

# 140 years of history lifted from the sands of Southampton



ROBERT WILSON, RECORD STAFF

Workers lift a 140-year-old barge in Southampton yesterday, a move that prepares the site for the excavation of the HMS General Hunter, which is buried beneath the barge.

## Marine history discovered in 2001 finally raised out of Southampton's sand

Wooden barge used in 1870s construction of dock makes a short trip to a new hole in safe, wet sand

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### SOUTHAMPTON

To the sound of applause and clicking cameras, a piece of Southampton marine history was successfully lifted yesterday from the sands of the public beach and reburied a short distance down the beach.

A steady stream of people lined the beach as word got around this Lake Huron resort town that the wooden barge, used in the construction in the 1870s of the long dock connecting the town to nearby Chantry Island, was being raised.

"I find this quite exciting," said Carole Lup-ton, a Southampton resident who spent the morning watching the show. "I have never seen anything like this before."

Pointing to the about 35 spectators, project director Ken Cassavoy said many of them have forefathers who worked on barges such as this one, transporting rocks to the dock construction site.

"They were not fancy vessels, but they were workhorses," Cassavoy said, adding little is known about these flat-bottom vessels, which had a hand-operated crane.

The raising of the barge went without a hitch. It took four minutes for a crane to lift it up from its home for the past 140 years, and place it in a four-metre deep hole about 30 metres down the beach.

It then took two hours to gently fill in the hole and return the barge to the safe environment of wet sand.

This story dates back to the Easter weekend of 2001 when a Southampton resident discovered ribs of a ship sticking up through the sand.

Several digs later and much research, it was discovered two boats were lying beneath the sands.

One was the barge, and the other turned out to be the hull of the HMS General Hunter, a British naval brig, built 200 years ago, and captured by the Americans in the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813.

"It is one of the few shipwrecks in the Great Lakes that is related to the War of 1812," said Patrick Folkes, a marine historian.

"Her decks were red with blood from that battle," Folkes said.

In August 1816, the ship was sailing as an American merchant vessel, under the shortened name of Hunter, when it was washed ashore during a violent storm on Lake Huron.

No one died.

About 60 years later, the barge also washed ashore and ended partly on top of the General Hunter under the sands.

The barge was moved for two reasons.

Last year, low lake levels and dramatic changes to the line of the beach caused part of this wooden vessel to be exposed, and despite the building of a temporary breakwater to protect it from the forces of the lake, wave action tore seven or eight timbers off the barge, said Cassavoy, a marine archeologist. Several of those timbers have been recovered from the lake.

The second reason relates to a long-term project to excavate the General Hunter's hull and display it in a specially designed building, hopefully at the Southampton museum, where a cannon and other military artifacts from that warship are already on display.

Since the barge lay partially on top of the warship, the raising of the barge was the first step in excavating the larger ship.

The major stumbling block to the larger plan is its \$3 million cost.

"If there is someone out there who would like a shipwreck named after them, for \$3 million, we could arrange that," said Cassavoy, a retired Trent University professor who now lives in Southampton.

Ken Rothenberg, another Southampton resident and volunteer on the project, said the raising of the barge is the talk of the town.

"I think it has galvanized a lot of interest. It is one more factor in claiming the town's marine heritage," Rothenberg.

Scarlett Janusas, an archeologist who has worked throughout Ontario, said Southampton is unique in the amount of community support and volunteer work given to this project.

"I think a community that backs its heritage is a community with a future," Janusas said.

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Workers prepare to lift a 140-year-old barge at Southampton yesterday.

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