

THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

Hulett's days appear to be numbered

By [BRIAN TUCKER](#)

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I am amazed at how long we have been reading and hearing about the fate of the two remaining Hulett's, those massive machines that once revolutionized the process of unloading iron ore from the holds of steamships that plied the Great Lakes.



Brian Tucker

For the record, I was raised in the small Lake Erie port town of Conneaut. Often, our family would pile into the station wagon for a summer visit to the Dairy Queen on one end of town and then down to a bluff that overlooked the port to watch these mighty machines do their work. They were strung with lights and looked like massive praying mantises as they went in and out of the ships' cargo holds.

My father was a former Great Lakes seaman who quit when he realized he couldn't be away from his kids for such long stretches of time. His father was a ship's captain on the Great Lakes. My dad's brother quit after a debilitating injury he suffered after falling into a cargo hold.

In other words, ours was a Great Lakes shipping family.

For the record, part 2: I love history and once believed I would spend my adult life teaching high school. It's easy to find the history of the Great Lakes fascinating because of everything that shipping meant to the growth and prosperity of big cities such as Cleveland and Chicago and small towns such as Conneaut and Ashtabula.

For the record, part 3: I love those TV programs that explain how engineers designed and built incredible things like dams, suspension bridges and the buildings that dominate our city skylines.

Now, as Paul Harvey might say, for the rest of the story: If we can't raise the money to put these last two machines (or even one) somewhere for appropriate display, they ought to be scrapped. We don't leave blast furnaces standing, despite the importance of the steel industry to America's history. They're too big and, once removed from their context, probably wouldn't be very interesting.

Same thing with the Hulett's. It costs too much to keep storing them and too much to move and reassemble them for public display. We're talking millions of dollars. The only place where the Hulett's would make sense is in tandem with the Steamship William G. Mather Museum, but the group supporting that is like every other nonprofit organization

in town scraping for the ever-shrinking pool of philanthropic dollars.

The Hulett's have been taking up an acre of land that Oglebay Norton Co. wants to use for business purposes. It's 18 months past the original five-year deadline for finding some way to pay for their restoration and display. In the end, this may be just too big a project for a city trying to concentrate its resources on other challenges that affect far more of our people.