

EARLY HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SHIPMASTERS' ASSOCIATION

(From the 1965 ISMA Directory)

In the winter of 1886, the First Mate of the Str. Boston of the Western Reserve Transit Company of Buffalo, New York, died. Capt. John H. Ivers, then master of the Str. Fountain City, a propeller in the Western Transit Company fleet, went to the home of the family of his departed friend to offer his services and sympathy. The widow very reluctantly told Capt Ivers than she had no money and asked him for the loan of \$50.00 to defray the expense of burying her husband. The Captain, not having that amount with him, told the widow that he would return with amount later that evening. After leaving the house, Capt. Ivers went to the store of Felthouse & Russel, a vessel supply house located on Main Street, and a place where the licensed officers of steamboats used to congregate. There, he met several masters and mates and told them about the circumstances of the deceased mate. Among those present were Capt. Martin Niland, Capt. John Disset, Capt. William Dickson, Capt. James Drake, Capt. Parlance McFarland, Capt. Joseph Hulligan, Capt. James Green, Capt. Patrick Shea, Capt, Lawrence Green, Capt. Frank Welcome, Capt. James Condon, Capt. John Byrne, Capt. Robert Smith, and Capt. George Hogg.

Capt. Ivers told his associates that this family needed money and would not be able to pay it back. Capt. Niland then took off his cap, place a five dollar bill of his own into it, and passed it around. Those present at that time as well as those who came later contributed, and in a short time the donations amounted to \$125.00. Capt. Ivers, and Capt. James Condon, Master of the Str. Arctic, were detailed to take the \$125.00 to the widow, which they did that evening. The widow was very grateful and began to cry, saying that she did not know how she would repay the kindness and that she would pay the money back even if she had to take in washings and that it was her wishes and prayers that no other widow of a Ship Master would be placed in like circumstance upon the death of her husband. The Captains assured her that there would be nothing to pay back as this money was a donation from the friends of her husband, who were employed on the line boats.

After Capt. Ivers and Capt. Condon returned to the store of Felthouse & Russel, a general discussion arouse about forming a little society among members of the profession, where in case of death of a member the widow or beneficiary would receive \$100.00, each member being assessed his portion, which was later changed to \$1000.00.

This being the last of the week, it was agreed that a meeting be held on the following Tuesday evening in a small hall above the vessel supply store (the use of the hall being donated by the owners of the store) for the purpose of organizing a beneficial association.

Fifteen licensed officers of the line boats assembled in the hall above the store on the following Tuesday evening and Capt. William Dickson was elected chairman, and later the same evening was elected President; and Capt. James Condon was elected secretary. Capt John Disset was appointed a committee of one to take the necessary steps to secure a charter for the new society, then known as the Excelsior Marine Benevolent Association. Board of Managers names as follows: William Dickinson, Valentine Jones, George Hogg, John H. Dissett, John H. Disset, Donald Gillies, John Cornish, and Lawrence Green.

The managers and owners of the different steamboat lines, thinking that this new association was a labor organization later to become affiliated with the Knights of Labor, objected to their Masters and mates joining it. But when it was explained to them the purpose of the organization, and that it was never to be a labor organization and always to be a benevolent association, they withdrew their objections and offered to help make up the \$100.00 that was to go to the beneficiary on the death of a member, in case there was a shortage.

A meeting was held every Tuesday evening until the charter was secured from Albany, New York. After securing the charter, a discussion arose about numbering the member as they joined the association. Owing to the fact that Capt. Niland hand rendered the new association such valuable service, along the line of creating a favorable opinion of this association among the vessel managers and owners, the members thought it fitting to honor him by giving him number 1.

Capt. John Disset thought that if honors were being given, that he, too, should be given a small number in place of Number 15. None of the members cared to give up their numbers until Capt John Ivers spoke up and said, "I will change with Capt. Disset and take Number 15 instead of Number 4."

Later in the spring, when it became known that the owners and managers did not object to their licensed men belonging to the association, seven more men were taken in before the opening of the navigation season, making a membership of twenty-two the members then thinking themselves in a flourishing condition.

The wife of Capt. Disset (who was formerly a school teacher) with the aid of an attorney (who was a friend of the family) drew up the first constitution and by-laws and also secured the first ritual. This constitution, by-laws and ritual were changed in January 1889, when the Grand Lodge was formed in Buffalo.

In the spring of 1887, Capt. John Ivers left the employ of the Western Transit Company and went as master of the Steamer Colorado, which was purchased by F.W. Botsford of Port Huron. Owing to the fact that the Colorado was to run between Port Huron and Duluth, the Captain moved to Port Huron.

In the winter of 1887 and 1888, in order to increase the membership of the Buffalo Lodge, Capt. Ivers solicited new members in Port Huron; but the men of Port Huron thought they should have a lodge of their own in town. Capt. Ivers then wrote Capt. Alexander Clark, who was President of the Buffalo Lodge at the time, for information in regard to forming a new lodge in Port Huron. Capt. Clark's reply was that he would take the matter up with the officials in Albany, New York, from who they had secured the Buffalo charter.

In due time, Capt. Ivers of Port Huron received word from Capt Clark in Buffalo that a lodge could be organized in Port Huron as a branch of the Buffalo Lodge, to work under Buffalo Lodge's charter; and that if twenty prospective members could be secured, he would come to Port Huron and organize Lodge Number Two. In a few days he came to Port Huron and organized Lodge No. 2 with a charter membership of twenty two. Captain Frank Danger was elected as President and William Hutchinson, secretary. Capt. John Ivers was still a member of the Buffalo Lodge, and consequently not eligible to be elected to office of the new lodge in Port Huron.

