

Wisconsin's UNDERWATER HERITAGE

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September 2007

The Milwaukee Fireboat Number 23

by Brendon Bailod



On January 10, 2005, Milwaukee dive charter captain Jerry Guyer was doing some routine sidescanning with his recently acquired Marine Sonic 900 kHz sonar when he encountered an unexpected surprise. Guyer was covering an area he had covered many times before, just to the south of the *Prinz Willem* wreck site, when the image of a previously unknown wreck crawled across his screen. The image showed a small (around 100 ft.) wooden hull with a big boiler on it, sitting in around 70 ft of water.

A few chilly dives quickly revealed that this was a new wreck site. A call to the author to compare notes confirmed Guyer's suspicions that the hull was most likely one of

the Milwaukee Fire Department's early 20th century fireboats. The heavy boiler, the hull dimensions, the appearance of char on the hull and the condition all pointed toward the Milwaukee Fireboat Number 23 as the leading candidate.

Two of Milwaukee's fireboats are known to litter the bottom off Milwaukee Harbor. The boats, known among historians as *MFD 23* and *MFD 17*, respectively, have been targets for area wreck hunters for about 30 years. The ships, although sunk intentionally, are considered valuable pieces of Milwaukee community history and would be popular dive targets. As such, the possible discovery of one of the fireboats generated considerable interest in the Milwaukee

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MFD 23

Bailey's Harbor Survey

by Jon Van Harpen
and Russel Leitz

The Wisconsin Underwater Archaeology Association completed more survey work on shipwrecks located by the Bailey's Harbor Lighthouse in late June. This continues a project started several years ago.

In 1998 summer resident and WUAA member Hank Whipple suggested the project to the group and that summer a survey by WUAA in cooperation with the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) of an unidentified schooner located in front of the lighthouse was partially completed. WUAA members returned the following three summers and in 2002 a mooring buoy was attached to the site by the WHS as part of their Maritime Trails program. The wreck was identified as the schooner *Christina Nilson* that sank there in October of 1884. The WHS in 2003 installed a Maritime Trails marker on the observation deck of the new Bailey's Harbor Marina. This is one of seven markers in Door County and has a brief history of the *Nilson* with information about the site.

WUAA returned in 2003 to investigate more wreckage found in the lagoon in back of the lighthouse.

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Association News

WUAA Action Meeting

An action planning meeting will be held on September 15, 2007. The meeting will be at Brendon's house in Marshall. All members are welcome to attend.

Items to be discussed are the fall conference and the summer projects. For more information or for directions to the meeting, email WUAA at wuaa@mailbag.com.

Field Work – Bailey's Harbor

This summer a group of WUAA members continued the Bailey's Harbor survey project. A report of their activities begins on page one of this issue.

Field Work – MFD 23

One of the WUAA's summer field-work projects has been to map and record the remains of the *MFD 23*. (An article on the history *MFD 23* begins on page one of this issue.)

The site was initially filmed by Tamara Thompsen of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, which revealed many interesting features. The WUAA fieldwork has been led by Kimm Stabelfeldt of the Great Lakes Shipwreck Research Foundation in conjunction with Jerry Guyer of LenDer Charters.

Due to the depth of the site and the complexity of the debris field, the survey work on the *MFD 23* will be extended into the 2008 field-work season. A preliminary report on the site and the history of the fireboat will be made at the 2007 WUAA Fall Conference to be held in October at the Four Points Sheraton – Milwaukee Airport.

WUAA Fall Conference

The annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology and Maritime History conference will be held in Milwaukee on October 20 (see flyer on facing page).

The featured speaker is Chris Baruth, curator of the American Geographical Society collection at UW-Milwaukee and a leading scholar on the history of the Lake Survey. He will be speaking about the history of mapping the Great Lakes. We will also have a presentation on the history and survey of the *MFD 23* as well as other presentations.

The exact date and location will be announced in the coming weeks. The training will include in-depth training on underwater archeology survey techniques and will include both land based and underwater practice.

The Association will also conduct a business meeting on that day.

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 write to the postal or email address below.

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3rd Annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology & Maritime History Conference

Saturday, October 20, 2007, 9 AM – 8 PM
Four Points Sheraton – Milwaukee Airport
4747 S. Howell Ave, Milwaukee, WI • 414- 481-8000

The Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association (WUAA) is pleased to announce the 3rd Annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology and Maritime History Conference. This event will bring together Great Lakes archeologists, sport divers, marine historians, shipping buffs and hobbyists for a full day of seminars and workshops related the Great Lakes maritime history and underwater archeology.

