

# Wisconsin's UNDERWATER HERITAGE

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## Here Today – Gone Tomorrow: The Rise And Fall Of Horn's Pier And The Schooner *Sea Bird* A Clay Banks Survey Project Report

by Dr. Richard Boyd

The Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association has undertaken a multi-year project to reconstruct the maritime history of the "Ghost Ports" of Clay Banks Township in southern Door County. Shortly after the Civil War, three villages sprang up along the Lake Michigan shoreline, centered on extensive logging and sawmilling operations in that area. To ship the products generated by these enterprises, each hamlet built an impressively long pier out into the Lake, some extending over 1,500 feet. With heavy maritime traffic to these ports, numerous shipwrecks occurred on the shoals and submerged boulders in the vicinity. One such unlucky vessel was the schooner *Sea Bird*, which was wrecked near Horn's Pier in 1875.

Horn's Pier was the most northerly of the three Ghost Ports in Clay Banks Township. A pier was established there just south of the township line in 1870 by the Horn Brothers, William & Ferdinand, of Chicago. Some reports claim that a pier was there as early as 1866). The Horns were very enterprising individuals who established docks and related business at many

spots along Lake Michigan. By early 1871, Horn's Pier extended 800 feet out into the Lake and the onshore facilities including a store, warehouse, saloon and other assorted dwellings. Unfortunately, a forest fire destroyed the entire complex that September, while also doing significant damage to the Clay Banks settlement. Undaunted by this loss, the Horns promptly rebuilt all the facilities and were functional again by Christmas that same year, and expected to stay operational throughout much of the winter.

Horn's Pier quickly became a flourishing center of maritime business where steamers plying Lake Michigan often put in for supplies and fuel. The village soon boasted a hotel, dancehall, saloon, several warehouses, a post office and various residences. Local newspapers reported a continuous "nautical parade" of schooners and steamers visiting the pier in the 1870s and 80s. Notably, Horn's business letterhead in 1874 depicted an extensive shoreline complex of docks and buildings (see adjacent illustration, courtesy of Doug Weimer). On the



## Wisconsin: The Diving State

by Paul J. Creviere

One wouldn't think that Wisconsin could be described as "The Diving State." Our home here has always been linked to dairy products and such. Diving has been left to ocean-side states like Florida and California. But much of what we find in the sport and the industry has its birth, or life, here.

Serious research for deep diving came to Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin in 1925 after the sinking of the car ferry *Lakeland*, that previous fall. An investigative diving team was assembled and brought to the site equipped with a helium and oxygen breathing mixture. The experimental mix had only been used in a laboratory environment up to that time. That summer five divers became the first humans to penetrate excessive depths—and defeat nitrogen narcosis—by descending to 200 feet in Lake Michigan. The U.S. Navy was involved in the effort and watched

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## Wisconsin: The Diving State

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the expedition closely. The *Door County Advocate*, the local newspaper, commented that it was not unusual to see navy admirals walking the streets of their city.

The U.S. Navy Diving Manual rarely pays homage to individuals. But, it mentions Max Nohl. Nohl was a Wisconsin engineer who experimented with mixed gas and in 1937 reached a depth of 420 feet in Lake Michigan. There are still state residents around who dived with Mr. Nohl.

As a young boy growing up in De Pere, Wisconsin, I remember my neighbor Hollis "Holly" Dalhed. Holly joined the Navy about 1937 to get out of the Depression Era bread lines. The Navy was one of the few places young men could find work. He was standing on the wharf next to the *USS Oklahoma* when it was hit by Japanese bombs and rolled over December 7, 1941, in Pearl Harbor.

A little under forty months later, Chief Petty Officer Dalhed was diving for the Navy. As a "frogman" he was one of a group of experts preparing the shores of Okinawa by blowing up reefs and other obstacles for the coming invasion. After the war, Holly spent another ten years blowing up sunken ships and other problem obstructions before moving back to Wisconsin. Holly gave me my first instructions on how to use a diving mask.

The Sturgeon Bay shipyard, Peterson Builders Inc., provided the U.S. Navy with the salvage vessels, *USS Safeguard* (ARS-50), *USS Grasp* (ARS-51), *USS Salvor* (ARS-52) and *USS Grapple* (ARS-53). Having been a guest about the *Grapple*, I had the opportunity to meet, dine with and dive with some of her crew members. I watched her in her career as she participated in the salvage of TWA Flight 800 off Long Island, the recovery of Egypt Air Flight 990, the search for Swissair Flight 111 and John Kennedy Jr.'s light plane. The crew was a hardworking, hard partying lot. One of the senior diving officers was discussing a mixed

dive he'd made to 400 feet. He set foot on the deck and dropped over from the effects of decompression sickness. Some of the crewmembers were just back from salvaging the propeller from the Steamer *Indiana* in Lake Superior. With their help, the propeller was raised and handed over to the Smithsonian Museum.

