

## **Assists at Station Portage Coast Guard with Captain Fred Sollman**

**Charles Bradley** October 10, 1931

She went aground near the entrance to South Entry. Fire broke out on the lumber carrier and crew of 13 got into the tow's yawls and got to shore.

The Captain said the entry light was not burning and he misjudged the entrance. (She was leaving the canal for the lake) The Bradley's tow hit the stern, breaking the conduits carrying electric wires and the steam line to the fire pump. The fire broke out in the partitions near the deck house. The pumps were useless and the crew used fire extinguishers and buckets until they were driven off by flames. She burned to the water's edge. She was partially loaded with pulpwood and was bound for Georgian Bay to take on more lumber. The Gramplan in tow was light.

The Portage Coast Guard crew with Capt. Fred C. Sollman was summoned and took the Bradley Captain and some of the crew to Chassell where the owners of the vessel were notified.

Daily Mining Gazette. She is a divable wreck.

**CHARLES BRADLEY**

towing schooners **BRIGHTIE, MARY WOOLSON and GOSHAWK**

PHOTO FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Photo Courtesy Michigan Tech Archives

**SHIPS THAT  
NEVER DIE  
NO. 147**

The lumber steamer **CHARLES BRADLEY** was built in 1890 as **HULL 75** of the **F. W. Wheeler & Co.** shipyard in West Bay City. She was built for the **Bradley** family of Bay City who operated a flourishing lumber business throughout the area.

The design of the ship was typical of the era's Lake lumber vessels. Her official number was 125-563. She had a gross tonnage of 804 and net tonnage of 624, with a length of 201', a beam of 37' and a 13' 6" depth. She had good power and usually towed three "schooners" per trip. After a profitable career, ill fate finally caught up with her as it did with so many of the wooden steamers of those days. She caught fire and sank in the Keweenaw Waterway of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

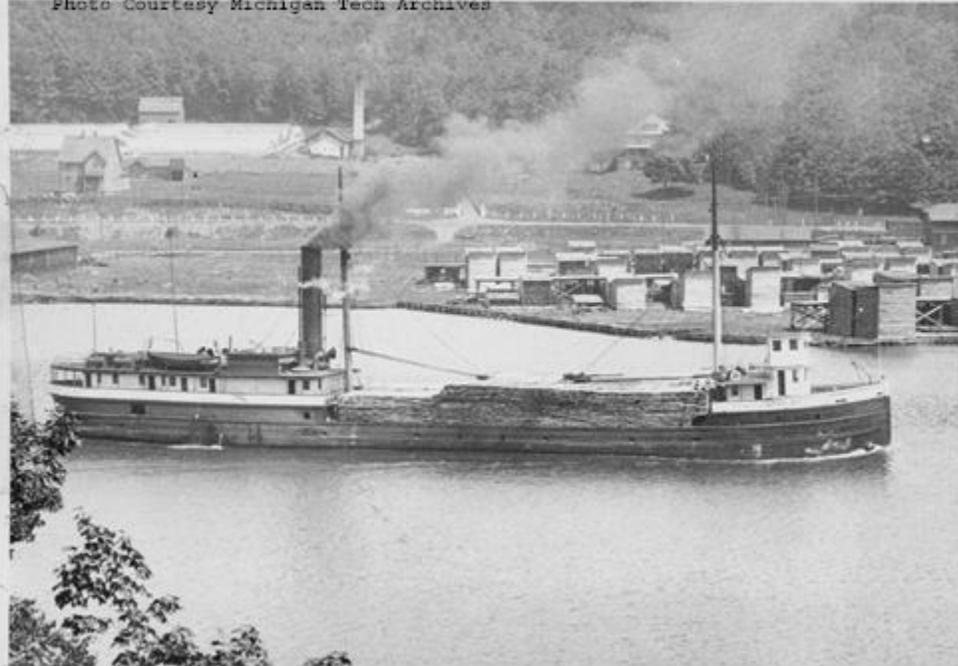
The near-standard depth of 13' for lumbermen on the Lakes was due to the high cost of stevedoring. The vessels were loaded and unloaded manually, board by board. A 13' depth allowed faster and easier handling of the standard 12' lengths...from the deck to the hold and vice versa. A premium was charged when the ship had a greater depth, requiring additional handling.

Many schooners ended their days being towed by steamers when deterioration or economics made it no longer profitable to operate under sail. In the 90s many "barges" were designed and built with a pointed (ship's) bow and were classed as schooners. Originally they were equipped with masts and sails (as were the early steamers), but sails were only used when the wind was "going their way". As the sails wore out or the masts rotted, usually they were not replaced.

It is interesting to note that the wooden hulls on the Great Lakes, built of white oak, were good for about 25 years. It then ceased to be economical to maintain them, principally due to dry rot. Power plants from older steamers would be removed and installed in other hulls. The advent of steel hulls reversed this process, since the hulls outlasted the power plants and they were (still are) frequently repowered.

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Photo Courtesy Michigan Tech Archives





### **George M. Cox.**

Shipwrecks off Keweenaw by Mac Frimodig. The Cox left Chicago in the last week in May arriving at Houghton after stops in Manistee, Soo and Marquette. She was to pick up 250 passengers in Canada for the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. After taking on passengers in Houghton, The Cox left the north end of Portage Ship canal after lunch on Saturday May 27 1933.

