

Port and Marine

Life is one big feast for veteran Lakes pilot

By CHARLES W. THEISEN
News Marine Writer

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Jack Lyons, the pilot who directed the Norwegian sailing ship Christian Radich for most of its trip from Duluth to Detroit, has become an expert on the foods of foreign lands.

As a Great Lakes pilot he has eaten aboard hundreds of foreign merchant ships. Foreign ships are required to carry American pilots to direct them through restricted Great Lakes channels.

"I do it with a tube of Roloids," he said, but hastened to add he was joking.

Italian and French ships serve the best meals, he said. "Their cooks are chefs who take real pride in their work," he added. "They serve their meals in courses, real gourmet cooking."

The British, Lyons said, provide the worst meals. "I end up with a stomach ache every time I eat on a British ship," he said.

Norwegian and Swedish ships serve what Lyons described as "wholesome meals. There is plenty of food and it's well prepared but not fancy."

Lyons, 61, of Taylor, has been a sailor for 43 years, starting out as an ordinary seaman sailing out of Lorain, Ohio, at the age of 18 aboard the interlake steamer James A. Campbell.

By the age of 21 he was third mate aboard the old John Sherwin. (A more modern vessel carries the name today.)

By 1946, he was able to buy his first ship, the 125-foot lumber hooker White Swan, which he sailed until 1951, operating his own business of buying lumber products such as railroad ties, cedar posts and telegraph poles on the upper lakes and selling them on lower lakes ports.

He also owned and operated the ferry North Shore, running between Beaver Island and Charlevoix, from 1948 to 1951.

He had a brief flirtation with ocean shipping when he

bought — for \$20,000 — the Greek ship Theodoros A., when the vessel was seized for nonpayment of bills at Detroit. Lyons' company operated the ship for only two voyages between Milwaukee and Antwerp in 1960 before reselling it.

After that, Lyons settled down to piloting foreign ships sailing north of Port Huron.

"On a lakes ship the crew is ready to kill each other by the end of the season, cooped up so long together.

"On this job, it's a new ship every two or three days. I've never grown tired of it."

While piloting, Lyons has retained other interests. He owns the "sandsucker" James B. — named for his son — and once also owned a bar on West Vernor in Detroit.

Lyons is married, and the father of three daughters in addition to his son. His wife is Canadian. The family settled in Taylor because Lyons was delivering lumber products to a yard on the River Rouge when they were married.

Despite his 61 years, Lyons and his son, who accompanied him on the Christian Radich, climbed high into the rigging of the ship — 130 feet above the swaying deck.

"I had to see what it was like," he said. "Besides people always get my age backwards. I really one-six, not six-one."

Sailors marched yesterday at the McNamara Building, the new federal office structure in downtown Detroit.

The marchers were members of the Seafarers International Union which was protesting violation of a U.S.-Soviet agreement.

Jack Bluit, port agent for the union, said the U.S. State Department is ignoring an agreement that at least one-third of the grain shipped to Russia should be carried in American flag ships.

Bluit said that 360,000 tons of grain are moving to Russia this month — none in American vessels.



—Photo by Charles W. Theisen

Pilot Jack Lyons with cadet Rune Pethersen at Radich wheel

Great Lakes captain's career spanned 50 years

BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI
Free Press Staff Writer

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He was only two months old when he first sailed the Great Lakes, riding on a steamship captained by his father.

The ride lasted a lifetime for Jack P. Lyons, who followed his father as a Great Lakes shipping captain and regularly piloted vessels from Duluth to Detroit in a career that spanned half a century. It ended with his death Friday at age 73.



Mr. Lyons

He had piloted ships through the close of last year's shipping season in December, but his battle with cancer kept him from sailing this year. Mr. Lyons, who lived in Taylor and died at Detroit's Henry Ford Hospital, will be buried wearing his captain's dress uniform.

He was vice-president of the Upper Great Lakes Pilots Association, which he helped found in 1959.

His first job was in 1932, when he was the wheelsman on the Charles M. Schwab, the ship his father, James Lyons, sailed as senior captain for the Inner Lake Steamship Co. In 1935, at age 21, he was certified as a master mariner, making him the youngest captain on the Great Lakes, said his daughter, Jeanne Lyons.

In 1946, he and his brother, Capt. Richard Lyons, founded Lyons Navigation, which operated a ferry that traveled to Beaver Island. He thought that as a married man, he should work on land, so he bought the Rose Bar on W. Vernor in Detroit in 1947. But in 1956, he returned to sailing with the McCarthy Steamship Line of Detroit.

"He loved it so much, he never gave it up, even when he was 73," Jeanne Lyons said.

His love of seafaring was passed on to his children. His son, James, has worked as a tugboat captain and two of his three daughters have worked on cruise ships.

He taught for 15 years at the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association School of Navigation in Toledo, where he developed a course of instruction to obtain a master mariner certificate.

