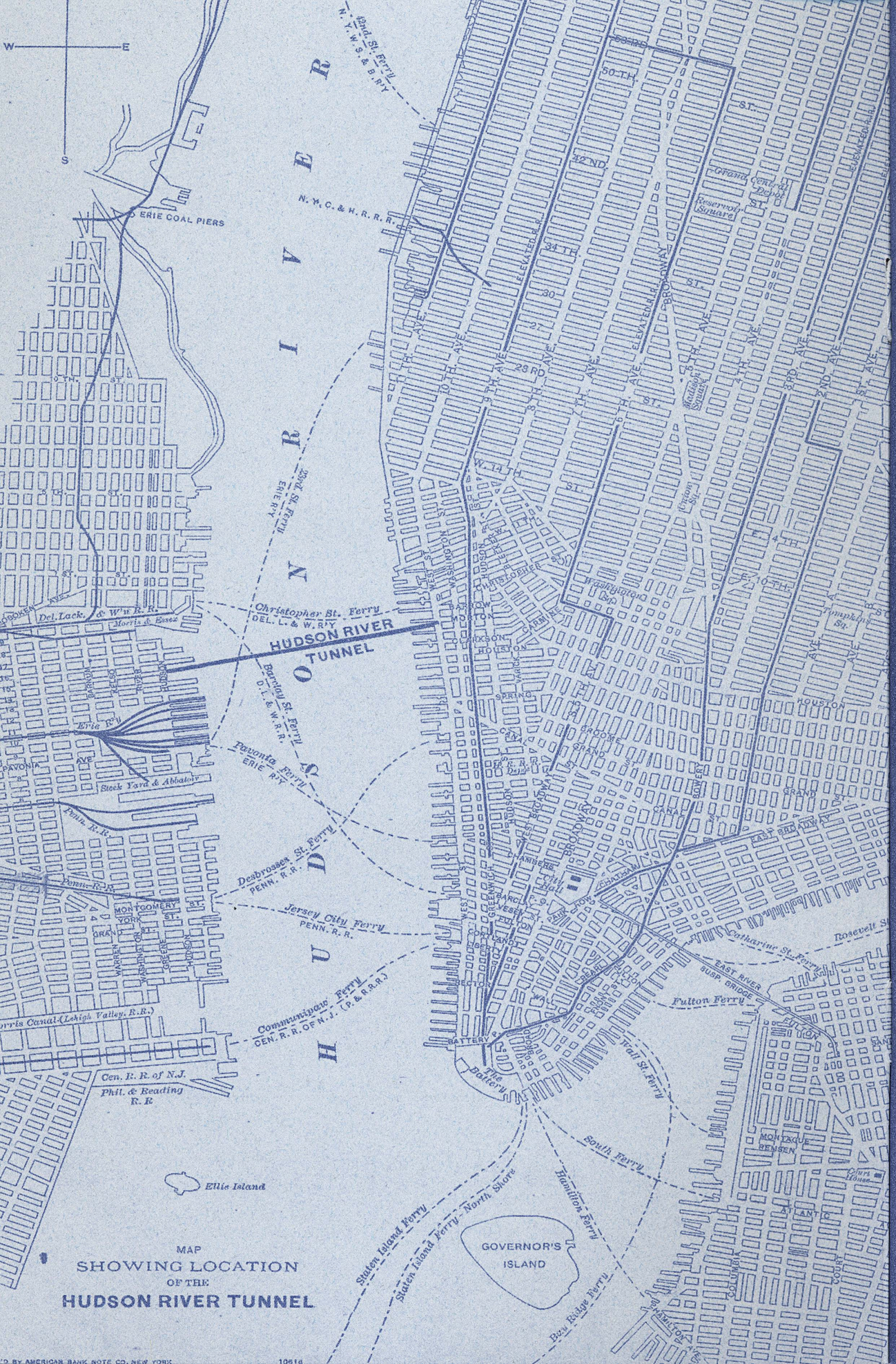
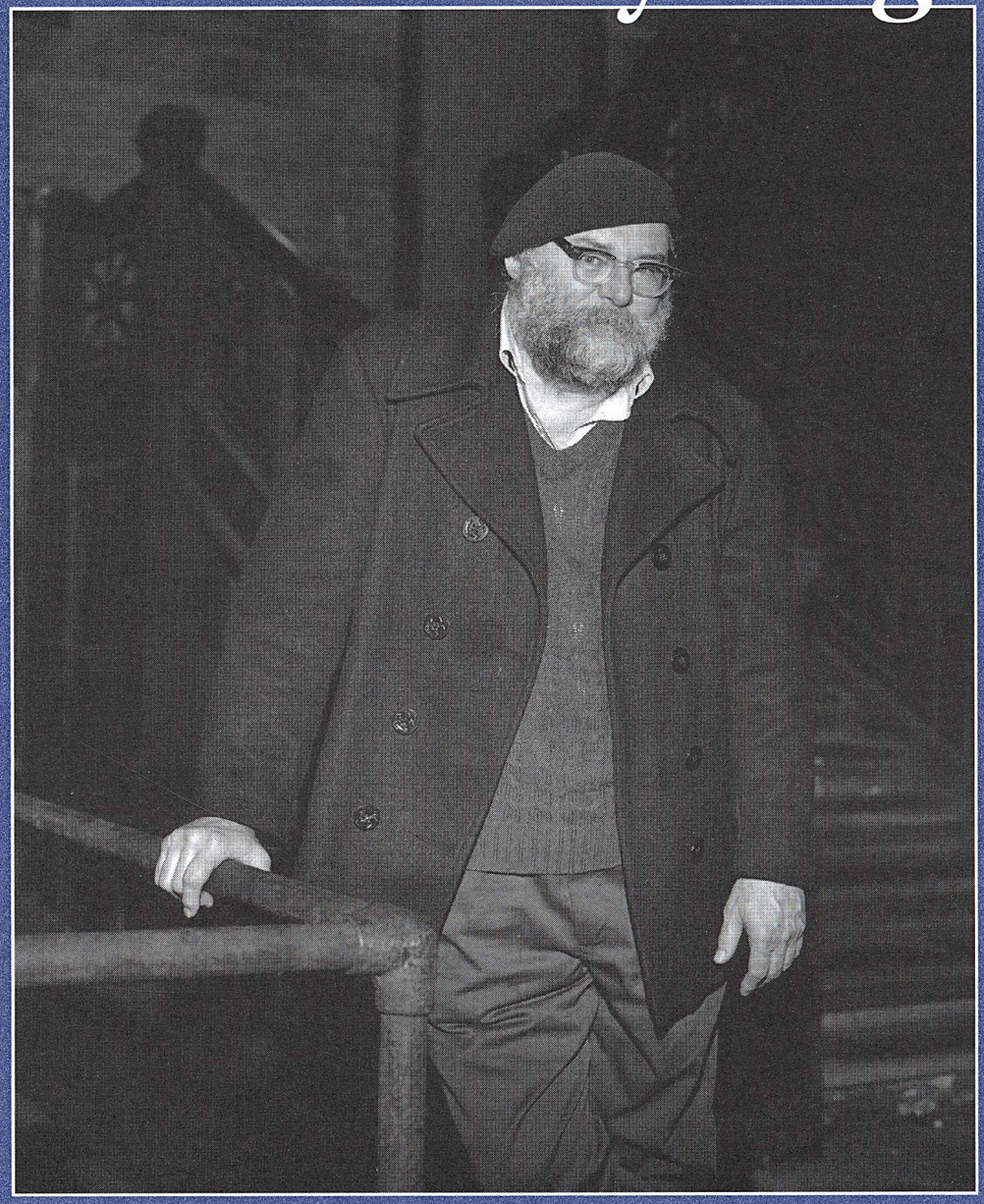
BOATS Ships & everything



Recollections of Jack Quinby
Marine Engineer



BOATS Ships & everything



Recollections of Jack Quinby, Marine Engineer

A chapbook from the "Vanishing Hoboken" series
of the Hoboken Oral History Project

Vanishing Hoboken

The Hoboken Oral History Project

A Project of The Hoboken Historical Museum
and the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library

New Jersey Council for the Humanities

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Cover: *The* Bath, *a Delaware Lackwanna & Western Railroad tugboat, on which Jack Quinby worked as a fireman. Charles M. Parslow Collection, Steamship Historical Society of America Collections, University of Baltimore.*
Inside Front and Back Cover: *Map of the Hudson River, showing locations of the Hudson River Tunnel and the Hudson ferry and railroad routes, c. 1908.*
Center Spread (pgs. 16-17): *The abandoned Lackawanna ferry slip in Hoboken, 1987. Photography by Robert Foster.*
Page i: *Portrait of Jack Quinby by Robert Foster, 1987.*

Unless otherwise noted, all images are from the collections of the Hoboken Historical Museum. Special thanks to HHM archivist David Webster for his assistance.

