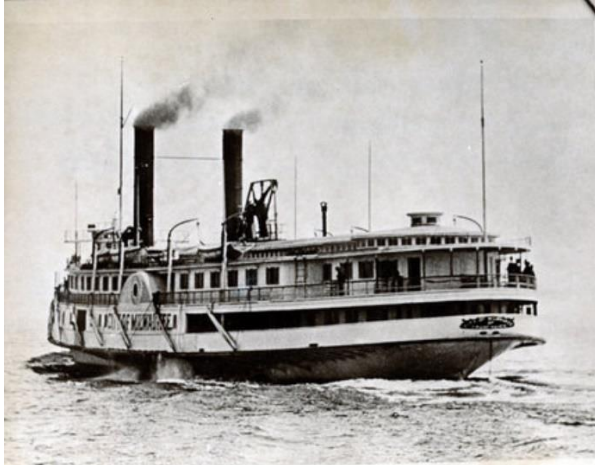


## The Tragedy of October 28, 1919

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*Side-wheel steamer "Muskegon" and the ship's remains showing in the Muskegon Channel.*

The Crosby steamer "Muskegon" left Milwaukee about 9 o'clock on Sunday night, October 27, at a time when the weather was good. By midnight a heavy wind sprang up from the Northwest. Captain Edward Miller decided it was safer to attempt to make the harbor than to turn about. By the time the boat reached the Muskegon piers it was blowing a gale, and the sea was running high. Just as the bow was entering the harbor she was thrown against the piers by the seas and undertow. As the water began to rush into the boat the fires went out and the lights were soon extinguished leaving everything in darkness. In less than four minutes after the crash no portion of the vessel remained above the water line.

The passengers, many clad only in their night clothing and some without clothing, and crew jumped for their lives to the pier. Reportedly there were about 35 passengers aboard with about twenty-two passengers who escaped, many of them women while all but eleven of the crew jumped to safety.

Grant Johnson, a one-time resident, was chief engineer of the ill-fated boat, and narrowly escaped with his life after a heroic effort to save his aged mother. When the boat struck the piers, he rushed to his mother's state room only to find the door stuck fast. Being unable to break it open, he went to get an axe, but before he could return the lights went out and he was unable to reach the cabin door again. The boat began to go to pieces, and she was lost. Another member of the crew also lost his life while trying to save Mr. Johnson's mother as he was washed overboard.

Harry Robinson was another former Montague man who narrowly escaped losing his life in the wreck. He jumped on the piers just in time to save his life.

On October 30, it was reported that nine members of the crew and six passengers lost their lives. Some other reports indicate that there were as many as 37 to 39 passengers aboard and a crew of 40. It was reported in the local paper that two Montague residents were among the victims of a terrible Lake Michigan tragedy.

Mr. & Mrs. Herman Lecus were returning from a two-week visit to Mrs. Lecus' parents at Port Washington, Wisconsin. They went there to celebrate their first wedding anniversary. The body of Mrs. Lecus was recovered within a few hours after the accident, but her husband's body wasn't recovered until Saturday, November 1.

Herman Lecus, the only son of Herman and Martha (ne Turns) Lecus, was born on 17 July 1891, in a family of eight children. He served in the Coast Guard for several years but had been employed at Sylvan Beach the past summer.

Mrs. Lecus was the former Bertha Beer, the daughter of Andrew and Josephine (ne Swatek) Beer. She was born at Port Washington on 7 January 1895. Herman and Bertha were married on 15 October 1918 at Port Washington.

Their funeral took place on Tuesday, November 4 and they were buried in the Mouth Cemetery.

The twenty-second body from the wreck was found on the beach on December 23, 1919. And it was believed that three additional bodies were yet to be discovered.

The iron-plated, side-wheel passenger and package freight steamer began life at the City of Milwaukee on February 11, 1881, at the Detroit Dry Dock in Wyandotte, MI, under the design and construction of Frank Kirby for the Goodrich Line. At 231 feet long and 34 feet wide, the City of Milwaukee was the pride of the line. With twin boilers and a massive walking beam engine built by the W. A. Fletcher Company of Hoboken, New Jersey, the vessel generated 1,500 horsepower – impressive for the time.

The vessel served a series of owners including Goodrich from 1881-1883; the Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee Railway Company from 1883-1897; the Graham and Morton Transportation Company from 1897-1917; and the Crosby Transportation Company from 1917 until its loss.

It was named Holland in 1904 under the Graham and Morton flag. The vessel received the name Muskegon from the Crosby line just 2 months before its final voyage.

The vessel had suffered a number of incidents and rebuilds over the decades. Over the winter season of 1900/1901 Graham and Morton added an entirely new upper deck of cabins and a new theatre to offer entertainment to passengers. In 1903, the company added sixty more staterooms.