

Marine History Lines

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AFFLECK:

A Family Biography of
Toledo's Yachting Leaders

When examining the Affleck family and their contributions to Lake Erie boating, we are really only discussing two individuals, a father and son combination whose gifts and efforts spanned three quarters of the twentieth century. Edward T. Affleck (1843-1911) and the youngest of his four children, also Edward T. Affleck (1879-1977). Both would lead stupendously adventurous lives and be well connected with some of America's leading names.

A Soldier's Life

Though their work in the promotion of yachting, yacht racing, and community building seemingly begins when the family arrives in Toledo, Ohio at the start of the last century, their lives had already been a complete and entertaining story. Edward Tullibardine Affleck Sr. was born in Belmont County Ohio, southwest of Pittsburgh just beyond the Ohio River. At the age of 20, as the American Civil War raged, Edward joined the Federal Army as his Ohio Militia Battalion was unexpectedly activated for national service. The family had already lost an older brother, Howard, who was wounded at Shiloh in 1862 and passed away at home a month after the battle. Edward was given the rank of Adjutant in the 170th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. The unit mustered in early May of 1864 as 100-day volunteers for the

defense of Washington D.C. Adjutant Affleck would end up in service for much longer than 100 days, however, as his career as a soldier took painfully unexpected turns. The 170th OVI would find itself thrown into combat at the height of summer 1864 under Union General George Crook and rushed into the defense of the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. Edward was surrounded by the enemy and captured at the Second Battle of Kernstown on July 24, 1864, one of the few members of the 170th OVI to not make it back to camp in Winchester¹.



Mid-19th Century Image of E.T. Affleck Sr.

<https://sites.rootsweb.com/~ohmfahs/cw-affleck.htm>

The young Adjutant was delivered to the Confederate prison for officers, Camp Sorghum in Columbia, South Carolina. That area became threatened in early 1865 as Union General William T. Sherman's forces advanced into the Carolinas as they tore out the underbelly of the rebel states having already Marched to the Sea. Affleck was trans-

ferred first to Camp Asylum (the state mental hospital in Columbia) than northward to North Carolina and finally to Richmond, the Confederate capital itself in March.

These were the waning and skeletal days of the Confederacy just one month prior to the surrender, when everything from infrastructure, government, and human resolve were breaking down. One cannot imagine the pained and hungry life of a prisoner-of-war trapped within a war-ravaged society, itself starving and on the boundaries of existence. Edward Affleck was at last exchanged into the hands of the United States Army on March 10, 1865, and moved into recovery at Camp Parole Maryland², he was very likely emaciated and in need of medical care but had survived the horrific ordeal of war.

According to his pension application, Edward moved himself to Columbus, Ohio in 1868 where he found work as a clerk for the railroad³, and married Laura Walkup in 1871⁴. Together they would have four children, and as mentioned above, their youngest being Ed Jr., born in 1879. Throughout these years Edward Sr. must have acquired a knowledge of the coal industry and developed a keen business sense as he rose year after year to be a principal coal and coke agent for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Columbus⁵. He would be quite a wealthy man when arriving later in Toledo and heavily involved in a great number of lucrative enterprises.

Like his father, Edward Jr. would be called upon to serve his nation during a time of armed conflict. War was declared with Spain on April 25, 1898, and Edward's unit of Ohio Volunteers would be activated for service two weeks later. He would serve as a Sergeant in Battery H of the First Battalion Ohio Volunteer Light Artillery⁶. This battalion, recruited all over Ohio, would not see combat action and would not leave the continental United States. But they were still seen as active troops contributing to the war effort and afforded veteran status. They were mustered out in late October 1898⁷.