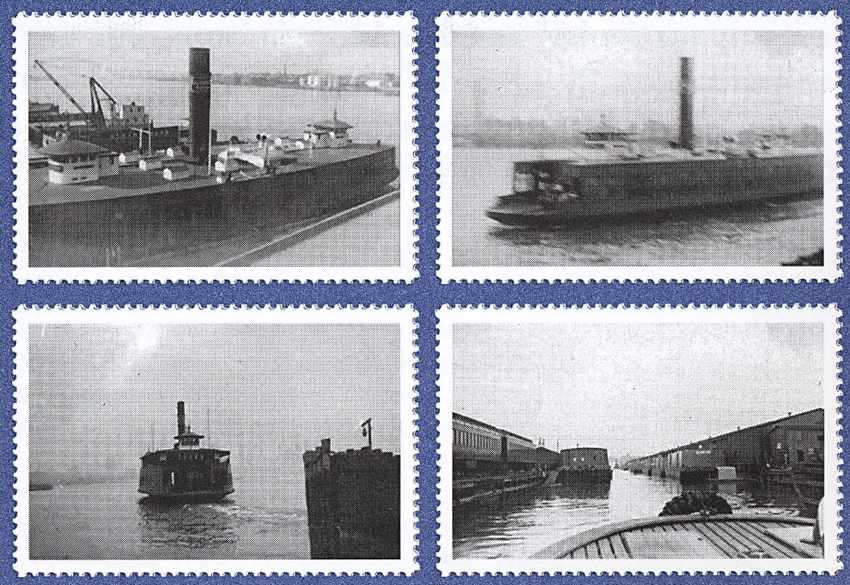
I always wanted to work on boats, ships, and everything, but I like harbor work even better than going to sea, which happened later on. I think it's more intimate. You see a lot of different things. Whereas you go to sea, it's such a boring, repetitious thing. Once you've gone to the same port a couple of times, it's déjà vu. But New York [Harbor], for me anyway, changes all the time. I still like riding the ferryboats, or just looking at the action going on, looking at New York Harbor.

But times change. I don't regret it. I think it opened up my horizons, or whatever you want to call it, to a different life. The fondest memories I have are of coming up the bay and watching the sun come up over Manhattan. Everyone's asleep on the boat except the guy on the wheel and myself. It's just something different, you know. It's hard to describe.

JACK QUINBY
JUNE 4, 1987

NOTE

This interview with marine engineer Jack Quinby, who worked for many years in the marine division at Hoboken's Delaware Lackawanna & Western Railroad Terminal, was conducted on June 4, 1987 by Jane Steuerwald and Robert Foster, as part of a larger project documenting the lighterage system (boats engaged in transporting goods) in the New York/New Jersey Harbor. Norman Brouwer, curator of ships at South Street Seaport for many years, was also present at the interview. Mr. Brouwer's remembrance of Mr. Quinby, who was a longtime friend and who passed away in 1995, introduces the engineer's oral history.



Series of photos from Jack Quinby's scrapbooks.

Introduction

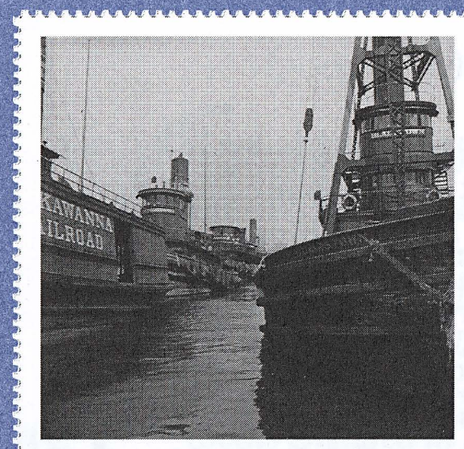
Jack Quinby (1930-1995)

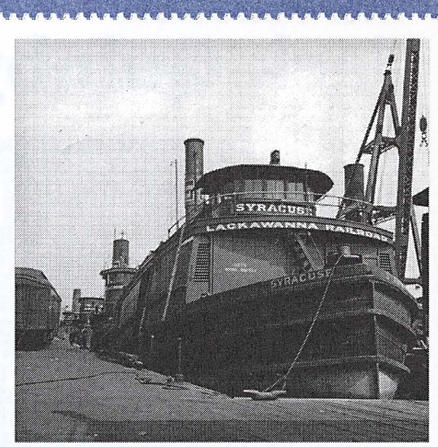
Jack Quinby was a boat person. He made his living as a marine engineer, starting out as a fireman on coal-burning tugs and ferryboats, and finishing up as an engine room watch officer on seagoing tankers. Nearly all his leisure time was spent on or around the water. In these recollections he alludes to the rigors of his early employment, the intense heat in the fireroom and the labor involved. Jack never dwells on this aspect. Instead, one gets the impression he felt extremely fortunate to have experienced at first hand the final years of the era of marine steam.

Jack had many interests. It was a trait he undoubtedly inherited from his father. E.J. Quinby was a published author, with a number of articles to his credit and two books, *Interurban Interlude* on the trolleys of northern New Jersey, and *Ida was a Tramp* on his experiences as a shipboard radio operator in the years just after World War I. He is best remembered as "Col. E.J. Quinby," dressed up in light-colored top hat and tails, playing the calliope on the deck of the steamboat *Delta Queen*, which he helped to save.

Jack always had a boat. He and his father brought the steam launch *Scudder* back from Ontario to operate in New York Harbor. When she became too much to maintain, Jack reluctantly sold her and acquired as replacement a smaller motor launch that had been the officers' gig of an early twentieth century American warship.

By the time I knew him, Jack was working for Exxon on tankers, part of the time in the Pacific on the Alaska run, and part of the time on the Atlantic seaboard. The liberal vacations gave him time to pursue his many interests. It was great fun traveling





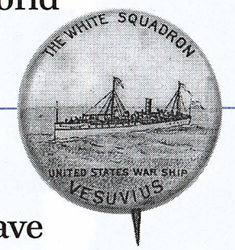
Series of photos from Jack Quinby's scrapbooks.
Opposite: *Commemorative pin, the* Vesuvius, *late 19th century.*

with him, either exploring the backwaters of New York Harbor by boat or car, or searching for old boats, and another shared interest, surviving coastal fortifications, as far afield as Norfolk, Virginia, and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Jack's enthusiasm was contagious. He was always researching some nautical topic, and eager to share his findings. He had the sort of brisk, purposeful walk Capt. Irving Johnson would have called "leaning forward into life." His upbeat attitude, his sense of humor, his generosity, and his store of knowledge are all sorely missed.

Norman Brouwer
June 2005

It Runs in the Family



My father was involved in engineering in the First World War. He was in charge of salvaging the electrical plant that the *St. Paul* had turned over at the docks, over here. Then they towed her into the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and they gave him the job of refurbishing that plant.

He did a lot of things. He was a radio operator in the merchant fleet; then, later on, he worked for RCA as a representative for Radio Marine Corporation, which installed the wireless stations on different ships. Then he was in the Naval reserve, and he got called up to active duty, again, in the Second World War, and was commandant at the fleet sound school at Key West.

His father was Admiral John Gardner Quinby. He was an engineering officer in the Navy from about 1875 until 1920, roughly. He was a gunnery officer at Santiago, on the *Vesuvius*. The Spanish-American war. He'd retired when the First [World] War came, and he went back into the line, on Army transports, in the First War.

