

Chapter 18

Making Shipwrecks Celebrities: Using the National Register, Shipwreck Preserves, Documentary Filmmaking, and Interdisciplinary Projects for Shipwreck Preservation

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Abstract Historic shipwrecks are fragile resources that sometimes are vulnerable to looting and other damage from various intrusive human actions. Rather than practice a strategy of hiding these shipwrecks from the scuba diving public, cultural resource managers might better explore innovative strategies that enhance shipwrecks to celebrity status as a tool for historic preservation. Such a blueprint has proven rather effective for the past two-and-a-half decades at Lake George, New York, as a coalition of archaeologists, historians, cultural resource managers, biological scientists, documentary filmmakers, and artists have interpreted the waterway's shipwrecks for public consumption and heritage awareness.

Introduction

Historic shipwrecks are cultural resources that sometimes are mistreated by invasive human activities such as scuba diver vandalism, errant anchor damage, and even well-intended but poor scuba diving techniques during visitation. Rather than

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practicing policies designed to hide or limit public access to sunken vessels to protect and preserve these finite resources, cultural resource managers and other stakeholders at Lake George, New York, have developed multidiscipline strategies that enhance shipwrecks to prominence as a strategy for protecting their structural integrity. These programs have included using the National Register of Historic Places, developing controlled public access through shipwreck preserves, installing informational signage, delivering public lectures, writing articles and books, producing documentaries that promote shipwreck protection, and organizing interdisciplinary programs incorporating shipwrecks, underwater archaeology, and the natural sciences. This blueprint has proven effective over the past two-and-a-half decades as a diversified coalition of people and groups have interpreted the waterway's shipwrecks to foster stewardship of these submerged cultural resources.

Brief History of Lake George Shipwrecks and Underwater Archaeology

Lake George is a 32 mile long waterway in upstate New York that is part of the Hudson River/Lake George/Lake Champlain corridor from New York City into Canada. The lake was the scene of hostilities during the French and Indian War (1755–1763) and American Revolution (1775–1783). More recently Lake George's natural beauty and its rich history have made the waterway a major attraction for recreational and heritage tourism. Therefore, it is not surprising that for the past five decades, the "Queen of American Lakes" has also been a popular destination for scuba enthusiasts (Zarzynski 2002: 75).

In the autumn of 1758, the British military deliberately sank 2 radeaux (floating gun batteries), a sloop, 260 bateaux, and other warships to protect them over the winter of 1758–1759 from their enemy, the French and their Native American allies. Known as "The Sunken Fleet of 1758," many of the submerged vessels were raised by the British and provincials in the summer of 1759 and reused, but several dozen sunken vessels were not retrieved (Zarzynski and Benway 2011: 35).

In 1903, a sunken British sloop was salvaged from the lake and the 44 ft long hulk was cut up for souvenirs, the so-called historic preservation of the times (Bellico 2001: 77). Over half a century later in 1960, two teenage scuba divers located a dozen or more bateau-class vessels, sunk in shallow water at the south end of the lake. The bateau was the utilitarian watercraft of its era. The flat-bottomed wooden watercraft was pointed at bow and stern. Bateaux generally were 25–40 ft long and were used by the Dutch, English (later known as the British), French, and later, the Americans. These vessels could be rowed, poled in shallow water, and a crude mast and square sail could even be rigged for sailing (Zarzynski and Benway 2011: 22–25).

In 1960, with State of New York permission, three bateaux were raised during an Adirondack Museum operation permitted by the State of New York. The boats were conserved using polyethylene glycol (PEG) and one bateau was displayed for years

at the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, New York. Unfortunately, today the three recovered bateaux are stored at a State Museum facility outside Albany, New York, as the initial conservation treatment, completed over half a century ago, was not entirely successful. Furthermore, since 1960, at least four sunken bateaux in the lake have disappeared, three bateau shipwrecks have been seriously vandalized by souvenir-seeking scuba divers, and another bateau, visible on the lake bottom in the 1960s, is now buried by stream delta overburden (Zarzynski and Benway 2011: 22–25).

In 1963–1964, the Adirondack Museum conducted a study of the lake’s sunken bateaux. Dubbed “Operation Bateaux,” the scuba investigation was executed by archaeological diver Terry Crandall under a permit issued by the State Education Department. Nearly a quarter of a century later, a not-for-profit corporation, Bateaux Below, Inc., began a long-term study of the lake’s shipwrecks, especially “The Sunken Fleet of 1758.” Bateaux Below also undertook a comprehensive public outreach program designed to protect the lake’s collection of well-preserved shipwrecks by promoting these resources as “celebrities” as a means to combat vandalism (Zarzynski and Benway 2011: 19–21).