Presentation/workshop topics will include newly discovered historic Great Lakes shipwrecks and fieldwork to document them, historical research and documentation techniques, inland underwater archeology and upcoming fieldwork opportunities. Noted archeologists and historians from around the Great Lakes region will participate in interactive discussion with attendees.

The conference will be held on Saturday, October 20, 2007 at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and is open to the public. For registration, directions, event schedule and lodging information, visit the WUAA website at www.wuaa.org. Inquiries may be made to conference chairperson Brendon Baillod, brendon@shipwreck.com.

For Hotel Reservations, call 414-481-8000. Mention that you will be attending the 3rd Annual Wisconsin Underwater Archeology & Maritime History Conference. ***Reservations must be in by October 14th to get the group rate.***

Other Hotels:

Radisson Milwaukee Airport, 6331 South 13th St.
(800) 303-8002
Baymont Inn, 7141 S. 13th Street
(414) 762-2266

Hotel Lunch & Dinner Options:

Scooter's Sport Bar
America's Lounge
America's House of Steaks
Courtyard Restaurant (breakfast only)



On the corner of S. 13th and Layton across from Mitchell Field
Take I-94 North from Chicago
Take I-43 South from Green Bay
Take I-94 East from Madison

MFD 23

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community as well as among the Milwaukee Fire Department.

Fireboat #23 was built at Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin in 1896 by the yard of Rieboldt & Wolter as the *August F. Janssen*. Competition had been stiff for the construction of Milwaukee's fireboat, and Rieboldt and Wolter were eager to win the contract, having just transferred their shipbuilding operations from Sheboygan to Sturgeon Bay. When the contract was won on July 18, 1896, it was a big boost for Rieboldt & Wolter, the *Janssen* being the first vessel they would build at Sturgeon Bay. The fireboat was named after the Milwaukee Fire Department's assistant chief, who had died along with eight other firemen in one of Milwaukee's most tragic blazes when the Davidson Theater burned on April 9, 1894. She was built at a cost of \$32,800 and slid down the ways on November 14, 1896. She measured 100.5 x 24.7 x 10.2 ft. and 133 gross tons. Her enrollment paper states she had an 84.48 ton capacity under deck, plus a 48.96 ton capacity above deck. Subtracting 42.70 tons for non cargo deckhouse space gave her a net tonnage of 90 tons. She was described as a screw steamer with one deck, no mast, a plain head and round stern. Her official number was 130711 and she was put into service on April 1, 1897. Her launch was recorded as follows:

Launch of the Milwaukee Fire Tug – Milwaukee's fine fire tug *A.F. Janssen* was launched at the shipyard of Rieboldt, Wolter & Co, Wednesday noon with all the pomp and glory incident to such an occasion. The train, which arrived at 11 o'clock had on board a delegation of Milwaukee's citizens, who were met at the depot by Mayor George Nelson

and John Conrad, the designer of the boat. Following is a list of the visitors: Chief Foley, Commissioners of Public Works Benzenberg and Brockman, Assemblyman Woller, Alderman Geo. E. Hill, Constable Corcoran, Thos. F. Ramsey, Patrick H. Connelly, O.T. Renning, Henry J. Kuntz, L.C. Caufy, Ernest H. Doerfner, Peter A. Stamm, Dietrich Thiele, Herman Buth, Robt. L. Rudolph, Teter Pawinski, Elias Stellenwerk, A.J. Andreszewski, S. Hanisecki, George Thuring, S.J. Schmidt, Mathias Berg, George Glasser, superintendent of fire alarm, C.F. Elmes of the Elmes Engineering works, who furnished the machinery, Chas. Nimmer and G.W. Steneve. Busses were in waiting and the visitors were driven directly to the shipyard where the fire tug with colors flying made a handsome appearance. After looking over the craft the aldermen were lined on her starboard side and a photograph taken. While this was going on ship carpenters were completing the preparations for the send off. Before the props were removed from the tug's sides, all the aldermen, with the exceptions of Kuntz and Thuring, scrambled to terra firma. Charles Elmes and John Conrad also remained on the tug for the initial bath. Nine of the townspeople also remained on board, making a total of just thirteen persons – a lucky omen in marine circles. At precisely 12 o'clock noon the rope was cut that held the craft on the ways and Alderman Rudolph cracked a bottle of "Milwaukee's Best" on her bow with the words: "In the name of the City of Milwaukee, I christen thee *August F. Janssen*. It shall be thy duty to protect the city in times of danger and distress." With the last words, the magnificent craft was moving down the ways, which performance

was accompanied by the shrieking whistles of several tugs. Without a hitch to mar the occasion the fine craft slid into the bay like an eel, her stern sinking deep into the water, driving a mess of foam and waves before it. And then the handsome tug straightened up with the grace of a swan amid the cheers of the hundreds of people who had assembled to witness the launch. Exclamations of delight and admiration were heard from all sides on the beauty of the tug's lines and the fine appearance she made in the water, and it was the verdict of all present that the city of Milwaukee had a fire tug it could well feel proud of. After the launch, the aldermen were served with refreshments by the dry-dock people, after which they had an hour or more in which to look about the city. They all returned home on the afternoon train. The *Janssen* left for Milwaukee on Thursday afternoon in tow of the tug *Sydney Smith*. – *Door County Advocate*, November 14, 1896

