

Shipwreck Explorers Discover HMS Ontario - 1780 British Warship in Lake Ontario

HMS Ontario, a British warship, built in 1780 has been discovered in deep water off the southern shore of Lake Ontario.

June 13, 2008 | By JIM KENNARD

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Artist Roland Stevens sketch of the HMS Ontario in the gale of October 31st 1780.

Copyright: Roland "Chip" Stevens

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Rochester, New York – *HMS Ontario*, a British warship built in 1780 has been discovered in deep water off the southern shore of Lake Ontario. Shipwreck enthusiasts Jim Kennard and Dan Scoville located the ship utilizing sophisticated side scanning sonar and an underwater remote operated vehicle. *HMS Ontario* is the oldest confirmed shipwreck and the only fully intact British warship to have ever been found in the Great Lakes.

HMS Ontario Founders

In the early evening hours of October 31, 1780, the British sloop of war *HMS Ontario* sank with over 120 men, women, children and prisoners on board during a sudden and violent gale. The *Ontario* had departed earlier in the day from Fort Niagara, near the western end of Lake Ontario, for Oswego and then on to Fort Haldimand located on Carleton Island in the St. Lawrence River. The following day some of the *Ontario*'s boats, hatchway gratings, binnacle, compasses and several hats and blankets drifted ashore in the area that is known today as Golden Hill State Park, located 30 miles east of Fort Niagara in New York State. Following the reported loss of the *Ontario*, the British conducted a wide search of the area on land and water. A few days later only the ship's sails were found adrift in the lake. In late July 1781, six bodies from the *Ontario* were found approximately 12 miles east of the Niagara River near Wilson, NY. This was the extent of the items ever found from the ship until its recent discovery.

Built as a Sloop-of-War

In October 1779, the work of building a new "brig sloop" began at the dockyard on Carleton Island. Six months later construction of this vessel was nearly completed and on May 10, 1780 it was launched and named *HMS Ontario*. The brig sloop was 80 feet long with a 25 foot beam and contained two masts with a length of over 80 feet. She had a "burthen weight" (tonnage capacity) of over 226 tons and carried 22 cannon on board. Throughout the summer of 1780 the *Ontario* transported troops, stores, and civilian merchandise around and across Lake Ontario, stopping at Niagara and Carleton Island frequently, in addition to regular visits to Oswego. During this period it never came under attack from the American forces. In late September 1780, the *Ontario* sailed from Carleton Island fully loaded with troops, Mohawk, Seneca, and Onondaga scouts, canoes, and supplies for Fort Niagara. The return trip back would be the last and a most fatal voyage.

Search for the HMS Ontario

The search for the *Ontario* began 35 years ago for Jim Kennard, however after several frustrating years of searching, he abandoned the quest for this ship. Six years ago he teamed up with Dan Scoville to search for shipwrecks off the southern shore of Lake Ontario. Since then the shipwreck explorers have been successful in locating seven ships in the lake. Obtaining good research regarding the sinking of a shipwreck is critical in determining its location. This time Kennard obtained documents from both the British and Canadian archives relating to the ship disaster before setting out with Scoville to find *HMS Ontario*. Even with the best information available, it still took them 3 years and a search area that covered over 200 square miles of the lake before they found the ship.

The Discovery

The discovery of *HMS Ontario* was made in early June utilizing sophisticated side scan sonar technology. The sonar imagery clearly shows a large sailing ship partially resting on one side, with two masts reaching up more than 70 feet above the lake bottom. The remains of two crow's nests on each mast provided good confirmation that the sunken ship would be the brig-sloop *Ontario*. The ship was found between Niagara and Rochester, NY in an area of the lake where the depth extends to more than 500 feet. Due to the depth limitations for diving on this shipwreck, an underwater remote operated vehicle with deep dive capability, developed by Scoville, was utilized to explore and confirm the identity of the ship. Kennard and Scoville have since notified the New York State Office of Historic Preservation of their discovery of *HMS Ontario*.

Exploring the Shipwreck

In the deep depth where the *Ontario* lies there is no visible light to illuminate the ship. A remote operated vehicle with on-board cameras and high intensity lighting was deployed to bring back images of the sunken shipwreck. The schooner was found sitting upright on the bottom leaning over to one side. The masts are still in place rising up over 70 feet from the bottom. A portion of the bowsprit remains and just below it there is a beautifully carved scroll bow stem. Two of the cannons are visible in the bow area but they have come loose from their original positions. Two of the large anchors are clearly visible. One anchor is still secure in its original position and the other has dropped off to the side of the ship. The most characteristic feature of this ship are the quarter galleries that are located on either side of the stern area of the *Ontario*. A quarter gallery is a kind of balcony with windows that are typically placed on the sides of the stern-castle, a high, tower-like structure at the back of a ship that housed the officers' quarters. Both quarter galleries are there with some of the window glass still in place. Under the ship's tiller rests one of the small cannons that had been mounted on the stern deck of the ship. A few deadeyes and pulley blocks can be seen lying about in the wreckage. Many of the belaying pins that were used to secure lines are still located on the rails of the ship. All of the hatch covers and skylights are gone leaving a slight opening to the deck below, however, the ROV was not able to penetrate into the lower deck due to the silt that has been deposited over the years.

