

On Sunday morning, August 5, Ted Green, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee went diving in the eastern basin of Lake Erie. We went to Barcelona, NY, to dive with Captain Jim Herbert on Osprey Dive Charter. The weather was sunny and clear, and the lake was flat and calm with 0' seas. It was a beautiful day to go diving, and the wreck to be dove was a newly discovered wreck just discovered on the previous Wednesday, August 1, by Jim Herbert, David VanZandt, and Kevin Magee. No divers had yet been on this wreck, but unfortunately David could not make this first dive due to the short notice and late planning. He hopefully will be diving it soon. After arriving and obtaining the proper gas mixes from Jim's new gas mixing trailer, everyone boarded the boat. There were a total of ten divers.

After arriving at the dive site and grappling it, the first two suited up to check the grapple and signal the others that it was hooked. Everyone else then proceeded to gear up and enter the water. The wreck lies in 145' of water, rests north-south, and was hooked at the extreme southern end, which turned out to be the stern. Upon descending to the bottom, a beautiful wheel greeted the divers. The wheel is undamaged except for a couple of missing handles, and the steering gear is plainly visible and intact behind it. The deck stands about 8'-10' off the bottom, and visible underneath can be seen the underside lines of the hull and the rudder, which is turned hard to port. The stern is nicely rounded and is sharply undercut down to the rudder. Forward of the wheel and offset to the port side is a moderately sized opening in the deck with about 3'-5' of clearance and some debris visible inside. Forward of this along the deck centerline is a single-handed pump and a vertical metal pipe bent over to the starboard side. Forward of this is a larger deck opening with only 2'-3' of clearance inside and then a capstan.

Afterwards, the main cargo hatches begin. They are unlike anything found on most wrecks in that they continuously cover about two-thirds the length of the ship, which is estimated to be about 130' long and 30' wide. The cargo hatches are really just one continuous opening divided up into five discrete holds by simple beams running across the width. The second hold from the stern is further divided by a beam down the centerline along the length of the ship, but the others appear to have notches that could have held similar dividers. The holds were silted to within 1'-2' of their edges, but inside the rear holds were found lumps of coal, its cargo. On both sides of the cargo hatches is decking about 8' wide with occasional sets of bollards.

Forward of the cargo hatches is a large windlass with all its mechanisms clearly visible and intact. Forward of this is a two-handed pump and then a large square tow bit at the extreme bow. On the starboard side of the bow is a moderately sized fluted anchor with a metal cross piece lying flat on the deck. A chain is attached to it and runs over the front and into the mud. On the port side is also an anchor, but it is pushed up close to the winch and cargo hold. It is also standing up on its cross piece with the flutes flat on the deck. One flute is hidden underneath a piece of debris, making the outline of the anchor initially hard to

observe. The bow is not sharp but appears to be a blunted design. A brief search for tonnage marks on the inside hatch frame was performed, but nothing was seen or felt. At the very least, some of the zebra mussels, which moderately coated the wreck, were removed in this area for later searches.

All decking on the ship is very intact with no damage evident anywhere. Individual wooden planks are visible in many areas where the silt does not cover the deck too deeply. The full perimeter of the ship is framed by a large gunwale that stands about a foot high, and there is no evidence of a railing. On the starboard side about a third of the way back from the bow are five closely grouped turnbuckles attached to the gunwale, suggesting the possibility of a wire-rigged mast at this location. However, a search of the other side and the rear third of the ship failed to reveal any more turnbuckles. It is possible, however, that they could have been hidden under "drifts" of silt that were up against the gunwale in those locations. No mast post holes were found because there was no decking along the centerline adjacent to the turnbuckles. Only the very large cargo hold was evident, meaning that any anchoring of the mast would have had to have been accomplished at the bottom of the hold, which is obscured by silt. No fallen masts were visible anywhere on the wreck or in the debris field.

The ship overall appears to be in excellent condition with no damage visible to any of the hull, decking, or equipment. The deck was, in fact, extremely clean of any debris or artifacts beyond the fixed equipment. Its construction appears to be mostly wood, but there are surprisingly large amount of metal in such areas as the gunwale, cargo hatch framing, and other areas that suggest it might be clad in metal or even fully metal, although this is considered unlikely. The hull was unfortunately not examined too closely. It stands high off the bottom at the stern but only 3'-5' off the bottom amidships and maybe 2'-3' off the bottom at the bow. No debris field is evident, and over 100' to each side could be seen due to the excellent visibility.

Overall, the wreck appears to be a schooner-barge or a pure barge. There is some evidence from its shape, such as the rounded stern, undercut hull, pointed bow, and turnbuckles that it was a schooner. However, other design features like the large cargo hatches, utilitarian construction style, and the blunted bow that it was, in fact, a barge. It is possible - but pure speculation - that it either started out as a schooner and was then converted into a schooner-barge or barge, or it started out in construction as a schooner but was then changed to a more profitable barge design in the middle of construction. Based on the fairly modern appearance in the design of the stern (it looks like a modern freighter's stern), the large amount of metal framing used in its construction, its use as a barge, and its reminiscent schooner lines, I'd say it is a transitional period ship from about the 1890-1910 era. Due to its lack of damage, especially to the decking, it appears to have sank slowly, possibly due to foundering or a leak. Until it is identified, however, this is all pure speculation.

In any case, it is a beautiful wreck and well worth diving. It is not too deep, and experienced divers can reach it. It's deck can easily be seen by cruising above it at the 130' level, and it is equivalent to the "Arches" in diving difficulty. As far as being a virgin wreck, it does not appear to have been historically salvaged since all its deck equipment is intact. Also, no signs of modern divers were found on the wreck. The wonderful wheel and anchors are in place, which is encouraging, and no disturbances like digging, ropes, or lost dive gear was evident.

There was one other unique feature of the wreck - tons of burbot. There must have been 25-50 of them on the wreck. Five were counted hiding in various parts of the windlass alone, and it was not unusual to see two or three hiding together under various parts of the ship. They were everywhere, possibly due to the fact that this site is not regularly disturbed like other wrecks. Diving conditions were also superb. Visibility on the bottom was 100+ feet, bottom temperature was a nippy 38 deg F, the thermocline was at 60' with a smaller one at 45', surface water temperature was 76 deg F, and surface visibility was a decent 10'-15'. Lighting conditions were slightly dark initially, but after a few minutes everything could be made out clearly without a light. Bottom time was 25 minutes, total run time was 55 minutes, and a maximum depth of 144' was achieved.