

"Preserving Michigan's submerged history for now and forever"

The Explorer



MICHIGAN SHIPWRECK RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Sept. 2005 Vol 2

Letter From the Board

Members and Friends,

The 2005 search season has been an unprecedented success. There have been so many years since we began our annual shipwreck searches in 1998 where we have nothing to show except miles and miles of empty bottomlands. While we have always kept a positive outlook knowing that lots of coverage means we know where the shipwrecks AREN'T located, it has been a disappointment for the team. This year was certainly different. We have made not one, But TWO new shipwreck discoveries!

The *Ann Arbor No. 5* was discovered by Clive Cussler's NUMA team and MSRA in the course of searching for the lost *Flight 2501* off South Haven

The *SS Michigan* was found by MSRA working with David Trotter in our third season of covering bottomlands off Holland specifically in search of this vessel whose loss bears similarity to that of Ernest Shackleton's vessel *Endurance* in 1912 in Antarctica.

MSRA divers and an affiliate team of technical divers has explored the two vessels in depth. (no pun intended!) What we are seeing underwater adds details to our knowledge of the two sinkings which took place miles and decades apart. Each ship is offering us new insights into the construction of the vessels and their ultimate demise.

While the NUMA/MSRA team did not discover the remains of *Flight 2501*, Clive Cussler has assured us that he will be sending Ralph Wilbanks and his team back for a third attempt at finding the crash site. Since the debut of our documentary on *Flight 2501*, MSRA has received dozens of calls from witnesses, people involved in the search and recovery and even the son of one of the victims. Information gleaned from interviews with these people has helped us develop a revised search area for next May. We are very hopeful that there will be a discovery in 2006. We also would like to spearhead the placement of a memorial marker dedicated to the individuals who lost their lives in this tragedy.

Valerie van Heest

The SS Michigan Final Resting Place Revealed!



Discovering the *S.S. Michigan* this June was the culmination of years of researching, side scan searching, plenty of elbow grease, David Trotter's expertise at interpreting side scan images, and God's good grace.

The *Michigan* is in remarkably good shape considering the circumstance of her sinking and the length of time she has spent in her ice water tomb. MSRA affiliate technical divers, Todd White, Jeff Vos and Bob Underhill have seen a rare double wheel, smoke stack, wood stock anchors, ship's bell, and the steam whistle. The video stills at right, were taken by Todd White and show the ships two most prominent features, the anchor and ships wheel.

The *Michigan's* cabins and pilot house were likely intact when she hit the bottom and based on their current position, we can conclude that they probably collapsed over the decades spent underwater.

Several of the side cargo doors into the *Michigan's* hold are open, perhaps by crew when they abandoned ship. Three levels of decks are accessible to divers, although penetration is a dangerous undertaking. Divers report the cargo deck empty, as would be expected of this ship, whose sole mission was to

MSRA's divers have been treated to visibility over 50 feet and enough ambient light to make their way around the

wreck, which sits in 275 feet of water. The only thing that obscures their prying eyes from all the details of the wreck are the very things that are responsible for clearing the water-

the thick layer of zebra mussels. The zebra's coat the remains of the hurricane deck roof and the sides of the ship, hiding important detail and artifacts on the wreck. Zebra mussels entered the Great Lakes in the early 1990's and have been able to survive at deeper and deeper depths, as is evidenced by their presence on the *Michigan*.

While diving the *Ann Arbor No. 5* this summer, (story on next page) we encountered incredible visibility, over 70 feet, no doubt due to the Zebra mussel infestation. From the surface we could see down 50 feet and watch divers doing their deeper stops. The question is, what is the long term effect of this invasive species and what effect would other invasive species have on the Great Lakes?

Could you imagine what would happen to our wooden steamers and schooners in a fresh water wood borer invaded our lakes? How about the dreaded snakehead fish? The snakehead fish is a large, very aggressive fish that might be hostile towards divers.

We really don't now how new species entering our lakes are going to change the wrecks off our coast or scuba diving, but it will probably have an effect on them in a negative way. That is why it is important to locate our local wrecks and document them as quickly as we can, because we may not get that chance in the future.

Article submitted by Ross Richardson



MSRA Board of Directors

Jan Miller
Valerie Olson van Heest
Craig Rich
Ross Richardson
Jack van Heest
Geoffrey Reynolds

A Surprising Discovery!

Finding the wreckage of the *Ann Arbor no. 5* in May 2005 was unexpected! We had already spent several weeks searching for the remains of *Northwest Airlines Flight 2501* with Ralph Wilbanks from NUMA, when the side scan sonar revealed a large shipwreck ten miles off South Haven. These were obviously not the remains of the airliner, but did turn out to be a significant historical wreck and an extremely interesting scuba diving site.

