

# AINA NEWSLETTER

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## Members' Issue

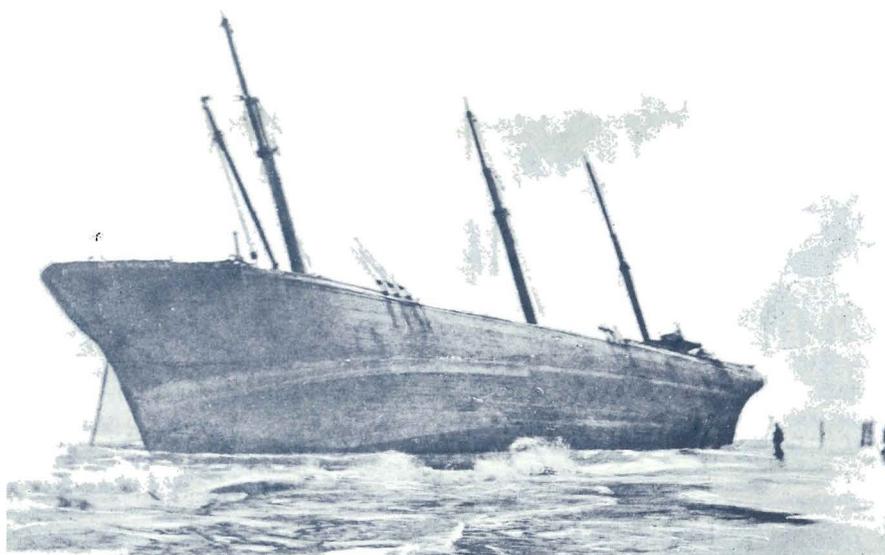
At the end of our first year of publishing the AINA Newsletter, we want to thank all of you for the support which has made much of our work possible. We have tried to share our successes in survey, excavation, teaching, restoration, and publication projects, and we hope you realize that each of you has been involved through your membership. In its short life, the Institute has become recognized world wide, with requests for advice arriving from every continent but Antarctica.

Not every AINA member is a diver or an archaeologist. Many of you will never see an ancient shipwreck on the bottom of the Mediterranean. But the excitement of research may not be much farther than your own backyard.

This number of the Newsletter, with others to follow from time to time, is dedicated to the work of our non-professional members, to show that it is not necessary to have a degree in archaeology, or be backed by a museum, to accomplish important results; and to suggest that greater personal satisfaction is derived from research than simple souvenir hunting.

Dick Steffy and I, with our families, recently spent a pleasant weekend with AINA members Susan and Jesse Langston in Sea Isle City, New Jersey. It has been four years since we first met the Langstons, and I have been so impressed by the dogged research Susan has done since then, without formal training in archaeology, that I have asked her to tell you her story. It should serve as a model for all amateurs and answer the most common question I receive from them: "How can I become involved in nautical archaeology?"

— George F. Bass



The George R. Skolfield stranded on the beach.

Photo courtesy Howard Wright

## Shipwreck Ashore

There was still enough sun and warm ocean to enjoy on September 10, 1971, when I took my early morning walk along deserted Ludlum Beach on the New Jersey coast. I knew that many shipwrecks had occurred along this stretch, and various kinds of driftwood always litter it, but several boards about five feet long especially caught my eye that day.

My husband Jesse, a former naval officer, knows ships and has often discussed shipbuilding methods with me. It appeared to me that these boards had strange nails and trunnels, or treenails, the wooden pegs used to fasten timbers together.

My curiosity was aroused, but I had to wait for the next Nor'easter, which came about a week later, to churn more sand from the wreck.

I now found 12 feet of a hump-like section fully exposed — quite clearly part of a ship. I did not know how much was still buried beneath the sand, but I was fascinated by the construction: the treenails appeared to be handmade and were at such odd angles that I wondered when the ship was built. I decided then that she would make an interesting museum piece and that I must salvage her.

From my attorney I knew that the area between high and low tides is something like a public thoroughfare and that if you find something there you have a right to claim it.