Visibility was less than a quarter mile when the Captain responded to the Rock of Ages light house alarm signal. Keeper of the light house could scarcely believe his eyes as a large steamship emerged from the fog band at high speed on a direct collision with the Rock of Ages reef. A mess employee was on duty and removing a tray of french fries and hot grease from the stove when the ship lurched to an almost abrupt stop. Jim Westcoat (10 years old) recalls the tragedy and the sight of the man writhing on the floor from the burns. This man was the only hurt person other than a few bruises and cuts. The reef was struck at 6:20 pm.

The wireless operator sent out an SOS and the Tremaine came and stood by. At 7:30 all 120 passengers and crew were off the

steamer and in the lighthouse. The hurt went to the Tremaine in their life boat and then to Port Arthur hospital.

Portage Entry Coast Guard came at 2 am Sunday. Shortly after daylight began taking passengers to Washington Harbor. Coast Guard Cutter Crawford from Minnesota came by 8:30 am. Crawford took passengers to Houghton. In June The Cox slipped to the deep water off the reef and there she lies today.

GEORGE M. COX (Boatnerd.com)

Other names: built as PURITAN last name in 1933

Official no. : 150898

Type at loss: propeller, steel, passenger steamer

Build info: 1901, Craig Shipbuilding, Toledo hull #82

Specs: 259x40x27 1762g 1267n

Date of loss: 1933, May 27 (Stonehouse says 28<sup>th</sup>)

Place of loss: ½ mi SE of Rock of Ages light, near Isle Royale

Lake: Superior

Type of loss: stranded

Loss of life: none

Carrying: 18 passengers\* (Stonehouse adds crew of 102)

Detail: Traversing the foggy area at 17 knots, she impaled herself on a rock pinnacle. Photos show her with 110 feet of her keel out of the water and her fantail awash. (Stonehouse says 110 feet of white bow high in the air.. her aft awash and listing 40 degrees to port..and picture shows the bow in air) She had been enroute to pick up passengers for her first cruise since refitting. She broke in half and slipped into deep water the following Oct. Owner: George M. Cox. Master: Capt George Johnson.

Used as a troop transport in WWI.

\*According to the National Park Service, there were a total 125 passengers and crew aboard.

Sources : mv,irs,mol,gwgl,lss,mpl,rf,hcgl

Information from Don Hermanson's DVD Isle Royale Lighthouses:

The Portage Coast Guard went out to Rock of Ages and took some passengers to Canada where they got on larger boat to return to Houghton. One passenger was Westcoat.

The George M. Cox hit the rock of ages reef in 1933. Mr. Alvin Roy who was a crewmember told me other stuff after the camera was off, he even cried, a nice man, was Leo H. Roy's brother. You should watch it (his DVD on Isle Royale Lighthouses) again as I researched it pretty good.

Big Jim (Westcoat) was a passenger with his parents; his dad was going to be the agent for the line in Houghton.

This was the maiden voyage of the Cox and they were going to Canada with a bunch of big shots from Chicago to pick up Shriners and probably pick up Canadian booze for the world's fair that was going on in Chicago. It was prohibition. They were partying all the way going full speed across Lake Superior in the fog when they hit the reef at Rock of Ages.

Big Jim said George M. Cox, who was aboard, had girls of the night along and said his dad even had their automobile aboard as they were going to drive back around the lake to Copper Harbor. His dad also owned the flying boat service to Isle Royale from the Isle Royale Sands airport where Superior block is now.

Walt Zurcher told me he was "hilling" corn at the farm (Andersons) when the boat went by and he could see people dancing on the aft deck and the band was playing "Shuffle on Down to Buffalo", imagine that!!!! He remembered the song. There's a lot more to this story. Don

#### Great Lakes Lighthouse Tales. Frederick Stonehouse:

2 p.m. departure from Houghton May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1933. Pages 157-174  
Photos and story of the Rock of Ages Lighthouse, Lighthouse Keeper John F. Soldenski, history of the steamer from 1901 to the wreck date, Cox's sister ship, Cox inaugural trip, captain and fog, description of the passengers and event of the wreck at approx 6:30 pm, nurse Keelings help, Soldenski getting the 18 passengers and 102 crew to the lighthouse, to Isle Royale, to Coast Guard cutter Crawford and back to Houghton, Grand Marais Minnesota lifeboat in salvage of baggage from stranded steamer, report, inquiry, first mate, salvage and steamer's slip off the reef.

Six ten in the morning of (29<sup>th</sup>).. Portage Coast Guard finally notified (message sent to wrong address.. 12 hour delay) of the

wreck and departed for 40 mile trip in motorized lifeboat (motor was not working well) for the largest mass rescue in Lake Superior history.

At 4:30 a.m. (time wrong . pm?) Portage lifeboat began transfer of 43 people to Singer Hotel at Washington Harbor Isle Royale 8 miles away.

At 6:30 a.m. Portage assisted with shuttle of passengers/crew at lighthouse to Coast Guard Cutter Crawford..

9:45 a.m. passengers on Crawford depart for Houghton. Freighter Morris Tremaine took 3 hurt crewmen and nurse to Port Arthur.

