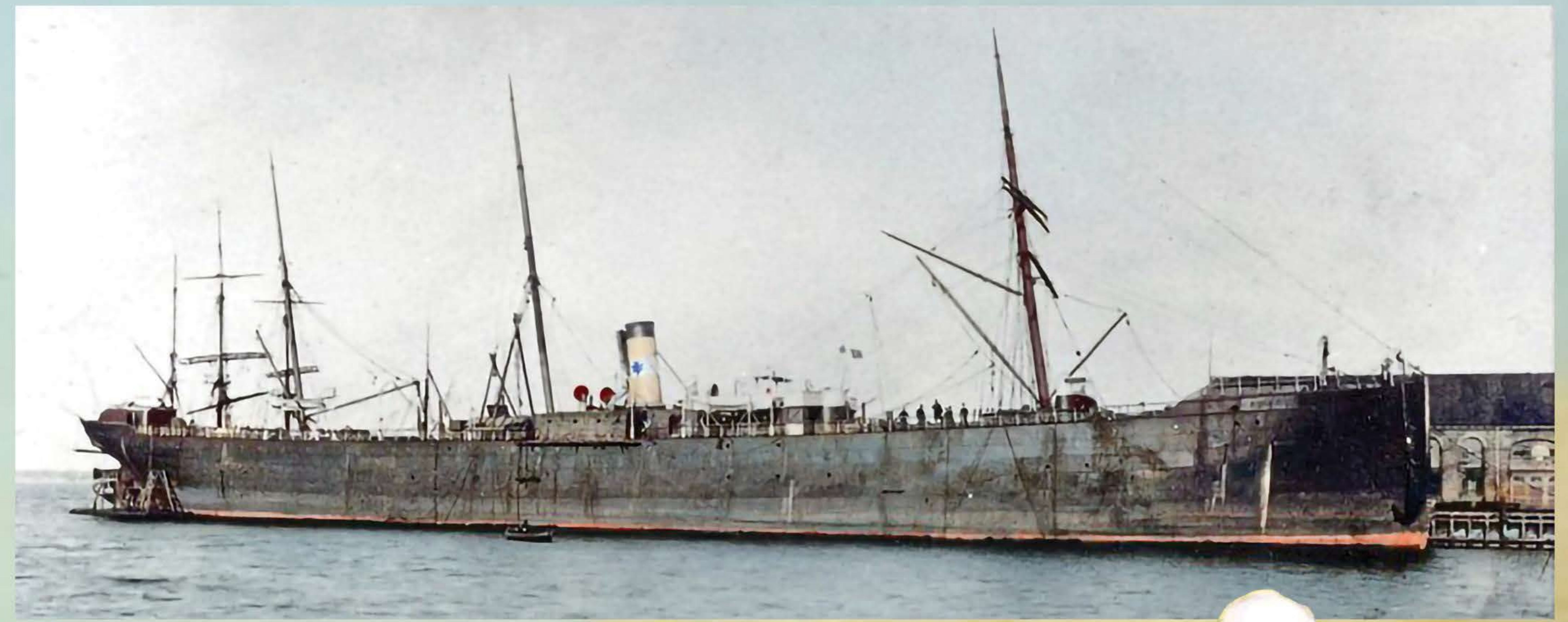


WHEN MISSOURI RESCUED DANMARK

FORGOTTEN TODAY, THE HEROIC ACTIONS BY THE CREW OF AN ATLANTIC STEAMER RESULTED IN ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE RESCUES AT SEA