My great-grandfather was in charge of the railroads of the Department of the Army of Tennessee, under Grant. He also fought in Mexico with Grant, in 1846 and '48.

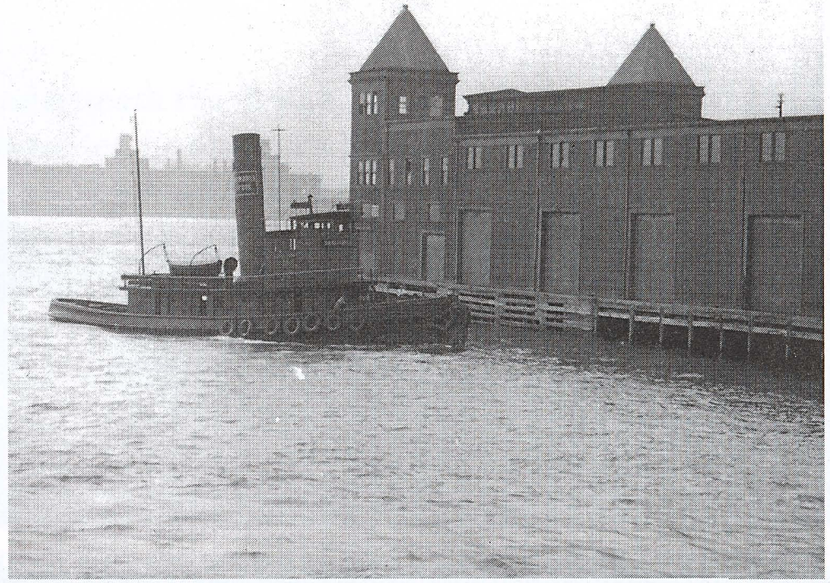
[Ships and engineering] sort of runs in the family—even on my mother's side, too. My mother was born in Brest, Brittany, which was a naval port. Her grandfather was commandant of a naval base—Pierre Gustav Mélange, under Napoleon III. In fact, I have his commissions and his medals at home, to prove it.

Starting Out: Tug Fireman

I started with the Delaware Lackawanna & Western Railroad marine department in May of 1951, as a fireman on their tugs. The tugs I worked on were the *Morristown*, the *Bath*, the *Corning*, the *Orange*, the *Montclair*, the *Newark*, and the *Stroudsburg*. We worked all sorts of odd hours, eight-hour watches, sometimes even twelve-hour watches. At that time they burned what is called anthracite pea coal, which is fine, hard coal. You have to clean the fires about every two hours. There were three furnace boilers, and primarily we transferred freight from the yards in Hoboken and Jersey City, to points all around New York Harbor, including Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan, and the upper part of New Jersey, going up toward Edgewater.

In addition to towing car floats, we had deck lighters and covered lighters carrying machinery (this was during the Korean war) over to the Army piers in Brooklyn, for the government; tanks, jeeps, trucks—anything. When we started at night, you'd have to clean the fires first. Then you went over to the coaling dock and took aboard about ten tons of coal, port and starboard bunkers, and also filled up your water tanks for the boiler. At that time, the tugs had ship-to-shore radio, and they would tell you what your orders were, where to pick up our tows, and where to deliver them around the harbor.

[Loading car floats] was taken care of by the rail crews in the yards. They'd load them. All we did was deliver them, and we took them out. The railroad business is very specialized. You never do another

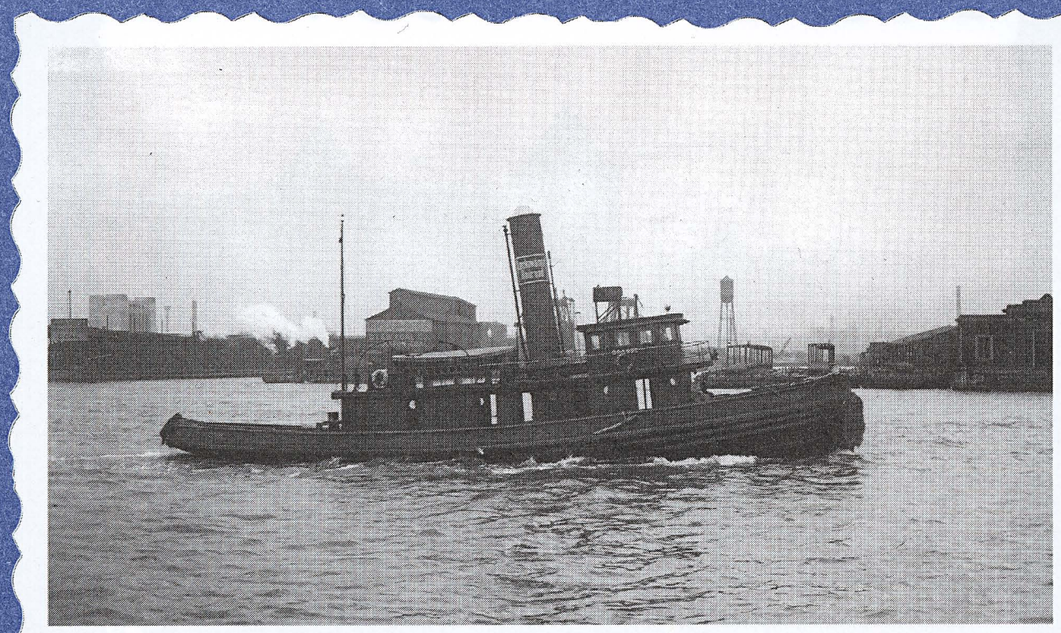


DL&W RR tugboat, the Morristown. *E. Gibbs Collection, Steamship Historical Society of America, University of Baltimore.*
Opposite: *Lackawanna symbol from ferry service schedule.*

man's job, because you'll put him out of work. You know what I mean? It was always, you might call it, divided into fragments, but everyone knew their business.

Most people think of firing a coal-fire boat as you just pour in the coal. Well, sooner or later the furnace becomes chock-full of ashes. Then what do you do? You have to wing the fires, and pull the ashes out with ash hoes, one at a time, and you're fighting the clock and the steam-pressure gauge at the same time. In the meantime, the engineer, of course, is screaming down the hatch at you to keep the pressure up. It gets rather entertaining. But when you're twenty-years-old, you don't worry about that.

The boilers were Scotch boilers, about 150 pounds pressure. They'd been built about 1903 or 1901, so they weren't too new at that time, and they had either two, or three, or four furnaces. The *Bronx* was the biggest one; she had four furnaces, and 1,000 horsepower.



Jack Quinby worked as a fireman on the Orange. *Charles M. Parslow Collection, Steamship Historical Society of America, University of Baltimore.*

Your controlling furnace is the lowest one. That's called the pitfire. Then you have your starboard-wing and your port-wing furnace, and you have to come out of the pit, climb up, and then bale it up into there. Like I say, you bail about a ton an hour, and you've got to rake out ashes, about a third of the weight, also on the hour. So it's quite a job, the fireboy. They called me "Fireboy." After I got to be twenty-five and had a family of three children, I got to be insulted. But anyway, the poor fireboy, when everybody was making merry, tied up at the dock, he had to clean fires and coal.

And then there were clinkers, that had to be broken up. A clinker is when the ashes form, they cake. It becomes rock hard. Then you go in there with a big, twelve-foot-long slice bar, and you just jam it in, and jump up and down on the end of it, break it out and hoe it out again. The hoes would almost melt sometimes, from the heat. You really had a nice time. It kept you really strong.

Hard coal has to be burned under what they call forced draft conditions. We had induced draft

underneath the fires, underneath the grates. It was a steam jet. It was just a pipe with holes drilled in it, and you opened up the valve and 150 pounds of steam from the boiler shot through, and induced the air. You have to have a lot of oxygen to burn hard coal, and a good draft as well. But it's clean burning; it doesn't make a lot of smoke. In New York Harbor, people don't realize, thirty years ago was a terrible place. There was smog, it was absolutely horrible, there were so many steam tugs. It sounds romantic, but to breathe it, it wasn't too good. You get weather like today and yesterday, and it really did a number on your lungs.

