

19th-Century Ship Parts - Bow

Diving in the Great Lakes typically involves wrecks of 1800's sailing vessels. They are a beauty to behold, but they can also be confusing. They frequently contain parts and equipment that are no longer seen on modern ships, and many divers are not sure what they are looking at. Presented here are some descriptions of the major parts likely to be seen on a 19th-century sailing vessel. To make things easier, these descriptions are separated into the bow, amidships, stern, and rigging. Placement on the ship can often aid identification, and things are more easily found and recognized when you know where to look.

The bow will be covered this month. Next month will feature more parts.

Bowsprit - The large, thick pole pointing outward from the front of the ship. It was used to support the jib boom. Very rarely, a **figurehead** of some design may be featured underneath the bowsprit. Bracing chains are also sometimes seen attached to the bowsprit and running to the hull.

Jib Boom - A long thin pole that is a continuation of the bowsprit. It is usually missing from most wrecks but occasionally seen. It was used to support the jib sails.

Stem - The curved vertical beam that forms the bow of the ship.

Forecastle - The front deck of the ship that was raised slightly above the main deck. Not all vessels had this.

Tow Bit - The large square vertical post on the bow of many vessels. It was usually placed immediately behind the bowsprit and ahead of the windlass. It was used to tow the vessel behind a steam-powered vessel, sometimes with two or three other sailing vessels. This was a common practice for schooners in later years. They usually had minimum rigging and sails if being towed as a consort.

Windlass - The large horizontal winch on the bow used to raise and lower the anchors.

Chain Locker - The compartment below deck where the anchor chain was stored. A small square hole in the middle of the bow's deck was used to run the chain into this compartment.

Cat Head - A horizontal post extending outward from the side of the bow near the anchor. A pulley, deadeye, or other tackle item would be attached at the end. They were used to help raise and lower the anchor and to help support the stowed anchor on the railing.

Hawse Pipe or Hole - The hole in the side of the ship for the anchor chain to pass from the deck to outside the ship. If metal was used, it's a **hawse pipe**. Otherwise, it is simply a **hawse hole**.

Wood Stock Anchor - An older style of anchor common on early vessels. It had a large wooden cross bar, or **stock**, connected to a single metal **shank**, two metal **arms**, and sharp **flukes** at the end of each arm. This is the classic pirate ship anchor, and it was always tied to the railing for stowage. Later anchor designs had metal stocks, and sometimes the stocks and/or arms could be folded to make the anchor more compact for deck stowage rather than hanging off the railing.

