

Wisconsin's UNDERWATER HERITAGE

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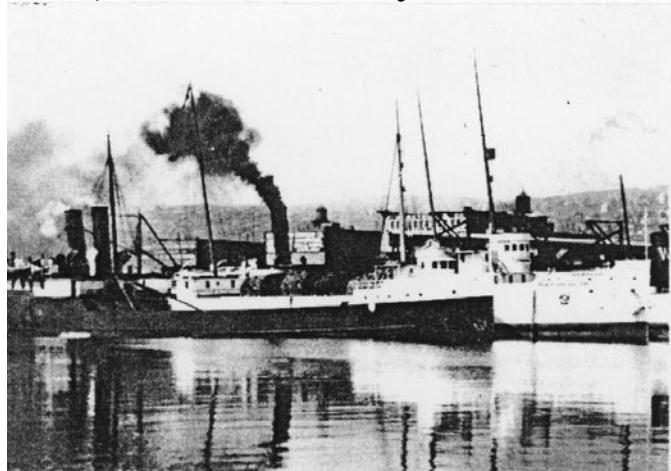
March 2006



We continue our review of various activities surrounding the recent discovery, exploration and scientific study of shipwrecks. (Refer to the December 2005 issue of *Wisconsin's Underwater Heritage*.)

Up on Lake Superior, a group of well-known wreck hunters has found several new deep-water wrecks, and one of them may turn out to be the long-sought *Benjamin Noble*. The *Noble*, a 239-foot steel freighter heavily loaded with metal cargo, disappeared with all 21 hands in a nasty storm in April, 1914. It has been the target of wreck researchers for over three

The Benjamin Noble. Photo courtesy Canal Park Museum.



Shipwrecks In Review

by Dr. Richard Boyd

decades, but to date all theories as to her location, and all sea-going searches had failed. The other wreck found by this group is thought to be the ghost ship *Moonlight*, lost in 1903 with a load of iron ore off the Apostle Islands. Sonar scans suggest a large debris field scattered around the hulk, apparently the iron ore cargo. This ship, like the suspect *Noble*, is in very deep water and has not yet been inspected by divers.

The *Noble's* discovery, if true, is a bit of serendipity since it followed on the heels of another wreck find, errantly identified as the *Robert Wallace*. For nearly five years, wreck divers Jerry Eliason, Kraig Smith,

Ken Merriman and Randy Beebe had been conducting sonar searches for the *Wallace*, a wooden freighter lost in November, 1902. A target, located in late 2003 about 13 miles southeast of Two Harbors (MN) in over 300 feet of water, was explored this summer using mixed-gas rebreath-

ers. Although the sonar profiles seemed to indicate that the vessel was the *Wallace*, the dives proved it to be a large tug, the *Thomas Friant*. Hoping that the *Wallace* still lay nearby, the divers expanded their sonar searches and soon had another target. This appeared to be a small steel freighter which was badly damaged during sinking and lies on its side in well over 300 feet of water. Since there are no other likely steel-wreck candidates in this particular area, it's quite likely to be the *Noble*.

Low water on Lake Superior uncovered several more previously unknown shipwrecks. Near Grand Marais (MI), the remains of a 3-masted schooner-barge have become unburied in the sandy shore. It has been tentatively identified as the *Annie M. Peterson*, lost with two other vessels in a 1914 storm. In tow of the steamer *C. F. Curtis* along with the *Selden Marvin*, the *Peterson* was lost after the towline broke. Unfortunately, the *Curtis* and *Marvin* fared no better and sank with all hands shortly thereafter off the Two-Hearted River. The wreck was discovered by diver Robert

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Upcoming Projects

Meteor Project

WUAA and GLSPS will again be sponsoring a working weekend on the whaleback *Meteor* at Superior WI. This will be our third time working on this project. Past workers have enjoyed their time scraping and painting in the engine room and galley. Work dates will be Saturday and Sunday April 29 and 30. The museum ship's season opens on May 14th. Lodging for Friday and Saturday nights will be furnished by local volunteers.