With the younger Affleck now returned to the home front, the first reference found to the family moving up to the western end of Lake Erie comes with the incorporation of the Affleck Coal Company in September 1899, headquartered in Toledo, Ohio with Edward T. Affleck Sr. as president. This would be a wholesale coal dealership delivering to Canada and Michigan. No doubt Edward's knowledge of the rail industry was a great benefit to cost effective delivery and now had use of the lake borne commerce as well. Edward Jr. served as the company's secretary and bookkeeper. The family's prospects continued to grow soon entering the cement business. In the fall of 1903, they would organize The Southern Ohio Portland Cement Company, again with E.T. Affleck Sr. as President and Edward Jr. as an officer⁸. This

organization would develop brick, cement, and coal properties and acquire control of 2,500 acres of land in Jackson Co. Ohio. Then within a few short months the Lucas County Saving Bank would name E.T. Affleck Sr. as a Vice President in January 1904. From there the accolades and titles would continue. 1906 saw Edward named Director of the Security Savings Bank and Trust Co. and in 1907 he was listed there again as well as director of the Continental Trust and Savings Bank⁹.

Big Boom in Yachting Circles Surely Coming for Toledo

So read the headlines in the Toledo News Bee for June 1st, 1902. The city was indeed on the starting line for a great new era in pleasure yachting and competitive sail racing and it was all largely due to the tireless work of one man, Noah Bowlus, an oil man and then Commodore of the Toledo Yacht Club. Bowlus wanted Toledo to rival other great yachting communities like Chicago, Detroit, and the cities of the Northeast Atlantic coast. Toledo had sailors, but it did not have the interest of the wealthy who could own and equip the large, sleek racers that could generate public spectacle for this royal sport. Plus, the Toledo Yacht Club was interested in erecting a new grand club house overlooking the Maumee Bay and Bowlus needed investors. He was known for regularly taking city business leaders on river cruises in his naphtha launch *Delta*. From downtown they sped to Point Place where he bought his passengers fresh fish dinners. He was also known, rather deviously, to regularly call newspaper outlets to ask for the results of the local small boat regattas, knowing there were none reported. These continual inquiries inflated the reporters' sense that there was demand for this sort of news and they began regular columns which in turn generated interest among the citizenry. Though at first Bowlus limited his circle to oil men like himself, somewhere along the line he must have shaken hands with E.T. Affleck¹⁰.

The Afflecks joined the TYC in 1901 when the club met at the Calvin Building at the corner of Summit and Cherry Streets and the boats used the anchorage at Riverside Boat House at the park down river. Though he grew up in landlocked Columbus, Ohio, Edward Jr. had first learned to sail at age 13 on family vacations to Whitmore Lake in Michigan¹¹. And now the family would purchase the 52-foot sloop *Ethel* with a regular rotating crew of about six local sailors. Unfortunately, the first reporting of the family's interaction with the vessel would come that fall as the *Ethel* was an early victim to an outbreak of river piracy that swept the city and lake shore in 1901¹². Then the following spring, the gasoline engine on the *Ethel*'s small tender exploded and burned the little runabout to the water¹³. But E. T. Affleck Sr., and his money, was still fully committed to the new lifestyle as on April 27, 1902, a new, large, and beautifully gilt silver cup trophy arrived in Toledo¹⁴. The Affleck Cup was the first of three that would arrive in the city that spring along with the Myers Cup and the Bowlus Cup¹⁵. The trophies would serve as grand prizes for the entire season of regattas from Memorial Day through Labor Day on Western Lake Erie. Displaying the trio in the storefront window of a noted downtown jeweler would increase excitement in the public's eye and increase awareness of the blossoming sport. The Affleck Cup would go to the TYC boat in the 35, 40, and 45 foot class that accumulated the most points over the summer. The *Ethel* would perform well that season with Edward Jr. at the helm taking First Place in the final regatta that September at the Monroe Piers. But ultimately the Affleck Cup would go to Joe Taylor aboard the speedy yawl *Jaunita*, a famed member of the fleet that would make headlines for years.

