

THE MARKER LIGHT

NUMBER 44

FOR FANS & MODELERS OF THE PORT HURON & DETROIT RAILROAD

SPRING 2021

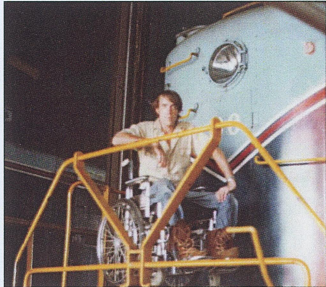
FIRE!

**Springtime at the Wye
The PH&DRR in WWII
Matching the Prototype: CN 660059**



Morton Salt Company Fire January 11, 1944 (Johnson Photo)

- Cover: A fire engulfs the Morton Salt Company resulting in a \$2,500,000 loss.
- PG. 2: From Where I Sit; Springtime at the Wye
- PG. 3: Replacing Ties the Easy Way
- PG. 4: Morton Salt Company Fire January 10, 1944
- PG. 5: (Cont.)
- PG. 6: The PH&DRR in WWII
- PG. 7: (Cont.)
- PG. 8: Matching the Prototype: CN 660059



FROM WHERE I SIT

Dear Friends of the PH&D,

The weather was below freezing when fire trucks arrived at the Morton Salt Company. Three fire companies plus the coast guard responded to the site and battled the fire for over seven hours, finally bringing it under control around midnight. Thousands of spectators witnessed the catastrophe. Here for the first time is the real story. The PH&DRR is no stranger to structure fire. You will recall the devastating fire we experienced which we covered in *The Marker Light* #13. That 1926 fire almost totally destroyed the roundhouse. This fire at Morton Salt nearly did the same. Because salt was a valuable and rationed commodity needed for the war effort, company

brass didn't hesitate to begin rebuilding. Morton Salt was back in full production by July.

We have yet to cover the role that the PH&DRR played in the second World War. In this issue, we begin to examine that. Most of the downriver industries were major contributors to the war effort. Gar Wood and Chris Craft produced landing and patrol boats. And there were plants located in the Dow switching area that produced components used by our armed forces. By late 1943, when the government took over all three area railroads, everyone was unified and committed to the cause. All employees were required to be registered, fingerprinted, and photographed. Even though U.S. railroads were "protected industries", our own George Duffy was drafted and sent off to the jungles of India as part of a Railway Operating Battalion. But that's another story.

In the meantime, we await the destiny of the former Tunnel City Treasurer who allegedly embezzled almost \$12,000 from our dedicated donor account. We remain hopeful that the County prosecutor will press charges after finishing his investigation.

Stay safe, mask up, and get vaccinated!

Sandy Duffy



SPRINGTIME at the WYE MARCH 1973



REPLACING TIES THE EASY WAY

The boys are in behind the Belle River Power Plant replacing ties. Those ties look well past their prime and were taking a beating from those unit coal trains. On the left, the claw bars have been laid aside having performed their task of yanking up those spikes from the old ties. With just 5 guys, the front-end loader can handle those rails with ease. A track wrench among that pile was used on the angle bars earlier that morning.

