

## Coming Events

- Feb. 22, 2003 **Great Lakes Shipwreck Film Festival.** Sponsored by the Ford Seahorses, Ford Performing Arts Center, Dearborn, MI. For information check their web site at [www.fordseahorses.org](http://www.fordseahorses.org).
- March 15-16, 2003 **Ghost Ships Festival.** Milwaukee, WI. For information contact Brendon Bailod, [brendon@bailod.com](mailto:brendon@bailod.com) or check their website, [www.ghost-ships.org](http://www.ghost-ships.org).
- April 12, 2003 **Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association Spring Meeting.** Manitowoc, WI. For information contact P. J. Creviere at 920-337-0270 or [syberdiver@aol.com](mailto:syberdiver@aol.com).
- April 25-27, 2003 **Our World Underwater.** Rosemont, IL. For information check their web site at [www.ourworldunderwater.com](http://www.ourworldunderwater.com) or email to [info@ourworldunderwater.com](mailto:info@ourworldunderwater.com).
- June 7-15, 2003 **Door County Shipwreck Survey.** WUAA will be mapping various sites in the Bailey's Harbor area. For details contact Russ Leitz, 715-258-2935 or [rleitz@vbe.com](mailto:rleitz@vbe.com).

**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.*

# Wisconsin's UNDERWATER HERITAGE

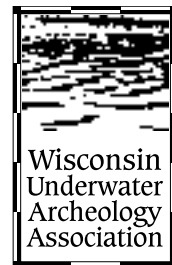
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## Collision at Sea: The Loss Of The Schooner *Daniel Lyons*

by Dr. Richard Boyd and Janet Defnet



An old marine maxim warns: "A fire at sea can ruin your whole day". No doubt the same could be said for a collision at sea on any given night. In the hey-day of the sailing ship, any abrupt and unscheduled nocturnal meeting of two vessels usually resulted in a marine disaster, and such was the case with the schooner *Daniel Lyons* in the 1870's.

The *Lyons* (also listed in some reports as the *Daniel Lyon*) was very much the typical three-masted Great Lakes schooner: she measured 138 feet long with a 26-foot beam, 11-foot draft and a gross weight of 318 tons. The vessel, official registry number 6780, was built by the

famous Goble Shipyards in Oswego, New York, and was owned by George Goble and Dan Lyons, both prominent businessmen in that city. The Goble Shipyard produced dozens of lake boats over a 40-year period, several of which are now popular shipwreck dive sites, including the *Lyons*. In 1873, Goble and his shipbuilding partner, James Macfarlane, coincidentally constructed three nearly identical schooners, namely the *Sam Cook*, *Atlanta* and *Daniel Lyons*.

The first five years of the *Lyons'* career were tediously uneventful until October 17, 1878. On that fateful Thursday morning, the *Lyons* departed Chicago about 1 am with

20,000 bushels of wheat consigned to J. B. Griffin and Company in Black Rock (Buffalo), New York. Riding a fresh west wind, the vessel made an effortless trip northward and by pre-dawn Friday was passing the Lake Michigan port of Algoma, Wisconsin, then known as Ahnapee. It was a crisp fall night and the lake surface glistened with bright moonlight as the schooner glided northward with first mate Owen Madden at the helm. The wind shifted slightly to the northwest, so Madden began tacking north by east along the Door County coastline.

Eventually a set of running lights appeared in the distance about a mile away. Both red and green colors were readily visible through the clear night, so a ship was obviously approaching directly from the northeast. This turned out to be another schooner, the *Kate Gillett*, carrying a cargo of fence posts from Cedar River, Michigan. She belonged to J. V. Taylor of Taylor, Bush and Company and was bound for Chicago.

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*A flotilla of schooners in Sarnia Harbor about 1873. The two-masted vessel anchored above the docked steamer Sarnia is the West Side, a product of the Goble Shipyards which is typical of the two and three masted canal schooners built there.*

*Great Lakes Marine Collection of the Milwaukee Public Library/Wisconsin Marine Historical Society.*

# Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association News

## Fall Meeting Report

The Fall meeting of the association was held on Saturday, October 12, 2002 in the Sellery Room at the State Historical Society Building in Madison.

