

Brother Jonathan Exhibit - Archaeological Significance

(Source: National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, National Park Services, United States Department of the Interior, July 5, 1995)

Observations on the archaeological remains of BROTHER JONATHAN are based solely on a video reconnaissance conducted with a remotely operated vehicle in 1993; additional reconnaissance, still photography, and the preparation of a site map have yet to be conducted. The observed characteristics of the site, however, as well as its location, indicate that the identity of the wreck is BROTHER JONATHAN.

The wreck lies embedded in the sand and silt bottom at a depth of some 250 feet off St. George Reef, and to the southeast of Jonathan Rock. The wreck lies inside a Court-injuncted zone near Dragon Channel. The wreck is clear and visible on side-scan sonar as a linear target with a slightly curved, "ship" shape.

The principal feature on the site is a substantial portion of the lower hull for an estimated two-thirds of the steamers original length, which has survived to a level below the original waterline. The hull appears to be resting to port, with the outer hull planking and copper sheathing protruding from the bottom. Video reconnaissance shows surviving ceiling planking and the exposed ends of floors and frames. The line of separation on the hull appears to be close to the turn of the bilge in some areas, with some frames and upper hull resting at an angle on the bottom where they have separated from the floors.

Visible portions of the ship's diagonal iron strapping are evident, and a layer of iron concretion covers many exposed timbers, perhaps accounting for the survival of substantial timber remains. The upper hull has apparently been consumed by marine organisms, as evidenced by the presence of exposed large drifts and other fasteners, in some cases with partially consumed timber adhering to it. The unconsumed portions, impregnated with oxides, are a common indicator of organic activity. While a layer of silt covers many timbers as well, and bottom sediments are probably dynamic, cyclic burial and uncovering are unlikely at the site given the presence of a substantial colony of anemones.

Machinery exposed on the site includes the port paddlewheel shaft, with hubs. The arms are missing. Inside the hull, the engine machinery is present, although displaced. The cylinder lies on its side, separated from the bedplate, with the D-valve exposed. The boilers are present, although the jacket of one has apparently corroded, exposing articulated rows of boiler tubes. What appears to be the heat exchanger lies near the exposed boiler. Various steam lines, rods and shafts lie disarticulated inside the hull and in this area.

A number of ceramic artifacts lie scattered outside the hull and inside it. At or after the time of the vessel's, a ceramic gun bottle, a dark glass wine bottle and ceramic plates with New York makers marks were recovered. Rows of other plates, bowls, and a chamber pot were observed on site, some of them lying atop exposed floor and ceiling timbers and on frame ends. Their presence may represent post-sinking deposition as intact structure was consumed by marine organisms. The appearance of the wreck is that of a vessel that sank more or less intact and has slowly disintegrated through organic activity, leaving a number of artifacts in relative position to their original placement in the vessel. This argues for a high level of archaeological integrity and research value as the site formation process was, after sinking damage, apparently gentle and gradual