

Father's Day, June 21, 2009, was a nice bright sunny day - perfect for fathers (and non-fathers) to do their favorite thing: diving! Although Lake Erie had been very rough the previous day, by Sunday morning it had calmed to 2'-3' seas. Thus, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee drove to Lorain, OH, and met Scott Harrison and Julie Wolf at Scott's boat "Wreck-Reation," which is docked in the Black River. A few slips down, Gary Humel, Greg Ondus, Jack Papes, and Sue Filakosky met at Gary's boat "Nobody" (a.k.a. "White Lightning") with the same thought in mind. Gary went out first and decided to run to the first wreck while Scott followed behind. At first, the trip was a little bumpy, but after rounding Avon Point, the lake turned noticeably calm, and by the time the wreck was reached, the seas were glassy and less than 1'. The surface water also looked inviting with at least 5'-8' of visibility and a warm 70 deg F temperature. Gary hooked the wreck, and Scott tied up behind him.

The wreck was the "Two Fannies," a 152' x 33' barkentine built in 1862 that sprang a leak in rough weather in August, 1890, while carrying a load of iron ore from Escanaba, MI, to Cleveland, OH, as a consort under tow with two other sailing ships behind a tug. The entire crew escaped safely in the yawl boat right before the ship sank in 55' of water off Bay Village, OH. As everyone descended the anchor line, it was discovered we had hooked the bow of the vessel, which points east, and there was a very good 10' of visibility on the bottom with bright ambient lighting. This was fortunate since there is a lot to see on this wreck. The wreck itself is mostly broken down, but everything is contained within the ship-shaped outline of the wreck to provide an enormous collection of ship parts and machinery to explore and see. The bottom temperature was a warm 63-64 deg F, and there was no noticeable thermocline.

Starting at the bow, the sides taper away from the stem as standing frames 3'-5' high with the sides of the ship splayed to the outside. Piled inside the ship are knees, beams, and planks that previously formed the upper parts of the ship. Aft of the bow, which is split open, is a small capstan lying on its side under some wooden debris. An enormous fallen square pawl bitt can be seen lying off to starboard, and a large windlass barrel with its end spools can be seen lying on the bottom at the centerline. In front of the windlass are the remains of the rocking arm and purchase rods that would have been attached to the pawl bitt and used to turn the windlass. Strangely, the Carrick bitts are missing, but the pawl rim and the purchase gearing can be seen still on the windlass' barrel. Near the windlass was found a hearteye, which is much like a deadeye and used to support the standing rigging at the bow. Behind the windlass is a small square hatch frame that was probably the chain locker, and draped on top of it is a lot of tangled wire rigging.

Moving aft, several large centerposts are standing 5'-8' tall along the centerline of the ship. A standing centerboard box is then reached that is about 2' wide and 8' high. On the port side up against the box is a capstan. Above the centerboard box are suspended deck beams and hatch frames, all precariously hanging in space and balanced on the centerboard. It is easy to swim under these beams while following the bottom, so care must be taken not to bump into them inadvertently if suddenly going up. Up against the box sitting on the bottom on the aft starboard side can be seen the

centerboard winch. This was used to raise and lower the centerboard to add lateral stability to the ship while it was under sail in deep water. Aft of the centerboard box are more centerposts, and then an identical second standing centerboard box is encountered. A second centerboard is a feature mostly found on early large sailing vessels. More hatch frames are suspended above this second centerboard box, and the second centerboard winch can be found lying on the bottom near the hull on the starboard side. The winch's support frames have an interesting curved shape, making it worthwhile to examine in detail.

More centerposts with a distinctive "T" shape are aft of the second centerboard box, and then the sides of the ship gracefully curve inwards to the standing rudder at the stern. The rudder is large in size and half-buried in the bottom. The rudderpost towers above it about 15' high. On top of the rudderpost is a cap for the steering gear, and halfway up is some structure where it would have passed through the ship's hull. After examining all the equipment and features of the ship, it is immediately obvious how big of a ship the "Two Fannies" was. All of the equipment and parts are oversized when compared to similar equipment of the smaller schooners of the era, and many dives could be made to fully see all that this wreck has to offer.