BY CARLTON REED

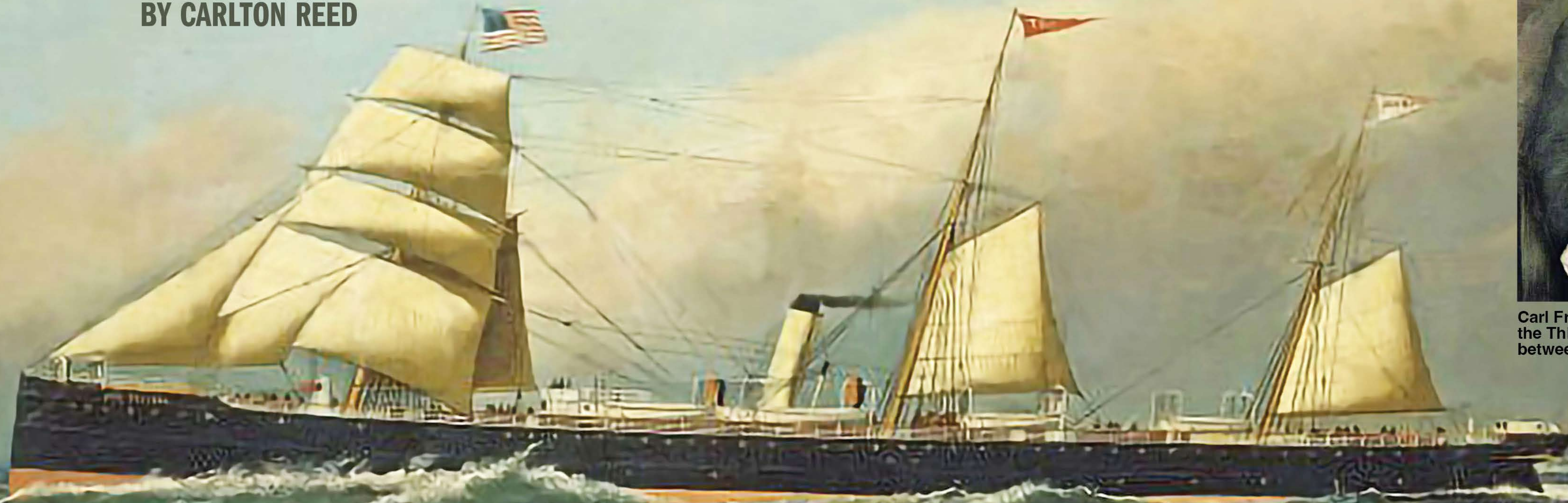


After being sold, *Jan Breydel* was renamed *SS Danmark* and went to work on the lucrative Scandinavia to USA emigrant route.



Carl Frederik Tietgen established the Thingvalla Line as a direct route between Copenhagen and the USA.

SS Jan Breydel depicted in an oil painting soon after launching in 1888.



Captain C.B. Knudsen was literally changing onto the wheel for dear life as the bow of *SS Danmark* rose 35-degrees into the cloud-blackened sky as the 3414-ton steamship fought for her life as she rode swells that were becoming more and more violent.

The date was 4 April 1889 and the Thingvalla Line steamship had been heading from Copenhagen to New York City. She was carrying a crew of 59 along with 665 passengers from Denmark, Sweden, and Norway — all of whom were seeking a better life in the American West. They were a poor but proud lot — only 28 passengers were in cabins and all the rest were in

steerage. Now they were placing their faith and their future in the crew of *Danmark*.

The ship had been built by C. Mitchell & Company at Walker-on-Tyne, England, and was completed during 1880. She had been constructed for the Engels Line of Belgium and named *Jan Breydel*. She was of iron construction with one funnel, three masts, was barquentine-rigged, had three iron decks and a partly iron awning deck, five cemented bulkheads, and was fitted with a single propeller. She had a compound engine with two inverted cylinders of 44- and 84-inches diameter respectively; stroke

of 480-inches; 80-psi; and was capable of 400-hp that would drive the *Jan Breydel* at a maximum of eleven-knots. The engine had been built in Newcastle, England, by T. Clark & Company.

Not the most elegant of vessels, the ship was purchased in 1888 by Thingvalla and renamed *Danmark* (Thingvalla Line was a shipping company founded by Danish financier, industrialist, and philanthropist Carl Frederik Tietgen during 1879 in Copenhagen, Denmark. The company maintained a route between Copenhagen and New York City, calling at Christiania — now Oslo — and Christiansand on the way. At its

peak, the line had ten ships in its fleet. In 1898, the company was bought by DFDS, another Danish concern, and the name was changed to Scandinavian American Line). On 20 March 1889, *Danmark* departed Copenhagen for New York on her first voyage for Thingvalla with stops at Christiania and Christiansand to pick up passengers before heading to New York. With 665 passengers loaded (most heading for the West to begin a new life along with a large number that had signed on to work as domestics in American households) and a crew of 59, the voyage started out in an agreeable manner but by 24 March, the 3414-ton

ship was fighting high winds and rough seas.

The situation would only get worse. By 4 April, the winds were much more violent and *Danmark* was now riding swells described as “mountainous.” In such weather, the majority of passengers became extremely seasick and the crowded living conditions soon became onerous. On 5 April, the violent weather caused her propeller shaft to snap and this apparently holed the hull. The engine was kept running so that the pumps could try to keep the holds from flooding but the water was entering at a faster rate than it could be pumped out. Captain

Knudsen, a veteran of many crossings, knew his options were limited. He could order the crew and passengers to abandon the steamer but he realized the chances of entering the lifeboats in such heavy seas would be risky at best. However, a rescue would soon be on hand — a rescue so miraculous that Capt. Knudsen and his crew never even considered it as a possibility.

In those storm-ravaged seas, the *SS Missouri* was also fighting its way towards America. The *Missouri* was one of four freighters built for the Atlantic Transport Line with the express goal of carrying cargo, cattle, horses, goods, and a small number of