

## **Michigan Every Day** **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

*Sept. 9, 1910*

*Pere Marquette 18 sinks; 29 crew and passengers die*

The *Pere Marquette 18* was considered one of the finest car ferries in the world. It was also one of the most expensive. The ship had spent the summer carrying passengers from Chicago on excursions to Waukegan for the Chicago Navigation Company. On Sept. 9, 1910, the vessel returned to its regular route, carrying passengers and train cars across Lake Michigan between Ludington and Milwaukee. A day earlier, the ferry was inspected by government officials and found to be in fine condition.

The *Pere Marquette* set out early from Ludington. But en route to Wisconsin, the 350-foot ship began to take on water around 4:30 a.m. Captain Peter Kilty was warned that the pumps could not keep up with the flow pouring in the ship's hull. Kilty picked up steam in an effort to make it to Wisconsin as soon as possible. The captain and his crew knew the situation was dire and they needed to throw the railroad cars overboard. With great difficulty they managed to remove nine cars from the hold but the loss of the freight did not lighten the load enough to prevent the ship from going under. At approximately 5 a.m., news of the disaster reached shore. A wireless operator sent a simple message – “Car Ferry No. 18 sinking – Help.”

The operator sent the message repeatedly for an hour. The operator is believed to have stayed at his post as the ship sunk into Lake Michigan. The *Pere*

*Marquette* 17 was sent out immediately to help its sister ship. *No. 17* reached its destination just in time to witness the final minute of the *Pere Marquette 18*.

The ship's enormous bow lifted into the air as the crew of *No. 17* looked on, horrified. As the bow rose, the stern swung under-water and the ship crashed rapidly into the water. The surface was littered with debris and people. Witnesses looked on as some passengers were sucked into the vortex of turbulent water left by the *Pere Marquette 18*. The crew of *No. 17* launched lifeboats to collect survivors. One life boat was lowered into the lake just as a large wave crashed against the side of the ferry. Two of the crew were lost. In all, 29 crew and passengers on board the *No. 18* drowned. Thirty-three were saved.

What caused the ship to take on water and sink remains a mystery.