

Wisconsin's UNDERWATER HERITAGE

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LaSalle In Wisconsin by Brendon Baillod

To readers of this publication, the French explorer, Robert Cavalier Sieur de LaSalle needs no introduction. His status as the first European to descend the Mississippi and his legendary lost ship, *Griffon*, have made him the subject of much conjecture and rumor in the maritime archeology community. Unfortunately, much of the important and interesting local history concerning LaSalle and his time in Wisconsin has been over-

LaSalle's Griffin passing the flats in the River St. Clair – George Cuthbertson



Robert LaSalle – Francis Parkman

shadowed by the search for his missing ship. Beginning with the first widely published claims of discovery in the 1930s, the *Griffon* in particular, and LaSalle in general, became mythical figures. So much conjectural interpretation of LaSalle's time on the Lakes was published that the facts and original source material became lost amidst the chaff. By the 1960s, *Griffon* discovery claims were pouring in from all five Great Lakes and much of the authentic history concerning LaSalle had been buried in layers of conjecture and speculation.

In an effort to learn more about LaSalle's time in Wisconsin, the author performed a bibliographic search for the original, primary sources concerning the *Griffon*. This proved difficult, given the proliferation of modern accounts, many with blatant and intentional misrepresentations. At length, I was able to discover that many of the people who actually sailed on the *Griffon* had left detailed written accounts of



their time on the Lakes and indeed, in Wisconsin. Modern historians are often familiar with the works of LaSalle's Recollect Friar, Father Louis Hennepin, because his latter account was the only one originally published in English. His work consequently, became the only frequently cited reference for LaSalle's time on the Lakes. Few historians however, are aware of the many other first person accounts which survive, and which throw much additional light on events of the time.

The first and most detailed primary account of the LaSalle expedition was written by LaSalle himself on September 29, 1680, while encamped near present-day St. Ignace. He had returned from his first abortive attempt to reach the Mississippi and was regrouping his men for a second attempt. Here he wrote a very detailed document known as the "Letter to an Associate." In this long document, LaSalle attempt to explain to a creditor how and why the first attempt failed and what became of his ship, the *Griffon*. The letter was eventually sent to King Louis XIV and was preserved by the Ministry of Marine & Colonies in Paris, where it still

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Association News

Business Meeting

The annual business meeting of the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association was held in Milwaukee on Saturday, October 16, 2010. President Brendon Baillod opened the meeting with an overview of the accomplishments for the year. These included work on the Baileys harbor and *Norland* projects, the publication of the book *Fathoms Deep But Not Forgotten: Wisconsin's Lost Ships, Vol. 1*, by Brendon and *A Pirate Roams Lake Michigan: The Dan Seavey Story*, by Dick Boyd.

WUAA Treasurer Lee Hintz reported the association had income of \$9368 during the last year and expenses of \$2608. The balance in the association's account in October was \$10,039. Lee is working on revising the web site, setting up items for sale via Pay-Pal and on obtaining 501-3C non-profit status for WUAA.

There was a discussion of NAS certification for the WUAA underwater survey training program. Pros and cons were presented and a vote was made to pursue certification.

Annual Conference

The Sixth Annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology and Maritime History Conference was held on Saturday, Oct. 16, 2010 at Discovery World in Milwaukee. Following is a brief list of the speakers and the topics presented.

Tami Thomsen gave an update on the Wisconsin Historical Society Maritime Archeology Program Fieldwork. Several shipwreck sites were added to the historic register this year. Projects worked on this year included the *Walter B. Allen* near Sheboygan, the *Island City* off Port Washington and a field school in Jacksonport.

Kimm Stabelfeldt described the work done by WUAA and GLSRF on the *Fireboat 23* and the *Norland*. The *Fireboat* report is being prepared and the survey continues on the *Norland*.

Russ Leitz discussed the Baileys Harbor and Clay Banks projects and the *Meteor* restoration work project.

Brendon Baillod talked about the recently discovered *L.R. Doty* wreck.



Mike Schroyer, participant in the August project at Baileys Harbor.

Kevin Cullen presented Discovery Worlds' Eyes in the Deep program, demonstrating the use of ROV technology on shipwrecks.

C. Patrick Labadie described the Evolution of Great Lakes Vessel Design.

Ellen Brody talked about the proposed Lake Michigan NOAA National Marine Sanctuary.

