

Local shipwreck center, Vermilion diver preserve Lake Erie's history

By Karen Cornelius

In the summer, Vermilion residents and visitors alike enjoy Lake Erie, the city's biggest asset. There's boating, fishing, swimming, and just marveling at the lake's rolling expanse and spectacular sunsets. But unknown to many, under Lake Erie's surface, there's a fascinating graveyard of shipwrecks on its murky bottom.

What also may or may not be surprising to you, as a citizen, is the fact that the shipwrecks under the Ohio waters of Lake Erie belong to all the people of the state. The state holds a title in trust for the people according to the Ohio "Shipwreck Law" passed in 1992. The law governs the management of all submerged property and prohibits uncontrolled recovery of such property. The purpose of the law is to leave artifacts where they lie so they will be there for generations to come, to see, touch, and study the unique maritime history of the Great Lakes and Ohio as it remains in real life.

Additionally unknown to many is the Peachman Lake Erie Shipwreck Research Center located right here in Vermilion at the Inland Seas Maritime Museum. The center is located in a former residential home just west of the museum and can be accessed from the museum's parking lot. It was open in June of 2000 as a facility to provide resources for researchers, students, and people with an avocational interest in shipwrecks, their exploration, and cultural and historical significance. The center is the focal point for organizing maritime archaeology workshops, documenting Lake Erie shipwrecks, and distributing shipwreck information to the general public and specific groups such as recreational divers.

It is estimated that there are between 1,750 to 8,000 shipwrecks in Lake Erie alone. More are lost than found with confirmed shipwreck locations numbering between 200 and 400 depending on the expert. Many ships resting on

said. She stated that in Ohio no permit is necessary to measure and survey a shipwreck. However, the state "Shipwreck Law" forbids any removal of property or artifacts unless a permit process is followed through the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. "This process is not used often nor is permission given often," said Sowden. She stated that a permit will never be given to a private individual because any recovered artifact has to be on display for the public. "There is no selling of artifacts, ever!" stated Sowden.

What could be exciting news for the Inland Seas Maritime Museum in Vermilion is the possibility that the state may grant a permit to retrieve one item, the bell, from a recently discovered famous shipwreck off Cleveland called "The Cortland." This sailing vessel carrying iron ore collided with a passenger steamer "The Morning Star" on June 20, 1868. It is reported that the first mate on "The Cortland" took an oil light down to trim because it was too dim. It was a very dark night and while the green light was down, the side-wheeler "Morning Star" rammed into the "Cortland" near the stern on the right side. Both ships were doomed and were thought to go to the bottom 15 miles northeast of Vermilion. There's no exact number, but about 38-45 people lost their lives.

Sowden stated that a salvage attempt was made on the "Morning Star" and it was moved from the spot where it sank. Today it sits upright in 70 feet of water about eight miles north of the Lorain Harbor. The site is marked and divers can go down and visit the "Morning Star." But, "The Cortland" was never discovered until last summer. Because it was one of the largest sailing vessels on Lake Erie at 173 feet, it was an exciting find for Jim Paskert, Kevin McGee and David VanZandt, members of CLUE, Cleveland Underwater Explorers, an informal dive team. Currently, the location of "The

"It's a good workout because the equipment is heavy, and I've always been drawn to mechanical things . . . When you dive, you're in a different world. It's like being on another planet. There's a totally different environment underwater . . . I can see and touch things that no one else has."

. . . Greg Ondus

the floor of the lake are well over 100 years old and can tell us some awesome stories of the past.

There are so many ships lost at sea because Lake Erie is the smallest in volume of all five Great Lakes. It only averages 60 feet in depth in most places except for a few spots reaching 210 feet. This shallowness makes Lake Erie a dangerous force of nature. It can quickly turn from a calm and placid body of water into a storm-tossed hell with sudden squalls causing large ships to flounder and sink.

Answering questions like why a ship went down, where it was going, what it was carrying, and who survived are answers that Carrie Sowden, archaeological director of the Lake Erie Shipwreck Center, and others continue to seek. Sowden is a perfect fit to command the center. She has a masters in anthropology with a major in nautical archaeology from Texas A&M. She has been diving herself for nine years and has been at the center for the last two years. She is probably the only archaeologist in the state doing shipwreck work.

Sowden said the center's data base has 2,200 shipwrecks covering Lake Erie, the Detroit River, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair River. She has recorded 270 wrecks that have been discovered and identified by the center. She stated the 2,200 vessels on file include any wrecking incident, but some ships could have been recovered or dynamite was used and divers only find a debris field.

One of Sowden's responsibilities is to coordinate surveys of shipwrecks and actually have divers go down and measure each sunken ship and do research. "We are trying to get as much information as possible and then share this information with others," Sowden

Cortland" is a well guarded secret because the men do not want the artifacts such as the bell falling into the wrong hands. The divers also want to complete a survey first before releasing the coordinates for the public.

