

**HIS MAJESTY'S HIRED TRANSPORT SCHOONER**

*NANCY*

A Thesis

by

CHRISTOPHER R. SABICK

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2004

Major Subject: Anthropology

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**ABSTRACT**

His Majesty's Hired Transport Schooner

*Nancy*. (May 2004)

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In 1997 a group of archaeologists from Texas A&M University's Nautical Archaeology Program traveled to Wasaga Beach, Ontario to document the hull remains of the eighteenth-century schooner *Nancy*. In 1927, the schooner was recovered from the banks of an island in the Nottawasaga River, near its confluence with Lake Huron. The hull is now on display in the Nancy Island Historic Site. Despite being available to the public for more than 75 years, the 1997 documentation was the first to thoroughly record the construction of the vessel. The hull data have become the basis for an on-paper reconstruction of the vessel. In addition to archaeological investigation, historical research was carried out to further our understanding of *Nancy's* commercial and naval career.

The archaeological data reveal a schooner that was built by talented shipwrights using the fine timber harvested around the Great Lakes in the eighteenth-century. This study adds a considerable amount of new information to the otherwise scanty base of knowledge available on the construction of early Great Lakes sailing vessels.

Historical research shows that *Nancy* and her crews were participants in many important events that shaped the Great Lakes Region. From her construction in Detroit in 1789, *Nancy* was employed in the fur trade. As tensions flared between Great Britain and

the United States in 1812, *Nancy* was utilized as an armed transport for the British forces around the lakes. In August of 1814, the schooner was trapped in the Nottawasaga River by a strong American naval force. *Nancy*'s commander set fire to the vessel to deny it to the enemy.

This thesis examines the construction details and history of the schooner *Nancy* in detail. Preliminary chapters will provide the historical context for the vessel and describe *Nancy*'s long journey that ended at the Nancy Island Historic Site. The second half of the thesis describes the construction of the schooner and compares it to other contemporary vessels. The study concludes that *Nancy*'s hull represents an eighteenth-century construction tradition modified for use on the Great Lakes, and also demonstrates the vessel's dual roles as trader and military transport.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The study of the construction and history of *Nancy* could not have been completed without the support of numerous people. First of all, I would like to thank the *Nancy* recording team, which consisted of Erich Heinold, Brian Atchison, Chris Patlevony, and Eric Emery. I would also like to thank the staffs of the Nancy Island Historic Site at Wasaga Beach Ontario, the Clements Library at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Queens University Library in Kingston Ontario, the Canadian National Archives at Ottawa Ontario, the Public Records Office in Kew, Great Britain, and the Detroit Public Library in Detroit Michigan, for their assistance in my historical research. A vast number of individuals assisted me with my research over the years, most notably, Jessica Staats, Jonathan Moore, Kenneth Cassavoy, Charlie Moore, Chris and Valerie Cook, and Bobby Jo Coke. Last but not least, this project could not have gotten off the ground without the continued support, encouragement, and friendship of Dr. Kevin Crisman.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century was a time of tremendous importance in the history of the Great Lakes Region. It was during this century that the lands surrounding the Great Lakes, and those further west, were first tapped for their abundant supply of furs on a large scale. The expanding network of trade routes demanded an efficient method of transporting bulky cargoes between the western end of the Great Lakes and the trading centers of the east. For decades this trade was carried out almost exclusively by canoe. In an effort to improve upon this system, many fur trading companies built small sloops and schooners to transport their goods on the lakes. Shipwrights from the east were often transported to wilderness posts to construct these vessels.

The schooner *Nancy* began its working life as a fur-trading vessel for Forsyth Richardson and Company in 1789. Later, *Nancy* was absorbed, along with its parent company, into the much larger North West Company. With the outbreak of war in 1812, the schooner was pressed into service by Britain's Provincial Marine and later the Royal Navy. It was while under the command of a Royal Navy lieutenant that *Nancy* was attacked by a superior force of American warships and destroyed before it could be captured.

In 1927 the remains of the schooner *Nancy* were excavated and removed from the banks of a small island in the Nottawasaga River, Ontario, Canada. The hull timbers

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This thesis is written in the submission format of *American Neptune*.

were placed on public display and remain to this day in the Nancy Island Historic Site. Although numerous sailing merchant craft were built on the lakes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, information regarding their design and construction is almost non-existent. Due to a lack of lines drawings, half models, or other records created by shipwrights at the time of construction, the only available source of information regarding these craft are archaeological remains. This resource is only now being exploited.

Seventy-five years would pass before *Nancy* was fully documented and examined. In 1997 five Nautical Archaeology graduate students from Texas A&M University's Anthropology Department traveled to Wasaga Beach, Ontario to complete the documentation of the hull timbers. The hull recording was supplemented by historical research at libraries throughout the Great Lakes region and at the Public Record Office in London, England.

The study that follows is a synthesis of the hull data recorded during the 1997 field project and the historical information collected thereafter. Together they reveal a vessel whose small size bears no relationship to the size and scope of historical events that the men who served aboard it witnessed. *Nancy* is one of a small number of eighteenth century vessels from the Great Lakes to be examined archaeologically, and therefore its importance in the understanding of early lakes ship construction techniques is invaluable. When placed in historical context the vessel's importance is only increased.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NORTHWEST FUR TRADE

The thousands of lakes, rivers, and waterways of Canada and the old northwest are the perfect environment for fur bearing mammals like the beaver. Though Native Americans hunted these animals for their pelts, it was not until the arrival of European trappers that the fur trade became a thriving industry in this part of the world. The French settlers of Quebec were some of the first to exploit this extremely profitable trade. However, the French settlers often found themselves competing for trading territory with the English colonists to the south. This friction, and an on going power struggle in Europe, led to open war between France and Britain in 1755. The conflict in North America has become known as the French and Indian War. Despite initial French victories, the English were able to soundly defeat the French and take control of Canada in 1760.

Prior to the war French merchants had established an intricate network of trading posts and forts, which stretched across Canada as far as the Rocky Mountains. From these distant posts, traders exchanged European manufactured goods with the local Native American populations and received packets of furs in return. The furs were then shipped back to Europe to be manufactured into finished products, mostly felt hats and winter garments. After the British conquest, English merchants exploited the lucrative fur trade of the Canadian provinces. With the elimination of the French trading companies, and with England's extensive manufacturing capabilities, the British tradesmen were able to dominate and expand upon the previously established networks.

In fact, because of their expertise in dealing with the bewildering array of native populations in the Old Northwest, large numbers of French traders were absorbed into the new British trading concerns.<sup>1</sup>

With the collapse of French control in Canada, many English trading companies that had previously been based in Albany and New York City shifted the focus of their operations to the lands northwest of the Great Lakes. The majority of these traders established themselves at Montreal by 1761, several agents arriving only days after the British army captured the city.<sup>2</sup> From this location, and with the help of French *voyageurs*,<sup>3</sup> the British were able to quickly seize and continue the fur trade.

The Hudson Bay Company, with a special charter from the Crown, had exclusive trading rights over the territory surrounding that company's namesake. For this reason the fur traders based in Montreal exploited the lands to the west. This territory included the lands surrounding the upper Great Lakes (Erie, Huron, Michigan, and Superior), but also extended far to the west, to the Canadian Rockies, and eventually to the Pacific Ocean. Prior to the American Revolution, this trade also tapped the headwaters of the Mississippi. The enormous area yielding furs demanded an intricate network of trade routes, trading posts, and strategically placed fortifications.

The fur trade centered on the exchange of European trade goods for the pelts which Native American populations were encouraged to trap. The majority of the supplies carried into the interior were manufactured goods: textiles, iron cookware, rifles, muskets, ammunition, hardware, paints, stationary, spirits, and many other goods.<sup>4</sup> These products were brought by ocean-going vessels to Montreal, and from that point they were

broken down into much smaller loads.

The transport of goods from Montreal to the areas of trade took an entire warm weather season. For this task, the traders divided their manpower into two distinct groups: the “canoemen” who carried the supplies as far as Grand Portage, on the western shore of Lake Superior, and the “north men,” who carried the goods to the actual trading centers in the northwest. Beginning in early May the first canoes left the small settlement of Lachine, which was nine miles west of Montreal. In early spring the “canoemen” often encountered large ice flows and bitterly cold nights. The voyage to Grand Portage usually took until early July. At Grand Portage, at least a week and possibly two were spent carrying the supplies across the ten-mile portage.<sup>5</sup>

The canoes that carried goods west were large vessels with a crew of eight to ten men and were known as *canot du maitre*. They were typically 30 to 35 feet (9.1-10.6m) in length with a beam of close to 6 feet (1.8m), and had a carrying capacity of approximately four tons.<sup>6</sup> These large canoes traveled up the Ottawa River, across Lake Nippising, and down the French River to Georgian Bay, then on to Michilimackinac, the falls of St. Mary and finally to Grand Portage. From this point, the goods were divided into smaller canoe loads for the journey westward. Canoes were the only vessels capable of traveling this route due to the thirty-six portages between Lachine and the open waters of Georgian Bay (figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

From Grand Portage, the “north men” carried the trade goods into the interior in a vessel known as a *canot du Nord*. These canoes typically had a crew of four or five men and a carrying capacity of one and a half to two tons.<sup>8</sup> The “north men,” who spent the

winter in the interior, also left their trading posts in early May carrying the pelts they had gathered from Native American tribes during the previous fall and winter. They carried these furs east to Grand Portage where they exchanged them for the manufactured goods the Native American tribes desired. If all was going according to plan, the *canot du Nord* would be loaded and on their way back into the interior by August 1. Likewise the “canoemen” would leave Grand Portage shortly thereafter with their loads of valuable furs, both reaching their destination only shortly before rivers and lakes began to ice-up, in late September.

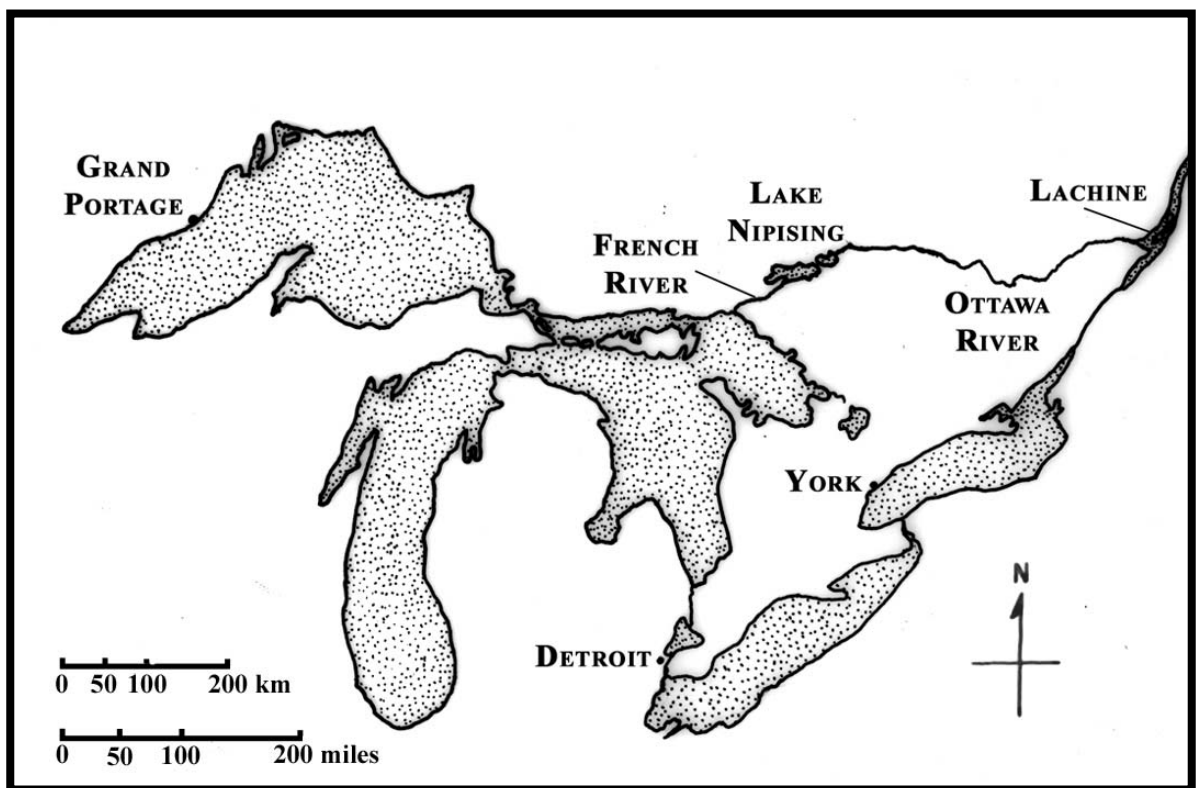


Figure 1: The Ottawa River route.  
Map by Christopher R. Sabick.