Tales of Treasure and the Holy Grail

HMS *Ontario* is considered to be one of the few "Holy Grail" shipwrecks in the Great Lakes. For years many divers and shipwreck hunters have searched the lake for the *Ontario* without success. Authors of shipwreck books speculated and then wrote tales of payroll treasure that might be on board the *Ontario*. This was far from the actual truth as any payroll for the troops would have been coming from Carleton Island, not from Fort Niagara. The book "Legend of the Lake" written by author Arthur Britton Smith in 1997 chronicles the history of HMS *Ontario* and provides an excellent treatise of the historical conditions between the British and the Americans during this period of time.

War Grave Site

The shipwreck of HMS *Ontario* is still considered to be British Admiralty property. The official record of the number of people on board the *Ontario* when she sank included: 74 military personnel, 9 women and children, 4 Indians, and 1 civilian. There were no prisoners-of-war officially listed by the British, however, private correspondence by an individual living at Fort Niagara indicated that there may have been a total of 120 people on board the ship including about 30 American prisoners. The shipwreck site of the *Ontario* is considered to be a British war grave and therefore should remain forever undisturbed.

Documenting the Shipwreck

Multiple cameras located on the underwater remote operated vehicle were utilized to document the condition of the ship providing over 80 minutes of color and black & white video imagery. There has been sufficient video documentation obtained so that it will never be necessary to return to the shipwreck site again. Kennard and Scoville plan to contact several TV production groups that may be interested in developing an historic program about HMS *Ontario*. In addition, they are considering the possibility of hosting a local dinner to premiere the showing of this historic shipwreck discovery.

Shipwreck Detectives

To search for and identify a potential shipwreck, more time is actually spent on land going through old newspapers on microfilm and conferring with shipwreck historians than on the lake searching. Guy Morin assisted in the research of the *Ontario* from reports that were documented in the Haldimand papers from the National Archives of Canada located in Ottawa. Ships that get caught in a storm become very broken up, the nameplate may become lost in the wreckage or the painted name on a ship can disappear over time. It is very important to do the research prior to conducting an expensive shipwreck search, especially when a ship may have actually been saved or salvaged later on. Once a ship is found, all efforts are made to confirm its name and history.

Lake Ontario Shipwrecks

There are estimated to have been over 4700 shipwrecks in the Great Lakes with approximately 500 occurring on Lake Ontario. Many of these ships were wrecked in a harbor or were driven on-shore where they were pounded to pieces. Probably fewer than 200 ships have actually been lost in the lake and there have only been a few notable shipwreck discoveries off the southern shore of Lake Ontario. Because lake depths often exceed several hundred feet just a few miles out from the southern shoreline, shipwrecks that are located in these depths are beyond the range of recreational divers and require costly search and support ship equipment to find them. For additional information, images, and to view a [short video](#) of the shipwreck of *HMS Ontario*, visit our website: www.shipwreckworld.com

Shipwreck Discovery Team

Jim Kennard has been diving and exploring the lakes in the northeast since 1970. He found over 200 shipwrecks in the Great Lakes, Lake Champlain, NY Finger Lakes and in the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers over the past 35 years. Using his background as an electrical engineer, he built the side scan sonar system that located these shipwrecks. In 1983 he discovered a unique horse powered ferryboat in Lake Champlain. National Geographic featured the ferryboat in their October 1989 issue. Several other of his shipwreck discoveries have been reported in various publications including *Skin Diver*, *Inland Seas*, and *Sea Technology*.

Dan Scoville is an experienced cave and "technical" diver who utilizes custom gas mixtures of oxygen, helium, and nitrogen to dive to depths of over 300 feet. In 2005, Dan led the development of an Underwater Remote Operated Vehicle with a team of college seniors from the Rochester Institute of Technology. Since then he has used his ROV to explore shipwrecks in Lake Ontario and to locate the bodies of three hunters from a lost Seabee Republic aircraft in Lac Simon, Quebec. He is currently the project manager and electrical engineer for the Remote Operated

Shipwreck Team Artist

Roland (Chip) Stevens is a retired architect and working artist whose artwork is well known in the Rochester area and has been accepted into numerous national exhibitions. A sailor for many years, Stevens has a love of the sea, as reflected in his seascape watercolor paintings. He has created paintings of the some of the recently discovered Lake Ontario shipwrecks that have appeared in various news stories and publications.

