

that triggered these musings highlighted major improvements in salvage gear and techniques, and discussed the viability of recovering some of the many vessels scattered about the bottom of the Great Lakes. Few would be worth the effort, the newspaper editor concluded, with the possible exceptions of the *Pewabic*, with its cargo of copper, and the *Cayuga*, with its modern steel hull. His conclusion was simple: changes in steam-propelled vessels in the previous decade and a half had rendered everything built prior to that point obsolete.

Those abandoned shipwrecks remain mute testimony to the uniqueness of the Great Lakes. Not only do the Lakes hold the world's largest supply of surface fresh water, but they offer inland navigation stretching over a thousand miles into the heart of North America. The nineteenth century application of steam to navigation rapidly transformed transportation on many inland waterways, those of the Hudson River and the Mississippi-Ohio system perhaps the most prominent among them. Where sloops on the Hudson and flatboats and keelboats further west were soon displaced by an expanding fleet of steam-propelled craft, on the Lakes commercial sail persisted into the twentieth century. In this respect, the navigation of the Great Lakes had more in common with coastal shipping both in North America and abroad where sail remained a viable alternative through most of the nineteenth century.²

During the War of 1812, substantial squadrons of sailing ships had navigated the Lakes. The largest vessel to be put into service, HMS *St. Lawrence*, at 2,305 tons, would be the single Royal Navy ship of the line ever confined to fresh water. With a loaded draught of twenty feet she would have been incapable of entering most ports of call on the Great Lakes in the nineteenth century.³ Barely a year after her launch, the return of peace freed investors on both sides of the border to begin plans to deploy steamboats, the first two of which went into service on Lake Ontario in the spring of 1817. Well over a century later there was still working sail on the Lakes.⁴

There has been a general consensus among Great Lakes historians that the transition from sail to steam as the dominant technology in Lakes shipping happened at some point between 1868 and 1885. John Jensen declared that "until about 1875 the wooden schooner,

² The various studies by John Armstrong of coastal shipping in Britain demonstrate this. John Armstrong and Philip S. Bagwell, "Coastal Shipping," in Derek H. Aldcroft and Michael J. Freeman, eds., *Transport in the Industrial Revolution*, (Manchester, 1983), 142-75; John Armstrong, "Climax and Climacteric: The British Coastal Trade, 1870-1930," in David J. Starkey and Alan G. Jamieson, *Exploiting the Sea: Aspects of Britain's Maritime Economy since 1870*, (Exeter, 1998), 37-58; John Armstrong, "Coastal Shipping: The Neglected Sector of Nineteenth-Century British Transport History," *International Journal of Maritime History*, VI, No. 1, (June 1994), 175-88.

³ Jonathan Moore, *Shipwrecks from the War of 1812 at Kingston, Ontario* (Kingston, 2008), 15. Jonathan Moore, "Frontier Frigates and a Three-Decker: Wrecks of the Royal Navy's Lake Ontario Squadron," in Kevin J. Crisman, ed., *Coffins of the Brave: Lake Shipwrecks of the War of 1812* (College Station, Texas, 2014), Appendix A, 371. It is worth noting that news of peace came before the Americans could launch their ships of the line or the British put into commission the two additional vessels they had been building.

⁴ *Our Son*, the last working schooner built on the Lakes sank with her cargo in 1930. The only cargo carrying sail vessel after this was the *J. T. Wing*, an import from the east coast which operated only a few years on the Lakes before being retired. Theodore J. Karamanski, *Schooner Passage: Sailing Ships and the Lake Michigan Frontier* (Detroit, 2000), 222-23. "The Schooner J. T. Wing Becomes Detroit's Marine Museum," *Telescope*, L, 1, (January – Apr. 2002), 5.