My first visit to the shipwreck Cayuga was in 1967. I had only been diving for a year, and I was anxious to explore this and other shipwrecks in the archipelago. There was a story going around about this shipwreck saying that there had been an attempt to raise it and that the lifting equipment was left there after an ill-fated attempt to salvage the vessel.

The fascination of viewing this fabled vessel was a driving quest for me, as I’m sure it was for the few sports divers of at that time. Sport divers were a new breed, inspired by "Sea Hunt" and Jacques-Yves Cousteau's adventures on the TV screens of this time.

I found one of the Charlevoix divers that someone had told me had been diving on Cayuga, and he volunteered a "range" and also depth of water to locate the shipwreck. The range was given as "in line with the east side of "Ile Aux Galets", an island lighthouse tower, to seven mile point on the mainland. Then find the only 100' deep basin in that range." "Skillagallee" is a popular nickname for this island.

When I checked out this information, the depth sounder I had onboard my boat, Burr-Is Bell, indicated a huge image on the bottom. We were above Cayuga. I used this range and water depth for years until Loran, and later...
GPS, were available for small craft to fix a firm position. A few times I attempted to leave marker buoys tied from the wreck to the surface, but because the site is directly in the shipping channel the floating markers were always torn off by passing merchant vessels.

Anchoring my boat upwind of the wreck and drifting across it gave me a direct drop to the wreck deck. Sometimes I made the trip to this site alone, and made my dives alone on it. Sometimes I heard passing ships above and hoped that I didn't meet my boat coming down as I was ascending to the surface.

Nowadays with autopilot systems on commercial vessels it is imperative to have someone stand watch on dive boats in this area, ready to radio oncoming ships. Many times in recent years ships would be bearing down on a collision course with us and we'd have to key the radio microphone and say, "SAFETY CHECK. We are the small vessel anchored ahead of you, north of Skillagallie. Could you please turn to miss us?" Sometimes the answer was "You are in the shipping channel. Please clear our way". We'd radio back again "We have divers below. The shipping channel is why there is a shipwreck here. Your passing could kill them." Usually the answer was "OK Roger." Then the bow of the vessel would veer to miss us. One time we had a very close encounter as a ship was closing in on our position. To our second request for them to turn, the reply was, "Uh, what? OK". Then the ship altered course.

The initial trips to the Cayuga revealed a majestic ship on the lake bottom leaning slightly to port, with a gash on the starboard side that caused it's sinking. Below that gash and laying on the bottom of the lake was the stem post of the ship Hurd that had struck Cayuga. A short distance abaft of this point was the windlass from Hurd.
I must note that in later years the port side has fallen to the bottom and no longer is standing proud. The anchor chains have been taken. What was once a coherent ship structure is now rubble and machinery on the bottom.
Cayuga’s propeller was a "bolt on prop" that had replaced a solid one, because of a previous need to haul and replace the damaged one. As I dropped down through the stern hatch, I found two more replacement blades at two different levels. These are still easily found today.
Swimming toward the bow on my first dive here, I noticed chains leading forward to port and starboard anchors several yards forward from the vessel. There were three large lifting pontoons on the sides of the wreck that were 13 feet in diameter by 25 feet long. There had been four, but in a lifting accident to salvage the wreck the fourth one apparently came loose and ripped a small gash in the port side of the wreck. I noticed that gash and wondered how it was made. Later research explained the origin of the port damage.

Pontoon near the port side of the stern. Photo by Carol Linteau.
At the time of sinking *Cayuga* had a cargo of grain and flour. There are still traces of flour on the inside hull. News stories of the day mention that mainland locals went afterward and collected much of the flour as it drifted to shore.

**IS THIS RAR FLOUR?** Raw flour fills the stern hold. *Photo by Carol Linteau*

The flour cargo settled around the second deck head. *Photo by Carol Linteau.*
Laying a few yards off the starboard side of the wreck is a sunken barge. This barge had been working to salvage the wreck with a lifting device over the wreck by pumping water out of the pontoons and filling them with air to lift Cayuga off the bottom making it easier to float the shipwreck. The plan was to slowly move the wreck into shallow water for easier salvage. Legend is that a "hard hat" diver is still beneath the barge since the accident. No one that I know has even seen the hose or evidence of a diver being there.

A triple expansion steam engine sat in the stern of the ship. It is still there and always will be, along with many of the deck winches, the windlass, capstan.

This is one of the few shipwrecks that I've taken nothing from, except pictures and memories. The other shallower wrecks in the archipelago from which I've harvested artifacts over the years are broken up, dispersed and/or buried. These scattered parts lose their identity.

