

8-10-39

# Str. J. B. John Has Colorful Past; 20 yrs. on High Seas, Great Lakes

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**Burned During Great World War by Enemy Spies at Dock in Genoa, Italy**  
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## TORPEDOED OFF GIBRALTAR

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When you first look at the cement transport, the J. B. John, a 260-foot freighter, docked at the City pier at Boyne City, for general repairs and painting, you will see just a boat.

But should you go aboard, poke into strange corners of her hold, and listen to the yarns that some of the old sailors aboard can spin, her plates of battleship gray will take on a new shine. And should you be a person of imagination, you will leave her docks with the feeling of having read an interesting book of adventures on the high seas, of sabotage and torpedo boats. For her's is perhaps the most glamorous history of any ship on the Great Lakes.

### Built in Scotland

She slid down the ways of a shipyard on the River Clyde in Scotland in 1909. She is 260 feet long and has a beam of 43 feet. The first name to be painted on her steel plates was "Kamanistague". First owned by a Canadian shipping concern, the ship carried cargoes of grain, steel and coal between almost every port on the Great Lakes.

### Saved During Storm

During the great storm in the fall of 1913 when, during one terrible day and night a "nor' easter" swept across the lakes foundering more than twenty ships and taking the lives of more than two hundred sailors, the Kamanistague was caught off Port Huron. Unable to face the awful wind and huge waves, her master swung her bows to the south and "ran for it." Visibility was almost zero but, as the old engineer who told the story expressed it, "by good luck and the grace of God, she ran straight into the mouth of the St. Clair River and the lives of her crew of thirty men were saved."

### Victim of Sabotage

In 1915 the ship was purchased by the Standard Oil Company and

her name was changed to "West-oil." She was taken back to the Atlantic and transported case oil between New York City and Genoa, Italy. During the World War she was burned at her dock in Genoa. Poured nearly full of water by fireboats, she listed over and settled to the bottom in shallow water. The case was called "sabotage."

### Torpedoed by Submarine

The Westoil was repaired and continued her run. Later, one dark night, she was torpedoed by a German submarine just outside the entrance to the Straits of Gibraltar. The explosion of the torpedo smashed a gaping hole in her bows but she carried on. Soon a fast British cruiser arrived on the scene and drove off the submarine. The Westoil continued in service during the remainder of hostilities.

Captain F. P. Russell of Petoskey, her present master, took command of the ship in 1921 and returned her to the Great Lakes. In 1922 she was purchased by the Petoskey Cement Company and her name was changed to the "J. B. John" under which she has operated since.

Until 1929 she transported grain, coal and sack cement and plied between most of the Lake ports. Then her present equipment was installed, consisting of a conveyor and specially constructed bins, and compressed air equipment for loading and unloading.

The Johns is one of three such ships on the lakes today. She loads in eight hours and can unload her entire cargo of bulk cement in fifteen hours. Her engines drive her at a speed of 11 knots.

There are twenty-nine officers and men in her crew this season, twenty of which are engaged in repairing her during her lay-up at Boyne City.

### Crew

**CAPTAIN — F. P. RUSSELL**, of Petoskey.

**1st Mate — James Remington** of Detroit.

**2nd Mate — "Mac" McCloud** of Detroit.

**3rd Mate — Ed McCann** of Beaver Island.

### Wheelsmen:

**Jack Hiller** of Petoskey.

**Frank O'Donnell** of Chicago.  
**Ted Sikorski**, Stony Point, Wis.  
**Watchmen:**

**Oscar Johnson** of Petoskey.  
**Gordon Swietzer** of Petoskey.  
**Guy Gray** of Petoskey.

### Deck Hands:

**Dale Cooper** of Walloon Lake.  
**Al Merner** of Walloon Lake.  
**Dave Kent** of Walloon Lake.  
**Albert Bester** of Harbor Springs.

