

# Wisconsin's UNDERWATER HERITAGE

Vol. 15 No. 3

*A publication of the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association*

September 2005

## Green Bay's Newest Shipwreck: The *May Queen*

by Dr. Richard Boyd

The enduring maritime history and geography of Door County are two salient features which have made it a favorite tourist destination. During the 1960's, the area became an icon for Great Lakes shipwreck diving. Historical research over many decades has indicated that Door County has witnessed hundreds of vessel mishaps, submerged remnants of which are strewn along the County's bottom lands, giving silent testimony to those unfortunate events. Some of these shipwrecks have become rather famous: The *Erie L. Hackley*, resting in 115 feet of water off Green Island, was Green Bay's worst disaster, taking the lives of 11 prominent citizens in 1903. The *Lakeland*, a 300-foot steel freighter, sank in 200 feet of water seven miles off Sturgeon Bay while carrying a load of 1924 automobiles. The *Frank O'Connor*, which burned and sank off North Bay in 1919, was one of the largest wooden freighters (301 feet) ever built on the lakes. The *Alvin Clark*, also known as the Mystery Ship from 19 Fathoms, was a 110-foot schooner of Civil War vintage that was raised in 1969 by amateur divers with the noble intention of turning it into a museum ship.

With so many noteworthy boats to remember, one could easily overlook the small, ubiquitous trading vessels that contributed greatly to the economic development of the Green Bay region. These itinerant wooden craft, often less than 100

feet in size, plied local waters in significant numbers, carrying common cargoes like lumber, lime, grain and fish. One such ship, the *May Queen*, a little coasting schooner that sank over a century ago, was just located last year by sport divers. Its story is a great example of the life, times and demise of a modest workaday lake vessel. It also provides some insight on the mercantile aspects of the fishing industry in the late nineteenth century.

The *May Queen* was a small, 2-masted schooner built in 1875 for Captain Ezra B. Graham of Fish Creek. She was approximately 39 feet in length, 12 feet in width, with a 5-foot hold depth, a center board and a weight of 13 tons. The vessel was built by Philbrook Brothers Shipyard in Menekaunee, Wisconsin, a harbor suburb of Marinette-Menominee. Menekaunee Harbor, an inlet off the Menominee River, was once a thriving basin for commercial fishing, shipbuilding and local industry. Philbrook's Shipyard was located on a large island in the river. Today, the area boasts a large mill and many neighborhood businesses, but the harbor and fishery are mere apparitions of former times (see photograph on page 4).

Captain Graham's family operated a sawmill in Fish Creek, but they also had an interesting marine business. Over the years, they owned several schooners which were outfitted as "floating stores." These

vessels were provisioned with assorted hardware, clothing and utensils which were displayed on shelves and casings built into the ship's hull. These craft would move from town to town, staying in port a few days in each place to accommodate local customers. When supplies ran out, new inventory was procured in major cities like Marinette and Green Bay. The *May Queen* was intended for this special "coasting trade" and for transporting local cargoes.

Shortly after her launching in June 1875, the Door County Advocate remarked of the *May Queen*, "When fully rigged, [she] will be a beauty!" The vessel was officially registered in Milwaukee in August 1875. Her first three years of service on the Bay were essentially uneventful, reportedly spent carrying assorted cargoes about the region. Her only known mishap was during the first year of operation when she dragged anchor and smashed into a pier, suffering minor hull damage. A newspaper error reported her lost in 1877, but the vessel involved was the *Queen City*, not the *May Queen*.

In May 1878, Captain Graham sold the *May Queen* to John Scott of Bailey's Harbor, who was essentially a "maritime junk dealer." He used the craft to transport cargoes like

*continued on page 4*



Wisconsin  
Underwater  
Archeology  
Association

## Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Conference

The First Annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Conference will be held on Saturday, October 22, 2005 at the Comfort Suites Milwaukee Airport. This annual event will benefit the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association and will include presentations on both Great Lakes and inland Underwater Archeology topics. This year's program will feature presentations as well as a panel discussion and social gathering. Presenters to date include:

C. Patrick Labadie of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. His topic will be - More Ways Than One to Skin a Cat: Current Approaches to Documenting Great Lakes Shipwrecks.

Dr. Robert Birmingham, former Wisconsin State Archeologist will talk about fur trade era archeological sites in the Lake Superior region.

Keith Meverden, the current Wisconsin Underwater Archeologist will talk about scow schooners.

A Panel Discussion will be held on Techniques for the Identification of 19th Century Great Lakes Shipwreck Remains. Social hour(s) will follow.