In the years before the American Revolution, traders also had the option of loading bulkier trade goods, like spirits, barrels of tobacco, shot, and powder kegs, into privately operated sailing ships or rowed bateaux on the Great Lakes. These vessels would carry the goods across Lake Ontario, where they would be unloaded and portaged across the Niagara peninsula. From there they would be loaded into another merchant vessel for the trip across Lakes Erie and Huron. At the Falls of St. Marys (Sault Ste. Marie), on Lake Huron, the goods would be portaged up the rapids to Lake Superior, where they would be loaded once again for the trip to Grand Portage, on the western shore of the lake.

The Great Lakes route was cost effective due to the reduced number of men needed to handle a given tonnage of goods when compared to canoe loads. However, the number of vessels available was limited, and due to the lack of carrying capacity it often took supplies considerably longer to reach Lake Superior than those carried by canoe. In 1775, only three sloops were employed on Lake Ontario, one of 60 tons and two others of 30 tons. On Lakes Erie and Huron four sloops and two schooners were employed in this trade, with a combined capacity of 235 tons.<sup>9</sup> Bateaux and large canoes were the most common vessels on Lake Superior. Due to the limited carrying tonnage available on the lakes, traders relied upon this route for their bulkier items while sending the majority of their more compact goods by canoe.

When the English captured the North American fur trade in 1760, the government decided that the northwest trade should be open to anyone who applied for a trading



license. This liberal policy led to the formation of many small trading firms, often consisting of only two or three partners. As time went on, the competition resulting from the number of individual firms involved in the fur trade was found to be harmful to all their profits. In addition to this, every year the traders continued to push further to the west, exploiting new fur fields, but also extending supply lines. This continued expansion, in conjunction with the restrictions placed on trade after the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, led to higher transport cost and lower profit margins. These facts encouraged a movement towards consolidation among the fur merchants.

In 1779, nine distinct interests signed a one-year contract which monopolized the majority of the Northwest trade.<sup>10</sup> The favorable returns for each member of this conglomerate encouraged them to sign another agreement extending their partnership for a further three years. Unfortunately, instead of the individual members working to make this partnership as successful as the first, each focused on acquiring control of the most profitable trading locations in order to be in the most advantageous position when the agreement ended. After two seasons of the three year agreement, it was abolished. Again, the traders returned to their counterproductive competition. As time passed they once again realized that this was hurting everyone's profits. So during the winter meeting of traders in 1783-1784, a five-year agreement was signed under the name of the North West Company. Benjamin Frobisher, Joseph Frobisher, and Simon McTavish were the principal members.<sup>11</sup>

The British Government placed strict limitations on trade after the American

Declaration of Independence. The Crown banned private trading vessels on the Great Lakes and ordered that trade goods be carried in the King's vessels if they were to go by this route. This was a major financial blow for the fur traders in Montreal. By 1776, the Great Lakes route had become increasingly important in the transportation of bulky cargoes that were difficult to handle in canoes. The Crown's vessels were often employed in supplying military posts, and thus had little time, or space, to commercial goods, particularly in a time of war. The Government vessels on Lake Ontario in 1775 were capable of carrying only 140 tons of cargo, and only 210 tons of carrying capacity was available on all the remaining lakes.<sup>12</sup> In order to avoid the delay expected from this situation, the traders resorted to loading all of their merchandise into an increased number of canoes at Montreal and sending them via the Ottawa River route.

As mentioned above, each of these canoes had a carrying capacity of only four tons, and was crewed by eight to ten men. This large crew-to-capacity ratio forced the reduction of cargo carried by one third, because the provisions and equipment of the canoemen took up the remaining space. This allowed each canoe to carry slightly more than three tons of trade goods.<sup>13</sup> The dramatic increase in the number of men and canoes employed on this route placed an excessive financial burden on the trading companies to cover wages and expenses. With the extreme distances to be covered and the long transport time necessary to carry out this trade, the principal traders had to pay for goods and transport on which they would not see returns for three years. This method of trade demanded a large outlay of capital annually without receiving any return on the investment of the previous two years.<sup>14</sup>

Though forced to use the much more expensive all-canoe route, the merchants involved in the northwest trade were willing to adapt to these restrictions while the war with the rebel colonies to the south continued. The need for such restrictions was fairly obvious. The types of goods that traders carried to the Northwest were exactly the items needed to furnish enemy troops: muskets, ammunition, blankets, and camp equipment. The government had little control over clandestine trading in the west: "the consumption of British Articles of Commerce may probably have been augmented by the large presents given to Indians, and by some of them sliding into the Rebel Colonies...The Labour and difficulty in conveying supplies to the enemy by way of Lake Superior are not great...they may reach him by the Mississippi (sic.) from that Lake by three different routes...."<sup>15</sup>

Through the mid-1780's, the North West Company enjoyed a virtual monopoly on the trade to the Northwest. This changed, in 1785, when a small concern was formed between Peter Pond, John Ross, Alexander Mackenzie, Peter Pangman, and a Mr. Pollock.<sup>16</sup> These men had not been impressed by the offer made to include them in the North West Company during the winter meeting of 1784 and they decided to form a new firm called the Gregory McLeod & Company to compete directly against the much larger monopoly. In many cases, the new company built its trading posts only a few miles from those owned by the North West Company. While this new concern lacked the capital to become a serious threat to the members of the North West Company, it did drive the price of furs up dramatically.<sup>17</sup> This competition continued until 1787, when the North West Company offered the founders of Gregory McLeod & Company favorable terms for

a merger which would reduce costs and increase profits for both interests.<sup>18</sup>

New competition quickly appeared to replace that which was absorbed in 1787. Several new companies were quickly formed to challenge the supremacy of the North West Company. One of these firms, Forsyth Richardson and Company, was to become a constant thorn in the side of its larger competitor. This company's principal partners, John Richardson, and Thomas and John Forsyth, had experience as clerks and junior partners of other firms.<sup>19</sup> They understood the method of trade, and quickly maneuvered themselves into a position which greatly affected the fur trade from Montreal as a whole.

As competition expanded and supply routes continued to stretch further to the west, the merchants of Montreal began to argue for a lifting of the damaging shipping limitations. Fur traders had been willing to accept the shipping restrictions imposed by the government during the war, but they became upset when they were refused permission to reopen the Great Lakes route after the cessation of hostilities. Traders were expending large amounts of their capital in paying the extra "canoemen" needed to carry supplies to Grand Portage. The few items they attempted to ship in the King's vessels were delayed by months or even years.<sup>20</sup> However, the Governor of Quebec, Sir Frederick Haldimand, continued the restrictions on private vessels based on his fear of illegal trade with the Americans, as he stated in a letter to Brigadier General Barrimore St. Leger dated September 14, 1784, "If the Transport of any merchandise upon those Lakes, except in King's vessels was permitted, a Door would be opened for a clandestine illicit Commerce which would be very hurtful to the trade of this Province, as a great part of the furs from the Upper Country would be introduced to the American states by means

of numberless small Rivers running from the Lakes..."<sup>21</sup>

In October 1784, the North West Co. continued to pressure Haldimand by asking permission to build a small vessel for use on Lake Superior. Haldimand acquiesced in November of that year and the vessel was built at Detroit the following spring. This vessel, the sloop *Beaver*, sailed to St. Marys in summer of 1785 to be hauled up the falls for service on Lake Superior. *Beaver*, 34 feet (10.4m) on keel 13 feet (4m) in beam, 4 feet (1.2m) depth of hold, proved to be too large to be hauled up the falls.<sup>22</sup> Upon further petitioning, the North West Co. was allowed to use this vessel to carry supplies from Forts Erie and Detroit to the falls at St. Marys.

With the door now open the Montreal merchants appealed to Haldimand for further compromise in early 1785,

That as the vessels on the Lakes are generally so much employed in transporting stores and provisions for the Government as to occasion the merchants effects to remain a very long time on the communication subject to waste, damage, and pilfering [we request that they] may be allowed to carry their Goods across the Lakes in Batteux or Canoes Which will not only assure to them a certainty of getting to market in time, but save them from burdensome charge...and they are more hopefull of obtaining this request, as they are particularly willing that all their Peltries be brought down in the Kings Vessells so that there may not be the smallest temptation to carry them into Alien States.<sup>23</sup>

This was also agreed to, though private sailing vessels other than *Beaver* were still not permitted.

Continued pressure by these companies brought further concessions from the Government. Haldimand and the leaders of Quebec's government were faced by a unified front of powerful traders. Since the taxes on the business these men carried out brought an average of £20,000 into the provinces coffers annually, this made them very

influential. In 1787, permission was granted to operate private vessels on Lake Ontario. Finally in 1789, the right of private navigation was extended throughout the Great Lakes.<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 166-67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>3</sup> *Voyageurs*, the canoe men, were mostly French Canadians who carried out much of the wilderness trade. Many of these men were later incorporated into English trading firms after 1761. Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, *The Northwest Company* (Toronto: MacMillian Co. Ltd., 1957), 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 166-167.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-53.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, *The Northwest Company*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 220-21.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-16.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>16</sup> Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 252-53.

<sup>17</sup> Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 254.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon Charles Davidson, *The North West Company* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), 26. and W. Stewart Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Co.*, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), 494, 442-43.

<sup>20</sup> Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 183.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, *The Northwest Company*, 29-30.



### CHAPTER III

#### MERCHANT YEARS

One of the first trading companies to take advantage of the lifted shipping restrictions was the firm of Forsyth, Richardson and Co. In their effort to compete effectively with the much larger North West Co., the partners of Forsyth, Richardson and Co. were keen to reduce their shipping costs as much as possible. For this reason they planned the construction of a schooner for use on Lakes Erie and Huron.

New trading companies were at a major disadvantage to their well-established competition. They often lacked the huge amounts of capital needed to compete successfully. The new firms also had little experience with the languages and customs of the various Native American tribes.<sup>1</sup> For this reason most of the tribes traded with the same traders year after year. Only by offering a higher price for furs could a small enterprise like Forsyth, Richardson and Co. hope to lure the Native American traders away from North West Co. posts. The construction of a private sailing vessel for use on Lakes Erie and Huron would allow them to transport the bulkier items needed for the Northwest trade at a much reduced cost, thereby allowing them to pay slightly more for furs without drastically reducing their profit margin. The importance of the new vessel is evident by the fact that John Richardson himself traveled to Detroit to oversee its construction.

John Richardson had some experience with sailing ships, having served as supercargo on the privateer *Vengeance* during the American Revolution.<sup>2</sup> This ship, which was outfitted by a group of Loyalists from New York, conducted several

successful cruises and made a small fortune for its crew. With the evacuation of Loyalists from New York after the Revolution, Richardson returned to his adopted home in Montreal and joined the fur trading concern of Robert Ellice & Co.<sup>3</sup> When this company was dissolved a few years later, he entered into a partnership with the brothers John and Thomas Forsyth. With the lifting of restrictions on private vessels, the experienced mariner Richardson went to Detroit in 1789 with a party of ship carpenters to build a schooner to carry the company's trade goods.

Detroit was the most important post on the upper lakes, as it had been since the time of the French trading companies. In fact, the majority of its 2,000-person population were Frenchmen who had sworn allegiance to the British. In addition, the town had a small British Garrison.<sup>4</sup> Most of these individual households were involved in agriculture, supplying their own needs, as well as a surplus which was sold to the Crown or to the fur trading companies for use as provisions. In 1778, the farmland surrounding Detroit supplied 13,000 hundredweight of flour to the North West Co. alone.<sup>5</sup>

Technically, Detroit was to have been surrendered to the Americans after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783. The British had been out-negotiated by their American counterparts on this treaty, and agreed to surrender more land than the military or diplomatic situation demanded. The border between Canada and the United States was established along the middle of Lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron and Superior, thereby placing the vital ports of Detroit, Niagara, and Michilimackinac on the American side of the Lakes. In spite of this agreement, the British resisted abandoning Detroit due to its role in controlling the Native American populations to the West and South, and also due

to the fact that it was a vital link on the fur trade route to the Northwest.

From Detroit, the British controlled the flow of trade goods to dozens of Native American tribes. With this trade, and the gifts given by the government, the British planned to encourage the Native Americans to increase their attacks on the American settlers who continued to push further west.<sup>6</sup> The English hoped that the powerful Native American tribes would be able to stop the spread of American settlement at the eastern bank of the Mississippi. This would have kept the western half of North America in the possession of tribes that were both allied to the British and bound to them through the fur trade. These goals could only be attained if Detroit remained in British hands.