You can find more information on the *Meteor* and or *Meteor* projects in the Sept. 2002, Dec. 2002 and Dec. 2003 WUAA newsletters. If you don't have them, you can download them from the WUAA website, www.wuaa.org.

If you are interested in helping out please contact Russel Leitz at rleitz@sbcglobal.com or call 715-258-2935.

Clay Banks Project

The Clay Banks region of Door County borders Lake Michigan from about 5 miles north of Algoma to about 3 miles south of the Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal. As Door County goes, this is a relatively undeveloped area with high hills overlooking a shoreline which sports several parks, long stretches of rocky beach and many wooded areas with clusters of cottages and homes. This part of the county quickly developed soon after the Civil War when several lakefront villages sprang up around industries producing lumber, bricks, tanning bark, cordwood and railroad ties. By the late 1860's the area had the longest piers (over 1000 feet) in Door County to facilitate the shipping of local products and to receive incoming supplies. These lengthy docks were needed because the offshore area harbors many shallow reefs, rock ledges and bottom boulders.

As one might guess, this treacherous marine topography resulted in

many documented shipwrecks in the area. Although these wrecks are likely broken up in shallow water, most have never been located, identified or surveyed. Interestingly, several hulks have recently been spotted from airplanes which has sparked new interest in this region. Only one wreck hereabouts has been studied, the *Daniel Lyons*, which lies in deep water several miles off Clay Banks.

Within Clay Banks township, three pioneer villages developed, thrived and then slowly withered away into ghost towns after the land was logged off. Today the town sites of Foscoro, Clay Banks and Horn's Pier have disappeared, leaving only hidden traces of their former glories. The terrestrial remains of their huge piers have likewise vanished beneath the water and even their exact locations have been lost from memory.

It is the intent of the WUAA to relocate the site of these old piers. This

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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.

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Association Business Meetings

March 11 Action Meeting

The next action meeting will be held on Saturday, March 11th at 9:00 a.m. in the third floor conference room of the State Historical Society in Madison. Discussion will mainly be on upcoming WUAA projects. All members are invited to attend.

Jan. 21 Action Meeting

An action meeting was held on Jan. 21, 2006, in Madison. Following is a summary of the meeting. The complete minutes are available on the association web site, www.wuaa.org. The first order of business was to follow up on the items discussed during the May 2005 meeting.

- 1) Russel L. contacted the Chicago group and discovered they use a liability form similar to ours.
- 2) Recommendations for dealing with Waiver, Experience for Projects and Medical Background. Hank W. mentioned that he had drafted the waiver form for the State and that it is something that we could use. The group decided "experience" meant both prior dive experience and experience for the job a diver will perform. Group agreed that each project is different and it would be up to the project/field leader and/or divemaster to take necessary steps to make sure team members have the required experience and are performing a job that they have had prior training/experience in. Members discussed the importance of knowing a diver's current medical health and medical prescriptions. Russel L. commented that we should not make any decisions on the waiver issue until the group was able to view a draft of the state waiver. A motion was put passed that we continue using current WUAA policy on these issues until further notice.
- 3) Dick B. is currently in the process

of reviewing the mailing list and is potentially planning to add more museums and/or maritime organizations.

- 4) Danny A. informed the group that nothing has been done as of yet regarding developing additional content on our web site.
- 5) Bob Korth wrote a purpose statement for WUAA.
- 6) Hank W. will check over WUAA bylaws and articles for possible revision.
- 7) Russel L. is developing an inventory of WUAA past and present work, documentation, information and any physical materials.
- 8) Dick B., Brendon B. and Kimm S. investigated the possibility of an underwater survey course at the Ghost Ship Festival. Dick B. stated that this would be more of a possibility next year. There was also a discussion whether we should resume the similar course at Our World Underwater. Since this event is outside of Wisconsin, other groups may be interested in that event and maybe we should focus more on the GSF. Dick B. will follow up.
- 9) Dick B. informed the group that a speaker bureau is in the works but nothing official has been done as of yet.
- 10) Russel L. has gathered information on officer job descriptions but has not put anything together as of yet.
- 11) Russel L reported that the information sheets for individuals who find a wreck and wish to gather and report information on it has not been developed. This will be made more of a priority because it coincides with potential projects such as Clay Banks.