A telegram was sent to the Secretary of State to register a claim on the wreck: "Have found abandoned wreck of old ship on beach in Sea Isle City, New Jersey. I claim salvage treasure and all property rights. I offer New Jersey the opportunity

to examine for historical value before salvage begins." To further protect my claim I contacted the local police to inform them of my discovery and the telegram.

I knew no one in the salvage business, but with a bit of luck I found a company willing to dig the wreck, which had to be done during low tide. Two bulldozers, one with heavy chains, pushed and pulled and finally got the 10-ton piece onto a 30-foot trailer for transport to a friend's back yard for storage. We found that we had a section of the hull, amidships (above and below the waterline), about 34 by 8 feet.



Remains of the *George R. Skolfield* being lifted onto a flatbed truck.

Photo by Jesse Langston

The total thickness of planking, frames and ceiling strakes was about 16 inches. There were also bronze spikes and bronze rods (ring bolts) which were riveted over washers at both ends.

But what was she? Where did she come from? What was her history?

I thought of marine archaeological expeditions and called on the archaeology department of Princeton University near my Cranbury home. There Professor T. Leslie Shear took an interest and suggested that I speak to Dr. George Bass, then curator of the marine division of the University of Pennsylvania Museum.

Bass and his associate, J. Richard Steffy, came to look at the ship. Dick Steffy said that there was not enough of the hull to enable him to project the lines, but that the construction was similar to that of downeasters built between 1880 and 1910. This turned out to be a remarkably accurate analysis.

Identification of wood by Dr. Kuhachka of the Center for Wood Anatomy Research in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, where George Bass had sent some specimens, also suggested that the ship had been built somewhere in the New England states: ribs of tamarack, treenails and wedges of black locust, and planking of pitch pine or yellow pine.

I also contacted the New Jersey State Museum with wood and metal samples which Mr. James Mitchell, curator of Americana, forwarded to the Smithsonian Institute. There Mendel Peterson reported that the wreck was probably Canadian or American in origin because of her pine planking. He also said that she postdated 1832 because the spikes and sheathing nails were of Muntz Metal, an alloy that sold for half the price of bronze, not invented until that year.

Local museums and libraries had nothing definite, but by asking among old timers in town I learned of a ship named "Scolfield" wrecked just after World War I. Using the New York Times index in microfilm I found the story of the shipwreck of the *George R. Skolfield* stranded on February 5, 1920, near Corsens Inlet near where I found the wreckage.

The former mayor of Sea Isle City did not recall the wreck, but suggested I get in touch with Howard Wright, Superintendent of Public Works. This suggestion led to a positive identification.

Howard Wright had been too young to remember the wreck, but his father had been a member of the Lifesaving Service and had assisted in the rescue of the crew. After failing in attempts to secure a line to the ship and make a rescue by breeches buoy, Howard told me, the rescue crew launched a surf boat and took off the crew in heavy surf.

Among Howard's large collection of photographs of the early days of Sea Isle City and the old Lifesaving Service was a photograph of the *George R. Skolfield* stranded on the beach but intact. She remained in good condition for several years until, after a number of salvage attempts had failed, a storm caused her to break up.

For years afterwards Sea Isle was plagued with pieces of driftwood from the wreck. To protect swimmers and boatmen, Howard had hauled many large sections off the beach to be burned in the public dump. Thus he was familiar with the construction details of the *George R. Skolfield* and was able to identify my wreck. In particular he noted the following similarities:

1. Size and spacing of planking, frames, ceiling strakes and fastenings.
2. Almost exclusive use of treenails for fastenings, including cross-

bracing of frames by treenails and use of wooden wedges at surface of treenails.

3. The occasional use of square spikes and ring bolts.
4. Many frames are not natural crooks but are sawn from straight timbers.
5. Square section copper nails with the remnants of copper sheathing under nailheads.

I looked in *Merchant Vessels of the United States* (Bureau of Navigation) for a year just prior to the date of the shipwreck and quickly found the *George R. Skolfield*. She had been built in Brunswick, Maine, in 1885 and was schooner rigged when she was stranded. She was 232.1 feet long, 39.9 feet broad, and had a moulded depth of 24.6 feet. Her gross tonnage was 1728 and her net tonnage 1646.