In order to maintain their control of Detroit and the other lake posts, the British deflected calls for their surrender by accusing the Americans of not abiding by some of the stipulations agreed to on signing the treaty.<sup>7</sup> The Americans were accused of harassing Royalists who returned to the States to collect personal property, and of paying their debts to British merchants in devalued currency.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this, Sir Frederick Haldimand, Governor of Quebec, refused to surrender the posts on the grounds that he had not yet received permission from the King to turn the posts over to the Americans.<sup>9</sup>

On the subject of surrendering the posts, Montreal merchants were very clear in their opinion that the British should retain them. At a hearing in Montreal in October of 1788, fur trader Colin Robertson stated that,

By relinquishing the posts of Detroit and Michilmackinac, we necessarily relinquish the sovereignty of that immeasurable chain of water communication formed by the river St. Lawrence and the lakes to the west, and the noble streams of the Ohio and Mississippi...and as a necessary consequence of this sacrifice we give up most assuredly the fur-trade, we abandon those advantages which as a commercial people are

the reward of our present possessions.<sup>10</sup>

In the journal of traveler John Long we see similar ideas expressed.

Were the English to remain in possession of every part of Canada except the posts, numberless doors would be left open for the Americans to smuggle their goods: and, in the process of time, the illicit trade would supersede the necessity of the exportation of British goods from England to Canada, and the commercial benefits which would rise from the consumption of our manufactured goods would be entirely lost. In that case Canada would be of little benefit to England in a commercial point of view.<sup>11</sup>

Taking these protests to heart, and realizing the value of the fur trade, not only to the merchants but also to the government itself, the British authorities continued to stall on the subject of surrendering the lake posts. For their part, the Americans had few settlers in the area near Detroit and were unwilling to begin another war with Great Britain for control of the Great Lakes posts. Negotiation continued, and it was not until June of 1796, after the signing of Jay's Treaty, that the British-held posts were finally turned over to the Americans.

Detroit had been the construction site for all government vessels on the upper lakes: between the years of 1772 and 1782, the King's shipyard turned out nine vessels ranging in size from 18 to 136 tons burden.<sup>12</sup> As restrictions slackened, Detroit also became the focus of merchant shipbuilding. The first to be built was the sloop *Beaver*, in the spring of 1785. The city's location on the St. Clair River gave its shipyards access to excellent shipbuilding timber, large rafts of logs were floated down the river to the yards. White oak was harvested from the shores of Lake Michigan for keels, frames, and,

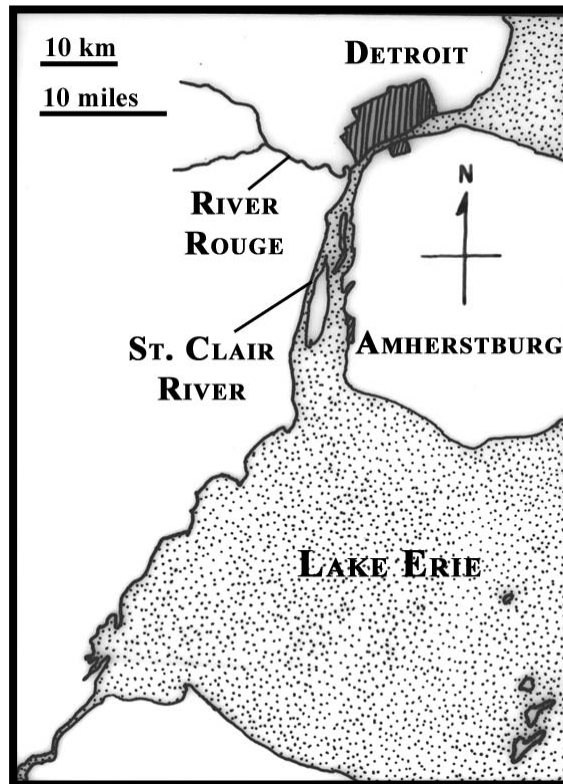


Figure 2: Detroit and the River Rouge.  
Map by Christopher R. Sabick.

planking, white pine was gathered from the shores of Lake Huron for masts and beams and red cedar was cut from the islands of Lake Erie for the upperworks of vessels.<sup>13</sup>

Richardson set out from Montreal on the 24th of May, 1789 and arrived in Kingston six days later; from here he traveled on to Oswego, arriving on May 31. Continuing in a "*Schenctady bateau raised a strake*," Richardson and his shipbuilding party arrived at Fort Erie on June 14 and pushed on to Detroit by the 20th. Richardson and his party, consisting of "three frenchmen, three englishmen, or rather irishmen, good tractable fellows, and the Master Carpenter." selected a building location south of the town on the banks of the River Rouge and set to work (figure 2).<sup>14</sup>

It appears that Richardson's crew was not as "tractable" as he had previously thought. He stated in a letter dated July 10, 1789: "We go slowly with the building of our schooner, being disappointed in some hands," although he went on to say "The Master carpenter turns out perfectly, to my mind, and is very ambitious to distinguish himself."<sup>15</sup> Construction of the schooner continued throughout the summer.

By September, the vessel was nearing completion. Richardson was obviously impressed with the hull that his crew had produced, as is evidenced in this quote from a letter dated September 23, 1789, "...the schooner will be a perfect masterpiece of workmanship and beauty. The expense to us will be great, but there will be the satisfaction of her being strong and very durable. Her floor timbers, keel, keelson, stem, and lower futtock are oak. The transom, stem, post, upper part of stem, upper futtocks, top timbers, stern timbers, beams and knees are all red cedar. She will carry 350 barrels."<sup>16</sup>

The expense of building a vessel at Detroit was quite high due primarily to the fact that the majority of the ship building materials other than timber had to be sent from England.<sup>17</sup> In light of the British ban on trading with the Americans, Forsyth, Richardson and Co. were forced to import all of the sails, cordage, iron fasteners, and other ships equipment directly from their home country. While the readily available woods were relatively cheap, the expense of shipping equipment from England greatly inflated the cost of construction.

As the vessel neared completion, Richardson and his master carpenter decided that they should acquire a carved figurehead for their vessel (figure 3).<sup>18</sup> This they



Figure 3: A conjectural view of *Nancy*'s figurehead.  
Drawing by Adam Loven.

ordered from a carver in New York named Skelling. As the schooner was to be known as *Nancy*, the head was to be a carving "of a lady dressed in the present fashion, and with a hat and feather." There appears to have been some difficulty in arranging for the carving to be shipped out to Detroit, and it is uncertain if it arrived before the schooner was launched on November 24, 1789.<sup>19</sup>

The remainder of the fall of 1789 and the spring of 1790 were spent finishing out the vessel and fitting her with masts and spars. Richardson reported *Nancy* departing for

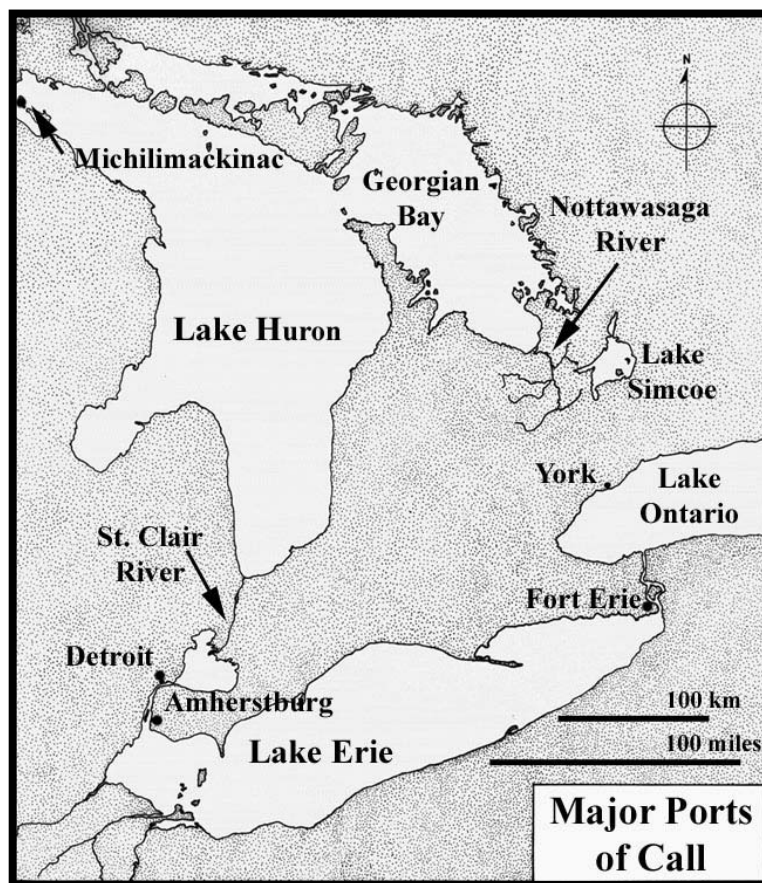


Figure 4: *Nancy*'s major ports of call.  
Map by Christopher R. Sabick



her maiden voyage on June 19, 1790, "The *Nancy* sailed upwards with a full cargo, and may visit Michigamoo ere she returns."<sup>20</sup> This was only the first of many such voyages she would make across the upper lakes during her 25-year career (figure 4).

Unfortunately, historical documentation dealing with *Nancy's* merchant career is somewhat limited, though the available material suggests that she spent the majority of her time carrying supplies and furs between the posts of Fort Erie and Detroit with occasional trips to Michilimackinac. The payment schedule in figure 5 shows the cost of transport on *Nancy* in 1790, both from Fort Erie to Detroit, and from Detroit to Michilimackinac.<sup>21</sup> The advertisement goes on to reassure the merchant wary of transporting all his trade goods in a single vessel with the following boast: "As this Vessel is constructed for fast sailing, and will be most complete in every respect: the safety and expedition attending Transport in her must be obvious."

This payment schedule is also noteworthy for the types of goods for which it quotes prices. From it, we have a good idea of the kinds of items typically carried in lake transport vessels. This list includes several types of barrels, puncheons, kegs, and casks, all of which would have been extremely difficult to carry in canoes, especially across portages. Included are items that could not have been carried safely by canoe transport, such as stoves and sheets of iron. The remainder are such dense products as pig iron, lead shot and boxes of soap. While these may have been easier to handle than stoves and barrels, they were quite heavy for their size, and therefore would have tested limited carrying capacity of even the largest canoes.

Log books of in-bound and out-bound traffic from Fort Erie list *Nancy* on the

*Transport on LAKES ERIE and HURON.*

**L**EITH and SHEPHERD hereby give notice to the Public, that the New Schooner the **NANCY** launched last November, will ply the ensuing season between Detroit and Fort Erie, and occasionally go to Michilimakinac when freight presents.---That no misapprehension may arise respecting the mode of ascertaining the bulkage, it is subjoined.---The rate of Freight over Lake Erie, will be fifteen Shillings New York Currency, equal to nine Shillings and four pence half penny Quebec Currency, for a barrel bulk; and two Shillings New York Currency, or one Shilling and three pence Quebec, per cubic or solid foot, for goods to be estimated by measurement.---Freight from Detroit to Micilimakinac at the rate of four Shillings New York Currency, or two Shillings and six pence Quebec Currency, for a bushel of Corn; and six Shillings New-York, or three Shillings and nine pence Quebec Currency, for a quintal of Flour.---Other goods the same as over Lake Erie.---Packs over each Lake, not measuring more than five feet, or exceeding 120lbs. in weight, four Sillings New York Currency, or two Shillings and six pence Quebec Currency, per pack.

As this Vessel is constructed for fast sailing, and will be most complete in every respect; the safety and expedition attending Transport in her must be obvious.---

**SCHEDULE of Packages computable by Barrel Bulk.**

	<i>Barrel Bulk.</i>
Puncheons not exceeding 120 Gallons,	3 1/2.
Porter Hogheads,	2
Wine ditto.	2
Casks and Barrels of 32 or not exceeding 36 Gallons,	1
Soap 3 Boxes of 1 Cwt. each,	1
Candles 5 ditto of 50lbs. each,	1
Shot 3 ditto of 1 Cwt. each,	1
Iron in Bars 3 Cwt.	1
Do. in Sheets,	1
Stoves Single,	1
Do. Double,	2
Gunpowder 2 whole barrels 100lbs. each,	1
Barrels of Pork ordinary size, 4 Barrels for	3
Kegs of 8 to 9 Gallons, for Kegs,	1
Oil in Jars of 3 1/2 Gallons, 6 Jars,	1
Paint in Rundlets, 8 of 28lbs. each,	1

All other Goods to be measured and reduced to Cubic or Solid feet.

