THE BARK CORTLAND
by Jim Paskert

It was “an auspicious event.” Most everyone in town had turned out to watch and as the moment grew near people scrambled to find a spot with an unobstructed view. The big bark had been the talk of the town for weeks and no one in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, that afternoon in August 1867, wanted to miss the launching of “the biggest and handsomest sailing vessel on the lakes at the time.” The name Cortland was proudly displayed on a huge pennant that ruffled in the breeze near the top of the main top gallant leaving little doubt as to the identity of this magnificent vessel. Cheers went up as the bark’s large, green, clipper-style hull finally touched the water. The Cortland was Sheboygan built and Sheboygan owned. It would be commanded by a Sheboygan master and cared for by a Sheboygan crew. She would call Sheboygan home and all of Sheboygan now celebrated her birth.

Master Builder Albert Huntley built the Cortland at the Sheboygan shipyard of Asahel P. Lyman, Huntley’s employer and proud owner of the Cortland. Lyman was a “most aggressive citizen” whose entrepreneurial success since migrating to Sheboygan from Western New York State in 1846 provided him with the means, and apparently the motivation, to build such a fine vessel. A. P. Lyman did everything in a big way and the construction of the Cortland was no exception. For Lyman, the Cortland had to be the largest, most well-built and well-equipped vessel afloat, and he spent literally a king’s ransom to see to it that she was. The Cortland was undoubtedly a testament to Lyman’s success, if not a monument to Lyman himself. The fact that the Cortland’s “beam was so great that she could not pass through the Eighth Street bridge and it was necessary to erect a new and larger draw before the big boat sailed out into the lake” only served to inflate Lyman’s ego — even if it did thin his wallet a bit. It certainly proved that the Cortland was indeed the biggest boat ever built in Sheboygan. By the time the Cortland moved down the Sheboygan River and out into Lake Michigan on her

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2 ibid
5 “Model of Ill-Fated ... ,” Sheboygan Press.
maiden voyage to Milwaukee, A. P. Lyman had invested over $65,000 in the endeavor.

Needless to say, news of the new boat spread quickly when the Cortland arrived in Milwaukee on August 18, 1867. Milwaukee was a Port of Registration and the Cortland would spend four days in port, sufficient time to be admeasured and enrolled at the Customs House as required by regulation. The extended stay allowed some lucky citizens and the press to get a good look at the boat everyone was talking about. The Cortland was an enormously impressive sight. While newspapers of the day rarely devoted more than a sentence or two to the announcement of a new sailing vessel, the Cortland was no ordinary vessel and the press did all it could to provide curious readers with as much detail as possible. The Tuesday, August 20, 1867, edition of the Milwaukee Sentinel offered a very uncommon and detailed description of the new bark and the article is included here in its entirety.

Barque Cortland

Of the immense amount of new tonnage added to the lake marine this season, the various ports upon the western shore of Lake Michigan have secured a fair proportion, and chiefly from their own shipyards. These additions embrace vessels of all sizes and descriptions, not a few of them ranking among the largest and best on the lakes. One of the latter class, the barque Cortland, arrived here on Sunday, fresh from the hands of her builder, Mr. Huntley, of Sheboygan, from which port she hails as the property of A. P. Lyman, Esq. In the design of the Cortland her builder succeeded in effecting a combination of graceful lines and a clean run with large carrying capacity upon a light draught of water; and in this respect she may well be pointed out with pride as a model craft. Her dimensions are as follows: Length over all 195 feet; breadth of beam 34 feet 6 inches; depth of hold 13 feet 6 inches; measurement about 675 tons new style. Her hull is of the greatest possible strength, the frames being 12x15 at the bottom, 12x8 at the top, and 22 inches from center to center; stanchions 8 inches square; outside plank 4 inches thick, garboard streaks respectively 8, 7 and 6 inches thick, scarfed and keyed; the planking is square fastened, with two bolts and two spikes in each frame, and the ceiling, besides, is edge-bolted throughout. Her main keelson is 18x40, sister keels 10x22, pocket pieces 18x36. There are two center boards, one 24 and the other 22 feet, made of 12, 10 and 8 inch plank.

