



BROWSE



 ***November's Fury: The Deadly Great Lakes Hurricane of 1913***
by Michael Schumacher (review)

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Dan Truckey

Michael Schumacher, *November's Fury: The Deadly Great Lakes Hurricane of 1913*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. 216 pp. \$24.95, cloth. \$16.95, paper.

Those of us who live along the Great Lakes have weathered many a storm. However, we have often been heard to say, "Well, at least we don't have hurricanes." While technically that is correct, on November 7, 1913, the storm that hit the Great Lakes could hardly be seen as anything but a hurricane. This "perfect storm," a collision of three separate storm systems, had a devastating effect on the region and, in particular, the dozens of merchant sailing vessels that were on the lakes during this storm.

Michael Schumacher's new book, *November's Fury: the Deadly Great Lakes Hurricane of 1913*, breathlessly spins a magnificent tale of the dozens of merchant ships caught up the storm. It calls to mind Sebastian Junger's novel, *The Perfect Storm*, about the great nor'easter of 1991. Schumacher takes the reader through not only the anatomy of the storm, but also the lives and ships it affected on each of the Great Lakes. The book sheds light on the acts of heroism, narrow escapes, and the inevitable tragedies that would follow in its wake.

Over four days, the storm wrought havoc on the Lakes, either sinking, **[End Page 112]** stranding, or demolishing dozens of boats and taking the lives of over two hundred fifty sailors. Schumacher takes us from the first signs of trouble on Lake Superior, where vessels such as the 525-foot Henry B. Smith, which left Marquette harbor as the storm began, were never to be seen again. The vessel, like the eleven others lost in the storm, would become part of the lore of the "hurricane." For the next one hundred years, divers and explorers would search the coast of the Upper Peninsula to try and find the Henry B. Smith. (It was reportedly discovered in five hundred feet of water near Marquette in 2013.)

It would be hard to recount all of the amazing tales in this book, and I'd rather not spoil them for the reader, but there are some that are worthy of recounting. One striking story is that of the rescue of the L. C. Waldo,

a 472-foot iron ore carrier that ran aground in the storm off the point of the Keweenaw Peninsula at Gull Island. Exposed to the dangers of the storm, the crew huddled together in the ship, hoping for rescue. A dangerous operation was mounted by the George Stephenson and the brave men of the Eagle Harbor lifesaving station. In the worst of the storm, the crew of the Waldo was transferred to a rescue boat with the help of these crews.

Less hopeful fates were in store for sailors on the twelve vessels that simply disappeared in the storm. Because the tales of these ships went to bottom of the lakes with their sailors, Schumaker is left to speculate about their fates. He does this masterfully, studying the history of the vessel and their crews and using eyewitness accounts of each vessel's final sighting. With depth and sensitivity he paints the picture of frightened sailors, fighting for their lives against each successive wave and knowing that to enter the cold embrace of a Great Lake in November would bring certain death.

One chilling account is that of the Wexford, a 256-foot freighter, returning to Goderich, Ontario, from a trip to Fort William on Lake Superior. While fighting the storm along the eastern shore of Lake Huron, the ship is believed to have nearly reached the Goderich harbor but could not enter due to the storm. The ship's horns could be heard on shore, but all that could be seen were distress flares. It eventually broke up after running aground south of Goderich, the wreckage and bodies of her crew washing ashore over the following days after the storm subsided.

The form of Schumaker's book took some adjustment for this reader. Where he tries to focus each chapter on specific lakes and parts of the storm, he inevitably jumps back and forth...

slaves they had forcefully liberated in Missouri (one slave owner was killed) through Iowa en route to Canada. Although even many antislavery Iowans disapproved of using force to free slaves, younger Iowans took up the cause of violent abolitionism, sometimes with disastrous results. Northern settler William Clarke Quantrill betrayed a party of men intending to liberate slaves from the Missouri farm of Morgan Walker. Quantrill alerted the Walker family, and three Iowans were killed.

Soike's clearly written narrative illuminates the intersection between free soilism in Iowa and turmoil in Bleeding Kansas. Readers interested in free soil politics and racial attitudes in Iowa will want to consult Robert R. Dykstra's *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier* (1993). Still, Soike has filled a niche in elaborating Iowa's role in the territorial struggle.

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