LAST EDITION

PORT HURON TIMES HERALD

WEATHER Colder, Light Snow

PORT HURON, MICHIGAN, TUESDAY, JANUARY 11, 1944

TWELVE PAGES TODAY

PRICE FIVE CENTS

\$2,500,000 FIRE AT MORTON PLANT

FDR ASKS NATIONAL SERVICE ACT CAUSE OF BLAZE STILL UNKNOWN

PROPOSAL TOPS SWEEPING FIVE-POINT PROGRAM

Would Make All Able Adults Available For War Work, Prevent Strikes

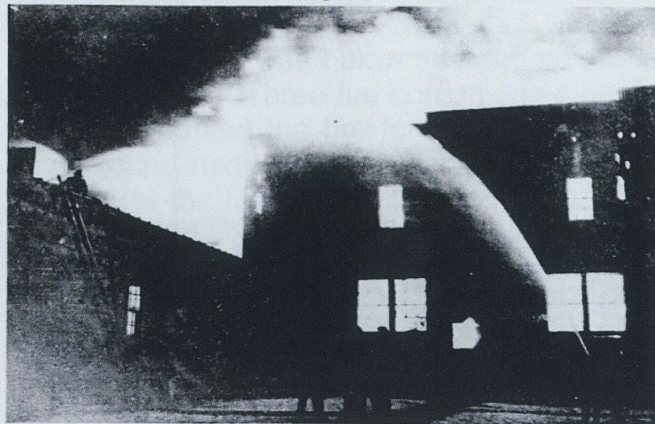
Washington, Jan. 11.—A five-point legislative program headed by enactment of a national service law, was recommended to congress today by President Roosevelt.

MUIR URGES NEW POLICE 'SUPER CHIEF'

Would Make Lucas Commissioner, To Share Authority With City Manager

Commissioner Carl E. Muir, declaring that the city commission's recent investigation of the police department disclosed it to be badly demoralized and mismanaged, proposed to the commission Monday night that the de facto office of police commissioner be created and that Sheriff Ferris E. Lucas be given the job.

Pictures Show Progress of Huge Blaze



Huge billows of smoke from the No. 2 warehouse of the Morton Salt company a few minutes before the front wall caved in, light the sky as two firemen spray the grainer building, the point at which the fire was checked after five hours of stubborn fighting. Notice the holes in the building at the extreme right, caused when intense heat punched holes in the magnesium alloy walls. At the extreme left, a fireman can be seen near a ladder against the grainer building.

CAUSE OF BLAZE STILL UNKNOWN

Availability Of Materials To Affect Decision On Rebuilding; Thousands See Spectacular Flames

Fire of unknown origin Monday night destroyed the productive capacity of the Morton Salt company's plant in Marysville, leaving six principal buildings and several smaller structures, and causing damage estimated at more than \$2,500,000. Firemen from Marysville, Port Huron, St. Clair and the Port Huron Coast Guard station battled the fire for more than seven hours, bringing it under control about midnight. Origin of the fire was not immediately determined, but Fred C. Ashbury, Michigan State police detective, said it apparently started in a kiln in the plant's coopeage building, where barrel staves were dried. Fred C. Pluthack, plant manager, who estimated the damage at \$2,500,000 while the fire raged, today said he was unable to give even a rough estimate of the damage. "It may be more or it could be less than the preliminary figure," he said. Of the 18 buildings on the two-acre site adjacent to the St. Clair river, only the powerhouse, machine shop, a grainer, office building and "several smaller buildings" remained standing today. After heading northward from the south part of the plant, firemen succeeded in checking the blaze at the grainer. While the future of rebuilding operations is uncertain, Mr. Philbrick said that the majority of the plant's 228 employees will be kept on the payroll. All but 42 girls who work in the plant, will start on the payroll. He said the site of debris in preparations for possible rebuilding. Girls employed in manufacturing will be released because there is nothing at which they can be used at the present time, Mr. Philbrick said. The decision to retain the plant's employees was made by company officials with whom he spoke over the telephone earlier today, he said. Rebuilding operations, he said, will depend on whether the War Production board permits the site.

SOVIETS PRESS ON TO RUMANIA Near Odessa-Warsaw Rail

THE MORTON SALT COMPANY FIRE OF 1944

It was a chilly 28 degrees on the Monday evening of January 10, 1944 when the Marysville fire department got the call to respond to the Morton Salt Company. A fire had broken out shortly before 7:00pm in the coopeage building, and began to spread to the #2 warehouse. Within an hour, flames had spread to three other buildings, helped by a brisk wind from the southwest. Within the hour, alarms were sent to three other fire halls, two in Port Huron, and one in St. Clair. Six fire pumps from Port Huron, and one from St. Clair joined the team from Marysville. It would take six hours to gain control over the fire. Below freezing temperatures and the wind gusting to 45 miles per hour hampered the efforts. Frozen water from the fire hoses made footing difficult for firemen.