National Register of Historic Places

Nearly 25 years ago, in 1987 when Bateaux Below first began its study of sunken French and Indian War bateaux in the lake, one of the initial goals was to complete a site plan of seven bateau shipwrecks, called the “Wiawaka Bateaux,” as part of a National Register of Historic Places nomination. James P. Delgado, then with the National Park Service, and Mark Peckham, with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, were key supporters of this effort. Following the 1987–1991 fieldwork, Bateaux Below members and state cultural resource managers succeeded in getting the “Wiawaka Bateaux” listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 (Zarzynski 1997: 463). These were the first Lake George shipwrecks designated to this registry and this began a “branding” process to promote cultural awareness and historic preservation of “The Sunken Fleet of 1758.”

Over the years, Bateaux Below has worked to get other Lake George shipwrecks listed on the National Register. In 1995, the 1758 *Land Tortoise* radeau shipwreck, a one-of-a-kind British warship discovered by Bateaux Below in 1990 using a Klein side scan sonar and studied by an all-volunteer team directed by nautical archaeologist, D. K. Abbass, was listed on the National Register (Zarzynski 2007: 117). In 2002, the *Cadet*, ex *Olive* steam launch shipwreck was listed on the National Register. The 48 ft long *Cadet*, ex *Olive* is possibly the best surviving example of its class in US waters. The steamboat wreck was discovered by Bateaux Below in 1997 during a Klein side scan sonar survey and then archaeologically studied over 1998–1999 (Zarzynski 2007: 120–121). In 2008, the 45 ft long *Forward* shipwreck, a 1906-built, gasoline-powered launch, was listed on the National Register (Zarzynski

and Benway 2011: 85). Furthermore, in 1998, the 1758 *Land Tortoise* radeau was designated a National Historic Landmark, only the sixth shipwreck in American waters with that prestigious heritage recognition (Zarzynski and Benway 2011: 40).

Shipwreck Preserves

In 1993, the State of New York's Department of Environmental Conservation, in cooperation with other government organizations, Bateaux Below, and other not-for-profit corporations, opened the Empire State's first shipwreck preserves, an underwater park for scuba divers. Called "Submerged Heritage Preserves," this state park is an underwater "museum" of shipwrecks for scuba divers. The state park has three shipwreck sites. "The Sunken Fleet of 1758" preserve is a cluster of seven bateau wrecks and one submerged replica bateau, all lying in 20–40 ft of water. "The *Forward* Underwater Classroom" preserve includes the 1906-constructed *Forward* shipwreck and a 500 ft underwater trail with informational stations lying in 20–45 ft of water. And, finally, the "*Land Tortoise* Radeau—A 1758 Floating Gun Battery" is in 107 ft of water. These shipwreck preserves promote recreational and heritage tourism and foster historic preservation within the scuba diving community (Zarzynski 2002: 81–84). Information about each shipwreck preserve, including a history of the sunken vessels, diver visitation guidelines, diver safety issues, archaeological drawings of the shipwreck preserves, and even a suggested reading list for each site, were provided in a state-produced shipwreck preserve brochure. More recently with the digital revolution, the brochure is published on the state's Department of Environmental Conservation web site (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/315.html>).

From 1993 to 2011, Bateaux Below provided the volunteer scuba support to set up, monitor, and close down the shipwreck preserves. In 2011, the New York State Divers Association, a dive club, Rich Morin's Professional Scuba Centers, a local dive store, and Halfmoon Marine Services, an area dive charter, took over the volunteer monitoring of the shipwreck preserves for the State of New York's Department of Environmental Conservation, the shipwreck park's administrator.

Shoreline Signage

A traditional, yet very effective, strategy to promote stewardship of the lake's historic shipwrecks employed by Bateaux Below and its historic preservation partners has been installing shoreside signage to inform visitors about the waterway's maritime history. In 1926, the New York State Historic Marker Program began when the state funded and erected blue-and-yellow metal markers. State funding for the program ended in 1939 but, in 1966, a new historic signage program was initiated using the same style of markers, but with historical societies and other groups funding this popular signage (New York State Museum 2011).

In 1992, Bateaux Below and its supporters erected the first of six historic markers along the shoreline of Lake George. Each marker includes a title, five lines of text, and generally a credit line. Each historic marker cost several 100 dollars and was forged in a foundry located in the Empire State. The respective title and the year of installation for each of the blue-and-yellow historic markers are: MILITARY DOCK (1992), SUNKEN FLEET (1993), RADEAU WARSHIP (1995), WIAWAKA BATEAUX (1996), SUBMERGED TRACK (2002), and CADET SHIPWRECK (2005). This prominent signage has been instrumental in informing the nondiving and diving public about Lake George's submerged cultural resources.

