

TRIPLETS OF THE GREAT LAKES

THE GREAT LAKES TRANSIT COMPANY COULDN'T SURVIVE THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE IN SEA TRANSPORT BUT WHILE IT EXISTED IT SERVED MANY AND SERVED THEM WELL

BY WILLIAM F. LEVINS

The entrance of the United States into World War Two triggered the greatest shipbuilding program in the nation's history but when hostilities commenced in 1941, they also sounded the death knell for what remained of the once numerous Great Lakes package freighters and the company that owned them last.

Shortly after the start of 1942, the federal government, through the

War Shipping Administration and the Office of Defense Transportation, placed all Great Lakes ships exceeding 1000-tons burden under the command of the Maritime Commission. The powers to do this were created by Congress in the Merchant Marine Act, which gives the President the authority during a time of national emergency

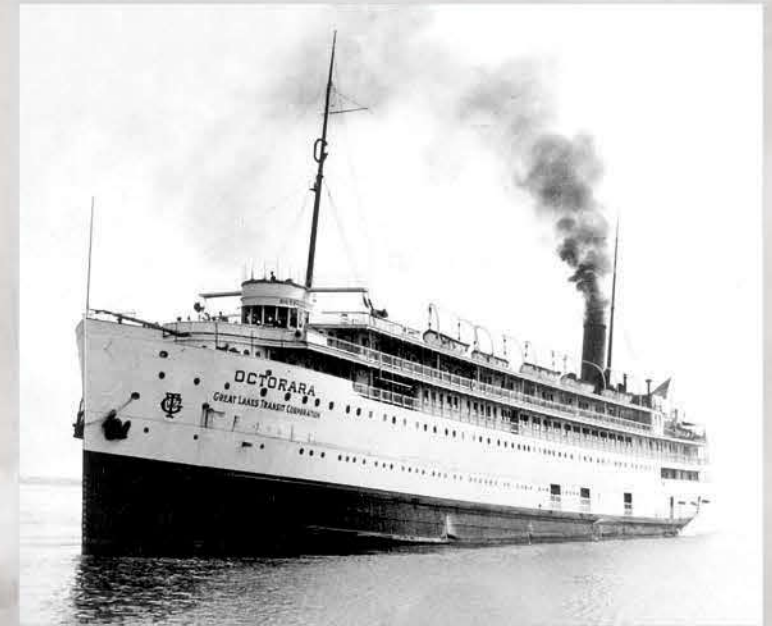
to charter or requisition all ships of American registry.

This prerogative was exercised during the war's early stages to assure a steady flow of iron ore from Lake Superior's docks to the demanding eastern blast furnaces and to press into salt water service as many ships as could be passed through existing canals. It was the latter objective that marked the end of the Great Lakes Transit Corporation and the package freight service it operated. Though this demise seemed unjustified at the time, it was

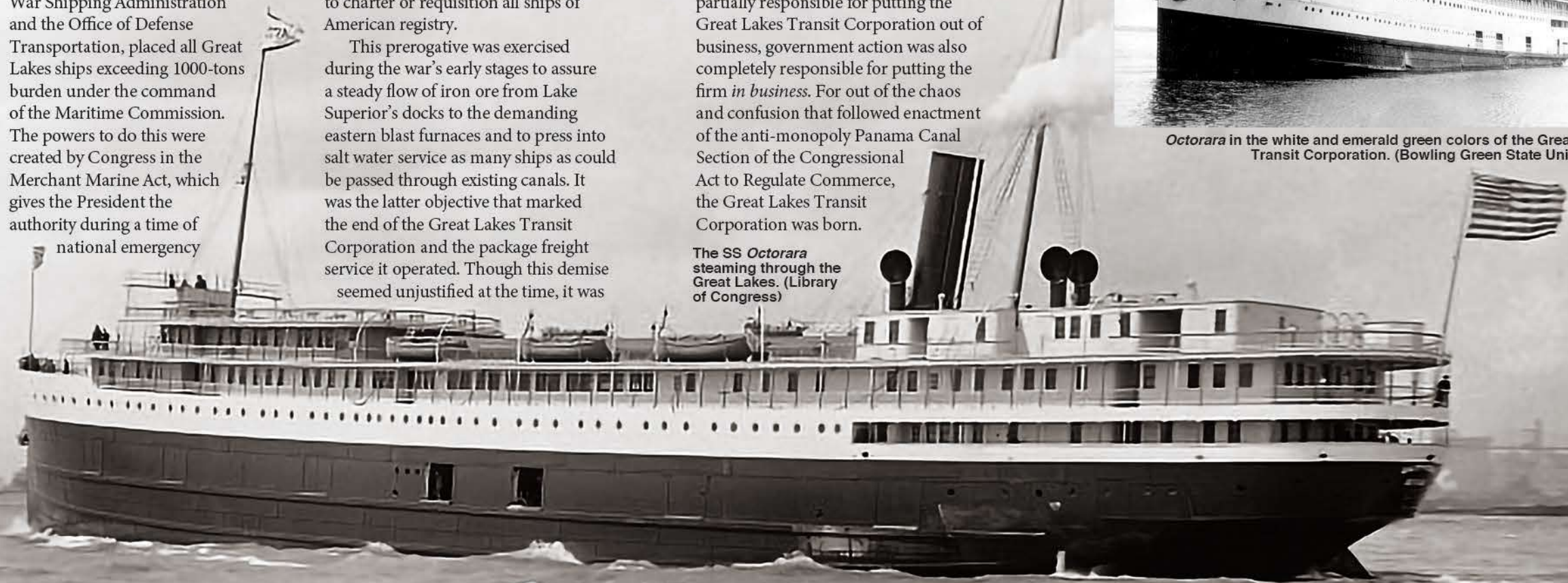
simply the premature fulfillment of an inevitable end.

Another government edict, different in nature but equal in consequence, forced the Great Lakes Transit Corporation in 1937 to withdraw from service its two remaining passenger liners. While removal of these freighters and liners from the Lakes was five years apart, their passing presents parallel cases in pointing up the irresistible running of the economic tide. While government action was partially responsible for putting the Great Lakes Transit Corporation out of business, government action was also completely responsible for putting the firm *in business*. For out of the chaos and confusion that followed enactment of the anti-monopoly Panama Canal Section of the Congressional Act to Regulate Commerce, the Great Lakes Transit Corporation was born.

The SS *Octorara* steaming through the Great Lakes. (Library of Congress)



Octorara in the white and emerald green colors of the Great Lakes Transit Corporation. (Bowling Green State University)



A 1914 menu from *Ocotara* when the steamship was operated by the Anchor Line.



The *Tionesta* in its launching slip.

Even though the three liners were extremely popular with passengers, time would catch up with the ships along with changing life styles.