**CHIEF ENGINEER — IRVING MENDORFF** of Petoskey.

**1st Ass't.—Fred Owens**, Petoskey.  
**2nd Ass't.—Bill Perry** of Sturgeon Bay Wis.

**3rd Ass't.—Gus Karl**, Petoskey.

### Oilers:

**Jim Clark** of Sheboygan, Wis.  
**George Hagen**, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.

**Lewis Hartlock**, Whitelaw, Wis.

### Firemen:

**Ben Evans**, Boyne City.  
**Ed Davis** of Boyne City.  
**Dick Kage** of Petoskey.  
**Carl Kage**, of Petoskey.

**Steward—Neil Dorgan**, Boyne City.

**2nd Cook—Frank Merkle**, Boyne City.

**Porter—James Dorgan**, Boyne City.

**Conveyorman—Frank Hawley** of St. Catherin, Ontario.

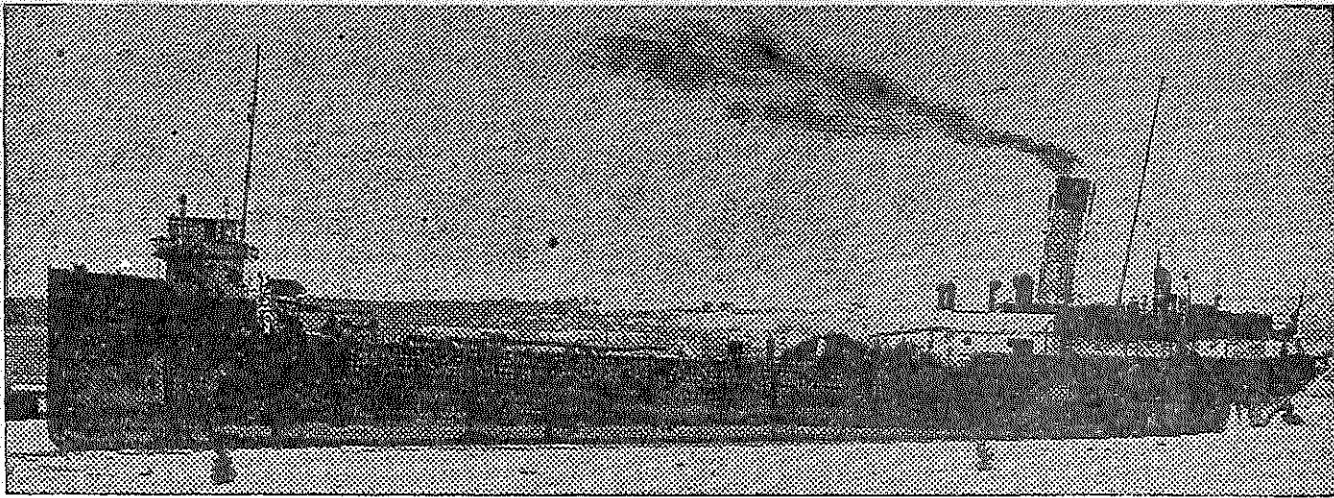
—By **F. D. Thompson** in The Boyne Citizen of Aug. 3.

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8.10.1939

# Veteran Ship Completes Record Year

DEC. 1945



The S. S. J. B. John, built in England in 1909, has served faithfully through two world wars. It is laid up in Harbor Springs for the winter repairs and overhauling.

## *J. B. John Lays Up For Winter At Harbor After Hauling 61 Cargoes of Cement During Season*

The Petoskey Transportation Company steamer J. B. John completed a record year and has gone to Harbor Springs to lay up for the winter months.

The ship carried 61 cargoes of cement this season, an all-time high. The best years previous to this were in 1941 and 1942 when the ship made 60 trips annually.

The "J. B." is probably one of the best known ships plying the Great Lakes. Her familiar battle-ship gray hull and long lean English style stack have been seen in nearly all lake ports at one time or another.

Built at New Castle, England, in 1909, it has served faithfully in both world conflicts. In the first World War under the name "Westoil", the ship carried oil in barrels out of New York to the battle fronts of Europe.

She was torpedoed off Gibraltar but limped into port, was patched up and went to sea again. Sabotage in Genoa harbor sent the ship to the bottom late in 1918, and she was not raised until after the armistice. In 1919 she was sent to Canada to haul grain and other products in the canal trade.

In the winter of 1921, the Petoskey Transportation Company bought the ship and Captain F. P. Russell brought her to Petoskey. With him as a wheelman was Frank Hawley, now conveyorman in charge of the loading and unloading machinery.

From 1922 until 1928 the ship carried cement in bags, grain, and coal to ports as far away as Buffalo. During the winter of 1928-'29, the present loading and unloading machinery was

installed and since that time only bulk cement has been handled. The ship can load a full cargo in eight hours and discharge in less than twelve.

During the war, movements and amount of cargo handled were considered secret, but the veil of censorship has been lifted and company officials disclosed that the ship carried approximately two and a half million barrels of cement from the local plant. These figures are from the spring of 1942 to the end of 1945.

Officers on the ship are Captain Frank Russell, Chief Engineer Erv Wendorf, First Mate Jim Rimington, First Engineer Fred Owen, Second Mate Edward McCann, Second Engineer August Carls, Third Mate Theodore Sikorski, and Third Engineer Wally Ecker.

12. 1945

Dec. 1945

## J. B. John Will Convert to Oil

The S. S. J. B. John, owned by the Petoskey Transportation company, will take to the Great Lakes next spring burning oil instead of coal as it has for so many years.

Officials of the company reported that a tank will be built at the Petoskey Portland Cement company dock so the ship can refuel here. Oil will be brought to Petoskey by truck.

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**THE J. B. JOHN** is now laid up in Manitowoc, Wis., and the crew will be busy with the annual cleaning and repair work until around Jan. 1. The "J. B." as it is known to its crew and sailors throughout the Great Lakes, is in her 36th year. Built in Newcastle in 1909, the ship was sunk twice during World War I, and was purchased by its present owners in 1921.

Captain F. P. Russell has been her master since that time. The ship made 59 trips this year, one less than 1945.

12. 1946