

# Unearthed timbers on beach recalled as 'the old wreck'



DAVID STILL II PHOTO

**THE OLD WRECK** – It's pretty convincing that all of these items show or refer to the same thing, but was it a shipwreck? Experts from across the country are putting their minds a to the available evidence and the answer for now is "maybe."



FROM IMAGES OF AMERICA, CENTERVILLE MASS.



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When 92-year-old Laurence Bearse was growing up in Centerville, it's fair to say that things were quite different. Pavement hadn't come to most of the village and Centerville Beach, as it was known, had rolling dunes behind it and little development nearby.

It was also a time close enough to the town and village's grand seafaring

days that ship remains on the beach weren't considered terribly unusual.

But part of Bearse's Centerville was unearthed in December as the town of Barnstable prepared to dredge the upper reaches of the Centerville River. Timbers from what Bearse and his family called "the old wreck" were pulled from the sand to make way for the basins needed to dewater the material dredged from the river.

# The 'old wreck'...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A-1

"I knew immediately what that was," Bearse said with a smile.

His home is not more than roughly a half-mile from the beach in the area that he's lived most of his life.

The wreck never had a name associated with it; the story his parents told him was that it originally wrecked on Martha's Vineyard, but was dislodged in a big storm and brought to Centerville.

"From the time I could get to the beach, the wreck was on the beach," Bearse said.

But whether it is actually part of a ship is what Vjc Mastone, director and chief archaeologist for the state's Board of Underwater Archaeological Resources, is trying to figure out.

"Just because people call it something, doesn't mean that's what it is," Mastone said.

There's evidence that the remains were at one time part of a ship, but for Mastone the current configuration suggested that it could have been reused, perhaps built into a wharf. The

Centerville Wharf Company operated out of that area from around 1852 to 1879.

But there are enough references to the "wreck" in enough places - historical pamphlets, town reports and in the archives of this newspaper - to give Mastone pause and the wreck theory more credence.

The Jan. 1, 1931 *Patriot* included the briefest of items on the removal of the "old wreck," which was dynamited and taken away. The 1930 Annual Town Report provides more information, but still contends that the wreck was entirely removed.

What DPW crews found in December suggests otherwise. As does a photograph, probably from the 1910s, showing two women and a young girl sitting atop wreckage that bears a striking resemblance to what was pulled from the beach.

When Robert Whitman of Marstons Mills saw the timbers, he was immediately con-

vinced it was a ship.

With 40-years of boat building and repair behind him, including work for Chester Crosby & Sons, the construction to him is not that of a wharf.

There are other clues within the piles of timbers, although they're more difficult to discern.

"The knees are easy to recognize," Whitman said, "but the rest is ... it's a puzzle, needless to say."

Mastone is consulting

with his colleagues around the country, showing pictures and providing as much detail, including what this paper found this week, to see what they think.

The answer as to whether it's the remains of a ship so far is maybe. If it is a ship, it was big. The dimension of the beams are similar to those found on four-masted schooners built north of here in Maine and Nova Scotia, Mastone said. But he can't be sure.



PATRIOT FILE PHOTO

**TIMBER!** - There's evidence that says this was once a ship, but nothing conclusive, yet.