**LEITH and SHEPHERD.**

*Detroit, 26th January 1790.*

Figure 5: Payment schedule for transport on *Nancy*.  
Nancy Island Historic Site Collections.

dates of August 5 and December 1, 1795, while the logs of Michilimackinac list *Nancy* on May 15 and August 21, 1794.<sup>22</sup> It appears that trade goods were not the schooner's only cargo, the journal of a trader named Thomas Duggen, who was stationed at Michilimackinac, lists *Nancy* as arriving from the St. Clair River on July 19, 1796, carrying a Native American chief and his family who were to receive presents from the British at that post. Unfortunately, the name of the chief's tribe is illegible in Duggen's journal.<sup>23</sup>

On at least four occasions, the British Government hired *Nancy* for transport duty. In early 1794, *Nancy* carried members of the 5th Infantry Regiment from Fort Erie to their new post at Detroit. Later that same year, she was hired to carry dispatches to military outposts on the upper lakes.<sup>24</sup> Again in 1801, she was hired to carry dispatches originating in Montreal.<sup>25</sup> Finally in 1803, she transported elements of the 49th Regiment of Foot to Amherstburg.<sup>26</sup>

Though *Nancy* was the first, and for some time the largest, merchant sailing ship built on the upper lakes after the Revolution, other companies soon followed Forsyth Richardson and Co.'s example by building vessels of their own. In 1790, the North West Co. had two small vessels on Lake Superior of 12 and 15 tons.<sup>27</sup> These were joined by the *Otter* (75 tons) in 1793, and the *Invincible* (tonnage unknown).<sup>28</sup> On Lakes Michigan, Erie, and Huron, the North West Co. had the sloops *Beaver* (45 tons) and *Athabaska* (40 tons).<sup>29</sup> Duggen's journal from Michilimackinac also notes the *Francis*, *Maria*, and *Charlotte* as trading there during the period from 1796 to 1798, though he makes no mention of their owners or of the size of these vessels.<sup>30</sup>

With the end of shipping restrictions after the Revolution, and the retention of the American Great Lakes posts, fur traders were able to extend their trading area into the untapped regions of the extreme northwest. Competition between the North West Co. and Forsyth Richardson & Co. was reaching as far west as the Athabasca River in modern day Alberta.<sup>31</sup> The North West Co. continued to push westward, sending Alexander Mackenzie on a trip to the west coast of the continent in 1789, and again in 1793.<sup>32</sup> As a result of these journeys, the North West Co. extended its realm of influence past the Canadian Rockies, and other traders were quick to follow. This continually extending line of supply put a heavy financial strain on the fur companies to cover the costs of transportation.

To make matters worse for the North West Company, several of its principal partners left the company to join Forsyth, Richardson and Co. in 1795.<sup>33</sup> These men brought with them rights to trading areas that were in direct competition with North West Co. posts. In 1798, a second serious blow was dealt to the North West Co. when Alexander Mackenzie announced his intention of retiring from the business.<sup>34</sup> Mackenzie was not only the North West Co.'s most celebrated explorer, but he was considered by many of his subordinates as the only man who could efficiently manage the trade from Grand Portage to the interior.<sup>35</sup>

In an attempt to recuperate the loss of capital and trading areas which resulted from these departures, the North West Co. decided to diversify its interests. In 1799, the company sent out a party to scout for possible silver mining territory.<sup>36</sup> They also attempted to tap the St. Lawrence waterway and its fisheries.<sup>37</sup> In addition to these new

interests, they continued to construct fur trading posts on the Missouri River's headwaters, and in Southern Saskatchewan and the Bow River region.<sup>38</sup>

The North West Co.'s position continued to deteriorate in the winter of 1798 when the remaining independent traders in Montreal consolidated their interests into the New North West Co., better known as the XY Company.<sup>39</sup> Forsyth, Richardson and Co. was one of the principal members of this alliance. The new corporation challenged the North West Company directly. Establishing posts on the Assiniboine, McKensie, Souris, and Peace Rivers, only a few miles from where the North West Co. operated.<sup>40</sup> This competition resulted in a reduction of furs gathered from these places for North West Co., and an increase in the amount of goods that they had to trade for them.

In 1802, Alexander Mackenzie returned to Canada and attempted to initiate a plan he had formulated while he was at his family home in England. He envisioned combining the Canadian fur trade and the fishing industry off the East Coast into a single monopoly.<sup>41</sup> His first goal was to consolidate the fur interests into a single company then to attract fishing concerns to his plan.

When he arrived in Canada, Mackenzie found that competition between traders was as rampant as ever. And though several members of the North West Co. were beginning to consider forming a union with the XY Co., Simon McTavish, the larger company's most influential partner, was opposed to such a union.<sup>42</sup> With his attempts to unify the fur and fishing industries temporarily foiled, Mackenzie decided to force the issue by throwing his support behind the XY Co. by becoming head of that concern on December 15, 1802.<sup>43</sup>

With Mackenzie in control of the XY Co., competition between the two companies became even more heated. Violence erupted at fur trading posts in the interior and more than one trader lost his life.<sup>44</sup> Both companies attempted to win the favor of certain tribes by trading large quantities of alcohol. The North West Co. traded an average of 9,600 gallons in the period from 1793-1798, and from 1799-1804, it averaged 12,340 gallons, with a peak of 16,299 gallons traded in 1803.<sup>45</sup> This increase in the amount of alcohol imported drove up transportation costs due to the bulky, unwieldy nature of casks and kegs of spirits.

The expensive competition between the two companies continued for another two years until the death of Simon McTavish in July of 1804.<sup>46</sup> With their major roadblock to consolidation out of the way, members of the North West Co. immediately approached the XY Co. with a proposal for unification. An agreement unifying the two rival companies was signed on November 5, 1804, and went into effect on January 1, 1805.<sup>47</sup> The new concern retained the name North West Company. Members of the XY Co. received 25% of the new company's shares, and also assumed responsibility for importing a quarter of the trade goods needed each year. This agreement also brought all of the XY Co. holdings under the control of the North West Co., including the schooner *Nancy*.<sup>48</sup>

With the union of the North West Co. and the XY Co., a virtual monopoly was formed. The North West Co. now held almost all the trading posts in the interior, except those controlled by the Hudson Bay Co. The consolidation of the two Montreal firms also reduced transportation costs, especially wages. The two companies had been

struggling to retain the most experienced personnel to carry out their trading, a competition that drove the wages for clerks and *voyageurs* to new heights. The unification of the two firms allowed wages to be cut dramatically. The annual salary for a clerk, which was £100 in 1804, dropped to £60 after consolidation, a considerable savings.<sup>49</sup> Naturally, the monopoly also allowed the company to maximize profits by minimizing the amount of trade goods that were exchanged for furs.

It is also in 1805 that we can first identify a captain of *Nancy*, a man named William Mills. This information comes from a letter written by John Warren dated May 3, 1805, which mentions that Mills is a quarter owner of the schooner, and lists the other partners as John Richardson, John Forsyth, and Alexander Mackenzie.<sup>50</sup> The letter discusses the request made in 1796 by Captain Mills, on behalf of his partners, for a piece of property located on the Fort Erie establishment. Mills was interested in building a small storehouse on the fort's property for the storage of trade goods en route to the northwest. This storehouse was intended to protect the company's goods from damage by the weather and to prevent pilfering while it awaited transport. Lt. Col. William McDouall had granted permission for the construction of this house in 1798.<sup>51</sup>

*Nancy* continued to carry goods between posts on the Great Lakes throughout the first decade of the nineteenth century. With the surrender of Detroit and Michilimackinac to the Americans in 1796, *Nancy's* routes shifted to Amherstburg and St. Josephs Island, which were on the Canadian side of the lakes and their connecting river systems.<sup>52</sup> Throughout this time *Nancy* was a vital element in the continued expansion of the fur trade into new areas by reducing transportation costs for her owners.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 254.

<sup>2</sup> Col. E. Cruikshank, "The John Richardson Letters," in *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records*, Vol. 6 (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1905), 20-36.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Almon Ernest Parkins, *The Historical Geography of Detroit* (Detroit: Michigan Historical Society, 1918), 99-100.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Brian Leigh Dunnigan, "Fortess Detroit. 1701-1826," in David Skaggs and Larry Nelson ed., *The Sixty Years' War for the Great Lakes, 1754-1814* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 167-68.

<sup>7</sup> Parkins, *Historical Geography of Detroit*, 102.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>14</sup> Cruikshank, "The John Richardson Papers," 23-27.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Parkins, *Historical Geography of Detroit*, 280.

<sup>18</sup> Cruikshank, "The John Richardson Papers," 29.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>21</sup> Statement of Rates, Nancy Island Historic Site Collections.

<sup>22</sup> Log Books, Nancy Island Historic Site Collections.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Duggan Journal, July 19, 1796, Clements Library, 27

<sup>24</sup> Littlehaus to LeMaistre, 13 November 1794, RG8 C series, National Archives of Canada (NAC).



- <sup>25</sup> Craigie to Green, 18 May 1801, RG8 C series, NAC.
- <sup>26</sup> Ormsby to Green, 15 November 1803, RG8 C series, NAC.
- <sup>27</sup> Gordon Charles Davidson, *The Northwest Co.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 213.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-14.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Duggan Journal, August 6, 1796 (*Francis*); September 23, 1796 (*Maria*); September 7, 1798 (*Charlotte*).
- <sup>31</sup> Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 229.
- <sup>32</sup> Davidson, *The Northwest Co.*, 51-68.
- <sup>33</sup> Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 255.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.
- <sup>35</sup> Davidson, *The Northwest Co.*, 74-5.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-6.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-4.
- <sup>41</sup> Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 256.
- <sup>42</sup> Davidson, *The Northwest Co.*, 76-7.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>44</sup> Davidson, *The Northwest Co.*, 76-7.
- <sup>45</sup> W. Stewart Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Co.* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), 143.
- <sup>46</sup> Davidson, *The Northwest Co.*, 86-7.
- <sup>47</sup> Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Co.*, 151-52.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.
- <sup>49</sup> Davidson, *The Northwest Co.*, 86.

<sup>50</sup> Warren to Green, 3 May 1805, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Parkins, *Historical Geography of Detroit*, 128.

## CHAPTER IV

### WAR YEARS

#### Prelude to War

During the early nineteenth-century relations between the United States and Great Britain became strained. The American public and government were outraged at the British practice of impressing sailors from U.S.-flagged vessels into the Royal Navy for their continuing struggle with Napoleon. It is estimated that the Royal Navy forcibly seized between 6,000 and 10,000 sailors from U.S. vessels.<sup>1</sup> Americans also accused the British of inciting Native American tribes to attack settlers on the frontier as part of a general policy of discouraging the westward expansion of the United States.

As tensions continued to rise, two naval engagements pushed the two countries toward war. On June 22, 1807 the British frigate *Leopard* attacked and boarded the U.S. frigate *Chesapeake*. The British recovered several Royal Navy deserters from the crew of the U.S. vessel.<sup>2</sup> This action produced a great deal of animosity toward the British among the general American population. Four years later, in May of 1811, the British Frigate *Guerriere* stopped an American coasting vessel and pressed several of its sailors into the Royal Navy. In response to this action the U.S. frigate *President* went in search of *Guerriere*. On May 16, *President* stumbled upon the British sloop-of-war *Little Belt*. The American frigate, which outgunned the British vessel by two to one, mauled the smaller ship, killing nine and wounding 23.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this action the Royal Navy continued to take sailors off of American

ships, even stopping vessels within the territorial waters of the United States. American President James Madison ordered the frigates *President*, *Essex*, *United States* and *Congress* to prowl the seas, and protect American ships. In April of 1812, the Americans began a trade embargo against Britain. This tactic was quite effective, reducing British exports dramatically.<sup>4</sup> Despite the increasing pressure, neither side was backing down.

## 1812

As tensions continued to grow between the United States and Great Britain, both countries began to formulate strategies for the coming conflict. In the Great Lakes region neither side was prepared for war. The British had only two naval vessels on Lake Erie when the war began, *Queen Charlotte* and *General Hunter*, with a third, *Lady Prevost*, still under construction.<sup>5</sup> Despite this weak force, the British naval situation was much superior to that of the Americans. The United States Government had only a single vessel on Lake Erie in 1812, the transport snow *Adams*.<sup>6</sup> In order to bolster their strength on the lakes, the British government looked to the other major owners of sailing vessels on the lakes, the fur traders.

As early as January of 1812, the British naval authority on the Great Lakes, the Provincial Marine, was exploring the possibility of arming merchant ships for the coming conflict. A letter dated January 13, 1812 from the North West Co. to Captain Gray of the Provincial Marine, lists the defensive strength and equipment of the company. This letter reports that the company has "...on Lake Superior: 1 vessel of 120 tons, could be armed with 6-8 guns, 1 vessel 60 tons, which might be run down the rapids at St. Marys for use

on Lakes Michigan and Huron. North West Co. has two vessels at Moy *Nancy* and *Caledonia* each from 100-120 tons and capable of carrying 4 guns."<sup>7</sup>

Fur traders were willing to offer more than just their vessels for the use of the Crown. In several letters from the North West Co., they mentioned their willingness to use their men and equipment not only to defend the King's property, but also to carry out offensive operations if called upon to do so.<sup>8</sup> The Company also offered to use its influence over the Native American tribes with which it had contact, to encourage them to join the British cause and attack American posts.<sup>9</sup>

The Crown and the fur companies were also exploring alternative routes of supply for their Northwest posts. With Americans in control of Detroit the water route between Lake Erie and Lake Huron could be considered closed to the British. This fact forced the British government to consider other options. The North West Co. suggested that an old trade route be adopted from York (present day Toronto) overland to Lake Simcoe. From Lake Simcoe it was only another short portage to the Nottawasaga River which empties into Georgian Bay, Lake Huron.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately for the British, this route was not prepared in any way when war broke out. It was sufficient for *voyageurs* and their lightweight canoes, but was ill-suited for transportation of the large quantity of goods and supplies that the Crown needed to send to the northwest.

