

Captain Floyd Sigval Thompson

Floyd Sigval Thompson was born on May 2, 1908 on South Manitou Island in the home his father Theodore built. Floyd was the third child for Theodore and Matilda Agnes (Beck) Thompson. His older brother, Ralph Theodore, was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on January 21, 1900. His sister, Irene Laura, was also born in Grand Rapids on February 20, 1902. His younger sister, Clarabell Cesene, was born on South Manitou Island on December 31, 1909.

Theodore Thompson moved his family to the island to be close to his only brother, Thomas Thompson. Theodore's mother Gesine was married to Bernt Johnson. Matilda's parents, August and Elizabeth Beck, were also living on the island.

Floyd was only three years old when his mother, Matilda, died on July 9, 1912. She died of Peritonitis. Matilda died at the family store. They had rented a house near the dock and sold candy, cigarettes, and cigars to residents and sailors who came in on their boats.

As a child growing up on South Manitou Island, Floyd enjoyed fishing, swimming, skiing, and playing games with the other children. His two best friends were his cousin, George Thompson and Willard Smith. Floyd's nickname was Whitey as his hair was more white than blond. Another nickname was "Ollie". He used to swim in Lake Michigan and the "little lake" with cousin George and Harold Tobin. At that time, the islanders referred to Lake Florence as the "little lake".

Floyd remembers one particular event while walking home from school. He was running ahead of the other children swinging his red Yum-Yum lunch pail. Tobacco came in Yum-Yum buckets. He was given the bucket to use as a lunch pail. He cut across a field where some cattle were grazing. One large steer with horns spotted him and came charging. Floyd had to run very fast. He was out of breath and crying when he arrived home. His dad had hired a housekeeper from Frankfort after his wife died. The housekeeper smelled Floyd the minute he walked in the door. The housekeeper asked him what he did. He said he didn't know but his pants were mushy. The housekeeper was so mad she took the dipper out of the bucket of water and smashed it on the table just as his dad walked in. Theodore asked what was going on and raised heck with the housekeeper. Theodore told the housekeeper to get the tub from out back and fill it with water. The water was taken right from the pump and was very cold. Theodore made Floyd take his clothes off outdoors and get into the tub of cold water to clean himself off. Every time Floyd told this story, he would start laughing.

For one of his birthdays, Floyd remembers getting ten cents from his dad. He said he spent it all on candy.

While living on the island, Floyd said he received one special Christmas gift. His father gave him a pair of skis. He used the skis to go back and forth from school during the winter months.

When Floyd was ten years old, he was paid \$3.00 a month to start the fire in the stove at school before the other children arrived. One blustery winter day the snow was at least a foot and a half deep. Floyd made his way to school and had the fire going by the time the teacher arrived. The teacher came in and asked Floyd to stand by the window to watch for the other children. She told him to keep his back turned as her bloomers had gotten wet from the snow and she was going to take them off. As his back was turned, the teacher took off her wet bloomers and hung them near the stove to dry. After they were dry, the teacher went into the coatroom and put them back on.

It was not all fun and games growing up on the island. Floyd had to split wood for the wood stove that heated their home and was used for cooking. On Saturdays, Floyd's job was to scrub the floors in their house. He also helped his dad with his pond nets and the fishing business. They used pond nets to catch White fish and trout. The fish were packed in crates and taken over to Glen Haven for shipping. The fish were then transported to Chicago to sell. They packed the fish 100 pounds to a box and iced them down for shipping. Theodore received about 35 cents a pound.

Floyd also remembered an incident involving Alvin and Charlie Gould. He said they were always saying they were going to leave home. This is pretty hard to do when you live on an island. Well, one day the Gould boys went down to the shore and found a big log and got a couple wooden paddles. They straddled the log and started paddling for the mainland. Alvin and Charles paddled out about a quarter of a mile when the Coast Guard lookout saw what he thought were two people on a log. The lookout used the telescope and alerted the Coast Guard rescue team. By the time the Coast Guard crew reached the boys they were halfway across the lake. The Coast Guard had to haul the log back to the beach along with the boys.

