



McDougall's Great Lakes Whalebacks

Neel R. Zoss

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During the last years of the 19th century, the Duluth Harbor, situated between the sister cities of Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, was the birthplace of a bold and innovative and decidedly odd-looking class of Great Lakes barges and steamships known as whalebacks. Capt. Alexander McDougall and his American Steel Barge Company built the curved-decked, snout-nosed whalebacks on the shores of the harbor, first at Duluth's Rice's Point and later in Howard's Pocket at Superior. The vessels were a radical departure, in design, form, and construction,

from the standard shipbuilding concepts of the era but proved themselves more than capable as a number of the boats sailed the Great Lakes and the seaboard

of America until the 1960s. All the whalebacks are gone now--either scrapped or sunk--with one exception. After sailing the lakes for more than 70 years, the

last whaleback, the SS Meteor, returned home to Superior in 1972 and is now continuing its service as a magnificent maritime museum on Barker's Island.

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