

UASC Wreck Checker

News and Views of the Underwater Archaeological Society of Chicago

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Buccaneer Scuttling Moves Forward!

by Cris Kohl, © Seawolf Communications, Inc. Used with permission.

The old Chicago tourist cruise ship named the *Buccaneer* is slated to become another ship scuttled off the Windy City for the express purpose of creating a new scuba dive site and artificial reef. She will join the *The Straits of Mackinac* (2003) and the *Holly barge* (2000) which were scuttled for the same purpose. However, the *Buccaneer* has the most dramatic history of the three.

Built by the Defoe Boat and Motor Works of Bay City, Michigan, as hull number 82 and launched in 1925 as the *Dexter*, the steel ship measured 99.66 feet in length, 23.0 feet in beam, and 8.0 feet in draft. The *Dexter* was one of 12 steel rumrunner chasers built in 1924 and 1925 by that company for the United States Coast Guard. Prohibition became law in the USA in 1920, making the manufacture, transport, and sale of alcohol illegal. But many ambitious individuals in neighboring countries like Canada, Mexico, and Cuba quickly established illegal but highly profitable alcohol export businesses. These liquor smugglers were called "rumrunners." Rumored that the *Dexter* might be used for ice-breaking purposes, the ship was, with her rivetted construction, built to ice-breaking standards, but she was immediately stationed in Pascagoula, Mississippi, on the Gulf of Mexico, to help keep "demon rum" out of the USA.

On March 20, 1929, the Canadian, 90-ton, twin-masted schooner with the unusual name of *I'm Alone* encountered US authorities in the Gulf of Mexico. The 125-foot-long *I'm Alone* had been built in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, in 1924 for use as a rumrunner. Her twin 100 horsepower diesel engines were a modern addition to this traditional, slow-moving sailboat, perfect for deepwater rum-running. It was said that the *I'm Alone*, smuggling large cargoes of alcohol between Nova Scotia and northeastern US ports, earned her owners three million dollars during her first three years (in a pre-inflation era when the average worker earned about \$1,500 a year and the cost of goods was proportionate!) In the fall of 1928, New York bootlegger Jamie Clark bought the ship for \$18,000, maintained her Canadian registration, and used her to deliver alcohol down to the Gulf of Mexico. Capt. John Randell would anchor the *I'm Alone* a safe distance off shore, and a smaller motor boat would run out at night, load up, and return with considerable alcohol for a thirsty New Orleans. By all accounts, Canadian Capt. Randell was a seasoned adventurer, honored with medals during World War One for his skirmish with a U-boat. This fearless daredevil at sea transformed into a debonair dandy on land, and he always sailed with a dinner jacket, a suit of tails, dress collars, silk socks, and a collapsible top hat tucked carefully away in his cabin.

On March 20, 1929, the US Coast Guard cutter *Walcott* approached the *I'm Alone*, which had been running alcohol from Belize (which is much closer than running trips from Canada) to New Orleans. The *Walcott's* captain ordered the *I'm Alone* to surrender to him. Capt. Randell, nonplussed, argued correctly that he was far enough off shore to be in international waters, and that the US Coast Guard had no authority over a foreign vessel there. The *Walcott* opened fire with a machine gun, but her four-pounder jammed, giving Randell time to hastily withdraw. For the next day, the *Walcott* ran in hot pursuit, being joined later in the hunt by her fellow Coast Guard ship, the *Dexter*, which fired a warning shot across the *I'm Alone's* bow. Through his megaphone, Randell yelled that he was on the high seas and the coast guard had no authority to stop him.

The *Dexter* opened serious fire, sending 20 rounds into the *I'm Alone's* hull. Still Randell refused to surrender. The *Dexter* shelled the wooden hull to splintered pieces with her three-inch gun. Randell ordered his eight crewmembers, miraculously unhurt, into lifeboats, while he remained with the *I'm Alone*. With her bow going under and her stern rising higher above the water, Randell jumped just before his ship sank more than 10,000 feet to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, closer to Mexico's Yucatan peninsula than to New Orleans. A strong gale made the seas rough, and the boatswain from the *I'm Alone* tragically drowned. Randell and the rest of his men were picked up by the *Dexter* and the *Walcott*, locked below decks after being given dry clothes and hot drinks, then taken to prison in New Orleans.

