

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

*Nov. 18, 1958*  
*Carl D. Bradley sinks*

An early winter storm swept the nation, stranding motorists and taking lives across the western states before it arrived with a fury in the Great Lakes. When the storm struck, the *Carl D. Bradley* was in the wrong place – a region of Lake Michigan north of Charlevoix long known as the “graveyard of ships,” due to the treacherous shoals and the distance between safe harbors. The cargo ship broke in two on Nov. 18, 1958. Two crewmen somehow survived: First mate Elmer Fleming and deck watchman Frank Mayes, both residents of Rogers City. The men managed to climb into a life raft just as the *Bradley* snapped and they survived 14 frigid hours on the lake before being rescued by a U.S. Coast Guard cutter.

The 615-foot *Bradley* sunk at a time when many people thought the days of tragic shipwrecks on the Great Lakes were a thing of the past because of improvements in shipbuilding, weather forecasting and communication.

The day following the wreck, ships and Coast Guard airplanes crisscrossed the lake in the area of the loss. Later, rescuers searched the islands around northern Lake Michigan in a futile attempt to find survivors – all they could do was collect bodies from the water. In all, 33 sailors were dead.

The town of Rogers City, where 25 of the crew had lived, mourned the loss more than anywhere else. After the rescue, Fleming told reporters he heard a thud and the ship began to list and then sink.

Before he left the ship as other crew members scrambled to find life vests, Fleming attempted to make a distress call over the radio. As Fleming made the frantic "Mayday" call at 5:31 p.m., he feared no one received the call. But the distress signal was picked up by a radio operator in Charlevoix, who could hear the chaos on the ship as crew members panicked.

Fleming and Mayes were lucky. Fleming was inspecting a life raft as the ship was thrown to its side, tossing Fleming and the raft into the lake. Mayes also was flung into the water, close enough to the raft to pull himself out of the lake.