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The Clay Banks Survey Project: The Foscoro Story

by Dr. Richard Boyd



As described in previous articles in this publication, the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association is conducting a long-term survey of the submerged cultural resources residing on the bottomlands off Clay Banks Township in Door County. Several

small hamlets in this locale were once important shipping points for lumber and farm commodities, but today are nothing more than “ghost towns,” with little or no physical evidence remaining of their once vibrant existence. One such vanished village was Foscoro, located

directly on the border between Kewaunee and Door Counties at Stoney Creek. This particular site is of special interest due to its complex history that intertwines both terrestrial and maritime events. Obviously, the history of every 19th century Door County “ghost port” is directly reflective of whatever artifacts may remain underwater. This includes submerged docks, shipwrecks, and numerous random materials that lie scattered about the rocky bottom.

Geologically, the Foscoro town site is located on an abandoned pre-historic beach, an ancient remnant of a high water stage of Lake Michigan following the last Ice Age.

This so-called Nipissing beach terrace was formed approximately 3,000 years ago about 20 feet above today's lake level, and has been more or less in continuous use by various Native Americans since pre-historic days. In historic times, the area was recognized as part of the Potawatomi Trail, a main pathway along the peninsula that was likely in use for many centuries. Stoney Creek, the most prominent physical feature of the terrace, was probably an active river in the immediate Post-Glacial Era, which attracted many early inhabitants. Similar Native American archeological sites at or near Door County waterfronts have been documented at Heins Creek, Ahnapee River, Whitefish Bay and Newport. (See adjacent photo of Stoney Creek today).

During the decades of the 1950s and 60s, a talented amateur archeologist and collector, the late Ed Wells, lived in Door County at Forestville. Over the years, Wells probed the wooded and open field acreage on both sides of Stoney Creek, where he found and cataloged a significant number of artifacts. Recovered materials ranged in age from the Archaic Period (8,000 - 1,000 B.C.) to the

Stoney Creek – Richard Boyd photo



continued on page 4

Association News

Action Meeting

The next Action Planning meeting will be held on Saturday, January 10, 2009 at Brendon's house in Marshall, WI. All members are welcome to attend. For directions, meeting time or other details check the WUAA web site or email us at wuaa@mailbag.com.

Association Dues

All membership dues for the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association now expire in October. If you have not yet renewed this year, please submit your dues by mail to our P.O. Box address, given below. Dues are \$20 per year.

Annual Meeting

The Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association's annual business meeting was held in Milwaukee on Oct. 25, 2008 during the Underwater Archeology and Maritime History Conference

The meeting was brought to order by president Brendon Baillod. There were 14 members present.

Prior to conducting the first item of business Brendon made mention that due to a previously voted upon WUAA policy change all memberships will be coming due shortly and any members wishing to renew could do so this day with the treasurer.

The first order of business was the Secretary's report given by Paul Laue. He proceeded to review the minutes from the last action planning meeting. During the review Paul asked the group to thank Steve Wagner for all the work he has done as treasurer for six years. Steve will be stepping down once a new treasurer has been elected. After Secretary's report was finished a vote was taken to accept the report into the records. All members were in favor.

The President's report was then given by Brendon. His first topic was thanking Kim Stabelfeldt and the Great Lakes Shipwreck Research Foundation for the grant given to WUAA for 2008 fieldwork. Next he

mentioned that he has current plans to transition the group's website from Berbee over to his domain. This will be a slowly coordinated move. He has also been able to establish a Paypal account for the website that will allow online (credit card) payments for WUAA merchandise and materials.

Brendon has recently worked with the In Wisconsin group (TV show) and in addition to his discussion of the *Robert C. Pringle* he was able to talk for a few minutes about our organization and what it does. The show should be airing soon and he will keep everyone posted. There is also another TV show on Charter Cable in Kenosha where he will also give a brief talk on the importance of WUAA. Finally, he mentioned he has been communicating with Lee Cox about doing some surveying work in the Fox River on the Bob Teed and the Satellite, potentially as early as next year.

Next, Steve Wagner reviewed the treasurer's report. He reported that

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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.