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The *Buccaneer*, formerly the US Coast Guard ship *Dexter*, in May, 2000, when she carried tourists to view the scuttling of the *Holly barge* off Chicago. Plans are to scuttle the *Buccaneer* off Chicago by late 2008. The steel housing, welded onto the hull, will not be torn off by the sinking, making it a more interesting scuba dive site. The mermaid figurehead, added in the 1990's, has been stolen from the ship, which awaits clean-up and legal permission for the scuttling. Photo by Cris Kohl



The *I'm Alone* was sunk by the *Dexter* (later renamed the *Buccaneer*) in 1929 near the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. Cris Kohl Collection

March 26 April 30
May 28 June 25
July 30 August 27
Sept. 24 Oct. 29 Nov. 19

Chicago skyline in spring from the Shedd. Photo by Cris Kohl

UASC Meetings in 2008!

Our meetings (dates given above) are held on the 6th Floor (8th Floor in March & April, 2008) of the Helix Building, 310 Racine Ave. at Jackson Blvd., Chicago, on the last Wednesday of every month (2nd last in November), beginning at 6:30 PM until 9 PM. Free parking is available in the Helix parking lots, the main one being on the west side of the building, and the other one located across the street from the main lot. We discuss shipwrecks off Chicago, plus we have exciting guest speakers. There is no December meeting.

Join us! The public is welcome!

...Continued from page 1

The subsequent international wrangling among the countries and numerous politicians of Canada, the USA and Great Britain took six years to iron out. By that time (1935), Prohibition had been over for two years, the lawmakers realizing the failure of "the noble experiment." In the end, the US government made a formal apology for the sinking of the *I'm Alone* and a token payment of \$25,000 to the government of Canada for legal expenses incurred, and paid the boatswain's widow \$10,000, Capt. Randall \$7,906, and \$7,760.50 to the rest of the *I'm Alone's* crew.

The *Dexter* went on to work in the Gulf of Mexico until 1934, when the ship was relocated to the Great Lakes, stationed at Buffalo, New York, on Lake Erie. On May 19, 1936, the *Dexter* was transferred to the U.S. Navy, which renamed it the *YP-63*. Serving in World War Two as a convoy escort, the *YP-63* reportedly saw action against German submarines.

After the war, the Navy sold the ship to James B. Fowler of Revere, Massachusetts, on July 2, 1946, and, although he did not formally enroll his ship until 1948, when it received official number 255692, he did rename it the *Kingfisher*. The *Kingfisher's* enrollment measurements in 1948 were 93.5 feet in length, 23 feet in beam, 10 feet in draft, 98 gross tons and 67 net tons. In 1957, the vessel's registered owner became M. V. Kingfisher, Inc. of East Boston, Massachusetts. In 1961, Robert H. Wagner of Chicago purchased the ship, brought her to Chicago, and renamed her the *Jamaica II*, a name which the vessel carried for only two years when, in 1963, she became the *Trinidad*. It was not until 1994 that the vessel received her final name, *Buccaneer*. At that time, she was used in the Chicago tourist trade, an activity maintained until not long before the ship was sold at a bank auction in April, 2005, to **Hank Fiene**, who gave the ship to the "Buccaneer Project," a non-profit organization intent on sinking this historic but tired, old ship to create a new scuba dive site off Chicago.

Jim Gentile of Windy City Diving (charter boat) has been working on the scuttling of the *Buccaneer*, and will soon have a "to-do" list. The clean-up will include the de-oiling of the two engines and the removal of some fuel left in the tanks. Twenty batteries have already been removed, as well as some other materials. Jim is in the "grant writing process," soliciting letters of support from various agencies in hopes of receiving some grant money from Illinois Tourism to help clean up the ship and eventually sink it as an attractive scuba dive site. He is also awaiting approval letters from various government agencies such as the DNR (Department of Natural Resources). Jim is hoping that the clean-up can be done by late May, 2008, and that the *Buccaneer* can be sunk by October, 2008.