MFD 23's machinery was purchased at a cost of \$30,000 and designed by the Elmes Engineering Works of Chicago. Charles F. Elmes

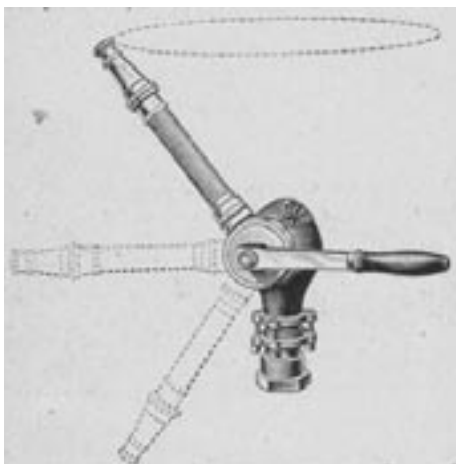
MFD 23. photo by Tamara Thompson



specialized in fireboat machinery and had designed the power plants for both Milwaukee's and Chicago's previous fireboats. Elmes designed *MFD 23*'s plant to pump 4,500 gallons per minute, delivered from two brass water cannons, mounted atop the deckhouse and bow, respectively. Elmes designed her with a double high pressure engine with a cylinder of 18 inches diameter and a 20 inch stroke. The engine was powered by a single firebox boiler of 9 ft by 16 ft. The *23*'s power plant was identical to the *17*'s in every respect except that the *17*'s cylinder had a diameter of 18 inches.

The *MFD 23* was Milwaukee's third fireboat, built as a twin for Milwaukee's second fireboat, the *James Foley*. The *Foley* (later *MFD 17*), had been put in service in December 1893 and had proved a remarkable success, as had Milwaukee's first fireboat, the *Catacraft*, placed in service in October 1889. These fireboats were part of a trend in fire fighting to use fireboats in cities on rivers and lakes. The fireboats proved particularly useful for bringing large amounts of water to places where hydrants weren't available. Without fireboats, water had to be hauled by horse-drawn wagon, and was quickly used up. Fireboats however, permitted water to be pumped directly from a lake or

water cannon



river, and delivered great distances by powerful pumps. Fireboats revolutionized fire fighting in waterfront areas and saved thousands of warehouses, grain silos, tanneries and other flammable waterfront buildings.

The *MFD 23* was initially used only in Milwaukee Harbor, and as such, didn't carry a certificate of enrollment with the customs house for several years. However, she did receive the usual inspections according to steam vessels of the day. She was considered quite a fine fireboat and was looked over by the City of Duluth, which wished to purchase a similar vessel:

The fire tug *August F. Janssen*, which was built at this port by Riebolt, Wolter and Co. for the city of Milwaukee has been inspected at that port by the board of fire commissioners of Duluth, who are desirous of buying fire boat. The *Janssen* engines were put in operation and one 2-inch stream and one 3-inch stream were thrown high in the air for half an hour. The boat was then run up and down the river, affording the visitors a good view of the territory covered by the boats and showing their plan of operation. The people of Duluth are anxious to buy a fireboat and the commissioners expressed themselves a much pleased with the operations of the *Janssen* and the method employed in that city of utilizing the boats and pipe lines. The prospects are that the shipyard people will have another fire tug to build. – *Door County Advocate*, March 13, 1897

MFD 23 had a long and successful career with the Milwaukee Fire Department, extinguishing many vessel fires and saving numerous waterfront businesses. In 1901, her name was officially changed to *No. 23 M.F.D.* This change was made to reflect the engine company which manned the specific boats.