The next agenda item was the WUAA conference. There was a short discussion on the pro's and con's of the conference. It was decided

that a more detailed discussion would be held at a future meeting when other key WUAA members were present.

Dick B. gave the group an update on the state of affairs of the *Meteor*. He pointed out that the city has been putting money into the area around the site to provide more of an appeal as a destination to those interested in visiting the location. He also shared various pictures of the location and how it has become more of an attraction. Russel L. asked if we should participate in any future projects regarding the *Meteor*. The group shared a collective view that WUAA could help out in order to show further interest in the project however all agreed that we should not set aside any association funds specifically for this project.

The next item for discussion was upcoming future projects. Hank W. informed the group of a potential project that would work with Bob Birmingham regarding Fur Trade research on Wisconsin rivers. Hank W. will follow up with Bob B. to find out more of the specifics.

Dick B. mentioned researching potential sites around the Clay Banks area in Door County since he has knowledge of a number of wrecks located off some of the old docks near various river outlets in the area. Dick has collected some information on a number of these wrecks and will forward this information on to the rest of the group. The diving would be easy off-shore diving in shallow water less than 50 feet. It was decided that WUAA could establish a group to gather preliminary information and do a basic field survey. Also discussed was to use part of the WUAA website as a way to communicate to

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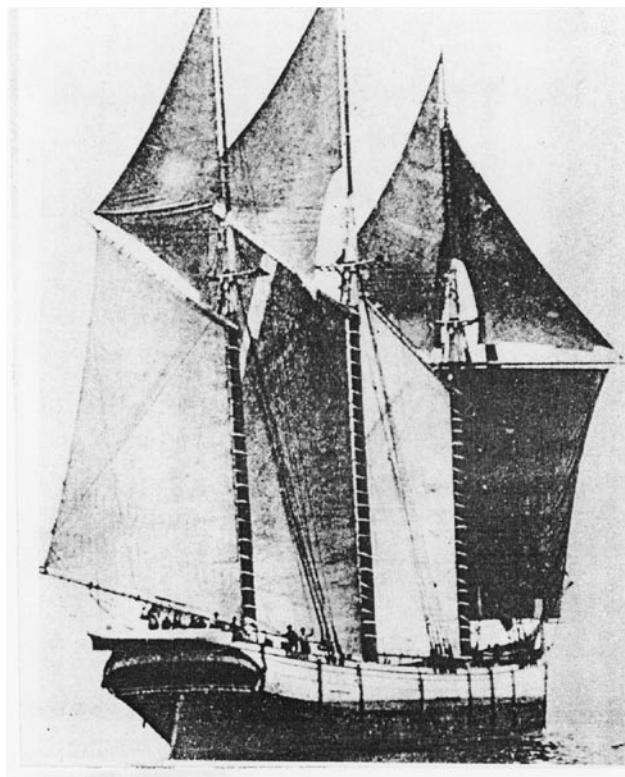
Shipwrecks In Review

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Hughes who sometime earlier had found remnants of the 213-foot packet freighter *Starrucca* that was lost in the same area in 1887. Over on the Canadian shore at Gargantua Harbor, low water has exposed parts of the boiler of the sunken tug *Columbus*. This vessel burned and sank in the harbor in 1909 and for many years has been a remote dive site in Lake Superior Provincial Park.