Wisconsin's Underwater Heritage

is published quarterly by the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association, a nonprofit association of individuals and organizations interested in studying and preserving the underwater cultural resources and historical sites of Wisconsin.

In addition to publishing this newsletter, the Association also holds

semiannual meetings and provides support to members' research and publication projects. Annual membership dues are \$20. For membership information write to the postal or email address below.

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Baileys Harbor 2010

On June 5 and 6, 2010 eight individuals worked on two side pieces, sites BH 112 and BH 113. Weather did not allow for the two pieces to be completed. On August 28 and 29 eight other individuals continued to work on sites BH 112 and BH 113. They also worked on side pieces, BH 109 and BH 110. Site 112 was completed while the other three sites each need to have one set of adjoining drawings checked and they will be complete.

The divers and WUAA would like to thank the Green Bay dive shops that provided air fills for the project, Aqua Center and Green Bay Scuba.

On June 4 and 5, 2011 we will be working on two more side pieces plus two pieces with keelsons and frames. The latter two pieces will be snorkeling projects while the first two are in about 15 feet of water. Anyone interested in participating should contact either Russel Leitz at rleitz@mwwb.net or Steve Wagner at swagner1922@sbcglobal.net



Participants in the August project at Baileys Harbor. L to R: Steve Wagner, Kevin Klein, Mike Brutlag, Russel Leitz, Jon McKenzie, Ruth Magnus, Bud Flood

Meteor Project 2011

The dates for next year's Meteor project dates are Saturday April 30 and Sunday May 1. Anyone interested in participating in the project can email Phil at pkerber@glsp.org.

Survey Workshop 2011

The Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association Workshop on Documentation and Survey Methods for Shipwreck Sites will be held on Saturday, March 26, 2011, from 9:30 am-12:00 noon. The workshop will be held at the Wyndham Milwaukee Convention Center, during the Ghost Ships Festival.

This workshop will provide a basic understanding of how an underwater site is surveyed, mapped and interpreted using manual methods. The class will cover survey objectives and the use of trilateration, offsets and sketches to generate preliminary maps of underwater sites. The workshop will include hands-on practice, using the tools and techniques covered in the discussion, on a nearly life-size mock-up of a Great Lakes schooner. A certificate of attendance or participation is included.

The fee for the workshop is \$49 per person. For further information or to register for the workshop go to the WUAA website: www.wuaa.org.

Participants in the June project at Baileys Harbor. Standing L to R: Garret Cunningham, Christine Danielson, Russel Leitz, Bob Lijewski. Seated L to R: Steve Wagner, Jason Suleski, John Touscany, Jeremy Saunders



LaSalle In Wisconsin

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exists. It was transcribed and published in French in 1861 by Pierre Margry, the curator of the Ministry and the leading scholar on LaSalle.

Unfortunately, this most primary and detailed account was never translated to English and for this reason has largely escaped the attention of modern American historians.

The second primary account of the LaSalle expedition was written by Father Zenobe Membre, one of three Recollect Friars that LaSalle brought along specifically to record the journey. Father Membre was commissioned by LaSalle to write an official account upon LaSalle's return to France in 1682. Membre's account, originally credited to LaSalle, is now known as the "Official Narrative," and was published in English by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in 1902. It provides considerable detail of day to day events, but is largely drawn from the Letter to an Associate," sharing some of the text verbatim.

LaSalle and Louis XIV – Francis Parkman



LaSalle's Second Expedition – Brendon Baillod

The third primary account of the LaSalle expedition was written by Father Louis Hennepin in 1683 upon his return to France. Published in book form as *La Louisiane*, the account is quite detailed. It too, makes use of the earlier LaSalle accounts, frequently repeating them verbatim. However, it also includes many observations that were clearly made by Hennepin himself. Because *La Louisiane* was not published in English until the 1890s, it is seldom consulted, even though it is more detailed and considered more authentic than Hennepin's later account.