[We didn't have too many clinkers,] only in the summertime. The Scranton-Lackawanna Coal Company was a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Lackawanna Railroad, which they staunchly denied. What happened was in the summer they would sell the good coal and give us what we called "dirt." Dirt just didn't burn, it didn't give off heat, but it sure gave off a lot of ashes and clinkers, and you had to keep twice as much hauling fires, cleaning fires. So the oiler and the engineer would come down and help you out, because it was just too much for one man. It would kill a man. In fact, I had a guy die alongside of me once. That was on the ferry.

An old-time fireman called Frank Stein, from East Prussia (*plou-deutscher*, a lowland German), a hell of a nice guy—he had a body on him like Charles Atlas, and he was seventy years old. He was in charge of breaking in the firemen. If Frank Stein passed you, then you were hired by the company. Well, I worked with Frank for two weeks, and he said, "You'll never do it. You're finished." So I went up to the head office and I said, "Frank says I'm ready to go on the tugs now." I blarneyed my way out of that. Because on the ferries,

you had to fire two boilers; on the tug you only had one. So I figured, "I'm not going to blow my chances now," you know.

But Frank taught me. He said, "A, never stand under the ventilator." I'd be stripped to the waist. He said, "You're going to end up with back trouble," which I did, in later years. Then he would always put a handful of raw oatmeal in the drinking water. Now the facilities were non-existent on these ships, boats. There were no bathrooms, there were no showers, nothing. We drank out of a community, galvanized pail, with a tin dipper. What you do is you put a handful of oatmeal, uncooked oatmeal, in the water, and it softens the water so you don't get cramps. And you never drink ice water; that's what kills you. The shock....It's 140 degrees in the fire room, and the shock to your system—your system can't take it. And that's what happened to this.... A black man, a nice guy, but he wouldn't listen. We were telling him a fairy story. So he just doubled up, and that was the end of him.

It seems incredible if I tell you, but when I used to take my dungarees off, at the end of the watch, you could stand them in the corner. They were soaked with salt—sweat. They gave us salt tablets, but they found out later on that that wasn't the right thing to do, either. So Frank was right all along. The oatmeal softens the water so your system—because you're ingesting tremendous amounts of water, and the water was stored in a beer barrel that was scorched. You built a fire in it to scorch the wood, and it just had a canvas flap on it. Everyone drank out of this thing. Sometimes the water was even a green color. Some of the men couldn't take the conditions. They were of a younger generation. They just quit. "No, this isn't for me."

[Back then], in 1951, I made $63.50 a week for a four-day week, but we worked many hours overtime. Everything over eight hours was time-and-a-half on the railroad, and that was a fabulous amount because I had just left a job in a warehouse, where I was working harder, in Long Island City, for $20.50 a week. So $63.50 was a lot of money. Also, we did not work under Social Security. We worked for the Federal Railroad Retirement System. We paid 8.25% across the board to the government for our pension, and the company paid an equal amount. If you realize that Social Security was, at the time, a penny and a half—that was a lot of money. So maybe someday I can get some of it back.

Ash Gang

I also worked on the ash gang. That was low man on the totem pole. You started on the ash dock, on the ash gang. That was a rough job. All these ashes.... This coal I was speaking to you about, it's got to be hauled out of the fire room; not only out of the furnaces, but out of the fire room. That's the worst job in the world. You shovel it into a vacuum pipe, with a steam jet blowing (that's how you lose your hearing), and you bail that stuff out. There were no masks, no breathing, respiratory facilities, or anything like that. That's about the hardest job.

On the tugs, we put it into a gondola car on the ash dock. What we didn't know was that the railroad was selling it for more than the coal cost them, to build cinder brick. That's how you make cinder brick; out of steam ashes. The rule was, you couldn't put newspaper, or rags, or oil in because you were contaminating the ashes.

That, to me, is the most miserable job. It's ear-splitting. Yeah, we put cotton in our ears, finally, but I lost some of my hearing doing it. God knows how much ash I've breathed over the years. Then you had to punch boilers, too. You open up the breaching doors, hinge them back early in the morning, and there's this rubber hose with a bent gas pipe on the end. You blow the soot out of the fire tubes in the boiler. Then when you're finished with that little chore, you run around to the back and open up the Compton doors in the combustion chamber, and shovel the gathered ashes out of that.

[We got rid of the ash] on the ferries after every day's runs. Tugs, also. So you might have six or eight boats lined up there.

Becoming An Oiler

I graduated to oiler, because I had some sort of mechanical ability. The engine ran at about eighty-five revolutions a minute, and you stood on a little, two-inch steel railing with your hand grabbing another, like a subway strap, and you oiled the engine, at 85 rpm. Now some guys used to lose their fingers doing that business, because the engine's going full speed. But I had good engineers. They taught me how to do it, and in the end—You have to heat the oil, by the way, to get it out of the squirt-can, and I used to sign my initials on the slide-valve, the slides of the engine. That's when you really graduate.

It took me about six months, maybe a little less [to become proficient]. Let's see—May, June, July, August. Yes, by September, I was a regular oiler. My father had

Deckhand on a railroad tugboat, ca. 1950.

taught me something about steam engines, so maybe I had an edge on the rest of the gang, you know.

[Lackawanna was on of the few companies that hired black labor during that period], as far as I know. And I think they were one of the first to have [black workers] as oilers, because I broke some in as oilers. Yes. I'd say — In fact, they were predominately firemen, and ash gang, and in the yard, at the dry docks. As far as I know, like I said, from the experience on the tugboats, you were rated solely on your capacity of doing your job, and that was it. The rest of it didn't count a hoot for shinola. Everybody had a nickname. You didn't even go by your own, regular name. I think that was a pretty democratic way of doing it.

We all wore Coney Island yachting caps, we called them. You'd buy them on the boardwalk at Coney Island. It just seems like they deliberately kept a low profile. In the summer, the uniform was cut-off dungarees, above your knee, and a pair of combat boots that you could buy for $2.50 in Modell's, and a big knife. The deckhands carried a big knife, to cut the lines. The lines were hemp. What's nice about hemp — they'd start to squeak, and let you know when they were going to let go. That's another reason we didn't stick our heads out, because when those lines let go and they came against the deckhouse, they'd take your head right off. They would give you a little warning, where nylon just stretches. It stretches, finally it lets go, and then it's a little too late.

[The equipment was well maintained.] The boilers were built by Lucan Steel Company of Coltsville, Pennsylvania, and some of those tugs had been built in 1901. They finally laid them up in 1965, so that's quite a long time for an original set of boilers.

I Always Wanted to Work on Boats

It was a good job. I liked it very much. Everyone helped each other out. There was a lot of camaraderie aboard. The oiler helped the fireman, the fireman helped the oiler, the engineer, and vice versa, and everyone knew their business. They were what they called "lunchbag" boats: they had had no galley, stove — kitchen facilities — aboard; you brought your sandwiches, and you made coffee aboard. Like I say, it was a good life.

I always wanted to work on boats, ships and everything, but I like harbor work even better than going to sea — which happened later on. I think it's more intimate. You see a lot of different things, whereas you go to sea, it's such a boring, repetitious thing. Sometimes, if you sail foreign, it's nice, to see — but once you've gone to the same port a couple of times, it's déjà vu. But New York, for me anyway, changes all the time. I still like riding the ferry boats, or going down on Pier 17, and just looking at the action going on, looking at New York harbor. But times change, economic and everything. I don't regret it. I think it opened up my horizons, or whatever you want to call it, to a different life. But the fondest memories I have are of, at dawn, coming up the bay and watching the sun come up over Manhattan. Everyone's asleep on the boat except the guy on the wheel and myself. It's just something different, you know. It's hard to describe.

And there was a great feeling of camaraderie, which you don't have at sea. At sea, it's very competitive, it's more jealousy or — I don't know. Maybe times have changed, but in those days — what



The Newark *at work in the New York-New Jersey Harbor. Tracey I. Brooks Collection, Steamship Historical Society of America, University of Baltimore.*
Opposite: *The demolition of the Meyer's Hotel on Hudson Street, Hoboken, where Marine View Towers was later constructed, ca. 1973. Photo by Donald "Red" Barrett.*

I'm talking about is some thirty odd years ago— if you knew your job, you were accepted, and that's all. Your last name or who you were didn't matter, and that was it. You just worked as a team.