The business meeting was brought to order by President Russell Green. The treasurer, Tom Villand reported a balance of \$3626. Articles and information for the next newsletter are due December 1, and the due date for the following newsletter is March 1.



Whaleback Meteor. photo by Tom Villand

June 7 through 15, 2003 is scheduled for diving on and drawing the wrecks in the harbor of Bailey's Harbor.

P. J. Creviere reported that he is working on putting lighthouse log books on computer.

Work done on the whaleback *Meteor* October 5 and 6 was discussed. Eight WUAA members worked on cleaning, scraping and priming the engine room. We hope to organize another work session for next spring.

Russell Green reported on the progress of the Maritime Trails project.

He also informed us that a Federal court has awarded ownership of the *Rosinco* to the state of Wisconsin. He also said that the *Appomattox* could be a possible future WUAA project/workshop.

Dates for next year's meetings were set. The spring meeting will be April 12 and the fall meeting will be on September 27. Location and program to be determined.

We adjourned for lunch and in the afternoon took a very interesting tour of the Historical Society archives. The Society is constantly making more information available online. WUAA members are encouraged to check out the Wisconsin Historical Society website at [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org).

## New Home For State Underwater Archeology

The WHS underwater archeology office has moved to a new building, at 523 Atlas Avenue, in Madison. The new facility will have a larger, improved conservation lab. The new telephone number is 608-221-5909.

**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 \$15. For membership information, contact the secretary or write to the address below.

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## Bailey's Harbor Summer of 2003 Field Project

A WUAA 2003 summer field project will be held at Bailey's Harbor from June 7 to June 15, with the surveys of three shipwreck sections that lie to the east of the wreck site of the *Christina Nilson*, in a lagoon shoreward of the Old Bailey's Harbor Lighthouse. The goal of the project is to do a complete field survey and site drawings of these three sites in order to determine if any of them are a part of the *Nilson* and if not what ship(s) do they represent.

The *Nilson* was built in 1871 as a three-masted schooner by Hanson & Scove at Manitowoc and was employed in the bulk cargo trade. During a blizzard on October 24, 1884 after she had transited Death's Door but was unable to enter the Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal to seek shelter, she reversed her course trying to find shelter at Bailey's Harbor. Blinded by the snow she struck hard on the Outer Reef at Bailey's Harbor. Unable to extricate herself she soon became a total loss. Her cargo of 525 tons on pig iron bound from Escanaba to Chicago was eventually salvaged. The *Nilson* was "rediscovered" in the summer of 1997, immediately reported to the Wisconsin Historical Society, and became the focus of the Society's and WUAA's 1998 and 1999 summer site surveys. For more information about the *Nilson* see *Wisconsin's Underwater Heritage*, Vol.8, No. 2, May 1998.

Those interested in participating in the 2003 field survey should contact Russ Leitz by phone at 715-258-2935 or email [rleitz@vbe.com](mailto:rleitz@vbe.com).

## Spring Meeting Plans

The Spring meeting of the Association will be held on Saturday, April 12 at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum in Manitowoc.

The morning will feature a presentation by John Karl on celestial navigation.

A business meeting will follow the presentation. After lunch there will be a tour of the museum, including the new addition.

Two other activities are possible. The museum now offers sleepovers in the submarine, *Cobia*. Those interested may be able to do so on the Friday night before the meeting. We may also organize a dive to scrape zebra mussels off the hull of the *Cobia*. The mussels add weight to the submarine, causing it to sit too low in the water.

Please contact P. J. Creviere if you are interested in either of these activities or if you have other questions about the meeting. You can call P. J. at 920-337-0270 or email [syberdiver@aol.com](mailto:syberdiver@aol.com).

The Wisconsin Maritime Museum's \$6.1 million renovation and expansion project will double its size to 60,000 square feet. The larger facility will incorporate an operating steam engine, *COBIA* orientation theatre, Wisconsin-built Boat Gallery, children's water room, an additional WWII periscope, a Little Lakefarer's Room for toddlers, submarine concourse, state-of-the-art library, and much more. For information on the museum check their web site at [www.wimaritimemuseum.org](http://www.wimaritimemuseum.org).