Seating will be limited to 130 and reservations must be made through the WUAA website ([www.wuaa.org](http://www.wuaa.org)). More info will follow on the WUAA website. Admission will be \$15 per person. Please get your reservations in early. Email [brendon@baillod.com](mailto:brendon@baillod.com) for more information.

Volunteers are needed to work the registration tables. Please contact Brendon Baillod at [brendon@baillod.com](mailto:brendon@baillod.com) if you are able to help out.

### Conference Reservations

Due to a limited space in the meeting room, we are asking attendees to fill out a reservation forms on the WUAA website. You can make your reservations quickly and then pay when you arrive at the conference. Check it out at the meetings/events page at [www.wuaa.org](http://www.wuaa.org).

### Wisconsin's Underwater Heritage

**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 \$15. For membership information write to the postal or email address below.

**Mail correspondence to:**

WUAA  
PO Box 6081  
Madison, WI 53716

**email:**

[wuaa@mailbag.com](mailto:wuaa@mailbag.com)

**website:**

[www.wuaa.org](http://www.wuaa.org)

**President:**

Russel Leitz  
Waupaca

**Vice-President:**

Hank Whipple  
Madison

**Treasurer:**

Steve Wagner  
Appleton

**Secretary & Newsletter Editor:**

Danny Aerts  
Middleton

**Directors:**

Richard Boyd  
Delafield

Robert Korth  
Gresham

Janet Defnet  
Mukwonago

**Website Manager:**

Colin Zylka  
Waukesha

## WUAA Action Planning Meeting

An Action Planning meeting was held on August 6, 2005 at the State Historical Society in Madison. Seven members were in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was to prepare for the Underwater Archeology Conference in October. The following items were discussed.

1. Brendon and Colin will post updated conference information on the WUAA website and will put up an online registration form that will send registration data to Steve Wagner.
2. All registrations will be made through the wuaa website to record the number of reservations. Reservations will be limited to 120.
3. Admission will be \$15 if you reserve or \$20 if you don't (and seats are still available).
4. Danny, Betsy and Brendon will work on a flyer with WUAA logo, program agenda, titles, etc, that will include large print URL for online registration form.
5. 300 - 500 flyers will be mailed to area dive shops and clubs, and possibly the mailing lists of AGLMH, GLSRF and Global.
6. Flyers will be tri-folded, not placed in envelopes; Janet will look into a mailing service. Flyers should go out before end of August.
7. Brendon will put out generic announcement to electronic media and publications.
8. Dick and Greg will visit the Hall at Comfort Suites and get dimensions for planning.
9. Brendon will check on venues for lunch, dinner and after event social (possibly hold social in hall with hotel concession).
10. WUAA will have a table to sell t-shirts and other items. Two or three other tables for small displays will be at back of hall. Three volunteers will be needed.
11. Two tables for reservations will be outside the front door six volunteers will be needed.
12. Volunteers will receive FREE admission.
13. GLSRF has offered the use of their A/V equipment.
14. We will NOT have a raffle.

Tentative agenda is as follows:

9:00-10:00 am-business meeting  
10:00-10:30 am - Opening remarks - wuaa fieldwork - goings on  
10:30-11:30 am - Keith Meverden  
11:30 am - 1:00 pm - Lunch  
1:00-2:00 pm - Dr. Bob Birmingham  
2:00-3:00 pm - C. Patrick Labadie  
3:00-4:00 pm - Panel discussion  
4:00 pm - ?? - Dinner / Social

The next action planning meeting will be held on Saturday, September 10, 2005 at 9:00 in the third floor conference room of the State Historical Society building in Madison. All members are welcome. Contact Russel Leitz for more information.

## WUAA Fall Business Meeting, Officer Elections

The fall business meeting of the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association will be held in conjunction with the First Annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Conference. The meeting will begin at 9:00 am on October 22 at the Comfort Suites Milwaukee Airport.

One of the main items of business will be the election of officers. If you would like to become more involved in the organization, please consider becoming an officer. The positions are: president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer.

## Green Bay's Newest Shipwreck: The *May Queen*

continued from page 1

scrap metal and bone to Chicago. For unknown reasons, Graham had repossessed the vessel by spring of the following year, and once again sold it, this time to M. H. Stevens of Fish Creek for \$600. Then in 1881, the schooner was purchased by F. G. Blakefield who planned to use it in the coasting trade, but instead sold it to John O. Lindquist.

