

What is a Shipwreck Preserve?

In 1983 the State of Michigan designated Straits of Mackinac as an Underwater Preserve. The Preserve covers approximately 148 square miles in Lakes Huron and Michigan. The State recognized the historical significance of the shipwrecks and wanted to preserve them for future generations to enjoy. Since 1980, Michigan law states that it is illegal to remove or alter any artifacts on the shipwrecks that lie within any of the Great Lakes bottomlands.

The Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Preserve: Where sail, steam and steel collide.

The Straits of Mackinac, where Lakes Michigan and Huron meet, is known for heavy shipping traffic, numerous islands and hidden shoals, unpredictable weather and heavy fog. Because of this, for centuries the Straits of Mackinac has long been well known as a dangerous area to navigate.

One of the oldest shipwrecks in the Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Preserve is the sailing vessel Sandusky. Built in 1848, she was carrying grain from Chicago en route to Buffalo, NY when she sank in a storm in September 1856. The side-wheeler Queen City attempted to rescue the Sandusky's sailors that were still clinging to the masts of their ship, to no avail. The entire seven man crew of the Sandusky perished in the storm.



Diver exploring the Sandusky figurehead.

There are many more wooden sailing and steam-powered propeller vessels that now rest in the Straits of Mackinac. Several of them sank after being cut open by ice in the early spring while trying to make their first run of the season. The schooner Northwest and steamers Minneapolis, Eber Ward, William Barnum and Uganda all met their fates due to ice.

The largest shipwreck in the Straits of Mackinac is the 604 foot Cedarville. Built in 1927, she was loaded with limestone bound for Gary, IN in May 1965 when she encountered heavy fog in the Straits and collided with the Norwegian vessel Topdalsfjord. Shortly after the collision, the Cedarville capsized and sank just east of the Mackinac Bridge. Ten men from the thirty-five man crew of the Cedarville perished that cold May morning.

Bibliography: Feltner, Charles and Baron Feltner, Jeri. Shipwrecks of the Straits of Mackinac. Dearborn MI: Seajay Publications, 1991.



Diver exploring the bow & pilothouse of the Cedarville.

The Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Preserve Association is a volunteer non-profit 501(c)3 organization. Our mission is to promote and preserve the maritime historical and underwater natural resources in the Straits of Mackinac area by enhancing diver safety and access to the shipwrecks in the preserve through education, and stewardship. For more information please visit www.straitpreserve.com and like us on Facebook.



Divers exploring the bow of the Eber Ward.

The Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Preserve



- Colonel Ellsworth – 138' wooden schooner built in 1861. Sank in September 1896 due to collision in 85' of water, while empty. No lives lost.
- Fred McBrier – 161' wooden steamer built in 1881. Sank in October 1890 due to collision in 100' of water, while carrying iron ore. No lives lost.
- Maitland – 137' wooden schooner built in 1861. Sank in June 1871 due to collision in 90' of water, while carrying corn. No lives lost.
- Northwest – 223' wooden schooner/barge built 1873. Cut open by ice, sank April 1898 in 70' of water, while carrying corn. No lives lost.
- Sandusky – 110' wooden brig built in 1848. Sank in September 1856 due to storm in 80' of water, while carrying grain. Seven lives lost.
- Eber Ward – 213' wooden steamer built in 1888. Cut open by ice, sank April 1909 in 135' of water, while carrying corn. Five lives lost.
- Minneapolis – 226' wooden steamer built in 1873. Cut open by ice, sank April 1894 in 120' of water, while carrying wheat. No lives lost.
- William Young – 139' wooden schooner/barge built in 1863. Sank in October 1891 in storm in 125' of water, while carrying coal. No lives lost.
- Martin Stalker – 135' wooden schooner built in 1863. Sank in November 1886 due to collision in 95' of water, while carrying iron ore. No lives lost.
- Cedarville – 604' steel freighter built in 1927. Sank in May 1965 due to collision in 110' of water, while carrying limestone. Ten lives lost.
- William Barnum – 219' wooden steamer built in 1873. Cut open by ice, sank in April 1894 in 75' of water, while carrying corn. No lives lost.
- St. Andrew – 143' wooden schooner built in 1857. Sank in June 1878 due to collision in 65' of water, while carrying corn. No lives lost.

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