VIDEO: A segment of the raw video footage of the HMS Ontario shipwreck

[New HMS Ontario Book - NOW Available!](#)


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76 Comments

 by **Brad Ferguson** on 6/13/2008


I cannot imagine the thrill and excitement of finding such a significant item of historical interest and value as HMS Ontario. Congratulations on a job "very well done"!

 by **anonymous** on 6/13/2008

What an amazing story! This is really a most remarkable find and if the technology exists then there should be an effort to retrieve the wreck and restore it for a memorial and museum. 300+ years has passed and I would imagine the rescue and restoration would honor those that perished as well as those that built the ship.

 by **Mike Classen** on 6/13/2008

Congratulations on solving on of the greatest mysteries of our lakes. I have lived on Lake Superior most of my life and currently reside in Sault de Sainte Marie, Michigan. I'm an author here that writes regional history, so I am acutely aware of what a momentous achievement this is for you. I'm also a photographer and those underwater photos are incredible. Thanks for your efforts.

 by **Not anonymous** on 6/13/2008

Can we say, "Well, duh" to the anonymous poster who proposes to "retrieve the wreck" for display although the article clearly states that it is considered to be a war grave?

 by **McDeIT** on 6/13/2008


It is an amazing story and find, but I think it's best to leave it where it is. After all "The shipwreck site of the Ontario is considered to be a British war grave and therefore should remain forever undisturbed."

 by **James Slayton** on 6/13/2008

I think they should raise the ship, restore it and put in a museum. Leaving something like that at the bottom of lake floor does it an injustice. If graves were meant to be hidden and out of view, tombstones would be below ground, not above. Let's raise this ship, and let it show off it's history. Let it tell the story of the all the sailors that died. If we do not allow it to be raised, then we not only do ourselves an injustice, but also the sailors that died.

 by **Dennis Powers** on 6/13/2008

This is an incredible and significant find!! Congratulations, Jim (Kennard) and Dan (Scoville), and then once again; this is definite National Geographic and History Channel material, given the historic importance, long perseverance, and the story of finding the HMS Ontario: not only the oldest confirmed shipwreck found in the Great Lakes, but the only fully intact British—yes, British—warship discovered there. Amazing and salutes!

 by **Tom Turner** on 6/13/2008


Let's leave her where she lies. She is preserved in large part because she's in deep, cold water. Were we to raise her, not only would we (in my opinion) dishonor her dead, but we'd probably damage her in the process and hasten her decay. Besides, she doesn't belong to us. She belongs to the British Admiralty.

 by **Kurt Geiger** on 6/14/2008

No, No, No!!! You must bring her up for all to see. preservin her is not an insurmountable issue. She's not doing one bit of good sitting on the bottom of the lake. Have you seen the Vasa, the Hunley? Unforgettable! I disagree that she belongs to the British Admiralty. They gave her up the moment she went down. I know how easy it is to get emotional about Honor and all that, but think of Honor in the reverse sense. Honor her by bringing her back for all to see.

 by **James Longshore** on 6/14/2008


This is AMAZING ! Let's see ... 1780 was 4 years after our Declaration of Independence was signed. I think to raise the ship, may show us more of what society was like back then. Maybe we would find more "undisturbed" items, that would not come to light - without having it raised. Raising it, would just add one more piece to our US historical puzzle.

 by **anon.** on 6/14/2008


yeah I agree it should be brought to the surface when it can be brought up all of it at the same time (without breaking it apart intentionally or unintentionally). It needs to be restored and in a museum but also be shown in other countries. I would love to see it up and I wouldn't be able to travel there. Besides sooner or later it might be destroyed by people so for that reason all the things needs to get into the right hands(the right museum).

 by **Tony Bove** on 6/14/2008

To raise the ship and properly display her and all of her belongings in a museum, and to do so in a reverent way, to honor the dead, would be a gift to the British and the USA. Think of the joy that the decedents of those who perished would feel, to be able to see, up close and personable, the ship and artifacts recovered, that belonged to or were used by their ancestors.

 by **richard** on 6/14/2008

This is amazing. But where is the link to the short video? : "For additional information, images, and to view a short video of the shipwreck of the HMS Ontario, visit our website"

 by **Oslo** on 6/14/2008

What an amazing find! Congratulation to you who was there when the ROV saw that ship for the first time. What a thrill it must have been!

To raise a ship as old as this like this has been done before. Take a look the remarkable story of the Wasa in Stockholm.


<http://www.vasamuseet.se/InEnglish/about.aspx>

Ok, she was not at 150m, but its worth the effort; today the vasa gives people insight into what has been in a remarkable way.


 by **shipwreckworld** on 6/14/2008

Richard,

The short video will be up soon. It's still in the editing process right now, so check this page sometime today or tomorrow and hopefully we'll have it up. Thanks!


 by **Prissy** on 6/14/2008

Wow,that IS exciting, like our Northern hemisphere Jacques Cousteau:) I'm torn on leaving it at the bottom, its our history- looking forward to the documentary.

 by **Edward Crawford in London** on 6/14/2008

As a descendant of the commander of the Ontario, James Andrews, I would like to come to the dinner! Proof of my descendency I can provide (assuming the virtue of my female ancestors) but alas my Canadian 4th cousins do not appear to be so interested in their genealogy. This is an incredible find. What staggers me is the state of preservation of the vessel.

