

Preface

Recounting conspiracies can be tricky business. When I set out to tell the tale of the ill-fated steamship *Cedarville*, I rediscovered the adage that there are two sides to every story. The survivors of the tragedy alleged corporate malfeasance and criminal misconduct. The owners denied all impropriety. The trial court, however, found the company's version to be lacking and sided with the claimants. Eventually, after much research, I too was forced to choose sides. In the end, I adopted the conclusions of the trial judge, as they appeared as clear to me as they had to the court nearly four decades earlier.

How then to paint the portrait of a conspiracy? Many Great Lakes histories have made objective mention of the *Cedarville* incident. But to date, none has explored its deeper themes of heroism and villainy; of betrayal and vindication; of courage and cowardice; of survival and death. Such a story deserves telling in the grandest of maritime traditions—as a historical narrative. As such, I have endeavored to reconstruct the actions and dialogue of crew members, corporate officers, family, friends, rescuers, and those aboard other vessels as accurately as possible from the available record.

Conversations and actions of surviving crewmen and their families are taken directly from the exhaustive personal accounts reflected in their depositions, correspondence, personal notes, hearing transcripts, diaries, logbooks, and press accounts. The remainder of their dialogue was provided by the participants interviewed. The more mundane bridge communications and radio calls (not typically recorded) are portrayed in a manner typical of ships navigating in the

various circumstances presented or otherwise prescribed by international law or treaty—particularly with regard to the foreign seamen involved. All judicial opinions and deposition testimony are quoted directly, except when necessary to condense or to correct occasional grammatical errors. Finally, questionable communications of company officials surmised by the trial judge to be in furtherance of the conspiracy are reconstructed in the spirit of the court's factual determinations.

In the face of uncertainty and apparent cover-up, this account makes every effort to shed light on that which can never be fully known. But it is the conflicting nature of the testimony that gave rise to the conspiracy and made this a rewarding and entertaining book to research and to write. That journey began when I chanced to stumble upon an obscure but fiery judgment in a dusty legal text. . . .