She has five breast-hooks forward, secured with beams which in turn are kneed off thoroughly; three similar hooks aft add greatly to the strength of the stern. Her deck frames are kneed off and salted in a manner similar to those of the *Homer*, while two lines of beam supporters extend the entire length of the vessel, just outside the combings of the hatches. The windlass pits, tow posts and snubbing posts are extra heavy and kneed off, and the shifting boards in the hold are let in between stanchions. Her spars are towering and massive, yet well proportioned and graceful in appearance. Her foremast is 34 inches in diameter in partners, and is rigged with double topsail yards, which, it is claimed, are just as easily handled as the patent reefing apparatus with which most of the large vessels on the lakes are supplied. Her mainmast is 94 feet long; with topmast, 150 feet. She is supplied with many of the latest improvements, among which we observe the patent steering apparatus and rudder-head supporter; three of Hammond's patent pumps, and two of his patent centerboard wenches—the pumps and wenches being far superior to anything of the kind we have ever before seen on board of a lake vessel. A double-action force pump with 100 feet of hose is placed on deck amidships, to be used for washing down the decks and in case of fire. She also carries two capstans, one forward and the other amidships, and is supplied with patent blocks and chain stoppers, iron cranes for handling the small boats, etc., etc. The anchors weigh respectively 2,016 and 1,475 lbs, and the cables are 1¼ to 1½ inches thick. Two tubes are let into her hold near the bow, and two at the stern, by means of which the hold is ventilated in the most thorough manner. Her cabin is large and well arranged, and the forecastle is placed on deck, just abaft the foremast, a far more convenient and comfortable arrangement for the sailors than the old stowaway method. The *Cortland* spreads 4,000 yards of the best cotton duck canvas, which with rigging was supplied by Messrs. G.D. Norris & Co., of this city. The inlet work is perfect in finish, and was done by a Milwaukee shipsmith, Mr. T. Sunderman. The *Cortland* has considerable shear, which makes her hold at the bow about 15 feet deep, and gives her an elevation above the water, when loaded down to thirteen feet draught, sufficient to make her comfortable in the heaviest weather. She draws when light, 5 feet 6 inches forward and 6 feet aft. Her cargo on this trip consisted of 6,000 pork barrels and lard tierces, whose estimated weight, 300 tons, has only put her down one foot deeper in the water. She is commanded by Capt. Jas. Louden, a thorough and experienced seaman. Capt. L has been in the
employ of Mr. Lyman for the past seven years, and superin-
tended the construction of the barque from the laying of the keel
until her final completion, including even the fitting out of her
rigging. To his superior knowledge are due many of the excellent
points possessed by the noble vessel. Her entire cost we guess to
be in the neighborhood of $60,000.

A large number of our citizens visited the Cortland yester-
day, and all united in pronouncing her one of the most complete
vessels ever built on the lakes.

The Cortland's first and only enrollment (Fig 1), issued at Mil-
waukee, August 21, 1867, contains the following basic information:

Owner: Ashael P. Lyman*
Vessel Name: Cortland
Master: J. W. Louden
Built At: Sheboygan, Wisconsin
Year Built: 1867
Builder: Albert G. Huntley, Master Builder
Decks: 1
Masts: 3
Length: 173.6 feet
Breadth: 34.4 feet
Depth: 13.8 feet
Capacity under tonnage deck: 636.99 tons
Capacity of enclosures on deck: 39.14 tons
Total Tonnage: 676.13
Type: Bark
Stern: Square
Head: Scroll

Regulations at the time required that the vessel name and port of
hail, as specified on the vessel’s documents, be painted on the stern.
More than a few spellings of the name of this bark have been offered in
various books, articles and news accounts. Suffice it to say that the
correct spelling is Cortland as evidenced by her enrollment.

The enrollment states that the Cortland was a bark. It is important
to note that the term, bark (sometimes spelled barque), as used on the
Great Lakes at the time, referred to a vessel having three masts of
which one or two were square rigged. In traditional usage, the term
bark referred to a vessel having three masts of which two were square
rigged, and the term barkentine (sometimes spelled barquentine) was
used to describe a vessel having three masts of which one (the fore-

*The author’s research confirms that A. P. Lyman’s name was misspelled on the enrollment.
mast) was square rigged. This differentiation was not always made on the Great Lakes and traditionally-described barks and "barkentines" were often, although not always, collectively described as barks. Navigating across and through the relative short distances and confines of the Great Lakes negated the open water advantages of increased sail and speed offered by the traditional bark rig. The true barks that actually sailed the Great Lakes were ultimately replaced with the more
It is very rare to find a photograph of any Great Lakes boat circa 1867, let alone a photograph of a boat launched in August 1867, and lost forever 10 months later. It should come as no surprise, however, considering what we know about A. P. Lyman, that a picture of the *Cortland*, pennant flying from the main top gallant and most likely taken just after her launch, still exists today. The picture clearly shows that the *Cortland* was square rigged on the foremast and fore and aft rigged on the main and mizzen. This information is corroborated by a model of the *Cortland* built in the late 1920s by the son of John Kane, the *Cortland*’s 2nd Mate. The model was donated to the Sheboygan County Historical Society Museum many years ago and is still proudly on display. Both the photograph and model indicate that the *Cortland* was, by traditional description, a barkentine. Additionally, both the photograph and model were helpful to the members of CLUE (Cleve-
land Underwater Explorers) during the process of identifying the wreck they discovered in Lake Erie off Lorain, Ohio, in late July 2005, as the remains of Cortland.

