

ALL POINTS BULLETIN



Make friends with... ..the past, through the....

Colorado Archaeological Society - Denver Chapter

“...in the future, as in the past, the gathering of information will depend to a great extent on cooperation between avocational and professional archaeologists.” (H.M. Wormington, 1978)

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THE GUNBOAT PHILADELPHIA

By Anne Winslow

The gunboat *Philadelphia* is America's earliest intact fighting ship on exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. Just 53 ½ feet long, the *Philadelphia* was built in August of 1776 and sunk several months later by the British at the little known Battle of Valcour Island on Lake Champlain, yet this small boat played a vital part in contributing to the ultimate success of the American Revolution.



When the fighting between the Americans and the British began at Lexington and Concord in April of 1775, the British Empire possessed the most powerful navy in the world. The Americans, on the other hand, had virtually no navy and very few resources with which to create one. In spite of this, the Americans recognized the strategic importance of the Lake Champlain – Hudson River corridor. In a time when few highways existed,

and those that did were rough and often impassable, water routes were of vital importance. Whoever controlled the Lake Champlain – Hudson River corridor would control not only the invasion route between Canada and New England, but would also control the vital link between the New England colonies and those in the Middle Atlantic and the South.

As part of the American attempt to control this critical transportation and communication route, the Americans took Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain in May of 1775. A subsequent invasion of Canada under General Benedict Arnold, begun in the fall of 1775, ended with the American retreat to Lake Champlain in the spring of 1776, pursued by the British. It soon became apparent that neither side possessed the ships necessary to seize control of the lake, so at opposite ends of the lake, each side set about constructing enough ships to allow them to drive the other from the lake.

Over a period of several months during the summer of 1776 the Americans managed to build a small fleet of 12 boats with which they hoped to keep the British from seizing control of Lake Champlain and moving on New York. The boats they built were designed for lake service. They were flat-bottomed, with one mast and square rigged sails, as well as a bank of oars which gave them most of their ability to maneuver. They were basically floating gun platforms, with little space or amenities for their crews. The *Philadelphia* carried 3 large guns: two 9 pounder cannon and a 12 pounder gun mounted on a slide carriage in the bow and operated by means of ropes fixed to a pulley on deck. In order to aim the large front cannon, the entire ship had to be turned.



The British and American fleets met at Valcour Island on October 11, 1776. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Americans were no match for the Royal Navy. After two days of fighting, almost the entire American fleet, including the *Philadelphia*, had been sunk or captured by the British. Although they had lost the battle, the

Americans had succeeded in delaying the British advance. Because it was late in the year, after the battle the British went into camp for the winter, thereby giving the Americans the vital time needed to prepare for the British advance on New York which came in the spring of 1777. Later that year, the British were defeated at Saratoga, a significant turning point in the war. The threat to cut off New England from the rest of the colonies, which would probably have led to the Americans losing the war, was over. This was made possible by the actions of the small American fleet at Lake Champlain.

The *Philadelphia* was largely forgotten until 1935 when it was located sitting upright in about 60 feet of water on the bottom of Lake Champlain by Lorenzo Hagglund, a marine salvage diver. The wreck was intact, preserved by the cold water. The mast was still in place, with the tip only about 15 feet below the surface. The 24 pound British cannon ball which had sunk the *Philadelphia* was still lodged in the wooden hull. Considering the technology available in 1935, it is amazing that Hagglund was able to raise the boat intact.

Although Hagglund was not a marine archaeologist and the technology available in 1935 was crude compared to that of today, he is credited with successfully recovering and preserving, in addition to the boat itself, hundreds of artifacts which give a detailed picture of the *Philadelphia* and her crew. Among the personal items recovered were a wooden canteen, knee and shoe buckles, cuff links, pewter spoons, buttons, and leather shoes. Cooking utensils and earthenware speak to the everyday life of the crew, while many of the artifacts would have been used in the operation of the boat. Among these were anchors, pieces of oars, rigging equipment, metal fittings, iron fasteners, spikes and nails. The three large guns were recovered, as well as round and bar shot, parts of muskets and bayonet fragments. Navigational equipment, including a sand glass and dividers were found. Iron axe heads, spades, chisels, a pitch brush and pitch bucket were among the tools recovered.



One of the artifacts on display at the Smithsonian is the final crew roster for the *Philadelphia*, dated October 16, 1776, which was discovered in 1973 at a museum in San Angelo Texas, inside a portable desk that had belonged to the captain of the *Philadelphia*, Benjamin Rue. The roster lists the names of the 44 individuals who served on the *Philadelphia* as crew, as well as the pay that each received for his service. Most had little or no sailing experience. Some continued to fight against the British throughout the war, while others were killed or captured by the British. Captain Rue served for the remainder of the war, although as an artillery officer rather than a sailor, dying in 1820 at the age of 69. The mate, Joseph Bettys, was captured by the British, changed sides and fought for the British. Captured by the Americans in 1782, he was executed.