Mail correspondence to:
WUAA
PO Box 6081
Madison, WI 53716

email: wuaa@mailbag.com

web site:
www.wuaa.org

President:
Brendon Baillod
Marshall

Vice-President:
Hank Whipple
Madison

Treasurer:
Lee Hintz
Oak Creek

Secretary
Paul Laue
Madison

Newsletter Editor:
Danny Aerts
Middleton

Web site Manager:
Colin Zylka
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Directors:
Richard Boyd
Delafield

Danny Aerts
Middleton

Janet Defnet
Mukwonago

in the last 12 months, income was \$3362, expenses were \$2441, and the current balance is \$1707. Upon completion of the treasurer's report review the group voted to accept the report into the records.

A nomination for Treasurer was brought forth by president Brendon Baillod. The floor was opened up and members in attendance were asked for any recommended nominations. Lee Hintz was nominated and elected treasurer.

The floor was then opened for additional discussion topics.

Referring to the Treasurer's report, Kimm Stabelfeldt mentioned we could potentially save some dollars by purchasing an additional GSF table at a discount. He stated that the first table is usually more expensive than additional tables and we could save a few dollars by teaming up with GLSRF and purchasing an additional table through them. The group will look into this option further at upcoming meetings.

The next topic was whether or not we wanted to continue donating \$100 to the Wisconsin Historical Society, as we do each year, for non-maritime themes. This year was a non-maritime theme and the group continued to make a donation.

Warren Peterson talked briefly about the red WUAA T-shirts he had printed and which were available at the conference.

The business meeting was then adjourned.

New Clay Banks Site

This report regarding a wreck at Clay Banks was received from Dick Boyd.

Over the Thanksgiving weekend, Janet Defnet, Greg Kent and I, along with Dick Bennett, checked out the newly reported wreck near Clay Banks.

It's located off the beach property of Bob Ryan, located down a private road near the old Foscoro site. At this spot is a small group of cottages accessible only by this road and sandwiched between the Clay Bank bluffs and the point north off Foscoro. Presently, the visibility was so poor after thermocline turnover that little could be seen underwater. Some of the wreck is buried in shallow water (3-4 feet) about 150 feet offshore, although an anchor and chain is reported out in deep water. A very prominent reef exists further offshore and wreck remnants are likely to be found there. This site has been completely unknown until now.

We originally thought that the wreck would be the lost tug of Capt. Fellows that sank at anchor off Foscoro. However, this site is about midway between Foscoro and Clay Banks, about one mike or more from each. Thus we now think the vessel to be the scow *Ida Bloom*. Bob maintains a buoy on the wreck in season and we did get GPS data. We are welcome to survey the wreck next summer and it would be a great project for anyone who wants to wade, snorkel, or dive, since all three methods are quite applicable to this site. Unfortunately, "weather timing" will be critical because the area is highly susceptible to north, NE or SE blows.

The 4th Annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology and Maritime History Conference

The 4th annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology and Maritime History Conference was held in the Lafayette Ballroom at the Wyndham Convention Center in Milwaukee on Saturday, October 25, 2008. Following is a summary of the presentations.

New Methods Of Rapid Field Survey Of Submerged Archeological Sites

Greg McMaster described a project to survey the entire bottom of Grand Traverse Bay, MI, for all cultural resources. The project was sponsored by the Grand Traverse Bay Underwater Preserve. They used a MS1000 Scanning Sonar by Kongsberg-Mesotech. A tripod-supported probe is set on the bottom. The head rotates to scan the area. The distance and scan rate can be adjusted to improve detail. Greg showed several examples and the results were very impressive. The scan unit costs \$35,000-\$50,000. Greg and his partners are willing to help on other underwater archeology projects.

Sailing Into The Past: Maritime Archeology From The Deck Of A Tall Ship

Kevin Cullen of Discovery Word at Pier Wisconsin talked about the museum ship *Denis Sullivan*. The *Sullivan* was based on the designs of

The Foscoro Story

continued from page 1

Woodland (A.D. 400 – 1,300). Of course, artifacts from historic times were also plentiful here. Wells' findings were discussed in detail in his 1972 article in the *Wisconsin Archeologist*, which also included an interesting map of the site that has been reproduced here (as modified by Paul Burton). This map also shows the location of some of the buildings in old Foscoro, including the actual site of the historic village pier.