The families living on the island enjoyed their social time. They would get together to play cards and occasionally had dances. Floyd said he always danced with his sisters, Irene and Clarabell. In the wintertime, the kids would take sleigh rides.

Floyd said like most young kids living on the island, he couldn't wait to leave.

Floyd's father, Theodore, decided to leave the island after Floyd and Clarabell passed their eighth grade examinations. His brother, Ralph, joined the US Life-Saving Service and Irene had gotten married.

The family moved to Manistee, Michigan, in 1922. Theodore got a job as a machine helper and Floyd was employed part-time driving a truck for the Manistee Laundry Company. They only stayed in Manistee for a short time as Theodore obtained a job on the Ann Arbor Carferry Service in Frankfort. Floyd also applied for a job on the car ferries. The individual doing the hiring told Floyd he would have to buy a pair of long pants. Floyd was wearing short pants or knickers at the time. So, Floyd went uptown and purchased a long pair of pants. He was hired in the month of October 1923, at the age of fifteen as a Cabinwatch on the Ann Arbor No. 4 for \$55.00 a month.

While still working on the Ann Arbor Carferries, Floyd moved up to his next job as a Deckhand and then as a Lookout and Wheelsman. He then worked up to being a Mate.

Floyd remembered one particular trip while working in Frankfort for the Ann Arbor Car ferries. Floyd was working on the Ann Arbor No. 3. The boat was on its way to Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and sailed into a big storm. The sea was so heavy it knocked all of the stuff out of the chain housing boxes and the water came in so heavy it went down on the car deck. Another Wheelsman and Floyd were lookouts at that time and decided they better go up and tell the Captain to turn around. They had a foot of water down in the boiler room. The firemen were standing in the water shoveling coal into the boilers and the water was getting deeper every minute. Floyd and the Wheelsman finally went up and told the captain to turn the boat around or it would be the end of them all. The captain agreed. He chased them out of the pilothouse and swung the boat around heading in the other direction until they got the boat pumped out. The crew had a long trip to Manitowoc that time as it took them twenty-three hours instead of the usual four hours.

The carferries had a tendency to roll back and fourth in bad weather. It was quite an experience to sit down at the mess table to eat when the ship was pitching back and forth. The cooks had a large rolling board with holes, which would hold different size containers with food. Floyd said we would all sit down to eat and all at once we would be in a big sea and all the food would roll right out of the dishes right into our laps. The crew went many a night in heavy seas without eating. Floyd said we would just crawl into our bunks and go to sleep.

In approximately 1931, Floyd married Catherine Fortine in Frankfort. They had two children. Beverly Laureen was born on January 15, 1932 and Donald Floyd on October 21, 1933.

Catherine was born in Glen Arbor Township, Glen Arbor, Michigan, on June 3, 1908. Catherine (Fortine) Thompson-Berryhill died at Munson Hospital in Traverse City, Michigan, from heart complications on July 12, 1987.

Floyd and Catherine were eventually divorced. Shortly thereafter, Floyd moved to Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Floyd married Marion Ambler in Menominee, Michigan on August 23, 1936. Marion Ambler was born in Manitowoc, Wisconsin on March 1, 1912. Floyd continued to work for the Ann Arbor Carferry Service.

Floyd and Marion had two children while living in Manitowoc. Sonja Ann was born on June 28, 1938. Sandra Marion was born on August 25, 1939.

Floyd moved his family to Elberta, Michigan, in approximately 1940. Floyd and Marion had two more children while living in Elberta. Floyd Fred was born on January 18, 1941 and Theodore Ralph was born on February 26, 1942.

Floyd couldn't move up fast enough on the Ann Arbor Carferries so he moved his family to Ludington, Michigan in 1946. He began working for the Pere Marquette Carferry Service. Floyd was hired as a Watchman. For some reason, the company didn't know he had a Mate's license.

The carferry Floyd was working on was short a mate so they couldn't take the ship out.. Finally, the skipper realized Floyd had a Third Mate's license so they were able to take the boat out. The skipper told Floyd he could be the Third Mate from now on. That is how he got his first promotion on the Pere Marquette Line. Floyd worked up from Third Mate, to Second Mate, and then First Mate. Floyd then studied for his Captain's license.