Plans and work continue to improve the grounds near the museum ship *Meteor* at Barker's Island in Superior (WI). The city has provided money to revamp the area with a new, lighted boardwalk, better parking facilities, and improved docking for charter fishing/tour boats. Members will recall that several years ago WUAA helped with inter-

The Moonlight



nal cleaning and refurbishing of the *Meteor*, the only surviving whaleback freighter. Some concern had been raised over the integrity of the vessel's hull which is partly buried, but recent investigations have disclosed it to be in good shape. Over in Duluth, the city is moving the museum tug *Lake Superior* to make room for the ex-Coast Guard cutter *Sundew*, the city's newest museum boat. Two museum ships, the old laker *William Irvin* and the cutter *Sundew*, will now occupy a slip adjacent to the Duluth Entertainment & Convention Center (DECC), a most convenient site for the lakefront tourist trade.

Over on Lake Huron, noted shipwreck hunter Dave Trotter has added another find to his already impressive list. Found was the barkentine *H. P. Bridge*, sunk off Saginaw Bay in 1869 after being slammed by the propeller *Colorado*. This wreck is said to be one of the best preserved ever found ... resting in 235' of water, she sports a fine

figurehead and standing masts with yardarms still attached. Trotter's group, Underwater Research Associates, has also investigated the steel steamer *W. H. Gilbert*. Also 230' deep, the *Gilbert* is located off Thunder Bay Island where she went to the bottom after a collision in fog in May, 1914. Discovered back in 1983, it was never surveyed due to poor underwater conditions in that area. Over in Lake Michigan off Holland (MI) where Trotter has been searching for the elusive steamer *Chicora*, sonar scans have disclosed another new, deep

water wreck. Its identity has not yet been made public, but further information is promised to be released by next spring.

At Lake Huron's Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, a wreck found by Bob Ballard during an extensive survey in 2002 has been tentatively identified as the *Corsican*. This schooner was run over in 1893 by a steamer, also named the *Corsican*, sending the sailing craft and all of her crew to the bottom. Several sailing ships of identical class and vintage "went missing" in this same area around Thunder Bay Island, so quick identification of specific wrecks is often difficult.

Down on Lake Erie, the Peachman Lake Erie Shipwreck Center and its Maritime Archeology Survey Team (MAST) are undertaking some new activities this year. The Center will offer a workshop in shipwreck underwater archeology this April (2005). This 3-day program for scuba divers and amateur maritime historians will examine both basic and advanced techniques for surveying underwater sites. Continuing its work on Lake Erie wrecks, MAST has begun a survey of the *Craftsmen*, a large dredge barge which sank in 1958 off Avon Point. In only 40 feet of water and barely two miles off shore, this vessel has been a very popular dive site. Foul weather on Lake Erie has stymied progress on that project, so it will continue into 2005. Also on the docket will be the placement of mooring buoys on six prominent shipwrecks.

Incidentally, a charter member of the MAST team became the North American Rolex Scholar as awarded by the 2004 Our World Underwater Program in Chicago. Joseph Hoyt, raised near Put-In-Bay on Lake Erie, became a scuba diver at an early age and developed a fascination with shipwrecks by age 15. As a teenag-

er, he became involved with avocational underwater archeology activities and eventually the MAST program. He then entered East Carolina University (ECU), one of the few colleges in the USA that offers a graduate program in underwater archeology. Of course, ECU has also produced Wisconsin's former group of outstanding underwater scientists including Dave Cooper, Jeff Gray and Russ and Cathy Green.

Georgann & Mike Wachter, also active divers in the Peachman program and frequent speakers on the "shipwreck circuit," have located and explored the sidewheel steamer *Wisconsin*, lost in western Lake Erie near West Sister Island in 1853. This vessel is of considerable historical interest because its 1837 power plant is one of the oldest engines ever found. The Wachters are also investigating a schooner barge off Port Stanley in 80 feet of water. This hulk, thought to be the *Theodore Perry*, is a 262-ton bulk freighter which "bottomed out" in a storm, split open, and sank in July, 1887. The wreck is reported to be in fine shape with the windlass, wheel, pumps, and one anchor still in place. Unfortunately, many small artifacts were pilfered by divers when the wreck was first discovered several years ago.

