THE BURNING OF THE WING

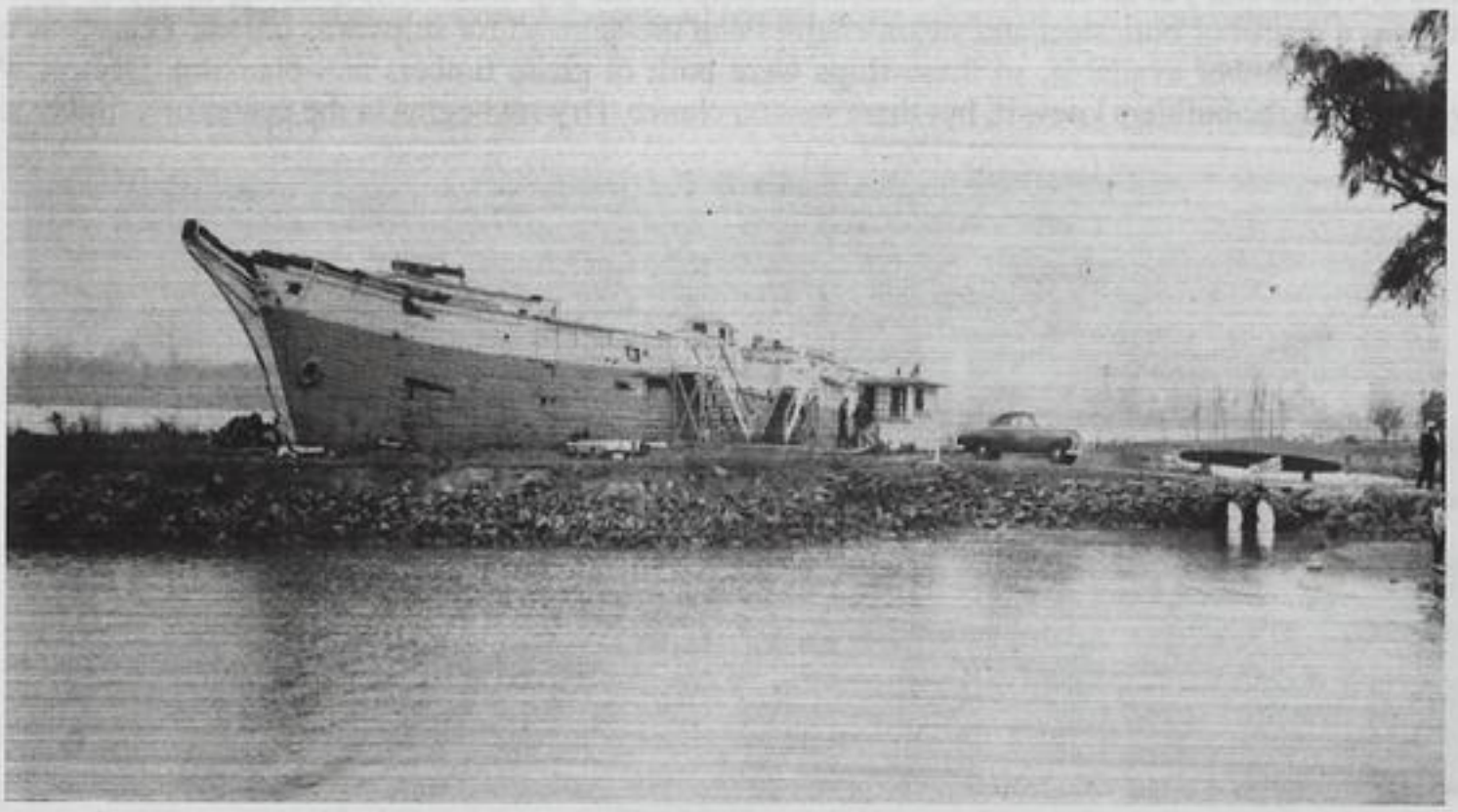
Reprint from
November 1956 Telescope

At 12:30 P.M. Saturday, November 3, tracer bullets were fired into cans of gasoline placed around on the superstructures of the schooner J. T. WING, and minutes later, the vessel was a mass of flame. So ended the last commercial sailing vessel to sail the Great Lakes.

We will not repeat here the life story of the vessel which came out in the February, 1956, issue of this magazine under the title, "The Saga of the J. T. Wing." The late Robert E. Palmer spared no pains in documenting that story and it is too bad that other writers have not taken the time to check their facts before touching pen to paper. Two errors have been repeated so often, by so many writers, we must here call them to the attention of our readers at this time lest they be considered true.

First: a careful search of U. S. Customs House records have brought to light nothing to indicate that the vessel was ever engaged in any unlawful activities. She was never used for smuggling liquor into the United States during prohibition times. It was perfectly legal for her to carry rum from the Maritime Provinces of Canada to the Bahamas, and this she may have done, though there is no record of it. Somehow, landsmen seem to have to associate ships and shipping men with crime, especially where a sailing vessel is concerned, yet, hardly a writer has touched upon the schooner, J. T. WING without stating that she was a rum runner.

Second: since the WING was used as a maritime museum, there has been a lot of adverse criticism of the whole project. One or two writers have stated that the Detroit Historical Commission was trying to palm off the J. T. WING as a Great Lakes schooner, when nothing could be more untrue. From the opening of the vessel as a museum, there has been a free leaflet distributed to visitors and giving the whole life history of her from building until the museum was opened.



Dossin Museum Collection

Bow view of the J.T. WING just before the torch was applied.