Older volumes of the Register showed that she had been ship rigged when built, but was converted to a schooner rig before 1900. Many square rigged ships were converted to schooners because they were better for coastal work. Also, with a donkey engine to help raise the sails, they could be manned with much smaller crews. By this time steam ships had beaten out sail on most routes, particularly for high revenue cargo, and the remaining sailing vessels had to be operated as cheaply as possible.

An earlier edition of *Merchant Vessels of the United States* showed that a George Skolfield was the owner of the ship. *Shipwrecks off the New Jersey Coast* did not list the *George R. Skolfield* but did list the *Oliver Skolfield* sunk near Manasquan Inlet. I realized that the Skolfield family was worthy of research.

Admiral John Will, USN (ret.), a member of the board of trustees of the Southstreet Seaport Museum in New York City, advised me to consult *Merchant Sail*, an invaluable six-volume history of American sailing ships by William Fairburn. From it I learned that the Skolfields covered generations and had built dozens of ships. Fairburn rates the Skolfield family probably the most important of the Brunswick, Maine, yards in the 1850's, 60's and 70's.

Early customhouse records show the spelling as "Skofield." The first listed builder was John Skolfield who built the schooner *James* in 1805. Several other ships were built by various Skofields until George, the most prominent shipbuilder of

the family, built the brig *Mary Ann* in 1810. Before he died in 1866, at 90 years of age, George had built 60 ships. His sons carried on the business until 1885, and the *George R. Skolfield* was the last and largest built by the family.

As I learned more of the Skolfield family and the renowned quality of their ships, I knew that my wreck had historic value and should be in a museum; drawings, paintings and ship models cannot give the feeling of reality that an actual section of an old ship can.

Most museums responded to my photographs and descriptions by saying that they found the wreck interesting but

they lacked the space, funds, or both for proper display. All, however, were helpful. The Mariners Museum in Newport News wrote that they had the figurehead of the *George R. Skolfield* on display and sent a photograph of it. The Bath Marine Museum in Maine sent two photographs of the *George R. Skolfield* docked in San Francisco. Southstreet Seaport Museum expressed an interest: they wrote to the San Francisco Maritime Museum and made tentative plans to cut the wreckage in half and display it in both museums since the *George R. Skolfield* frequently called in both ports, but these did not materialize. Mr. Lunny of the New Jersey

Historical Society knew the Skolfield family in Brunswick, Maine.

I had written to the newspaper in Brunswick, asking for information on the Skolfield family and ships, and a real estate agent wrote in return with the address of one of the family.

My letters to the newspaper and Chamber of Commerce in Brunswick were turned over to John Skolfield, the great-grandson of Master George Skolfield, who remembers the shipyard intact before decay set in; his father Daniel had worked in the yard as a boy. John inherited part of the family farm as well as many tools, half models, paintings and documents about the Skolfield ships and yard, including the half model and log book of the *George R. Skolfield*. He told me that two museums in the area were considering a Skolfield Shipyard Room and might like to acquire the wreck to give scale and reality to the display. He also said that old family records showed ships built in the 1700's, much earlier than the official records showed.

This resulted in Ralph Snow, Director of the Bath Marine Museum, visiting Sea Isle City to inspect the wreckage; shortly afterwards the museum agreed to accept it for exhibit. During their visit, we introduced Mr. Snow and the Skolfields to Howard Wright, who generously gave them one of his prized possessions — a bronze plate inscribed "George R. Skolfield," apparently one of the plates on each ladder step.

Next came the problem of transporting the wreckage to Maine, a problem made more difficult since museums are notoriously short of money. The Woodplex Company of Wiscasset, Maine, donated the use of a flatbed trailer and driver. A local marine contractor, R & H Marine Construction Co., agreed to lift the ten-ton wreck onto the trailer for \$35 — far less than the \$400 wanted by several others contractors. After the usual troubles of handling such a large load, the wreck arrived safely at the Percy and Small Shipyard, a recently acquired part of the Bath Marine Museum, and the only surviving shipyard to have built large wooden ships.

In June, 1973, we were invited to Bath for the dedication of a new section of the museum and a visit to the Skolfields. We saw the remnants of the Skolfield shipyards with a part of the old ways still



*The George R. Skolfield docked in San Francisco.*

Photo courtesy the Bath Marine Museum

standing. We saw the half model of the *George R. Skolfield* herself and of many other Skolfield ships.