Flames shot 300 feet into the air and the glow could be seen from as far away as Mt. Clemens. Several thousand spectators stood nearby or sat in their cars watching the conflagration. Thirteen box cars loaded with salt, spotted along a long loading dock on the east side of the plant next to the St. Clair river, were consumed. One empty car standing next to the five-story dairy mill, burned for more than an hour, leaving only "charred wood, steel wheels, and underpinning". The dairy mill was the largest building on the property where salt was pressed and packed for shipping. Of the nine major buildings on the property, only the powerhouse, office building and the machine shop were left undamaged.

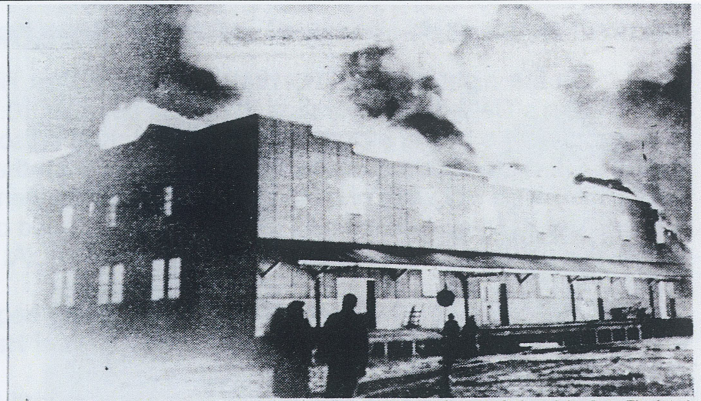
Plant manager Fred Philbrick stated that the plant produced nearly 30% of salt product for the military. "Rebuilding operations will depend on whether the War Production Board permits the allocation of materials for the reconstruction of the plant which annually produces 250,000 tons of salt."

Preliminary investigations by the Michigan State Police, and the state fire marshal indicated that the blaze began in the building which housed the kiln, used to dry wooden staves used for barrels.

In the Times Herald edition of the 18th of January, Manager Philbrick announced that a contract to rebuild had been awarded to Bryant & Detwiler Construction Company out of Detroit. Work once authorized, began immediately and commenced at a furious pace. Clearing the debris was the first order of business, and then construction began. It was a remarkable achievement: By the end of June, the Times Herald announced that full production was expected to resume in July.



13 cars loads were totally destroyed along a loading dock next to the banks of the St. Clair River. This image is of a loading dock next to the River road. It too would be consumed.

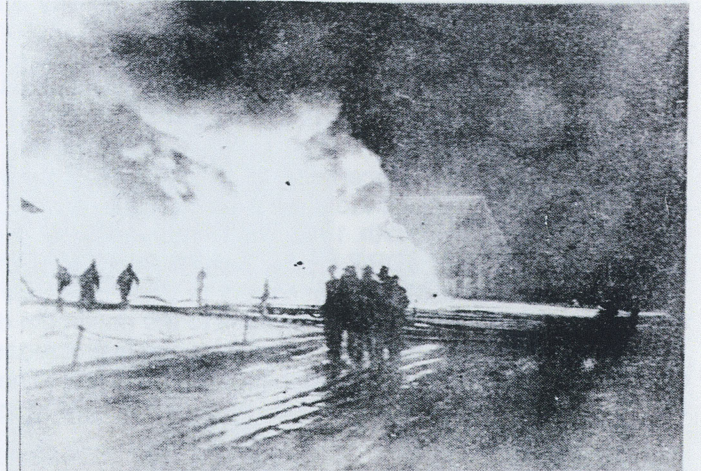


This is No. 2 warehouse with its walls of magnesium alloy which was destroyed by fire. The interior of the building was enveloped in flames almost an hour before the walls crumbled. It was here that a large number of explosions were heard, apparently caused by the intense heat which punctured the walls and scattering fragments over a wide area. (Additional fire pictures, page 10).

#2 warehouse had a 3-bay loading dock with a spur running its length. The magnesium was highly flammable and was no match for the firemen. By morning, it would be leveled.