UASC could play a very important role in these events. Before the *Buccaneer* is even sunk, we could use it as training for underwater archaeology. Measurements could be taken and drawings could be made, it being much easier and faster doing it now before the ship becomes a shipwreck. The *Buccaneer* is presently docked at Marine Services in Dolton, IL, near 150th Street. Many UASC members have already expressed great interest in working on this project.

The First Two 2008 UASC Meetings

Our first 2008 guest speaker was Maritime Historian **Fred Neuschel**, no stranger to the UASC podium. Fred's most recent book is *Lives and Legends of the Christmas Tree Ships*, and on Jan. 30, 2008, he told stories he found about the lumber industry ships on Lake Michigan while researching this book.

Our February 27, 2008, guest speaker was **Cris Kohl**, who did a presentation on Missouri's Bonne Terre mines (which several of our members are hoping to dive in late April, 2008) and later, a solo presentation called "Tall Ships Chicago--Then and Now," which he normally co-presented with **Jim Jarecki**, but



Historian Fred Neuschel
Photo by Cris Kohl

Jim took sick and could not make the meeting (he's feeling better now).

UASC also surprised Cris with a "Shipwreck Cake" to celebrate the recognition he received on Feb. 16, 2008. The cake included two of Cris' underwater photos of the *Wells Burt* and the words "Congratulations Cris Kohl, 2008 Our World Underwater Lifetime Achievement Award."

We thank both speakers for joining us!



Cris Kohl and the Shipwreck Cake.
Photo by Joan Forsberg

Bonne Terre Mines Dive Trip, April 25-27, 2008

This year, members of UASC are getting together to learn a little more about the world around us -- including the underwater world! And to have fun! Bonne Terre Mines, Missouri, about a 6 hour drive from Chicago, has many signs of its mining history left underwater after the mines flooded. To sign up for two days (Sat. & Sun.) of diving, call **Don Doherty** at (708) 636-3619, e-mail: dkdoherty@chicagosite.org.

A diver examines a steel ore cart left over from the old lead mining days at Bonne Terre Mines, Missouri. Photo by Cris Kohl



Door County Shipwrecks Dive Trip, June 27-29, 2008

This year, members of UASC are getting together to learn a little more about the world around us -- including the underwater world! And to have fun! Door County, WI, about a 5 hour drive from Chicago, has many shipwrecks plus visible appreciation of its maritime history. To sign up for two days (Sat. & Sun.) of diving, call **Joan Forsberg** at (630) 293-4020, e-mail: jaforsberg@aol.com.

The rudder, steering quadrant, & propeller of Door County's *Frank O'Connor*. Photo by Cris Kohl



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Calendar of Events



Compiled in March, 2008.