The Gunboat *Philadelphia* is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic Landmark. You can take a virtual tour online (see link below). Included in that tour are several minutes of film footage from 1935 showing the actual raising of the *Philadelphia*. The grainy black and white film shows the slings and spreaders being attached prior to starting to raise the boat. Then, as the tip of the mast breaks the surface of the water, the activity stops while a diver attaches an American flag to the top of the mast. The *Philadelphia* then rises slowly to the surface, once again proudly flying the flag for which she fought so bravely.

Sources:

[The Gunboat Philadelphia and the Defense of Lake Champlain in 1776](#), Phillip K. Lunderberg, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, 1995.

[The Gondola Philadelphia and the Battle of Lake Champlain](#), John R. Bratten, Texas A & M University Press, 2002.

www.Americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/gunboat-philadelphia

www.historiclakes.org/Valcour/philly.htm

All photos taken by Anne Winslow



January General Meeting: Monday, January 12th at DMNS in Ricketson Auditorium at 7 PM. Enter through the Security entrance. The West entrance is closed.

Since 1999, Catherine Griffin has pursued archaeology as both a volunteer and professional, working on archaeological sites located in the Pacific, Southwest, and Plains regions. Catherine is now a professional archaeologist and has earned a B.A. and M.A. in Anthropology. While pursuing her degrees, Catherine worked in Cultural Resources Management as a Lab Supervisor, and Field and Lab Technician, working in all phases of mitigation. Catherine is the newly elected Vice President of the Colorado Archaeological Society, Denver Chapter. She also serves as a board member for the City of Aurora's Historic Preservation Commission. Catherine currently works at HistoriCorps as a Programs Manager. This non-profit organization engages volunteers in the hands-on preservation work of restoring and sustaining important historic places. Catherine is presenting a summary of her Master's thesis research "*A Geophysical Analysis of a Ceramic Period Pueblo in the Sierra Blanca Archaeological Region, New Mexico.*" Her research involved using a resistance meter and a gradiometer to map near-surface features resulting in both expected and unexpected findings of both natural and cultural origins

Minutes of the holiday Members Night "meeting" of the Colorado Archaeological Society, Denver Chapter, December 8, 2014

Approximately 20 members gathered at Sturm Hall on the DU campus, where all feasted on goodies such as crock pot meatballs, deviled eggs, Linda S' caramel brownies, cheese spreads and crackers, and cookies. Three people shared presentations, as two were ill and could not present.

Jack Warner opened the gathering by stating that all curation has been completed for artifacts found at Blackfoot Cave site. This was quite a timely accomplishment for any kind of archaeological dig. Minutes of the November, 2014 general meeting were approved after one change suggested by Jack: There were approximately 20 people at the November general meeting instead of 15. Jack then

turned the meeting over to the incoming DC-CAS president, Linda Sand. She reported that DVD's are available of past speakers at general meetings. Some are better quality than others.

The first presentation was by Jack Warner, entitled "Getty Villa, (museum of) 44,000 Neolithic, Roman, and Etruscan Artifacts from 6500 BC to 400 AD". Located in Malibu, California, this large museum contains excellent works of art and antiquity purchased by Mr. Getty over the years. The grounds are designed to look like a villa in ancient Herculaneum, with statues, pools, and beautiful mosaics. There is also a Roman herb garden at the facility. No crowds were in the way of the Warners' viewing as only a limited number of visitors are let in at a time. There is no entry fee. Mr. Getty passed away before the museum was finished.

The second presentation was by Craig Banister, on the Blackfoot Cave Open House (held June 28, 2014) and final day of excavation (August 23, 2014). Visitors, including CAS members from other chapters, especially Colorado Springs, came to the open house, where four excavation areas were shown and explained. On the final day, a picnic was held and all of the excavation pits were filled in. Several members of Denver CAS were shown in the photos. Craig also gave a brief history of the site and showed some photos of artifacts of various time periods that were found at the site.

The third presentation was by Teresa Weedin, entitled "Mariposas Monarcas Magnificas en Mexico". Teresa went with the Denver Botanic Gardens to Mexico to see areas where the Monarch butterflies spend the winters in certain types of pine trees. She talked about the butterflies' life spans in general, their migration patterns, how some of their habitat is being lost, and showed beautiful photos (and a moving picture) of thousands of butterflies covering the trees and also fluttering around. Some of the areas were accessed by horseback.

After the presentations there was some socializing, and the event ended around 9 pm. All present wished each other happy holidays and safe travels over the holidays.

Minutes submitted by Linda Trzyna, for Kendra Elrod

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