The Cortland had a scroll head according to her enrollment. Like a figurehead, a scroll head was a decorative piece that served only an aesthetic purpose; a bit of gingerbread to please the owner’s ego; an 1800s version of the modern day “you are what you drive” mentality. By the mid 1800s, the nautical tradition of fitting a sailing vessel with a figurehead, or its less ornate and less distinctive relative, the scroll head, had become unpopular. Vessels on the Great Lakes were particularly utilitarian and the profit motive compelled owners and builders to dispense with such non-functional and ornate fit and finish luxuries. Of course the Cortland was no ordinary vessel, and the pride of A. P. Lyman’s fleet certainly would not have had the usual plain head, as it was called. The scroll head played an important role in CLUE’s identification of the wreck as well.

Despite all of the excellent information that has survived regarding the Cortland, the origin of the name and A. P. Lyman’s motivation for giving this name to this most magnificent vessel remained a modern mystery. It was only recently that this author discovered a connection between Lyman and the name Cortland.

In 1959, the wife of Lyman’s deceased grand nephew gave the Sheboygan County Historical Museum several mementos left to her husband subsequent to Lyman’s death in January 1904. The mementos included a vest pocket hymn book with the following words written in Lyman’s hand on the flyleaf: “A. P. Lyman, Cortland Village, Cortland County, New York 1835.”

Cortland, New York, was obviously the home Lyman left in 1846 to emigrate, with his wife and family, to Sheboygan, Wisconsin, at the urging of Lyman’s brother, George, who had emigrated there a year earlier in 1845. The brothers saw a great opportunity in this developing area and had plans to open a general store. Twenty-one years later, at the time of the launching of the Cortland, A. P. Lyman had turned that one general store into a chain of stores in five Wisconsin cities, a fleet of ships, a waterfront warehouse, a shipyard, major holdings in various transportation enterprises including plank roads and railroads not to mention real estate and livestock. There must have been something very special and nostalgic about A. P. Lyman’s youth in Cortland, New York, that compelled him to look past his success and position in Sheboygan, back to a simpler but perhaps happier time, to find a name for the vessel that was so much a measure of his life.

When Asahel P. Lyman watched the *Cortland* sail out of the Sheboygan River into Lake Michigan on August 17, 1867, he certainly could not have imagined that his $65,000 investment would be nothing but a memory ten months later. The collision between the D & C Navigation Co. steamer, *Morning Star*; and the bark, *Cortland*, on a dark night in June 1868, is well documented. Both vessels and approximately 38 lives were lost. The *Cortland* represented the enormous success and wealth of her owner, both figuratively and literally, and her untimely loss marked the beginning of a slow and steady move in the other direction. One account described this decline as follows:

The suit resulting from the wreck was one of the most notable cases in the history of lake litigations. It is said that Mr. Lyman paid $85,000 on a verdict of libel and costs, attorney fees and similar expenses amounted to another fortune. It is said that it ultimately resulted in his abandoning lake shipping.\(^8\)

By the time Lyman died on January 29, 1904, at age 90, he had lost most of his fortune\(^9\) and the name that brought him so much joy ultimately left him with nothing but his sorrow.

**About the Author:** In 1966, at the age of 16, Jim Paskert purchased his first boat, learned to SCUBA dive and began to research Great Lakes shipwrecks. His passion to discover and explore Lake Erie wrecks helped him to develop excellent research skills and a genuine interest in Great Lakes history. Over the years he has participated in, and contributed to, the discovery and identification of numerous Lake Erie wrecks. These wrecks were and continue to be his window and link to the past. Jim hopes that shipwrecks will stimulate others and help them develop an appreciation for the history of our inland seas. Jim is a graduate of John Carroll University and is President of VtecUSA, Inc., a distributor of vacuum automation components for industry. He is a member of the Great Lakes Historical Society and Cleveland Underwater Explorers. Jim and his wife, Peggy, have two grown children and reside in Medina, Ohio.

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\(^8\) "Model of Ill-Fated ...." *Sheboygan Press.*

\(^9\) Buchen, *Historic Sheboygan*