Sowden hopes to have a chance to coordinate "The Cortland" survey in the future. Right now she is busy with a diving group called MAST (Maritime Archaeological Survey Team) measuring another shipwreck called "The Dundee" a wood schooner-barge lost in a storm on September 11, 1900. "The ship is in 75 feet of water and is just beautiful and in intact condition. It's 220 feet long and sank when the remnants of a Galveston hurricane came across and hit Lake Erie." Sowden said MAST is a fantastic group of volunteers who support the center. While their members dive, measure, and do research on "The Dundee" she directs the official survey.

One of MAST's most dedicated members is a Vermilion resident and businessman, Greg Ondus, owner of Ondus Auto Service on Liberty Avenue. He is not only passionate about diving, but is helping Sowden and other MAST members with the survey of "The Dundee" this summer. He also assists the state by placing buoys and moorings on shipwreck sites during the dive season and then bringing them back in the winter to be cleaned and stored in Vermilion. There are now moorings marking six shipwrecks in Lake Erie. Ondus stated that divers can attach a line from their boats to the mooring float line and then follow it down to the shipwreck.

Ondus has been diving for the past twelve years, and has completed several levels of certification. He can now dive with a tri-mix which enables him to go deeper than 160 feet into any



Carrie Sowden, the archaeological director of the Peachman Lake Erie Shipwreck Research Center in Vermilion, dives down to see the remains of "The Dundee" on Saturday, June 24. (Photo courtesy of Jack Papes of Akron, a MAST member documenting the wreck's survey)

body of water. The tri-mix contains helium which displaces the nitrogen and keeps a diver's head clear. In a St. Lawrence dive, Ondus has gone as far as 225 feet down. "I've always been interested in history and wanted to explore and learn more about shipwrecks," said Ondus.

To Ondus, diving represents a little bit of everything rolled into one. "It's a good workout because the equipment is heavy, and I've always been drawn to mechanical things which you get into with ships. When you dive, you're in a different world. It's like being on another planet. There's a totally different environment underwater." He stated that diving down and seeing ships that have been in the dark for hundreds of years is like discovering a time capsule. "I can see and touch things that no one else has, and I can come back up in the sun which is something the ship hasn't

seen for decades."

Ondus said there are 35 shipwrecks within a 40-45 mile radius of Vermilion and he has been to all of them, many he visits regularly. "Each time you dive, you see something different," he said. Two weekends ago, he joined Sowden and MAST members to help measure "The Dundee." He said there is an actual base line on the ship itself, like a measuring tape. Two people usually go down to the wreck and plot points along the base line. They then go back up with the data and it's transferred to graph paper which is to scale.

Ondus said the bow of "The Dundee" is broken up into lots of little parts, but it has six large cargo hatches you can swim through and it sits upright. "The cold, fresh water of Lake Erie preserves these ships," he said. As a bit of trivia, one of the actual anchors off "The

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Above, Vermilion businessman and resident Greg Ondus gets ready to dive, his favorite recreational activity. Ondus helps the state mark shipwrecks and is a member of MAST doing survey work on ships.



At left, is a view of the collapsed bow deck of "The Dundee" from the hold below hatch one. This is a view from the sunken ship looking out. The wreck is spacious enough for divers to swim through it. At right, is a photo of the mast collar, but the masts were probably salvaged and are not with the wreck. "The Dundee" sits in 75 feet of water and was sent to the bottom of Lake Erie by a storm in 1900. (Photos courtesy of Jack Papes, MAST member)

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"Dundee" now sits at the Buyer's Fair/Cargo Jewelers site in Vermilion. It's the one with the wooden stock. "You can still see the chain on the ship where the anchor was before it was salvaged," said Ondus.

Ondus has dived in all the Great Lakes except Lake Michigan. He even dives in quarries in the winter to keep in shape. "It's a perishable skill, so I dive year round," said Ondus. "If you don't do it, you lose it." The diver really takes advantage of the summer weather and his free time. Over the Fourth of July weekend, Ondus and others went to "The Morning Star"

shipwreck and then to the "Marshall F. Butters" a wreck two miles over the Canadian border. He really likes this wreck because it was the first ship on the Great Lakes with electric running lights. It lies in 70 feet of water and sank on Black Friday, October 20, 1916 on its way to Cleveland with a load of lumber and shingles. The date was known as Black Friday because three other ships were lost on the lake that day during a raging storm.

The group also went to another shipwreck the "Schooner G" off Barcelona, New York, over the Fourth. This is one

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Above is one of the buoys and moorings that mark six of Lake Erie's shipwrecks during the dive season. There is a line to guide divers down to the shipwreck. Vermilion diver Greg Ondus assists the state with this program and takes care of the shipwreck moorings.

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Lake Erie shipwrecks

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site Ondus has not seen and it's a two-mast schooner that's 150 feet deep. He and his friend Jack Papes, another MAST member who documents the surveys with photos, joined Georgann and Michael Wachter for the trip because the Wachters wanted to videotape some shipwrecks. Georgann and Michael, Avon Lake residents, are the authors of several books on Lake Erie shipwrecks which are invaluable diving guides.