In fact, we used to have some crazy times, going up the East River. We were all young, Second World War veterans, and we'd break out the fire hoses and wash each other down until we hit the old man in the face in the wheel house, you know. He blew the whistle on that. Then we decided we'd go — We called it "the market boat." We'd run over to Shaeffer's brewery and get a couple cases of beer, then the non-alcoholics would demand we go to the Pepsi Cola plant at Long Island City. So we would go over there for couple cases of Pepsi. Then somebody decided the wife would like a fish dinner, so we'd run down to Fulton Street and buy fish right off the pier.

Then we'd go up the East River, heading for the Harlem River, the Harlem transfer, and the young nurses were on — at that time I think it was called Welfare Island — so we'd wave and toot the whistle to them, and whistle a few invitations. They'd smile back at us. By that time it was time to wash up. We were on our way back to Hoboken.

So we'd take off what few clothing we had, and wash on the stern of the boat. But by that time, Barry's Circle Line was going around Manhattan, and they turned us in to the Coast Guard for indecent exposure. We had no real bathing facilities aboard; we didn't mean any harm or anything like that. But I guess somebody took umbrage about it, so they turned us into the boss.

Hoboken Hub



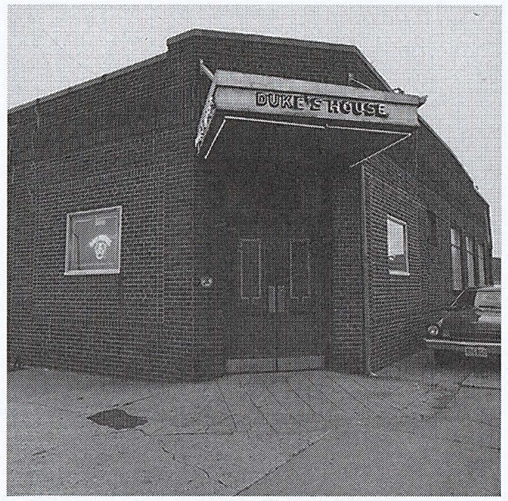
In Hoboken, we had the coal dock, the grain dock, the mail dock, freight dock, and an oil dock, where freighters used to come in, regular trans-Atlantic steamers. As you stand on the ferry pier, you look south toward the ventilating tunnel at Pavonia, of the Holland Tunnel. We [the railroad] owned all that property. Jersey City bisects it at an angle, so part of it was in Hoboken, part of it was in Jersey City. There were also car-float docks in there, too. Long slip was there,



feeding water to the Henderson Street powerhouse. Railway Express had a huge warehouse that ran for about five blocks.

I was in Hoboken from age twenty. I worked there seventeen years. Later on, I moved to Hoboken, when they built the Mayor Grogan high-rise [Marine View Towers on River Street were built during the Grogan administration]. It's not a high-rise today, but it was at that time.

Duke's House



You had twelve-fourteen-hour days; you'd sleep in your overcoat in the Y [in the Hoboken Terminal], and wait. Everything's seniority on the railroad, and when you're a junior you have to stand by for orders. So we wouldn't go home. We'd just sleep up in the Y. The rooms were terribly filthy. [We'd sleep on what] we called a "bronco." It was like a leatherette couch. And we'd look at Jackie Gleason until about midnight, then pass out until 4:00 in the morning. Then the call-boy would wake you up to go down and start the engines, and clean the boilers.

[The Y] was on the upper deck, in Lackawanna terminal, opposite old Duke's House. At Duke's House, we'd buy meal tickets for $20.00 a month. That would entitle us to thirty meals, until our next paycheck came through the paymaster's office.



The Morristown, *with other Lackawanna tugs, on the New York side of the Hudson River. Charles M. Parslow Collection, Steamship Historical Society of America, University of Baltimore.*
Opposite: *Duke's House, Hoboken, in 1976. Photograph by John Conn.*

Duke's House was a very old bar and grill and cafeteria, right across the street from the Sam Sloane monument, where that new ten-story building is. It was the oldest bar in Hoboken — if that's any distinction, seeing how many bars there are in Hoboken. But he had in his franchise the right to the whole block, to sell liquor. No one else could. So it burned down one day. The walls stood about five feet high, and as long as one wall was standing, he still had the right to that franchise. So he rebuilt it in a hurry.

But it was a meeting place for all the guys on the tugs and ferries on payday, because Rule G was strictly enforced: Except for the beer that I'm talking about, we didn't drink on the job — except on pay night, when we were off for the weekend. So we'd all adjourn over there.

He had a free lunch, by the way, at Duke's House, and a ladies' entrance in the back — being an old, I think, Hudson County law at the time. Ladies weren't

allowed in the front entrance; they had to go in and have a table. They had their ideas, you know. In fact, if you remember, the bar next to Clam Broth House, that was men-only. Finally, the federal law stepped in and changed it — for the better, I think, anyway.

A Way of Life

Lackawanna merged with the Erie [in the late 1950s], and that brought another cutback, because the Erie had dieselized before we did. When the diesels came, they were much more powerful. One diesel tug could do the work of three steam tugboats. You can imagine what a dent that made in the manning scale. Also, they only carried a captain, a mate, two deckhands and an engineer; they did away with the oiler and they did away with the firemen. Later on, they did away with the engineer. So it was quite a change.

Steam tugs [lasted for the Lackawanna] until about 1957. When they got their diesel tugs, they went into hock to the Chase National Bank, and they went bankrupt. Simple as that. You cannot buy equipment on credit and expect to get away with it, and that's just what they did. They bought a whole mess of lighters, steel lighters and diesel-electric tugs. They were very good; they're still running at Baton Rouge and New Orleans, some of them, and Florida. But they could barely make the mortgage payments much less — I mean the interest payments, much less the mortgage, I should say. Then the end was just in sight. The railroads were going through a rough time; the highway system was beating them out of freight, and steamship trade was changing into containerships — containerization, you might say. So that was it.

So it lasted until, I'd say, the mid-'60s. Possibly it struggled on to about '70, because I was out of it by that time. The ferries had folded up. The ferries were a victim of the Port Authority. They had signed a secret contract, without notifying anyone else, that they would only take over the Hudson Tubes providing the ferries gave up the ferry service. I had a friend who was in on the say, and I was able to notify the union about it. The union manager gave us severance pay; otherwise, we'd even have been beat out of that.

I received my first third-engineer's license, then I sailed with Standard Oil, on tankers, and raised my license twice, from third-limited to third-unlimited to second-unlimited. That's what I have now. Engineering-wise, your license states the horsepower you're qualified for. Anything, I think, over seven- or eight-thousand horsepower is unlimited. So I had to sail as an oiler, even though I had a license for about two years, until I got enough discharges. Then I sat for another exam, and received my unlimited license. After several years of that, I went back to school and studied for my second-. (There's third-, second- first- and chief-.)

[But working on steam tugs and ferries, that's] a way of life that's totally gone today, of course. There were good parts of it and there were rough parts of it, like anything else. But I rather enjoyed it. I think it was a very worthwhile experience. The trouble is, I think it spoiled me for the — what do you call it? — the automation age. There just isn't the feel.

Some of the best parts? Well, the camaraderie, I guess, and seeing the moving machinery. You just had to like it — the smell of the oil and coal and everything else. The fact is, you're young, you're strong, and you

think, "Wow, this is the life." Boy. You feel about ten feet high. Maybe I shouldn't say it's a macho thing or something like that, but you feel great. You really do. In fact, I used to forget to collect my pay, and they used to haul me up to the office. "What's the matter with you?" "Well, I've been so busy." So they thought I was a millionaire. I wasn't a millionaire; I was living on barges, sleeping on the decks of barges in the summer and up in the Y on the winter, but fairly enjoying myself. That's all.

