



JILL WOODBECK/NEWS-REVIEW

Josh Barnes points out the major shipwrecks in the Great Lakes. Barnes leads a group of people from Charlevoix as they search for The Griffon, a ship that disappeared in Lake Michigan on its maiden voyage in 1679.

JUN 02 2006

Lake Michigan bottom home to many shipwrecks

ERICA RICHARDS
NEWS-REVIEW STAFF WRITER

The eerie ship skeletons lying in local waterways serve as ghostly reminders that the Great Lakes could be just as treacherous as the ocean to sailors of centuries past.

Beneath the waves, the remains of vessels great and small are an alluring but potentially deadly attraction for divers, and a source of fascination for many others.

"It is a forbidden world," said Dennis Jessick, a diver for the marine division of the Emmet County Sheriff's Office. "Mama Nature sits right on top of you down there."

Jessick said that shipwreck diving is a breathtaking experience, but also a psychologically challenging one.

"It's not like seeing it on TV," he said. "You've got to feel the cold, the numbness in your fingers. Up is not up, and up is not out."

One of the most disastrous shipwrecks in the area was the Champlain, a steamship built in 1870 that went aground about a mile northwest of Fisherman's Island south of Charlevoix.

Shortly before midnight on June 16, 1887, a fire broke out near the engine room of the Champlain, probably started by a lantern in the engineer's cabin.

When the fire was discovered, the captain tried to race for shore, going so fast that the lifeboats could not be dropped into the water. The first engineer was seen running across the deck engulfed in flames.

Some of the 57 people on the ship jumped overboard and made it to the island, but in the end 22 were killed, 15 of which were unidentified and buried

in a Charlevoix cemetery.

David Miles of the Charlevoix Historical Society called the Champlain "the worst maritime disaster in Charlevoix history."

In 1911, not far from where the Champlain found its watery grave in Lake Michigan, the Henry Warrington also met its fate.

After setting out from East Jordan bound for Chicago with a load of lumber, the Warrington traveled up Lake Charlevoix and into Lake Michigan, where it quickly sprung a leak in a storm. The captain decided to head back into the harbor, but because of rain the shore was hidden in fog and the Warrington struck a rocky reef about two miles from the Charlevoix Pier Lighthouse.

The crew of the Warrington was saved, but the ship was left to slowly break up over the years.

Lake Charlevoix itself also has several wrecks, starting with the Keuka near Two Mile Point. The Keuka was a gambling ship, and Jessick said Al Capone once spent time on it. It sank in 1932.

Oyster Bay in Lake Charlevoix has eight wrecks, two of which are unidentified fishing vessels, because it was used as a "graveyard" for sinking already damaged boats. The most intact and visible of these is the Jennie Mullin, which suffered many partial sinkings and collisions before running aground for the final time in a 1907 storm near what is now Boulder Park.

The Mullin was towed into Lake Charlevoix and sunk just west of the middle of Oyster Bay.

Josh Barnes, a diver and former mayor of Charlevoix, said one of the most interesting

shipwrecks in the area is the Carl D. Bradley, located off the coast of Manistique in Lake Michigan.

The ship was returning from Wisconsin in 1958 when it encountered a storm and sank. There were only two survivors of the 26 people on board.

Barnes was present when one of the survivors went down to the wreck in a submersible before it was verified as the Bradley.

"The first thing he saw was 'Carl D. Bradley' lit up in the lights," Barnes said. "He screamed. He was hysterical."

The survivor found a coin collection that had belonged to him still intact in the wreck.

"It's really spooky because she's a big ship," Barnes said. "It's awesome to think of something that big on the bottom."

Erica Richards can be reached at 439-9344 or erichards@petoskeynews.com.

Shipwreck is topic of Charlevoix Historical Society meeting

JAN 8 1992

By LISA BABCOCK
News-Review staff writer

CHARLEVOIX — When Mike Spears seeks answers, he goes underwater.

Spears, of Dearborn, has been diving on the Keuka, a shipwreck in Lake Charlevoix, searching for answers that could teach him more about shipbuilding on the Great Lakes.

The shipwreck, marked by buoys, is in Lake Charlevoix near Ferry Beach.

Spears' investigation delves deeper into the physical characteristics of the ship instead of its history, although it carries a legend of Prohibition era partying that may — or may not — be true.

Spears is working on documenting the ship's size and making drawings of the ship's deck and hull, which will tell him how the ship was constructed.

The Keuka, a schooner barge, was built in 1889 in New York. Schooner barges were wooden schooners that were towed behind steamships.

In 1929, the Keuka and a steamship, the Elmira, were moved to Boyne City after they were bought by James Gallagher of the Wolverine Steamship Co.

After the Elmira burned at its Boyne City dock in 1930, the Keuka was converted to a party barge, Spears said. It was moored in Boyne City most of the time and towed around the lake in the summer.

In late 1930, there was a shooting on board — evidence through police records that the ship was used year-round.

But that proves little else to Spears.

Despite old rumors about gambling and other vices aboard the ship, "I have found no evidence of that," he said.

Spears said the daughter of the last owner said if the ship was used for entertainment with alcohol — this was during Prohibition, remember — it was a "bring your own bottle" arrangement.

In 1932, the Keuka sank. Spears thinks negligence caused the sinking.

People have been diving on the wreck since the 1960s, Spears said.

Spears, who lives in Dearborn and works for Ford Motor Co., has taken classes in underwater archaeology in Key West, Fla., through a community college in St. Ignace and through the Michigan Preserve Council.

He got involved with the Keuka through his interest in preserves and because it was close to shore and intact.

He will talk about his findings with members of the Charlevoix Historical Society at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 11, at the Harsha House Museum, 103 State St. in Charlevoix.

Shipwrecks are a "very valuable non-renewable cultural resource," he said, and he wants to teach a lesson in the importance of conservation.

Ultimately, Spears wants to write an archaeological report and some magazine articles on the Keuka.

He is also interested in learning more about the ship's machinery and artifacts — most of its small artifacts have been pilfered off the ship, he said.

If anyone knows where artifacts are, he would like to know so he could photograph them and include the information in his report.

He can be reached through the historical society.

Shipwreck society hosts dedications

Three structures at the Whitefish Point Light Station will be dedicated by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, July 25.

Selected speakers will provide simple reflections at the dedication. The public is invited to attend and refreshments will be served.

The Light Station's U.S. Coast Guard Lookout Tower has been fully restored to its historic appearance as part of the U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Station at Whitefish Point. It is being dedicated to the memory of Arthur John Ley Jr., father of Sean Ley of Petoskey. The restoration was funded by Ley's surviving family in Cincinnati.

Watch was kept on the 40-foot tower, constructed in 1923, on a 24-

hour basis by the Coast Guard. From the tower, the cry of "vessel in distress" alerted the Rescue Station's crew and sent them scrambling to launch the surfboat. The Coast Guard responded to more than 1,000 calls for assistance at Whitefish Point through the 1950s.

A panoramic view of Lake Superior's Shipwreck Coast is now enhanced by a new 80-foot boardwalk from the Whitefish Point Light Tower, the oldest active light on Lake Superior, to the shoreline. The boardwalk features a large 54-foot by 24-foot observation platform, allowing barrier-free access across the sand dunes. A new aluminum flagpole with yardarm has also been added to the Shipwreck Museum Complex.

The Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum has been listed as one of Michigan's top 10 attractions. The museum is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily until Oct. 15. For further information call the society at (800) 635-1742.

PHOTO BY
S. J. HARRIS

PHOTO BY
S. J. HARRIS