

THE INFLUENCE OF THE WAR OF 1812 ON GREAT LAKES SHIPBUILDING

A Thesis

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Excavation on the exterior of the vessel did not reveal the rudder or any of the associated hardware. Exterior excavations revealed Roman numeral draft marks located on both the stern and stem posts. They were located only on the port side on the stempost and the starboard side on the sternpost. Several types of fasteners were observed throughout the vessel, but the mitigative nature of the excavations did not allow time for determining their pattern. An assortment of iron nails, iron bolts, and treenails were employed (Cassavoy 2005: 38-39).

Great care and attention to detail was employed in the construction of *General Hunter*. This is demonstrated in the time consuming labor of notching the keelson to fit over the floors and the use of treenails for fastening the vessel. The craftsmanship of the shipwright is noted in the fact that the joints between the planks were still tight and uniform nearly two hundred years later. The use of limber boards to access the bilge water ensured that water would not pool in the hull and cause rot. All of these factors indicate that the vessel was intended to have a long career on the upper lakes.

Hamilton (Diana) and Scourge (Lord Nelson)

The *Lord Nelson*, later named *Scourge*, was a merchant vessel constructed in Niagara, Ontario and launched 1 May 1811 (Cain 1983: 36). While shipping goods across Lake Ontario, the schooner was stopped by U.S. Navy Lieutenant Woolsey. Upon suspicion of smuggling goods from the States to Canada, the schooner was confiscated and eventually ended up in the American fleet at Sacket's Harbor (Cain 1983: 54-55). The *Diana*, later renamed *Hamilton*, was a merchant schooner built at Oswego, NY in 1809 (Cain 1983: 27). On 12 October 1812, the schooner was purchased by the U.S. Navy for service in the Lake Ontario squadron (Cain 1983: 65). The converted merchant ships had their bulwarks raised and heavy guns added, making them very top heavy vessels. The heavy weight of these guns ultimately led to their sinking

during a squall near present day Port Dalhousie, Ontario on 7 August 1813 (Nelson 1983: 290). The account of the night was later recorded in detail by one of the survivors, Ned Myers (Cooper 1843).

During the night, both the British and American fleets anchored near Twelve Mile Creek on the British side of the Niagara River. Myers reported that the British fleet was “so near, indeed, that we could almost count their ports...Our object was to get together lest the enemy should cut off some of our small vessels during the night” (Cooper 1843: 78). As mentioned earlier, it was not the British that caused the loss of the two American schooners that night, but a severe and sudden squall. Myers recalled that “a flash of lightening almost blinded me. The thunder came the next instant, and with it a rushing of winds that fairly smothered the clap” (Cooper 1843: 81). The *Hamilton* and *Scourge* both foundered in this unexpected squall. Only sixteen crewmembers from these ships survived.

Searches for both wrecks began in 1971 by Dr. Daniel Nelson, an avocational archaeologist from St. Catharines, Ontario, using the logbook of HMS *Wolfe* to pinpoint the location. In 1972, magnetometer and side-scan sonar searches were conducted, and likely targets were revealed in 1973. In 1975, researchers used deep-tow side-scan sonar to gain the first views of the vessels, upright on the lakebed with their masts still intact, as if they had peacefully floated to the bottom (Cain 1983: 130-131). The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), which had collaborated with Dr. Nelson in the search for the schooners, persuaded the U.S. Navy to sign over the rights of the vessels in 1979. For the rights, the ROM agreed to study the wrecks with the goal of determining if they could be raised and displayed. Also, any human remains uncovered would be returned to the United States. These are the only U.S. naval vessel that have been released from American ownership. After a few months, the ROM gave responsibility of

the vessels to the City of Hamilton. In the early 1980s, Jacques Crouseau, and then National Geographic filmed the schooners, bringing a great deal of publicity to the wrecks. This publicity led John Lehman, American naval secretary at the time, to offer to help raise the wrecks in exchange for the *Hamilton* and its artifacts (Cain 1983: 131-132). The City of Hamilton declined and, until recently, no detailed archaeological studies have been conducted.

