

Milwaukee Clipper Keeps Alive Memories of Island's Glory Years



A Look at History

BY FRANK STRAUS

Milwaukee Clipper

When the *South American*, pride of the Georgian Bay Line, was broken up in Camden, New Jersey, some years ago after many years deteriorating in mothballs, most Mackinac Islanders believed that the lost vessel had been the last surviving cruise ship to make regular stops at Mackinac Island's Arnold Dock. Unbeknownst to most Islanders, however, another such vessel survives to this day. It is the Anchor Line's *Juniata*, better known now as the *Milwaukee Clipper*, and it is securely moored in Muskegon as a National Historic Landmark. This year, 2005, is the 100th anniversary of the boat's entry into active Lake service.

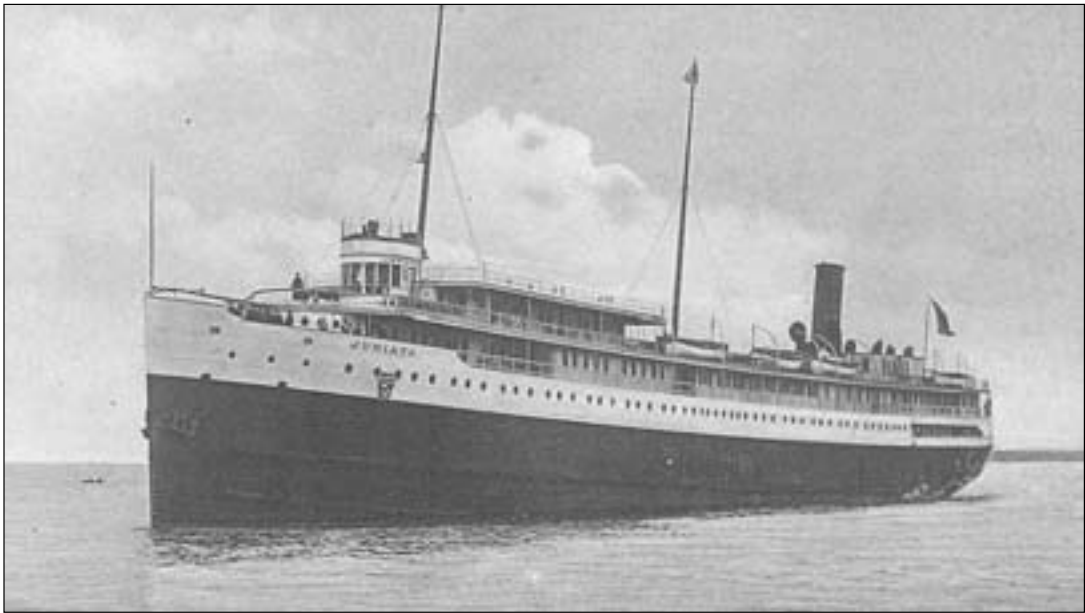
The Anchor Line was funded by one of America's mightiest corporations, the Pennsylvania Railroad. Best known on the Island as one of the original partners in the construction of Grand Hotel in 1887, the Pennsylvania R.R. was one of the key railroads of the so-called "Progressive Era." The "Pennsy" was renowned among business travelers for the railroad's ability to keep to a complex schedule. Older Americans

will remember that before the 1950s there were no major-league baseball clubs west of St. Louis. Baseball historians explain that this was because Chicago and St. Louis were the "Pennsylvania's" western hubs, and major-league ball could not have operated without the silent help provided by this railroad.

Starting in the 1880s, the largest Western railroads began to offer their services to well-heeled tourists. National parks such as Yosemite, Grand Canyon, and Glacier were set aside by Congress with the help of lobbyists from the Southern Pacific, the Santa Fe, and the Great Northern railroads. The largest Eastern railroads had no national parks to offer on their rights-of-way. Two of them, the New York Central and the Pennsylvania, chose to concentrate on the Great Lakes. The "Central" helped make Niagara Falls a must-see attraction, while the Pennsylvania encouraged travelers to travel a "great circle" route in which one of the legs was a cruise on the Great Lakes. The Pennsylvania's three 1900-10 vessels, the *Juniata*, the *Octorara*,



The SS *Milwaukee Clipper* could carry 900 passengers and 120 automobiles in 1952. It was billed as the "finest luxury liner on the Great Lakes." (Photographs courtesy of Tom Pfeiffelmann)



The same ship, pictured here, was earlier known as SS *Juniata*, sailing in the Anchor Line.

and the *Tionesta*, were designed for service between Buffalo and Duluth.

The legal name of the company that built these three boats was the Erie & Western Transportation Company, but the cruise line's logo was an anchor and the company quickly became known as the "Anchor Line." American Shipbuilding laid the *Juniata's* keel in October 1904 in Cleveland. It is a mark of how quickly men could build boats in those days that the vessel was launched only two months later, on December 22, 1904, and was fitted out and ready for service in the summer of 1905. For 30 years, from 1905 to 1935, the *Juniata* was a frequent visitor to Mackinac Island's Arnold Dock.

A typical Anchor Line visitor enjoyed an experience similar to present-day cruise vessels plying the Great Lakes. The boat gave Island visitors several hours to take a carriage ride

through the interior of Mackinac Island, or to stroll Main Street and buy souvenirs. Many highly treasured relics of the early 20th century, such as Mackinac Island silver and glassware, were designed for cruise visitors.

The venerable boat line's anchor chain became badly rusted during the Great Depression. Most Americans could no longer afford to buy excursion tickets on the Great Lakes, and travel by railroad had already entered what was to become its death spiral. Most Americans who could travel were moving about by car. All connections between the Anchor Line and Mackinac Island's Grand Hotel had long since been dissolved. The Anchor Line tied up its vessels permanently at the end of the 1936 season.

Four years later, the *Juniata* entered upon a second life of active existence, this time in cooperation was America's new

life on rubber wheels. Rebuilt and refitted as the *Milwaukee Clipper*, the new/old vessel shuttled passengers and their cars back and forth from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Muskegon, Michigan. As part of the refitting, and in line with newly enacted passenger safety requirements, the *Juniata's* new owners dismantled the boat's classic cruise-line upper works and wooden superstructure. The vessel retained its steel hull and classic quadruple-expansion steam engine.

The *Milwaukee Clipper* crossed and recrossed lower Lake Michigan in 1941-70. With the completion of the I-94 superhighway loop through greater Chicago and around the lower end of the lake, demand for the old boat's services once again declined. It was retired for the second time in 1970, and this time its withdrawal from active service was to be permanent. Efforts were made to preserve the *Clipper* as a floating tourist attraction, and it was sited for various periods in Chicago, Illinois, and Hammond, Indiana. In neither location did it support itself. The old *Juniata*, a.k.a. the *Clipper*, seemed to have become the "Flying Dutchman" of lower Lake Michigan, a failing vessel that would be towed from port to port until it found its final destination in some scrapyard.

Dedicated volunteers from one of the *Milwaukee Clipper's* home ports, Muskegon, stepped in. Raising money and

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