

operations and management.

Historical Background

Lake Ontario had served a unique role in Great Lakes maritime commerce throughout the nineteenth century, as the individual lakes became increasingly integrated into a continuously navigable waterway, functioning as what John Jensen has characterized as an “expanding western maritime frontier” of the Atlantic.³ The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, marginalized Lake Ontario’s role as the principal outlet of the Lakes, establishing Buffalo as the most cost-effective eastern terminal for eastbound lake commerce, both American and Canadian. The opening of the Welland Canal across the Niagara Peninsula in 1829 and the Oswego Canal in 1826 succeeded in partially restoring Lake Ontario’s role in down bound commerce, particularly for Canadian shipping, albeit at a substantially smaller scale than on Lake Erie.⁴ For eastbound forwarders exploiting the Erie Canal, bypassing the upper Erie Canal by the Welland Canal, Lake Ontario and the Oswego Canal offered considerable savings per ton on tolls.⁵ For Canadian shipping, the opening of the Welland Canal restored down-bound traffic to the Rideau Canal and Saint Lawrence River.

Commerce under sail on the Great Lakes underwent a protracted decline from the later 1860s and 1870s. After 1867/68 the overall number of sailing vessels reached 1,994 vessels, declining thereafter. American sail tonnage peaked in 1873, though the American classification system for vessel registry aggregated fully-rigged vessels intended to operate under sail-power and rigged vessels that were principally towed.⁶ By the late 1870s and 1880s, steam surpassed sail in both aggregate tonnage and vessel numbers.

The increased emphasis upon high-volume, low-cost transport, and scheduling, conspired to relegate sailing commerce to marginal markets. As a result of this competition and the reliance on the forwarding of grain from the Upper Lakes, the number of sailing vessels registered in American ports on Lake Ontario declined precipitously in the late nineteenth century.⁷ The smaller scale of the Canadian economy along the north shore of Lake Ontario created an economic environment that enabled sailing commerce to persist into the late 1920s. Profitable commerce in the export of grain from north shore ports to Oswego and Kingston forwarders persisted into the 1890s, ceasing after the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890. The cessation of Canadian grain export following 1890 resulted in increased reliance

³ John O. Jensen, *Stories from the Wreckage* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2018), 6.

⁴ Ben Ford, *The Shore is a Bridge: The Maritime Cultural Landscape of Lake Ontario* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2017), 87.

⁵ *Oswego Palladium*, 24 March 1841.

⁶ Walter Lewis, “Transition from Sail to Steam on the Great Lakes in the Nineteenth Century,” *The Northern Mariner* 25: 4 (October 2015), 374.

⁷ *Oswego Palladium*, 10 March 1880., 26 April 1916.