

# Lake Michigan shipwreck could be world's 'most intact wooden schooner' ever found

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The team Left to right- Brent Tompkins, Bryan Dort, Cal Kothrade, Ross Richardson, and technical diver Steven Wimer II celebrate after capturing successful video of what they believe to be overwhelming evidence to identify the wreck.

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**LAKE MICHIGAN** – A shipwreck found almost by accident, sitting 300 feet deep in northern Lake Michigan, is being described as one of the “most intact wooden schooners” in the world.

The discovery of the cargo-hauling W.C. Kimball, lost in an 1891 gale with four people aboard, was announced this week with details, photos and videos being shared on social media.

Shipwreck hunter and author Ross Richardson of Lake Ann made the initial find. This spring, he and diver Steven Wimer of Milwaukee joined a group of other wreck enthusiasts to document its position.

A video showing their expedition and use of a remote-operated vehicle to explore the wreck site is being shared online. You can see it below.

“The W.C. Kimball is a true representation of Great Lakes schooners,” Richardson says on the video. “She was built on Lake Michigan and spent her entire life on Lake Michigan.”

Despite its nearly pristine condition, there were no identifying marks on the schooner. Figuring out which shipwreck they'd discovered took a lot of maritime sleuthing. It meant poring over old records of lost ships, and trying to narrow it down by looking for clues that would tell them if their mystery ship had been built before the Civil War, - or afterward.

Richardson [details the underwater discovery](#) and search for the Kimball's identity on his website.

But the initial find itself was just a momentary reading on his boat's sonar screen more than a year ago. Richardson was crossing northern Lake Michigan in September 2018, headed to South Manitou Island for a day of wreck-hunting, when he noticed a "small blip" on his sonar screen. It showed something that was resting in about 300 feet of water, and rising 90 feet off the lake's bottom.

Richardson made a note of the GPS coordinates, then went on with his day.

Fast-forward to this May, when Richardson returned to the spot with Wimer, a technical diver; underwater photographer Brent Tompkins; maritime artist and diver Cal Kothrade, and ROV pilot Bryan Dort.

After descending to the wreck, Wimer described the W.C. Kimball as "the most intact shipwreck I have ever encountered."

During the dive and ROV-led inspection, the team noticed the Kimball's lifeboat was still attached to its stern. This led them to believe it was either unreachable at the time the wooden schooner went down, or its crew had already gone overboard.

The Kimball, built across the lake in Manitowoc, Wis. in 1888, was just three years old when she sailed out on her last voyage on the evening of Thursday, May 7, 1891. She was laden with 200 barrels of salt and had 250,000 wooden shingles stacked on her deck when she set out to round the Leelanau Peninsula, according to Richardson's website account.

By the next morning, a northwest gale was lashing the Great Lakes. The Kimball vanished, along with her captain and three others aboard.

Days later, bits of debris began washing up near the top of the Leelanau Peninsula.

There was some early speculation that the Kimball had been run over by a larger ship in the storm, but her recently-discovered condition stamps out that fate.

Artist and diver Cal Kothrade said in a Facebook post this week that he was happy not just to be part of the team that discovered and identified the Kimball, but happy to be able to paint the wreck as well.

You can see [more of Kothrade's artwork here](#).

"I want to congratulate my good friend Ross Richardson on what may prove to be one of the most significant shipwreck discoveries ever in the Great Lakes...a little schooner nobody's heard of," Kothrade said. "Why is it so significant? Because it's the most intact 19th century wooden schooner shipwreck in the world. No other vessel of its type has been as well preserved."