At present the remains of the *George R. Skolfield* are on display at the Percy and Small Shipyard. The Bath Marine Museum is planning a larger exhibit later on the Skolfield family.

I feel content. I have preserved a small piece of American history.

—Susan Langston

## Penobscot Bay

On August 14, 1779, an American fleet of forty-odd ships was defeated by British forces in Penobscot Bay, Maine. The wreck of one of the American ships, the brig *Defense*, was located in the summer of 1972 by the Maine Maritime Academy/Massachusetts Institute of Technology Summer Sea Grant Project under the direction of Captain W.F. Searle, USN (ret.), one of AINA's Board of Directors. Subsequent inspection and the raising of sample artifacts by students from the two institutes have revealed the wreck to be well preserved and worthy of further study.

On February 9, 1975, Captain Searle led a brief expedition to Penobscot Bay so that George Bass, David Switzer and Donald Frey could further evaluate the site for possible AINA participation in its excavation. With the assistance of Professor David Wyman of MMA, and accompanied by midshipment from the Academy, the dives were made in a driving snowstorm. It was a long way from the sunny Mediterranean!

Following the inspection, Searle, Bass and Frey were joined by J. Richard Steffy to deliver papers at a full-day workshop and symposium on underwater archaeology and the *Defense* at MIT in Cambridge, Mass.



## USS Monitor Found

The long lost Civil War ship, USS *Monitor*, was finally located 16 miles off Cape Hatteras in 220 feet of water by a group of scientists headed by John Newton of Duke University Marine Laboratory, Beaufort, North Carolina. An in-depth historical study of old records played an important part in planning the area to be searched, with sonar devices doing the actual pinpointing.

Positive identification was made from underwater TV records and some photographs made from aboard the R/V *Eastward* (August 1973) by Gordon Watts, an archaeologist with the State of North Carolina. Additional confirmation was made from a photomosaic taken aboard the *Alcoa Seaprobe* (April 1974) with U.S. Navy cooperation.

Equipment designed by Prof. Harold Edgerton (left) of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, played a major role in the successful survey. AINA member Edgerton, an electrical engineer, is no stranger to archaeology, having assisted



Photo courtesy Harold Edgerton

archaeologists in underwater surveys from the Caribbean to the Mediterranean during recent years. Here he holds an EG&G side-scan sonar, while John Newton holds a buoy that was used to mark the position of the wreck.

## Shipwrecked Models



Photo by Anne Marie Chollot

AINA member Marc Chollot of Beirut (left) has acquired two terracotta boat models, found in the sea. If they are of the same period as numerous statuettes also being found by local fishermen, they are of approximately the fourth century B.C., but this is not certain.

Here Mr. Chollot shows the models to Pierre and Patricia Bikai at Tyre, Lebanon. Mr. Bikai, a student in AINA's first summer field school in 1974, is manager of the Tyre excavations, where Mrs. Bikai is

an archaeologist; she recalls fragments of similar pieces in her land excavations, and will now see if it is possible to date such models from stratified finds.

Another amateur, Mr. Chollot has a deep interest in recording and publishing such finds, in the hopes that these will lead to the discovery of wrecks along the Lebanese coast which can be excavated. He has published some of his finds in French archaeology journals.

## AINA Continues to Grow

**Robin C.M. Piercy** was born in June, 1942, in Wales. He studied surveying at the College of Estate Management, London, and while working as a quantity surveyor in 1966 he commenced studies at the Institute of Archaeology, London, as an extramural student. Later that year he accompanied a group from the University of London Union Sub-Aqua Club to the south of France to experiment with various methods of underwater survey.

Since that time Mr. Piercy's experiences in underwater archaeology have been broad. In 1967 he directed the underwater surveys of the Garigliano River, Italy, for John Huston's Council for Underwater Archaeology. Later that year he worked with Peter Throckmorton on the Torre Sgaratta wreck in Italy, and the following summer joined the Kyrenia Ship excavation in Cyprus as surveyor. Then followed ten months with the Canadian Historic Sites Service, Underwater Re-



search Department. He assisted in conducting seabed surveys through the ice which led to the location and excavation of a French merchant ship sunk in 1760 in the Baie des Chaleurs. He also carried out reconstruction work on a St. Lawrence river gunboat.