And the tough parts were when you had bad coal. Well, I'll tell you something [else]. We pulled in back of the Statue of Liberty at the Standard Oil dock, in the middle of the summer, and the barge wasn't loaded and we had to wait. All of a sudden, I swear, thousands of mosquitoes came down and drove the whole crew — and the only way we saved ourselves — we flung the fire doors open in the boiler, in the furnaces, and roasted these mosquitoes. You can imagine how hot we were, but we were being eaten alive. The captain ran up to the wheelhouse and got on the radio and he said, "We can't stay here. This is terrible." So the dispatcher said, "All right. Haul out into the harbor, and I'll call you when the tow is ready to haul out." That, to me, was a rough experience.

Then one time, in the winter time, I was firing — that was the winter of '52 — we had two big car floats, and the tug was keeled over on her side, port side if I remember right. I looked at the doors for the port bunker, and water was coming out of them. A tug is very low in the water. We had exactly one-foot free-board aft. That's not much. So I reported to the chief engineer that we were taking on water through the port bunker door. We were all bottled up, you know. All the ports were dogged down, the doors were shut —

because we were nice and toasty, you know. But we managed to get those doors open, we looked out, and the whole deck was underwater. We were caught under the guard of the car float, and the car float was pushing us down in the water. So we got that straightened out in a hurry. The captain rang "stop," loosened up the lines and we started the pumps going.

There have been cases of tugs going down right off the Battery, towing these car floats. They come around the Battery and they hit another current, and it throws their side under. The old man saved himself by leaping out the pilothouse, but the poor fireman, he went down with her. He couldn't even get up the ladder. That's how low they were. They're very deep in the water. What small amount of water you take aboard will put you under, immediately. You don't have much of a chance. There have been cases where, towing two of these big floats up the East River, and the current gets them, and these car floats squeeze you, and the deck beams actually pop up about two foot — that's another way to go, quick.

[We were down below.] The deckhands wouldn't change positions with us, and we wouldn't change positions with them — because they used to die in the wintertime. In the wintertime, they used to slip overboard on the snow and ice of the car floats, and that's the end of them.

The most dangerous jobs? Well, I'd say this. The first eight years I worked for Lackawanna Railroad, I couldn't get life insurance. It was called high-risk. The railroad finally woke up and put in what they called safety procedures, and from that — then the door was just beaten down by all these people trying to sell me life insurance. So it was for oilers and deckhands — on

the floats, not on the ferry. Not on the ferry. You see, the ferry, we'd wait until we'd go on the slip to oil the engines, but the tugs, you had to oil them on the run. And if they're maneuvering and hit something, the old man was supposed to blow the alarm whistle, but sometimes it was too late, and guys fell in the engine. That's it. Then we had flare-backs in the boiler. That's coal gas. You're bailing in the coal, and suddenly it unites with the oxygen and — blam! It just blows. At night you could see purple gas come out of the stacks, thirty feet high, when we were racing the boats.

Did people ever try to get together and get working conditions improved? Yeah. I belonged to quite a few different unions. At one time I was in the coal-miner's union. I don't know how that wound up, but it seemed apropos. Then I was in the Transit Workers' Union. We used to join different unions about every other year. Then I got into the Teamsters' Union. Well, that was good until I found out that all the bosses were in jail. Of course, that was a mistake.

Characters

A lot of us were characters, I guess. We all had nicknames. I was "Side-wheeler," and then there was "Walking-Bean" Bernardo, because he had a limp and he used to walk like this, so I gave him the name "Walking-Bean." Then, of course, there was José Pesos, called "Pork Chops." Pesos was — traditionally, years ago, the firemen came from Spain. They were tough, and lived on Christ-oph-er Street. They always pronounced that Christ-oph-er, and they had a boy runner at night go on the ferry and wake these guys up in the rooming houses, so they'd come out for the tugs or stay on their watches. And Pork Chops, in the big railroad

strike of 1919 — They put up the strikebreakers in these Pullman cars, in the yards, so they wouldn't be beat up by the strikers. The only thing he would order was pork chops, so that got him the sobriquet, Pork Chops — José Pesos.

And "Radio" was a fireman from Newark. He loved to smoke cigars in a holder, which was regarded as highly effeminate in our society at that time. Radio, as a sideline, had lady friends he used to farm out in Newark — would I be interested? He had a full catalogue of glossy black-and-whites. No, that's not quite my idea of entertainment. But he was a good chap. I often wondered what happened to Radio. He got the name because he was always quack-quackin', motor-mouthin' away.

Chink Sererio was "Captain". He was a great fan of Frank Sinatra's, because he'd been born in Hoboken. So he suddenly got charged with the idea of stringing colored lights at Christmas time (this was on the ferry), fore and aft, and playing Frank Sinatra records on a loudspeaker. Well, this went fine for the first few days, but after a month of it the passengers began to complain. So Chink and Walking-Bean Bernardo were told, forthwith, to cease operations.

Then there was Fulcher. Fulcher had a lady friend quite his junior, and he elected to save money by living in the pilothouse, with his girlfriend. So at night he would throw out his heaving line, which is about 100 feet of extension cord, and that would supply power for his hot plate and electric blanket, for him and Shirley. So they used to live in the pilothouse of the ferry, when it tied up at night.

Then Fulcher decided that the way to go was with dogs. Three or four dogs would keep you much warmer

than an electric blanket, so he'd pack the dogs aboard, and if you were an esteemed friend of his, he'd lend you three or four dogs to keep your bunk warm for the remainder of a chilly night. Yes, they were characters all right.

Everyone was playing the numbers, too. We had a guy — Porter — also a fireman, black fireman. He lived up in Harlem. He finally won the numbers, $1,200, and his wife says, "I'm gonna cook you a nice meatloaf. You watch to see that that meatloaf's done." Meantime, she takes the night train to Chicago with her boyfriend, with the money.

The wives used to come down and fire the boilers on payday, in order to get money — because they knew these guys would either play the numbers or get into their cups and they wouldn't have enough to feed their kids. So I turned to the chief and said, "What's goin' on?" He said, "Never mind. Look at the steam gauge. They're keeping the pressure up a lot better than their husbands are."

The Adventures of Crazy Kowalick and other Shennanigans

Then there was "Crazy Kowalick." [Well], there were two Kowalicks. That was the trouble. Danny Kowalick was a great friend of mine. He was called "The Sane Kowalick"; the other Kowalick was called "Crazy Kowalick." You didn't want to go into the fire room in a full moon with Crazy Kowalick because he was just liable to have at you with a Number-nine shovel. We used to have fights in the

forward stokeholes. We'd sharpen the shovels — you always sharpened them razor sharp with a file, to slice into the coal, to meet little resistance, you know. It makes a wonderful weapon, also. When the full moon came around, people steered clear of the fire room.

[But they kept him on.] In the end, they had such a hard time getting firemen. Who was going to put up with these kinds of conditions? You know what I mean?

The best thing I remember about Crazy Kowalick was somebody stole his car — which must have been all of twenty years old — off Washington Street, and abandoned it up on Canal Street. So the police call him up, he goes up to Canal Street to get his car, and the car had gone into a head-on collision with a truck or something, and the radiator was in bad condition. So he struggles down, with his son, on the ferry, to Barclay Street, with the car. It's leaking oil and it's blowing steam out, so he comes down and he puts this ferry-boat engine oil into the crank case to get him to Hoboken, and he decides that the sure-fire way of sealing the leak — which seems to work — he went into the fire room and he got this oatmeal, again, and he threw that in the radiator of the car, and that plugged the leaks.

[And also, there was this Kowalick story.] A side job of deckhands, traditionally, was gathering newspapers from the commuters and baling them up. They'd hide them in the life-preserver lockers, and at the end of the week they'd divide it up, take it home and sell it. So Kowalick decided to cut himself in on this largess, which he did, even by the fact that he would soak it down with the fire hose, to get a little more weight out of it, to gyp the junky. He lived in a fifth-floor walkup on Washington Street, and when you're in a fifth-floor

walkup the rent is a lot cheaper, because you've got to walk up so many flights.

