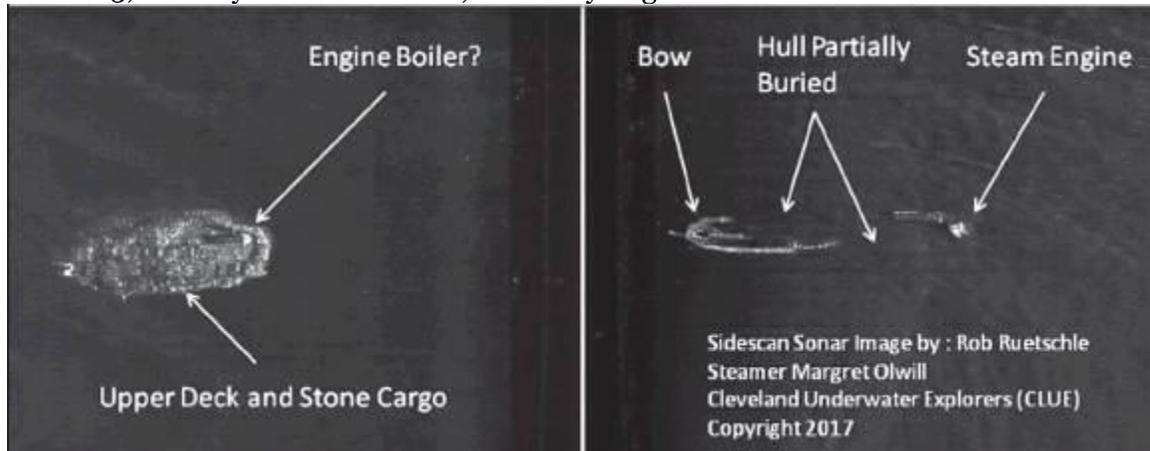


## NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE GREAT LAKES

# Discovery of shipwreck sites announced

March 23, 2018 By TOM JACKSON, Sandusky Register



Provided photos/NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE GREAT LAKES

ABOVE: A sonar image of the wreck of the Margaret Olwill, which sank off Lorain in 1899. The sonar image was taken by Rob Ruetschle



BELOW: The steam barge Margaret Olwill, whose sinking caused the deaths of eight people.

### SANDUSKY

Lake Erie still has long concealed shipwreck secrets to unveil.

The National **Museum** of the Great Lakes and its partner in the hunt for shipwrecks, Cleveland Underwater Explorers, recently announced the discovery of four shipwrecks in Lake Erie.

The shipwrecks include the location of the Margaret Olwill, a steam barge which sank off Lorain in 1899, claiming eight lives, and the locations of three still unidentified shipwrecks. The wrecks were found in 2016 but the discovery has just been announced. The **museum** and the diving group have worked together for 13 years to find shipwrecks in Lake Erie. They've found a number of ships, with the divers going out to find the wrecks and the **museum** giving them support to cover their expenses. The 2015 discovery of the Argo, a tanker barge that was still holding oil, launched a \$6 million federal cleanup.

All of the four most recent shipwrecks have been found in an area stretching from the Lake Erie Islands to Cleveland, an area that extends from Cedar Point to Cleveland, off the Erie County, Lorain County and western Cuyahoga County coasts, said Christopher Gillcrst, executive director of the National **Museum** of the Great Lakes, which is in Toledo. The group is reluctant to give the exact locations of its wrecks because it wants to preserve the sites.

The loss of the Olwill was caused by a storm. The eight who died included the captain and his wife. "Of 12 people who were on board the vessel, only four survive to tell of the disaster," a page one article in the June 30, 1899, Cleveland Plain Dealer states. "Some of the dead lost their lives when help was almost within reach. After hours of suffering, tossed about by the sea, the four men who were rescued from the wreck were picked up by passing vessels and taken to places of safety in a condition more dead than alive."

The article states one person was almost saved, “but he was too much weakened by long exposure to grasp the rope that was thrown him and he sank in the sight of those who were endeavoring to save him.”

All three of the still unidentified shipwrecks are silted over, and the **museum** and the diving group will have to figure out in the next few weeks how to proceed. Excavation of the sites by divers may be needed to identify the names of the lost ships, Gillcrist said. “We have to determine what is the best use of resources,” he said.

Gillcrist said Cleveland Underwater Explorers sweeps the lake floor in commercial shipping areas, concentrating on the area between Sandusky and Cleveland, using sonar. When the sonar shows a possible wreck site, the divers hone in with closer sonar renditions and sometimes dive at the site.

The Olwill was identified after divers made measurements on the remains, including measuring a steam engine that was matched up against the ship’s records, Gillcrist said. Some years, no shipwrecks are found. “It’s a lesson in patience more than anything else,” Gillcrist said.

How many shipwrecks have taken place in Lake Erie? Hundreds, apparently.

The Lake Erie Shipwrecks website, [eriewrecks.com/eriewrecks/](http://eriewrecks.com/eriewrecks/), is offering a chart of the lake for sale, in PDF format, that shows the location of 305 shipwrecks.