The first divers sent to investigate the wreck were Jeff Vos and Bob Underhill, technical diving affiliates of MSRA. They verified the wreck was that of a barge, but one that had been cut down from a railroad car ferry. This is made evident by the sets of railroad tracks on the deck. They reported two massive propellers and a gigantic rudder — made all the more dramatic by the fact that the “AA5” is sticking up out of the bottom of the lake at a 30-degree angle! While the fantail is accessible at a depth of 120 feet, the forward portion of the wreck plunges beneath the clay bottom at 160 feet.



With four railroad tracks and a capacity of 30 railroad cars, she was a behemoth. For 55 years, the *Ann Arbor No. 5* worked the Great Lakes until, like all car ferries, she outlived her usefulness. She was sold to Bulterna Dredge & Dock Company in 1967 for \$27,775, cut down and used as a temporary break wall at Palisades Nuclear Power Plant near South Haven from 1967-1969.

From there, the story takes an unusual turn. While published reports all confirm that the ship was broken by the ice during the winter of 1970 and scrapped the following spring, MSRA now believes the vessel had a very different demise.

A Holland man contacted MSRA with a story that explains why about 1/3 to 1/2 of the ship now lies ten miles offshore from the nuclear plant. He reports that the vessel did not break up, but rather, suffered a “broken back” while under tow to Manitowoc for scrapping in the spring of 1970. Furthermore, he reports having watched a home movie of the sinking! This certainly explains why only a portion of the vessel has been located. MSRA is attempting to obtain that video.

We believe that the “AA5” was discovered by Captain Richard Race in the 1980s during his own search for *flight 2501*. The location never was revealed until MSRA released the information to the diving public in July 2005. We can all thank Clive Cussler, Ralph Wilbanks and the NUMA team for this very exciting new dive site in West Michigan. *Article Submitted by Craig Rich*



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Kenneth Pott
Maritime Archaeologist

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Maritime Archaeologist



Jeff Vos made the first “penetration” dive to explore the interior of the wreck and reported that the propeller shafts are housed inside large “tunnels”, which are an unusual design feature unique to the “AA5”. This feature enabled the ship’s “hold” in the stern of the vessel to be flooded for ballast. Since that time MSRA divers, Craig Rich, Ross Richardson, Jack and Valerie van Heest, and MSRA affiliate, Todd White, have

extensively documented the site. Todd has provided the image seen here as well as those on MSRA’s web page.

The vessel was built by the Toledo Shipbuilding Company. She was 360’ long and at the time of her launch in November 1910, she was the largest ferry on the lakes.

Michigan Shipwreck Research Associates, is a Michigan non-profit corporation, whose mission is to Preserve Michigan’s submerged maritime history. To that end, the organization’s work includes research, exploration, documentation and education regarding historic shipwrecks within Michigan waters, with an initial emphasis on the area off West Michigan. MSRA works in cooperation with State Agencies. As a Holland-based volunteer-driven organization, MSRA relies on memberships, fundraising events and grants to continue its work.

Clive Cussler Doesn’t Give Up

May 2006 Will see the return of Ralph Wilbanks and Steve Howard, NUMA’s chief search team, to West Michigan, thanks to the persistence of Clive Cussler, who rarely ever gives up on his quest for lost ships, planes and trains.

MSRA has been assembling an increasing load of research including numerous witness accounts. This new information is helping to refine the search area to bring us closer to finding Northwest Flight 2501.

Mark Your Calendars

May 6, 2006

Knickerbocker Theatre
86 East Eighth St. 7:00

Please join MSRA and the Joint Archives of Holland as we present *Mysteries and Histories, An Evening Beneath The Inland Seas*, MSRA’s annual event.

The Evening with feature programs on the newly discovered wrecks off West Michigan as well as a few surprises. Details will follow in the new year.

Join MSRA

\$25 Annual Individual Membership

Includes 1 free admission to *Mysteries and Histories* event, daily search emails and MSRA newsletters.

\$50 Annual Family Membership

Includes 2 free admissions to *Mysteries and Histories* event, daily search emails and MSRA newsletters.

\$100 Supporting Membership

Includes 2 free admissions to *Mysteries and Histories* event, daily search emails and MSRA newsletters, plus a complimentary documentary in video or DVD.

\$250 Supporting Membership

Includes 2 free admissions to *Mysteries and Histories* event each year, daily search emails and MSRA newsletters, plus two complimentary documentaries in video or DVD.

\$500 Sustaining Membership

Includes the above plus the opportunity for you to join the MSRA search crew on a side scan expedition for one day during the June 2005 “Wreck Quest”.

\$1,000 Lifetime Membership

Includes the above plus opportunity for you and a friend to join the MSRA search crew on a side scan expedition for one day during the June 2005 “Wreck Quest”.

To join, please send your check, made out to MSRA, to the address at the left. Please indicate if you plan to attend the event on May 7th, and how many tickets you need held for you.



MICHIGAN SHIPWRECK
RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

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