remembered thinking about the black outs they'd been having. "I thought to myself, boy if lose our electrical power... now by this time it was rolling so bad we were just hanging on for dear life to whatever you could hang onto, that they'd never be able to do anything to get back on the line. Luckily we didn't lose the power, but we really rolled."

The tension in the pilot house thickened as one of the forward anchors now began swinging out of its anchor box, pounding against the ship each time she rolled. It seemed like it would take forever but the Schwab slowly began to come around. "She kept swinging a little bit, that gyro would just tick a couple times at the worst period there. We had an old salt water sailor, a Norwegian at the wheel at the time, and he'd say, 'Yup, still coming, it's still coming,' and you know, then finally started to click. The gyro clicked a few more time, and eventually came around."



## The Captain

The Interlake Steamship Company was one of the largest fleets when George began sailing for them in the late forties. In those beginning years they were operating nearly forty ships. For unlicensed personnel trading ships and fleets occurred often with little plan for the future. When George climbed the ladder to a mate's position there was plenty of opportunity to move up because Interlake operated a large fleet of vessels. Once he got there however, he had little place to go. In the mid seventies Interlake followed the trend on the lakes by downsizing its fleet, while its marine engineers and architects planned for a fleet of larger vessels. The only way for George and his contemporaries to move up was through attrition, and perseverance. "When I was Second Mate my seniority number, I figured was a hundred eleven, and when you get down to ten or twelve ships, well then to hold a job with twelve ships my number would have had to have been forty eight to hold Third Mate."



ELTON HOYT 2ND upbound in the Detroit River  
author's photo

George finally moved up to First Mate in 1969 while serving on the ELTON HOYT 2ND. After twenty

years of making docks George was given the chance to bring the boat in himself, at a time when he least expected it, at the fueling dock at Sarnia. "I had just left the pilot house, the captain was taking over and I just got down on the deck when he called me on the P. A.," recalled George. "'Come back up here,'" the captain called to George. "So I went up. I didn't know what the heck he wanted me to come back up to the pilot house for, we had a ways to go yet to the dock. I wanted to see that everything was ready for tying up, but I went up there. He said, 'Where are your gloves?' "Oh, I got 'em in my back pocket," answered George. "Let me see them," demanded the captain. George was getting a bit perturbed at this unexpected round of questions. "Oh, what the heck does he want?" thought George. "So, I give him the gloves. He said 'Well, they're big enough. I'm gonna borrow 'em for a while. I'm gonna tie her up on the forward end. You take her into the dock.'"

George would spend another ten years as a First Mate working his way among many of the boats in the Interlake fleet. At the start of the



CHARLES M. BEEGHLY approaching Soo Locks  
author's photo

1978 season George worked First Mate on the JOHN SHERWIN before he took command of the steamer HARRY COULBY in May, where he stayed on, with the exception of a brief stint at a ship handling

school in Grenoble, France, to the end of the season. It had taken George a long time to reach this point and in his mind he knew he was ready for the challenge. After all the years of waiting George had one more obstacle to overcome, a major downturn in the steel industry. All over the Great Lakes boats were laid up, rafted together like cord wood at vacant docks. Over the next several years George would alternate between being First Mate or Captain while the industry rode out the recession. The late seventies and early eighties were a time when many of the lake carriers underwent the conversion from straight decker to self unloader. To gain experience with self unloading vessels George would spend some interim time as an observing captain on the HERBERT C. JACKSON. In 1975 the JACKSON had become the first of the Interlake boats to be converted to a self unloader. This would be George's first experience working on that

style of vessel.

In 1981 he made his first full season as captain aboard the ELTON HOYT 2ND. The following season



J. L. MAUTHE loading at Superior's Globe Elevator  
author's photo

George would take command of the J. L. MAUTHE where he would stay for the next three years. "We got to be pretty much a steady grain trade to Buffalo, and every load except one we were always in port over night. So heck, I had a chance to get home."

The MAUTHE became one of George's favorite boats over the course of his long career. "We'd wind up in Buffalo most of the time in the evening, and wouldn't start to unload until the next morning," recalled George. "We'd get out in the afternoon of the third day and I couldn't think of an easier way for the Captain to get his pay check than a run like that."



George's retirement celebration aboard the BEEGHLY  
Eskolin family photo

In 1984 George was transferred from the MAUTHE to the CHARLES M. BEEGHLY where he would remain as captain and finish out his career. It was a milestone that was approaching fast and George now began to plan his retirement. "I started to figure on that over a year before. I thought I'll

be sixty two in the spring of '87 and I'll have forty years with the company by staying till the beginning of August," said George. "Heck, I'll put in the forty years and then retire after the forty years is up."

The last season with the BEEGHLY was spent mainly running the lakes with stone and pellets. When August came around the crew on the BEEGHLY took up a collection to get George a retirement gift. "They gave me a painting. They got an artist to paint the picture of the BEEGHLY going down the St. Mary's River on a kind of a misty morning, the sky you know, just starting to clear up and a little bit of mist and so on, and the BEEGHLY going down the river." It was a proud moment for the quiet captain.

On his final trip George brought the BEEGHLY into Stoneport, Michigan for a load of stone. While George swears that it was only a coincidence he couldn't deny that the destination for the cargo would be a special one. "We came to Superior with it, and that was the first time we got into Superior that season. It was the end of

August." George laughed thinking about that day. "In fact, the Chief Engineer, I don't know if he was pulling my leg, he said that they made a special effort to get you into your home port on your last trip. I still don't think they did that. It just happened to turn out that way."

It had been forty years since a young kid just off the farm stood on the docks in Allouez waiting for his first boat. George had spent his entire career on the lakes working for Interlake Steamship. With the voice of Kent Davis still ringing in his ears George knew couldn't have found a better company to work for. "I never had any reason to want to go with any other fleet. I didn't know if one fleet would be any better than the rest of them, but I started with a fleet that didn't wind up going out of business in the seventies like a lot of them did."

It was somehow fitting, coincidental or not, that George Eskolin finished his career in his home port. After all he had accomplished during his years on the lakes George is remarkably humble about his great adventure. "One thing, I never tried to impress anyone that I'm a captain on the COULBY, or a captain on the BEEGHLY, or whatever. When people ask, 'What kind of work do you do?' Oh, I work on the Great Lakes boats."