- March 26, 2008 (Wed.) -- UASC meeting. Guest speaker: **Brendon Baillod**. His topic will be "Researching the *Griffon*, the 1st Wreck on the upper lakes."
- April 5, 2008 (Sat.) -- The 14th annual "Shipwrecks/2008" Show in Welland, Ontario. Presentations throughout the day. See www.vaxxine.com/nda/
- April 12, 2008 (Sat.) -- Holland, MI, show highlighting the 1958 loss of the freighter *Carl D. Bradley* in Lake Michigan, and the sinking of *Titanic*. **Cris Kohl** will do "Titanic, The Great Lakes Connections." 616-994-3483
- April 19, 2008 (Sat.) -- A revival by the Ford Seahorses of the "Great Lakes Shipwreck Festival" Show in the Detroit area. New location: Schoolcraft Community College, 18600 Haggerty Rd., Livonia, MI. All-day presentations (9 AM to 5 PM) plus evening program (7 to 9 PM). UASC members doing presentations there are **Valerie Olson van Heest** and **Cris Kohl & Joan Forsberg**. Other presenters include **Dave Trotter, Jim & Pat Stayer, Robert McGreevy, and Lee Murdock**. ALSO: Many saltwater presentations. See www.shipwreckfestival.org for more detailed information.
- April 30, 2008 (Wed.) -- UASC meeting, 6:30 PM.
- May 3, 2008 (Sat.) -- The 10th annual "Mysteries and Histories Beneath The Inland Seas" Show, Holland, MI. Presenters: archaeologist **Ralph Wilbanks, Dave Trotter, and Michigan Shipwreck Research Associates**. Knickerbocker Theatre, 86 E. 8th St., Holland, MI, 7 PM. Tickets \$15.00. For info, call 616-738-9233, or see www.michiganshipwrecks.org
- May 28, 2008 (Wed.) -- UASC meeting, 6:30 PM.
(See page one for UASC meeting dates, June to October, 2008)
- November 19, 2008 (Wed.) -- UASC meeting, 6:30 PM.
- November 22, 2008 (Sat.) -- **SPECIAL 25th annual "Shipwrecks and Scuba"** Show, Huron, OH. Presentations, exhibits, workshop, evening dinner, and keynote speaker. See www.bayareadivers.net for more information.
- November 27, 2008 (Thurs.) -- THANKSGIVING DAY
- February 20-22, 2009 (Fri.-Sun.) -- The 39th annual "Our World--Underwater" Show in Chicago. Seminar presentations, exhibits, workshops, Friday Evening Film Festival, a different Saturday Evening Film Festival, much more! Many Great Lakes presentations! See www.ourworldunderwater.com
- March 7-8, 2009 (Sat.-Sun.) -- The 56th annual "Boston Sea Rovers Clinic." Presentations, Exhibits, Film Festival. See www.BostonSeaRovers.com
- March 27-29, 2009 (Fri.-Sun.) -- The 34th annual "Beneath The Sea" New York City Scuba Show. See www.beneaththesea.org

Next Speakers

Great Lakes Maritime Historian **Brendon Baillod** (left) will be our guest speaker on March 26, 2008, while either **Larry Boucha** (right) or **Richie Kohler** will speak on April 30th.

Photos by Cris Kohl



UASC at OWU 2008

Many UASC members helped operate our booth at Chicago's annual "Our World--Underwater" Show on Feb. 15-17, 2008, among them (l. to r.) **Jim Jarecki, Cheryl Wickstrom, Scott Reimer, Tony Kiefer, Joan Forsberg, Delphine Pontvieux, Diane Gulcznski, and Cris Kohl**. We signed on 24 new UASC members at that show!

Photo by Geoff Kohl



UASC at the Chicago Maritime Festival



The 6th annual Chicago Maritime Festival, held on Saturday, Feb. 23, 2008, at the Chicago Historical Museum, was again very successful, with considerable UASC participation. *Clockwise from left:* **Dan Kasberger** teaches knots; **John Loftus** and **Howard Openlander**, among others, manned our booth; the children's shipwreck education area; **Ruth Loftus** opens a new world. *Photos by Cris Kohl*





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- Participation at regular meetings
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Members cannot participate in dive activities if membership is not current.

Please circle your areas of interest: boating wreck diving shipwreck surveying researching maritime history learning u/w archaeological techniques u/w still photography u/w videography UASC exhibits architectural drawing membership recruiting public relations Other: _____

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MISSION STATEMENT — The Underwater Archaeological Society of Chicago (UASC) is a volunteer, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of Illinois' shipwrecks and other underwater cultural resources.

The UASC conducts shipwreck site surveys which employ field drawings, underwater photography and videotape. Field survey work is augmented by academic historical research. The Society attempts

to preserve sites by studying the effects of natural and biological forces as well as the impact of human activity on shipwrecks. It advocates responsible use of submerged cultural resources.

Membership is open to everyone. The Society presents the opportunity to meet, work together, and socialize with others who share similar avocational interests. It allows members to apply their diving or other skills to group projects that produce site maps, published surveys,

technical drawings, and educational programs.

The UASC shares the results of its work with the community through publications, museum exhibits, and presentations to all interested public and private groups.

Through its work, the Society hopes to add to the body of archaeological data available to local historians and maritime enthusiasts of future generations. It also seeks to enhance the enjoyment and value of local sport diving.

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