Edward Riou Crawford

 by **wow!** on 6/14/2008

Really interesting, especially about all those ships that have sunk in the great lakes. Don't take the ship out because it will decay.

 by **Oliver Butler - London** on 6/14/2008

Brilliant and fantastic. The stern just looks amazing - I'd love to look through those windows into the Captains quarters.


As for raising her - forget it. It's the last resting place of British servicemen and they must all be treated with the utmost respect regardless of time passed.

As for the person who said "the British gave her up when she sank" I suggest he reads up on the Commonwealth War graves Commission website for a bit of an introduction to how the British look after their fallen:

<http://www.cwgc.org/>

 by **Emerald Kristina Price** on 6/14/2008

Hey Arthur Britton Smith, get that book back in print: The Legend of the Lake.
I can't find it anywhere.


 by **JimKennard** on 6/14/2008

Brit Smith has indicated that he will most likely update the book with the details of the discovery with many of the pictures that we obtained of the shipwreck. Stay tuned in the future for when a new book will be published. Jim K.


 by **shipwreckworld** on 6/14/2008

To see raw video footage of the HMS Ontario taken by the ROV go here:
<http://www.shipwreckworld.com/weblink/raw-video-fo...>

Also on youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF_5RtN3nVJ

 by **Bob** on 6/14/2008


I would love to see this ship raised and in a museum.

 by **KSA** on 6/14/2008

Anyone know where I can get the names of crew, passengers, and possible pisoners?


 by **PatinLA** on 6/14/2008

Was reading "The French and Indian War" by Walter R. Bomenan last night and today a vidio of a real Man of War.
Outstanding, but let her rest, and keep location hidden. To many idiots will destroy this treasure.


 by **Kirk** on 6/14/2008

I'm curious, what are the particular rules as to when something is considered a war grave and when it isn't. Also what are the rules as to who owns the finds, in this example apparently the ship still belongs to the Brits, but I've seen other times where ships that are found seem to belong to the person who found them.


Either way as lovely as it would be to have those artifacts and the ship, I do completly understand leaving it lay. Even the people who died over 220 years ago deserve to have their remains respected.

 by **Dave** on 6/14/2008

Nice job... Im from Rochester, New York and it was in todays paper..... I became very interested... Thanks for the history behind the ship, very interesting

 by **CAPT. D. Peter Boucher, Dip.LA, MN (Ret.)** on 6/14/2008

This is quite an extraordinary find. One can well understand the conflict of raise her or leave her. Mr. Kurt Geiger is in fact mistaken in that the Admiralty "gave her up". Under maritime law she is still their ship. If she has been declared a "WAR GRAVE" it is forbidden by International Law to disturb her in any way. However it may be possible to get permission from the British War Graves Commission to raise her and any remains interred with military honours. Personally I would like to see her raised but it is a complex legal and engineering problem. Good Watch.


 by **Bill Smy** on 6/14/2008

One point on terminology:--


It is inappropriate to use the article "the" with the name of a British, Canadian, Australian or New Zealand warship. HMS stands for His Majesty's Ship, thus one would not say "the His Majesty's Ship". This is the case with HMS Ontario.

 by **XIOTISA** on 6/14/2008

Congratulations on your find! What a thrill it must have been. Unfortunately a nightmare for the crew. It should be left in its resting place. Although, I do wonder, how can the ship still belong to Britain, when after unanimous European court rulings, Britain still won't return Greek archaeological finds and parts of the Parthenon that their military stole.

 by **Glyn Garside** on 6/15/2008

Amazing. I caught my breath at the end of the clip when the camera comes around the stern. I was born in London, but I now live in Wisconsin, near Lake Michigan. Having seen the Wasa (which was brought from shallow water), I would like to see the Ontario recovered if this can be done safely and respectfully. Maybe it is too fragile.

 by **hearsejr** on 6/15/2008


I'm glad you found the wreck of the HMS Ontario, and I am sure you have the best of intentions about saving the ship. I do not agree that the wreck should be left on the bottom where it will be gone one day with ever being shown to the public. It should be raised and restored for the public to see up close and to get a real look at her. By simply saying mess like it's a war grave is a cop out. Most of the sailors... and I'm sure all of the captive Americans, did not want this to be their resting place. With the waters of the Great Lakes getting warmer every year it will not be long before wood-eating sea creatures get to it. Then you gotta add the chance of ships dragging anchors, and pollution, this ship will be gone and the only thing we'll have to remember her by is pictures you took of stuff that you think was worth looking at, and leave out very interesting things that sailors used in everyday life, or stuff that others will find very interesting. We know this ship was never used in battle, and that makes it a very far reach to claim it a war relic. If that is the case then we should leave every wrecked humvee on the side of the road if it happened during a war time. Talking about respect, what about respecting the wishes of the widows and parents and children who wanted to have their family buried beside them? Anyhow I am excited to see the video and most of my diving work is done on my sailboat, fishing boats, and tugs, I would love to see a real ship intact, but it will most likely never happen.
Bill

 by **Lee Stockhaus** on 6/15/2008

Congratulations on a great discovery. I have read extensively about the War of 1812 on the Great Lakes and didn't even realize the British had a naval presence during the War of Independence. Raising the ship would be exciting, but there are two American warships from the War of 1812, the Hamilton and Scourge, which were found years ago, are smaller and still they can't decide if it is practical to raise them for a museum setting. With the Bicentennial of the War of 1812 approaching, it might make more sense from a tourist perspective to focus on the other vessels first. I am looking forward to seeing the TV program. I hope the History Channel picks up the story and carries forward the production.

