

On Saturday, September 2, Mike Holda, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee went diving on Mike's 19' boat "Erie Lady" out of Rocky River, OH. Lake conditions were again calm at 0' seas, so the decision was made to run 30 miles across the lake to the Canadian side east of Pelee Point. A whole cluster of interesting wrecks are mentioned at this location in the Wachter's book, and we've been waiting the whole summer for weather conditions that would allow this long run to be made. Unfortunately, soon after entering the Canadian side of the lake, the 1-2 mile haze started to darken, the sun disappeared, the western horizon turned black, the wind started to blow, white caps started forming, and the waves increased to 2'-3' with a high chop. We were not deterred, however, and kept on going. Soon, the darkness passed, the wind calmed down, and the seas subsided to 1'-2'. The sun even came back out as we were getting ready to enter the water. Given our luck with pressing the weather this summer, we've decided "Erie Lady" should be re-christened "Fearless Lady."

The first wreck was the "Little Wissahickon," a wooden schooner that sank in 75' of water in 1896 after springing a leak in a storm. Upon descending to the wreck, we discovered excellent visibility at 15'-25' and good lightning conditions. The anchor had snagged on some netting on the starboard side of the ship. The wreck is in good shape with the sides still standing and the deck fallen but still visible on the interior of the ship. We swam to the stern (E), where we found the rudder post standing and the ship's wheel lying among the scattered decking at the bottom of the ship. The wheel is in great shape and a wonderful sight. Swimming towards the bow (W), we saw small coal nuggets scattered all around the bottom inside and outside the wreck. This was its cargo, and the bottom appears like gravel rather than silt because of the coal. Some decking is still intact near the center of the ship around the centerboard, and the mainmast collar and a boom/yardarm are also visible on the bottom in this area. At the bow the decking is again intact, and the ship's bell is sitting there encased on top of a slab of concrete. This bell was part of an unauthorized salvage that the Canadians returned to the wreck. Lying next to the bell is a large pile of chain, and forward of that is a large winch/windlass with a large bit forward of that. On the port side deck at the bow stands one of the large anchors. It is a classic anchor with two flukes and a large wooden cross member with a swivel eyelet at the top, just like the childhood vision of a pirate ship's anchor. A second, identical anchor is found off the starboard side of the bow in the mud with its flukes hidden underneath the ship.

Between the wheel, bell, and anchors, this wreck is absolutely fabulous. Furthermore, everything was clearly visible, not only because of the great viz, but because there were almost NO zebra mussels to be seen anywhere, only empty shells on the bottom and a few small individuals. Everything was bare wood, the individual links of the chain were clearly visible, the bell was a bell shape with a copper color, the anchors were clean, etc. The only thing covering the wreck was a thin green algae that formed small strands. These strands filled the water when disturbed by a fin kick but quickly settled out. This must have been how

diving was in the Great Lakes before zebra mussels appeared, but with better viz.

After releasing the anchor and surfacing, Gary Humel and Rick Schmidt arrived in Gary's boat "Nobody," followed by Greg Ondus in his new boat with Michelle Foss. Nice boat, Greg! While they hooked into the wreck, we proceeded two miles away to the second wreck, the "Valentine," another wooden schooner that sank in 80' of water in 1877. Upon descending, we again found that the anchor had snagged on some netting, this time at the immediate bow of the ship. Although there was some netting on the "Little W," there was a lot more netting on the "Valentine." Most of it is heavily snagged on the bow (N) and stern (S) and decoratively arranged by being draped from floats that are hung 10'-15' off the bottom. It was very artistic. Once again, there was a complete absence of zebra mussels and great viz at 15'-25'.

The decking is mostly intact on this wreck, and all the equipment is laid out upon deck. At the immediate bow is a large bit, followed by a winch/windlass, a small opening for the chain locker, a hand pump, and the foremast snapped about 5' above the deck but still surrounded by its fife rail, a rare sight. Several belay pins were still in place, and the empty holes for the other pins could be easily seen thanks to the complete absence of zebra mussels. Following this were another winch, a cargo opening - mostly silted but with some large rocks visible inside and some pieces of coal found, a capstan, a large wooden cleat, another cargo opening, and another winch. After this, the decking collapses, exposing the cargo hold. At the very stern is the standing rudder post with the rudder turned hard to starboard.

At the bow a yardarm lies resting against the bit and running diagonally up about 20' above the deck. It is draped in nets, and a burbot fish was found hiding near the top. The forward mast is fallen and lies running forward off the bow to the port side. Amidships a mast also lies running off the port side into the debris field. Following these masts out into the debris field, both disappear under the lake bottom, and it becomes obvious that the lake bottom actually dips down to meet the wreck. This means that the wreck actually sits inside a crater about 3'-5' below the actual lake bottom. This is also obvious at the stern looking south into a sloping wall of mud. Alas, this wreck is slowly sinking into the mud and will be gone from view at some time in the distant future. This is unlike the "Little W," which stands high off the bottom and has a resulting shallower depth by about 5'.

Both wrecks were outstanding, and the great viz and absence of zebra mussels made the dives even more enjoyable. The bottom temperature for both dives was 53-58 deg F with the thermocline sharply present at 62'. We look forward to diving more of the wrecks on the Canadian side in the near future!