

Marine History Lines

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Negotiating Western Lake Erie Environs in 1838:

The Schooner *Wyandot*

by Ed Warner

A log kept by M. Bundy, master of the schooner *Wyandot* during the early 1838 sailing season, resides in the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library in Fremont, Ohio. That record encompasses just seventy-four days, commencing on April 5th and ending abruptly and without explanation on June 17th. The vessel was built in 1833 at Lower Sandusky, Ohio (now Fremont), her home port was Buffalo, she was about seventy-eight feet in length, just under ninety-nine gross tons, had two masts,¹ and carried a crew of five in 1838 — a mate, three seamen, and a cook.² A number of the daily entries in the log are revealing and include difficulties encountered in the early commercial trade under sail.

The master and his crew were occupied with fitting out for the approaching sailing season from April 5th through April 23rd, then left Buffalo bound for Cleveland on April 24th.

From that point on they traded between those two cities until May 22nd, at which point they began taking on freight, and the next evening they “left Buffalo for Sandusky, Toledo, Maumee City & Monroe.” On May 26th, during the trip westward, they went into Cleveland for additional cargo, wherein on May 28th they “Took in 328 bags, supposed to contain a thousand bushels [of] corn,” for Maumee.” It would not be many years later when corn would be shipped from Maumee.

On May 30th, the *Wyandot* got into Sandusky and discharged some freight. However, Bundy wrote that in “Going out [of Sandusky] got aground & remained about an hour, got the kedge [anchor] out and hove off and made sail.” The crew had engaged in a laborious procedure known as *kedging*, whereby the schooner was pulled into deeper water by means of carrying an anchor and line away from the vessel in

a ship's boat, dropping the anchor, then pulling the schooner toward the placed anchor, presumably using the windlass or capstan, thus heaving themselves into deeper water.³

The *Wyandot* arrived at Monroe at 3:00 p.m. on May 31st, discharged cargo for that location, left Monroe on June 1st at 4:00 a.m., arrived in Toledo, just over four miles up the Maumee River from its mouth,⁴ at 10:00 a.m., and unloaded cargo. Bundy then wrote that “at 4PM got under way with a pilot on board for Maumee and at 7PM got there and moored to the wharf.” It appears that the master was not familiar with the Maumee River upstream from Toledo and/or was advised to hire a pilot who was familiar. Too, it should be mentioned that harbor and river tugs did not come into Lakes-wide general availability until the mid-1850s, so probably were not available at Toledo. The distance to Maumee is between ten and eleven miles⁵ and required just three hours travelling upstream, so that a favorable wind must have prevailed.

On June 4th Bundy wrote “Light winds from the Eastward — At 4AM got underway to beat down the river and

at 7 PM got up to Toledo and brought up with the small bower anchor abreast of the town.” Returning to Toledo required fifteen hours — five times the amount of time required for the upstream passage. Beating [tacking close-hauled] to windward in this fairly narrow river that meanders north to east in its generally northeast course required coming about to the opposite tack frequently — a fairly significant operation for a vessel the size of the *Wyandot*. Moreover, the River is characterized by frequent depth variations as well as high banks and a number of islands toward the Maumee City segment, producing wind shifts which no doubt further complicated the passage.⁶

At 6:00 a.m. on June 5th the *Wyandot* “got underweigh [sic] for Portage River with light Easterly winds & beat out [of the River and into Lake Erie].” At 8:00am on the following day they entered the Portage River at Port Clinton and “at 7 PM got up to Hartford,” which is present-day Oak Harbor, a distance of approximately thirteen miles.⁷ The *Wyandot* commenced taking on a load of staves on June 7th and continued doing so into June 10th. It is not clear whether

the crew and/or local dock workers performed the loading job, but crew employment contracts, particularly in the early years, often included those duties.

On June 11th at 7:00 a.m. Bundy recorded that they “got underweigh [sic] bound down and after warping and kedging a good ways, got down to Port Clinton at 8PM and came to an anchor in the stream.” In addition to the previously-noted kedging process, the crew engaged in *warping*, which involved moving the vessel by securing a line or lines to fixed objects (trees along the River’s banks, moored vessels, and docks) toward or

along which the vessel was then drawn. As with kedging, that process was labor-intensive.

At 5:00 a.m. on June 12, the *Wyandot* “got underweigh [sic] [from Port Clinton] bound to Buffalo.” At 4:00 a.m. on June 15th the vessel arrived at Buffalo and commenced discharging its cargo of staves, which likely were transported to an eastern location by way of the Erie Canal.

And thus concludes the brief 1838 sojourn of the schooner *Wyandot* into western Lake Erie waters. Ultimately, the vessel was lost while on Lake Erie in 1853.⁸

1. Gerald C. Metzler Great Lakes Vessel Database, Wisconsin Maritime Museum; Manitowoc, Wisconsin.
2. Noted, with names, on the initial page of the log.
3. Bundy's term "hove" is the verb form of "heave," as is "heaved".
4. The mid-River linear distance from the mouth of the River to the M.L. King [Cherry Street] Bridge, the approximate site of 1838 Toledo. Adapted from U.S. Geological Survey, "7.5 Minute Topographical Map Series"; Ohio: Oregon (1965) and Toledo (1965) Quadrangles.
5. *Ibid*
6. The writer has sailed extensively (in a small sloop) on the River and has, thereby, experienced the difficulties noted.
7. The mid-river linear distance from the mouth of the River to the State Route 19 bridge. Adapted from U.S. Geological Survey, "7.5 Minute Topographic Map Series"; Ohio: Lacarne (1967), Lindsay (1969), Oak Harbor (1967), Port Clinton (1969), and Wight-mans Grove (1969) quadrangles.
8. Metzler Great Lakes Vessel Database.

