

Wisconsin's Underwater Heritage

Vol. 4 No. 1

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Projects to be focus of '94 Spring Conference

A discussion this summer's projects and an expert on wooden artifact preservation will highlight the 1994 WUAA Spring Conference on Saturday, April 29.

The meeting will be held at the Milwaukee Public Library in the second floor meeting room near the new facility which houses the Library's Great Lakes Marine Collection. The speaker will be Harry Alden of the U.S. Forest Laboratory.

Preserve program funding nears approval

As this newsletter goes to press, the state Senate had approved its version of Assembly Bill 91 which would provide funding for continued work on a preserve management program for Wisconsin.

According to John Jensen, an underwater archeologist with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the state Assembly is expected to vote on its concurrence with the Senate's changes to AB 91 some time in early March and Governor Thompson has agreed to sign it.

Thompson partially vetoed similar legislation last year that would have provided funding for a preserve program coordinator and DNR enforcement of shipwreck preservation laws. DNR enforcement is seen as the key to putting some teeth into the state's anti-looting effort.

Between Issues

Editor's Note:

Due to an illness in the family and some major changes in my business, WUAA newsletters have been somewhat sparse since last summer. However, life has returned to being a bowl of (Door County) cherries, and I'll be resuming a bi-monthly production schedule. Therefore, you're all back on the hook for submitting articles.

Bob O'Donnell

Great Lakes Shipwrecks in Review

Salvage and new discoveries continue to make news

By Dick Boyd

This will be an on-going column which will briefly review significant diving events with respect to the discovery, research, preservation, and archeology of sunken ships.

While it will concentrate on Great Lakes Wrecks, occasionally pertinent salt-water incidents will be covered. As this is the first of these articles, it will cover important occurrences over the past two years.

Out in Lake Ontario, an anxiously awaited report on the War of 1812 wrecks **Hamilton** and **Scourge** was finally approaching release as of spring 1992. It was believed that the report, overdue since 1990, would recommend further exploration on these historical gunboats.

A two-week underwater expedition in 1990, headed by noted oceanographer Bob Ballard, had produced considerable research on the vessels as well as a *National Geographic* article. The U.S. Navy, owner of the

wrecks, had deeded them over to the Canadian city of Hamilton on the nearby lake shore. Hamilton is expected to make them a special preserve, although talk about raising them for display has been widespread!

Down in Lake Erie, much ado has occurred over the wreck of the **Atlantic** a sidewheel steamer which sank in Canadian waters in 1852 while enroute from Buffalo to Detroit. The 265-foot side-wheeler was found in 1984 by Canadian commercial diver Mike Fletcher, a strong advocate of shipwreck preservation.

However, rampant rumors have circulated about gambling money and valuable immigrant artifacts aboard the wreck. Possibly spurred by these rumors, the Mar-Dive Corp., a California-based salvage firm, laid claim to the **Atlantic** in 1991.

Despite the act that Fletcher had claimed title to the wreck years before as did the Province of Ontario, Mar-Dive persisted in its

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Niagara site project was a highlight of fall conference

An underwater video of WUAA divers' participation in the State Historical Society's work on the steamer **Niagara** was shown at the 1993 Fall WUAA Conference.

Held at the Manitowoc Maritime Museum last October, the conference also included a discussion of the project by John Jensen, an underwater archeologist with the Historical Society, and participating WUAA divers. The 230-foot **Niagara** was built in 1845 and burned off Port Washington in 1856.

Eight volunteer divers assisted two state divers at various times during a three-week period last August. The volunteers were

involved in performing general site mapping and machinery surveys. The research team accumulated a total of 71 hours of bottom time on the wreck.

According to WUAA participants, the benefits of the project included having a headquarters area where divers could be briefed on the day's work and tangible evidence of previous days' work could be viewed. All agreed though that working on offshore sites like the **Niagara**, which is about two miles offshore, can be a challenge to one's stamina and endurance.

During the business session, the treasurer's

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Shipwrecks

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efforts to salvage and lift the ship. Ontario finally took a strong legal position establishing its jurisdiction over the wreck and even filed criminal charges against Mar-Dive.

This year, a grass-roots committee was established to promote the raising of the Atlantic with its eventual display at Dunkirk, New York. The estimated cost of the project is \$15 million with the salvage contractor being none other than Mar-Dive, who is proposing the use of saturation diving techniques to accomplish the task!

As a Wisconsin-related note, Mar-Dive once attempted to claim salvage rights to the steamer **Lakeland** sunk off Sturgeon Bay.

In 1992 near Drummond Island in Lake Huron, a group of divers located and began documenting the remains of the 3-masted schooner **John B. Merrill**. The vessel is scattered in depths from 30 to 100 feet. Down in the Mackinac Straits off Bois Blanc Island, a spectacular, accidental find was made by the motor vessel **Laurentian**.

