

CLUE, 2008-08-31 – *Riverside*

On August 31, 2008, David VanZandt, Jim Paskert, Tom Kowalczyk, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee – all members of the Cleveland Underwater Explorers (CLUE) – took Dave's boat *Sea Dragon* out into Lake Erie from Cleveland, OH, to dive the shipwreck *Riverside*. The *Riverside* was a 137' long x 25.8' wide x 10.8' deep three-masted schooner that was caught in the terrible storm of 1893 while carrying a load of stone. It foundered with all seven crew lost. The ship left Kelley's Island, OH, on Friday evening, October 13, 1893, headed for Tonawanda, NY, and the next day on Saturday, October 14, it ran into the great storm, a remnant of a Caribbean hurricane with 60 mph winds, that stranded an estimated 29 vessels, sank approximately 10 vessels - including the *C.B. Benson* and the famous *Dean Richmond* - and killed about 54 people. No one knows the exact day of the ship's loss since the storm raged from October 14-15, but the following week the steamer *Sauber* heading between Buffalo, NY, and Huron, OH, reported seeing two spars of a sunken ship above the water, as did the steamer *Havanna* heading between Ashtabula, OH, and the Pelee Passage. About a week after the storm the fish tug *R.T. Roy* operating out of Cleveland found two topmasts of a schooner sticking 25 to 35 feet out of the water. They were painted white with gilded balls on top, allowing the ship to be positively identified as the *Riverside*. This identification was further reinforced by the foremast being spliced with two rings around it, a unique feature of the *Riverside*. The mainmast and foremast were both above water, and the *Riverside* did not have a topmast on its mizzen. It was also reported that ropes and scraps of clothing, including a coat sleeve and cap, were attached to the topmasts, suggesting the horrible fate of the crew who lashed themselves to the masts in a desperate attempt to survive the sinking but were ripped away by the storm's enormous waves.

After resting for almost a hundred years on the bottom, the *Riverside* was found in the 1980's by Leroy Meermans and Jerry Metzler, divers and searchers out of the Cleveland, OH, area. On October 6, 2007, CLUE members again located this intact wreck. Impressed with its excellent condition, CLUE decided to document this shipwreck as it currently rests on the bottom. Upon descending on the August 31 dives, conditions were found to be very good with 8-10 feet of visibility, a 51°F bottom temperature, and a thermocline at 50 feet with 70-73°F surface water above it. The ship itself rests at a depth of 75 feet and is below the lake bottom by several feet since a 2- to 4-foot high mud bank exists around the wreck, leaving the ship lying inside a bowl depression. Dave took still photos and performed a video survey for the later creation of a mosaic by Tom. Cindy and Kevin took measurements for the creation of a scaled layout. The bow points west, and the bowsprit is missing. No anchors are visible, but both anchor chains pass through the hawse holes and down into the mud. No catheads were evident at the bow, but large wood rub plates are mounted on both sides of the ship where the anchors would have hung. The pawl bitt of the windlass stands

on the centerline near the bow with the windlass behind it. A rocking mechanism on the front of the pawl bitt has linkages connecting it to the drum aft that would have been used to turn and ratchet the windlass. Anchor chain is wrapped around the windlass drum, and a large pile of chain rests on the deck on the port side. Most of the decking of the ship is intact. On the starboard side at the bow is a large spar stuck diagonally through the broken deck and down into the bottom of the chain locker. Leaning up against the windlass on the starboard side is a tapered pole with two alternating hooked brackets attached to its sides. It was identified as the martingale, or dolphin striker, which is the vertical pole found on the underside of the bowsprit used to carry the stays aft.

Immediately aft of the windlass is a small square chain locker opening. Offset to the starboard side behind the windlass is a large vertical bitt. There is a small circular metal-rimmed hole on the port side's deck for chain or rope to pass down into the chain locker. Behind the square chain locker opening is the outline of a missing hand pump's base with four corner bolt holes and a center hole with linkages coming out. A hatch opening is aft, but it is smaller than the main cargo hatches. Behind this opening is a horizontal metal rail mounted to the deck, followed by the broken foremast, which is leaning towards the stern, starboard side. It is broken almost 5 feet above the deck, and on both railings opposite of the mast are four deadeyes with several additional hearteyes. The railings are intact on both sides, and the sides stand high off the bottom by 5 to 8 feet, especially at the bow. At least one hearteye is also mounted on the railing at the bow, and some netting is evident on the starboard railing.