So Mullins had the apartment underneath Kowalick, and Mullins looks up one day, and his chandelier is getting very close to [his] bald head. He started looking, and he said, "I think that ceiling is starting to come down." So, knock, knock. The fire marshal goes up to Kowalick's, and he's got it like the Collyer brothers, stacked up with newspaper, right up from the floor to the ceiling. They told him he has to get rid of this stuff immediately. He was waiting for the rise in the market. So Kowalick, being pragmatic and practical, just jacks open the window, and starts throwing these bales out, without yelling, "Watch out below." Well, these bales come flying out of a fifth-floor window, and people are walking up and down Washington Street. When they hit, the bindings let go, and there was just an explosion of newspapers all over the place. Oh, God, I'll tell you.

But the best thing Kowalick ever pulled — he was also in the scrap business, not only paper. Later on the ferry service was really cut down, to one boat on weekends. The boats were laid up and I was watch engineer, keeping the bilges pumped, the fires bailed up and the steam pressure up, the heat in the cabins — various things. You had eight boats; you were busy. Then you had that little key — you had to turn it with the watchman's clock at different stations throughout; and, also, a fire watch. So Kowalick decided, "Oh, they're never gonna use these old spare engine parts, and there's a wonderful junky down by the Morris Canal and his price is just right." So he loaded his car — which he got repaired again — down there. Monday morning Big Joe Buckley wants a certain bearing for a certain boat, and it's gone.

Naturally, the suspicion immediately fell on Walter Kowalick. Joe Buckley laid the law down. He said, "You either get it back or else you're out of work." So Kowalick's got to go down there [to the junk yard]. He's got his oldest son [with him, and] these meatball patties. He says, "I jump the fence, you throw the meatball patties over here so the dog goes there." This is almost like a Normandy invasion. The dog eats the meatball patty at one end of the yard; Kowalick has to jump over the barbed wire and get the engine part out of the yard. Of course, the junky who was reviewing this, with sort of an interested idea of where the heck his profit was going.

I'll never forget our last steamboat inspection. That was a riot. The Coast Guard came aboard. You see, the Coast Guard took over steamboat inspection, which was a separate, federal entity or body, after the *Morro Castle* disaster. (The third *Morro Castle* burned at sea, roughly off Asbury Park, in 1934, in September. From then on, all your navigation and fire safety laws were changed drastically, and the Coast Guard took over the steamboat inspection service, because it was very political at the time. For good or bad, a lot of ships couldn't make the stringent safety laws and had to be laid up or scrapped.)

The Coast Guard took it over, but they retained the old inspectors. They brought them into the Coast Guard. When they got of a certain age they retired, so here we got these young cadets, fresh out of New London — the New London Coast Guard Academy. So they trooped down, and the first thing — they grabbed me and said, "Where's the fuel shut-off valve?" So I stuck my head in the fire room and I yelled to the firemen, "Stop shoveling." "All right." That was the fuel shut-off valve. Then they said, "Where is the water-

tight door?" and I said, "You're standing in it." It really wasn't watertight, it was just a door. It had a dog on it. He said, "Okay. We're going to start sprinklers in a team way." That's the gangway where the vehicles are parked. Well, that's all right, except we still were hauling horses and wagons from Hoboken to the Fulton Fish Market, and, nature taking its course, the old horses did their thing up there on the gangway. The caulking wasn't looked to, so when we turned on the fire pump, the sprinkler system brought all this stuff down into the engine room, it hit the white-hot cylinders of the steam engine, and that was the end of the cadets and the Coast Guard.

Annual Feasts and Fisticuffs in Hoboken

Once a year, in the '50s, we'd get together, I think in the fall of the year, and have an annual dinner for all the employees on the ferries and tugs, the Marine Department. We'd invite the bosses. We invited management, and paid for their tickets. We haul up in either the Grand Hotel, which is a condo now, or the Meyers, which is where the Grogan apartments are — Mayor Grogan's riverside apartments. It was strictly male, at that time, because there was nothing but male employees. We'd have a grand old time. Everyone got into a suit and tie, and you didn't recognize each other, because no one had ever shown up in a suit and tie before.

And, of course, old friendships would renew and old hatreds would burgeon during the night, much to the detriment of the tie-and-shirt gang. All this would

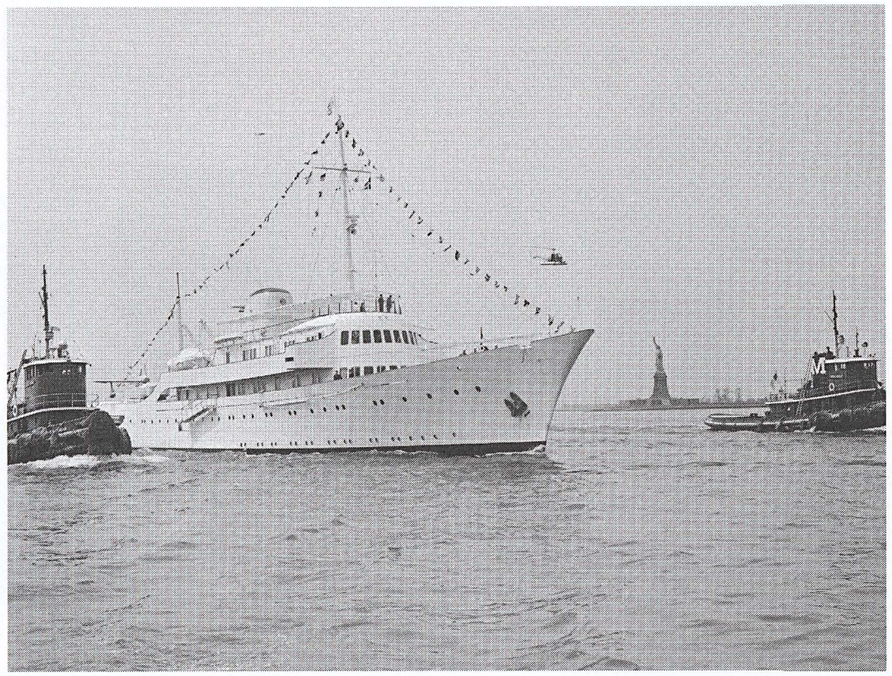


Advertisement for the Union Club, Hoboken, ca. 1950.

boil out into the street about 2:00 in the morning. You'd settle all your old grudges. But everyone was forgiving about it. Then the last dinner we had we were merged with the Erie-Lackawanna, and that precipitated another fight. Larry L. Larsen was the superintendent of ferries and the Marine Department. He retired, and we gave a dinner at the Germania Club, which is called the Union Club now. As far as my recollection, that was the end of it all. But it was very nice, and we all posed for those great, big, group photos. The wide-angled lens, you know? Great times.

New Year's Eve

One tradition — on New Year's Eve all the ferry and tugboats would tie their whistles down, for over a minute. Then the Coast Guard decided we were having too much fun, and they banned it. But to me, that was something that was —



The Christina, *the yacht of Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis, sailing into the New York-New Jersey Harbor with Sir Winston Churchill aboard. The vessel received the traditional harbor salute. Photograph by Joe Giardelli, April 1961. Courtesy of Bettmann/CORBIS.*

because, you must remember, we were all young and most of us were married, with families. The wives and children resented it, that Daddy would be working New Year's and Christmas Eve, for years and years. They didn't realize that's what was putting the shoes on their feet, the time-and-a-half. That was always our little celebration.

But what a magnificent experience, to hear all these liners and freighters and — You must remember, there were a lot more [on the water then]. Everything going berserk. The only other times I remember are when Churchill came here, as a very old man, on the *Christina* — Onassis' yacht — and we all lined up and blew salutes; when the *[Queen] Mary* sailed on her last trip; [and] when the *Isle de France* came, with the survivors of the *Andrea Doria*. That was really something.

Interesting as Heck

My kids aren't doing this. They're a lot smarter than I am. I brought my son down there one time, and he said, "This is not for me!" I was sort of disappointed, but he's doing pretty well down in the financial district. Maybe he's a lot smarter than I am.