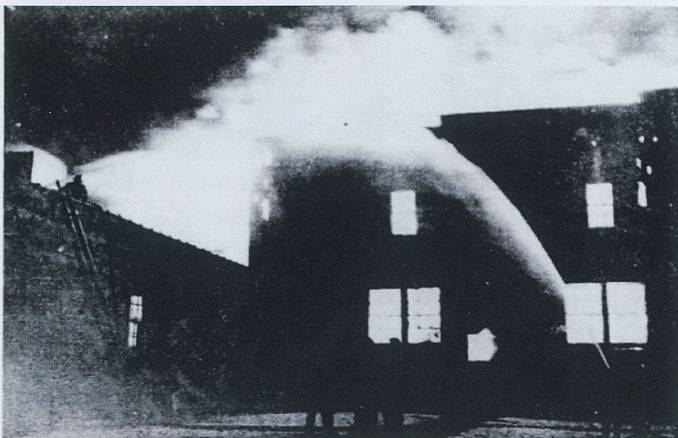


Of the 18 buildings, only 3 remained relatively untouched. This 5-story dairy mill would be gone in a matter of hours.



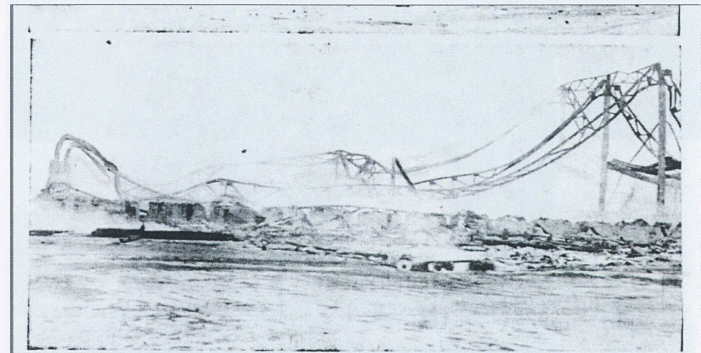
The \$2,500,000 fire which swept through the Morton Salt company plant Monday night started in the cooperage building, near the No. 3 warehouse pictured here. The warehouse, located south of cooperage, was saved because a brisk southwest wind whipped the fire to other buildings. A tile roof prevented any flying debris or sparks from getting a start. This picture was taken early in the blaze.

#3 was south of the cooperage building and escaped serious damage. A 45 mph wind hindered the firefighters.



Huge billows of smoke from the No. 2 warehouse of the Morton Salt company a few minutes before the front wall caved in, light the sky as two firemen spray the grainery building, the point at which the fire was checked after five hours of stubborn fighting. Notice the holes in the building at the extreme right, caused when intense heat punched holes in the magnesium alloy walls. At the extreme left, a fireman can be seen near a ladder against the grainery building.

#2 warehouse enveloped in flames as firemen vainly direct their hose upon the fire. Both of these buildings would be piles of smoking rubble by morning.



Steel beams, twisted into grotesque shapes and piles of smoking debris were all that remained of fire swept buildings on the site of the Morton Salt company's Marysville plant. Above is the ruined No. 2 warehouse and in the left background may be seen the evaporator building. Below are the beams of the warehouse which became white hot in the intense heat as the building burned furiously in a strong southwest wind. The almost molten beams drape over their masonry supports and form ribbon-like patterns against the smoky sky.

Tuesday morning revealed a sobering scene of total destruction. Thousands of local residents drove by the site to view the damage. This is all that remains of warehouse #2. Police were on the scene to direct traffic.

PH&DRR & WWII

On the night of June 21, 1942, the city of Port Huron underwent a total city-wide blackout, coordinated by the local Citizen's Defense Corporation. It was to begin at 10:30 and end at 10:45. George Duffy invited a few close friends to experience the event, including his girlfriend, Kay Wilson. They met at the PH&D roundhouse. The group went in and climbed the three flights of stairs and came out, up on the roof. At 10:27, sirens sounded the "alert signal". At precisely 10:30, the entire city went pitch black. All street lights went dark, including all homes and businesses. It was eerily silent with nothing moving. Automobiles pulled over and turned off their headlamps. Up on the roof, the only sounds were cocktails with ice cubes. At 10:45, the lights came back on. At 10:47, the sirens announced the "all clear" and the end of the test.

