

Shipwrecks In or Near the White Lake Area –
Some Leave Remnants and Others Leave Memories

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The Contest

(Courtesy of Laura Connell)

Back in 1855, who would have ever imagined that the skeletal remains of a ship from that era would show up on a sandy beach in 2018, and generate so much attention and excitement. With all that excitement, one might wonder what other shipwrecks took place in the area. Here is a partial list.

Telegraph – was a 103 foot schooner built in 1848 at Ferrys Mill Point, MI by John Conner for William M. Ferry of Grand Haven. The 2-mast schooner was driven ashore at White Lake in October 1853 and went to pieces. There were no casualties. This was the first of two vessels built for the Ferrys to carry this name. The second vessel to be named Telegraph was built by E. M. Berkwith in Racine, WI for Ferry & Sons of Grand Haven in 1854. This vessel was only 79 feet in length. It was reportedly sold in 1863. It's not known what its final disposition was.

North Yuba – was a 97 ½ foot 2-masted wooden schooner built in Manitowoc in 1853 by Eli Bates & Son. It was not all smooth sailing for the North Yuba, however. It capsized several time, was repaired and put

back into service each time. In October 1855, Isreal E. Carleton of White River was listed as the owner. Few details tell what happened in December 1855 which saw the North Yuba come ashore and wreck .

Alexander Mitchell – was built in 1853 by George Barber in Port Huron, MI, for N. Luddington of Milwaukee, WI. At 124 feet in length, the Mitchell was classified as a Brigantine. It was driven ashore in heavy weather and pounded to pieces near White Lake on 22 October 1866.

Madison – was a 2-mast schooner built in Clayton, NY in 1840. It went to pieces ashore and water logged near White Lake on 17 September 1877. She was carrying load of lumber at the time.

L. C. Woodruff – a 170 foot 3-mast wooden Barkentine built in 1866 by Francis Nelson Jones of Buffalo, NY. The owners were N. C. Winslow and B. S. Wolvin of Buffalo, NY. It was lost 1 November 1878. Disabled off Big Point Sable on October 30, 1878, her anchor was put out but it did not hold. She drifted and grounded in 13 feet of water about a mile north of the White Lake Harbor. The waves on the Lake swept over the ship. The Captain and 9 crewmen resorted to positioning themselves in the rigging.

With no Lifesaving Station or crew at White Lake at the time, help had to come from Grand Haven. A telegraph message had to be sent from Montague.

The Woodruff was loaded with 35,500 bushels of corn bound from Chicago to Buffalo which swelled and caused her sides to burst open. The First Mate was fatally injured during the rescue; two others were swept away and drowned.

Contest – a 126 foot, 2-masted wooden schooner built in 1855 in Buffalo, NY by F. N. Jones for Hart, Newman & Co. It sailed in Lakes Erie, Huron and Michigan and operated in the grain trade. The Contest sank near the mouth of the White Lake Channel during a storm on 25 October 1882. She was driven ashore where she went over on her beam end (side). She was stripped and broke up a few days later.

Following some high water and rough seas, she became visible on shore again in December 2018. This may be the third time the wreck has been rediscovered. Reportedly, she was also found in 1942 and again 1975.

Previously unidentified, members of the Michigan Shipwreck Research Association worked in December 2018 to finally identify the ship as the Contest.

Although there are no original pictures of the Contest, there are certainly plenty of pictures of her now. She is still visible on the shore in March 2021, but with the lower lake level now, she may soon become covered up again.

L. J. Conway – was an 80 foot schooner built in Manitowoc, WI, in 1873 for the lumber trade. On November 16, 1886, after delivering a load of lumber, the Conway left Chicago for their home port of Muskegon with a load of grain: 3,735 bushels of corn and 1,332 bushels of oats. A ferocious snow-laden gale raged over the Great Lakes for several days, while hundreds of ships were making their late-season runs. One of the victims of the storm was the L. J. Conway. It sank on 17 November 1886, north of White Lake Channel near Flower Creek, taking the lives of the Captain, the 4-man crew and a passenger. In 1992, there were reports of wreckage discovered on the beach near Meinert Park and Flower Creek, the same area where the Conway went down.

Helen – was built in 1881 in Milwaukee, WI by Wolf and Davidson. The schooner was 90 feet long with 2 masts. Bound for White Lake from Chicago on 18 November 1886, it was driven on a reef, capsized and wrecked. Although only 100 yards from shore, all lives were lost. The Captain's body came ashore north of Muskegon. The Captain's wife who was also onboard, drown with the rest of the crew. The wreck was discovered 14 September 2002.