During the past year there have been at least six reports of "net hangs" by Lake Erie fishermen and most of these are apparently on shipwrecks. Details about the vessels are still sketchy at present, but active explorations are currently underway. Stay tuned for more information on these discoveries.

Several years ago out on Lake Ontario, a beached and buried shipwreck was found near Southampton. The small craft appeared to be very old and possessed a mounted swivel cannon, a most unusual feature. Initial investigations suggested that

it was the *Weazell*, a merchant schooner built in 1786 in Detroit. Armament was not unthinkable the 1790's, since the *Weazell* apparently carried general cargo, furs, rum and firearms throughout a lawless wilderness region. Recent on-site archeological work, however, has uncovered military uniform buttons which suggests that the ship is the *General Hunter*, a 1812 warship lost in 1816. Regardless of its final identity, the wreck is certainly of considerable historic interest and value.

In New York's Hudson River, an extensive sonar survey being conducted to evaluate marine habitats, has turned up many sunken vessels, in fact, probably over 100. The sonic profile of one ship seems to be that of a Hudson River sloop. These rare sailboats were specifically designed for transporting goods along inland waterways, and about 10 of them are known to have been lost in an 1870 storm. Diving will soon give us first hand information on this matter. These sloops, like certain boats used on Wisconsin's own Fox River, are known only from early writings and sketches... no actual remains have ever been recovered.

Down Virginia way, the Mariner's Museum at Newport News is featuring a display depicting the famous 1862 battle between the ironclads *USS Monitor* and *CSS Virginia* (formerly the *Merrimac*). Besides interesting photographs of these vessels, salvaged parts from the *Monitor* can be viewed in the 20 huge tanks where they are presently being conserved. The curators have tastefully interwoven documents, letters, photographs and artifacts to tell the story of the battle and the subsequent emergence of iron warships. Over the next several years, the exhibit will be expanded and revamped to create the national *USS Monitor* Center which will open in March, 2007.

Out west in Wyoming, the National Park Service conducted an interesting underwater project in Yellowstone Park at the Firehole River. Shortly after Yellowstone became the Nation's first national park, the Marshall Hotel was built in 1880 on the edge of the river to provide lodging where early tourists could have a "wilderness experience" along with some creature comforts, namely natural hot baths. A sizeable frontier community developed there including the hotel, a blacksmith shop, saloon, livery stables and a thermal bathhouse. Up to about 1891, the complex used the river as a handy dumping ground, thereby creating a layered and dated artifact field for future anthropologists. The Park Service, with staff and students from East Carolina University and several other research centers, surveyed the river bottom and recovered various artifacts, which are currently being interpreted and conserved for display in a new Yellowstone Park museum. These materials should give interesting insights about the life and times of 19th century wilderness vacationers. This project was the first ever in a thermal river environment and won an archeology award for its uniqueness.

Another fantastic deep-water treasure ship has been found, this one off the south Georgia coast. Here sank the *SS Republic* in October, 1865, while heading from New York to New Orleans, carrying 92 passengers and a mass of gold and silver coins! The money was to resupply the cash-starved South as the post-war Reconstruction Era got underway, but a hurricane interrupted the *Republic's* journey. A few survivors lived to tell the tale of the steamer's demise, but the exact site of the sinking remained unknown until 2003. Using a sophisticated

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sonar system, a group of Tampa-based treasure hunters began seeking the wreck, following years of formal research. After discovering a likely sonar target in 1700 feet of water under the Gulf Stream, they confirmed the wreck's identity with a small ROV. In 2004, the salvors returned with a heavy-duty ROV, equipped with a mechanical arm and capable of operating in the swift bottom currents prevalent at the site. The numerous coins retrieved so far are in mint-condition and many are rare specimens. The entire cargo is now estimated to be worth \$75 million. For excellent coverage of this matter, see National Geographic Magazine (September, 2004).