The British military presence in the northwest was even more pitiful than their naval force. The total number of regular troops available to Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, Governor of Upper Canada, numbered roughly 1,600 men.<sup>11</sup> With the surrender of Detroit and Michilimackinac to the Americans in 1796, the British had been forced to

establish new bases at Amherstburg and St. Joseph. These new posts were far from prepared for war, according to a report from General Henry Prevost to the War Office in London, dated May 18, 1812:

Fort Amherstburg, situated on the River Detroit at the head of Lake Erie, is of importance from its being the Dock Yard and Marine Arsenal for the Upper Lakes. It is also a place of reunion for the Indians inhabiting that part of the Country, who assemble there in considerable numbers to receive Presents: The Fort has been represented to me as a temporary Field Work in a ruinous State: it is now undergoing a repair to render it tenable: The Garrison at Amherstburg consists of a Subaltern's Detachment of Artillery, and about 120 men of the 41st Regiment, the whole commanded by Lieut. Col. St. George an inspecting Field Officer: The Militia in it's vicinity amounts to about 500 men.

Prevost goes on to describe St. Joseph as:

...distant about 1500 miles from Quebec, consists of Lines of strong Pickets enclosing a Block House. It stands on the Island of St. Joseph within the detour communicating the head of Lake Huron with Lake Superior: it can only be considered as a Post of Assemblage for Friendly Indians, and in some degree a protection for the North West Fur trade: The Garrison at St. Joseph consists of a small Detachment from the Royal Artillery and One company of veterans.<sup>12</sup>

The British officials realized that the fur companies would be an incredibly valuable addition to their meager forces in the west. Not only did the North West Co. have vessels, supplies, and men that could be marshaled by the government, but they also had a more intimate knowledge of the territory, and the routes through it, than anyone else. For these reasons, in addition to the constant pressure by the heads of the Montreal firms, the British Government realized that it was to their advantage to protect the interests of the fur traders.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, the fates of the Montreal fur companies were tied directly to that of the

British Government. Any loss of territory or restriction on trade would have had a devastating effect on these companies. Therefore, traders were willing to offer any support they could, be it supplies, vessels, or men. They may also have seen another possibility if the British were victorious in the coming war: a successful British military might grant exclusive rights to trade in territories captured with the help of the fur traders.

When word of the American declaration of war of June 18, 1812 reached British military officials on the lakes in July, they immediately held the North West Co. to its promise of assistance. A letter from Lieutenant Colonel St. George in Amherstburg to Major-General Sir Isaac Brock dated July 8, 1812 states:

I have embodied the Canadians in the eleven boats from Montreal (70 men) belonging to the NW Co. Their cargoes I am obliged to make free with consisting of Arms, Ammunition, and Blankets. Had I not detained them they would have fallen into the hands of the enemy. On receiving your letter of the 28th I ordered the *Nancy* belonging to the NW Co. of about 70 tons, waiting for a wind to take her up from Moy to the upper lake, down here, where she remains, I have taken some three pounders from her to mount in the boats before mentioned.<sup>14</sup>

Thus began the war career of the schooner *Nancy*. On July 30th, after being detained in Amherstburg for more than a month, *Nancy* sailed for Fort Erie in the company of *Lady Prevost*, carrying reinforcements to bolster the faltering militia garrison there.<sup>15</sup> The schooner remained under the command of North West Co. employee Captain Mackintosh, though he now received orders from the British Army.

Due to the difficulties of communication during the early nineteenth century and negligence on the part of the U. S. War Department, American commanders in the west

did not receive notice of the declaration of war for several weeks. However British officials were quick to inform their post commanders of the outbreak of war. These men exploited the advantage that this information gave them over their uninformed opponents.

Captain Charles Roberts, commander of the British post at St. Joseph, received notice of the declaration on July 8<sup>th</sup> and quickly began to assemble his forces. Having only 46 men of the 10th Royal Veteran Battalion, he turned to the North West Co. for support. Approximately 200 Canadians answered the call to arms, along with 400 Native allies.<sup>16</sup> On July 15 Roberts received a letter from Brock telling him to act under his own discretion. Roberts immediately loaded his troops and two six-pounder field pieces into the schooner *Caledonia* and several bateaux. On July 16, this small force departed St. Joseph for an attack on Fort Michilimackinac.

The American commander at Fort Michilimackinac, Lieutenant Porter Hanks, had only 61 men and officers under his command, and he had not yet received word that his country was at war.<sup>17</sup> The British forces landed on the north side of Mackinac Island early in the morning of July 17. Only as civilians fled before the advancing British force did Hanks realize that his position was under attack. The British quickly secured a hilltop position overlooking the fort and dug in their guns. When Roberts had his men and guns in position, he sent an envoy to the American garrison demanding their surrender. This demand was the first official word that Hanks had received to inform him that America and Great Britain were at war. The American position was hopeless. The British guns had a commanding position on the hilltop, and they had a numerical superiority of 10 to 1 in troops. Hanks quickly surrendered Michilimackinac to the



British; uninformed of the state of war, and without proper reinforcements, he had no other option.

The failure of the U.S. War Department to inform its field commanders of the declaration of war in a timely manner also played a role in the fall of the most important American post on the upper lakes, Detroit. Upon learning of the declaration of war on June 28, the American commander of the Northwestern Army, General William Hull, assembled a considerable force at Detroit. Hull's army was composed of three regiments of Ohio militiamen, and the 4<sup>th</sup> US Infantry Regiment under Colonel James Miller, a total of about 2,500 men.<sup>18</sup> This force was opposed by Colonel Henry Proctor's British 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment based at Fort Malden in Amherstburg. Hull's men began crossing the river on July 12, intending to capture Fort Malden before British reinforcements arrived. Unfortunately for the Americans, the British had already assembled considerable reinforcements due to their advanced knowledge of the war. The American attack was hampered by infighting between Hull and his militia captains, and exacerbated by supply problems. After minor skirmishes with British troops, and receiving news of Michilimackinac's fall, Hull retreated back to Detroit.

General Sir Isaac Brock, realizing that the capture of Detroit would secure the British right flank, traveled to Fort Malden to lead the assault in person. Colonel Proctor meanwhile, was dispatched to disrupt the American supply line which stretched for 50-miles (80.5km) back to the rapids of the Miami River (Maumee). He therefore sent a force under the command of Captain Thomas Muir and native leader Tecumseh to cut this route. During the first week of August the British force encountered an American

supply train and destroyed it.<sup>19</sup> The following week General Brock began his preparations for the actual assault on Fort Detroit.

Brock first placed a battery of guns in Sandwich, directly opposite of the fort. He then employed the British vessels *Queen Charlotte* and *General Hunter* as floating batteries, placing them slightly upriver (north) of the fort. The main British force of 330 regular troops, 400 Canadian Militia, and 600 Native allies crossed the river on August 16.<sup>20</sup> When these forces were organized for the attack, Brock ordered his artillery to open fire. Faced with severe supply problems, untrustworthy subordinates, a determined enemy, no hope of relief, and a severe lack of nerve Hull surrendered Detroit to the British the same day.

The British capture of Detroit and Michilimackinac completely altered the face of the war in the Northwest. The British now had undisputed control of the upper lakes and many Native American tribes that had remained neutral now joined with the British forces. These tribes were free to raid American settlements to the north and west of the Ohio River at will. The disaster in the northwest also changed the focus of the war for the Americans. U.S. military planning had originally called for the capture of Montreal and the cutting of the British supply line to the west via the St. Lawrence River.<sup>21</sup> These early defeats led the American Government to shift many of the forces intended for this attack to shore up the faltering position in the west.

## 1813

After the death of General Brock at the Battle of Queenstown Heights, Proctor

was promoted to Brigadier General and placed in command of the British military forces around the upper Lakes. To secure the southern shore of Lake Erie and cement the British position in the west, Proctor hoped to capture the American forts in northern Ohio. The first of the forts that Proctor wanted to reduce was Fort Meigs on the Miami River (figure 6). Knowing that the fort was not yet completed or fully manned, Proctor planned to attack before the Americans could finish their preparations.<sup>22</sup>

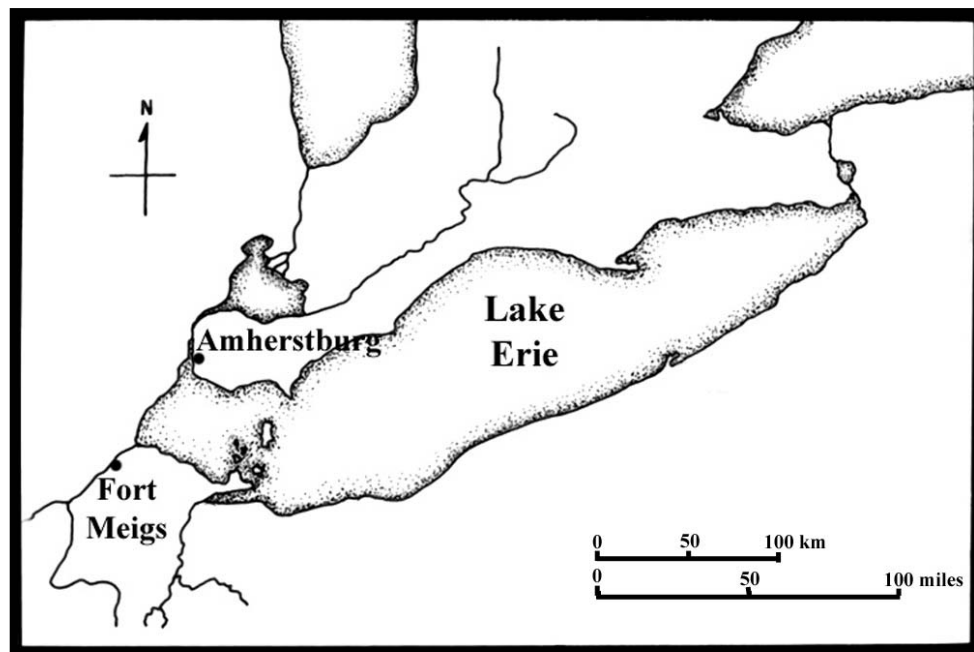


Figure 6: Attack on Fort Meigs, 1813.  
Map by Christopher R. Sabick

Early in the spring of 1813, U.S. Army General William Henry Harrison, commander of the new Northwest Army learned of the British plans to attack Fort Meigs,

which might occur earlier than he had planned due to the fact that Lake Erie would be ice-free earlier than normal that spring.<sup>23</sup> Harrison, away in southern Ohio ordered, Major Amos Stoddard, commander at Meigs, to complete construction of the fort while Harrison worked to find troops to man it.<sup>24</sup>

Though Proctor had planned to attack as soon as navigation was possible, the departure of the attacking force was delayed by several weeks of constant rain.<sup>25</sup> During these precious weeks, Harrison and his commanders were able to complete construction of the fort and greatly increase their troop strength.

The fort itself was constructed on a height of land on the eastern bank of the Miami River. The fortification consisted of seven blockhouses, five batteries, picketing, and an earthen rampart.<sup>26</sup> Enclosed within its walls were a well, and several earthen transverses to limit the effectiveness of British artillery. The garrison had twenty pieces of artillery for their defense. The "Big Battery," located at the front of the fort, consisted of four, 18-pounder guns, the largest American pieces in the west.<sup>27</sup> Reinforcements continued to arrive throughout April bringing the total garrison strength to approximately 2,000 regulars and militiamen, with them came General Harrison who assumed command of the fortification.<sup>28</sup>

Proctor, whose force had been recently reinforced by men of the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment, finally set sail from Amherstburg on April 24. *Nancy*, *Lady Prevost*, four other sailing vessels, 2 gunboats, and several bateaux, transported Proctor's 978 troops across Lake Erie.<sup>29</sup> *Nancy* carried 28 men of the Royal Artillery, three officers of the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment, and 56 men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.<sup>30</sup> On April 27, Proctor landed on the

western of side of the Miami River, where he met up with Tecumseh and 1,200 Native American warriors.<sup>31</sup> On the 28th, the British forces established their camp opposite the fort, out of cannon range. British artillerists located a small hill directly across from the fort, and began building an emplacement for their guns, while Tecumseh's men covered them with small arms fire from both sides of the river. Throughout the remainder of the 28th and 29th, the two sides exchanged intermittent cannon fire, with little result.<sup>32</sup>

By dawn on April 30, most of the British artillery had been placed. The battery consisted of two 24-pounder guns, an 8-inch howitzer, two 5-½ inch howitzers, and three 12-pounder cannon.<sup>33</sup> With these guns in place, the bombardment began. Despite the considerable firepower possessed by each side the resulting casualties were light. The artillery duel continued through May 1 and 2 during which the British fired almost 600 rounds, some of which were red hot shot. Again the casualties were fairly light, for the Americans reported six killed and eleven wounded.<sup>34</sup>

As the sun rose on the morning of May 3, the American garrison awoke to find that the British had slipped across the Miami during the night and constructed a small battery on the eastern bank of the river, only 300 yards (274m) from the fort. This small battery consisted of a 6-pounder gun, a 5-½- inch howitzer, and a mortar of the same size.<sup>35</sup> Now with two batteries trained on the fort, the artillery duel resumed, and continued through May 4.