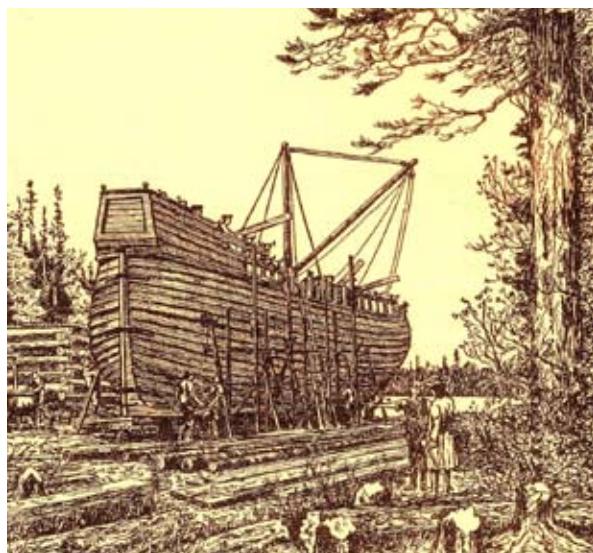
The fourth primary account of the LaSalle expedition was written by LaSalle's lieutenant, Henri de Tonti in 1684. It is a short account and does not deal with many of the events in Wisconsin, as Tonti was not present for them, having traveled down Lake Michigan by the opposite shore. However, the account is interesting in that it confirms many dates and events and contains some information not elsewhere given. It was published in French by Pierre Margry in his 1861 release of original LaSalle documents.

The fifth primary account of the LaSalle expedition was written by

the third Recollect, Father Gabriel Ribourde. Nearly 70 years of age when he set out, Father Ribourde was the leader of the Recollects on the mission, although Hennepin elevated himself to that role in later accounts. His detailed diary was believed lost when he was murdered in present-day Indiana on September 1, 1680 by Kickapoo Indians on the Illinois River. However, the diary later surfaced in the hands of a Jesuit Missionary and was reportedly sent back to France. Unfortunately, Pierre Margry, during his extensive search for original LaSalle documents was unable to locate it, although it is believed still to exist in some Jesuit repository in Europe.

Louis Hennepin - Francis Parkman





The Griffin on the stocks – George Cuthbertson

The sixth primary account of the expedition was the original journal of Father Zenobe Membre. Following Father Membre's murder in Texas during LaSalle's ill-fated Texas expedition, the journal was sent to Father Membre's cousin, Felicien LeClerq, a missionary at Gaspe, who published excerpts of it in an obscure 1691 history titled "The First Establishment of Faith in New France." This book was translated and published in English in 1888 but contains only a rather general account of expedition events and adheres closely to the Official Narrative.

The seventh known primary account is a short narrative written by Henri de Tonti in 1693. Tonti stayed in New France and explored from the Great Lakes to Louisiana, accompanying another expedition to Lake Michigan in 1699 and

Frontenac wrecked on Lake Ontario – Roy Fleming



The building of the Griffon – Francis Parkman

eventually taking up with D'Iberville in the founding of New Orleans. This last account of Tonti is less detailed than the first and adds little to the narrative. It was published by Pierre Margry in his 1861 master work.

The eighth and final known primary account is the second book by Louis Hennepin. Titled "A New Discovery...", the account was published in 1698, many years after the original events. Hennepin's narrative in this, the most cited account, differs substantially from that in his earlier account and adds significant embellishments. It is from this account that Hennepin's reputation for misrepresentation stems. In it, he takes credit for a number of important feats, well known to have been achieved by LaSalle. Concerning LaSalle's time on the Lakes, however, the account is quite accurate, although less detailed than that in La Louisiane. Again, this work relies heavily on the Official Narrative,

reproducing its text in a number of places.

In order to reconstruct the expedition's time in Wisconsin, the author drew

together all eight of the known primary sources and created a timeline concordance, adding chronological details from each of the documents. The result is an extremely detailed and interesting chronology of the LaSalle expedition as it passed through the area that would become Wisconsin. In the interest of brevity, I included only the time period of the first attempt to reach the Mississippi, as it is the most interesting and the best detailed by the reporters. As such, the chronology covers events from the departure of the *Griffon* from present-day Buffalo Creek to the arrival of the expedition at Fort Miami at present-day St. Joseph, Michigan.

In constructing the chronology, I attempted to specifically identify places of encampment and significant events not otherwise chronicled by other authors. I also tried to avoid speculative interpretation of the original accounts with respect to modern locations and land features. The account begins with the effort to build the *Griffon* and includes every significant detail noted by any of the known primary accounts:

1679, January 22 – Hennepin et. al. erect the stocks for the *Griffon* at Cayuga Creek.