Another favorite haunt for Ondus is "The City of Concord" because it's a pleasant dive down 45 feet and it's only 12-1/2 miles from the Vermilion River heading northwest. This ship sank in 1906 and is about 135 feet long, a classic wood schooner which carried lumber. "If you want to see 19th century wooden ships, they're only in the Great Lakes," said the diver.

Ondus has already planned his Labor Day vacation with a dive to "The Empress of Ireland" in Quebec. This ship sank on the eve of World War I and more people died than on the "Titanic." It's at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River about 130 feet down. The dive is a challenge because the

river current runs from the top to the very bottom.

Despite the tall tales, very few divers think there is buried treasure under Lake Erie. While there are a lot of mysteries to solve, Ondus isn't intrigued with searching and discovering more shipwrecks. "I don't actively search for shipwrecks," said Ondus. "It's kind of boring and not as exciting as diving. It's a little like mowing grass. You have to go back and forth over square-mile areas with sidescan sonar imaging." He said the equipment is very expensive and searching is extremely time consuming. There is technology in the making that features a remote-control robotic device that will make searching easier. "That I might like, but it's about \$30,000."

It is said that there are currently over 1,000 dive clubs in the state of Ohio. Ondus is proud to be a member of MAST because other divers, historians, archaeologists, tourism agencies, and local history buffs will use the results of the MAST projects. He is also a member of the Lake Erie Wreck Divers, a recreational club where divers can



Les Friedman of Cargo Jewelers and Gallery takes good care of the anchor off the shipwreck "Dundee" by preserving it with linseed oil annually. The anchor is located in the parking lot of the business in Vermilion. Note the wooden beam at the top of the anchor and the burn marks still remaining after the ship sank in 1900. (Photojournal photo - Candace Barczyk)

socialize, have fun, and swap stories. Spearheading the club are Dave and Annette Soule of Lorain.

For more information about the

Shipwreck Research Center or diving, call Carrie Sowden at 440-967-3467, extension 6, or go to the website at www.inlandseas.org.



Sharing a common interest, divers often go out to shipwreck sites in groups. Above, diving enthusiasts gather at "The Dundee" survey the last weekend in June. The wreck is about 32 miles northeast of Vermilion in Lake Erie. Diving is now a major recreational sport.

Enjoy Mill Hollow and Schoepfle programs

The Lorain County Metro Parks are now into the summer programming season. Programs are held at the Vermilion River Reservation (Carriage Barn, Amphitheatre, Benjamin Bacon Museum), 51211 N. Ridge Rd., Vermilion; or the Schoepfle Garden Visitor Center, 11106 Market St., Birmingham. For more information on these programs or any of the programs offered by the parks, contact the Park Office at 1-800-LCM-PARK or www.LorainCountyMetroParks.com.

Benjamin Bacon Museum Tours, Sunday, July 9, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Benjamin Bacon Museum. Enjoy a tour through the 1850s mill owner's house. Learn about the Bacon family, their neighbors, and the former community of Brownhelm Mills.

Garden Tram Rides, Sunday, July 9, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Schoepfle Garden. See the garden in the great comfort of an electric tram.

Summer Concert Series, Sunday, July 9, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., Amphitheatre.

Hear the 70's rock sound of Cleveland native Alex Bevan.

Garden Tram Rides, Thursday, July 13, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Schoepfle Garden. See the garden in the great comfort of an electric tram.

Watercolor Workshop: Summer Splendor, Thursday, July 13, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Schoepfle Garden Visitor Center. Summer splendor is the theme of Clela Stelnicki's all-day class in watercolor. Bring lunch. Preregister. Pay \$25 at the door. Supplies extra.

Summer Breeding Bird Hike, Saturday, July 15, 8 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Hike the beautiful Chance Creek area of the Vermilion River Reservation in search of nesting birds. Meet at the parking lot of Peasley Road near Portman Road.

Kids in the Garden: River Ramble, Saturday, July 15, 1 a.m. to 12 noon, Schoepfle Garden. Kids check out the Vermilion River valley by walking through the river. Wear shoes and clothes that can get very wet.

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HEALTH NOTES

Testosterone for Aging Men

by Carl Lapp R.Ph.



Approximately 30% of men 60-70 years of age and 70% of men 70-80 years of age have low testosterone levels. When low levels of serum testosterone are found in association with specific signs and symptoms, including diminished libido and sense of vitality, erectile dysfunction, depression anemia, reduced muscle mass and bone density increased fat mass, frailty, osteopenia, and osteoporosis, the clinical term is "hypogonadism". When hypogonadism occurs in an older man, the condition is often called andropause, or Androgen Deficiency of the Aging Male (ADAM). Due to the increasing recognition of andropause and the availability of topical preparation (which are superior to oral testosterone and its derivatives), testosterone prescriptions have increased 500% in the past 10 years. Testosterone Replacement Therapy (TRT) has relieved symptoms and improved the quality of life for many men. The only absolute contraindication to testosterone replacement therapy is the presence of prostate cancer or male breast cancer.



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