Since the winter of 1969 Mr. Piercy has made his home on Cyprus where, as Assistant Director to the Kyrenia Ship Excavation, he has worked on all aspects of the project. For a brief period in 1970 he joined David Owen as Assistant Director to his Porticello Excavation in Italy, and he was an assistant to AINA's 1974 project at Yassi Ada, Turkey. He has recently been appointed AINA Projects Advisor. At present he lives in Kyrenia with his wife Gay, an orange tiger-cat, and 39 potted plants.

**David C. Switzer**, AINA's new Adjunct Professor of American Naval History, resides in Plymouth, New Hampshire, with his wife, Judy, and two children. Since 1965 he has been a member of the history faculty of Plymouth State College of the University of New Hampshire, where he is the chairman of the Department of Social Science.

Dr. Switzer received his undergraduate degree in history from the University of Maine. Following an active duty tour as a reserve officer at a Nike missile battery in the Boston area, he taught at Vermont Academy, a private school in Saxtons River, Vermont, and then entered graduate school at the University of Con-



necticut. During his graduate study — leading to an M.A. and Ph.D. in history — he spent two summers at the Munson Institute at Mystic Seaport.

During the past summer he was a member of AINA's expedition to Yassi Ada, and a few weeks before arriving in Turkey he participated in a week-long wreck study seminar held at Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy. Hosted by the New Brunswick and Grand Manan Museum, the seminar involved discussions on various aspects of wreck study as well as a number of dives on significant wrecks.

**Donald A. Frey**, newly appointed AINA Associate Professor of Physics, is a theoretical physicist who joined the Yassi Ada excavation in 1969, while he was teaching at Robert College in Istanbul. He has devoted every summer since to a project involving underwater archaeology: a magnetometer and sub-bottom survey of Porto Lungo Harbor in Greece; two seasons of side-scan sonar and closed-circuit television searching along the Turkish coast; excavation of a Byzantine shipwreck at Pelagonisi, Greece; the search and location of the probable site of the Battle of Lepanto; an underwater survey of Gythion, the ancient Port of

Sparta; and continued excavation of the Roman wreck at Yassi Ada in 1974.

In his academic career Dr. Frey has also pursued an interdisciplinary interest in science and archaeology. In 1971, under the auspices of a study and research grant from the American Council of Learned Societies, he left Turkey and went to the Research Laboratory for Archaeology at Oxford, England. His research project there was the computerized interpretation of magnetometer



surveys of land archaeological sites. He also prepared lecture notes for a course in applications of scientific methods to archaeology, and in 1974 received a Junior Visiting Faculty award to teach this course at the University of Wisconsin.

Professor Frey lectures in four languages, speaks three others, and is particularly familiar with the Mediterranean and AINA operations there.

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## Midwest Lecture Tour

AINA Executive Director, Cynthia Eisman, will be speaking on underwater archaeology and AINA activities to local societies of the Archaeological Institute of America as part of the AIA's lecture program. Lectures will be given at East Lansing, Mich. (April 14), Appleton, Wisc. (April 15), Milwaukee, Wisc. (April 16), Chicago, Ill. (April 17), and Madison, Wisc. (April 18). AINA members who wish to attend a lecture can obtain additional information by writing Mrs. Eisman prior to April 6, 1975.

## Membership Secretary's Note

It is time now for some AINA members to renew their memberships. As renewals become due on a quarterly basis, a notice and renewal card will be enclosed in the newsletter. It is our hope that all AINA members will continue their support, which is so vital to AINA's continuing success, and will tell their friends about AINA.



# AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF NAUTICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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The American Institute of Nautical Archaeology is a nonprofit scientific/educational organization whose purpose is to gather knowledge of man's past as left in the physical remains of his maritime activities and to disseminate this knowledge through scientific and popular publications, seminars, and lectures. The AINA Newsletter is published periodically by AINA and is distributed to its members and Supporting Institutions to inform them of AINA's current activities.

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