Beneath the Inland Seas: Michigan’s Underwater Archaeological Heritage
John R. Halsey and Wayne R. Lusardi

In Beneath the Inland Seas: Michigan’s Underwater Archaeological Heritage, authors John R. Halsey and Wayne R. Lusardi have compiled a valuable resource on the practice and development of maritime archaeology in a state that boasts over 38,000 sq. mi. of bottomlands in four Great Lakes. As state archaeologist and state maritime archaeologist, respectively, Halsey and Lusardi combine years of professional knowledge with contributions from a variety of avocational divers and researchers to produce a volume sure to appeal to both specialists and interested members of the public alike. The state archaeologists define maritime archaeology and outline its potential before delving briefly into issues of theory, methodology, and legislation, focused on the Great Lakes. An additional 13 contributors discuss significant shipwrecks from individual state bottomland preserves. An impressive bibliography complements attractive archival images and photographs of wrecks in situ, resulting in a work that few interested in Great Lakes history and maritime archaeology can afford to ignore.

In their introductory chapters, Halsey and Lusardi provide a concise geologic and cultural history of the region from the prehistoric period to the present, while suggesting the unique possibilities of archaeology to offer new lines of evidence about this history. In keeping with Christer Westerdahl’s influential idea of maritime cultural landscapes and developments in foreshore- and inundated-sites archaeology, the authors emphasize that maritime archaeological sites are not confined to the historical shipwrecks that fill the popular imagination, and instead encompass everything from shore installations to ancient fish weirs. The perennial fascination with the first European ship lost in the lakes, LaSalle’s ill-fated Griffon, is used to introduce a thoughtful summary of the evolution of shipping on the Great Lakes, reminding the reader of the intimate link between maritime transport and larger trends in social and economic history. Halsey does not neglect marine architecture, however, and discusses the transition from sail to steam on the lakes, and the development of bulk carriers from modest wooden-hulled vessels to the thousand-foot steel behemoths of today. These transformations are illustrated with individual examples, and the dozens of ships mentioned by name are all accompanied by their dates of operation in parentheses. This level of detail is sure to delight any ship enthusiast.

Of particular value is Halsey’s discussion of legal and professional issues in Michigan maritime archaeology. He cuts through the jargon inherent in any legislation to define “bottomlands,” and explains that the state of Michigan claims ownership of all abandoned wrecks in these areas, with the exception of those protected under federal law or the sovereign immunity of foreign states. This information will be of interest to sport divers curious about the legal status of the wrecks they visit, as well as professionals working in other states or countries. Halsey also describes the establishment, organization, and mission of the state’s 10 Great Lakes State Bottomland Preserves, which complement the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Isle Royale National Park. He stresses the vital role avocational groups such as the Michigan Underwater Preserve Council (MUPC) continue to play in the success of these initiatives. The authors’ emphasis on the many successful partnerships between volunteers, enthusiasts, and professional archaeologists is a major strength of the work, and a refreshing change from the marginalization of those without formal academic credentials by some archaeologists. Michigan’s proactive and collaborative approach in managing its underwater cultural heritage should serve as a model for other states, although some aspects of the relevant legislation remain dubious. While Public Act 452 of 1988 was apparently enacted to curtail abuses of

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an earlier 1980 law, the statement that “it is now a felony to recover or destroy abandoned property with a fair market value of $100 or more” (p. 30) raises several questions. Is it legal to recover artifacts worth less than $100, and perhaps more importantly, who assesses the market value of an historical item? Despite this alarming loophole in otherwise sound legislation, the considerable public interest in Michigan’s Bottomland Preserves and the state’s maritime history in general seems to indicate a widespread shift towards more responsible stewardship by the public.

The final chapter, “Historic Wrecks from Michigan’s Lakes and Shores,” will perhaps be of the greatest interest to most readers. Here authorities such as museum curator C. Patrick Labadie and diver Cris Kohl discuss significant shipwrecks. A great diversity of vessel types is represented here, ranging from the schooner Dunderberg with its idiosyncratic figurehead, to vernacular fishing craft of Isle Royale, to the modern steel bulk-carrier Cedarville, which was sunk in 1965. As is typical with edited collections of this kind, the quality of contributions is somewhat uneven. While divers like Thomas Mercier and Carol Linteau tend to focus on their personal experiences under water, others like Labadie and former National Park Service archaeologist Kenneth J. Vrana provide detailed site descriptions using the more formal and specific language familiar to archaeologists. The quality of the reproduced historical images and underwater photographs is superb, but unfortunately the same cannot be said for the maps which accompany the text on individual wrecks. Smaller images—details from a perfectly adequate map of the entire Great Lakes region found on page 29—appear rather cartoonish and mar otherwise excellent graphic design. Additional faults are minor discrepancies, and one wonders if the first steel ship on the lakes was the Spokane of 1886 (p. 9), or perhaps the tug Sport built in 1873 (p. 25). The claim that the Walk-in-the-Water (1818) was the first steamship on the lakes (p. 7) will likely be hotly disputed by historians across the border, who instead accord that honor to the steamer Frontenac, launched two years earlier in 1816. These are small criticisms, however, of an otherwise excellent volume that synthesizes a vast amount of data and does much to bring the different stakeholders in Michigan’s submerged cultural resources together. It is hoped the examples Halsey and Lusardi provide will inspire curious sport divers and other motivated members of the public to take an active role in studying and protecting the state’s maritime heritage.

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