Down in Central America, significant underwater discoveries related to the Mayan civilization have been made within the numerous underwater caves scattered throughout the Yucatan Peninsula. The ancient Mayans had special reverence for caves, viewing them as portals to their sacred Underworld. Cenotes (open, water-filled sinkholes, usually linked to cave systems) were often used as worship centers, sacrificial pools, as well as water-sources. Many of the great Mayan cities developed around prominent cenotes. In recent years, the Mexican government and its university system has created a special archeological center and dive team to survey, map, and explore the hundreds of cenotes in southern Mexico. These sinkholes are now yielding vast amounts of information and well-preserved artifacts, including human sacrificial remains. As expected, these materials are often nicely layered, just as they were deposited, ranging in age from pre-Mayan (600

BC) through post-Classic times (AD 1,500). Evidence of man's earliest activities on the Yucatan (10,200 BC) has also been found adjacent to these sinkholes.

Besides the fascinating archeology associated with the cenotes, their geology is equally interesting. About 65 million years ago, a huge meteorite struck the northwestern edge of the Yucatan, blasting a crater 110-miles across and producing a worldwide debris cloud that possibly led to the extinction of the dinosaurs. The impact of this "space rock" so badly fractured the limestone underlying the peninsula that it eventually pocked, eroded, collapsed and finally filled with water, creating many of the region's numerous sinkholes!

Across the Atlantic in North Sea waters, the sunken German submarine *U-864* has been located by the Norwegian Navy. This vessel has some unique history since it was the only sub ever to be torpedoed and sunk by another sub while both were submerged! In early 1944, the British sub *HMS Venturer* sent the *U-864* and its crew of 73 to the bottom. Now the Norwegians are pondering raising the craft, but records indicate that it carried a cargo and ballast of mercury which poses an enormous environmental risk.

Down the Atlantic Coast in France, underwater archeology is shedding some light on French privateers, essentially pirates licensed by the Crown to prey on commercial vessels of designated enemy nations. The adventures of various privateers have become legendary, although very little physical evidence of their existence has ever been found. During the 17th century, St. Malo, a French port, was known as the "Hornet's Nest" due to the treacherous shoals and narrow channels leading into this port, plus the fact that it was a thriving den of pirates. Sometime ago, two privateer vessels,

apparently corsairs, were discovered in shallow water off St. Malo. Ongoing excavations are revealing details on these ships as well as on the life and times of the pirates who sailed them. For example, certain fishing paraphernalia found suggests that the crew fished off Newfoundland for part of the year and would then recross the ocean to harness European shipping. Such radical "turnabout" in occupations was known from writings, but this is the first physical evidence indicating that this practice really did occur!

Moving down to Portugal, we learn about the excavations of a singular wreck in the Tagus River near Lisbon. This vessel, the *Nossa Senhora dos Martires* which stranded and sunk in September, 1606, may be the only true "spice ship" ever discovered. She carried a fortune in peppercorns, exotic spices, and Indian cotton cloth. Much of this cargo was salvaged after the accident, but 400 years later, a layer of peppercorns still covered remnants of the hull, which has sparked the nickname "PepperWreck." Next to nothing is known about this type of merchant vessel, called a nau, so archeologists have been gleaned much valuable data from this site since it was discovered some 10 years ago. About 15 naus have been found over the years, but essentially nothing was left of the ships themselves, thus the "PepperWreck" is unique in that regard. Apparently the brackish river water preserved portions of the wood structure, whereas ocean water and ship worms would have obliterated it. Excavations have periodically continued on the wreck as time and money permitted, spearheaded by Portuguese archeologists and visiting scientists from Texas A & M's Institute of Nautical Archeology.