Near midnight on May 4, Harrison received a message from Brigadier General Green Clay, who was approaching the fort with 1,200 reinforcements from Kentucky. Clay reported that he and his troops were traveling down the Miami in 18 boats, and that

they were within two hours of reaching the fort. Harrison, seeing a chance to catch his enemy off-guard, quickly ordered Clay to split his force. He was to land 800 men on the west bank of the river to assault the large British battery there, spike their guns, and then rejoin the remainder of the Kentuckians, who would proceed to the fort.

The plan worked well, at first. The 800 Kentuckians landed on the west bank of the river under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Dudley. These men quickly seized the British battery and attempted to spike the guns, though they used musket ramrods instead of the much more effective gun spikes.<sup>36</sup> Now that the capture of the guns had been successfully carried out, the Kentucky men descended on the British camp instead of returning to the fort as ordered. Proctor, hearing that his guns had been captured, hastily assembled a counterattack, which caught Dudley's men off guard. In a confused action the British were able to capture the majority of the militiamen. Only 150 of the 800 Kentucky men made it to Fort Meigs, and more than 600 were captured.<sup>37</sup> To add insult to injury, the British reoccupied their battery, removed the ineffective ramrod spikes and resumed the bombardment.

While Dudley's men had been assaulting the British position on the western bank of the river, 350 men of the Meigs garrison sallied forth to capture the British battery on the eastern bank. This they accomplished quickly, disabling the guns and capturing 41 prisoners. On May 6, Proctor demanded that Harrison surrender the fort, but he was refused.<sup>38</sup> Unaccustomed to the slow pace of siege warfare, the Native allies that were so important to Proctor began to melt away. In addition to this personnel problem, many of the British militiamen were demanding that they be allowed to return to their farms and

crops. With his opportunity quickly disappearing, and more American reinforcements on the way, Proctor decided to raise the siege and return to Amherstburg. On May 9 *Nancy* and the rest of the small transport fleet carried Proctor and his men back to Detroit and Amherstburg.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1813 the conflict raged back and forth on the Niagara Peninsula. The American forces managed to capture Forts George and Erie and threatened to cut the supply routes to the northwest. In addition, the Americans were expanding their naval base at Presque Isle, on Lake Erie. Though this base received only a fraction of the supplies its commander demanded, American naval forces on the lake continued to grow.

The well-protected harbor at Presque Isle made the possibility of a successful raid by the British naval force unlikely. Proctor saw a land attack as his only hope of eliminating this base. By mid July Proctor initiated the first step in this plan, the capture of the Sandusky region of northern Ohio. Proctor loaded a small contingent of regulars and 1,000 Native allies into his transport fleet, which included *Nancy*, and on July 21 arrived in the mouth of the Miami.<sup>40</sup> Here the British and Indian forces hoped to draw reinforcements to Fort Meigs, before their primary attack at Fort Stephenson on the Sandusky River (figure 7).

The force that Proctor brought against Fort Meigs was weaker than the one he had

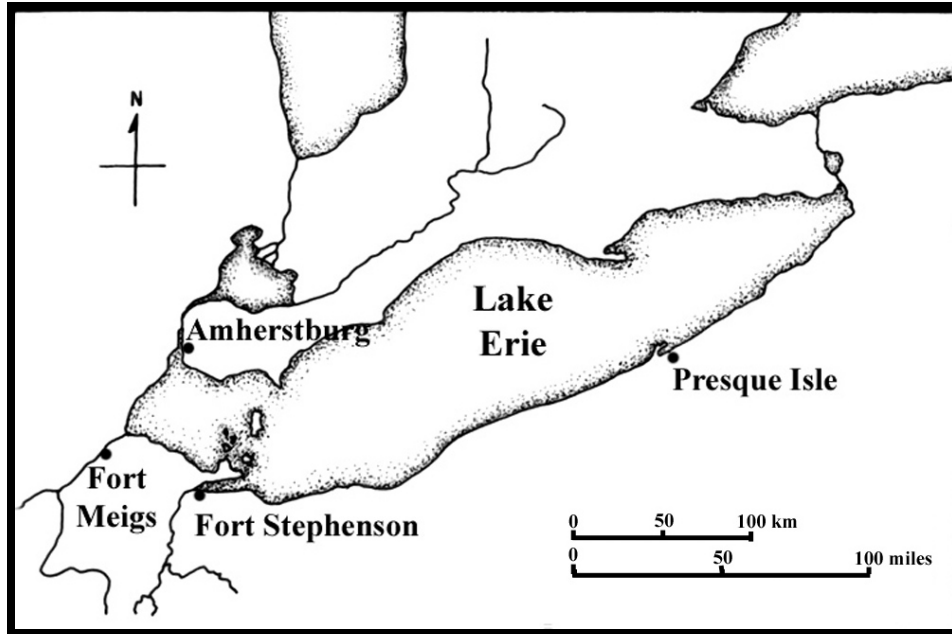


Figure 7: Attacks on Fort Meigs and Fort Stephenson.  
Map by Christopher R. Sabick

employed earlier that year, while the American position had continued to improve. Clay had additional reinforcements and a large supply of provisions. In a vain attempt to draw the American troops into open battle, Tecumseh and his men staged a mock battle in the forest around the fort, making it appear that an American relief column was under attack. Unfortunately for the British, Clay had prior information that no American forces were in the area.<sup>41</sup> With their ploy foiled, Proctor and his men reboarded their vessels on July 28th and set course for the Sandusky.

The second objective of Proctor's attack on northeast Ohio was the capture of Fort Stephenson on the Sandusky River. Harrison, who was in the south assembling reinforcements, realized that this small fort was in grave danger. Fort Stephenson was a small stockaded post which had been built in 1812, and strengthened in early 1813.<sup>42</sup>



The post was under the command of Major George Croghan who had 200 men of the 17th Infantry Regiment in his garrison. Realizing that this post might be overrun, Harrison ordered Croghan to abandon the post and destroy the supplies remaining there. The following day, on July 29, Harrison received a letter from Croghan, who stated that he and his men would stay and defend the fort. Harrison, furious at having his orders ignored, almost replaced Croghan, but the commander of Fort Stephenson and Harrison were old comrades and the general allowed him to stay in command. Feeling that the British would attack elsewhere, Harrison ordered that Croghan retreat if British forces appeared and time permitted.<sup>43</sup>

On August 1, British troops and their Native allies appeared around the fort. Croghan, feeling that retreat in the face of the enemy was impossible, decided to defend his post. Proctor demanded the surrender of the post, but was refused. The British immediately began to bombard the post from gunboats in the river and with a howitzer that had been landed, but this proved ineffective. That night Proctor landed his only mobile artillery, three 6-pounder cannon. With these guns the British attempted to breach the stockade, but they proved too weak.<sup>44</sup>

Without any heavy artillery Proctor was forced to order a frontal assault during the afternoon of August 2. In the late afternoon three columns of British regulars advanced on the fort. Croghan ordered his troops to hold their fire until the red coats were crossing the defensive ditch that surrounded the fort. As the British filed into the ditch, the Americans unleashed a devastating volley of musketry, supported by their only piece of artillery, a 6-pounder gun loaded with grape shot. In the face of this torrent of

fire, Tecumseh's men who were supporting the British assault vanished into the wilderness. The ferocity of the onslaught could be clearly heard by the captain and crew of *Nancy* as they waited at anchor in Sandusky Harbor.<sup>45</sup> The British troops fell back to a protected piece of ground and waited for nightfall to complete their retreat. By 9 p.m. Proctor and his men began reboarding their transports for the trip back to the Detroit area. The American garrison suffered only eight casualties while the British forces had 26 men killed, 29 captured, and 38 wounded.<sup>46</sup>

After off loading Proctor and his men at Amherstburg, *Nancy* traveled up to Moy. Here she was loaded to "the draught of water 7 feet 2 inches" (2.2m) with supplies for the British garrison at Michilimackinac.<sup>47</sup> The schooner set sail on August 31, 1813, carrying not only provisions but also a new commander for the northern fort, Captain Richard Bullock, and his family.<sup>48</sup> *Nancy* arrived at Michilimackinac after a ten-day voyage. Once she was finished off loading Captain Bullock and the supplies for the fort, *Nancy* was employed transporting troops between St. Joseph and St. Mary. By the first week of October, Mackintosh and his crew were sailing back to Moy from the north with a load of surplus sugar, gunpowder, and cannon for the fort at Amherstburg.<sup>49</sup>

What the crew of *Nancy* did not know was that while they were away on their errand to the north, the nature of the war on the upper lakes had changed dramatically. On September 10, after a hard fought three-hour battle near Putt-in-Bay, Lake Erie, the American squadron commanded by Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry captured the entire British squadron under Commander Richard Barclay. This decisive American victory left *Nancy* as the sole remaining Royal Navy vessel on the upper lakes.

Following the American recapture of Detroit and the abandonment of Amherstburg at the end of September, *Nancy's* situation became even more precarious.

With the Americans in control of Detroit, *Nancy* no longer had safe passage from Lake Huron to Lake Erie via the St. Clair River. This fact was revealed to Captain Mackintosh, as he was about to make this passage on October 5, 1813. Before entering the river, Mackintosh sent a boat ashore to determine the situation in the surrounding territory. Unfortunately, due to a freshening gale, he was unable to retrieve the men from the shore. After consulting with other men on board, Mackintosh decided he must take the schooner into the river to avoid the worst of the coming weather.<sup>50</sup>

One may wonder why Captain Mackintosh decided to brave the confines of the St. Clair River without first learning if it was free of American forces. His reasons can be found through a close examination of the logbook left by Mackintosh. In an entry for July 26, 1813, Mackintosh reported, "Unmoored. The hawser broke in several places, spliced it again,"<sup>51</sup> This quote suggests that they had had a chronic problem with this cable. Faced with the choice of riding out a strong storm on the open lake with an indifferent hawser, or of entering the protected waters of a river he had every reason to assume was safe, he chose the latter option. As the following excerpt from the log book dated October 5 illustrates, he chose wisely, "...myself being of the opinion that as we are short of provisions & the wind continuing to blow fresh from the northward (as it is at present with a heavy sea running) it would be best to run into the River's mouth...Upon which we get under weigh, & in so doing break the cable & leave the anchor behind."<sup>52</sup>

After entering the river, Captain Mackintosh was able to pick up the men he had

sent ashore, who had walked along the river's edge to where *Nancy* had come to a halt below the rapids. These men told the captain that a group of Native Americans had informed them that both Detroit and Amherstburg were in the hands of the Americans. Despite the risk of encountering an American force, *Nancy* remained in the river, unable to leave due to the strong northerly wind. The following morning, October 6, a Native American came aboard *Nancy* and warned her captain that a unit of mounted American soldiers was coming up the river. A little less than an hour later a group of men brandishing muskets appeared on the riverbank. Fearing that he might have to destroy his vessel, Captain Mackintosh loaded the few passengers he had on board into the ship's boat and sent them ashore.