By 1889, Capt. Ivers had transferred his membership to the Port Huron lodge, and became President of Lodge No. 2. On January 8, 1891, when the first convention held and the Grand Lodge was formed, Capt. Ivers traveled to Buffalo as the delegate representing Lodge No. 2. During this first convention, each lodge was entitled to two delegates for every 25 members.

The second meeting of the Grand Lodge was held in Cleveland on January 21, 1892. Seven lodges, with a total of 800 masters, were represented. The growth of the association during the year was remarkable, showing an increase of 120%. The treasurer's report showed that during the year, \$9,000 had been paid out in death benefits. The old officers were reelected.

The third meeting of the Grand Lodge was held in Port Huron on January 17, 1893. Nine lodges, with a membership of 900, were represented. The reports showed that \$11,840 had been paid in death benefits. At this convention, the constitution was amended to some extent and the name changed to Ship Masters' Association. The old officers were again chosen.

On January 16, 1894, the fourth annual convention was held in Chicago. The reports showed that the association had been prosperous in both numbers and finance, and that the new amended constitution was working well. The reports of the President showed that there were 1,000 members enrolled in the Order, out of 1,086 masters of steam crafts reported by the commissioner of navigation, thus making it evident that most of the licensed masters on the lakes had been members of the Association. The secretary's report showed that during the year, \$12,500 had been paid to widows and orphans of departed members. The first officers were again elected, as they had shown themselves diligent and active in their efforts to bring the association to a successful and prosperous condition.

The fifth annual meeting was held in Detroit on January 15, 1895. The President's report stated that, although the season had been a bad one, the Order was in a flourishing condition. During the year,

\$13,742 had been paid out for death benefits. New pilot rules were thoroughly discussed and carefully revised, and the bill known as the White or Goulder bill was endorsed by the convention. The provisions and details of this bill had been advanced by experienced members of the Association. At this meeting, the mantle of the Presidency fell upon the shoulders of Captain C.E. Benham of Cleveland Lodge No. 4, while the other Grand Lodge officers were reelected.

The sixth annual meeting was held in Washington, DC in January 1896, and the treasurer's and secretary's report showed that nine death assessments were paid during 1895. Captain George McCullagh of Detroit Lodge No. 7 was elected as Grand President.

The seventh annual meeting of the Grand Lodge was again held in Washington, DC from January 21-23, 1897, and the wisdom of transacting annual business at the capitol, where the delegates were in touch with the officers of the Steamboat Inspection Service was again shown, although it was decided, on the account of the expense, to hold the next meeting in Milwaukee. It was found by the secretary's and treasurer's reports that 11 death claims, totaling \$11,000 had been paid during the year. Captain McCullagh was reelected as Grand President.

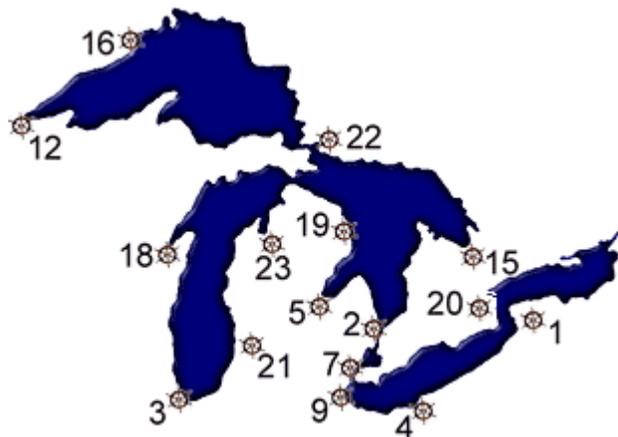
In 1917, due to a growing Canadian presence of membership, the name of the organization's was changed to "International ShipMasters Association."

While ISMA no longer has a benevolent fund, its purpose is still to unite shipmasters and promote safety of navigation.

Over the following years; the annual convention has been held at many principal ports around the Great Lakes, as well as Orlando, Florida in 1997.

Today, ISMA continues to enjoy a respected and fruitful relationship with vessel company management and governmental bodies. ISMA functions as the representative of all Great Lakes mariners. Through meetings, committees, newsletters, and communication between members, ISMA informs and educates its members on issues of vital concern to mariners. And through ISMA, mariners of all levels have a collective voice when critical decisions on maritime affairs are made by government. ISMA plays a cooperative role with the Canadian and US Coast Guards and various other maritime organizations and associations.

Local Lodges



Lodge No. 1 – Buffalo, New York

Lodge No. 2 – Port Huron, Michigan

Lodge No. 3 – Chicago, Illinois

Lodge No. 4 – Cleveland, Ohio

Lodge No. 5 – Bay City, Michigan

Lodge No. 7 – Detroit, Michigan

Lodge No. 9 – Toledo, Ohio

Lodge No. 12 – Twin Ports of Duluth, MN & Superior, WI

Lodge No. 15 – Georgian Bay – Huronia

Lodge No. 16 – Thunder Bay, Ontario

Lodge No. 18 – Green Bay, Wisconsin

Lodge No. 19 – Northeast Michigan

Lodge No. 20 – Niagara District, Ontario

Lodge No. 21 – Muskegon, Michigan

Lodge No. 22 – Twin Sault (Michigan & Ontario)

Lodge No. 23 – Grand Traverse, Michigan