

REV. EDWARD J. DOWLING, S.J.

On Saturday, May 18, 1996, the Great Lakes shipping community lost its foremost historian, and the Toronto Marine Historical Society lost an honorary member who had been a supporter since the formation of the Society. For on that day, Rev. Edward J. Dowling, S.J., passed away at the Colombiere Jesuit Community Centre at Clarkston, Michigan, in his 90th year. Requiem mass and interment were at Colombiere on May 22nd.

Born on September 19th, 1906, at Rockford, Illinois, Edward Dowling moved with his family to North Chicago in 1907, and he received his primary and secondary schooling there. He graduated from Loyola University, Chicago, in 1930 after majoring in Latin and Greek. He was accepted into the Jesuit Order in 1930 and was ordained a priest in 1940, after continuing his study of languages and theology at Xavier University, Cincinnati, and St. Louis University. He began his teaching career at St. Ignatius High School in Chicago.

He was to enter Fordham University to obtain a doctorate in languages, but instead was summoned to the University of Detroit to teach mechanical drawing due to the demands of the war. His father was a Chicago architect and young Edward had worked in his office as a draftsman. Except for one year when he taught at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Illinois, Fr. Dowling remained at the U of D for the rest of his active life, and he taught many courses. He retired in 1974 as a Professor of Engineering and Architectural Graphics, but remained with the University as its archivist. He moved to the Colombiere Centre at Clarkston in 1993 for reasons of health.

Fr. Dowling developed an interest in lake shipping very early in his life, and he probably was one of the last living persons who could recall seeing the package freighters of the various U.S. railroad lines in the colours they wore before being amalgamated into the Great Lakes Transit Corporation in 1916 as a consequence of the Panama Canal Act. He saw these vessels frequently, as well as many others, on his visits to the Chicago waterfront, and he enjoyed telling others of his recollections of those long-gone days.

He became an avid historian and photographer of ships and developed a huge collection, which now is housed in the library at University of Detroit Mercy. He was one of the founders of the Marine Historical Society of Detroit in 1944, and he was a member of many marine societies. He wrote numerous fleet and individual ship histories, and his book The Lakers of World War 1 was published by the U of D Press in 1967. His historical work was so highly respected that in 1993 he was honoured with the American Merchant Marine Museum's Nathaniel Bowditch Maritime Scholar Award. He was the M.H.S.D.'s Historian of the Year in 1971.

Fr. Dowling was a marine artist of exceptional capability and he produced some 1,000 watercolours of lake ships. He painted many of these during his summers at Sault Ste. Marie, where he assisted, primarily at Sacred Heart Church on Sugar Island. He particularly enjoyed trying to paint ships of which there were no known photographs. Those who own Dowling paintings are indeed fortunate, and derive great pleasure from his works.

We will remember Fr. Dowling as a truly gentle man, completely devoted to his calling, to his profession, and to his avocation, and as someone from whom we all learned so very much. We will recall his artistic talents but, even more, his kindness and his supreme generosity. We will remember the sparkle in his eye, his easy smile, and his great sense of humour. But most of all, we will remember how privileged we were to be able to share his friendship.

Ave atque vale, Fr. Dowling.