

Statement of Jeff Gray
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It is probable that a greater number of monuments of the skill and industry of man will, in the course of the ages, be collected together in the bed of the ocean than will exist at any other time on the surface of the continents.

--Charles Lyell, 1872

The Great Lakes have played a critical role in the nation's development, both economically and culturally. By offering an east-west thoroughfare stretching over a thousand miles into the interior of the continent, the lakes provided a means for efficient transportation and communication that connected cities and people separated by hundreds, even thousands, of miles.

On her maiden voyage in 1679, the *Griffon*, the first ship to sail the upper lakes, disappeared without a trace and became the Great Lakes' first shipwreck, foreshadowing the next 300 years. Thousands of schooners and steamers followed the *Griffon* on the Great Lakes. They brought the immigrants and settlers to the lumber camps, farms, and cities of the heartland. They carried the lumber, grain, and iron ore that fueled the Industrial Revolution. Over 30,000 vessels sailed the Inland Seas and these vessels helped build a nation. As with the *Griffon*, the Great Lakes claimed thousand of these vessels along with their crews and passengers.

Today, preserved by the waters on which they once served, the historic shipwrecks of the Great Lakes are arguably the world's best collection of shipwrecks. Lacking the salts and marine organisms found in the oceans that corrode iron and devour wood and other organic material, the cold, fresh water of the Great Lakes is ideal for preserving archaeological materials. Scores of schooners rest below the waves intact with their masts and rigging still standing. Throughout the Great Lakes, an amazing collection of steam engines from shipwrecks, spanning more than a century of development, tower above the lakebed.

This underwater museum presents a unique opportunity to open windows to the past that would otherwise remain shut. Shipwrecks are unique places that contain a wealth of historical and archeological data. Such sites not only include ships, magnificent artifacts in themselves, but the shipwrecks often still hold the cargo, personal items, tools, utensils, and other telling items that humanize history. Historic shipwrecks acquaint us

with the men and women, the builders, sailors, and longshoremen, who were the lifeblood of the Nation's shipping industry and the naval conflicts of country. Their stories are often missing from the written record, but archaeology can give them a voice. This is important because these voices enlighten and educate us about our connection to our common maritime heritage. To hear these voices, these sites need to be studied, managed, and protected.

Despite the incredible preservation of these sites, shipwrecks are among the most fragile resource in the underwater environment. Unlike most natural resources, shipwrecks are non-renewable. Once a site or artifact is damaged or lost, it is gone forever. Removing artifacts from a shipwreck without conducting proper archaeology robs the site of its historic integrity, permanently diminishes its recreational and educational value.

The preservation that makes shipwrecks such spectacular archaeological resources also gives them tremendous recreational appeal. Wreck diving is a powerful and important way to connect with the past. It offers an experience to see and touch history. This experience has produced hundreds of tireless stewards of these resources. Many divers spend their own time and money researching and protecting these sites to work towards their preservation for future generations.

Unfortunately, some wreck divers take pieces of our shared history. Some have stripped countless historic shipwrecks of all their artifacts and fittings. Individuals have personal collections of up to 30,000 artifacts, many times more than many maritime museums in the Great Lakes. Magnificently preserved when left submerged, these artifacts face rapid deterioration when pulled from the stable underwater environment unless properly conserved. Many artifacts rot away in basements and garages without proper documentation, analysis, or conservation, and are hidden from the public.

The U.S. Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987 (ASA) conceded ownership and management responsibilities of historic shipwrecks to the states in whose boundaries they lie. The ASA encouraged states to develop programs "for the study, interpretation, protection, and preservation of historic shipwrecks. (§ 2103)." To date, only seven states have fulltime programs dedicated to submerged cultural resources. Of the eight Great Lakes states, only Wisconsin has a program. These numbers are dreadfully low, and desperately need to be improved. A large collection of historic shipwrecks also are located in federal waters and are not being properly managed.

But there is good news. Advocational groups like the Chicago Underwater Archaeological Society, the Wisconsin Underwater Archaeological Association, Save Ontario Shipwrecks and others have made tremendous contributions to the study and preservation of historic shipwrecks. Some federal agencies are doing spectacular work protecting submerged cultural resources in marine protected areas. The National Park Service has been a leader in archaeology and preservation in and outside of our national parks. From the Florida Keys to the Monterey Bay, we at the National Marine Sanctuary Program are making great strides in studying, protecting, and interpreting shipwrecks and

other facets of our maritime heritage. The newest marine sanctuary, the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve in Alpena, Michigan, was designated specifically to preserve and interpret the more than 100 shipwrecks within the sanctuary's boundaries. It is my hope that the Thunder Bay Sanctuary will illustrate to the nation the significance and fragility of these resources, as well as the opportunity they present to illuminate and appreciate our past. Understanding our heritage through connections to the Great Lakes and our oceans is a key to understanding the present, and underscores our need to protect marine resources for future generations.

A handful of marine protected areas and dedicated advocational groups are not adequate to protect such a fragile and important resource. Society is beginning to recognize the importance of our maritime heritage and submerged cultural heritage thanks to such high-profile shipwrecks as the *Titanic*, the *Monitor*, and the recent discovery of the *Portland* in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. However, we have just begun to scratch the surface of our maritime history. There is a need for more underwater archaeological study and outreach. Outreach is the essential mechanism by which we educate the American public about the significance of our heritage, both cultural and natural, which are inseparable. More needs to be done to encourage and assist coastal and Great Lakes states in developing and sustaining fulltime submerged cultural resources management programs before history is lost. The ASA has given the states the responsibility to manage many of these resources, but many are unable to fulfill the obligation. With small investments, states could tap the skills of dedicated advocationalists and make great strides in research, preservation, and interpretation of the nation's maritime history.

In closing, shipwrecks are underwater museums that need research, protection and management to ensure continued enjoyment and educational benefit for future generations. When preserved, historic shipwrecks allow divers and non-divers, young and old, to take a trip back in time to eras when schooners and steamers ruled the waterways.