

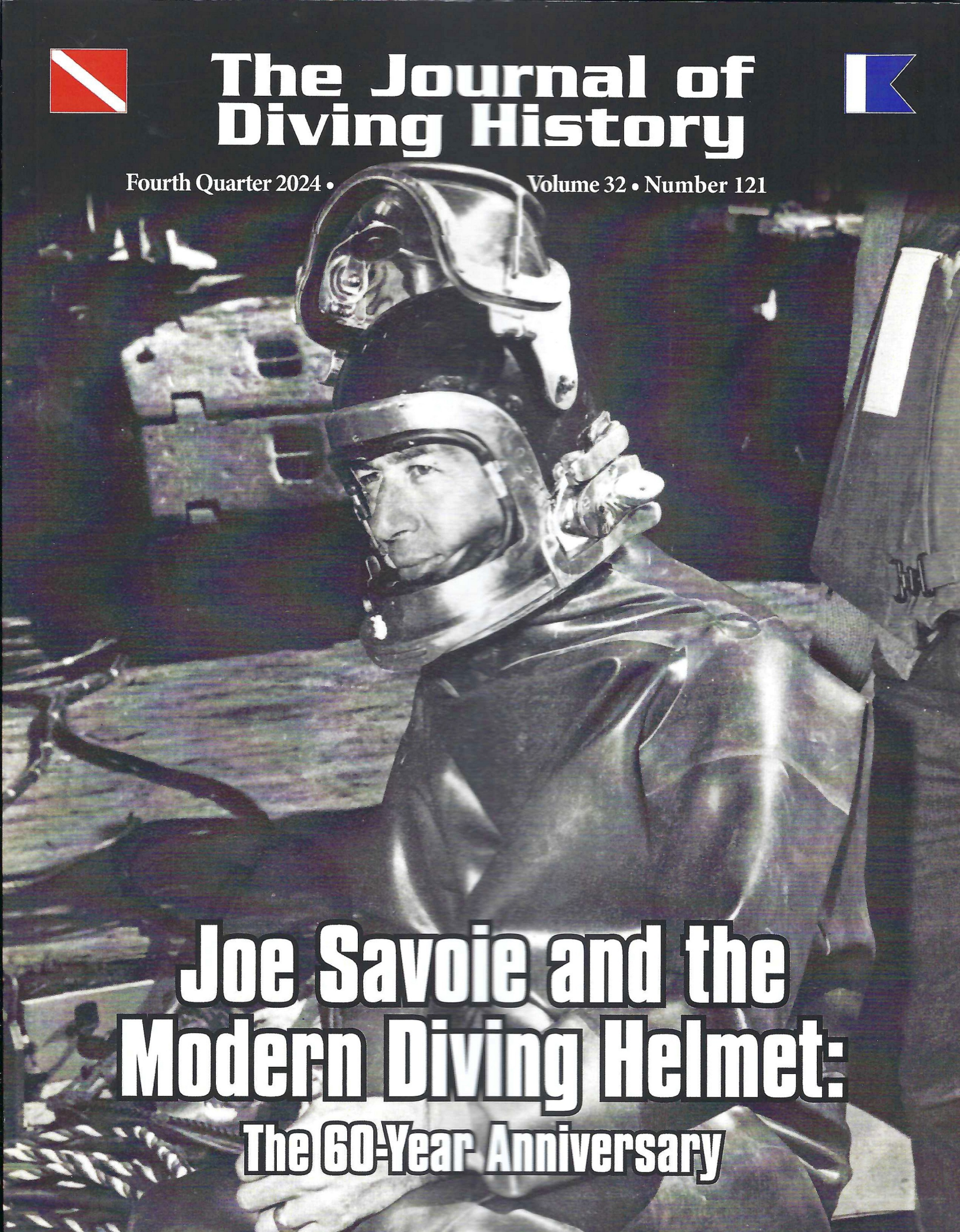


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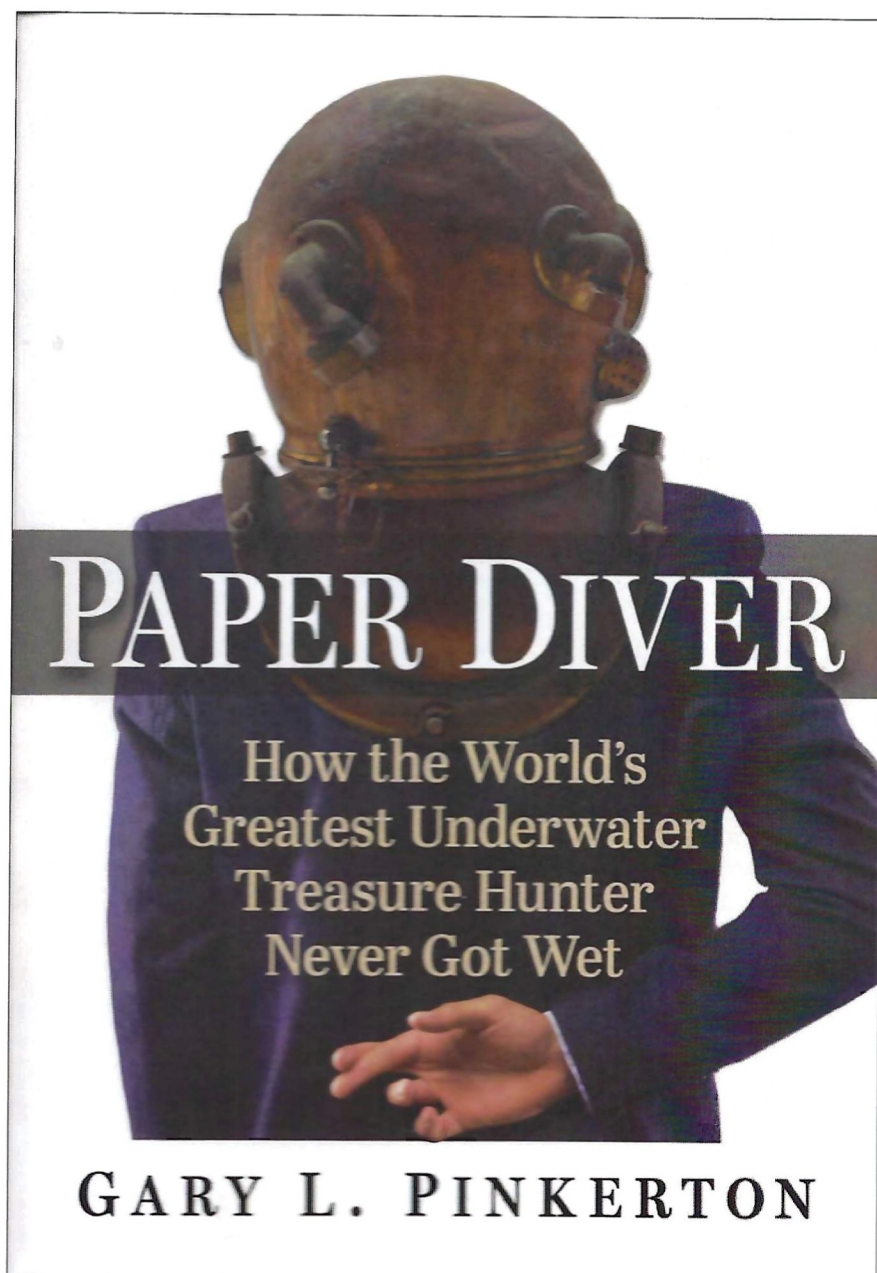
A black and white photograph of a man, Joe Savoie, wearing a modern diving helmet and a dark wetsuit. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark and indistinct, possibly underwater or in a workshop.

**Joe Savoie and the
Modern Diving Helmet:
The 60-Year Anniversary**

Paper Diver: *How the World's Greatest Underwater* *Treasure Hunter Never Got Wet*

By Gary L. Pinkerton

Reviewed by Nyle C. Monday



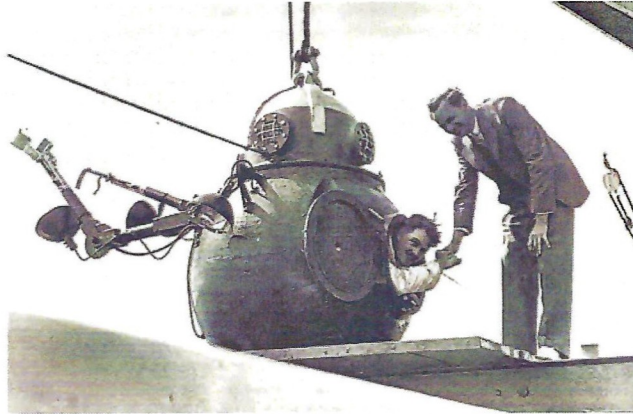
To readers of a certain age, the name Harry Rieseberg conjures up images of sunken galleons with chests overflowing with gold coins and jewels, usually guarded by a giant octopus. We may be forgiven for this, however, because from the 1930s into the 1970s, the tales of Rieseberg's thrilling adventures were to be found everywhere, from articles in newspapers and magazines, to radio programs, newsreels and even a Hollywood publicity tour. This reviewer remembers his book, *I Dive for Treasure*, as one of only a few books on deep sea diving available in his local public library when he was a youngster, and we youngsters took his stories as gospel. Over the years, however, many readers began to notice discrepancies and things that didn't quite make sense, and Rieseberg's reputation, at least amongst those "in the know" began to falter, but it was not until the publication of Gary Pinkerton's *Paper Diver: How the World's Greatest Underwater Treasure Hunter Never Got Wet* that the whole story began to emerge. And quite a story it is.