Daisy Day – was a 103 foot wooden steam-powered bulk freighter built in 1880 by Jasper Hanson of Hanson & Scove for Captain John Jacobs and George B. Guyles of Manitowac, WI.

She was built specifically as a lumber hooker, so called because they would stop at small ports and camps with no docking facilities, requiring the vessel to use their "hook" or anchor to hold them in place.

In 1889, she was sold to E. Sant of Montague who continued to use her in the lumber trade.

In early Oct 1891, she was loaded with lumber ready to make her last delivery before being sold. As she was leaving port, she became stuck on a sandbar off Claybanks Township Park in Oceana County. It was thought that she would be in no danger and was waiting until a tug from White Lake could come up to pull her off. However, a heavy sea came up during the night and she was sunk on 11 October 1891. The remains of the Daisy Day were discovered in April 2003.

State of Michigan/DePere – was a 165 foot vessel built for the Goodrich Steamship Line by Burger & Burger of Manitowac, WI in 1873 for Captain A. E. Goodrich of Chicago, IL. The vessel originally carried the name DePere.

After serving the Goodrich Line, the DePere was sold to Stephen B. Grummond in 1892 for \$20,000. It was then that her name was changed to State of Michigan. She was put into service on the Detroit-Mackinaw route. By 1897, she was laid up in Canada.

The State of Michigan was sold to the Barry Line of Chicago in 1900.

On October 15, 1901, she left Muskegon harbor for Manistee with a cargo of salt. When off White Lake, a piston rod from the engine broke and put a hole through the bottom of the boat, which caused water to pour in with such force and volume that the engine hands were driven from the engine room.

The men were sent ashore for assistance. The Life Saving crew and a tug attempted to tow the rapidly filling boat to port, but the water came in so fast they had to abandon their efforts and she went down.

She sank on 15 October 1901 about 2 miles Northwest of Whitehall. In 1908 an unsuccessful attempt was made to raise her.

Day Spring – was a 73 foot 3-mast wooden schooner built in Milan, OH in 1860. It was carrying a load of sawdust from Frankfort to Chicago when it sprang a leak about 15 miles north of White Lake Channel and 3 miles from shore in August 1904. The 4-man crew and 8 passengers worked the pumps but were unable to keep ahead of the incoming water. A distress flag was hoisted and the crew of the White River Life Saving Station responded, safely bringing all those aboard to the Life Saving Station for the night.

Brightie/Brighty – was a 182 foot 3 mast lumber schooner barge built in 1868 by Lafrinier & Drake of Cleveland, Ohio. In 1886, the middle mast was removed. She was lost on 23 August 1928 about 8 miles north of Whitehall in 70' of water when she was caught in a storm and her seams burst. She was carrying a load of pulpwood at the time. Of the seven crewmen on board, one was lost.

Interlaken – was a 170 foot schooner built in 1893. It sailed the Great Lakes moving shingles and lumber. It was converted to a barge in 1913. On 4 October 1934, the Interlaken and a flat scow were being towed to White Lake for the winter when the tugboat ran out of coal four miles north of the White Lake channel. The tugboat made it through heavy seas to port but the Interlaken sank with four crewmen still on board. The Coast Guard crew was able to rescue the men.

In 2003, the remains of the Interlaken were discovered about 7 miles north of Whitehall in 15 feet of water.

One of the worst storms in many years swept across Lake Michigan and the Midwest on 11 November 1940, leaving a path of destruction in its wake and much tragedy in the history of Great Lakes shipping: Four ships went down with all hands; five others were aground. It was estimated that approximately 120 seamen lost their lives on Lake Michigan as a result of the storm. The following three vessels were among the ships that were lost in the area:

William B. Davock – a 7,200 ton 420 foot steel bulk freight steamer built in 1909. It sank in 200 feet of water off Little Sable light with 33 men aboard.

Anna C. Minch – Built in 1903, the 380 foot bulk carrier broke in two and sank in Lake Michigan during the November 11th storm near Ludington with all 24 crewmen aboard. She was reportedly carrying a load of hardwood lumber. Her wreckage has since been located about one and a half miles south of Pentwater, not far from the wreckage of the William B. Davock, which went down in the same storm.

The Novadoc – Built in 1928, the 253 foot pulpwood carrier went aground on Juniper Beach near Pentwater and broke up on 11 November 1940. Seventeen of her crewmen were taken off but two were washed overboard. The Novadoc was one of three freighters lost in the storm that day including the William B. Davock and the Anna C. Minch.