Truthfully, we don't actually know how early the Foscoro site

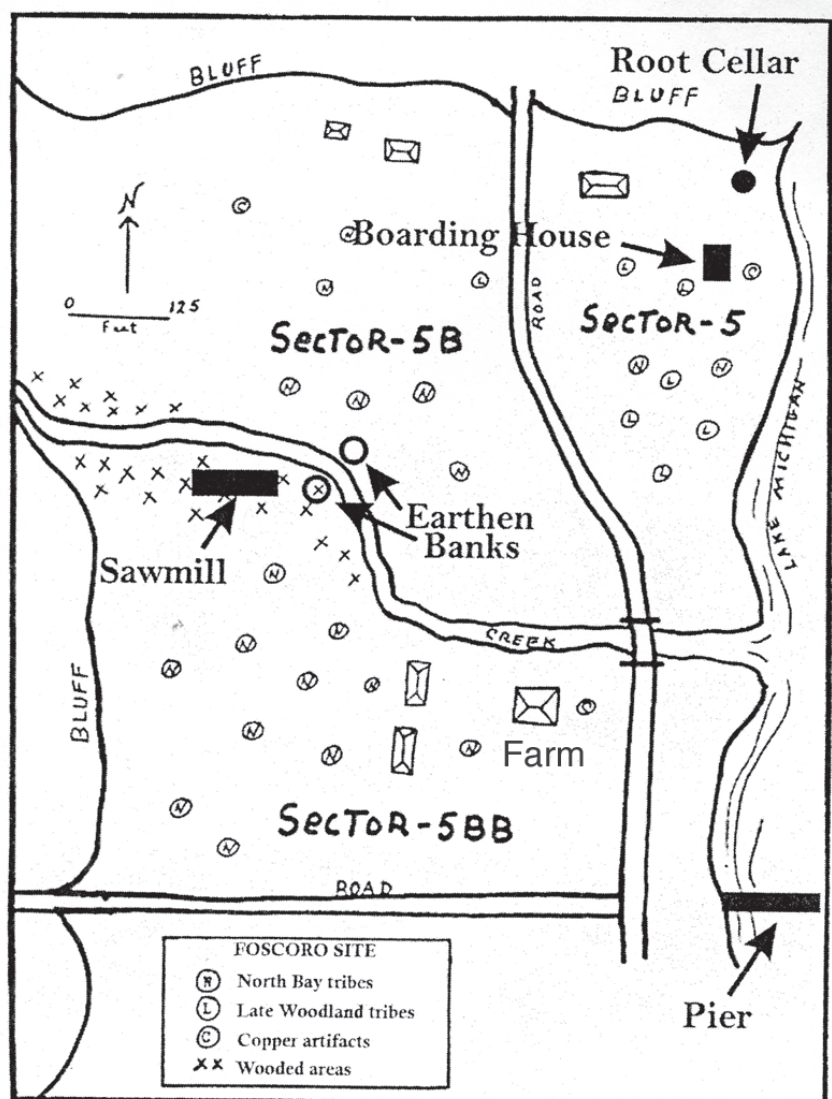
may have been occupied. Wells never actually excavated there and simply dug a few test trenches, which disclosed a series of distinct cultural horizons. Recent archeological work at two sites in Door County (the old Boss Tavern and the Cardy Farm) suggests that Paleoindians may have been present in this area over 10,000 years ago. It seems entirely possible that these early hunters followed the retreating glacier northward up the peninsula, settling temporarily at convenient sites such as stream mouths. We really don't know if that's the case at Stoney Creek!

The Indians reportedly called the creek "Sensippe," which probably means "stream of rocks." The first area settlers in the early 1800s converted the name to "Stoney Creek." Wells claimed that the first building on the site was a pioneer trading post or general store that likely escaped the historical record because it burned down sometime in the early 1850s.