I have taken many divers to this Cayuga so they also could enjoy this unique piece of history. One time I took a small group of divers out, and I made it clear that my only restriction was that the divers were to take no
souvenirs. As we were taking off our dive gear after the dive, one of them said “Look at the nice pulley I found down there!” I told him "Let me see." He handed it to me and I tossed back into the lake. He said, "What did you do that for?". I just said, "What did I tell you guys before we made this trip?". He looked as if I had just slapped his face. This only proved that I’m not a nice guy after all.

My weight belt fell off one time while diving on Cayuga. I had invented a quick "fasten and release" device. I snagged it on the wreck and my belt dropped to the deck close below. Luckily, I grabbed it before I was about to float to the surface. I signaled my partner, Carol Linteau, that I was going to abort the dive at that point and was going up. I waved goodbye and started to ascend. She elected at that point to go with me to the surface. Having the weight belt in my hands threw my balance forward, and wanted to turn me upside down. So, all I could do was hold the belt close to my body and circle round and round to keep an upright position and ascend. I was sure that she thought I was narked. I was wearing a dry suit, which meant that if I turned upside down the air in the suit would go to the legs, and hold me in that position, expanding on the way up. That would make it hard to use the snorkel on the surface, unless I could breathe with my feet. I chose to abort the dive because if the weight belt came off again I most likely wouldn't be that lucky. A "plan B" weight belt buckle was in the near future.

Editors Notes:

Cayuga's raw flour cargo was said to float to the surface in huge blobs, encasing upon itself like a huge egg without a shell. Folks along the shore captured the floating flour for baking.

Diving with Dick on Cayuga was indeed memorable. His "fasten and release" device was a bent coat hanger.... I was very glad he replaced it with a standard buckle!

Beaver Island has a long history of wreck salvaging which began well before the 1984 state law that defines shipwrecks and human artifacts on the Great Lakes bottomlands as the property of the ship owner or the people of Michigan. The Island features many maritime structures, old ships and the tools and cargo that define their maritime era.
One time we went with the Johnny Gillespie on his tug vessel *American Girl* without GPS or Loran, using only ranges and bottom readings. After the second pass, we found and anchored on *Cayuga*. He had divers with him who were excited for their chance to see the wreck. I donned my Viking dry suit, but forgot to hook up the suit inflator. I dove the wreck anyway. Now I know just how much a suit can pinch at 100 feet with 44.5 psi extra pressure on my body.

Another time I was dropping down through the aft hatch, and was about half way down; when a huge fish darted up from a lower level and grazed me because the hatch was so small. That was the only time I remember actually "jumping" while under water.

While in his teens, Islander Bill McDonough wanted to see the wreck. We were anchored across the salvage barge off the port side, so he was instructed to go down if he wished, but NOT to leave the anchor line. As I was coming back to the barge from exploring *Cayuga*, I found Bill there, holding on to the anchor line, stretching it to see more of the barge. That Bill's parents had such a great influence on their offspring surprised and impressed me, giving me confidence and pride in our Islanders.

In 1981 a Scuba North crew came to visit, and we went to *Cayuga* with a $5,000.00 VHS video camera that belonged to Randy Pyle. It was powered by an automobile battery and was extremely cumbersome by today's standards. This camera did a great job considering the murky water of that era, before the zebra mussel invasion. Jack Spencer, a long-time dive buddy and former owner of SCUBA North, recalled that Randy's camera weighed 104 pounds with the counterweight to make it neutral. What a beast!! Today's GoPro cameras cost and weigh just a fraction of the old underwater cameras, and do a wonderful job.
Looking at this photo, I don't know why I wasn't wearing my new regulator that didn't have a neck strap. One hose (second stage) with that neck strap swinging in my face. Grey straps on my backpack, with double 72 cubic foot tanks. Life was simple then, not even a pressure gauge. With doubles who needs one anyway? I think the regulator was "White Stag" or maybe it was my new "Calypso". White Stag is a clothing store, great on style, but at times a little short on air supply. My USDivers regulator delivered much better!

Jack and John Schafer shared many of their dive stories with me. Some were really spooky. Both were very sharp and adventurous divers. They recall, as I do, that on this dive I forgot to zip my unisuit. Recently, Jack told me “I only wish I had a picture of your entry and exit in 38-degree water! We all enjoyed it. John Shaffer recalled it too. Great times!”
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Source: David Swayze, Great Lakes Shipwreck File