

## Fairport Harbor & the Great Lakes: Bells Toll on a 45th Anniversary



Fairport Harbor and the Great Lakes - they are inseparable. The lakes and the lives of those people living along their shores are intertwined. Transportation and commerce on the lakes have a beginning dating back to the first ship, LaSalle's *Griffin*, in 1679. She left the shores of Lake Michigan with a cargo of furs and a crew of six on September 10th. That night, gale force winds churned up the waters and the *Griffin* never was seen again.

By the 1800s trade and commerce were thriving in Fairport Harbor and everywhere on the Great Lakes. Over 3000 ships entered Fairport in 1847 and a million dollars of commerce was recorded. Madison and Fairport ranked one and two as key Lake Erie ports. In time, wooden vessels were replaced by new steam-powered vessels. Despite some fires and collisions, weather and the 'big blow' were always present. A storm in November 1905 left 15 ships wrecked on Lake Superior. The Gales of November took the lives of 254 seamen and 18 ships were lost on November 13, 1913. A two-day storm beginning on November 11, 1940 claimed 3 freighters and 57 men. May 11, 1953 saw the *SS Henry Steinbrenner* founder in Lake Superior and half its crew perish. November 18, 1958 claimed 33 seamen as the *Carl D. Bradley* was lost to the November gales. A sole survivor, Dennis Hale, was left after the sinking of the *Daniel J. Morrell* on November 29, 1966.



In all, 10,000 lives have been lost on the lakes. 6000 shipwrecks are known on the 5 inland seas. The Mariners' Church in Detroit holds a yearly memorial service each November 10 to honor those men and women lost to the inland lakes' fury. However, one part of the service resonates locally every year. When the Rev. Richard Ingalls rings the 'brotherhood bell' 29 times to honor the 29 lost on November 10, 1975 on the wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, Fairport Harbor's own [Edward F. Bindon](#) is remembered. Eddie was a ship's engineer that

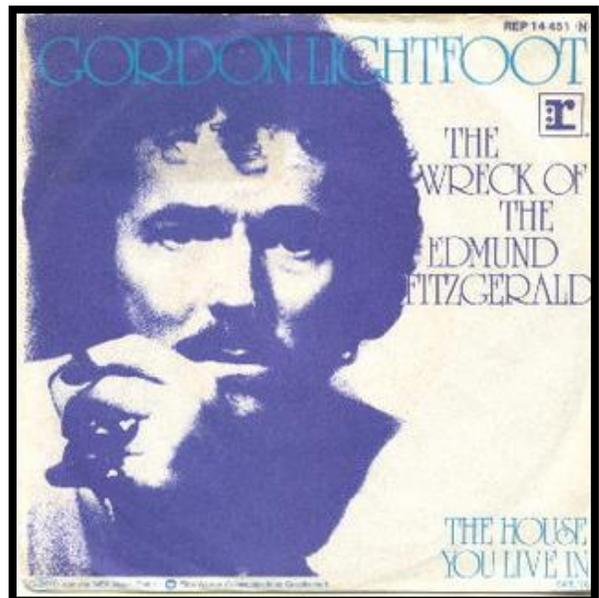
fateful night. Another Fairporter, Bill Simko, had served on the vessel in its earlier years. He still resides in the village of Fairport.



REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after January 1, 1922 and on or before June 30, 1924)		
SERIAL NUMBER W # 656	1. NAME (Print) Edward Francis Bindon	ORDER NUMBER 13015
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 4 Houghton Ct., Fairport Harbor, O.		
3. MAILING ADDRESS Same as 2		
4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS 18	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Fairport Harbor, O.
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Helen Kasari, same address as 2		
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS		
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Student, Harding High School, Fairport Harbor, O.		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE		
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 6-1-42)	(over)	Edward Francis Bindon

The *Edmund Fitzgerald*, named after the vice-president, chairman of Northwestern Life Insurance, was launched in 1958. At 729 feet and weighted at 13,632 tons, it was the largest carrier on the lakes thru 1971. In 1964 it was the first vessel to carry one million gross tons of ore through the Soo Locks. In 1968, that record increased to 1.2 million tons including a single trip record of 27,402 tons. Known as the Toledo Express, the *Fitz* left Burlington Railroad docks on November 9, 1975 on a cloudy and chilly afternoon. Their cargo was taconite iron ore pellets.

Winter storms and gale warnings were forecast, but its captain and crew were well seasoned. The *Fitz* took on water as waves of 10 feet and higher formed. 16 hours of increasingly bad weather followed. At 7pm on November 10, the last contact was made. That proved to be the fateful moment as all 29 crew members were lost 17 miles NW of Whitefish Point. Captain Ernest McSorley's choices remain unknown. Communication systems and safety practices were in effect. Other ships survived that night. Theories of the *Fitzgerald* disaster include structural failure of its watertight hatches, swells of 30 feet, or gusts hitting 70 knots, to the ship renting on a 36-foot shoal. The wreckage lies in 530 feet of pitch-dark water to this day. Below is a recovered lifeboat.