About 1865, three enterprising lumbermen decided to build a sawmill and shipping facility at Stoney Creek to harvest and process the extensive timber resources that extended inland from the Lake Michigan shoreline. These three individuals were a Mr. Foster and Mr. Coe from Port Washington, and a Mr. Rowe from Chicago, who extracted and combined part of each man's name to create FOS-CO-RO! Upstream on the creek, they built earthen dikes to produce a spillway that provided rapid water flow for the sawmill. As already mentioned, Stoney Creek reportedly had a much heavier flow rate in pioneer days as evidenced by an old photograph published in the *Algoma Record-Herald* on 29 December 1971. This picture, probably taken in the late 19th century, is perhaps the only known photograph at the Foscoro site. It shows a group of citizens viewing the dam site on Stoney Creek, which is flowing an absolute torrent of water. The man with dog was reported to be Fred Fellows, an important citizen of Foscoro and local mailman. His father, C. L. Fellows, played a crucial role in the development of the town.

This mill produced an immense quantity of wood product, which was shipped from a 1,000-foot pier that was constructed slightly south of the mouth of the creek. This was a prominent structure, including a tramway system to deliver lumber products directly to waiting vessels,

Foscoro site – by Wells and Burton



which called almost daily at the port. Foscoro, along with the sawmill and docks at Clay Banks and Horn's Pier, was said to be the busiest and most productive shoreline area in all of Door County! The settlement even got a noteworthy mention in the *Milwaukee News* on March 15, 1871. The reporter described the fledgling town in glowing and gushy terms that make for rather amusing reading. Parts of that article are reprinted below:

To the north of the village plat, about a quarter of a mile, the high bluff at the lake recedes some forty or fifty rods and diminishes to a gentle hill, which extends south-easterly about the same distance from the lake for some miles and then returns to the shore again. Within this amphitheater is in the future, the sweetest village that the waves of Lake Michigan shall kiss. The surface of the ground, from the gentle hill, descends softly to the lake, so that there can be no idle water there, and the soil is rich and easy of cultivation. Springs of chalybeate water abound on the hillside. I thought that when I first saw the spot that imagination might call it the home of the fairies.

One other feature I must tell you of. In this amphitheater comes a stream, nearly as large as Cedar Creek in Ozaukee County, bounding along as if glad to get there, and then stops in a quiet estuary at the lake and smiles upon the scene. The Indian name of this stream I understand to be Sensippi, which I am informed means 'stream of rocks,' a name very appropriate, as its bed is filled with the freight of some former glacier.

Nor is this all; only a short distance from the mill, and connected with it by a wooden rail, is a pier run out into the lake 1,000 feet. How it mars the beauty of this fair nook! It is as if some beautiful girl,



Stoney Creek at Foscoro – Algoma Record-Herald

with a mouth to excite an irresistible desire for a kiss, should all at once run out a tongue like an ant-eater.

Where is Foscoro? Six miles north of Ahnapee [Algoma].

This particular reference to the *Milwaukee News* article was first cited by Door County's patriarch historian, H. R. Holand, in his *History of Door County* (1917). Interestingly, the original source article could not be found during recent newspaper research. The only Milwaukee newspaper published in 1871 with a similar name was the *Milwaukee Daily News*, which does not mention Foscoro on March 15. The *Milwaukee News* was created by the amalgamation of three newspapers in 1918, and did not exist in 1871. Thus we do not really know exactly what vehicle called the *Milwaukee News* Holand cited. Whatever the exact nature of this publication, there is no reason to suspect its validity.

The sawmill business was so successful that a little town sprang up around the operation. Within a few years, the village sported a boarding house for workmen, a cooperage for fabricating barrels, a tavern,

dance hall, plus several warehouses and log cabin residences. Within a few years, it even had its own schoolhouse, telegraph station and official post office. A Door County legend says that the first murder in the County occurred in the Foscoro saloon. For over 30 years, the thriving lumber enterprise pumped out softwood products such as sawed planks, shingles, and cedar posts. Railroad ties from swamp hemlock trees were also a major product, as was cut hardwood for heating purposes.