1679, January 26 – The keel of the *Griffon* is laid. Hennepin and LaSalle are present and LaSalle drives the first bolt.

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LaSalle In Wisconsin

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1679, February 1 – LaSalle sets out for Fort Conty, then sets out overland for Fort Frontenac, a distance of 80 leagues with only a sled dog and some roast Indian corn to aid him.

1679, March – April – The *Griffon* is constructed. Indians threaten to burn her on the stocks and annoy and threaten the shipwright.

1679, April 30 – LaSalle and Tonti launch a “brigantine” on Lake Ontario at Fort Frontenac for the purpose of salvaging materials from the brigantine *Frontenac*. They arrive and become ice bound.

1679, May – The *Griffon*’s hull is launched and the men begin to sleep on board. LaSalle’s creditors seize his supplies at Montreal and Quebec.

1679, May 20 – Tonti receives orders from Major de La Forest at Fort Frontenac that LaSalle wishes him to proceed to the head of Lake Erie in advance of the *Griffon*.

1679, June 11 – Tonti sends LaMotte, Hennepin and others back to Fort Niagara in the brigantine. A distance he reports as 60 leagues from the *Frontenac* wrecksite.

1679, July 16-17 – The brigant-

tine sails up the Niagara near the falls with *Griffon*’s rigging, anchors and arms salvaged from *Frontenac* wreck.... Hennepin and others portage it around the falls to the waiting *Griffon*.

1679, July – The *Griffon* is finished and lies in Cuyuga Creek, windbound.

1679, July 22 – Tonti is sent to Detroit with an advance party of five men.

1679, late July – Hennepin succeeds in getting the *Griffon* up the Niagara River and anchors her off Squaw Island.

1679, early August – LaSalle arrives at Fort Niagara and finds the *Griffon* complete.

1679, August 7 – The *Griffon* sets sail across Lake Erie for present-day Detroit with 30 men, including three Recollects and 7 small cast cannons.

1679, August 8 – *Griffon* travels 20 leagues the first night. Pilot nearly wrecks *Griffon* on Long Point in fog.

1679, August 9 – *Griffon* travels 45 leagues along Lake Erie north shore, almost always in sight of land, passes the Lake Erie Islands.

1679, August 10 – Tonti reaches Detroit and awaits the *Griffon*.

1679, August 10 – *Griffon* reaches the other end of Lake Erie at mouth of St. Clair River. Detained there several days by headwinds.



Hennepin map – Brendon Baillod

1679, August 23 – *Griffon* reaches Lake Huron after towing and poling her up the River. *Griffon* travels the west coast of Lake Huron and passes Saginaw Bay in a violent storm.

1679, August 24 – Beccalmed off Thunder Bay Island near present-day Alpena.

1679, August 25 – Reaches Presque-Isle, bears off shore to the north but encounters a violent gale.

1679, August 26 – Strikes sails and drifts before the gale.

1679, August 27 – Arrives at Michilimackinac, anchors at present-day East Moran Bay, St. Ignace.

1679, August 28 – LaSalle visits the fort of the Hurons at Michilimackinac.

1679, August 29 – Tonti sets out for Sault Ste Marie to reclaim some of LaSalle’s deserters.

1679, September 12 – *Griffon* departs for Green Bay (some sources say September 2, but most primary source says 12.)

1679, September 14 or 15 – *Griffon* arrives at Washington or Rock Island. Date uncertain, no sources give the exact date. Because dates are given for every other leg of the journey in great detail, it is very likely that the trip was made in only

Loading furs on the Griffin at Washington Island – Roy Fleming



two days. Earlier, the *Griffon* had made 45 leagues on Lake Erie in 24 hours.

1679, September 17 – Tonti returns to St. Ignace with LaSalle's deserters and awaits the *Griffon*.

1679, September 18 – *Griffon* sets sail from Door Peninsula bound for St. Ignace with five men on board carrying supplies for building another ship, which they were to leave at St. Ignace before going to LaSalle's storehouse at Fort Conty to deposit the furs.

1679, September 19 – LaSalle and Hennepin set out from Door Peninsula for Chicago, down the Wisconsin Shore, with 14 persons in four canoes.