In January of 1942, area automobile dealers began tire rationing and quotas. In that first quarter of 1942, the average peacetime draft totals skyrocketed after Pearl Harbor. In the January 9, 1942 edition of the Times Herald, the army set a goal of 4 million expected to fill the ranks

In October of 1940, George Duffy had registered for the draft. Since he was employed in a "protected industry", he was classified with an occupational deferment, II-A. In March of 1942, he's reclassified I-A and ordered to report for a physical. In July, he and Kay announce their engagement. On the 19th of September, he's ordered to report for induction slated for October 13. On the 13th, he and 49 others depart the Tunnel Street station, bound for Fort Custer and induction into the army. After basic training, he would report to Fort Belvoir, Virginia on 21 January 1943, where he would enter the Corps of Engineers Officers Candidate Course. He would complete that on 14 April 1943, and emerge as a 2nd Lieutenant. On May 4, 1943, he and Kay would be married. On 3 September, he's assigned to the 745th Railway Operating Battalion in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Then, on a rainy Sunday evening of November 28, he bids his wife goodbye and leaves on a train composed of two sections, with 19 officers, 2 Warrant Officers, and 661 enlisted men. The train departs on an east-bound track but, outside of town switches to a west-bound main, bound for the west coast, to thwart "interested parties". On 10 December, the battalion joins 4 other R.O.B.s and a Shop Battalion and boards the converted luxury liner, S.S. Mariposa. The liner is bound for the port of Bombay, and eventually, the jungles of Assam, in Northeast India.

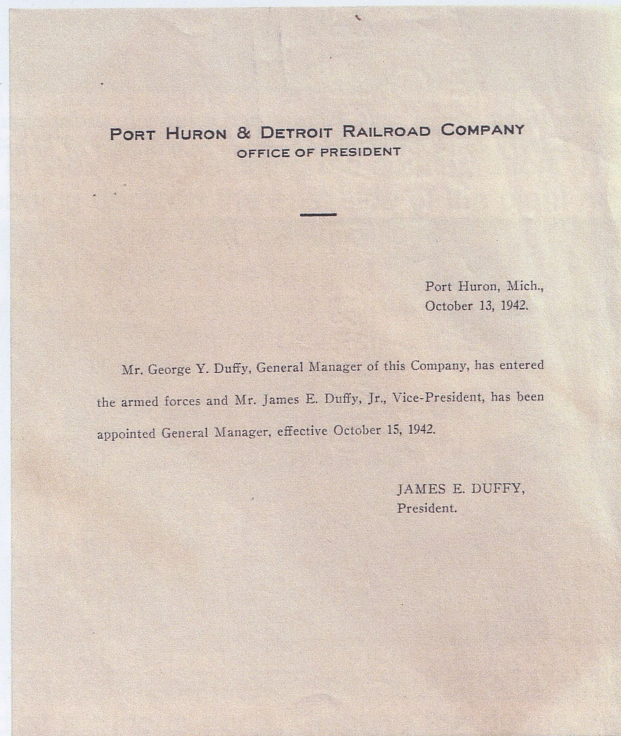
On the 13th of December, an inter-office memo from President James E. Duffy announces that, as off the 15th, George Duffy has entered the armed forces. He is replaced by his brother, James E. Duffy, Jr.

On December 29th 1943, 1st Lieutenant M.D. Howard, Sixth Service Command, arrives to assume "technical possession" of the PH&DRR for the government. Other army officers have arrived at the Pere Marquette and the Grand Trunk Western railroads. The Secretary of War "...permits the management of carriers taken over by the Army to continue their respective managerial functions to the maximum degree..."

In January of 1944, all employees are instructed to be photographed for security purposes. Their pictures will be used as official documents for identification purposes. They are expected to carry these on their persons at all times and be prepared to surrender them upon request from authorized personnel.