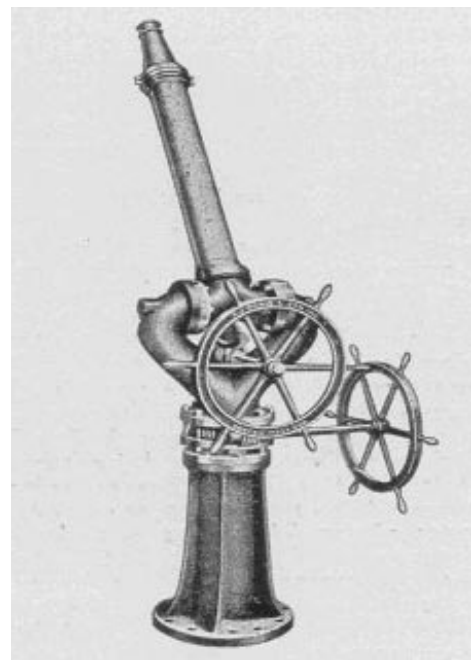
The *August F. Janssen* was manned by Engine Company 23, while the *James Foley* was manned by Engine Company 17. From May 1897 to June 1906, the *23* was stationed at the Cherry Street Bridge where she shared fire fighting duties with the *James Foley* and *Catacraft*. Following the *Catacraft*'s retirement, the *MFD 23* was moved to the Menomonee River Dock just west of 6th Street, where she remained stationed for the rest of her career.

In reviewing the certificates of enrollment at the Port of Milwaukee it is interesting to note that the fireboat's first four owners were generally recorded as the Mayor of Milwaukee at the time, and that the tug's ownership followed the two year Mayoral election cycle. Following the 1912 election, the Fire Department began to record the Milwaukee Fire Department's Chief Engineer Clancy as the Managing Owner. This relieved the need for re-enrollment every two years.

The *MFD 23* had two captains for most of her career, Adolph J. May serving the majority of her

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water cannon



MFD 23

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career as her master. Other firemen who crewed the *23*, included Tom Rutherford, John Koster, Dan Ruppert, Timothy J. O'Donahue and Frank Etzel.

On April 30, 1906, the *23* was involved in a dramatic rescue, for which her captain, Harris G. Giddings, along with firemen Lawrence A. Hanlon and Peter Lancaster, were awarded gold Carnegie Medals. The citation reads:

Harris G. Giddings, aged forty-five, captain of city fireboat, helped to save Jacob Flyter, aged thirty, labor foreman, from drowning, Milwaukee, Wis., April 30, 1906. Giddings and two other men descended a fifty-five foot shaft and rescued Flyter, who was imprisoned in an air-chamber of a tunnel under the Milwaukee River, into which water was leaking.

By 1920, the Milwaukee Fire Department had two newer fireboats, the *MFD 15* and the *MFD 29*, as well as the *MFD 17*, which was

still in service. With the aging *MFD 23* as the fourth fireboat, her days were numbered when the decision to order a new, modern fireboat was made in 1922. The *MFD*'s new fireboat, to be named *Torrent*, would have nearly three times the pumping capacity of the aging *23*. As such, the *23* was stripped of all her major equipment in December of 1922. Her parts were removed for use as spares on the aging *MFD 17* and her engine was removed for scrap. On July 27, 1923, she was towed out into deep water off Milwaukee, set ablaze as a public spectacle and allowed to sink. It was an unceremonious end for a vessel that had fulfilled her duty "to protect the city in times of danger and distress."

The *MFD 17* followed in the *23*'s wake, being scuttled on May 12, 1930 with her engine and machinery reportedly still on board. Her remains have yet to be located, but are believed to lie further northeast.

The *MFD 23* is today in a fairly concentrated debris field in about 70 ft of water just south of the site of the *Prinz Willem*. Her main hull bed is relatively intact and features her

massive boiler and condenser as well as her very substantial propeller, which is still standing upright beneath her sternpost. ■

References:

Cyclopedia of Fire Prevention and Insurance, American Technical Society, Chicago, 1912.

Carnegie Hero Fund Commission Report - 1907

Fireboats - Paul Ditzel.

Fireboats in Milwaukee - James Moher, John Sutschek - *Inland Seas*, Spring 1962.

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WMHS Soundings - Vol. 31, No. 2.

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Annual Report of the Steamboat Inspection Service - 1897 - 1902.

Beeson's Marine Directory - 1897 - 1903.

Annual Lists of US Merchant Vessels - 1896 - 1930.

Port of Milwaukee Customs House Vessel Enrollment Certificates

Milwaukee Public Library - Vessel File.

Milwaukee Fire Department File - James Ley, Historian.

Tamara Thompson - State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Kimm Stabelfeldt - Great Lakes

3 ft. ruler laying on covering board, cross line is tied to the and to the left of the scarp is the rail cap of Baileys Harbor wreck.

Bailey's Harbor diving crew. Bob Lijewski, Russel Leitz and Jon Van Harpen with Steve Wagner, on Steve's boat.



