

*Upon the occasion of the M.E.B.A.'s sesquicentennial (150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary) to occur on February 23, 2025, National President Adam Vokac issued the following statement to the M.E.B.A. Union halls & offices.*



### **Honoring the Past, Powering the Future**

The heart of American maritime commerce beats strongest with the rhythm of the engines, and for 150 years, the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (M.E.B.A.) has been the unwavering voice of the men and women of the U.S. Merchant Marine who deliver the goods. On this, our 150th anniversary, we pay tribute to the generations of maritime professionals whose skill, solidarity and dedication have propelled our nation's trade across the globe in both peace and war. The M.E.B.A. stands as a testament to their collective power, a symbol of their unwavering commitment to a better future. It is a privilege to celebrate this milestone with you.

The M.E.B.A.'s story is one of resilience, courage, and a strong desire for a better future. In the 19th century, a mariner's life was a precarious gamble. So little value was placed on the lives of mariners of the day as shipowners prioritized profit over safety. Deplorable conditions and frequent boiler explosions made their vessels floating coffins, and a mariner's life could be extinguished in the blink of an eye.

It was on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1875, on the banks of the Great Lakes in Cleveland, Ohio, that the seeds of the National Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association were sown. The M.E.B.A. founders were representatives of three Lake associations, a river association and an ocean port. Those determined engineers, driven by a desire for safety, fair treatment, and a better future, laid the foundation for what would become the formidable M.E.B.A. we know today. Over the course of a few days, they hammered out a cohesive Constitution for a national organization that protected and enhanced their members' interests. It was "a bold venture." This was the first group of maritime workers to organize nationally in our country's great history. The odds against their success were great.

Lake engineer and former deck officer Garrett Douw was the primary force behind the formation of the M.E.B.A. As our Union's first President, he helped define the M.E.B.A.'s core mission, its organizational structure, and its early strategies. He would be proud that over these 150 years, the M.E.B.A., forged in the fires of adversity, has been tempered into an indomitable force within the maritime industry and the broader labor movement.

From its inception, the M.E.B.A. fought tirelessly for legislation that certified and licensed mariners, ensuring their competence and professionalism. These early victories also secured positions for American officers, both deck and engine, aboard U.S.-flagged vessels, displacing foreign seamen and

protecting American jobs. These foundational struggles, among many others, laid the groundwork for the worker protections and benefits we enjoy today.

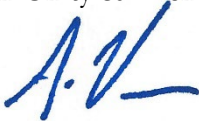
The M.E.B.A.'s commitment to service extends far beyond peacetime. Our members braved the treacherous North Atlantic and the perilous Murmansk Run during World War II, and have served in every U.S. conflict since 1875, from Korea and Vietnam to the Persian Gulf, Operations Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom. We've delivered vital food aid to starving populations in regions across the globe. When tragedy struck on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, M.E.B.A. members were there, ferrying thousands to safety in New York Harbor. Through multiple pandemics, from the War on Terror to the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and countless other disasters, M.E.B.A. has consistently answered the call, demonstrating the professionalism, pride, and patriotism that define the American mariner.

Under the guidance of visionary leaders like Jesse Calhoun, who skillfully guided the Union into the modern era, M.E.B.A. has consistently fought for improved wages, benefits, and working conditions, ensuring that maritime officers receive the compensation and respect they deserve for their vital contributions.

The M.E.B.A. has always been at the forefront of the struggle to improve the quality and strength of the American Merchant Marine, recognizing its crucial importance to the nation's economy and national security.

As the M.E.B.A. reaches this remarkable 150th anniversary, we honor the legacy of our founders and pledge to continue their fight for a better future for our membership and their families. We power forward with confidence, ready to meet the challenges of the future and continue the important work of improving wages, benefits, and working conditions for our members. Congratulations to the M.E.B.A. on 150 years of strength, service, and solidarity.

In Unity & Friendship,



Adam Vokac

National M.E.B.A. President