This University of Michigan research ship

was demonstrating scanning sonar for students when an unexpected target appeared. This turned out to be the 3-masted schooner **Newell Eddy** which sank in 1893 and was now sitting upright, fully intact in about 180 feet of water! Subsequent diving in 1993 has found this is a truly outstanding wreck.

This November, noted Michigan shipwreck-hunter Dave Trotter announced the discovery of the schooner **Minnesota** in Lake Huron at a depth of 250 feet. This vessel was the largest wooden schooner ever constructed in Canada and was mysteriously lost in 1905 while in tow from the Soo to Harbor Beach, Michigan.

The **Minnesota** was in the middle of a 3-ship tow between the steamer **Westmount** and the barge **Melrose**. Speculation suggests that the hull was pulled open during stormy weather by the strain of the tow cables. The 4-masted, 250-foot schooner had been converted to a grain barge in the early 1900's.

In Door County, Wisconsin, more remains of what is believed to be the hull of the **Pierpont** are emerging on a beach near Sturgeon Bay. The vessel was first found in 1988 as wind and wave action slowly uncovered her.

Further north, another Apostle Island shipwreck, the **Sevona**, has been placed on both State and Federal Registers of Historic Places. This 300-foot steel steamer grounded and broke up on Sand Island Shoal during a storm in September, 1905.

The wreck site was surveyed by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin's underwater archeology program in July of 1990. The **Sevona** joins the **R.G. Stewart**, **Noque Bay**, **Ottawa**, and **Lucerne** on the Registers.

Several shipwreck events also occurred in Lake Superior. At Whitefish Point, a wooden barge and steam crane, the **Sadi Thompson**, was found in August of 1992.

The Great Lakes Shipwreck Society in co-

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Wisconsin's

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Contributions to *Wisconsin's Underwater Heritage* are welcomed. For details, contact Bob O'Donnell at 1-800-236-5739.

Upcoming Events and Conferences

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|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| March 26 | Shipwreck Video Program — Preceding the Inland Seas U/W Film Festival, the N.E. Wisconsin chapter of WUAA will have a program and speaker at the historic Whiting Boathouse in Neenah. For more info., call Bob O'Donnell at 1-800-236-5739 or 722-8465. |
| April 9 | WUAA Spring Conference — 9:30 a.m., Milwaukee Public Library. Plans will be finalized for this summer's training and research programs (see page 1 for speaker and program information). |
| April 16 | Wisconsin Marine Historical Society's Shipwreck Day — Milwaukee Public Library. Speakers and programs on Wisconsin and Great Lakes wrecks. For more information, call 1-414-286-3074. |
| May | WUAA Basic Underwater Archeology Program — plans are being developed for a weekend program that would be offered at a dive resort in Wisconsin and may be PADI-certified. More information in next newsletter and at April 9 meeting. |
| May-June | Fieldwork Season Begins — Tentative plans call for work on an inland site and possibly a deep-dive project on Lake Michigan. More information will be available at April 9 meeting and future newsletters. |
| July-August | WUAA Field Training Program on Remote Sensing Techniques — Dick Boyd has again offered to lead an on-water training program in Door County. More details will be available in upcoming newsletters. |
| August | Fieldwork Opportunity — The State Historical Society is tentatively planning to continue its survey of the Niagara wreck near Port Washington this summer. Volunteer divers will be needed. More information will be available at April 9 meeting and future newsletters. |
| Sept. 8-10 | Association for Great Lakes Maritime History — annual meeting at Traverse City, Mich. We will be organizing a group from WUAA to attend the conference. More details in upcoming newsletters. For more information on AGLMH, contact: David Glick, P.O. Box 25, Lakeside, OH 43440. |

More wrecks

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operation with Dave Trotter's group, found the vessels in diveable waters during sonar scanning operations.

The crane barge was lost in the 1950's during the construction of the Refuge Harbor at the Point. On another matter, the Shipwreck Society is attempting to consolidate its land holding at the Whitefish Point museum. The Coast Guard abandoned that property in 1970 and then leased it to the Society which now seeks full ownership.

Further down the Lake in 1992, the **Marquette County Shipwreck Preserve** officially opened; it includes the shore waters of Marquette County including the Huron Islands. The first act of the Preserve was the placement of a buoy on the **D. Leuty**.

The 178-foot wooden steamer grounded in 1911 and sank in 30 feet of water on rocks just north of Marquette. This is actually the fourth wreck in the Preserve to be marked; four others remain unbuoyed.