In the past decade, evidence has been uncovered that divers have recently been visiting the site (Moore and Keyes 2009: 148). Diving visitation was not a problem at the time of discovery, as they lay in 300 feet of water, well beyond the range of sport diving equipment, but modern technology has now allowed divers to explore these underwater graves. The City of Hamilton has installed a radar system to warn against unauthorized divers; however, with sophisticated breathing apparatus, this system can be eluded and these sites are now in danger of being looted. These wrecks are the most complete and intact examples of converted merchantmen on the Great Lakes. As such, they are extremely significant sites.

In 2008 and 2009, a site condition survey was conducted of the two wrecks, initiated by the City of Hamilton working with Parks Canada and other partners. A remotely operated vehicle (ROV) was utilized to inspect the ships for quagga and/or zebra mussel growth and to carry out further archaeological recording (Keyes and Moore 2009: 129; Moore et. al. 2011). In preparation for the ROV survey, two multi-beam sonar surveys were conducted by the Canadian Hydrographic Service in 2004 and 2005. Parks Canada conducted a week long side scan sonar survey in 2007. The aim of these surveys was to obtain more images of the wrecks and their debris fields to support planning for the ROV inspection (Harris et al. 2009: 141-143).

The original construction of the *Diana* and *Lord Nelson* and their conversion into the United States Navy armed schooners *Hamilton* and *Scourge* are poorly documented in the

historical record. Information about their construction, including lines plans, construction drawings and contemporary images are lacking. Some historic documents do provide glimpses of their construction, for instance an account book for the building of *Lord Nelson (Scourge)* and first hand operations of the *Scourge* by Ned Myers (Cain 1985; Cooper 1843). The 2008 site survey collected data that was used to determine the dimensions of both the vessels and to create a preliminary scaled site plan, unlike the previous not to scale rough sketched site plans (Lockhart et al. 2009).

During the 2008 survey, the ROV was only able to obtain interior views from the forward hatch of *Scourge*, since the aft hatch was blocked by fallen pikes. Views of the deck beam stanchions, the riding bitts, and the base of the foremast were observed from the forward hatch. A great deal of damage was evident since the last ROV dives in 1990. Damage was observed on the starboard stern quarter and at the transom where planking has separated from the counter timbers. The iron bowsprit cap has broken and the jib boom has separated from the vessel and lies on the lakebed (Moore and Keyes 2009: 152-153). Both dual-axis and sector sonar scans were conducted in order to accurately map the two wrecks. The length of *Scourge* from the taffrail to the knighstheads was determined to be 57.4 ft. (17.5 m). The overall length of the vessel could not be determined since the jib boom had separated from the rest of the vessel, and the end of the bowsprit was not captured in the scans. The maximum breadth at deck level was measured at 14.4 ft. (4.4 m), the midship breadth at 13.1 ft. (4 m), and the stern breadth at 12.8 ft. (3.9 m). The distance from the foremast to the bow was 10.8 ft. (3.3 m), the distance between the two masts 21.3 ft. (6.5 m), and the distance from the mainmast to the stern was 25.6 ft. (7.8 m). Interior deck beams were visible at the stern of the vessel through the stern gallery windows and were spaced 1.6 ft. (0.5 m) apart (Lockhart et al. 2009: 177-178).

Video and photos of *Scourge* reveal that the planks are mostly intact and the hull appears to be in good condition, except for the transom. However, the dual-axis sonar data revealed that there is some warping of the hull as it is twisted from bow to stern. Furthermore, the sonar data revealed that the starboard bow bulwark was slightly caved in. This may have been caused during the wrecking, and is not observed below the bulwarks. The bulwarks were part of the modification of the merchant vessel to a warship, and video from 1982 suggests that they were roughly constructed. By comparing the 2007-2008 data with previous site plans, it is clear that these two schooners are smaller than previously believed (Lockhart et al. 2009: 178-179).