Author Pinkerton divides Rieseberg's life into two basic eras: Harry before the fall and Harry after. The "fall" being referred to was an actual fall, which Rieseberg took in 1935 while aboard the *Constellation*, then docked on the Potomac River. This accident, which left him with a limp and other injuries that would plague him through the rest of his life, also proved to be a significant influence on his future career. Pinkerton sees the event as the key to understanding the false stories he sold to the public for the next thirty-five years.

Prior to that time, Rieseberg had presented himself as the "information man" for treasure hunting. This was largely based on the work he had done while employed by the Bureau of Navigation at the Department of Commerce.



Harry E. Rieseberg in his later years.



Harry Rieseberg shaking hands with Ralph Fleming, as the latter emerges from the Romano Diving Robot.



A crudely faked photo of Rieseberg in diving equipment which first appeared in *Popular Mechanics* in 1941.

That position had given him access to records of shipping, including vessels lost at sea, and it was while in this position that the idea of treasure seems to first have taken hold in his mind. It was this information that he would seek to use in treasure hunting, with others supplying the monetary backing and doing the actual recovery. This changed after his accident, and it was during his prolonged recovery period, that Rieseberg first begins to imply in his prolific writings that he actually had done the things that he wrote about. This brought about the creation of the persona that he was to present to the world until his death in 1970. It is author Pinkerton's conclusion that, despite his stories, Rieseberg not only did not find the treasures that he writes about, but was certainly not trained as a diver and probably never went under water at all!

One thing that quickly becomes apparent was the mountain of material that Rieseberg published over the years. At one point he claimed to have published over 4000 articles in magazines and newspaper, but even if the reality was half that, he still stands as one of the most prolific writers on diving in history, particularly up to that time. He made up for lack of truth with sheer volume, in an attempt to become what he himself claimed to be – the greatest underwater treasure hunter in the world. Yet, even in this, he worked the angles, often rehashing old stories or even sending the same story to multiple publications.

One of the interesting side stories included in this fascinating volume is the story of the Romano Diving-Robot. Rieseberg formed an association with the owners of that innovative diving bell and helped to arrange its transport from Seattle to the East Coast, where it was put on public display in an attempt to gain potential investors and perhaps even purchase by the U.S. Navy. The facts of this partnership are detailed in Pinkerton's book. The Romano bell would play a recurring role in Rieseberg's publications and stories, even long after it had probably rusted away in ignominious solitude in some forgotten warehouse.*

The portrait of Rieseberg revealed in this volume is not a flattering one. Rieseberg was definitely an underachiever, while at the same time a shameless self-promoter. Although he managed to stay employed by the Federal government for a period of time, he jumped from job to job, often spending only a few months in one position, and, even then, only one step ahead of being disciplined for inefficiency or worse. He learned early how to play the system, and he was very successful at it for a period, especially in a time before modern communications and records keeping were the

norm. His personal life was not much better. He left a string of broken marriages in his wake, and often fell back upon his parents or other relatives to see him through the lean times. Rieseberg was a joiner, and held membership in a great number of social groups such as various Masonic organizations. Unfortunately, not all these groups were quite so upright in nature, and in 1929 he was publicly identified as being the Grand Kleagle for the District of Columbia branch of the Ku Klux Klan. Later he would join the National Order of Protestant Clubs, an innocuously named group made up of former Klansmen who were anti-Black and anti-Catholic.

Author Pinkerton is to be congratulated on the granular level of research he did in bringing the full story of Rieseberg's decades-long deception to light. He has located and examined an enormous amount of material in order to create this detailed portrait of a man who many readers thought they knew, but in reality did not. This is an important book which verifies many of the suspicions readers have had over the years and sets the record straight. In writing this volume, Gary Pinkerton has given us a definitive solution to one of the great mysteries of American diving history. 📖

Paper Diver: How the World's Greatest Underwater Treasure Hunter Never Got Wet

By Gary L. Pinkerton
McFarland & Company, Inc. (2024)
Available through the publisher (www.mcfarlandpub.com)
and Amazon.com.

*Readers interested in learning more about the Romano's diving bell may wish to read Michael Kranzler's excellent article, "Eugene Romano's Diving Robot," which appeared in *Historical Diving Times*, Issue 77, Autumn 2023.

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