2nd Lieutenant G.Y. Duffy packs his 1941 two-toned silver and gray Buick sedan in Bay City, before shipping out.



Effective October 15, J.E.D. Jr. replaces G.Y.D. as General Manager.

In our archives, we found these "thumbnail photos", each approximately 2" square. These were office copies. Each employee carried a copy on his person at all times.



Carl Kohn



Herschel Warner



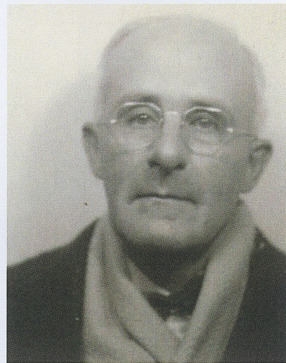
Merl Sari



Joe Deemer



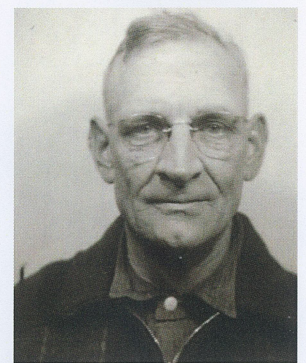
Gurdon Watson



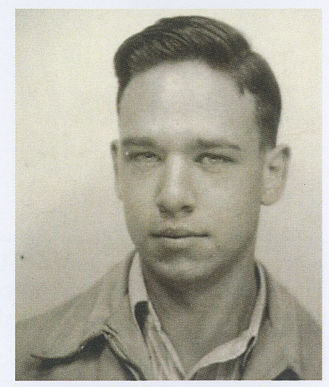
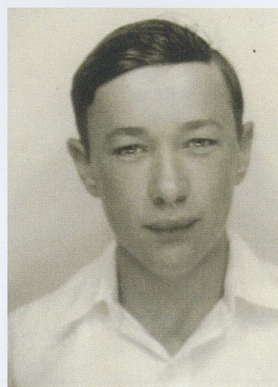
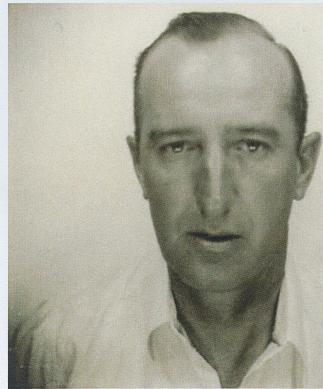
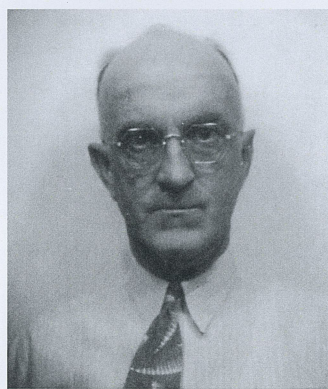
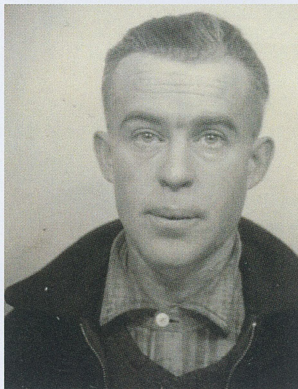
Ben Reed