At the time that I was visiting, the crew was preparing to make their "Qual Dives", the qualification dives they needed to complete before the ship could take operational status. Divers were required to descend to a depth of 190 feet. I worked a little with Lt. Cameron Pearl to provide information for a suitable sight. Lt. Pearl hoped to dive the wreck of the *Lakeland* off the Sturgeon Bay canal. I provided blue prints. As a return courtesy he arranged to have me on board, watching the close circuit TV while sipping coffee in the ship's wardroom. The Navy was bringing in diving supervisors to observe. Suddenly, the ship received orders to proceed out through the St. Lawrence Seaway before winter set in and I was denied my big viewing chance. I still value my ARS-51 cap.

Barometric research has a home here in the diving state. Navy dive tables were, in part, formulated here. The Reverend Doctor Edward Lanphier was a researcher at the University of Wisconsin's Biotron. Asked to find a safe ascent rate for divers, he reasoned that Navy divers had few instances of decompression sickness. He interviewed diving officers about hard hat divers about their ascents, which was done mostly by winching them up. Then the Reverend interviewed Navy combat divers. To paraphrase a hard bitten old commando, 'Well, Doc, we put down these explosives then we get the %^&\*@# outta there.' Lanphier pressed him for a hard number. The two rates were averaged out and the resulting ascent rate of sixty feet in



UNITED STATES SHIP SALVOR (ARS-52)

COMMISSIONING  
STURGEON BAY, WISCONSIN



*John Krohta in uniform and in Navy Deep Sea Dress*

sixty seconds was used by divers worldwide for decades. Reverend Lanphier also participated in other barometric research like the problems with carbon dioxide retention.

Some years ago a friend of mine, who was an active SCUBA diver, was facing Rheumatoid Arthritis. She asked her physician about diving and was told to give it up. Cindy wasn't willing to do that without a second or even third opinion. She called the Hyperbaric Center at Catalina Island in California. They said give up diving, adding, "If you want the definitive answer, call Dr. Eric Kindwall at St. Luke's Hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He'll know." My friend couldn't imagine that someone in the mid-west would know more than hyperbaric experts along the coasts and she continued to call around. She called treatment centers all around the United States. Each call provided the same answer: "Stop diving ... but you might want to call Dr. Kindwall in Milwaukee." She finally called Dr. Kindwall who told her, "Sure, keep diving ... it'll probably be good for you. Just stay above thirty feet."

I visited the hyperbaric facilities at St. Luke's Hospital and for a while my group of divers was traveling to the recompression chamber there to take a test dive to 165 feet. We were given a lecture on decompression sickness and guest divers were allowed to ask any question, they wanted, about diving, limits, tables and complications. I got to know the chamber manager, John Krohta. John had attended the U.S. Navy Diving School at the Washington Navy Yard. After graduation, in 1941, he was assigned to Honolulu where he was told to settle in until they needed him. On December 7, 1941, they needed him. John's first job as a Navy diver was to descend into the *USS Arizona* that Sunday morning. John would never describe what he'd seen inside the sunken battleship. You couldn't meet the man without his dives into the *Arizona* becoming a part of the introduction. But, he would never reveal any details beyond his descent through that hatch.

When the Robert De Niro/Cuba Gooding movie "Men of Honor" was being produced about Navy

diver Carl Brashear, set designers turned to the Desco Corporation of Milwaukee. Desco made the Mark V deep sea diving equipment used in the movie. The company still produces over a dozen various styles of diving helmets including the official Navy Mark V. For about six grand, you too, can be the proud owner of one of these 60 pound beasts. The T-shirts are pretty snazzy for \$20. Check out [www.divedesco.com](http://www.divedesco.com).

We can't finish this article without mentioning Global Manufacturing Corp. of West Allis, a mainstay of dive equipment supply. The company supplies all manners of diving equipment worldwide.

So, if someone tells you that all Wisconsin offers are cheese and Packers, tell them what Wisconsin offers for divers, sport and commercial. Diving didn't start here, but some important contributions to the industry continue here. ■