In the early afternoon, one of the Americans on shore demanded that *Nancy* surrender. When this man repeated his demand a second time, Mackintosh went ashore to negotiate with his would-be captors. They turned out to be a group of American militia men led by a Lieutenant Colonel Beaubien. Beaubien again demanded that Mackintosh surrender his vessel, this time adding that no private property belonging to the captain or his crew would be molested. Captain Mackintosh requested an hour to contemplate his decision, and this was granted. Mackintosh returned to *Nancy* and asked his crew if they, "would surrender or fight and defend the vessel."<sup>53</sup> One by one each said they would defend their schooner. Mackintosh relayed his decision to the Americans waiting on the shore. Beaubien replied that his men would open fire on the schooner if she attempted to raise anchor and return to the lake.<sup>54</sup>

Despite this threat, the crew of *Nancy* began preparations to get underway back

toward Lake Huron, but not before running out both guns to face the enemy. While they were still in the process of raising the anchor, the Americans fired a volley at the vessel. *Nancy's* crew returned fire with both cannon and musket. As the schooner struggled upstream against the current, the two forces continued to exchange fire for about twenty minutes, after which the Americans disappeared into the woods.<sup>55</sup>

Only one member of *Nancy's* crew, seaman Joseph Paquet, was wounded in this engagement when two cartridges for the guns detonated prematurely. This mishap also set the mainsail on fire, but it was quickly extinguished. Mackintosh also reported that *Nancy* had been damaged by musket shot in her mainboom, cabin, foremast, squaresail, and mainsail. Due to their hasty retreat the crew was unable to determine if they had inflicted any casualties on the American force.<sup>56</sup>

Anticipating the Americans' return, *Nancy* and her crew continued to struggle upstream. Finally reaching the rapids by sunset, she was forced to stop there due to a lack of wind. The following morning the wind picked up and by 8 a.m. the vessel had made it back into Lake Huron. The crew was obviously glad to escape the confines of the St. Clair River because upon reaching the lake, "we then fired 3 guns & cheered 3 times..."<sup>57</sup> After this brief celebration, they set sail and headed for the anchor they had lost on October 5. They retrieved their best bower before noon, and with winds picking up as the afternoon wore on, they set course for Michilimackinac.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the deteriorating weather of October 7 and 8, *Nancy* made considerable headway toward her destination. By the morning of October 10, the storm had increased in strength and the log book recorded, "mountainous sea," which left *Nancy*, "rolling

gunnel in." No longer making any headway, *Nancy* was simply running before the storm.

On October 11, Mackintosh noted that he had to man the pump every two hours. The storm continued through the 12th, as strong as when it had begun. When Mackintosh came on deck before light on the 12th, he thought he caught a glimpse of land in the moonlight. Upon reporting this sighting to his first mate, Jacob Hammond, the man jumped into the ships' boat, which was chocked up above the main hatch, for a better view. The mate confirmed Mackintosh's sighting and the captain ordered that a sounding be taken immediately. When the sounding lead was heaved overboard they found that they were in only 14 fathoms (25.6m) of water. Now that the schooner was in danger of running aground, the captain ordered that both bowers be dropped immediately. Before the ship's anchors bit and *Nancy* came to a stop, she had drifted into only seven and a half fathoms (13.7m) of water.<sup>59</sup>

The *Nancy's* situation was becoming desperate as Captain Mackintosh described in his logbook,

We then took in sail & handed them, clinched the best & small bower round the mainmast, chocked up the windlass from the deck, and between the foremast & the windless bit, which had already canted about 3 inches- the vessel pitching bows in, & it blowing if anything more violent than ever... What now must the reader think of our situation, on a lee shore riding out a most violent gale in the month of October, with 2 very indifferent cables, & them of only 60 fathoms in length, with a scanty stock of provisions.<sup>60</sup>

As the day brightened the crew could see shoal water in every direction. Though there were islands with sheltered water nearby, they dared not raise anchor for fear of the shoals. Thus, they were forced to wait out the storm that continued to blow through

October 12 and 13.

Finally at noon on October 14, the storm broke and Mackintosh put his crew to work repairing storm damage. While the crew was working a canoe filled with Native Americans approached *Nancy* and Mackintosh, unsure of his location, discovered that they were approximately 80 miles (128km) north of the St. Clair River. The storm had blown them almost the entire length of Lake Huron. By 6:30 that evening a favorable wind had come up and the battered *Nancy* once more set sail for Michilimackinac.<sup>61</sup> On the 16th, *Nancy* stood off the island and sent word to Captain Bullock of the loss of the British Squadron on Lake Erie and requested orders. By October 18, the schooner was "anchored in three fathoms of water, three cable lengths from shore."<sup>62</sup>

About a week later Mackintosh was greatly relieved to receive orders to take his battered vessel to St. Marys to be laid up for the winter. Only two days later he was equally disappointed when these orders were countermanded. His new orders required him to make one more run to Mackadash in November in order to gather supplies and return with them to Michilimackinac. Captain Mackintosh was furious and demanded that his battered vessel be surveyed to assess its ability to carry out these orders.<sup>63</sup>

Captain Bullock granted this survey and three local gentlemen were assembled to carry out the task, the report of which they delivered on October 28, 1813,

In pursuance of an order dated the 25th Inst: From Captain Richard Bullock of the 41st Regiment Commanding the Post of Michilmasckinac- We the undersigned appointed to examine the state and condition of the schooner *Nancy* whereof Mr. Alexander Mackintosh is commander; do report that said schooner is not fit to be sent to Matchidash on account of the insufficiency of her sails and cables. The only good sails she has are the two topgallant sails, squaresail & one cable. The fore top-, main Top-, fore-, & main-sails, jibs, and one cable unserviceable. signed John Askin

Jr., Fredrick Oliver, and John McGulpin.<sup>64</sup>

With this report supporting his position, Mackintosh was able to set sail for St. Mary. *Nancy* arrived at her winter quarters in the middle of November and her crew set about preparing for the winter. During the long winter months, the crew was kept busy with numerous tasks including: slaughtering and salting cattle, cutting fire wood, patching sails, picking oakum, making oars, patching *Nancy's* hull, and overhauling her badly damaged rigging.<sup>65</sup> The crew also attempted to refloat another North West Co. schooner which had been laid up at the post after striking a rock ledge. This was the small schooner *Mink* of about 45 tons.<sup>66</sup>

## 1814

When the 1814 campaign season began, *Nancy* was once again employed carrying supplies to Michilimackinac, though now she traveled from the newly established supply depot on the Nottawasaga River. The creation of this supply base was made necessary by the American capture of Detroit and their control of the St. Clair River. The North West Co. had suggested this supply route as early as January of 1812, but with the early capture of Detroit by British forces it had proven unnecessary. The depot at Nottawasaga allowed supplies to be transported overland from York to Lake Simcoe, and from there down the Nottawasaga River (figure 8). The Nottawasaga River empties into Georgian Bay, from which *Nancy* could carry the supplies to Michilimackinac, bypassing the St. Clair River.

Because Captain Mackintosh's logbook ends on March 29, 1814 detailed



information on *Nancy's* actions during the early part of that campaign season is limited.

It is known that during this time period the schooner received her first Royal Navy

Commander. In a letter from Governor-General Sir George Prevost to

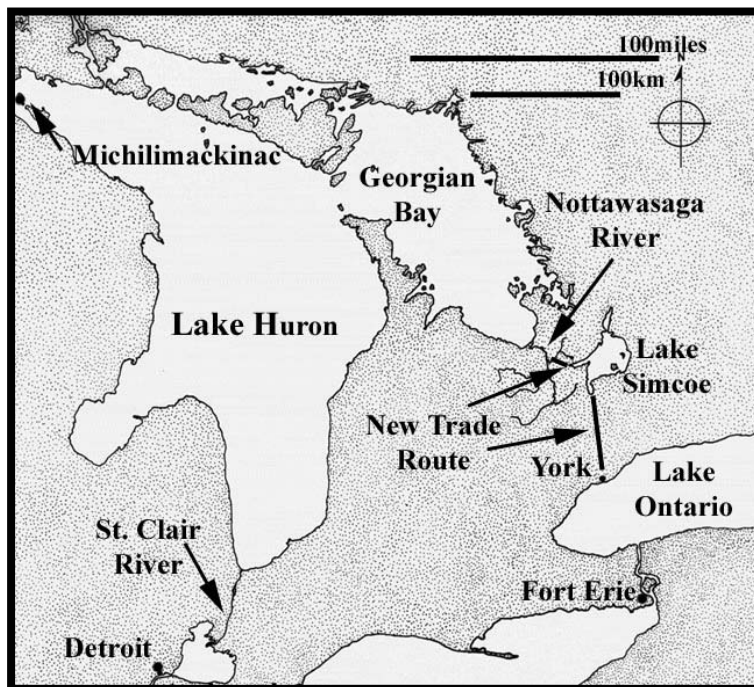


Figure 8: Nottawasaga supply route.  
Map by Christopher R. Sabick.

Lieutenant-General Gordon Drummond dated January 8, 1814, Prevost asked for additional forces including "...two companies of the 2nd Battln. of Marines and a proportion of seamen under a Leut. to man the *Nancy*."<sup>67</sup> A list of appointments sent by Commodore James Yeo to the Admiralty Board dated February 9, 1814, lists Lieutenant Newdgate Poyntz as being transferred from the frigate *Aeolus* operating on the east coast,

to the new establishment on Lake Huron.<sup>68</sup> Newdgate Poyntz, a 29-year-old veteran of Copenhagen and Alexandria, left Kingston on February 12 with a party of 20 seamen, and arrived at the Nottawasaga post after a two-week journey. At this post Poyntz supervised the construction of six bateaux mounting cannon and 24 regular bateaux, a task which lasted well into April. Shortly after these vessels were completed, Lieutenant Colonel McDouall arrived with 120 reinforcements for the 41st Regiment of Foot and supplies for the garrison at Michilimackinac.<sup>69</sup>

The flotilla of bateaux left the mouth of the Nottawasaga River and entered Georgian Bay on April 25. The voyage to Michilimackinac lasted 24 days. The bateaux were hampered by massive ice flows and terrible weather. Only one bateau was lost during the voyage, and its crew and cargo were recovered.<sup>70</sup> On their arrival at Michilimackinac Poyntz and McDouall found the garrison near starvation. With the supplies and equipment that they had brought from Nottawasaga, McDouall set about improving the defenses of the fort. Poyntz was employed in building batteries and mounting artillery pieces until *Nancy* arrived.

The defense and supply of Michilimackinac was of primary importance to both McDouall and Poyntz. With no other naval assets on the lakes there was even discussion of turning *Nancy* into a floating gun platform for the defense of the island. A letter by McDouall dated May 26, 1814, concluded that this idea had little merit:

No step has yet been taken to out fit the *Nancy*: her former commdr Capt McIntosh gave his opinion that she was not fit to be cut down, or worth it, and I silently acquiesced in Lt. Poyntz's opinion, that even if fitted out, she could not shew herself before the force which the enemy could bring against her, because I derive more advantage from her guns on shore than I have any hope of doing from her being equipped with them.<sup>71</sup>

Poyntz and his seamen relieved the crew of *Nancy*, though Alexander Mackintosh was retained to act as pilot for the schooner. Throughout July *Nancy* continued to ferry supplies from the base at Nottawasaga to the garrison at Michilimackinac. With the passage between Lakes Erie and Huron under the control of the Americans the British were expecting an attack on their fort at any moment.

Toward the end of July, Poyntz was removed from command of *Nancy* and returned to Lake Ontario. Apparently a conflict had arisen between Poyntz and McDouall, for a letter from Drummond to Prevost dated June 16, 1814 mentions "Sir, in consequence of my application to Sir James Yeo, requesting that he would order another Officer of the Navy, to Lake Huron, to take charge of the flotilla there in lieu of Lt. Poyntz, whose conduct appears to have been so highly offensive to Lt. Col. McDouall"<sup>72</sup> It appears that this conflict centered around who had control of the few naval assets available to the force at Michilimackinac.<sup>73</sup>

Poyntz was replaced by Lieutenant Miller Worsley, who Drummond described as "an able, active, and intelligent officer of conciliatory measures."<sup>74</sup> Worsley was transferred from his position as first lieutenant of the frigate *Princess Charlotte* on Lake Ontario. The conflict between Army and Navy over who commanded the vessels supplying Michilimackinac was settled by a letter from Yeo to Worsley, dated July 2, 1814, which instructed the lieutenant to follow the orders of McDouall.<sup>75</sup> If there had been some friction between McDouall and Poyntz, it doesn't appear to have affected Yeo's opinion of the latter. A letter written by Yeo, and enclosed in a report from Poyntz

to the Admiralty Board, states that the commodore "selected Lt. Poyntz for this most arduous service from his indefatigable Zeal and particular abilities. His having greater abilities than any officer I have met with in the service..."<sup>76</sup>

Worsley, like Poyntz before him, traveled to the post at Nottawasaga. At the end of July he took command of *Nancy*, and set about loading the schooner with supplies and provisions to be carried to Michilimackinac as soon as possible. Loading of the vessel was a lengthy process. The supply depot had been established several miles upstream from the mouth of the river. *Nancy* was only able to navigate the first mile or so, therefore the supplies had to be brought down the river in canoes and bateaux, then loaded into the schooner. There also appears to have been a small gunboat at the post that could be used as a lighter to bring cargo to the schooner.<sup>77</sup> The supplies loaded included 157 barrels of flour, 143 barrels of pork, and 6 barrels of salt.<sup>78</sup> A letter dated August 21, 1814 from Mr. Crookshank to Mr. Turquand also mentions that there were an additional 50 bags of flour on board that were personal property.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, this source does not mention to whom they belonged.

While Worsley was settling into his new command and preparing to return to Michilimackinac, the anticipated American attack on that fort finally arrived. An American force under the command of Fort Stephenson's defender, Lieutenant-Colonel George Croghan, had been assembling at Detroit since the early spring. Foul weather and supply problems delayed the expeditions departure until July 3. Croghan's 700 troops sailed on *Niagara* (20 guns), *Lawrence* (20 guns), *Scorpion* (2 guns), *Tigress* (1 gun), and two gunboats, all under the command of U.S. Navy Captain Arthur Sinclair.

