

HERITAGE CORNER

Watery graveyard once surrounded Stag Island

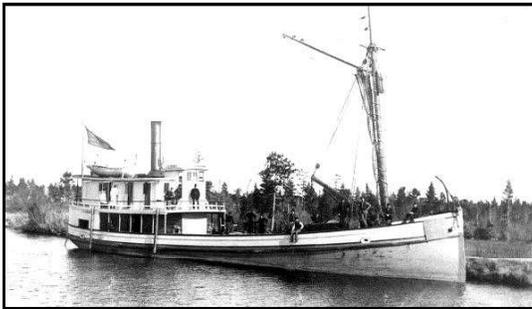
Information provided by Heritage St. Clair

In the era of wooden ships, wood-fueled boilers, and towed barges and schooners, the St. Clair River was a very dangerous place.

Since the 1830s, there have been over 200 marine disasters along the river; within the boundaries of present day St. Clair Township, over 60 of these have occurred. Fortunately, few of these resulted in the direct loss of life, although many deaths occurred in the wake of these marine accidents.

People didn't seem to worry as much about the image or the health of our beautiful river in those days. It was not uncommon for a vessel that had been deemed unseaworthy or that had been fired beyond repair to be abandoned in the river outside of the shipping channel.

A popular dumping ground was Stag Island; over time, the shallows surrounding the island became the ideal place to get rid of an unwanted vessel. But this



The J.S. Ruby

sels included the steamer *Superior*, the *J.S. Ruby*, the *Mineral Rock*, and two unidentified ghosts.

The *Superior* was docked at Port Huron in May, 1920, when a fire in the boiler room engulfed it. After a brief attempt to douse the fire failed, the ship was cut loose from its moorings and allowed to drift downriver, where she burned to the waterline. She eventually ran aground at Stag Island. An 11 year argument ensued between the ship owner, the insurance company, the Government of Canada, and the citizens of Corunna over who was re-

careless disposal of derelict vessels had dire consequences for those who ventured too close to the submerged hulks. The ruined ves-

sible for having the vessel removed. However, only two barge loads of debris were removed from the ship and they were dumped into Lake Huron.

The *J. S. Ruby*, a small steamer headed north in November, 1891, caught fire about three miles north of Corunna and was eventually beached at Stag Island. The crew escaped unharmed. The steam barge, *Mineral Rock*, was worn out from years of service; her engine and boiler were removed and she was abandoned at Stag Island.

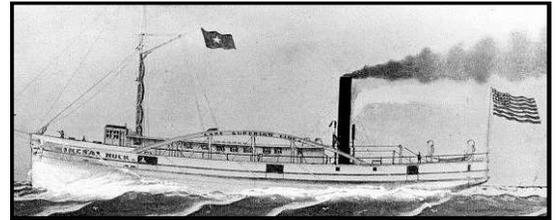
And the *Germanic* caught fire after running aground at Stag Island on Nov. 6, 1904. Her crew escaped unharmed and she languished beside the *Ruby* and the *Mineral Rock*. She

was later raised by Reid the Wrecker of Sarnia, rebuilt, and renamed the *Reliever*.

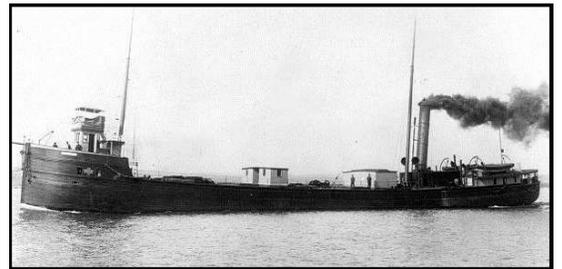
She eventually burned in Georgian Bay in 1909.

Two drownings and a number of pleasure boat sinkings were caused by the unmarked relics. Fortunately, in 1958, Lee Marine of Wallaceburg won the Federal contract to remove these unwanted, dangerous derelicts that posed such a threat to those who dared venture into the treacherous marine graveyard. The company removed as much debris as they could from the ships

with cranes and backhoes, and dynamite was used to blow what remained to pieces.



The Mineral Rock



The Germanic

Doors Open Lambton County seeks unique heritage sites

The Doors Open Lambton County event is slated for June 11 and 12 this summer. In preparation for this event, organizers are asking the owners of unique heritage sites to consider participating. This is the third year Doors Open has been held in Lambton County; the 2012 and 2014 events attracted over 13,000 visitors to sites to the area.

Doors Open is a cultural event celebrated annually by communities around the world. The event provides residents and visitors with a unique opportunity to explore hidden heritage

treasures free of charge.

To this end, organizers are looking for heritage sites that are rarely seen by the public. These include private residences, businesses, public buildings, and natural spaces.

Sponsorship opportunities are available.

For more information or to participate, please contact doorsopen@county-lambton.on.ca or go online to: www.doorsopenlambtoncounty.ca

MORE HERITAGE CORNER

Ship building and destruction featured in new display

The St. Clair River used to be a place where ships not only sailed its waters, but they were also built along its banks and they succumbed to its hidden hazards. And, on occasion, they were the victims of bad judgement on the part of those who sailed them.

Such was the case of *The Maude*, a propeller-driven, steam barge built at the Anderson Shipyard in Marine City, Michigan, in 1899. Built from the best local lumber, the vessel was 95 feet long, 23 feet wide, and had a draft of seven feet. *The Maude* sailed without incident until 1915, when she was struck by *The Hilton* while docked at Courtright. She was subsequently raised and returned to service, but in 1917, she was destroyed by fire at St. Clair, Michigan.

This is just one of the fascinating stories visitors will find when they take in *Wood, Glory, Tragedy*, a new exhibit at the Sombra Museum. The story of the illustrious wooden shipbuilding era along the St. Clair River, as well as tales of the over 100 shipwrecks and disasters that occurred on it, will no doubt give visitors a new respect for the river's concealed dangers.

Just a ferry ride away in Marine City, Michigan, the Marine City Museum is joining forces with the Sombra Museum to present its own display, Ship Building in Marine City. For more information, call 519-892-3982 or go online to: sombramuseum@hotmail.com or sombramuseum.webs.com

The Maude during her days as a steam barge in the St. Clair River.