1679, September 19 – Hennepin relates a storm hitting while they paddled between Door Islands and mainland. They cross to the mainland during the dark of night amidst the storm.

1679, September 20 – LaSalle's canoe party shelter in a sandy bay on the east coast of Door Peninsula for 5 days to wait out the storm (thought by some to be Rowleys Bay or Sand Bay).

1679, September 20 – *Griffon* is reported sheltering in a bay at the north end of Lake Michigan by local Indians.

1679, September 25 – LaSalle's party continues south down the Wisconsin shore, encounters more rough weather, lays up for two days on a "bare rock." (This site

LaSalle and company proceeding up Lake Michigan – Roy Fleming



is thought to lie to the north of Sturgeon Bay in Door County).

1679, September 28 – LaSalle's party continues on into the night until a whirlwind forces them to land "on a rocky point covered with bushes." (This is believed to have been Sheboygan's North Point.)

1679, October 1 – LaSalle's party continues and makes 10 or 12 leagues, comes upon a Pottawottomie village amid high bluffs and lands three leagues beyond it to avoid enthusiastic natives who swarmed around them. (This village is thought to have been at the present-day site of Port Washington.)

1679, October 2 – LaSalle's party sets out and sails four days along high bluffs with big waves. (The party made slow progress along the bluffs south of the Port Washington area.)

1679, October 5 – Tonti sets out for the St. Joseph River down east shore of Lake Michigan with his men.

1679, October 6 – LaSalle's party lands at the base of the bluffs and pulls the canoes up to the top for the night (these bluffs are thought to be in the area to the south of Port Washington).

1679, October 16 – LaSalle's party stops and begins to have good luck hunting game after nearly starving. (As soon as the bluffs receded, the hunting improved and the party came upon present-day

Milwaukee, where they rested.)

1679, October 28 – LaSalle's party reaches the southern end of Lake Michigan.

1679, October 30 – LaSalle has a minor altercation with an encampment of Outagamie Indians

1679, November 1 – LaSalle's party arrives at the mouth of the St. Joseph River where they were to meet up with Tonti's party of 20 men that had been dispatched from Michilimackinac down the east shore of the Lake. Tonti meets up with a canoe carrying men LaSalle had sent back to Michilimackinac for news of the *Griffon*. He learns that it did not arrive at Michilimackinac.

1679, November 12 – Tonti's party arrives at St. Joseph River and tells LaSalle the alarming news that the *Griffon* had not arrived at Michilimackinac.

1679, November – LaSalle builds Fort Miami at the mouth of the St. Joseph River and sounds the sandbar at the river mouth. He marks the boundaries of the river channel with buoys for the *Griffon's* arrival.

From this point, the party builds Fort Miami and spends the winter before embarking on the first abortive attempt to descend the Mississippi. During the attempt, Hennepin is captured by the Sioux and taken into Minnesota where he is eventually rescued by Daniel Greysolon Sieur Du Luth. Tonti is nearly killed by Indians while encamped at Fort Crevecoeur (present-day Peoria, Illinois), and LaSalle is forced to walk with two of his men, all the way from the site of present-day Peoria to the site of present-day Detroit, a trip that nearly kills them from fatigue, illness and exposure.

Eventually, the men regroup at Michilimackinac in September of 1680 to begin their second, successful attempt to descend the Mississippi. They elect, this time, to pass down the Michigan shore and do not record any further visits to Wisconsin in great detail. ■

**Wisconsin Underwater
Archeological Association
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*For those interested in the study and preservation of
Wisconsin's underwater history and cultural resources.*

Coming Events

Feb. 18–20, 2011	Our World Underwater , in Rosemont, IL. For information check their web site at www.ourworldunderwater.com .
Feb. 26, 2011	Upper Midwest Scuba Adventure And Travel Show , in Minneapolis, MN. Sponsored by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Preservation Society. For information check their web site at www.glsps.clubexpress.com .
Mar. 25–26, 2011	Ghost Ships Festival , in Milwaukee. Sponsored by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Research Foundation. For information check their web site at www.ghost-ships.org .
Mar. 26, 2011	WUAA Shipwreck Site Survey Workshop , in Milwaukee. For further information or to register for the workshop go to the association website at www.wuaa.org .