He was involved in many businesses related to shipping, acting as president of the North Central Maritime Corp. of Duluth, South Shore Marine Services of Chicago and Seaway Services Corp. of Duluth. He was a partner of North Central Terminal Operation of Duluth and National Sand and Gravel of Lorain, Ohio.

He was a member of the International Shipmasters Association, the Propeller Club, Elks Lodge No. 403 in Superior, Wisc., and an honorary state trustee of Mariners' Church in Detroit.

Survivors include his wife, Jerry; three daughters, Jeanne, Jennifer Sharp and Juli Lyons; one son, James (Skip); four grandchildren; two brothers, and one sister.

Visitation is from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. today at the Martenson Funeral Home, 10915 Allen Road, Allen Park. Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. Monday at the funeral home. Burial will be in Michigan Memorial Cemetery, Flat Rock.

Memorials may be made to Mariners' Church, 170 E. Jefferson, Detroit or West Mound United Methodist Church, 22395 Eureka Road, Taylor.

Jack P. Lyons

Youngest captain on Great Lakes

DN 7-12-88

Jack P. Lyons, the youngest person to ever attain captain's rank on a Great Lakes ship, died Friday, July 8, 1988, in Ford Hospital, Detroit, of cardiac-respiratory arrest.

Born in Lorain, Ohio, Capt. Lyons, 73, who lived in Taylor and in Boca Raton, Fla., began his career as a Great Lakes sailor in 1932 with the Charles M. Schwab Interlake Steamship Co. He became a Great Lakes ship's master in 1935 when he was 21. From 1946 to 1950 he operated the Lyons Navigation Co. with his brother, Capt. Richard Lyons.

He also owned and operated the North Shore and Beaver Island Ferry Service and was president of the North Central Maritime Co. of Duluth, Minn. He also was a partner in the National Sand and Gravel Co. of Lorain, Ohio.

A charter member of the Upper Great Lakes Pilots Association, he served as vice-president of the group at the time of his death. In 1967, Capt. Lyons developed a course of instructions for a master mariner's degree.

Survivors include his wife, Jerry; a son, James; daughters Jennifer Sharp, Jeanne and Juli; four grandchildren; two brothers; and a sister. Services were Monday in the Martenson Funeral Home, Allen Park.

The following information about Jack Lyons was compiled from an article written by William Lafferty and published in the August 2019 issue of the Detroit Marine Historian.

The son of well-known Great Lakes Captain James B. Lyons, Jack Lyons began his sailing career straight out of high school as a seaman on the JAMES A. CAMPBELL, advancing to wheelsman on his father's command, the CHARLES M. SCHWAB, and obtained his masters papers in 1935 at the age of twenty-one, serving as mate in the Interlake Fleet afterwards. In 1946 Lyons and his brother Richard formed Lyons Navigation Company at Charlevoix that operated the NORTH SHORE to Beaver Island and the WHITE SWAN in the northern Michigan lumber trade.

Jack Lyons, a Lorain native, left sailing and relocated to the Detroit area in 1947 to pursue his lumber wholesale business of which WHITE SWAN was a part. He also bought a tavern, the Rose Bar, most likely using a relator who specialized in restaurant and bar real estate, Tom Lane.

Lane and Lyons became business partners on June 2, 1952 when they purchased the BEATRICE OTTINGER at a marshall's sale in Detroit. After converting the OTTINGER to a sandsucker, Lyons and Lane established the National Sand and Gravel Company at Lorain to operate the vessel. The headquarters of the newly formed company was the wooden frame home of Lyon's brother, Captain Thomas Lyons, on 6th Street in Lorain, Ohio. Thomas Lyons would become vice-president and manager of National Sand and Gravel, and in April 1960 he became a partner with his brother and Lane in ownership of the OTTINGER.

In 1956, Jack Lyons returned to the lakes, sailing as officer for the T.J. McCarthy Steamship Company of Detroit, and sold the Rose Bar, which under its new ownership, would become a mecca for Detroit's early rock bands.

Lyons would go on to pilot foreign vessels navigating the Great Lakes, and he and Lane made the papers in July 1959 when they bought the impounded Panamanian freighter THEODOROS A. for \$21,500 and sent it to Antwerp and back twice before selling it to other Panamanian owners that fall.

During the winter of 1962-1963, National Sand and Gravel sent the BEATRICE OTTINGER to Lorain's American Shipbuilding Company yard to be lengthened by fifty feet and equipped with a more powerful 14-inch sand pump capable of handling 6,000 gallons per minute. When the vessel entered service in the spring of 1963, it had been renamed JAMES B. LYONS in honor of Jack Lyon's father and son. In 1977, Jack and Thomas Lyons paid the estate of Thomas Lane, who died three years earlier, \$28,702 for his share of the LYONS. For the next decade, the vessel operated fairly regularly for National Sand and Gravel until 1988 when, a month before Jack Lyon's death, Lyons and his brother Thomas sold the vessel to Presque Isle Sand & Gravel of Erie, PA.

Jack Lyons passed away in Detroit on July 8, 1988 at the age of 73.