Public Presentations

From 1987 into 2012, Bateaux Below members, principally Russell P. Bellico and Joseph W. Zarzynski, presented over 400 public outreach programs (lectures, professional papers, school instructional lessons, workshops, walking and boat tours, and radio and television shows). These presentations, given to a wide variety of groups, were all on topics related to the history, underwater archaeological study, and preservation and protection of Lake George's shipwrecks and other submerged cultural resources. These public outreach programs reached over 12,000 people and provided them with accurate information about the waterway's shipwrecks, the results of Bateaux Below's maritime archaeology studies of these shipwrecks, and passionate pleas from the presenters for the public to practice preservation of the lake's underwater heritage resources.

Articles and Books

Furthermore, another conventional way employed to promote interest in Lake George shipwrecks and to foster their historic preservation was through print media. Bateaux Below members wrote articles published in newspapers, newsletters, popular magazines, professional journals, and its members published several books. From 1992 to 1996, Bateaux Below published an 8-page newsletter, 15 issues total, entitled *The Lake George Nautical Newsletter*. Besides this newsletter and the occasional magazine articles published about the lake's shipwrecks, from 2004 to 2010, Bateaux Below's Joseph W. Zarzynski and Bob Benway wrote 64 columns about the waterway's submerged cultural resources that appeared in the popular *Lake George Mirror* newspaper.

Several books on Lake George vessels and shipwrecks have helped inform the public about the waterway's submerged cultural resources and in so doing have promoted historic preservation. Lake historian Betty Ahearn Buckell wrote a book entitled *Lake George Boats* (1990). Another local historian, and also one of the excursion boat pilots on the lake, William Preston Gates, authored the tome, *Lake*

George Boats and Steamboats (2003). Bateaux Below's historian Russell P. Bellico wrote two comprehensive and highly acclaimed books on Lake George's maritime and military history including information about the lake's numerous shipwrecks: *Sails and Steam in the Mountains: A Maritime and Military History of Lake George and Lake Champlain* (originally published in 1992) and *Chronicles of Lake George: Journeys in War and Peace* (1995). D. K. Abbass and Joseph W. Zarzynski co-wrote a young adult book, *The Radeau Land Tortoise: North America's Oldest Intact Warship* (1993), that reached the younger generation. Zarzynski and Bob Benway wrote the most recent book on the waterway's underwater cultural heritage, *Lake George Shipwrecks and Sunken History* (2011). All of these publications have gone a long way toward encouraging historic preservation of Lake George's inanimate celebrities, its shipwrecks.

Ship and Shipwreck Models for Public Interpretation

Crafting ship models is as old as boatbuilding itself, dating back to ancient times. John Farrell, Bateaux Below's ship modeler, has completed 18 boat models constructed from a variety of materials including wood, plastic, metal, foam board, and paper. These have been used as teaching tools during archaeological fieldwork and replica vessel construction and for exhibit in museums, visitor centers, libraries, and art galleries. The subjects of Farrell's scale models and dioramas have been the 1758 *Land Tortoise* radeau, British colonial bateaux, a 1960-built research submarine constructed to photograph bateau-class wrecks of "The Sunken Fleet of 1758," and shipwreck site dioramas. Animator John Whitesel used Farrell's scale models to create visually stunning animation and computer-generated still imagery used in DVD documentaries, in public lectures by the Bateaux Below team, and in museum and visitor center video programs.

Shipwreck DVD Documentaries

In 2005, Pepe Productions, a Glens Falls, New York, documentary production company, released the first of two award-winning documentaries on Lake George shipwrecks and their underwater archaeological investigations. The first documentary, "The Lost Radeau: North America's Oldest Intact Warship," was produced for home video distribution and was later shown on Public Broadcasting Service television stations in New York state. The 57-min long production explores the 1758 *Land Tortoise* radeau and its archaeological study.

In 2010, the documentary filmmakers released the 58-min long DVD documentary, "Wooden Bones: The Sunken Fleet of 1758," produced for home video consumption. It tells the story of the archaeological study of the bateau shipwrecks in Lake George, the strange saga of a 1960 research submarine that was stolen and

Fig. 18.1 In 2008, this 31 ft replica 1758 bateau “wreck” was built by Saratoga Springs City School District middle school students and is based upon the archaeological record. The replica was then sunk off a popular walkway in shallow water at Lake George for pedestrian viewing (Photo by Joseph W. Zarzynski, 2008)



mysteriously sunk in Lake George, and an archaeology project that mapped a submerged 1758-built military wharf. “Wooden Bones” was co-winner of the “Maritime Heritage” award at NOAA’s 2010 Gray’s Reef Ocean Film Festival in Savannah, Georgia.