[But I'd do this work again.] Oh, certainly. I'd do it tonight. I'd do it tonight. Because I used to go down and sit on the docks, late at night, before I was due to go on duty, and just listen to those tugboat whistles, calling back and forth up the harbor. You could interpret — You knew from the sound of the whistle what boat it was. At that time there were 750 tugs in New York Harbor — officially registered. Each whistle had a different sound to it, and you knew. In fact, no two Lackawanna boats sounded the same. Because there was a whole system, a whole system of code signals by whistle, before the days of radio. It was interesting as heck.

The Hoboken Oral History Project

"Vanishing Hoboken," an oral history project, was initiated in 2000 by members of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Museum in response to dramatic physical, social, and economic changes in the city of Hoboken over the preceding twenty years, and to the consequent "vanishing" of certain aspects of public life.

For much of the last century, Hoboken was a working-class town, home to many waves of immigrant families, and to families who journeyed from the southern regions of the U.S. and from Puerto Rico — all looking for work. Hoboken, close to ports of entry in New Jersey and New York, offered a working waterfront and many factories, as well as inexpensive housing. Each new wave of arrivals — from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico — found work on the waterfront, at the Bethlehem Steel Shipyards, Lipton Tea, Tootsie Roll, Maxwell House, or in numerous, smaller garment factories. Then the docks closed in the 1960s; and factory jobs dwindled as Hoboken's industrial base relocated over the 1970s and '80s. Maxwell House, once the largest coffee roasting plant in the world, was the last to leave, in 1992. In the go-go economy of the 1980s, Hoboken's row houses, just across the river from Manhattan, were targeted by developers to young professionals seeking an easy commute to New York City. Historically home to ever-changing waves of struggling families — who often left when they became prosperous — Hoboken began in the mid-1980s to experience a kind of reverse migration, where affluent condominium-buyers replaced poor and working class tenants, many of whom had been forced out by fire, through condo-conversion buy-outs, or through rising rents. More recently, building construction has further altered the face of Hoboken, as modern towers are rising up alongside the late-19th century row houses that once spatially defined our densely populated, mile-square city and provided its human scale.

The Hoboken Oral History Project was inaugurated with the goal of capturing, through the recollections of longtime residents, "Vanishing Hoboken" — especially its disappearing identity as a working-class city and its tradition of multi-ethnic living. The Project focuses on collecting the oral histories of residents who can evoke Hoboken's vanished industries through their recollections of employment in the city's many factories and on the waterfront, and those who can capture for present and future generations the ways

in which Hoboken's rich ethnic and cultural diversity was once evident in the everyday life of the city. In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the Hoboken Oral History Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of "Vanishing Hoboken" chapbooks. Since 2002, nine chapbooks have been published in the series, with the support of the Historical Commission and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

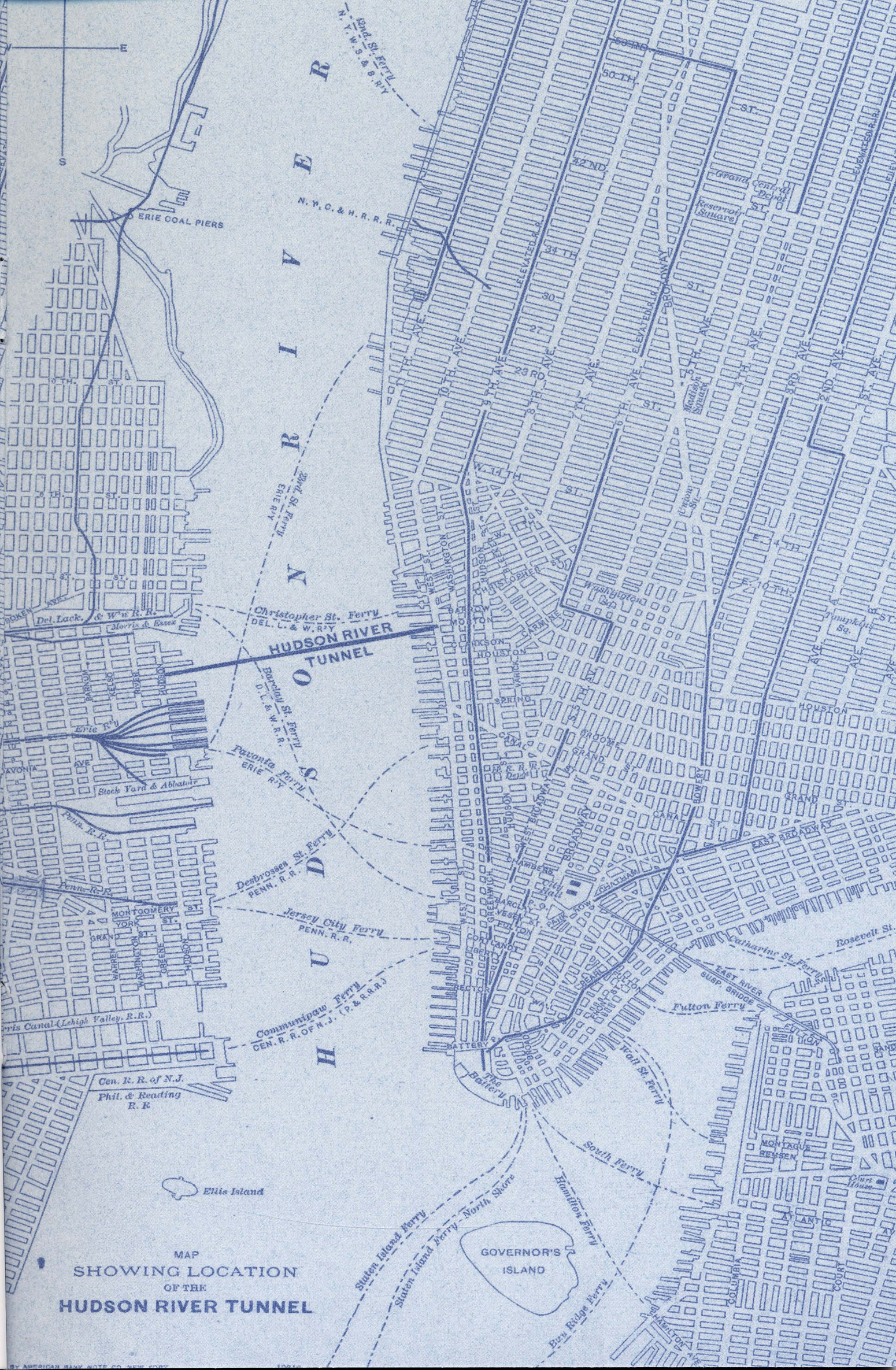
Vanishing Hoboken Chapbooks

The editor of this series chose to call these small booklets "chapbooks," a now rarely heard term for a once-common object. And so, a brief explanation is now required: A chapbook, states the most recent edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, is a

> ...small, inexpensive, stitched tract formerly sold by itinerant dealers, or chapmen, in Western Europe and in North America. Most chapbooks were 5 x 4 inches in size and were made up of four pages (or multiples of four), illustrated with woodcuts. They contained tales of popular heroes, legends and folklore, jests, reports of notorious crimes, ballads, almanacs, nursery rhymes, school lessons, farces, biblical tales, dream lore, and other popular matter. The texts were mostly rough and anonymous, but they formed the major parts of secular reading and now serve as a guide to the manners and morals of their times.

Chapbooks began to appear in France at the end of the 15th century. Colonial America imported them from England but also produced them locally. These small booklets of mostly secular material continued to be popular until inexpensive magazines began to appear during the early 19th century.

Although some of the chapbooks in the Vanishing Hoboken series are considerably longer than their earlier counterparts, others are nearly as brief. They are larger in size, to allow us to use a reader-friendly type size. But all resemble the chapbooks of yesteryear, as they contain the legends, dreams, crime reports, jokes, and folklore of our contemporaries. One day, perhaps, they might even serve as guides to the "manners and morals" of our city, during the 20th and early 21st centuries.



MAP
SHOWING LOCATION
OF THE
HUDSON RIVER TUNNEL

BY AMERICAN BANK NOTE CO. NEW YORK 1906

A Project of
The Friends of the Hoboken Library and
the Hoboken Historical Museum