In 1947, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway System took over the Pere Marquette line. At one time they had six boats in operation.

In the winter when it was cold and icy the boats would get stuck two to three days at a time. The ice was thick and they would have to back up and go ahead two miles at a time to try to break the ice.

In bad weather the boats might get halfway across Lake Michigan and have to turn around and lay in dock for a few days until the weather permitted them to sail again.

As a Captain, Floyd's nickname was Captain Snowball. His hair was very white.

Floyd's daughter, Sonja Ann died at the University of Michigan Hospital, Ann Arbor, Michigan, on September 25, 1950 from a brain tumor. She did not recover from surgery. Sonja was only twelve years old and had red hair just like her mother, Marion. This was a very difficult time for Floyd and Marion.

In 1952, the C&O launched two sister ships. The first was the S.S. Spartan and the second the S.S. Badger. Floyd was the captain on the S.S. Badger and sailed her from Wisconsin to Ludington on her maiden voyage. The ships were still known as carferries but the company preferred to have them known as "train ferries," or to those who traveled by car as "auto ferries."

Floyd told many stories which occurred during his years of sailing across Lake Michigan. One event involved a group of motorcycle riders. The group became very destructive and started throwing things overboard. Captain Thompson had one of the crew go down below and collect all the keys from the bikes. When the ship docked in Ludington, Floyd made them pay for the damages before he gave them their keys back.

Another event concerned two young boys who were adrift on a raft several miles out from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The ship received a radio message requesting assistance in

locating the boys. Shortly thereafter, the radar picked up a signal on the screen. The helmsman thought it was possibly a log but Floyd decided they better check it out. They changed course and sure enough it was the two young boys on their raft. A lifeboat was lowered and two happy but scared boys were brought aboard. Floyd received a very nice letter from one of the boys' mother thanking him for finding and saving her son.

Marion (Ambler) Thompson died on May 15, 1967 from a faulty heart valve. She is buried in Lakeview Cemetery in Ludington, Michigan.

Floyd retired on November 1, 1968 at the age of sixty. Floyd was a very respected Captain.

Floyd remained in Ludington for a few years and eventually moved to Clearwater, Florida. His remaining years were spent in Barberton, Ohio. He was 85 years old when he died of pancreatic cancer. He is buried in Lakeview Cemetery next to his wife Marion.



Sheet No. 1 of 2 R. R. B. No.

RECORD OF EMPLOYEE'S PRIOR SERVICE

Section 1.—IDENTIFICATION

Concerning prior service claimed under the Railroad Retirement Act by—

Thompson (Last name)	Floyd (First name)	Sequal (Middle name)
425 N. Ninth Street (Street and number)	Manitowoc (Post office)	Manitowoc (County)
		Wisconsin (State)

who states that he served with the employer or its predecessor as shown in section 2 herein.

Section 2.—EMPLOYEE'S CLAIMED SERVICE

The Ann Arbor Railroad Company
(Name of employer)

NAME OF EMPLOYEE IF NOT SAME AS ABOVE	Name on pay roll		DATE BEGAN (Month, year)	DATE ENDED (Month, year)	DEPARTMENT	LOCATION OR DIVISION
	Thompson (Last name)	Floyd (First name)				
			Oct. 1923	Feb. 1924	Marine	Lake
			Sept. 1924	Mar. 1925	Marine	Lake
			May 1925	Aug. 1925	Marine	Lake
			Oct. 1925	May 1926	Marine	Lake
			May 1926	June 1927	Marine	Lake
			June 1927	July 1928	Marine	Lake
			Feb. 1929	Apr. 1929	Marine	Lake
			June 1929		Marine	Lake

Section 3.—BIRTH DATA

Employer's records indicate the employee was born at—

South Manitou Island (City)	Leelanau (County, parish, or other civil division)	Michigan (State or country)
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on **May** **2nd** **1908**, which ~~has~~ (has not) been verified, and that such of birth was entered on records of the employer during the year of **1932**

Section 4.—STATUS AUGUST 29, 1935

Was the employee in compensated service on August 29, 1935? **No** (Yes or No) If the answer is "No" the employer with whom service is claimed on August 29, 1935, will complete and attach form ERR-8.

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