Bailey's Harbor

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This turned out to come from one to two additional schooners wrecked in the area.

The WUAA fieldwork team this year consisted of Russell Leitz, Bob Lijenski, Bernie Bloom, Steve Wagner and Jon Van Harpen. The fieldwork consisted of surveying sites located last fall and this winter north of the lighthouse. The site turned out to be a new wreck.

On June 24 WUAA president Russell Leitz, who has been instrumental in the survey work at Bailey's Harbor, set up base lines and cross lines on the 56-foot by 13-foot side piece of an unknown vessel found by Hank Whipple in the harbor of Baileys Harbor. Depth was 12 feet and the location was N 45 03.432 and W 87 05.910. This is west of the old light house. Additional data and drawings were also completed on pieces in the cove east of the light house that were drawn in 2003. Jon Van Harpen supplied his boat for this work.

On June 30 the group worked on mapping one of the new sections and taking additional side scan imaging of the area. Steve graciously lent his 23-foot boat *Seehund* for dive operations and side scan survey of the area. More wreckage was discovered north of the new sections. Wreckage stretches from the

reef almost all the way north to the Bailey's Harbor Yacht Club. This would suggest that there are at least four or more wrecks in the immediate area.

Each of the divers did two dives and completed drawing two 10-foot sections and one 14-foot section to scale underwater. Another 10-foot section was half completed. That evening at the cottage, the 34 feet of completed drawings were traced onto the site plan.

The next morning, July 1, drawing of the wreck was completed. Measurements were recorded on various planks, fasteners and frames. Pictures were taken and the base line and cross lines removed. Zebra mussels thickly covered the entire wreck, requiring scrapping for detection of some details.

The thickness of the ceiling planks was 2 in. and outer planks 1 in.. The rail cap was 3 in. thick and 11 in. wide while the cover board was 3 in. thick and 16 in. wide with the top edge convex. Fasteners on the ceiling were 1 in. square with no roves. Length couldn't be determined. Fasteners on the outer planking were 7/8 in. diameter and 11 in. long. The outer side was not visible so it is not known if roves are present. Frames were all double, 6 in. molded, 5 in. sided, room 10 in., space 16 in. with room and space totaling 26 in.. The knee measured 2 ft. 6 in. along the body and 1 ft. 7 in. along the arm.

It was determined by the group that this is an entirely new wreck and not just pieces of the *Christina Nilson*. This is a very high-energy environment and in the days of sail it was a very hazardous area for ships. Because of the reef, rock ledges, storm's and ice shoves ships that sank here broke up and dispersed leaving parts of one wreck articulating with the site of another. This

makes a survey of the area more difficult and precision work has to be done to associate the proper section with the correct wreck.

A second piece Hank found nearby was not drawn but pictures were taken and measurements made. It includes a 54-foot keelson section with a 9-foot by 24-foot centerboard trunk lying across it. Thanks to Hank Whipple for placing a buoy on the pieces.

Additional pieces of wreckage were detected by using Steve's side scan sonar. Afternoon dives were made on these pieces to take measurements and pictures. Two were side pieces lying east of the *Christina Nilson*, one measuring 51 feet by 9 feet and the other 26 feet by 13 feet. Five side pieces were north of the side piece we drew. Dimensions were 30 feet by 8 feet, 45 feet by 9 feet, 57 feet by 8 feet and two partially on top of each other, 43 feet by 12 feet and 46 feet by 9 feet. A sixth piece in the same area appeared to be a stern section. Exact measurements were not made but were approximately 6 feet by 8 feet by 5 feet high.

The seasonal buoy was placed on the *Christina Nilson*.

WUAA members were very pleased with the amount of work accomplished in a weekend in which the weather cooperated throughout.

Some tasks, such as using a metal detector to try to locate remnants of the pig iron cargo that the *Christina Nilson* was carrying for a more positive identification and other reconnaissance work could be accomplished this season. Next year additional mapping of sections may be done. Russell Leitz also entertained the idea of this area becoming a small maritime preserve. The *Christina Nilson* is already on the list of historic places in the National Parks System. ■

knee on Baileys Harbor wreck



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

Sept. 15, 2007

Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association Action Committee Meeting. 10:00 am at Brendon's in Marshall. For information check the WUAA web site at www.wuaa.org or email wuaa@mailbag.com.

Oct. 20, 2007

Wisconsin Underwater Archeology and Maritime History Conference. Four Points Sheraton, Milwaukee. For information check the WUAA web site at www.wuaa.org or email wuaa@mailbag.com.

Nov. 2-3, 2007

Gales of November. DECC, Duluth, MN. For information check the Lake Superior Maritime Museum web site at www.lsmma.org.