## In Memoriam

Clark Willick, of Appleton, age 75, died Monday, November 25, 2002, at Appleton Medical Center. Clark was born on May 11, 1927, in Burlington, Wisconsin, to the late William and Harriet (Berndt) Willick. Clark worked as a construction diver for many years in Wisconsin and surrounding states. He also worked as a millwright for a number of years in the Fox River Valley. Clark never did retire and was still pursuing his diving activities up until the time of his death. He was a member of the Fox Valley Scuba Club and the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association.

*Jahn Opheim in the wheelhouse of the Meteor. photograph by Tom Villand*



## Collision At Sea: The Loss Of The Schooner *Daniel Lyons*

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The *Gillett* continued to close on the *Lyons* ... soon only a green running light was visible to the *Lyons'* crew. Because green is the starboard marker, it was assumed that the oncoming vessel had shifted course and was now proceeding directly south, allowing the two ships to pass starboard to starboard. But minutes later, only the red (port) light was discernible, indicating that the *Gillett* was now on a crossing track and a collision might be at hand. The *Lyons'* helmsman quickly attempted to turn away, but it was too late ... the sails lost wind, luffed, and his vessel was rammed halfway between the main and mizzen masts on her starboard side!

The collision had occurred about 3:45 am on Friday morning about three miles offshore from the small Door County community of Clay Banks. The two vessels remained impaled together for about 15 minutes, but it was soon apparent that the *Lyons* had been mortally dam-

aged. Nevertheless, the captain and crew remained aboard until the schooner began settling at the stern. Then they quickly retreated to the safety of the *Gillett* as the *Lyons* pulled free and plunged bow first into 115 feet of water.

As commonly evolves with marine tragedies, a slightly different account of the sinking story also exists. In both cases, the basic details remain the same until the vessels collide. The second version then relates that the captain and crew of the *Lyons* gathered most of their possessions and disembarked in the lifeboat. Only the cook, W. H. Barder, lost his clothes and valuables. Soon after the *Lyons* vanished into the deep, the *Kate Gillett* picked up the castaways. History does not clarify which of these two versions of the sinking is the correct one.

The *Gillett* had not escaped the collision unscathed. She had sustained considerable damage to the starboard bow and had lost her

jib-boom along with much of the head-gear. Leaking badly, the vessel headed for Chicago, hugging the shoreline in case it became necessary to enter a nearby port. The two crews took turns at the manual pumps to control the incoming water as the vessel headed south. At 5 am on Saturday morning, the schooner with its exhausted mariners arrived safely in the Windy City.

Once ashore, Captain Jerry McCarthy of the *Gillett* issued a public statement which in no way conceded any fault for the collision. His account implied that the wheelsman on the *Lyons* had contributed to the accident. McCarthy said that upon seeing the *Lyons'* lights coming north by east, he had changed his course one point (about 11 degrees) to the west. The helmsman on the *Lyons*, upon detecting this course change, had tried to turn away and lost the wind. Quickly realizing that he could not safely cross the *Lyons'* bow, McCarthy maneuvered to clear her stern, a fatal move, as it played out. The *Gillett* impacted the *Lyons* at a full nine knots!

As to be expected a conflicting report was tendered by Captain Holland of the *Lyons*. He had refused a *Chicago Times* interview, but persistent reporters extracted information from the schooner's crew which was not refuted by Holland. The story, as told from the viewpoint of the *Lyons'* personnel, related that the captain of the *Gillett* erred by trying to pass across the bow, when a simple easterly adjustment of his course would have allowed a safe and easy starboard



*The West End in Sarnia Harbor about 1873. Great Lakes Marine Collection of the Milwaukee Public Library/Wisconsin Marine Historical Society.*

passage. Even under modern Rules of the Road, as the craft with the wind aft, the *Gillett* would be burdened to grant the *Lyons* clear passage. Whatever navigation rules one applies, it still seems apparent that the *Gillett* was the offending vessel.

A lawsuit against the owners of the *Gillett* seemed likely. Unfortunately, according to marine law of the time, in a favorable court decision the owners of the *Lyons* could only recover the offending vessel. In other words, the owners of the *Lyons* would be awarded the schooner *Gillett* itself! Whereas the *Lyons* had been a reasonably new vessel in fine shape with an A-1 marine rating, the *Gillett* was aged and near the end of her useful life. Thus a judgment awarding the *Gillett* to owners of the *Lyons* would result in a net financial loss, equal approximately to 85 percent of the total value of the *Lyons* and her cargo. Clearly, this would be a very substantial monetary setback!

