

Ed Erickson was a colorful person indeed. Born in Bayfield in 1910, Ed graduated from college in Chicago as an electrician. Returning to his beloved Bayfield, he took up commercial fishing and captained a boat for a local fishing company.

During the War, Ed served in the Merchant Marines in both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. After returning from the War, he continued to devote his energies to the betterment of his hometown erecting a fisherman's monument in Bayfield harbor, establishing an educational foundation in his name and leading the effort to build a local maritime museum. Ed also served on the County Board for over 26 years and was mayor of the city for two terms in the 1970s and 80s.

LCT-103 Becomes The Outer Island

The *Outer Island* was built as the LCT(5)-103 at Tonawanda, New York, and took part in the Normandy invasion where its bow ramp was blown off by German mortar fire. Beginning in 1946 the 103 was purchased by the Lullabye Furniture Co. of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and named the *Pluswood* after its plant by that name in Oshkosh. The *Pluswood* was used to haul the maple and birch lumber used to make veneers for furniture. Coal was also shipped to the plant in 300-ton loads.

In 1950 the ship's operating base moved to Bayfield and she was re-named the *Outer Island* after one of the nearby Apostle Islands. Ed Erickson captained the ship for Lullabye and eventually bought it from them. For the past 50+ years, the *Outer Island* has plied the waters of Lake Superior performing a variety of marine services in the Bayfield--Apostle Islands area.

Scrape With Disaster

In December of 1972, The *Outer Island* had been returning to Bayfield from Blois Blanc, in the Straits of Mackinac. While running the west side of the Keewenaw Peninsula between Copper Harbor and Ontonagon, Michigan, a strong northwesterly storm rose, and the craft, piloted by Erickson's son Richard, and a crew of Bayfielders, Elvis Moe, Bucky Boutin and Red Compton, lost its nighttime battle against the piling northwest seas and grounded in a grinding shoreline of ice, sand and boulders six miles southwest of Ontonagon.

They were trapped in the dark, in mounting seas, until they were crushed against the shore ice where the craft was finally embedded in the heaving floes of early winter ice. Once the four men realized the helplessness of their condition, they secured the ship and cast the vessel's spotlight 200 yards toward shore and began the perilous crawl over the lighted pathway of heaving, moaning ice chunks toward shore.

Reaching land, they found the highway, where a patrolman, looking for lost snowmobilers stopped to

inquire of the four men. They would end up as the first guests in temporary bunks in the new Ontonagon County Jail. Richard phoned in his 1:32 a.m. report: "Dad, I lost the *Outer Island*".

As the light came up on the morning of December 15, no one would have doubted Richard's assessment. A nighttime of storm waves had frozen on the hull. Entombed within and beneath the dirty glazed chunks was a logging truck, two pickups, a crane and a 112-foot craft. They began ten days of extricating the mass. First, the ice had to be dynamited off the hull, the load lifted so the vessel could float. After buying dynamite and getting an explosives expert from White Pines Mine, with the able resources of a mine employee named Jim Mattson, they began blasting and shoveling, three and four foot chunks at a time.

Salvaging the LCT

Forty friends from Bayfield picked and shoveled for eight days on the seemingly hopeless task. On the morning of December 24, Richard changed oil and pressed the starter on the cold-soaked starboard engine which had not been under water and was, therefore, the only candidate for possible duty. Blur smoke and muddy water poured out of the exhaust.

Shifting the gear into forward, Erickson knew the entire task was hopeless if this propeller would not turn. The wheel did turn. And though it was hard to tell where the boat ended and the pack-ice began, Erickson thought he saw movement between the two. He shifted to reverse. Again, it seemed to move. Then again forward. Reverse. Forward. Reverse. An opening appeared off the bow. Forward hard, and the mass of steel and muddy ice carried two dozen unwilling riders toward open water.



The *Outer Island* after being driven ashore during the storm of December, 1972 near Ontonagon, Michigan. The tearing and rending would have finished a lesser vessel. Photo courtesy of Harkins Marine Photography, Duluth, MN.