Lindquist was a prominent and prosperous merchant in Menekaunee, where the schooner had been built. There he established an emporium in 1874 and quickly

expanded his inventory to include everything from clothing to furs to foodstuffs. He was also an agent for several large steamship companies, including the famous White Star Line (see 1882 advertisement from the Marinette newspaper on page 5). Within a few years, Lindquist became a major buyer and shipper of salted fish. Even in a "slow-season," he was handling about 27 tons of fish per month and on a "good day" might ship 8,000 pounds. To keep up with these prodigious cargoes, Lindquist acquired the *May Queen* in June 1881, and it was during this service that the vessel met its demise.

On December 4, 1882, the *May Queen* had been heavily loaded with packaged, salted fish and was being towed to Menominee by the tug *J. F. Dayan*, captained by John Heck. The schooner was commanded by Thor Anderson of Fish Creek, assisted by his crew of three seamen. About 9 pm, the little schooner suddenly developed a horrendous leak. So severe was the flooding that the *May Queen* sank within five minutes, giving the sailors no time to launch the life boat. As the

schooner sank beneath them, one crewman tossed Captain Anderson an oar to keep him afloat in the icy water while the others swam to their overturned yawl. Because the sinking occurred after dark, the master of the *Dayan* did not immediately realize what had happened. As soon as he did, the tug was brought about and the castaways were located clinging to their swamped life boat. The accident had occurred in Michigan waters offshore between Ingallston and Rochereau Point.

The aftermath of the foundering fostered the usual degree of confusion and consternation associated with shipwrecks. The precise site of the sinking was unclear: The Door County Advocate claimed it was 12 miles north of Menominee offshore in 8 fathoms of water. The Marinette-Menominee papers reported it as 9 miles north of that city in 40 -50 feet of water and 1.5 miles offshore. Analytical hindsight suggested that the vessel had been grossly overloaded, which perhaps had instigated its loss along with the \$1,500 cargo. Neither the cargo nor the craft were insured, so the entire loss fell upon John Lindquist. An insulting reminder of the sad affair surfaced in late December, when many packets of fish were found floating around Chambers Island.

As was often the case with nineteenth-century shipwrecks, a salvage effort was mounted soon after the mishap. In the spring of 1883, the *J. F. Dayan* attempted to drag for the sunken hull, but inclement weather and the lack of a precise location thwarted that project. Three unsuccessful attempts were made to find the sunken craft. In early July, the wreck was actually found by a local fisherman, but by then the

Area of former Philbrooks Brothers Shipyard.



*Dayan* had left the area to operate on Lake Winnebago for the summer. Thereafter, the records become murky, but apparently salvage efforts were soon abandoned, probably because the true water depth turned out to be 80 feet, almost twice as deep as originally reported. However, the registry papers were not surrendered until 1888, which means the vessel was not officially abandoned until five years after the sinking!

We now move forward to the 1960's when many shipwrecks were first being found and explored in the Green Bay region. Rumors persisted for years about the presence of a wreck in the general vicinity where the *May Queen* had vanished. From time to time, commercial fishermen reported snagging their nets there; some even claimed that ship artifacts were retrieved in those nets.

In 1970, one such snagging event

was reported by the owner of Ruleau Fisheries of Cedar River to Frank Hoffmann, of *Alvin Clark* fame. Hoffmann and this writer made two trips from Menominee to the reported "snagging site," where several fruitless searches were conducted with scanning sonar. Our failure to find the wreck is not surprising considering its small size and the primitive nature of scanning sonar in the 1970's.

The *May Queen* remained lost until another snagging episode occurred in 2003, again by Ruleau, but this time by the son of the fisherman who had made the original encounter. They lowered a small, underwater "drop camera" onto the obstruction, thereby confirming that it was a shipwreck. This event was related to Bob Berg, longtime dive shop owner and wreck diver in Menominee. Bob's associate, Ken Mortinson, searched for and found the vessel in 2004.

The schooner is in remarkably good shape, although it has suffered structural damage in the stern, likely from various net snags that tore decking and rigging from the hull. Many artifacts are still aboard, including ship's hardware, galley glassware and personal items from the crew. In fact, one recent photograph shows a still intact, sailor's foul-weather cap resting on the deck. The underwater visibility there is said to be mediocre, often a common problem in that area because of the silty rivers emptying into the Bay along the Michigan shoreline. Silt, however, can act as a preservative, and is known to protect wood, cloth, food and other normally perishable materials for a century or more. Apparently, this is the case aboard the *May Queen*.

Virgin shipwrecks resting at moderate depths are a rather rare find, especially coasting trade schooners like the *May Queen* which were

built, used and lost within a limited locale. Such vessels have seldom been studied by nautical archeologists. When studies are conducted (if ever), the site has usually been disturbed by many divers, including some souvenir hunters. Looting shipwrecks has been illegal in Michigan and Wisconsin waters for many years, but that has not entirely stopped such pillaging. Underwater archeologists operating out of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary at Alpena (MI), hope to survey the *May Queen* this year while the craft is still in pristine condition.