The original Foscoro founders sold their pier to Charles L. Fellows, a prominent resident of Clay Banks, whose descendants remained in the Algoma area well into the 1990s. Fellows had wisely bought up a significant amount of the forest land in the area, which eventually hamstrung the original logging operation for raw material. Captain Fellows soon took on a partner, W. Swaty of Algoma, and the pair then bought the "Bridge Piers" at Clay Banks, which they operated into 1890s. In 1878, Fellows even received state permission to "improve Stoney

continued on page 6

The Foscoro Story

continued from page 5

Creek," so that sufficient water depth was maintained to float logs from 4 miles upstream!

Pier operations were a difficult and unpredictable business, and the lengthy pier at Foscoro suffered mightily from seasonal storms, as did others in that area. For example, the *Door County Advocate* in February 1883, mentioned that 100 feet of the Swaty and Fellows pier at Foscoro was destroyed by a violent gale. Again, in March 1885, the *Ahnapee Record* reported: "During the storm last Sunday night a field of ice, which was moving at the rate of five or six miles per hour, struck the bridge piers at Foscoro and Clay Banks, taking away about half of each one." Only a year later, in April 1886, the *Advocate* lamented: "The Foscoro pier was completely demolished by the same storm, the ice cutting the piles and crowding them out of position." It would seem that the pier business required constant maintenance and frequent cash infusions!

The history of commercial piers in Clay Banks Township is muddled, to say the least. It is well documented that several docks exceeding 1,000 feet in length were built and operated in the decades immediately following the Civil War. However, exactly how many of these structures existed, their precise locations, and chain of ownership is unclear. It is becoming apparent that more piers were present along this shoreline than have been captured in the historical record. This subject will be covered in a future article in *Wisconsin's Underwater Heritage*, as will the many shipwrecks that occurred in the vicinity.

Unfortunately, the entire economy of the town centered on the lumber industry that steadily consumed all the nearby forest resources. Once these consumables were gone, the sawmills shut down and most residents moved on to other settlements. This downturn was hastened when the railroad reached Algoma, which lessened the demand for maritime shipping. By 1890, Foscoro was well on its way to becoming a ghost town. The school was moved and the post office was closed early in the 20th century, and soon most businesses were abandoned or had relocated. Essentially the same scenario occurred at the ports of Clay Banks and Horn's Pier, both located north of Foscoro. The *Door County Advocate* succinctly described these forlorn sites on 11 January 1896: "Nothing remains of the piers at Clay Banks, Horn's Pier, and Foscoro except a few piles here and there, but these will likewise disappear in time. The superstructure has long since yielded to the force of wind and sea."

The old Foscoro site received virtually no attention after the collapse of the lumber and maritime shipping industries except for several brief stints in early spring during the 1950s. During these years, Stoney Creek was a famous "smelt stream," where unbelievable masses of these small (and tasty) fish would invade this brook to spawn. These "night spawning runs" also occurred in certain other Door and Kewaunee County streams and attracted fishermen from all over region, who often camped out near the streams for several weeks. The *Algoma Record-Herald* in April 1971 ran a photo showing a glut of fishermen netting smelt at Stoney Creek in 1953. A caption described that run as the "largest in history," claiming that one group easily filled the box of a pickup truck with fish. Having net-

ted smelt across the Peninsula at Red River in the 1950s, this writer can testify to the "circus atmosphere" that occurred during these spring runs.

Thus ends the story of Foscoro, a town created by the lumber industry that grew and prospered for about 30 years until the local natural resources ran out. Then, faster than it had blossomed, the village wilted and declined into nothingness. Sadly, this story has been reenacted many times around the Lakes at various small ports dependent upon lumbering, farming, and mining. In truth, today more remnants of these maritime communities remain below water than above! ■

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Conference

continued from page 3

the *Moonlight*, *Lucia Simpson*, *Rouse Simmons* and *Clipper City*.

The *Sullivan* project started in 1991. Masts were obtained in 1994. Laying white oak frames and tamarack boards started in 1996. The ship was launched in 2000.

The *Sullivan* is 97 tons displacement, 137 ft x 24 ft x 8 ft 9 in, her masts are 95 ft high and she has 10 sails.