Bert Sari



Ed Short

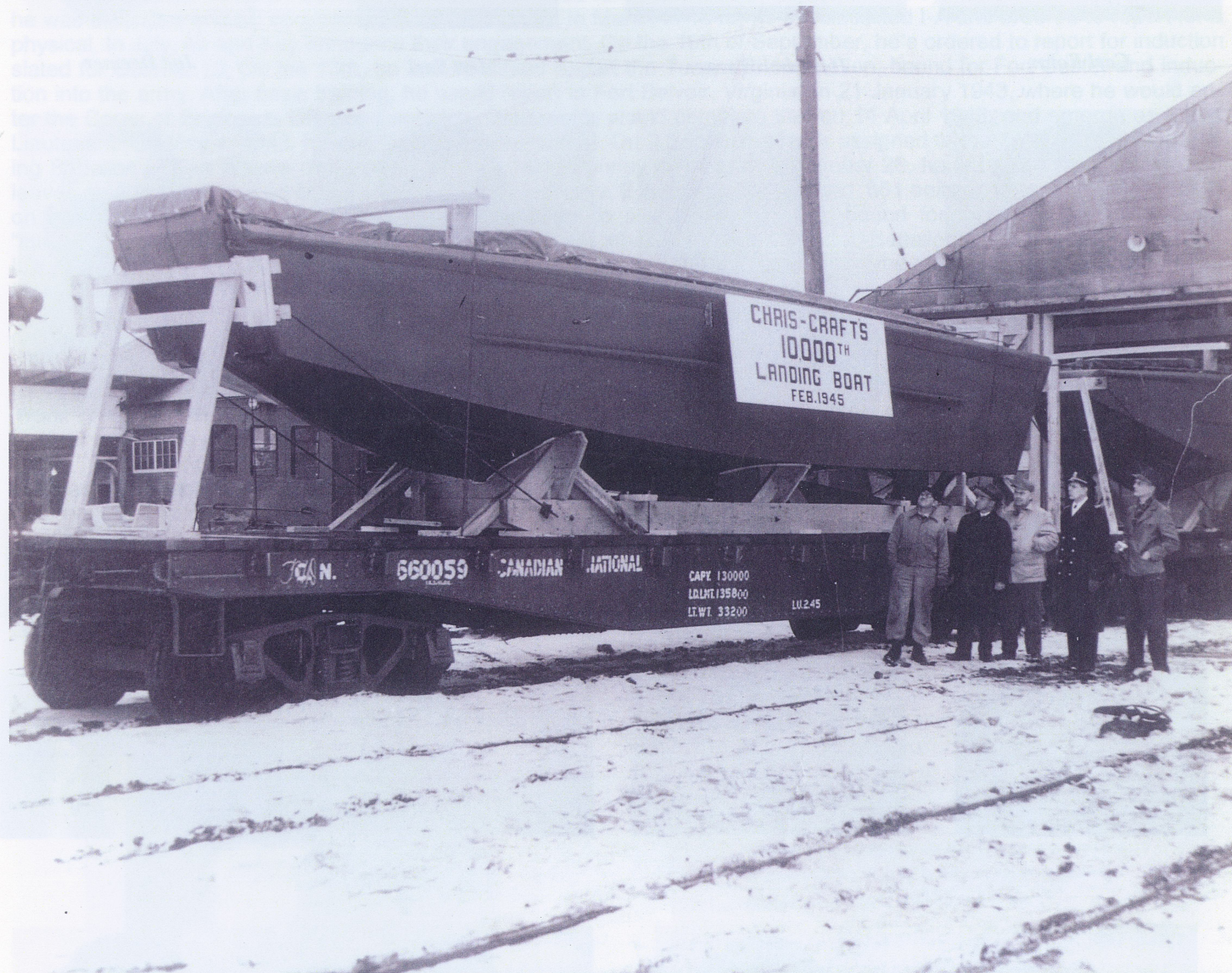


Matching the Prototype: CN 660059

In the ORER (*Official Railway Equipment Register*) of April 1942, CN 660059 is a 41'5" flat car with a capacity of 130,000 pounds. There were 159 of these cars built by the Canadian National, with numbers between 660000-660199.

While no exact HO scale models can be found, undecorated 40' flat cars can be obtained on Ebay. These CN 40' flats can be used on a transition era (1940s-1950s) PH&DRR layout. After the war, they would have been spotted for interchange at Marine City with Chris Craft's Algonac Transit Company, to be taken into their plant in Algonac.

This photograph shows plant officials along with an officer of the U.S. Navy commemorating the completion of the 10,000th landing craft in 1945.



SPECIAL THANKS!

Like to thank Dennis Klymko for his generous donation recently. He's living the dream down in Sunny Florida!

ALLEN STEVENS

Like to acknowledge the passing of a dedicated Society member Allen Stevens. He loved all things PH&DRR. He was featured in ML#30, Summer 2017.