Before his 27 years sailing the Great Lakes, Eddie Bindon grew up on Houghton Court in Fairport Harbor, just a stone's throw from the Lake Erie shoreline. He graduated from Harding High School, playing football & basketball, and was known for his good sense of humor. He served a year & a half in the Army, including a tour in the Phillipines. After his discharge, Eddie began his long career aboard ship, working for the Columbus Transportation Co. He was married to Helen Majoros Bindon for 25 years. The couple had no children. Eddie's name appears alongside Helen's at Riverside Cemetery, although his remains were never recovered.

In 2014, Eddie's niece Fran Gabor told the *Detroit News* that her Aunt Helen, received a surprise silver wedding anniversary gift after the tragedy. While in port in Duluth, Minnesota, Eddie bought a two-carat diamond ring and gave it to a friend for safekeeping. "For some reason, he didn't want to take it aboard the ship. He just had an ominous feeling — at least that's how it seems," said Gabor, who remembers her family crying together in the kitchen when the package arrived. "My aunt never remarried, and she wore that ring the rest of her life."



Every fifth year a remembrance ceremony is held in Fairport Harbor. November 10, 2020 marked the 45th anniversary of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* tragedy. The Fairport Harbor Historical Society and US Coast Guard - Station Fairport held a joint program at the high school auditorium to pay tribute to the 29 crew members. 25 county residents were there in person and another 80 plus viewed the program via streaming. Fairporter Bill Simko still shares his memories of his years aboard the *Pride of the American Fleet*. Edward Francis Bindon and his 27 years of lake service are part of a bond forever linking Fairport Harbor to the Great Lakes.

Sources: Fairport Harbor Historical Society archives, John Ollila article, USCG records, Mariners' Church of Detroit, Bill Simko visits. Also, <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/life/2014/11/04/edmund-fitzgerald-legend-lives/18488647/> and *The Harding High School Harbor Light* 1944 & 1945. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/21150/edward-francis-bindon>

**Submitted by Dan Maxson** *Local Lore by Max, 2010-2016 - Community Media Lab, The News-Herald; Volunteer Trustee, Curator - FHHS/ Fairport Harbor Lighthouse & Marine Museum; Volunteer Curator / Docent - Old Stone School, Concord Township*

Fairport Harbor Lighthouse & Bindon home on Houghton Ct.



## The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald

The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down  
Of the big lake they called Gitche Gumee  
The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead  
When the skies of November turn gloomy  
With a load of iron ore twenty-six thousand tons more  
Than the Edmund Fitzgerald weighed empty  
That good ship and true was a bone to be chewed  
When the gales of November came early  
The ship was the pride of the American side  
Coming back from some mill in Wisconsin  
As the big freighters go, it was bigger than most  
With a crew and good captain well-seasoned  
Concluding some terms with a couple of steel firms  
When they left fully loaded for Cleveland  
And later that night when the ship's bell rang  
Could it be the north wind they'd been feelin'?  
The wind in the wires made a tattle-tale sound  
And a wave broke over the railing  
And every man knew, as the captain did too  
T'was the witch of November come stealin'  
The dawn came late and the breakfast had to wait  
When the gales of November came slashin'  
When afternoon came it was freezin' rain  
In the face of a hurricane west wind  
When suppertime came, the old cook came on deck sayin'  
"Fellas, it's too rough to feed ya"  
At seven PM, a main hatchway caved in, he said  
"Fellas, it's been good to know ya"  
The captain wired in he had water comin' in

And the good ship and crew was in peril  
And later that night when his lights went outta sight  
Came the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald  
Does anyone know where the love of God goes  
When the waves turn the minutes to hours?  
The searchers all say they'd have made Whitefish Bay  
If they'd put fifteen more miles behind her  
They might have split up or they might have capsized  
They may have broke deep and took water  
And all that remains is the faces and the names  
Of the wives and the sons and the daughters  
Lake Huron rolls, Superior sings  
In the rooms of her ice-water mansion  
Old Michigan steams like a young man's dreams  
The islands and bays are for sportsmen  
And farther below Lake Ontario  
Takes in what Lake Erie can send her  
And the iron boats go as the mariners all know  
With the gales of November remembered  
In a musty old hall in Detroit they prayed  
In the maritime sailors' cathedral  
The church bell chimed 'til it rang twenty-nine times  
For each man on the Edmund Fitzgerald  
The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down  
Of the big lake they called Gitche Gumee  
Superior, they said, never gives up her dead  
When the gales of November come early.

*Gordon Lightfoot, 1976*

[GordonLightfoot.com](http://GordonLightfoot.com)



<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/21150/edward-francis-bindon>  
Addeed by Shad Wilde.