After surfacing from this great dive it was discovered a solid layer of low gray clouds had moved in, but the day was still warm and calm, so lunch was eaten before moving the boats several miles northwest to the second wreck, the "Sand Merchant." This wreck was a 252' x 44' steel sandsucker built in 1927 that was traveling with a load of sand from Point Pelee to Cleveland at 10 p.m. at night in October, 1936. The ship began to list from a shifting load, and at the same time a gale started to blow, causing the vessel with its open hatches to become dangerously unstable. Both lifeboats were being lowered when the ship suddenly overturned. The captain, who was supervising the lowering of the boats from the bridge, jumped into the water and was rescued by one of the seamen. Unfortunately, both lifeboats were overturned by the sinking ship, and everyone was forced to hold onto the overturned boats in 15' seas for 10 hours before finally being rescued the next morning. By then 18 sailors and one unauthorized woman on board had lost their grips and drowned, leaving only 7 survivors, including the captain, who was later exonerated of the accident.

This ship is one of the wrecks moored by the Maritime Archaeological Survey Team (MAST), so hooking into this wreck is as simple as attaching the boat to the mooring buoy. The wreck itself lies upside down in 55' of water with its stern pointing east, and the mooring is attached to the skeg of the rudder. The rudder itself is turned slightly to port, and in front of the rudder is an impressive four-bladed propeller with enough room for a diver to swim through the propeller slot. The hull is sunken deeply into the bottom to form a very deep and narrow trench around the perimeter of the wreck. This trench varies from 2'-3' wide to as much as 5'-6' wide and as much as 10'+ below the lake bottom. Its sides are composed of loose near-vertical silt and clay, and visibility in the trench is usually fairly low with dark conditions. Conditions on the "Sand Merchant" were not as good as on the "Two Fannies," and only about 3'-5' of visibility was on the bottom with about 5'-8' of visibility on top of the overturned hull, which is at about a 40'

depth. Visibility in the trench was only about 2'-3'. Curiously, the water temperature was also colder with about 60-62 deg F on the bottom.

The wreck can be circumnavigated at the bottom while peering into the trench. Sometimes small gaps under the ship's hull can be seen, although it would be highly inadvisable to attempt to enter due to the danger of collapse of the silt in the narrow trench. There are no other entry points into the interior of the wreck. Forward of amidships can be found buckling in the hull that is on both sides of the ship. The hull is never breached by this buckling, but the frames' shape can be seen through the wrinkled steel skin of the ship. On the starboard side near the bow, a steel beam leads away from the ship for about 20' with some debris lying around it. At both the bow and stern the trench disappears, and at the bow the curved stem rises out of the bottom. An anchor chain comes off the port side, climbs out of a small 2'-3' clay wall about 6'-8' away from the bow, and continues along the bottom for 20'-30' before it disappears underneath the mud. Somewhere out there is the port anchor. The wreck has an extensive debris field to the south and west, but visibility was not good enough for most to attempt to find anything. However, Greg Ondus made a foray off the stern and found a lifeboat davit with a block hanging off its end coming out of the mud about 100' off the wreck. The bottom of the hull can also be explored along the top of the wreck, but the only items of interest are two small openings side-by-side near the stern where the inky blackness of the interior can be glimpsed. These openings are speculated to possibly be dump chutes.

After surfacing it was discovered the sky had cleared and was sunny again. The seas remained calm, and a pleasant trip was made back to port. Afterwards, everyone collected at the picnic table in front of Scott's luxuriantly carpeted dock (courtesy of Julie) for an impromptu dock party with the leftover food and beverages. Russ and Sue MacNeal, who had been at their boat when we pulled in, came over to join the festivities. Overall, it was a great Father's Day!