 by **W.G WILLIAMS 16/06/08** on 6/16/2008


My wife and I have the excitement of donating some train memorabilia the excitement of that was wonderful but all of you involved in this **THRILLING** discovery are to be thanked profoundly for your dedication, effort, doggedness well done. Hail HMS Ontario!

 by **Bob** on 6/16/2008

Bill Smy - it's also inappropriate to say "ATM machine" yet people do it all the time.


Congrats to the team who made such a significant discovery.

And for all those saying "blah blah it needs to be raised even though British sailors died there," I am sure you will support raising the USS Arizona so it can go on display, too.


 by **CAPT. D. Peter Boucher, Dip.LA, MN (Ret.)** on 6/16/2008

To Bob: USS "Arizona" is on display beautifully, respectfully and under guard of U.S. Parks Service. One is escorted out to her in launches operated by the U.S. Navy in white. She lives just below the water quite visible. I have visited her each time in Honolulu and it is always moving experience. One can see the droplets of oil slowly coming to the surface after all these years. After 60 years of seagoing I still tear-up on seeing that.

To Bill Smy: You are quite correct in the use of "the" prior to HMS though perhaps a bit picky. However review your comment and please use spellcheck next time. After all none of us are perfect we just try our best don't we. Good Watch.

 by **hearsejr** on 6/16/2008

First thing y'all need to overlook my spelling, I'm just no good at it, plus the keys stick on my new laptop. Hahaha any way, part of the USS ARIZONA is in a scrap pile somewhere near the base. I remember watching the story of it on the P.B.S. channel here in N.C., once. They showed the twisted pile and gave a short history lesson on it, and it is watched very closely by the parks service, but is not on display... or it was not at the time.

 by **hearsejr** on 6/16/2008

Here is a site about some of the items that have been salvaged from the USS ARIZONA,
<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/arizonali...>

also one ponders that the USS ARIZONA was attacked and sunk during a battle, where (the) HMS ONTARIO was sunk by a storm.

 by **Danielle Norton** on 6/17/2008

I think this was a wonderful discovery. I was amazed to read that Don Scoville and Jim Kennard are electrical engineers! I am a electrical engineering student myself, and didn't know there were so many interesting uses for EE.


Thanks, Danielle

 by **JimKennard** on 6/17/2008

Danielle: I thought that you would be interested in knowing that the underwater remote operated vehicle (ROV) was initially developed as a senior design project in 2005 at Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, NY. and led by Dan Scoville. The senior design team designed and built the working ROV in less than 6 months which was a great achievement for those college seniors in this short a time period. The ROV worked perfectly the very first time it was operated in the college pool. The ROV is now a commercial product sold by Hydroacoustics (Rochester, NY). Dan is the ROV project manager. Yes, there are still many exciting and wonderful opportunities to pursue as an electrical engineer in the future. Best of luck in your chosen career. Jim


 by **JimKennard** on 6/17/2008

Danielle: As a side note: Dan's 1 1/2 year old daughter is named Danielle !


 by **hearsejr** on 6/17/2008

JimKennard, are you talking about the ROV that was used for the search for HMS ONTARIO was made in 05? I used to operate a Phantom 4000 R.O.V., for small jobs and exploring wrecks of fishing boats. we had a huge one that was built around 1989, and was heavier then a small car, but we never could find an excuse to use it....plus we would have hire a tug to carry it. last I heard a few guys from Japan were buying it and they had shipped it to C.A. it was way out dated.


Bill YES, the original ROV was developed as a senior design project in 2005 and has since been upgraded over the past 3 years as it was developed into a commercial product.

 by **anon** on 6/18/2008

The Hunley is being restored in Charleston, SC. I see no difference between this ship as a war grave and the Hunley which was also a war grave. It should be raised,the crew remains interred with honors, the ship restored, and placed on display for all to learn from and enjoy.

 by **Patricia** on 6/18/2008

From one of the web sites listed in the article about the HMS Ontario, and her discovery after all these years. Just wonderful. Really enjoyed it. QUESTION: Has there been any work done on the names of all who were lost on the ship. YES. QUESTION: Were there records at the Admiralty in England, that might at least give a crew's list, the names?? DONT KNOW QUESTION: Was there any land records of those prisoners as listed as also being lost. NO it does seem odd that the ship would just be lost, go down and seem to settle nicely on its side, slightly, not broken up in pieces, as would have been the case had she been tossed about by a very turbulent storm. AIR TRAPPED BELOW THE DECKS WOULD HAVE KEPT THE ONTARIO SOMEWHAT BOUYANT MINIMIZING THE RAPID DESCENT I too would not wish the ship to be too greatly disturbed but would be interested to know more about her. The WHY, etc.