At the western end of the Lake in October 1992, the finding of the scow-barge **Mayflower** was announced by Duluth divers Gary Buchanan, Eric Jacisin, and Rick Stauber. The vessel, loaded with slabs of sandstone, had capsized in 1911 off the

Lester River while in tow of the **Cora A. Sheldon**.

An ownership tiff over the wreck quickly developed between Buchanan's team and the State of Minnesota. The divers desired possession for exclusive charter purposes because the wreck's in good shape in only 90 feet of water.

Further up the North Shore at Thomasville, the Minnesota Historical Society discovered the wreckage of the freighter **George Spencer** near the remains of the barge **Amboy**. The Spencer was towing the Amboy when she ran ashore in the famous November storm of 1905.

Although the remains of the Amboy had been known for some time, it was believed the the Spencer had been completely salvaged.. not so!

FEDERAL ENFORCEMENT NEWS

In the realm of federal underwater archaeological protection, the U.S. Government has successfully prosecuted a number of individual who pirated shipwrecks.

In Virginia, two watermen and two private collectors were found guilty of interstate trafficking in materials removed from the Civil War wrecks **Cumberland** and **Florida**, both Navy property, sunk in the James River.

The thieves had used clam tongs and suc-

tion dredges to remove various artifacts which they advertised for sale in a national collectors magazine. The felony conviction resulted in the largest monetary-equipment forfeiture in a shipwreck case to date!

With respect to this same case, a federal Appeals Court upheld the conviction of another artifact collector for violating the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). This act protects archaeological deposits on Federal and Indian lands

However, the Court interpreted that a catch-all provision in law extends its coverage to private or state lands when interstate trafficking in artifacts is involved. It was applied in the Virginia case just discussed.

This fall, a notable salt-water shipwreck discovery was made public by archaeologists working in **Pensacola Harbor**, Fla. The vessel is believed to be part of a 13-ship fleet belonging to **Tristan de Luna** who landed there in the 16th century.

In 1559, this fleet entered the harbor to evaluate the region for settlement, but a hurricane destroyed seven of the vessels. The lower hull and contents of the discovered wreck appear to be well preserved and its structure is consistent with that of 16th century Spanish ships.

If it is indeed a member of that flotilla, it could be the oldest wreck ever found in the Americas!

WUAA Membership Application



As a private, non-profit organization, the Wisconsin Underwater Archeological Association presents an opportunity for both individuals and organizations to participate in and contribute to state efforts in u/w archeological research and preservation. Dues are \$15 per year.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone: Day _____ Evenings _____

We would like your input on the types of goals the association should have:

- ☐ Documentation of state underwater archeological sites
- ☐ Training individuals in u/w archeological methods
- ☐ Exchange of information between members
- ☐ Preservation of state underwater archeological sites
- ☐ Public education on underwater heritage
- ☐ Creation of state underwater preserves
- ☐ Others: _____

I would like to be involved in the following activities:

- ☐ Archival research
- ☐ Training in archeological methods
- ☐ On-site work - shoreside
- ☐ On-site work - underwater
- ☐ Association Committees:
 - ☐ Newsletter ☐ Organization
 - ☐ Training ☐ Membership
 - ☐ Other: _____

Make \$15 check payable to "WUAA" and mail with this form to:

Wis. Underwater Archeological Association - P.O. Box 6081 - Madison, WI 53715

Fall meeting

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report noted that the Association currently has a balance of \$1,524 in its checking account. During the election of officers, Tom Villand was re-elected president and Dave Neudek, secretary-treasurer.

Bob O'Donnell was elected vice president and agreed to continue publishing the Association's newsletter. Two directors, Dick Boyd and Bob Korth, were re-elected to another term; and two new directors, Craig Fink and Mike Tock, were elected by the membership.

In reviewing pending legislation of interest to the WUAA, John Jensen of the State Historical Society noted that three bills have been introduced in the State Legislature that would restore funding for DNR enforcement of the shipwreck preservation law passed last year and a preserve coordinator position.

The meeting concluded, after one of the longest lunches in the Association's history, with a tour of the Manitowoc Maritime Museum. The next meeting will be the Spring Conference on April 9, 1994 at the Milwaukee Public Library.

WUAA 1994 Spring Conference

When: Saturday, April 9, 1994
9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Where: Milwaukee Public Library
814 W. Wisconsin Ave.

During the business portion of the meeting, we will be working on plans for this summer's fieldwork projects and training programs (see page 2 for details). There will also be a speaker and an opportunity to tour the Library's new facility for its Great Lakes Marine Collection.

**For more information, call
Tom Villand at 608-221-1996 or
Bob O'Donnell at 1-800-236-5739**

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For those interested in studying and
preserving Wisconsin's underwater historical sites