

On Saturday, July 23, 2005, a group of 17 divers gathered to dive a new wreck made available for the first time to the public by Jim Herbert of Osprey Charters. Dubbed "Schooner C," it rests in 110' of water off Dunkirk, NY, and was discovered in September, 1996, while searching for the "Brunswick." The 50' aluminum crew boat "Southwind" left Barcelona, NY, with the following divers: Jack Papes, David Miller, Mike Chrisopulos, Greg Ondus, Travis Clower, Mike and Georgann Wachter, Jeff Mark, Kelly Vay, Bill Madden, Vlada Dekina, Tom Wilson, Ken Farnsworth, Erik VanDorn, Michael Zipho, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee. Also riding along was Linda Zander for moral support, and Mike served as the mate and deckhand.

Jim had installed a mooring earlier in the week, making hooking into the wreck easy. Upon descending, the mooring was found attached to the starboard anchor resting against the bow's railing. The bow points northeast, and the ship leans to port and is heavily sunken into the silt with only the starboard railing visible. This is very reminiscent of the nearby wreck "Schooner B" / "Washington Irving." There is a second anchor hanging off the cathead on the port side with its fluke snagged on the railing. Because of the sunken nature of the wreck, however, only the fluke and wooden stock stick above the silt. The bowsprit is broken away and rests pointing south with both the bowsprit and jib boom disappearing into the silt. Just peeking out of the silt by several feet at the tip of the bow stem is the top of the cutwater, or sheerwater. According to local lore, this wreck was apparently found and dove in the late 1970's and again in the late 1980's/early 1990's. Those divers reported the ship sticking much higher out of the silt, and they reported a scrolled figurehead on the wreck. Parts of ornate carved lines were detected on the sides of the cutwater, but excavation will be required to expose any figurehead that may be present.

On the bow deck is what appears to be a square samson post, or tow bit. It is unique, however, because it is carved into a U-shape at the top and covered along this surface by a continuous bent piece of metal, possibly tin, riveted to the wood. Examination of this unusual decoration revealed no discernable design in the metal. There is some speculation this may in fact be an articulation hinge to allow the bowsprit/jib boom to be folded up for transit through canal locks or small crowded harbors. In any case, the post's design is unique and has not been seen on any other wrecks. Further examination will be required to resolve its purpose. Behind this post is a windlass with chain wrapped around the spool. The windlass is sunken into the silt with no decking evident behind it and only the starboard railing heading aft. About 10' aft is the fallen foremast lying perpendicularly across the deck with its end disappearing into the silt on the port side after only 10'-15' of length. The other end near the starboard railing shows the mast to be broken off.

On the railing adjacent to the mast are 8 deadeyes. They were heavily encrusted in zebra mussels and required cleaning to positively identify them. Moving aft along the railing, it is a long swim before the top of a capstan becomes visible

about 10' off the north side. Only the very top of the capstan is visible inside a bowl-shaped depression in the silt with no other parts visible. A little further aft 3 deadeyes can be found on the railing. This makes the vessel a 2-masted sailing vessel, and the large number of deadeyes on the foremast indicates it was most likely square rigged while the mainmast was schooner rigged. If this were the case, then the vessel would be a brigantine, a relatively rare vessel found only early in the history of the Great Lakes. This would make the vessel's build date approximately the early to mid-1800's.

Moving aft to the stern, part of the port railing becomes visible as the aft steering deck becomes visible. Both railings end at the raised transom, and yawl boat davits point straight back from the corners of the transom. The aft steering deck is out of the silt with what appears to be a cabin hole in front of it. In the middle of the steering deck is a horizontal lengthwise spindle supported between two A-frames. This probably once held the steering wheel, but no sign of the wheel is evident. There is also no obvious connection to steering gear that would attach to the rudderpost. Behind the steering wheel frame is a lengthwise opening in the steering deck measuring approximately 4'x2', and there are two 1' square openings on either side of this opening. It is possible these openings somehow allowed a steering rope or chain to pass from the steering wheel down to the rudderpost after passing through leveraging pulleys on the sides of the ship. No sign of pulley blocks were found attached to either railing, however.

Finally, the transom stands fairly high off the bottom, but the backside is heavily silted. The early divers reported windows under the transom. Excavations quickly revealed the tops of 3-8 windows just below the silt line, some apparently with glass still in them. This positively identified the wreck as being the same one reported by the early divers and is another unique feature. Sadly, when dove in the early 1970's, these windows were reported as being 8'-10' off the bottom, meaning much sinking into the silt has occurred since that time. The unusual decorations at the bow, the brigantine construction, the primitive steering gear, the early style of yawl boat davits, and the transom windows all point to an early construction date for this wreck. Since these are all rather unique features, identification of this wreck might be fairly straightforward with some research. Georgann Wachter took measurements of the wreck, and it measures approximately 124' in length and 22' in beam. It is a shame this unique and interesting wreck is disappearing into the silt, and it would be great to be able to see more of it. The dive conditions were good with 2' seas and a clear sunny sky. Surface visibility was 15'-20', and the surface temperature was an almost too warm 78-80 deg F. A weak thermocline was between 60'-70', and the bottom temperature was 42-43 deg F with decent 30'-50' visibility and bright ambient lighting conditions. Some people chose to do one long dive with some decompression, and some chose to make two recreational dives. Making two dives allowed notes to be compared and then follow-up observations to be made on the second dive.

It should be noted that Pezbra, the mysterious diving PEZ dispenser, was seen diving the wreck, and the bad equipment luck from last week seemed to follow. Someone again forgot to bring a special drysuit inflator hose, and therefore Cindy's drysuit again made a dive without her. After arriving back on shore, Greg, Linda, Mike, Georgann, Cindy, and Kevin ate lunch and then toured three different wineries and sampled their wares. It turns out the area is loaded with many small local wineries with some very good wines. Pezbra was again seen, but this time tasting wine and at one point swimming in a decorative fountain. Georgann and Mike left for Cleveland, and Greg, Linda, Cindy, and Kevin stayed overnight to dive the "Swallow" the next day. The day awoke overcast and windy, and 4'-6' waves were encountered on the dive site. Kevin and Cindy sat the dive out, and Cindy's drysuit, for the third time in two weeks, made a dive without her when someone tore a neck seal getting geared up. Kevin's hood also made a dive without him. Their gear now dives more often than they do!