 by **hearsejr** on 6/18/2008

Patricia, I have the same question, as to how she went down so gentle like with out busting some of the glass. I am thinking that back in them days the glass windows on a ship, were huge by todays standers and more brittle then what we use now. in most of the wrecks I see on fishing boats and tugs, with bigger windows on the pilot house they get busted up pretty good in rough seas. could this ship have hit something...maybe a log.. and holed her hull? don't laugh I seen it happen to a sail boat once and it happened to a 38' shrimiboat in the Pamlico sound NC. the shrimper was an older wood vessle that made it to a boat yard, and never sunk, but did take on an unbelievable amount of water in a short time, but other boats and crew bought pumps and canvas and the boat is still working today.

Bill

 by **John R. Stevens.** on 6/18/2008

Fifty years' ago, as a friend of C. H. J. Snider in Toronto, I did considerable research of early Great Lakes ships, particularly warships. I made drawings of the Ontario from the Admiralty draught. Never thought I would see photographs of the actual ship! Made drawings of the 1789 Detroit-built schooner Nancy, from the hull remains, and the same for the schooner Tecumseth(1814).

 by **Larry** on 7/2/2008

This is an important find. You need to bring it up to preserved the ship and to bury any remains. However, I doubt there are any human remains left. Otherwise, just like the Titanic, someone else will find it and they will destroy it. The only way to prevent this grave site from being desecrated is to raise the ship with honors and have it properly preserve in a facility that tells its story. We need to stop being naive and accept the fact that there are people who will do anything to rob this grave site.

 by **Dave Andrews** on 7/4/2008

Incredible discovery! Congratulations. I think she should be recovered and with all respect to her crew and unfortunate prisoners be preserved in their memory.

I have been overwhelmed to see HMS Victory, USS Constitution, The Warship Vassa in Stockholm and Henry VIIIth Flag ship, The Mary Rose and of course USS Arizona which will bring tears to the eyes of anyone who visits her. If permission can be obtained from the British War Graves Commission to raise HMS Ontario, restore her and memorialize her crew for future generations to reflect on their lives. I see no disrespect in doing so, beter to do this than have

some misguided diver accidentally come upon her and destroy a part of history.


 by **joedawg36@hotmail.com** on 7/17/2008

is it possible to see the ship underwater (from a distance) at its side view? showing it from keel? to mast?


 by **JimKennard** on 7/17/2008

NO, it was not possible to see the ship from a distance. There is no natural light at the depth where the Ontario lies.

However, I am looking at our video and trying to determine if it is possible to make a mosaic image of the side of the ship from images taken from the video.

 by **Anne** on 7/18/2008

I really think that it is "Her Majesty the ship" not his majesty...ships are all she except they say the battleship Bismark....that is the only ship that has that title.... I am a ship geek and I read look and study them....it is my hobby...my favorite the SS United States....I would like to see her become a museum????

 by **Anne** on 7/18/2008

I remember a few years back camping at golden hills state park in Barker NY reading about the HMS ONTARIO somewhere near that area...it is so thrilling to read about it and to see the pics of the sunken British warship....raising it sounds so thrilling....probably not going to happen.

 by **Cordelia** on 7/20/2008

HMS: "His" Majesty's Ship – the ship of King George III. To raise the ship would be desecration; it would be destroyed. Not only do we not have the technology to do it without severely damaging it; who will fund the operation? How will it be housed and preserved? There is much much more involved in properly preserving, cataloguing, interpreting and displaying this valuable artifact than you realize.

 by **Champlain Mad Hatter** on 7/24/2008

Well they know where the Hamilton and the Scourge are.. and those two wrecks are in around 300 feet of water. There has been lots of gossip on the desire to raise them, but since Parks Canada has no money to raise let alone conserve or house them. I dont see the US/Brit govt. spending the \$\$\$ to raise/conserve/house this or any other wreck. For now they just catalog the condition and location, and that is all they should do..

 by **Thomas O'Donnell** on 7/28/2008

Thought you'd enjoy reading about this project underway..

<http://thedespatch.wordpress.com/>

An Astrolab was discovered during a dive in this same area, several years back.. from an earlier wreck.. actually I think two Astrolabs in total..

Would any remnants of The Despatch still exist near the site.. ? Very doubtful..

Or from the other related wreck.. the Rankin, 10 years later.

Regardless, the story of The Despatch and the Harvey Family is one of the most elusive and little known stories in the history of Maritime Rescue..

Best regards..

and keep up the incredible work you're doing..