ROV inspection of *Hamilton* revealed that mussels now covered almost all of the surfaces of the vessel, more heavily on the horizontal surfaces and the ordnance. Interior video footage was taken at the open aft hatch and the forward hatch. At the aft hatch, a transverse bulkhead dividing the stern cabin was observed, which had two openings leading forward. At the foot of the ladder was a rack of approximately 10 muskets resting in place. Also a possible berth or low stowage box was seen against the starboard hull. Much of the cabin was filled with sediment and some mussel occupation; therefore, other interior features could not be distinguished. Through the forward hatch opening, two wooden steps nailed to a deck beam stanchion were observed. Some indistinct components of the lower hull could be seen projecting from the silt (Moore and Keyes 2009: 150-151). The sector-scan images revealed that *Hamilton*'s determined length from the taffrail to the knightsheads measured 65 ft. (19.8 m) in length. The midship breadth measured 18.7 ft. (5.7 m) and the stern breadth 15.7 ft. (4.8 m). The distance from the mainmast to the stern measured 30.2 ft. (9.2 m). Determined length for *Scourge* was 57.4 ft. (17.5 m), measured from the taffrail to the knightshead. The midship

breadth measured 13.1 ft. (4 m). The distance from the mainmast to the stern measured 25.6 ft. (7.8 m) (Lockhart et al. 2009: 177-8).

Both vessels demonstrated elaborate figureheads that embellished their bows. *Scourge* (originally *Lord Nelson*) displayed the striding figure Admiral Horatio Nelson on the prow of the vessel (Figure 3-8). Nelson died at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and was the most celebrated contemporary naval hero. Although it was a well-known fact that Nelson lost his right arm in 1797, the figurehead was depicted with both arms. The striding pose of the figurehead is common in the 19th century (Cain 1983: 55). The figurehead of *Hamilton* (originally *Diana*) represented the classical goddess of the hunt and motherhood, Diana. On her left side, the goddess is portrayed with only her quiver and its strap, while she is portrayed in Empire dress on the right. Her hairstyle is suggestive of an ancient warrior's helmet. Partially-clad goddess figureheads were common throughout the 19th century, though typically in classical rather than contemporary dress (Cain 1983: 40).



Figure 3-8: Figure of Lord Horatio Nelson on the prow of the *Scourge* (originally *Lord Nelson*) (Cain 1983: 55).

Since in depth archaeological recording of these wrecks has not been completed due to the limiting factors of their location, it is difficult to determine their specific construction details and techniques. It is clear from their excellent preservation more than two hundred years later that they were sturdy and well-constructed vessels. Desire for ornamentation on these vessels demonstrates that attention to detail was important to the owners of the vessels and that these were schooners that were intended for use over a considerable length of time. These vessels do present a remarkable understanding of what merchant craft at this time resembled since they remain intact. It is possible to understand their modification from merchant vessels to warships by observing the addition of the upper works and deck layout of these two vessels. Further study of these two vessels will yield a great deal of information about merchant craft from the early 19th century.

Pre-War of 1812 Vessel Attributes

The Anglo-American vessels built in North America from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century demonstrate differences between freshwater and ocean going vessels as well as merchant and naval vessels through their hull shapes and construction techniques. *Defence* exhibited a very sharp design, with a V-shaped entrance forward. This was critical in its role as a privateer, where speed was essential. The other vessels operated on the inland lakes where a shallow draft was advantageous for navigating the shoals of the lakes. These vessels displayed flat floors that reduced their draft at the expense of speed. While speed may have been desired in the warship *Boscawen*, the ability to duck into shallow harbors was of greater value. For the merchant vessels *Nancy*, *Lord Nelson*, *Diana*, as well as *General Hunter*, whose primary role in the Provincial Marine was that of a transport vessel, the full shape of their hulls allowed for increased hold space for transporting goods, and stability, which were more important than