Americans enjoy watching movies, television, and documentary programs. Thus, these Pepe Productions documentaries have helped instill an aura of superstar stature for Lake George shipwrecks, thereby supporting their historic preservation.

2007–2008 Bateau “Wreck” Model

In June 2008, local archaeologists and historians, with state and local government permission, sank a replica “shipwreck” at the “Queen of American Lakes.” The full-size, 31 ft long replica 1758 bateau “wreck” was constructed over a 6-month period by middle school students and Technology class teachers from Saratoga Springs, New York, with advisory support from underwater archaeologists. The replica was placed into the lake’s shallows, adjacent to a walkway for pedestrian viewing (Fig. 18.1). It shows what a 250-year-old bateau shipwreck would look like with the vessel’s upper strakes and some frames deteriorated and fallen off. Rocks, like those used by British and provincial soldiers in 1758 to help sink these bateaux, were



Fig. 18.2 This painting was one of several art/science pieces exhibited at the Lake George Arts Project gallery in 2009. The painting shows two microscopic testate amoeba tests (shells) found at a bateau shipwreck site and then examined by cell biologists using a scanning electron microscope. The art/science illustrator shrank a 30 ft long bateau to the size of a microscopic amoeba shell and placed them into one landscape. Such interdisciplinary artwork attracted a diversified public to view this exhibit and promoted interest in Lake George’s cultural and natural resources (Painting by Elinor Mossop, 2009, from Joseph W. Zarzynski Collection)

placed inside the warship’s skeletal remains. Such innovative programs not only help to educate school children about American history and underwater archaeology; these efforts likewise inform the older nondiving populace (Zarzynski and Benway 2011: 111–113).

2009 “Raising the Fleet: An Art/Science Initiative” Tri-Exhibit

A 2009 tri-exhibition, “Raising the Fleet: An Art/Science Initiative,” conceived by Samuel S. Bowser, an Albany, New York, cell biologist, in conjunction with not-for-profit entities, helped local residents commemorate the 250th anniversary (1759–2009) of the British military recovering some of the shipwrecks of “The Sunken Fleet of 1758.” Many of those salvaged vessels were repaired and used by General Amherst’s army in the 1759 campaign that pacified the French fortresses in the Champlain Valley, propelling the British to victory in the French and Indian War. The 2009 program was an art/science interpretation of the study of testate amoebae found in the lake bottom adjacent to eighteenth-century shipwrecks. The tri-exhibit included a display of over three dozen art and science pieces at the Lake George Arts Project gallery (Fig. 18.2), an underwater art/science exposition for scuba divers with easels erected around a replica bateau wreck at “The Sunken Fleet of 1758” shipwreck preserve, and an Internet exhibition (<http://www.themua.org/>)

[raisingthefleet/](#)) hosted by the Museum of Underwater Archaeology. These three exhibits featured the creations of science artist Elinor Mossop and ship modeler John Farrell. The gallery program also included a mini-documentary created by Pepe Productions. Such multidiscipline approaches broadened the scope of interest among the diving and nondiving communities toward the lake's diversified cultural and natural resources (Zarzynski and Benway 2011: 113–117).

“Snails and Trails,” a 2012 Lake George Arts Project Exhibit

In a continuation of art/science collaboration as a tool to inform people about Lake George's abundant natural and cultural resources, including its historic shipwrecks, an exhibit entitled “Snails and Trails” was held in the summer 2012 at the Lake George Arts Project gallery. Directed by cell biologist Samuel S. Bowser and gallery director Laura Von Rosk, with assistance from regional artists and Bateaux Below members, the exhibition traced the trails of life, from microbial to animal and human, to examine how art and science can work together to create more sustainable living and foster protection of the waterway's natural and cultural resources.

Conclusion

Archaeology is a study of material culture from the past to discover and interpret new information about how people of yesteryear lived. Today, Americans have developed significant affinities with our society's prominent people, even though in most cases they have never met these figures. At Lake George, archaeologists, historians, artists, documentarians, and other resource managers have created traditional and unique public outreach programs that shed light upon the cultural significance of the waterway's shipwrecks by giving these inanimate resources celebrity status. In doing so, divers and nondivers have not only gained a greater understanding of local history, they likewise have become more prone to support historic preservation of these perishable cultural resources.

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