

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
AMERICA (U.S. Registry 107367)
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Isle Royale, N.P.

STATE
Michigan

CODE
26

—NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

COUNTY
Keweenaw

CODE
083

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER Sport SCUBA

Unit within
Thematic Group

N/A

diving park
visitors.

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (if applicable)
NPS, Midwest Regional Office

STREET & NUMBER
1709 Jackson Street

CITY, TOWN
Omaha

VICINITY OF

STATE
Nebraska 68102

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Customs Office

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Duluth, Minnesota

STATE

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
None (see note)

DATE

—FEDERAL —STATE —COUNTY —LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

NOTE: The shipwreck location is known as a result of informal isolated searches by private individuals and/or common knowledge of Isle Royale park staff and island inhabitants. No systematic surveys have been conducted.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Original Description

Hull number 127 came out of the Detroit Dry Dock Company Shipyards in May, 1898. Christened America for owners Dunbar and McMillan, the vessel was 164-feet 6-inches long, had a 31-foot beam, 11-foot depth of hold, a gross tonnage of 486 (net tonnage 283) and was given U.S. registry number 107367. From keel to rail she was constructed of steel; the main and promenade decks were also of steel, the only wooden construction on the ship were her cabins and pilothouse.

America's horseshoe shaped pilothouse sat well forward on the Texas (uppermost) deck; captain's and some crew quarters were immediately behind the pilothouse and her single stack sat amidships. Booth Line advertisements described America as palatial with forty-one staterooms, containing double lower and single upper berths located on the promenade deck. In addition, a bar, dining salon, ballroom and gambling room were aft. America could accommodate up to 1,200 excursionists, feeding them lake and brook trout, whitefish, steak and ice cream. She carried a crew of 30. A passenger/package side loading freighter, America had side loading cargo hatches to facilitate loading, unloading and storage of freight, luggage or other miscellaneous package goods. The vessel was rigged with two masts, one fore and one mizzen mast, used for her running lights. America was powered by a triple expansion (15", 24", 38" x 2' stroke) engine capable of 450 hp. The Detroit Dry Dock Engine Works built her engine as well as the twin scotch boilers which completed the vessel's power plant. Steering engines were in common use when America was built and almost all of the large steamers were equipped with auxiliary engines to turn the rudder. However, America was not so equipped, rather she had a very low steering gear ratio, making it necessary to spin the wheel several times to effect even a small change in course.

Originally designed for use as a day steamer between Chicago and Michigan City, the boat was sold in 1902 to A. Booth and Company who added cabins and made other improvements to make her suitable for use as an overnight steamer. Her home port was shifted from Chicago to Duluth at this time. In 1911, she was lengthened by 18 feet and 12 more staterooms added to accommodate more passengers

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and freight. Her modified overall length was 182-feet 6-inches and her gross tonnage increased to 937 (net tonnage 593). The modifications made to America, i.e., conversion from a day steamer to an overnight boat in 1902 at Grand Haven and lengthening in 1911 at Superior were made in response to local market demand.

Booth and Company owned the vessel at the time of her loss on June 7, 1928. Salvage rights were sold to Cornelius O. Flynn in September, 1929. Flynn retained ownership until 1961 at which time SS America Salvage Incorporated obtained salvage rights through quit claim. Ownership of America remained in limbo until 1966 when the Solicitor declared that the National Park Service had legal jurisdiction over the vessel.

Present Description

America [REDACTED]

There is no site number presently assigned to the vessel either by the State of Michigan or the Park.

The vessel, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. America is an intact vessel, easily penetrable by divers; the pilothouse and cabins forward of the stack (amidships) have been crushed by ice and the debris distributed either by natural events or as a result of the 1965 salvage attempt. Debris from the salvage attempts is clearly noticeable around the vessel.

Aft of the stack area on the promenade deck the dining salon and ballroom are intact. A large open room directly above the dining salon and ballroom, possibly used as the gambling room, is also intact. Tables, portions of a piano along with fragments of cloth, possibly curtains, remain in these rooms. Several boat davits on the top deck are in place. The hull is undamaged with the exception of a small hole, approximately 3-feet long, below

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the engine room. Side loading cargo hatch covers on the starboard side are still in place although damaged; port hatch covers are in place with the exception of one.

Divers have removed much of the ship's apparel, dishes and personal belongings of the passengers and crew. The crew's quarters below decks have been stripped of portable artifacts as have the galley and other adjacent rooms. The Model-T Ford truck has been stripped and is only marginally recognizable as a vehicle. The engine, boilers and auxiliary piping in the engine room are still in place although all of the gauges and brass knobs have been removed. All of the brass portholes also have been removed. An interior storage room behind the galley, in a little visited area, may still contain period artifacts.