Tom

Thomas D'Arcy O'Donnell

Toronto, Ontario

 by **Chris - Buffalo NY** on 10/18/2008


Absolutely fascinating. I grew up in Niagara County, NY and consider myself to be a history sponge, especially local history. I have visited the places mentioned in the article quite often, (Golden Hill, Fort Niagara and Wilson) and I actually got chills when I read about how they tie in to the history of the ship. I look forward to hearing more about this, and hopefully getting some national coverage on the Discovery or National Geographic channels. I can't even begin to imagine how it must feel to be a part of this wonderful discovery, especially after all the years of hard work (and money!) that have been, ahem... "sunk" into this project. (Sorry. Couldn't resist.)

Well done, and I'll be looking for the info on any premiere events happening.


Thank you.

 by **Brian - Baldwinsville NY** on 11/10/2008

I notice everyone seems very set on either raising the ship, or not. I propose that anyone willing to shell out the cash to properly raise the ship, would be better off commissioning a replica as a memorial. Nothing says more about the life of our ancestors than living history reenactments.

 by **Richard** on 12/14/2008


Explore it, leave it, build another.

 by **Joe** on 12/16/2008

Fantastic discovery great photos, can't wait to see the film. One point on the photograph captions: That is a top, not a crow's nest. All vessels that have a topmast have tops where the lower mast and the topmast connect. Their purpose is to give an angle to the topmast shrouds so that they support the topmast properly. No ship in the 1780's had a crow's nest. That term came into use in the early 1800's and was used to refer to the lookout post on Arctic whaleships which is located at the very top of the mast. In order to keep the lookout from freezing to death in short order, Arctic whaleships would mount a barrel or some kind of windbreak for the lookout to stand in. Other sailors thought it looked like some bird had built a nest in the mast, hence 'crow's nest'. Sorry if this sounds like a rant, but this is a question I deal with ALL the time. No offense intended to anybody.

As to raising her ...


As a war grave she can't be disturbed UNLESS the British government gives permission to do so. The Hunley was U.S. Navy property (yes I know she's a confederate vessel, but by default all ownership of all confederate vessels was bestowed on the U.S. Navy) and I believe the Navy gave permission for the salvage. In Ontario's case, as Brian said, even assuming the Brits gave permission, building a recreation would be just as effective and less expensive.

 by **ian** on 3/31/2009

hi im a uk resident and i personally feel that the ship should be left where it is and leave the poor souls that went down with the ship to lay in slumber to put into perspective if the uk asked the u.s. to raise the arizona how would that make you feel i realise we would never do that but for arguments sake how would you feel if your brave sailors grave's where disturbed

 by **Mike Kahr** on 3/31/2009

While it seems logical to bring this piece of history from the deep, it should only be done if it can be preserved in a better state than it is now. None of the above comments seem to remember what happened to the Alvin Clark, a 19th century schooner which was raised in Green Bay (Lake Michigan) in the 70's. She was brought to the surface and actually floated! At the time the most perfectly preserved shipwreck in the world. Unfortunately there was no funding to preserve her and she slowly rotted away to nothing. I would hate to see this happen to this wreck. I do worry about invasive (known and future unknowns) taking a toll where she lies however.

 by **Jim Kennard** on 3/31/2009


And to add to Mike's point above, the remains of the schooner Alvin Clark eventually ended up in a land fill !

 by **Bruce Lynch** on 4/24/2009

Very remarkable find! Congratulations on the book publication about the HMS Ontario. In search of records on the "Superior" – a Great Lakes vessel with a similar configuration of a brig to the HMS Ontario. Two masts with fore and aft sails like a Great Lakes sloop. Was this a hybrid developed for Great Lakes sailing conditions. Surely will appreciate replies.

 by **andre lorin** on 11/23/2009

Dont forget that wooden hull preservation is very difficult. 40 years after rising VASA from Baltic sea, chemical changes inside the hull occurs and sulfur contained inside the wood, coming from iron bolts corrosion give sulfuric acid. Iron is very present in XVIIIe and XIXe warships (cannons, bolts...): Conservation engineers must resolve the problem before rising a new wooden hull from the sea. Hunley submarine has an iron smaller hull and metal conservation is more easy and cheaper.

 by **Harold Young** on 1/17/2010

I know that myself, I would rather be brought up and have a proper burial and headstone instead of lying in the cold, dark, waters. The ship would be a most valuable piece of history for all to look at in a museum somewhere!

 by **John D. Rae** on 3/12/2010

G'day there, Mates,

You may be interested in finding out that the HMS Ontario, has actually been sighted sailing Lake Ontario! No word of a lie, I have personally witnessed, the HMS Ontario, sailing off the coast of Cobourg Ontario! Feel free to read my eyewitness account:

<http://www.torontoghosts.org/index.php?/20090412620/Transportation-Reports/The-HMS-Ontario.html>

 by **Robin** on 4/8/2010

The Mary Rose has taken tens of years to preserve and most of that you could hardly see her. The costs alone would be millions to constantly spray her with water then poly ethylene glycol.

I have been involved in preservation of smaller artifacts and it is not an easy job plus the Zebra mussels may actually be all that's holding her together. I agree though over time she will deteriorate whether it's Zebra mussels, torpedos or chemical corrosion.

