

Only the Shipyards Will Gain: The Buffalo Hurricane of 1921 as a Demonstration of the Combined Economic Power of Commercial Carriers on the Great Lakes

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Le 18 décembre 1921, un ouragan a endommagé la flotte de vraquiers des Grands Lacs, mouillés à l'abri pour l'hiver, à Buffalo, New York. Soixante-deux navires ont été affectés. L'événement avait le potentiel de faire grimper le prix du blé, car une grande quantité de céréales a été stocké à bord des navires désarmés. Grâce à une action collective, les armateurs, assureurs, et l'Association des Transporteur des Lacs ont rapidement récupéré les vraquiers et leurs cargaisons. Le résultat a été une reprise rapide qui a non seulement maintenu une livraison ininterrompue du grain vers les marchés nationaux et internationaux, mais a également remis en service tous les navires à temps pour la saison record de 1922.

The focus of market-oriented enterprise is competition. Competing favorably against other companies or eliminating competition is a primary preoccupation. These imperatives are well-studied and familiar. However, less well-studied is how competitors cooperate for mutual advantage in times of shared emergency, both natural and man-made. But rarely is a localized disaster with potential regional, national, and even international repercussions able to foster a combined response by geographically diverse commercial competitors in a single industry. One event that demonstrates the critical impact of a highly coordinated response among commercial competitors is the great Buffalo hurricane of 18 December 1921.¹

In this event the Lake Carriers Association – the industry umbrella group for American ship owners on the freshwater Great Lakes – worked closely with insurers, wreckers, and government agencies to quickly respond and recover a shipping community when a shared emergency occurred. The event happened just as the freshwater lakes were starting to freeze, limiting options for effective response.

Background

After the War of 1812 grain from the Great Lakes states and provinces of the

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