Moving aft of the foremast, the first cargo hatch is found followed by an expanse of intact decking. Scattered on the deck all over the wreck are blocks and wire rigging. Against the starboard railing is a gaff with a boom lying on top of it. Visible is the boom's jaw, and underneath is the bow's hand-operated bilge pump pushed up against the railing. Along the centerline is a small slot cut into the deck with the top of the centerboard visible inside. It is speculated this could be an inspection slot used to determine the position of the centerboard. Aft is a capstan, followed by a small hatch opening with the centerboard box transecting it and chain draped back and forth over the top of the box. An H-shaped foremast bitt with a hanging block is aft of the hatch opening, and the centerboard winch is behind this slightly rotated out of position. This is followed by the broken stub of the mainmast. The stub is broken a foot or two below the deck level. Furthermore, it is surrounded by a square-shaped fife rail that is collapsed. On both railings opposite of this mast are four deadeyes with their accompanying hardware. Mounted to the railings are fife boards that are missing their belaying pins.

Aft of the mainmast is another cargo hatch opening. Looking into the cargo hold, jagged stones can be seen sticking out of the silt about 3-5 feet below the deck level. Immediately aft of the cargo hatch is a partially dislodged manual bilge pump similar in construction to the forward pump. This is followed by a bitt for

the mainsail with a block hanging from it. Aft of the bitt is a circular opening in the deck for the mizzenmast. The entire mast is missing, and the hole is not surrounded by a collar like the other two mast holes. Instead, it is simply a circular hole cut into the deck. The *Riverside* was originally built in 1870 as a two-masted schooner, and in 1884 it was rebuilt and modified into a three-masted schooner. This mast hole is the one that was added. Immediately following the mast hole is the opening for the cabin, which is missing. On both sides adjacent to the mizzenmast, the railings are collapsed and splayed outwards. One deadeye was seen underneath the wreckage on the starboard side, confirming the mast hole was actively used as a mast. There is significant damage to the entire stern area, although the basic shape of the hull remains intact. A gaff lies diagonally on the deck on the port side. Its tip stretches from the centerline to the port side with its jaws pushed against the port railing. Lining the inside the jaws are the remnants of leather used to prevent chaffing on the mast.

The interior of the cabin opening is cluttered with debris. The cabin hole fills the width of the ship, and Tom found a broken plate inside. On the starboard stern corner is the metal-lined circular latrine opening to the underside of the ship, and a large green bottle lies among the ship's frames next to it. Speculation is this bottle was hidden there for illicit drinking purposes. At the center of the stern is the rudderpost, which stands 5 to 8 feet high off the bottom. Mounted on top of the rudderpost is a cap for the steering gear connections. No steering gear or wheel was found. The rudder is turned to the port side, and the top of it can be seen sticking out of the silt. Surrounding the rudderpost in a thin strip of metal about halfway up, and the metal is gray with no corrosion or growth on it. The front is flat, and the rear is rounded to conform to the rudderpost's shape. This was a bearing surface where the rudder passed through the hull to reduce friction and make turning the rudder easier. This metal may be lead or tin based on its color and lack of growth and corrosion. The ship's transom is mostly missing, but the underside curves of the ship can be seen.

Lying diagonally off the port side is a fallen mast. The end that is near the stern terminates in a jagged broken end, indicating it is either the foremast or, more likely, the mainmast. The mast goes along the port side of the ship before disappearing into the mud bank that surrounds the ship. Additional debris and planks trail behind the stern and also disappear into the mud bank. The entire ship is clear of zebra mussels, indicating it is in the dead zone of Lake Erie where depleted oxygen levels do not allow the growth of these animals.

The weather for the day was excellent with calm flat seas, pleasant 70-75°F air temperatures, and a clear sunny sky. However, towards the end of the third dive, the weather started to turn rough, and whitecaps and 2'-3' seas began to develop. Due to the extreme distance of this wreck from shore, the rough seas made for a long trip home, and they built to 4' seas before shore was reached. However, the excellent condition of this wreck made the trip worth it, and it

provides another example of the historic shipwrecks that can be found in Lake Erie.