On September 30, 1902, Edward Affleck Sr. was nominated as Rear Commodore of Toledo Yacht Club behind Noah Bowlus returning for a second consecutive term. It was a crucial time for leadership in that club's history as the new southern colonial clubhouse was due to open the following year. Of the nomination the Toledo News Bee would write that Affleck "was a happy choice. The advent of influential men of business into the yachting world in this city has done much for the good of the royal sport, and as an enthusiastic yachtsman and solid businessman Mr. Affleck will do much to give the sport dignity and solidarity."¹⁶ The years ahead would be busy for the 59-year-old Civil War veteran considering his aforementioned business pursuits as well as the bursting yacht world centered around Toledo's new Bayview Park.



SAILING YACHT ETHEL

TOLEDO LUCAS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

On October 10, 1903, E.T. Affleck was elevated to Commodore in one of the first meetings held in the newly completed clubhouse. Edward Jr. would serve as the fleet captain for that term. J.M. Skinner would serve as his Rear Commodore, a man who would come to be a stalwart partner in future developments on western Lake Erie. At once the *Ethel* became the flagship for the fleet after another year of respectable presence in the races. Affleck had also added the naphtha launch *Ettaco* to his personal collection of vessels¹⁷. (Naphtha is a fuel oil refined to replace steam engines for personal use in low horsepower external combustion engines.) The *Ethel* was built in 1875 in Jersey City, NJ¹⁸. She had a length at the water line of 45 feet and a beam of 14. She was described along with a drawing of her at the opening of the 1903 season. "The *Ethel*, a first-class sloop, is not a racing machine by any means, but is the most commodious cruiser in the fleet, barring, perhaps, the *Puritana*"¹⁹ (The *Puritana* is a reference to Com. S. O. Richardson Jr.'s mighty Schooner) During the senior Affleck's tenure as commodore, the Toledo Yacht Club would narrowly escape disaster as the new clubhouse caught fire in March of 1904. Commodore Affleck showered local firemen with praise for their fine work in containing the blaze and saving the hard labor of so many sailors and construction workers.

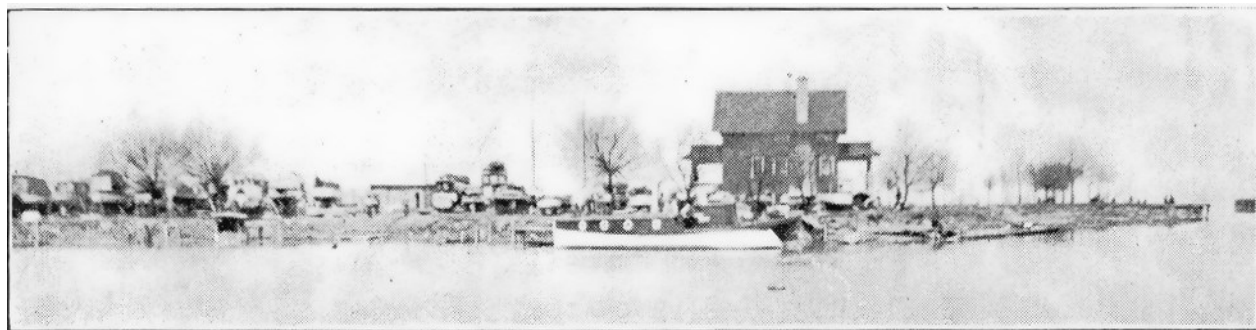


THE FIRST TOLEDO YACHT CLUB AT BAYVIEW PARK 1903-1907 AS IT APPEARED DURING COMMODORE AFFLECK'S TERM.