Fortunately, the owners of the *Lyons* did carry insurance: the Chicago Cargo Pool had insured the grain for \$10,500. The vessel itself, however, was only insured for a total of \$8,000 through policies with Orient Insurance and Detroit Fire and Marine, each providing \$4,000 of coverage. Since the actual value of the hull was reported to be \$15,000, a significant financial loss still occurred even with insurance payback. Historical reports are unclear as to whether further litigation was instigated and how this matter was finally resolved.

History further records that Wisconsin waters were very hostile to Daniel Lyons, owner and namesake of the lost schooner. Another vessel which Lyons owned, the *M. J. Cummings*, was lost near Milwaukee in 1894. This ship, en route to Racine with a load of coal, was running before a howling

spring storm. Unable to safely enter the Milwaukee harbor, her captain decided to drop anchor south of the entry. Unfortunately, both anchors dragged and the craft stranded 1500 feet from shore in 18 feet of water where the waves slowly pounded her to pieces, forcing the crew into the rigging. When the horrific event finally ended, the vessel had disintegrated, six crew members had perished, and the captain of Milwaukee's Lifesaving Service had been relieved of command due to errant judgment calls he made during several failed rescue attempts!

Within the realm of Great Lakes maritime mishaps, the story of the *Lyons* is in no way a unique or exceptional case. Certainly many other shipwrecks resulted in greater losses of life and material goods. However, the *Lyons* could be considered a paradigm of the haphazard circumstances which often shrouded the demise of a Great Lakes sailing ship. For example, the legal entanglements and financial shortcomings characterizing this particular sinking were typical of many which occurred during the late decades of the 19th century. Numerous shipmen, including many captain-owners, found themselves financially wounded or wiped out by various disaster-at-sea scenarios. The *Lyons* story exemplifies one such potential riches-to-rags maritime calamity.

All too commonplace were complex maritime accidents where blame or guilt was hard to assess. Reconstruction of the exact circumstances surrounding a given accident was often impossible in the aftermath. Many investigations degraded into "we said, they said" finger-pointing accusations by the concerned captains, usually backed up by their respective crews who were the only witnesses. Subsequently, the determination of fault and liability was often rel-

egated to the marine courts where an unfavorable judgment frequently decimated the losing party.

The sinking of the *Lyons* also offers a sample of the imperfect chronicling of maritime mishaps which commonly took place during the great age of sail. The conflicting reports describing what happened after the two schooners had collided was hardly an unusual situation. Depending on how, when and where the information was obtained, variant accounts were often derived and reported after a marine disaster. In many cases, the true sequence of events remains unresolved to this very day. Even in our modern era of nearly instant, worldwide electronic information gathering, similar factual inaccuracies still permeate the news media during major stories.

The tale of the *Lyons* does not end here. Captain Cuncer of the schooner *Skylark* reported that the sunken vessel's maintopmast was still jutting above water on October 19, 1878. Confusion subsequently occurred in Door County over the vessel's identity, and the local newspaper, the Door County Advocate, reported it was the *Two Katies*. This is an example of another common type of maritime reporting error: that caused by the similarity of names. The *Two Katies* had collided with the propeller *Waverly* off Whitefish Point and had then beached in Bailey's Harbor as a total loss. No doubt the *Two Katies*, which had nothing to do with the *Lyons* incident, was confused with the *Kate Gillett*!

During the following weeks, other eyewitnesses passing the wreck site confirmed that a single mast was protruding above the surface. Eventually fall storms overwhelmed this final remnant and the wreck then lay undisturbed for over 100 years. In the mid-1980's

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## Collision At Sea: The Loss Of The Schooner *Daniel Lyons*

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the site was located by a team of Wisconsin shipwreck divers following tips from local fishermen. With the cooperation of Algoma fisherman Andy LaFond, these divers salvaged two anchors and some assorted rigging from the wreck in 1985. Accounts of this salvage project reported that the salvors had a serious falling out over the dispersal of the recovered artifacts.