In Italy, the remains of the only Roman warship ever found have

been reclaimed from the muddy harbor at San Rossore in Pisa, not far from the famous Leaning Tower. The 40-foot warship, described as the "best-preserved ever found," dates from about AD 30 and possessed a reinforced oak prow covered with iron for ramming purposes. The artifacts aboard should provide significant new information about Roman naval warfare. Over the years, this small, silted inlet has produced several other fascinating ancient craft, including a merchant vessel containing the skeleton of a North African lion, probably destined for gladiatorial combat.

Elsewhere in Italy, a 2nd century AD Roman ship was uncovered during the construction of subway tunnels in Naples. Although the tunnels are being dug almost a mile from the sea, 2,000 years ago that area was shoreline. The discovered craft appears to be a 33-foot coastal fishing vessel in exceedingly good condition due to the airless mud that encased it. Aboard were many utensils, amphorae, crockery and even remnants of a sailor's shoes.

On the Indian subcontinent, a group of coconut harvesters near the coastal town of Kadakkarpally discovered the remains of a most unusual boat. The 1,000-year old vessel was found buried nearly a mile inland, but appears to be of a coasting type used for regional trade. It was made from a local hardwood, but its planked construction is not consistent with that of other craft of the same age known from India. This has led to some speculation as to the origin of its design, perhaps imported from some far land. Archeologists from the Institute of Nautical Archeology are presently assessing the vessel. ■

Clay Banks Project

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should, in turn, lead to the discovery of several new wrecks which history indicates were lost either at or near these docks. In addition, we would like to canvas the adjacent shallow reefs (25 feet deep or shallower) for other wrecks and artifacts known to have been lost in this region. In truth, virtually no archeological survey of any nature has been done in this region.

We will organize this project so that small groups or single teams of divers can check out a given area as delineated on a chart and site plan. As each team completes a precur- sory survey of a given sector, this action will be recorded on a master site plan along with a written report detailing the divers' observations. As areas are investigated and items located, any significant finds can then be studied or surveyed in detail at a later time. Since the area involved is quite sizeable, this project will take several years to complete.

More details on this project will be in the next WUAA newsletter. If you are interested in participating please contact us at wuaa@mailbag.com.

Business Meeting

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members what is being done on this project. Hank W. volunteered to work on the grids for this project.

The number of WUAA meetings per year was discussed. A motion was passed to change the bylaws to specify that WUAA will hold one general meeting annually with multiple meetings throughout the year designated for committee work.

Russel L. will look into the cost of purchasing additional WUAA bi-fold correspondence cards. A motion also passed to purchase additional Mylar sheets.

There was also some discussion about purchasing additional T-shirts. The question was asked whether or not we wanted to change the T-shirt design. No decision was made.

Russel L asked if WUAA should have a booth at the Ghost Ships Festival. Danny A. said that he thought we would be able to distinguish ourselves more as a group if we had our own booth. All members agreed that this was something we would look at doing.

It was asked by Russel L. if WUAA should continue to donate \$100 annually to for the Archeology Week poster. Last year WUAA did not get printed on the brochure/poster. A motion passed that we should continue with the donation only if they have a maritime theme and the name of our organization gets printed on their brochure/poster.

The members discussed changing the name of the organization to "Wisconsin Underwater Archeology and Maritime History Association". Danny A. replied that maybe we just look at changing the name as it relates to the annual conference. All members seemed to agree. Nothing further was decided.

Coming Events

Mar. 11, 2006 **Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association Action Committee Meeting.** 9:00 am at the State Historical Society, Madison. For information check the WUAA web site at www.wuaa.org or email us at wuaa@mailbag.com

Mar. 11, 2006 **North American Shipwreck & Dive Show.** West Bloomfield, MI. For information check their web site at www.shipwreckshow.com.

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

Jun. 1-4, 2006 **North American Society for Oceanic History Conference.** Wisconsin Maritime Museum, Manitowoc, WI. For information check the museum website www.wisconsinmaritime.org.

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Wisconsin
Underwater
Archeology
Association

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