THE STRUCTURE WAS LATER DESTROYED BY FIRE FEBRUARY 1907

On Christmas Eve of 1903, just two and a half months into his term, Commodore Affleck secured the purchase of a new flagship, the *Hussar II*. She was built in 1900 by G.W. Neeley in Philadelphia. At 70 ft. she was too large to traverse the Erie Canal and would have to be sailed up the New England coast to the mouth of the St. Lawrence then all the way upriver to the Welland Canal. Edward Jr. and his older brother Howard departed for the East Coast in early spring to make the delivery. Departing on April 15, 1904, the voyage would take two months encountering snow and ice in most harbors they toured. Light and adverse winds slowed their progress and three of the Toledoans on board as crew needed to return from Boston by rail. Bostonians would be recruited for the remainder of the voyage which lay over at Halifax for a week as a new storm stay sail was sown. The *Hussar II* possessed an early auxiliary gasoline engine (a rare and elite feature) that boasted 15 horsepower and could drive her tonnage to 6mph. Her dramatic yawl rigging could push her to 12.5 knots. Her waterline length was 50 ft with an impressive 18 ft beam, drawing 5'6" on her heavy ocean keel. There were nine berths on board. The mahogany interior was finished with white enamel and gold alongside silk draperies. Reporters described her as a vessel to rival the Sigma, a huge 135 foot, three masted steam yacht built by Craig Shipbuilding²⁰. She would not only survive her long cruise to Lake Erie but Edward Jr. would sail her to the Commodore's Trophy at the I-LYA regatta that summer at Put-in-Bay. Coincidentally his father would be elected Vice Commodore of I-LYA that year despite his duties leading the Toledo Yacht Club²¹. In July 1904, the *Ethel* was sold to Dwight H. Goodwin of the Maumee River Yacht Club who began an extensive re-build. The *Ethel* would go on to compete in the very first running of the Mills Trophy Race in 1907.

Undaunted and in no way slowed by his term as Commodore, the senior Affleck continued strides of leadership for the Lake Erie boating community. In the Spring of 1905, he, along with Commodore J.M. Skinner, would officially found The Toledo Power Boat Club. This new action returned Affleck to his yachting origins at Riverside Park Boat House where the new club operated and moored their vessels. Affleck's naphtha launch *Ettaco* was one of their first fleet along with Skinner's cruising launch *Restless*, which was described as one of the finest on the lake and had already been the flagship at Monroe Boat Club²². With so much grand attention at last paid to sailing prowess, the Toledo Power Boat Club was designed to now promote the newer mode of lake travel and teach newcomers the complex nature of early engines and inspire innovation. Opportunities would abound for Toledo boat and engine builders alike. The TPBC would operate for two years at Riverside Park before moving into new accommodations alongside TYC at Bayview Park in 1907. (TPBC is the predecessor of the current Bay View Yacht Club of Toledo) There, the growing membership would build the first powered marine rail line for boat launching and removal on the Great Lakes²³.



A POOR QUALITY IMAGE, BUT PERHAPS THE OLDEST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF THE TOLEDO POWER BOAT CLUB AT BAYVIEW PARK — CIRCA 1912. CLUB FOUNDED BY E.T. AFFLECK IN 1905. PHOTO IN THE POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR.

To celebrate the Toledo Power Boat Club moving into new accommodations, the senior Affleck would commission a huge new cabin cruiser from plans created by Small Brothers. At 50-feet with a 25 horsepower, 4 cylinder ralaco engine it would be the largest pleasure boat in the Point Place harbor though there were plans to cruise the vessel to Florida the bulk of the following year²⁴.

The Great Race of 1909

The *Hussar II* would be one of six sailing vessels to compete in the long-distance race of the TYC regatta in August of 1909, a race for the Mills Trophy now two years old. The event would be renown for the great storm that was blowing out of the Northeast that night and so strong all six boats would be casualties facing some level of heavy damage – none more so than the big *Hussar*. Newspapers at the time referred to the weather as a gale, but there are no accurate reports of actual wind speed. The boats began in close proximity as the starting gun fired at 6:23pm in an aggressive squall²⁵. Almost immediately the *Hussar* lost her jib as well as time in getting it replaced. What little light was visible in the terrific storm faded as the sun set within an hour. Modern eyes cannot imagine the darkness of a Great Lake in the first decade of the twentieth century with virtually no electric light on shore to act as reference and the dead reckoning skills of a skipper intimately crucial. The difficulties began on the long second leg from the Bar Point light off Amherstburg with the soaring wind on a broad reach and visibility limited. The *Genesee* of Detroit had her mainsail ripped to ribbons and the crew tried to rig a “leg-o-mutton” sail for steerage. *Elsie* had broken the jaw of her gaff and returned with only staysails. The *Puritana* turned her engines on having lost both back stays and absorbing damage to her steering gear. Ed Affleck Jr. at the helm of the *Hussar* was far ahead of all in the big 70-footer. A sudden great gust broke the cast iron shoe to which the mainmast was stepped. This allowed the base of the massive spar to shift. The base pressed against the planking and opened a seam to the lake. The *Hussar* was quickly filling with water²⁶. As they neared West Sister Island, crew remarked the cabin and berths taking on water. Of the 18 crew members, 14 were set to bailing or working manual bilge pumps. There were few if any to trim or reef the sails.