In retrospect, the case of the *May Queen* and its eventual loss is reflective, if not typical, of the life story of many unheralded lake vessels of the late nineteenth century. These small, workaday craft were sometimes wrecked, occasionally causing tragic loss of life, but almost always creating financial hardships or local business disruptions. History has usually highlighted those marine disasters where many people or great vessels perished; nonetheless, we should not forget those smaller nautical adversities which added greatly to Green Bay's colorful maritime history. ■

#### Selected References

*Door County Advocate*, 14 Dec 1882; 10 May 1883; 17 May 1883; 5 July 1883.

Edward and Lois Schreiber (ed.), *Fish Creek Voices: An Oral History of a Door County Village*, Sister Bay, WI: Wm. Caxton Ltd., 1990.

*Marinette & Peshtigo Eagle*, 19 June 1875; 9 Dec 1882; 23 Dec 1882.



## Request Concerning Research in Russia

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

From your website and publications we learned about your role in development of undersea excavations and research on maritime history. That is why we have decided to approach you on the following matter.

Our team is going to test a hypothesis about an existence of evidences of the Great Silk Way in the Northern Caspian seabed. As you may know Caspian sea level has significantly increased for the last century, so there are a lot of archeological memorials and settlements in the seabed now. Major Russian and international oil companies are going to work in the Northern Caspian shelf, that is why there is a real danger of destruction of unique historical sites, that are underwater now. Our primary goal is rescue those memorials from adverse impacts of the industry.

We also pursue a scientific goal of proving that one of the routes of the Great Silk Way passed on this territory in the Middle Ages. We are going to begin our exploration next summer.

So now we are looking for prospect partners and project sponsors. Let me tell in brief about our team. We work in the Department "Caspiy" of the engineering firm "Octopus" (<http://www.octopusgaz.ru>). Directions of our department's investigation are sea-pollution monitoring and undersea archeology. We work with specialists from

P.P. Shirshov Institute of Oceanology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (<http://www.ocean.ru>) and with archeologists of the Astrakhan Museum of Local History.

We have available a research vessel for our investigation. But there is lack of necessary underwater equipment and funds for research.

Sincerely,

Chief of the "Caspiy",  
Vyacheslav Yaschenko

## Group Tries To Provide Look At Superior Wrecks

*The Capital Times*, July 11, 2005

Researchers are using remotely operated vehicles to catalog shipwrecks in Lake Superior, with hopes that the images they bring back will help preserve a fragile and deteriorating part of history.

With support from a Michigan Department of Transportation grant, the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society is cataloging five wrecks, the *Mining Journal of Marquette* reported recently.

"We've done a lot of research related to the shipwrecks, created models, commissioned paintings and taken scores of underwater video and still pictures," said Tom Farnquist, director of the society.

The group has finished surveys of the *Vienna*, which sank in 1892, and the *John Osborn*, which sank in 1884, and is finishing a survey of the *Samuel Mather*, which sank in 1891. All three were wooden steamers.

The group also plans to survey the *John Cowle*, a wooden steamer that sank in 1909, and the *Comet*, a propeller ship that sunk in 1875.

Los Angeles artist Ken Marschall also is doing paintings of the vessels. Using the information gathered by the researchers, Marschall creates a photorealistic painting of the wreck site.

"The visibility is always much, much less in actuality than what you see in my paintings," Marschall said. "I create sort of a God's eye view. You can never see such clear views at 100 feet depth or more. "The most you can see is 20 to 30 feet at a time."

The project highlights the fragile nature of wrecks throughout the Great Lakes. In the lower Great Lakes, zebra mussels threaten to encrust and destroy shipwrecks, and preserving them is a fight against the elements.

"They are endangered. They break down constantly. They suffer from natural degradation," said historian Pat Labadie of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. "Our task is to gather as much information with as much integrity as possible."

## Suggested Books

The Great Lakes Shipwreck Research Foundation, Inc. has new books in stock. Below are the books, released this last year. Visit the web site today to order your books.