I have dived on many wrecks of this age that people died on and not all are considered a war grave but most are still admiralty property. In the UK we have many problems stopping looters or tides and weather eroding the sites.

It's highly controversial as to whether to salvage and preserve or leave where it is but from my point of view the only reason to leave it is if it's a grave and the remains of the dead are still alive or if it's nice for divers and a reef for fish and good for the ecology.

I have seen so much smashed, washed away and damaged it's criminal if it's in a turbulent location to not put it in a museum.

I have produced quite a few DVDs on this for several wrecks.

The problem with this is it's probably too fragile, too deep and as correctly put admiralty property with dead probably still on it. It's not our decision.

 by **avid Lake O fishermen** on 4/9/2010

Absolutely fascinating! I spend a lot of time out in the deep blue water fishing all the time I have spent out there I never once thought about what was going on out there 300 years ago! I wonder what the fishing was like back then? I still see a lot of boats with cannons on them but I prefer big jons on my boat:)

Jim, Dan
Excellent work!


If there is ever a movie made on this I would like to audition for captain! I will proudly go down with the ship for a few hundred thousand:)

 by **JimKennard** on 4/9/2010

Thank you Avid Lake O fisherman —

To learn more about the details and view many of the underwater images of HMS Ontario and learn about the events going on during the Revolutionary War period at that time I suggest that you might enjoy reading the Discovery Edition of Legend of the Lake. Available in many libraries and also here through our Shipwreckworld Store & Books. See the Legend of the Lake book details:

<http://www.shipwreckworld.com/articles/legend-of-the-lake-discovery-edition>

 by **will** on 1/17/2011


that is so cool

 by **I am a person** on 3/13/2011

What an amazing story, I am so happy they found this. However, what about the Iroquois/Anson which was discovered near Wellesley Island in the 1000 Islands: wasn't it sunk before the Ontario?

 by **shipwreckworld** on 3/17/2011

The Iroquois is not in the Great Lakes. The scattered remains of that ship is in the St Lawrence River.

 by **popeye** on 1/30/2012

I'm a model ship builder and very interested in your discovery of HMS Ontario. I am at present completing a large 4 foot model of the ship in very fine detail. It is being crafted from all hand made wooden parts.

 by **TURN Washington Spies** on 8/17/2016

To Andre Lorin. Remember that this ship is lying in freshwater not saltwater. Corrosion would be minimal at best!

 by **Col. Gadsden** on 8/21/2016

If they were to find 20-30 sets of shackles in her hold then by all means raise her. She can be listed as a war prize to the USA and a proper burial ceremony can then be administered. The British Admiralty has always been known to keep some pretty bad secrets. Lusitania was a perfect example of a British Auxiliary Cruiser carrying armaments which brought the USA into WWI with serious brevity.

 by **MatthewAndersonUS80** on 11/1/2016

Fantastic discovery! 236 years and she doesn't look a day over 5 years! I'm glad such a magnificent ship, especially an 18th century Royal Naval vessel, is this well intact. Hopefully she'll last for centuries to come.

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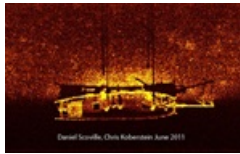


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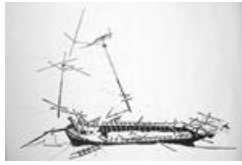
The wreck of a U.S. Air Force C-45 aircraft abandoned during flight by its crew in 1952 has been located in deep water off Oswego, New York. Crippled by the failure of one of its two engines the plane continued on a 65 mile pilotless flight until it... [more »](#)





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Oswego, NY - A rare 18th century built sloop, Washington (also known as Lady Washington), has been discovered in Lake Ontario off the shores of Oswego, New York by a team of shipwreck explorers. Jim Kennard, Roger Pawlowski, and Roland Stevens located... [more »](#)



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Rochester, New York – The battered remains of the Canadian schooner Ocean Wave, which capsized and eventually sank from a sudden and violent squall, has been found in the depths of Lake Ontario. Shipwreck explorers Jim Kennard, Roger Pawlowski and... [more »](#)



Divers locate Coast Guard boat sunk in 1977

The US Coast Guard boat, which sank in a storm December 1, 1977, has been located by local divers, Jim Kennard and Dan Scoville. [more »](#)



Rare Sailing Craft Found in Lake Ontario

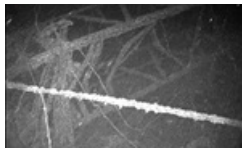
Oswego, New York – A rare sailing craft identified as a scow-sloop has been located in deep water off Oswego, NY. In August 1872 the scow-sloop Black Duck was enroute from Oswego to Sackets Harbor when it foundered in a northwest gale. Only a small... [more »](#)



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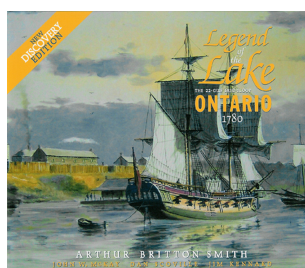
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