

Association, the unified owners' organization, use welfare capitalism to strengthen owner unity and offer a controlled alternative to sailor unions? And what was the impact of three major strikes between 1901 and 1906 in sharpening labour divisions that would play out during the 1909 strike? These issues combined to create the conditions that led to the Great Lakes strike.

It is important to note that the 1909 strike was not a clash of equals; rather it demonstrated a decisive shift in power away from sailors to owners that continued for the next half century. The Lake Carriers' Association, maritime labour, and the 1909 strike have received only limited scholarly and popular attention.¹ Thus a critical understanding of the interactions between labour and corporate entities remains elusive. unexamined. Yet these factors taken together provide a broader understanding of the Great Lakes Strike and its significance in the region's history.

From Sail to Steam: Rival Unions and Fragmentation

Sailors had unionized since the 1860s with limited success. These efforts created small assemblies of workers at individual ports throughout the Great Lakes. The definition of a sailor came from the apprenticeship model of skill and craft: the ability to handle lines, manage rigging, trim cargo, and a host of other skills learned through long practice. This fostered not only great pride but also a shared identity. The long decline of sail in the years after the American Civil War and the growing number of steamships created strong divisions on the Lakes.

Steam-powered ships created new categories of sailors. Deckhands, though called able-bodied seamen, had different certifications and appeared to traditional sailors as less skilled. Engineers tended to the increasingly sophisticated steam engines, allowing even those ships equipped with sails to need them only in emergencies. Engines also required oilers, water tenders, coal passers, and firemen to keep steam up and the mechanical parts working and they had only limited responsibilities beyond their engine room work.²

These new men entered a community that faced severe challenges to its autonomy and identity. Captains, often as builder-owner-operators of their vessels, had managed nearly all aspects working alongside mates and seamen alike. This

1 Henry Elmer Hoagland, *Wage Bargaining on the Vessels of the Great Lakes* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1917); Charles P. Larrowe, *Maritime Labor Relations on the Great Lakes* (East Lansing Mich.: Michigan State University Labor and Industrial Relations Center, 1959); Bertram B. Lewis and Oliver T. Burnham, "Lake Carriers' Association," *Inland Seas* 27:3 (September 1971), 163-173; Al Miller, *Tin Stackers: The History of the Pittsburgh Steamship Company* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999); Jay C. Martin, "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," *The Northern Mariner* 25:2 (April 2015), 133-146; Brent Fisher, "Wood Ships, Iron Men, Iron Ships, Wooden Men: The Great Lakes Labor Strike of 1909" (master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, 2005).

2 James Christopher Healey, *Foc's'le and Glory-hole: A Study of Merchant Seamen and His Occupation* (New York: Merchant Marine Publishers Association, 1936), 25-28; Walter Lewis, "Transition from Sail to Steam on the Great Lakes in the Nineteenth Century," *The Northern Mariner* 15:4 (October 2015), 345-374; Martin, 194-197.