The *Hussar* bounced on, up and over the gaining seas, overpowered with too much canvas, all stays and shackles stressed. Some crew wanted to put in at West Sister. Affleck knowing the boat would best be repaired and looked after in her home port decided to push the nine-year-old racer and continue the last leg which returned to the Toledo Harbor Light - the crew bailing furiously.

Affleck and the crew of *Hussar* crossed the finish line first at 2:52am, a remarkable speed. Only under way for 8 hours and 29 minutes it was a record that would stand unmatched for nearly 30 years. Despite slogging low in the water, half foundered, and fighting into enormous seas on the final leg, *Hussar* had maintained 7.7 knots as an average cruising speed. Slowly as the early morning hours gave way to August daylight, all boats returned, limping in one form or another. The Mills Trophy would go to Detroit aboard the *Agawa*, which had sustained the least damage, only parted sheets. She would win on time allowance. But TYC would be proud of the standing record in the face of such memorable weather.



HUSSAR II IN 1906—IMAGE FROM FOREN'AFT

The Later Years

By 1910 Edward Affleck Jr. would own the *Red Feather*, the 50-foot power boat. He would often tow the smaller regatta boats to their starting ports, be it Detroit or others on Western Lake Erie. His father, Commodore Edward Affleck Sr. would die in early 1911 and go to rest beside his wife Laura in Woodlawn Cemetery, Toledo. She had preceded him in death five years before. History does not recall if she ever enjoyed the move to Northwest Ohio or the yachting life on the big lake. Edward Jr. would sell his father's famous flagship, the *Hussar II* in 1912 to a Chicago boater, Charley Thorne who had no doubt seen the elegant craft for the Mackinac Race each of the last six years²⁷.

Edward Jr. would apparently remain a bachelor until he was 35. In 1914 he married 32-year-old divorcee Agnes Kimball, a rather famous singer and recording artist from New York. Agnes sang for The Victor Herbert Orchestra (composer of *Babes in Toyland*) and made the first recordings of *Madame Butterfly*, the new opera by Giacomo Puccini²⁸. Agnes Kimball was a first-rate celebrity at the height of her stardom with releases on all the major recording labels of the age; a fitting match for the wealthy yachtsman, a prince of the lakes. Some of Agnes' early pop music recordings can still be widely heard on youtube and the website for the Discography of American Historical Recordings Victor Matrix B. Her voice was robust and powerful but floated sweetly and child-like when required. Agnes brought a daughter, Eloise, to Toledo and Agnes and Edward would give birth to a new daughter, Laura, in 1915, though she would shortly join her grandparents in Woodlawn Cemetery. Despite sharing new and comfortable accommodations in Toledo's fair West End, Agnes herself would die in 1918 after a two-week bout with food poisoning contracted over the Christmas holiday. No one would know what motivated her to give up a life of celebrity and move to Toledo, perhaps it was genuine love. Edward lost a wife and the world lost a remarkable songbird.

Now a widower, Edward rose and took his place in the leadership of Toledo, serving as the Vice President of the Electric Auto-Lite Company alongside founder C.O. Miniger. And he took command of the Toledo Yacht Club as commodore in 1922 and 1923. . During these years he



AGNES KIMBALL ON TOUR IN 1912

PHOTO PRINTED IN PITTSBURGH GAZETTE

paced the *Red Feather* in the power boat competitions and served as a judge or committee member for nearly all the regattas of the new AYC and the established I-LYA. He would retire from the Auto-Lite company in 1926 at the age of 47. Edward upgraded to the *Red Feather II* in 1928, his last yacht purchase²⁹.

