

THE LAUNCH OF THE S.S. EDMUND FITZGERALD THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY JUNE 7, 1958/2008

This coming summer marks the 50th anniversary of the launch of the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald. She was side launched on June 7th, 1958 from the ship yard of the Great Lakes Engineering Works, located in River Rouge, Michigan. Her claim to fame at that time was the fact that she was the first, largest and fastest straight-decker bulk-ore carrier on the Great Lakes for St. Lawrence Seaway service. She met all expectations and was referred to as the "*Queen of the Great Lakes*", although commonly known as "The Fitz". It is fitting that this event be noteworthy and celebrated, since it marks the start of a record breaking career.

Hull # 277437 was commissioned by the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin and built in 1957-58 at a cost of 8.4 million dollars. She had a span of 729 feet, with a beam of 75 feet and a depth of 39 feet. She was christened after the Vice-President of the Mutual Life Insurance Company, and cast off during an eventful ceremony by his wife.

The Sault Historic Sites intends to mark this golden anniversary with a three part project consisting of refurbished displays and dedication ceremony. The organization is fortunate to be custodian of the two salvaged lifeboats from "The Fitz", as well as a remnant of a life ring. The exhibit is the corner stone of the museum. Besides touring and learning about the history of the S. S. Valley Camp, visitors are drawn to the site by the presence of those two lifeboats. We will provide an accurate account of the history of the Edmund Fitzgerald, from launch to wreck.

THE PROJECT:

The 50th anniversary will be celebrated with a commemoration and the unveiling of a set of refurbished display boards, as well as a memorial tribute to each of the sailors. Next to Lifeboat # 2 and attached to the bulk-head, we will set up display boards totaling 21 feet in length. It will consist of two main panels depicting the bow and the stern, with three additional panels showing the middle section. The bow panel will outline the construction and the launch of the ship, while the stern panel will provide a sequential and chronological recollection of its last trip. The three middle panels will focus on its structure, the crew, and its records. These panels will be segmented and scaled accordingly to the dimensions of the resting three pieces of the ship on the bottom of Lake Superior. Next to Lifeboat #1 located within an enclosed confine of the hull and attached to the ballast sides, we will set up an array of individual plaques for each of the twenty-nine sailors. The visitors will be able to familiarize themselves with each crew member, as to their origin, their status in life, their assignment and their known personal background. This enclosure will also be equipped with a motion sensor, triggering off

Gordon Lightfoot's song of "*The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*" being heard in the background. The senses and emotions experienced by the visitors will be memorable and everlasting. This project will engrave the mind of visitors with a sense of grandeur and respect of the maritime folklores, for years to come. The project will be unveiled as part of a special ceremony to be held on Saturday, June 7, 2008. This special day will celebrate and commemorate the Golden Anniversary of the Launch of the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald.

THE FITZ AND FACTS:

The S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald was the flagship of the Columbia Transportation Division of Oglebay-Norton Steamship Lines. She was launched on June 7, 1958. She met her demise and sank to the bottom of Lake Superior on November 10, 1975. The recollection and interpretation of those events need to be maintained.

The first project to be undertaken will be the computer programming, construction and installation of a series of display boards, depicting the history of the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald. Visitors to the Museum Ship Valley Camp need to be clearly informed and apprised of the facts as it relates to this ship. Many a conversations and debates about the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald dwell on the events leading to her sinking. The purpose of the display is to outline exactly what has been reported and recorded in the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Board of Investigation Report (No. USGC 16732/64216).

The display boards will be set up vertically against the bulkhead wall separating cargo hold # 2 and cargo hold # 3. The dimensions of the panels will be 44" in height and 21 feet in length. It will consist in a series of five (5) panels, with the first one on the left being 7' wide, the next three (3) panels being 2' in width each, and the last one on the right being 7' wide. The background of the panel will show a picture of the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald as a color watermark, with bold black text and script overlaid in visible and readable format. The first panel will provide the history of the construction and the launch of the ship. The middle panels will each have a special theme: the structure, the crew, and the records. The last panel will chronologically outline the events of her last trip. The presentation will be showcased in front of Lifeboat # 2, and equipped with proper lighting fixtures installed over the panels.

The creation and production of the panels will be commissioned to Sault Realism of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. This local enterprise has the expertise and the necessary technical equipment able to produce computerized posters that are laminated on a hard surface. Previous Michigan Council of the Arts and Cultural Affairs grants has been awarded to a local comparative organization for the restoration of industrial heritage pictures and displays. The text and script will be provided by the Project Manager and resourced from factual reports and data in archives. The installation will be completed by the Sault Historic Sites maintenance staff; their qualifications and credentials are reflected by the multitude of displays already installed in the museum. This will be

carried out over a period of two months, culminating with the opening ceremony on the first weekend of June.

Credits will be given to the Michigan Council of the Arts and Cultural Affairs with the inclusion of the logo on the bottom right hand corner of the third panel, on the right.

Visitors to the Valley Camp can access and view all of the displays set up on all three levels of the ship. The entrance ramp from the parking lot is used as the main entrance to the mezzanine area. Once inside, visitors can go to the main deck or down to the cargo hold via a ramp constructed between cargo hold # 1 and cargo hold # 2. School and bus tours are our mainstay, as well as the individual tourist/visitors.

THE WHO'S WHO OF THE CREW:

When the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald sank to the bottom of Lake Superior on the evening of November 10, 1975, it took along the lives of twenty-nine (29) sailors. Each and every one of them needs to be remembered as to who they were and who they had left behind.

The second project will consist of producing individualized plaques with pictures and personal information about the sailor. This will bring to life the nature of the individual and state their history and their background. Visitors will be able to know who they were, where they came from and who they left behind. A name, a title and a place of origin is only the basic; an obituary and a memorial tribute will be the personalization of the crew. All of this will be set up next to the ripped and torn lifeboat # 2, showing the fury of the waters and the events leading to their demise. The display will be horizontally and vertically arranged in order of seniority and status. The Captain and Mates, along with the Steward and staff, as well as the First Engineer and his crew will be displayed. This will also give a sense and knowledge of who is on board and who does what.

In addition to sight, the enclosed area will be equipped with a motion sensor that will trigger off a CD, playing Gordon's Lightfoot's song of "*The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*". As the visitor will be taking stock of the details of each crew member, they will also be able to feel the sense of memorial and nostalgic.

THE UNVEILING AND DEDICATION:

Saturday, June 7, 2008 marks the 50th anniversary of the Launch of the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald. This special day needs to be celebrated for the memory of the sailors.

The third project will consist in a special dedication ceremony to be held within the cargo hold of the S.S. Valley Camp. Special guests and local/regional dignitaries will be invited to attend the opening ceremony. Speeches and curtain openings/unveiling will be the order of the day, followed by a tour of the new exhibits and all of the other

exhibits in the S.S. Valley Camp Museum Ship. Recognition and credits will be made for the Michigan Council of the Arts grant.

Costs associated with the promotion through local media (TV – Radio – Newspapers) and rental of A/V equipment will be part of the grant; other means of promotion such as the organization's web site will be used to advertise the event.

MANAGEMENT OF PROJECT:

The project will be supervised by the Curator of the Sault Historic Sites Inc. in the person of Paul Sabourin. He has been recently hired (Summer 2007), following a thirty year career with the Province of Ontario, as a Regional Advisor with the Ministry of Culture. His duties included the supervision and evaluation of a multitude of heritage and cultural projects. The overall responsibility rests with the Executive Director and the appointed Board of Directors, whose expertise is sought at all stages of the project.