Post-depositional Impacts: Ice shelving damaged the pilothouse and forward deck during the winter of 1928-29. Further damage occurred during the winter of 1929-30 and in the spring of 1930 the vessel slipped completely beneath the surface.

Captain Cornelius O. Flynn made an underwater survey of the vessel shortly after her sinking to evaluate salvage options. It is reported he made several visits to America using hard hat gear. The first reported sport diver exploration of America was made in April, 1957, by a salvage hard hat diver Jack Coglán, who removed photos, broke into the purser's office, removed the Model-T Ford horn and a jar of sauce. He stated that dishes were still on sideboards, and tables and chairs were intact.

The only serious salvage attempt began in September, 1965. The SS America Salvage Company crew, based at Grace Island, removed several tons of "debris" from the top deck of the ship and from the openings to ready them for patching. The stack was removed during this salvage attempt. Unauthorized "salvage" of America artifacts since 1965 has resulted in the vessel being virtually stripped of most portable items by divers. Some items which were removed, and later donated to the Park, are currently being curated at the park headquarters.

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The site has been a popular sport diving locale and is the most heavily visited shipwreck at Isle Royale (Stinson 1981:15). In 1978 a team of divers under the direction of Fredrick Stonehouse, from Northern Michigan University, visited the site to photograph and obtain measurements of the forward area of the vessel as there were no plans made of the vessel following her lengthening in 1911. A total of 42 dives were made between August 19 and 23, 1978, and approximately 30% of the interior measurements were completed. Several small items were located during the survey: 1 tube of "Palmolive Shaving Cream," 1 brass combination pen and pencil set, 1 2-inch brass level and 2 anchor-faced brass buttons. All of these items were turned over to the Park headquarters.

The National Park Service's Submerged Cultural Resources Unit visited the site in June, 1981. The research team made a total of 25 dives on America directed primarily at evaluation. Several objectives were outlined: 1) investigate the vessel by diving all accessible (i.e., penetratable) rooms; 2) evaluate and where feasible reduce diving hazards; 3) compare site maps, builders' plans and sketches with the wreck to determine accuracy of available material; 4) produce video tapes of the vessel for use in site evaluation and possible visitor interpretation; 5) photo document specific site features; 6) examine the vessel's intact auxillary machines to aid in identification of those found on less intact wrecks; and 7) evaluate the viability of an interpretive trail. The only alteration made to the historic fabric was the removal of an interior door to a room in back of the galley. One death of a sport diver has occurred in the storage room and it was felt that taking the door off its hinges, allowing access for those divers who wish to explore the area, rather than sealing up the room, was less disruptive of the historic fabric. The door was left lying in the floor of the storage room.

Description of Loss - The Wreck Event

America departed Duluth, Minnesota on June 6, 1928, on her usual northshore route which included stops at Cornucopia and Grand Marias then across to Washington Harbor on Isle Royale's western end prior to heading back to Port Arthur and Fort William (now Thunder Bay) on the Canadian side. The vessel reached Isle Royale

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in the early morning hours of June 7, [REDACTED] 1

[REDACTED], bumped four times, and opened a hole in the hull below the engine room.

Wheelsman Fred Nelson described the events of the stranding:

We were outbound [REDACTED].

This caused a loud noise which awakened most of the crew and passengers. Those who were not up when the crash occurred came on deck when the ship's bells started ringing (Duluth News Tribune, June 8, 1928).

Initially, First Mate Wick ordered reverse engines then stopped the engines when a deckhand from below informed him that the boat was shipping water and several tar barrels below were already submerged. Captain Smith ran to the bridge giving orders to beach the vessel to prevent her slipping off into deep water. Nelson swung America hard to starboard toward a gravel beach in an effort to follow the captain's orders. [REDACTED]

Members of the crew moved from cabin to cabin assisting passengers into the five lifeboats that were launched. All passengers and crew rowed to the safety [REDACTED]. Captain Smith was the last to leave the sinking America, stepping out of the pilothouse door into the last boat. It took approximately an hour and a half for the boat to settle, stern down, [REDACTED]. There was no panic exhibited by passengers or crew and no loss of life with the exception of an Irish Setter which was tied in the stern.

The steamer Winyah, formerly Andrew Carnegie's private yacht, immediately departed for Isle Royale to pick up passengers and crew and take them to Duluth and Port Arthur.