[www.ghost-ships.org/storefront/](http://www.ghost-ships.org/storefront/)

### *Shipwrecks of Lake Superior*

The second edition of the popular James Marshall's *Shipwrecks of Lake Superior* is updated and redesigned to best present the engaging collection of maps, photos (historical and color) and accounts of the boats that once sailed the Greatest of Lakes. Will keep "wreckies" young and old turning pages. \$20.00

### *Women on the Lakes, Untold Great Lakes Maritime Tales II*

By Frederick Stonehouse. The original *Women on the Lakes*, published in 2001 focused on stories of remarkable women who in some way, "worked" the Great Lakes. Included were stories of vessel captains, "deep sea" divers, lighthouse keepers and ship cooks among many others. Reception of the first book was excellent and this book is a continuation of the theme. \$16.00

### *Great Lakes Passenger Ship Disasters*

From new author Wayne Kadar, this book explores the tragic tales of ships designed to carry passengers, be it a ferry, a day or weekend excursion vessel or a ship with cabins for extended cruises. Meticulously researched by Kadar, these stories from the tragedy of the *Eastland* to the *George C. Cox* on the rocks, are sure to intrigue. \$16.00

### *Great Lakes Shipwrecks and Lighthouses — True Stories of Courage and Bravery.*

Rescues, shipwrecks, ghosts, you name it. All meticulously researched by one of the Great Lakes best and most popular authors, Wes

Oleszewski. Great reading for any Great Lakes aficionado. \$16.00

### *Great Lakes Crime — Murder, Mayhem, Booze and Broads*

Not a new book, but one we just can not keep in stock. This book by Frederick Stonehouse is in high demand and we now have it back in stock. It may not have been the Spanish Main, but pirates did sail the Great Lakes as did all manner of thieves and murders. The great Sweetwater Seas had their fair share of criminal activity. Captains sank their ships to obtain the insurance money and honest lightkeeper were "done in" for their meager savings. Throughout prohibition the Great Lakes were the back door to America's heartland. Hundreds of boats hauled millions of gallons of illegal booze over the Lakes to wet the dry throats of honest citizens. Bullets often flew as bootleggers and government agents fought it out on the Inland Seas. On shore and sometimes afloat, female companionship was always available, for a price. Relieve the tales of murder, rum running and shady ladies in this great book. \$16.00

### *Great Lakes Shipwrecks — A Photographic Odyssey*

This book by Gary Gentile is another one we could not keep in stock, but a new order has come in. From my standpoint as an historian, some of the "best" wrecks are those that were yesteryear's most tragic. Their fascination lies in their sad sagas of shipwreck and survival, dramatic rescues, and the melancholy circumstances of impending death. Furthermore, many Great Lakes wrecks are historic by dint of their age and methods of construction. The diversity of shipwreck types is clearly substantial, so that anyone interested in the structure of vessels and their evolution will find a wealth of material to study. \$30.00

## New Maritime Trail in Jacksonport

The State Historical Society has set up a new maritime trail at Jacksonport, in Door County.

This is the ninth maritime trails site with a historic marker. The others are:

Bullhead Point in Sturgeon Bay

*Christina Nielsen* in Bailey's Harbor

*Fleetwing* in Garrett Bay

*Frank O'Connor* in Bailey's Harbor

*Louisiana* on Washington Island

*Niagra* in Port Washington

Pilot Island at Gills Rock

Washburn

For detailed information on these sites check out the web site at [www.MaritimeTrails.org](http://www.MaritimeTrails.org)

## Coming Events

Sep. 15-17, 2005      **Association For Great Lakes Maritime History Annual Meeting.** Tobermory, Ontario. For information check their web site at [www.aglmh.org](http://www.aglmh.org).

Oct. 22, 2005      **Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association Fall Meeting.** 9:00 am at the Comfort Suites, Milwaukee airport. For information check the WUAA web site at [www.wuaa.org](http://www.wuaa.org).

Oct. 22, 2005      **Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Conference.** 10:00 am - 6:00 pm at the Comfort Suites, Milwaukee airport For information check the WUAA web site at [www.wuaa.org](http://www.wuaa.org).

Nov. 11-12, 2005      **Gales of November.** At the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center. For information, contact the Lake Superior Maritime Museum Association at [www.lsmma.com](http://www.lsmma.com).

Feb. 25, 2006      **Dive Into The Past, Twin Cities Shipwreck Scuba Show.** At Ramada Inn and Thunderbird Convention Center, Bloomington, MN. For information check the Great Lakes Shipwreck Preservation Society website at [www.glsps.org](http://www.glsps.org).

Mar. 24-25, 2006      **Ghost Ships Festival.** At Four Points Sheraton, Milwaukee, WI. For information check the festival website at [www.ghost-ships.org](http://www.ghost-ships.org).

**Wisconsin Underwater  
Archeological Association**  
**P.O. Box 6081**  
**Madison, WI 53716**



Wisconsin  
Underwater  
Archeology  
Association

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