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# Salvagers, Michigan probing what may be 17th-century shipwreck

October 22, 2005

BY [ANDREW HERRMANN](#) Staff Reporter

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One of Lake Michigan's great shipwreck mysteries may be closer to being solved.

For over a year, a court battle has waged over a find that may be the remains of the 17th-century sailing vessel Le Griffon. That dispute has eased as a salvage company and the state of Michigan have agreed to work together on exploring the site near Green Bay.


"Instead of standing still in a court, we can now dive," said Scott Demel, a Field Museum archeologist who is working to identify the ship, considered by some as the Holy Grail of the Great Lakes.

The 45-ton wooden shipping vessel mysteriously disappeared "through a crack in the lake" in 1679, writes William Ratigan in his book *Great Lakes Shipwrecks and Survivals*.

Steven Libert of the Great Lakes Exploration Group filed papers last summer making a claim on the ship. The state of Michigan moved to block Libert's claim in federal court, arguing that federal law gave it ownership. Meanwhile, Demel's preliminary tests suggest, at the very least, the vessel dates to the time the Le Griffon went down and is around where it is believed to have sunk in a storm.

The agreement does not solve ownership. The government of France is

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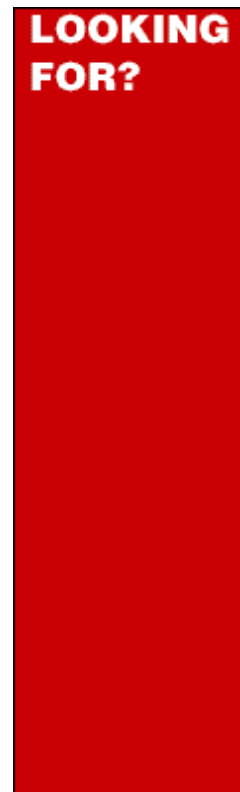
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expected to stake a claim as well; the ship was built for French explorer Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle, for whom La Salle Street is named.

Demel plans to return to the site this spring with metal detecting equipment to look for cannons known to have been on Le Griffon, so named for its two wooden adornments of griffins -- mythical monsters with lion bodies and eagle heads. Libert couldn't be reached for comment, but Demel said Libert wants the ship to end up in a museum.



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