

INDIANA SHIPWRECKS IN LAKE MICHIGAN

Shipwrecks are more than just wood and steel beams. They tell an important story about past events and about the people who lived before us. Studying shipwrecks provides information regarding our economic, technological, and cultural history. If we preserve shipwrecks, they will be available for many to see and study for years to come.

Lake Michigan has 14 known shipwrecks in Indiana's waters, but as many as 50 are suspected. These ships date from the later 19th to the early 20th centuries and were mainly used for commercial and industrial transport. You can learn about these wrecks and more on the Indiana Department of Natural Resources website at IndianaShipwrecks.org, which features a virtual tour of



Virtual Tour of the Material Service (DNR NP website).

four of the shipwrecks. Just drag and spin to view a 3D model of the Car Ferry, J.D. Marshall, Material Service, and the Muskegon. Underwater photographs of the shipwreck and the archaeological investigations are also featured.

The J.D. Marshall Preserve is Indiana's only underwater preserve, dedicated in 2015. The ship was built in 1891, transported commercial and industrial goods, and was later converted to suck and haul sand. During a storm, the J.D. Marshall capsized and sank in 1911, losing four crew members.

Two of the Indiana Lake Michigan shipwrecks are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Muskegon was listed in 1989, and the Material Service was listed in 2014. The Muskegon was built in 1872 as a package freighter and burned while at the dock in 1911. Its significance is tied to its innovative naval architectural design. The Muskegon operated as the Lake Michigan-Lake Superior Transportation Company flagship until 1900. The Material Service was built in 1929 to transport supplies along canals. The Material Service was designed with unique, self-loading technology to carry sand and gravel. When it sank during a storm in 1936, the captain and 14 crew members lost their lives.

Legal Protection

Historic shipwrecks are protected by both federal (Abandoned Shipwreck Act, 1988 and Sunken Military Craft Act, 2004) and state (Indiana Code 14-21-1 and 312 IAC 6-3) laws. Recreational diving is a great way to observe Indiana's nautical history but divers must be aware of and follow the law and safety procedures. Only qualified underwater archaeologists, with the proper permit, can legally conduct archaeological field investigations of historic shipwrecks.

Removing artifacts from a shipwreck site without an approved plan is prohibited. This law is needed because the accumulated effect of artifact looting will eventually destroy the remains of the ship as an archaeological site. Conservation of underwater resources can be difficult and costly. The best management practice regarding shipwrecks is to leave them in place for others to enjoy. If you find something along the shoreline, leave it in place and report it. Even though nature can be destructive, it can also be important in preservation. Anchoring near a shipwreck can cause irreparable damage to the wreck and the area that surrounds it. Mooring buoys are available at the J.D. Marshall.

Take only photos, leave only bubbles.

History of underwater archaeology in Indiana

In the 1980s, Gary D. Ellis (the first State Archaeologist with the DNR) and Indiana Conservation Officers worked on locating and documenting the shipwrecks in Lake Michigan. The methodologies included: archival research, sonar and other remote sensing methods, systematic survey on grids or transects, photographic and graphic documentation, and subsurface topographic mapping. The DNR also surveyed inland lakes, such as Lake Maxinkuckee.



Archaeologist recording shipwreck.

Archaeologists have returned to the Lake Michigan shipwrecks sites. Underwater archaeologists periodically document any changes as non-invasive technology improves. A comprehensive archaeological survey was completed in 2011 of a number of the Indiana shipwreck locations and additional investigations have been completed at the Muskegon, J.D. Marshall, and the Unknown #4. It is important to resurvey sites due to ever-changing conditions, such as sand migration, which can obscure or uncover various components of the sites. Damage from natural or man-caused sources are important to monitor and record. The Muskegon was put into jeopardy when a pipe was laid on top of and wrapped around elements of the shipwreck. Efforts are being taken to remove portions of the pipe and to continue monitoring of the conditions to ensure the preservation of the Muskegon.

As important as the changes in technology were for building the ships 100 years ago, so are the changes in advancing our abilities to locate and document the cultural resources. Sonar equipment is still used today, but has improved. Archaeological documentation still includes illustrations and photography but now also includes high-tech photogrammetry to document the shipwreck sites. This is accomplished by taking numerous photographs and compiling them together in a 3D model. This technique was completed to create the virtual tours of the four shipwrecks on IDNR website and to analyze the Muskegon and the affecting pipe.

Protecting Shipwrecks

Shipwrecks tell us about Indiana's history, nautical technology, vessel designs, materials and construction, regional shipbuilding, commerce, trade, and tourism. Shipwrecks are also places to honor the crew members who lost their lives. We can also learn about their early survival on the Great Lakes and rivers throughout Indiana. Due to the fragility and rarity of these unique cultural resources, these sites need protection, not only from natural forces, but also from development and looting. Looting not only impacts the ship itself, but also destroys the valuable contextual information the site has to offer. Although many divers enjoy sightseeing historic shipwrecks, it should be noted that structural remains, such as timbers, exposed nails, rigging, and other debris – along with poor visibility – create a very hazardous environment. Remember to take safety precautions while diving.

References:

Becker, Charles, Ph.D.

2016 *Muskegon (aka Peerless) Shipwreck (12Le0381) Intrusive Modern Pipe Assessment*. Indiana University for Underwater Science, Bloomington, Indiana.

Campbell, Peter

n.d. Phase I Documentation of Shipwreck 12-Pr-640. Cave Archaeology Investigation and Research Network.

Ellis, Gary

1988 *Muskegon (Ne Peerless) Shipwreck Site*. National Register Nomination. SHAARD. Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

n.d.a *Indiana Shipwrecks*. Lake Michigan Coastal Program. Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Indianapolis, Indiana. Accessed at <https://www.in.gov/dnr/lakemich/8482.htm> on January 17, 2020.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

n.d.b *Shipwrecks in Indiana Underwater Archaeology in Lake Michigan*. Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Kaufmann, Kira, Ph.D.

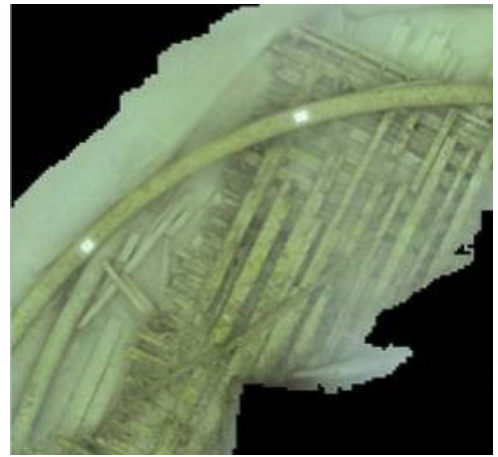
2011 *Report of Investigations for Submerged Cultural Resources within Indiana's Territorial Waters of Lake Michigan*. Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group, Inc., Jackson, Michigan.

2013 *Material Service Shipwreck (12-La-641)*. National Register Nomination. SHAARD. Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Indianapolis, Indiana.

For more information contact:

Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology
402 W. Washington St., Rm. W274
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2739

PHONE: 317-232-1646
EMAIL: dhpa@dnr.IN.gov
WEB: on.IN.gov/dhpa
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/INDhpa



3D illustration from photo scanning the Muskegon (Indiana University).



Propeller of the George F. Williams Shipwreck.