The ship is used in several programs including Science Under Sail and ROV days. Kevin showed some video from the ROV project taken on the wreck of the *Prins Willem V*, which sank in 1954. This past year they also collected video on the Milwaukee car ferry wreck, which was lost in 1929 with all hands.

Discovery World also has a replica of the clipper ship *Challenge*, a model of the Great Lakes and fresh and saltwater aquariums.

Wisconsin Historical Society 2008 Field Work

Wisconsin underwater archeologist Keith Meverden summarized the projects conducted this year by the historical society. Keith said there is a possibility of a national marine sanctuary being established in Wisconsin. In relation to that the historical society has compiled a summary of Wisconsin historic shipwrecks for NOAA.

Maritime Trail signs were added along the Lower Fox River locks – one in DePere and two in Appleton. Maritime Trails geocaching has been established in Manitowoc and Two Rivers.

The wreck of a small trading sloop at the mouth of Sturgeon Bay, in Green Bay was surveyed. Visibility was very poor. The ship was possibly built prior to 1880.

Photo-mosaics of several Lake Michigan wrecks were made in cooperation with Woods Hole using a 3-D camera system.

The wreck of the *Byron* near Sheboygan was surveyed. This was a two-masted schooner built in the 1840s and lost in 1858.

A survey was also done on the *Home*, a schooner wrecked about 10 miles from the *Byron*. It also dates from the 1850s.

Fireboat 23 Project

Kimm Stabelfeldt of GLSRF and WUAA described this year's work on the wreck of Fireboat 23. The ship was built in 1896 and scuttled in 1923. She was a wooden vessel 100 ft x 25 ft.

Fireboats not only fought fires in the harbor, they also pumped water into a system which fed water to blue hydrants used to fight fires on land.

The group made good progress this year. They have had 24 volunteers participate. The survey should be finished in 2009.

The site is 72 feet deep, visibility is 15-20 ft. The huge boiler makes it difficult to lay a baseline.

Kimm showed sketches and photos. He also presented certificates to Peter Kastella, Robert Lijewski, William King, Paul Frank and Jerry Guyer for their work on the project.

The Robert C. Pringle - Fifty Fathom Time capsule

Brendon Baillod and Steve Radovan of WUAA gave a presentation on this recently-found wreck. In 1981 fisherman lost a trawl bag at the site, but couldn't relocate it. In 1993 it was snagged by gill net.

Steve Radovan subsequently located the wreck in 300 feet of water. A team of divers was assembled to investigate the site. They had expected to find a schooner, but found a steamer instead. The wreck was identified as the *Pringle*, a big, big tug boat.

She was built in Manitowoc in 1903 as the *Chequamagon*. At 113 ft long with a 500 hp engine, she was narrow and overpowered.

The ship spent three years in the Apostles before being leased to Pabst for runs from Milwaukee to Whitefish Bay Resort. She was sold in 1907 and went to Traverse Bay Resorts. She ship was next sold to the Pere Marquette line and named #7.

In 1918 she was sold to Pringle Barge Line in 1918 and later renamed *Pringle*. She was a tower with a big winch at the stern. In June 1922, while towing the *Venezuela* from Milwaukee, she stuck something and sank fast.

Reportedly was 15 miles from Manitowoc but was actually 8 miles off Sheboygan. The wreck is in very good shape. Steve showed video of the site.

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



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

Coming Events

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| January 10, 2009 | Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association Action Planning Meeting , in Marshall, WI. For information check the WUAA web site at www.wuaa.org or email wuaa@mailbag.com . |
| February 20-22, 2009 | Our World Underwater , Rosemont, IL. For information check their web site at www.OurWorldUnderwater.com . |
| February 28, 2009 | Dive Into The Past , in Mounds View, MN. Shipwreck-Scuba Show sponsored by Great Lakes Shipwreck Preservation Society. For information check their web site at www.glsps.org . |
| March 20-21, 2009 | Ghost Ships Festival , in Milwaukee. Films, seminars and presentations about great Lakes Shipwrecks. Sponsored by Great Lakes Shipwreck Research Foundation. For information check their web site at www.ghost-ships.org . |