During an extended cruise to the north Georgian Bay, Edward would marry Lillian Ridley Spencer in August 1929 at Little Current in Ontario. Lillian herself was a widow from Chicago two years his junior. Lillian would bring yet another daughter to the family, Isabelle Spenser. Now at age 50, Edward had already returned to the workforce with another Toledo giant, the Willys-Overland Company.

Well into middle age, the new family began enjoying the society life. They were nearly constant fixtures at all the race committee balls, dinners, and celebrations about the lake. Edward would sell the beautiful *Red Feather II* in 1936³⁰. Throughout the middle of the twentieth century Commodore Affleck would either race in, or work as judge or committee member for nearly every Mills Trophy Race³¹. The splendid Affleck Bowl, perhaps one of the most easily recognized trophies, was purchased by the family, and is given to the best finish for a yawl or ketch in the annual competition. No doubt a nod to the early and golden days of yacht racing on the Great Lakes and the magical work of *Hussar II*, herself a yawl, in the biggest contests of the age. The Affleck Bowl is still proudly on display today at the Toledo Yacht Club.

The club would honor Com. E.T. Affleck Jr. in 1968 as the oldest living commodore at age 89. His life membership with the organization, purchased after the great fire of 1907, still honored. Edward Jr. would live to the remarkable age of 98, passing in late 1977. He was the last living veteran of the Spanish-American War from Ohio³². He would take his place in the family plot at Woodlawn Cemetery, now no longer the outskirts of a growing city but choked into its dense center. There he joined his two older siblings, his mother and father, his first wife and their infant daughter. Lillian R. Affleck would also be long-lived, from her birth in 1887 to her death in 1982 at age 95. She also rests with the family. It is the hope of this article that memory, attention, honor, and gratitude be paid to an American family that gave so much to the history, development, and sustainment of the Great Lakes as a pleasurable resource we inherit.

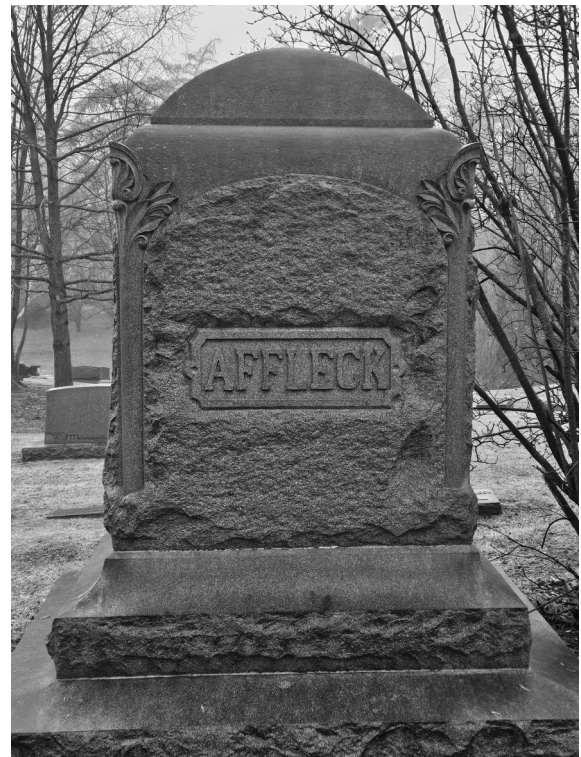
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needs your help, your voice, your talents,
and energy.

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THE AFFLECK BOWL
STILL AN ACTIVE TROPHY AWARDED TO A YAWL OR KETCH
MILLS TROPHY RACE



THE AFFLECK FAMILY STONE IN WOODLAWN CEMETERY
TOLEDO, OHIO
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

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