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Official investigations into the cause of America's stranding were begun immediately by H. P. Hogstad, Booth Fisheries' local manager for the United States and Dominion Transportation Company and Captain D. T. Sullivan of the U.S. Steamboat Inspection Service. Neither First Mate John Wick nor Wheelsman Fred Nelson were very familiar with Isle Royale waters and a course too close to shore was chosen, ultimately leading to the stranding. Results of the official investigations determined that First Mate Wick was careless in his navigation and was censured; no other officers shared fault.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES May 1898-June 7, 1928 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Detroit Dry Dock Company, Wyandott, Michigan

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
Significance Summary

America (1898-1928) was a steel passenger and package freight carrier which plied Lake Superior from 1902 to 1928. The vessel is significant because: 1) it provided an important social, economic and communications link for northshore and island inhabitants; 2) the people and events associated with the vessel were important in the history and development of Isle Royale; 3) she was used in and was representative of an economic and trade activity which flourished on the lakes for a relatively short period of time; and 4) she is representative of an intermediate vessel type which gradually took over the passenger/package freight trade from wooden and composite vessels. This vessel has further significance because of the seven known steamers sunk in Lake Superior within the 300 to 500 net tons range of America this vessel is the only steel passenger/package freighter in the population and is the only remaining example of her class and size available for study in Lake Superior (Heden 1966:69-80).

Supporting Data

America is significant because she provided an important social and economic link for the people of the northshore and Isle Royale. The "Booth Line" vessel routinely carried the mail, hauled fish catches, brought supplies to the many communities after the spring thaw and throughout the year, carried cement, bricks and other materials to help build the small communities on the northshore including the courthouse at Grand Marais and the church at Toft, and transported lumberjacks and mules to Nipigon country in support of the lumbering industry.

A. Booth and Company, Inc., which owned America during her entire span on Lake Superior, controlled the Great Lakes fish trade establishing fisheries at several cities including Escanaba, Manistique, Bayfield and Duluth; all ports visited by America. From the 1880s through the advent of World War I fishing around

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Isle Royale and along the northshore flourished. However, fishermen were often forced to borrow from the large companies, such as Booth, to replace nets and set up operations in the spring, purchase goods and supplies throughout the season from the company store and sell their fish catches back to the company to repay their debts. This occurred around Isle Royale to some extent. Booth and Company, via America, delivered fishermen to their camps at Isle Royale in the spring, brought a steady flow of supplies and transported fish catches to the Booth fishery in Duluth. Without regular access to America and the services she provided, Isle Royale fishermen would not have been able to sustain themselves during the season nor would they have had an immediate market for their fish.

The demise of America in 1928, compounded problems already being faced by Booth and other local fishery operations. An overall decline in the number of people fishing, smaller fish catches and increased competition for the remaining resources coupled with the completion of the northshore highway, which allowed fishermen to become independent of the large fisheries to which they had been tied by accessibility of transportation and indebtedness, acted together to unsettle the local economy. As a direct result of losing America, with her immediate capacity to transport fish from Isle Royale and the northshore communities and heavy competition from other small companies, Booth was forced to close their Duluth fishery (Holden, personal communication).

There were no roads along the northshore of Lake Superior until after 1910 so local passenger/package vessels, like America, filled a vitally needed communications and transportation role in the Lake Superior area.

While connection with Duluth has been maintained by the passenger boats of the...Northern Navigation Company, it was the America which did the local, routine work along the northshore, poking her nose into every little harbor on the coastline and keeping communication between the mainland and Isle Royale uninterrupted. While the Hamonie was sailing majestically from point to point, the America was

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serving all of the places enroute. She was like the local train which unloads its freight at every unimportant siding, past which the stately express train glides as if it never existed (Daily Times Journal, Fort William, Ontario, June 1928).

America is significant because she kept communications open during an era where shipping was the only means of transportation for island residents to the mainland and inter-city transportation along the northshore.

America is significant because it filled a special niche in the lives of many people who played a role in the development and growth of Isle Royale and northshore communities. Almost all of the visitors to and summer residents on Isle Royale prior to 1928 arrived via America as she was the island's only regularly scheduled passenger vessel.

Many of these early passengers owned island property around Isle Royale. Booth Island, at Isle Royale's western end, is named for the prestigious Booth family which owned America and ran a fishery operation on that island for many years. The Minnesota industrialist, George G. Barnum, Sr., on board America the morning she sank, is another whose name is associated with a small island at the west end. Merritt Island, after the Alfred Merritts of Duluth, and Minong Lodge on Minong Island, run by the Duluth Smiths, are others whose commercial activities left lasting impressions along the northshore or on Isle Royale.

Fred Schofield bought Fish Island (on Isle Royale's northshore) in 1915 and renamed it Belle Isle, the name it carries today. Schofield's Belle Isle Resort was one of the first stops America made on her regular trips to Isle Royale. As a result of Schofield's enterprising approach, i.e., riding America back and forth between Duluth and Isle Royale drumming up business for the hotel, the resort flourished in the early years and was a viable business until 1946 (Oikarinen 1979:110). America visited a number of resorts on the island all of which were dependent upon her regular passenger service for a steady stream of hotel guests.