The wreck remained largely unvisited and unstudied until the early 1990's when it was briefly investigated by the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association as part of an ongoing survey of Wisconsin's submerged cultural resources. Dive publications have described the wreck as broken, scattered and uninteresting. As reported, the wreck is broken, but generally along a longitudinal axis which caused the hull to fold open, exposing the internal structure, especially the centerboard box. This intact 3 by 25 foot wooden housing towers ten feet above the bottom with its windlass and pennant chain still attached. A rare site for a diver to behold!

The bow of the ship is collapsed onto its port side, again exposing the internal framing; the anchor windlass and chain are fully accessible. A significant pile of chain lies beneath the windlass on the crumpled side, but the anchors, as mentioned, are gone. Dead eyes are still strapped to the side of the hull. The main mast lies across the split hull about 40 feet back from the bow and projects out into the sand bottom with its trestle platform still in place; a large double block remains chained to its base. Many other artifacts lie scattered about the sandy bottom and buried therein.

Although the ship is indeed split, breakage occurred in such a manner that the internal structure can be examined and studied without any specialized penetration diving. Underwater light conditions and visibility on the wreck are often quite good, especially in late summer and fall. Zebra mussels are present, but are not yet a major hindrance to viewing the vessel's structure. Since three-masted schooners like the Lyons became a primary workhorse on the Great Lakes in the late 1800's, this wreck offers a handy field laboratory where such a vessel can be studied archeologically by fairly routine procedures.

Like certain other shipwrecks, the Lyons has been designated to receive an official Wisconsin state mooring buoy so that divers can visit the wreck without inflicting damage by dragging grapples or anchors. Placement of a mooring will likely occur within the next two to three years, thereby providing easy access to the sunken vessel. Of course, since the passage of the Federal Abandoned Shipwreck Act and related Wisconsin statutes, removal of artifacts from shipwrecks is now illegal. Hopefully, the Lyons will remain a reasonably pristine site for those who visit shipwrecks recreationally as well as for those who wish to study them as historical resources. ■

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## More Association News

### Wisconsin Maritime Trails

At long last, the first two Wisconsin Maritime Trails historic markers are installed! Please check out the latest Notes from the Field entry, which documents the placement of the *Fleetwing* and Pilot Island markers. <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/shipwrecks/notes/>

The *Fleetwing's* marker is located at the public boat ramp at Garrett Bay, near Gills Rock, Door County. The second marker, highlighting the wrecks at Pilot Island, can be found at the Northport Ferry Terminal (Washington Island Ferry) at the tip of Door County. Four more wrecks will be marked by next spring, and we plan on adding more markers every year.

Special thanks to: Jeff Gray who started the Trails program, the town of Liberty Grove who greatly assisted the Society by pouring the concrete bases that anchor the signs, Jim Robinson of the Shoreline Resort who also helped out with logistics, and John Karl and UW Sea Grant Institute who also helped to make things happen.

We are excited about implementing this new aspect of the Trails and welcome comments and suggestions, especially from those of you that we will be working with on additional historic markers. Thank you again to all of our supporters.

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### Meteor Cleanup Successful

Eight WUAA members; Danny Aerts, Cathy Green, Russell Green, Pat Labadie, Russel Leitz, Larry Mishkar, Robert Tom and Tom Villand participated in the cleanup project on the whaleback *Meteor* on October 5 and 6. The crew worked on cleaning, scraping and priming the engine room, one of the most visible and impressionable areas of the ship. Although it was hard work, everyone thought it was worth the effort. A private tour of the ship was one benefit the volunteers received, in addition to much appreciated coffee and donuts and a fine lunch provided by museum staff.

There was a lot of publicity involved in the project, including coverage by three TV stations and a

nice article, including photographs, in the Duluth News Tribune.

The ultimate goal of the Superior Public Museums is to completely restore and refloat the ship. Money is being sought to pay for some repairs, but volunteer work can contribute greatly and is very appreciated. WUAA hopes to organize another work session next year.

The *Meteor* was built in Superior in 1896 by Alexander McDougall's American Steel Barge Company. It was first launched as the *Frank Rockefeller*. In 1927 she was refitted and renamed the *South Park*. In 1942 she was rebuilt as a petroleum tanker and named the *Meteor*. For more on the history of the *Meteor* and other whalebacks see the article by Pat Labadie in the September 2002 issue of *Wisconsin's Underwater Heritage*

*Cleanup crew in the Meteor engine room.  
photograph by Tom Villand and Larry Mishkar*

