



# Ninety Years Crossing Lake Michigan: The History of the Ann Arbor Car Ferries

*Grant Brown Jr.*

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"A must buy for anyone interested in the Great Lakes."

---Frederick Stonehouse, maritime historian

In 1892, the Ann Arbor Car Ferries shook the transportation world by doing what was then deemed impossible---carrying loaded railroad cars by ship across the sixty-two miles of open water between Frankfort, Michigan and Kewaunee, Wisconsin. With passion, acuity, and remarkable detail, Grant Brown describes the nearly 100-year crossings---from their beginnings with James Ashley's bold new idea of car ferrying down to the last fight for survival until the Michigan Interstate Rail Company finally closed in 1982.

Crossing the lake with loaded freight cars was a treacherous task that presented daily obstacles. Knowledgeable people believed it was impossible to secure rail cars from tipping over and sinking the ship. Weather and ice presented two near-insurmountable hurdles, making car ferrying doubly difficult in the winter when nearly all shipping on the Great Lakes shut down. This vivid history gives voice to the ships and their crews as they battled the storms without modern navigational aids or adequate power.

This spirited account of the Ann Arbor car ferries draws on ships' logs from various museums, over 2,000 newspaper articles, annual reports from 1889 through 1976, and interviews with former employees. The result is a living history of the ships, the crews, and their adventures; of the men who built and ran the business; and of the enormous influence the vessels had on the communities they served.

Grant Brown, Jr., worked for S.D. Warren Company, a paper manufacturer, for 37 years. He raced sailboats on Crystal Lake in northern Michigan for ten years while growing up, continued in Boston and St. Louis, and has since returned to living and racing in Frankfort, Michigan. He spent eight years in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve, where he learned navigation and shipboard procedure.

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