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[REDACTED] Pots, pieces of china, shoes, etc., are visible on the bottom.

America's two captains were well known and respected on Lake Superior. Jacob F. Hector, known as the "Fog King" along his route because of his ability to maneuver the vessel along the treacherous shoreline in even the most inclement weather, captained the vessel from 1902 to 1910. Captain Edward C. "Indian" Smith took command of the steamer in 1910 and continued as her master until she was lost in 1928. Both captains were lifelong Duluth residents. Chief engineer Frank McMillin served on America from the time she began her career on Lake Superior until her loss, a total of 25 years. Members of America's crew were drawn from throughout the northshore during her 25 years on Lake Superior.

Mrs. Sam Sivertson would have disembarked for their Washington Island fishery at 3 am on June 7th, except that with his broken leg and the dim early morning light they decided to wait until the afternoon return trip. Stanley Sivertson, captain of Wenonah since 1964 which makes regular runs to Isle Royale not too unlike the old America, heard his father, Sam, shouting 'The America is sinking! The America is sinking!' in the early morning hours (Oikarinen 1979:43).

Even today on Voyager II's regular trips around Isle Royale, nearly duplicating America's old route and serving the same function for the island's residents and visitors, the sunken vessel [REDACTED] Captain Roy Oberg. Roy's father fished Tobin Harbor in 1918-19, and Roy has been piloting boats since 1934. He and many other northshore and island residents have vivid memories of America.

America is significant because she was used in and was representative of an economic and trade activity which flourished for a relatively short period of time. America was different from the ordinary class of passenger vessels on the Lakes because she was not hauling immigrants nor being used for long distance travel by vacationers, rather she was a local passenger packet. Passenger ships began to flourish on the lakes beginning in the 1880s, reaching a peak about 1910. However, the economic

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feasibility of passenger and small package freight vessels, like America, was clearly in question by 1928. The shift toward automotive transport of people and package freight and the steady increase of the bulk freight trade in larger, more efficient ships, left the vessel without a market demand which she could meet. Salvage, refitting and re-entry into the shipping business was impractical. America spanned a period of rapid social and economic growth in the region and on Isle Royale; by the time of her loss she had outlived her usefulness in the specific trade for which she was designed.

The construction and general design of America is representative of smaller steel-hulled passenger/package freight vessels. Wood cabins above decks, steel hulled and fired by steam-powered boilers, the vessel did not exhibit any unusual elements at the time of her launching, other than being considered small for passenger service. America is significant because she is a representative type of passenger/package freight vessel which gradually took over this trade from older wooden and composite constructed vessels. Of the four documented steamers sunk in Lake Superior in her size and class range, 300-500 net tons (Heden 1966), America is the only example of a steel passenger/package freighter in the Isle Royale assemblage and indeed the only steel passenger/package freight vessel in Lake Superior available for study.

The significance of America rests on several points: the vessel filled a special niche in the lives of the people who helped develop Isle Royale and the northshore and influenced the socio-economic growth of these small communities by providing otherwise unobtainable goods and services, keeping communications open and reliable transportation available. To lifelong residents of the region and their descendants the vessel is a part of their personal history and their lives. Although she was a representative vessel type, there are no other examples in Lake Superior available for study.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(see attached sheets)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA (see attached sheets)

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 5.7

Longitude [REDACTED]
Latitude [REDACTED]

UTM REFERENCES

A [REDACTED]
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Toni Carrell, Archeologist

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service, Submerged Cultural Resources Unit

DATE

9/83

STREET & NUMBER

1220 South St. Francis

TELEPHONE

(505) 988-6750

CITY OR TOWN

Santa Fe

STATE

New Mexico 87501

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES NO NONE

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National State Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

James D. Stewart
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 6/12/84

ATTEST

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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1956 "God's Country and the Ships." Sparks, August, pp 10-12. Bulletin of the Automobile Club of Minneapolis, Minnesota.
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1980 "Report on a One Week Field Trip to Test and Evaluate Underwater Archeological Research Approaches for Use at Isle Royale in the 1981 Field Season." Unpublished manuscript. On file U.S. Department of Interior, Isle Royale National Park, Houghton, Michigan; Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska; Southwest Cultural Resources Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico.
- 1981-82 Field work notes and drawings.

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Duluth News-Tribune, Duluth, Minnesota; April 10, 1910; June 8, 9,
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Superintendent Carlock E. Johnson, ISRO N.P. dated April 1, 1966.

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Solicitor's Opinion, December 8, 1966.

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