The small squadron struggled up the St. Clair River against contrary winds, finally reaching Lake Huron on July 12.<sup>80</sup>

After searching in vain for the British supply depot at Matchadash, the American squadron proceeded to St. Joseph Island. Here they found the British post abandoned and burned what remained. While anchored off the island the Americans captured the recently-refloated schooner *Mink*. Croghan sent a detachment of men to St. Mary to capture and destroy the British post there. The contingent of North West Co. employees at St. Mary learned of the coming attack and were able to escape into the wilderness. The American forces burned the post and attempted to bring the North West Co. schooner *Perseverance* down the falls from Lake Superior, but when the attempt failed the vessel was burned.<sup>81</sup>

Croghan and Sinclair next made the short journey from St. Joseph to Mackinac Island, arriving on July 26. Croghan paused for several days, waiting for more favorable weather and the return of the troops sent to St. Mary. McDouall, who had been anticipating the attack for some time, built a blockhouse on the hill overlooking Fort Michilimackinac, the position that the British had used to capture the fort in 1812. McDouall's force numbered around 500 regulars and Militiamen, and an indeterminate number of Native allies.<sup>82</sup>

On August 4, Croghan decided to land in the same location that the British had chosen in 1812. McDouall's force met the American troops before they had marched a half a mile (0.8km) from the shore. The British regulars and militiamen took up a blocking position behind a breastwork, which was flanked on both sides by thick forests.

American troops attempted to outflank the British position by advancing through the woods, but were met by a vicious Native American attack and beaten back. This failed American flanking attack was followed by a frontal assault on the breastwork which was also crushed by British fire.<sup>83</sup>

Croghan called off the assault and his troops returned to their vessels. British casualties had been very light, though no information is available on the number of Indian casualties. The Americans on the other hand had 15 men killed in action and 48 wounded.<sup>84</sup> Unable to destroy the British force outright, Croghan and Sinclair decided that the elimination of the British supply depots and remaining supply vessel, *Nancy*, would force the surrender of Michilimackinac. Prisoners who had been taken in the capture of the schooner *Mink* had revealed the location of the Nottawasaga depot and *Nancy's* presence there.<sup>85</sup> With this information Croghan and Sinclair set out for Georgian Bay. The brig *Lawrence* and the gunboats returned to Detroit with the American wounded, while *Niagara*, *Scorpion*, and *Tigress* hunted *Nancy*.

Upon the arrival of the American squadron off Mackinac Island, McDouall dispatched Robert Livingston, an Indian Department courier, to warn Worsley and his crew that the American attack had begun.<sup>86</sup> Livingston reached Nottawasaga as *Nancy* was preparing to set sail and delivered the message to Worsley; he then continued on to York to inform British officials there. McDouall ordered Worsley to take *Nancy* as far up the river as possible, and for a blockhouse to be built with which to defend the schooner.<sup>87</sup> Worsley and his crew warped *Nancy* about a mile (1.6km) upstream and began construction of a blockhouse on a hill overlooking the vessel, into which he placed

two 24-pounder carronades and a 6-pounder long gun from his vessel's armament.<sup>88</sup> As it neared Georgian Bay the Nottawasaga River runs parallel to the shore, leaving a thin spit of land between the open water of the bay and *Nancy's* hiding place in the river. The blockhouse was constructed on the east bank of the river, and had an open field of fire across this peninsula (figure 9).

The American forces appeared in Georgian Bay on August 13, and a shore party discovered the schooner's location that afternoon. Contrary winds and heavy seas forced Croghan and Sinclair to wait until the following morning to make their attack. For this task they had between 400 and 450 men, Worsley had only 21 seamen, and 10 native allies that Livingston had gathered on his return from York.<sup>89</sup>

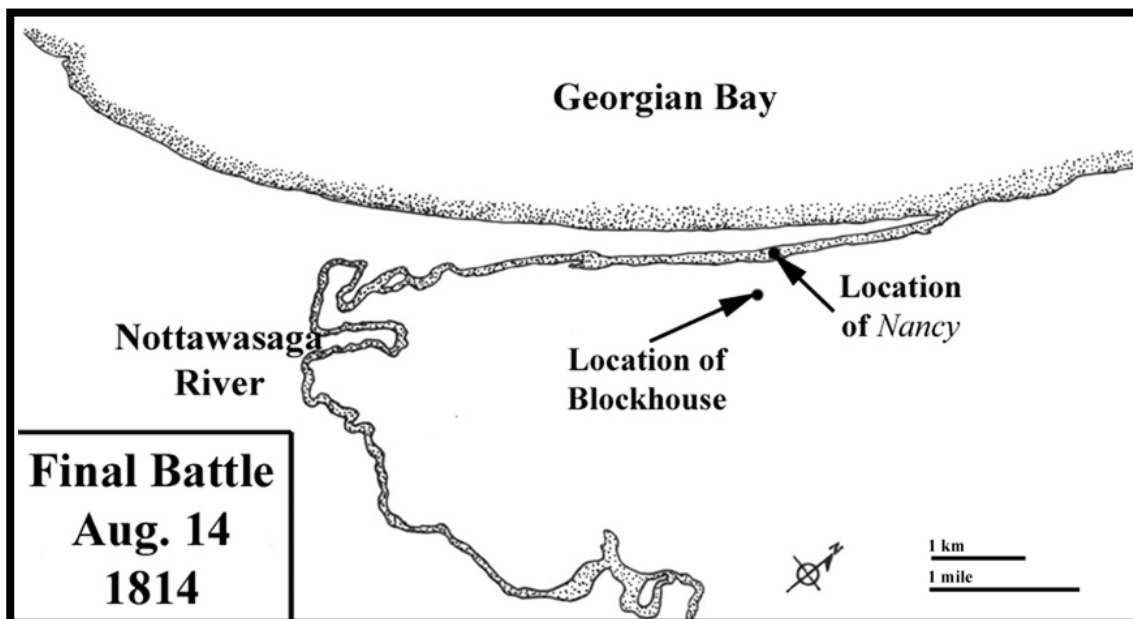


Figure 9: *Nancy's* final battle.  
Map by Christopher R. Sabick

On the morning of August 14, reduced seas allowed the American warships to approach shore and safely land troops. *Niagara*, *Scorpion*, and *Tigress* began to

exchange fire with the British blockhouse. This lopsided bombardment lasted until early afternoon, when Croghan landed a larger contingent of troops and two howitzers. While the American troops skirmished with Indians and red coats on the spit of land separating the river from the bay, the howitzers ranged in on the blockhouse. The British position was becoming desperate and Lieutenant Worsley made preparations to destroy both the blockhouse and *Nancy*, leaving powder trains that led to demolition charges in each.<sup>90</sup>

Around 4 p.m. American howitzer fire began to fall on and around the blockhouse. The events that followed are in some dispute. In a letter written some time after the battle, Worsley claimed that as the situation became intolerable, he ordered the demolition charges lit.<sup>91</sup> The American version of the story claims that a howitzer round knocked out the blockhouse and lit the powder train to the schooner.<sup>92</sup> Either way, the blockhouse was abandoned and the schooner set afire. Worsley and his men disappeared into the surrounding wilderness while *Nancy* burned furiously.

*Nancy* had been loaded with more than 306 barrels of supplies for the garrison at Michilimackinac. As the fire consumed *Nancy* these supplies added to the conflagration. Barrels of flour exploded, barrels of pork burned violently, and bursting powder kegs blew the small schooner apart. American troops who reached the riverside in hopes of capturing *Nancy* were driven back by the intensity of the flames.<sup>93</sup> The schooner burned to the waterline and sank into the murky depths of the Nottawasaga River.

Though the 25-year career of the schooner *Nancy* was at an end, the men who had formed her crew still had an important roll to play in the War of 1812. Worsley and his men, who, amazingly, had suffered only one man killed and one wounded, retreated



upriver to the supply depot.<sup>94</sup> After resting here for several days and waiting for the American ships to leave, which they did on August 16, Worsley and his men loaded the bateaux that remained at the depot with supplies and ventured out into Georgian Bay. Worsley and his small flotilla traveled along the northern coast until they reached Michilimackinac, slipping past *Tigress* and *Scorpion*, both of which had been left by the Americans to interdict supplies headed for the fort. After the supplies had been unloaded, Worsley led his seamen and a detachment of soldiers from the fort in the daring capture of these two schooners.<sup>95</sup> The British capture of *Tigress* and *Scorpion*, which were renamed *Confiance* and *Surprise*, signaled the resurgence of British naval power on the upper lakes.

After the incident at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River, *Nancy* appears in sporadic correspondence concerning a claim by the North West Co. for compensation for the loss of their schooner. In a letter dated November 17, 1814, from the North West Co. to Governor-General Prevost, the fur traders valued *Nancy* at £2,200. They also claimed a charge of £1,486 2s for the transport of government goods.<sup>96</sup> The following month, the Claims Board responded that they agreed with the value of the schooner, but offered only £1,243 5s 4p for transport services.<sup>97</sup> Unfortunately, it is unclear what amount was agreed upon.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Spencer C. Tucker and Frank T. Reuter, *Injured Honor, The Chesapeake Leopard Affair, June 22, 1807* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 48.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 192

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>4</sup> William S. Dudley, ed. *The Naval War of 1812 A Documentary History* vol. 1, (Washington: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth A. Cassavoy and Kevin J. Crisman “The War of 1812: Battle for the Great Lakes,” in *Ships and Shipwrecks of the Americas, A History Based on Underwater Archaeology*, ed. George F. Bass (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 171.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 171-72.

<sup>7</sup> St. George to Brock, July 8, 1812, *Select British Documents of the War of 1812* vol. 1, ed. William Wood (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 364.

<sup>8</sup> Gray to Prevost, January 11, 1812. *Select British Documents of the War of 1812* vol. 1, ed. William Wood, 283-86.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>11</sup> Harrison Bird, *War for the West 1790-1813* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 94.

<sup>12</sup> Prevost to War Office, May 18, 1812, PRO, WO1, 129-30.

<sup>13</sup> Gray to Prevost, January 29, 1812, *Select British Documents of the War of 1812* vol. 1, ed. William Wood, 251.

<sup>14</sup> St. George to Brock, July 8, 1812, *Select British Documents of the War of 1812* vol. 1, ed. William Wood, 364.

<sup>15</sup> Proctor to Brock, July 30, 1812, *Select British Documents of the War of 1812* vol. 1, ed. William Wood, 416.

<sup>16</sup> Alec R. Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest* (East Lansing: The Michigan State University Press, 1958), 89.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 65

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>21</sup> Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812, A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989),

80.

<sup>22</sup> Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest*, 182.

<sup>23</sup> Robert McAfee, *History of the Late War in the Western Country* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms Inc., 1966), 252-53.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>25</sup> Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest*, 182.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>30</sup> War Office to Baynes, April 23, 1813, RG8 C series, NAC.

<sup>31</sup> Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 135.

<sup>32</sup> Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest*, 183.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>37</sup> McAfee, *History of the Late War*, 270-71.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>39</sup> Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest*, 190.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-05.

<sup>42</sup> McAfee, *History of the Late War*, 308.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 322-23.

<sup>44</sup> Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest*, 206.

<sup>45</sup> C.H.J. Snider, ed., *Leaves from the War Log of the Nancy* (Toronto: Huronia Historical Development Council, n.d.), 11.

- <sup>46</sup> Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest*, 207.
- <sup>47</sup> Snider, ed., *War Log of the Nancy*, 13.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 14-15.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 17, 19.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., 21.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 25.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., 28.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 31.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 38.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>64</sup> Board of Inquiry to Bullock, October 20, 1813, RG8 C Series, NAC.
- <sup>65</sup> Snider, ed., *War Log of the Nancy*, 38-9.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> Prevost to Drummond, January 8, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.
- <sup>68</sup> Yeo to Admiralty Board, April 13, 1814, PRO, ADM 1.
- <sup>69</sup> Poyntz and Yeo to Admiralty Board, August 15 1815, PRO, ADM 1.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> McDouall to Drummond, May 26, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>72</sup> Drummond to Prevost, June 16, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>73</sup> McDouall to Drummond May 26, 1814, *Select British Documents of the War of 1812* vol. 3 part 1, ed. William Wood, 272.

<sup>74</sup> Drummond to Prevost, June 16, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>75</sup> Yeo to Worsley, July 2, 1814, RG 8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>76</sup> Poyntz and Yeo to Admiralty Board, August 15, 1815, PRO, ADM 1.

<sup>77</sup> Crookshank to Turquand, August 21, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC,

<sup>78</sup> Worsley to Crookshank, August 2, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>79</sup> Crookshank to Turquand, August 21, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>80</sup> Lieut. Col. E. Cruikshank. "An Episode of the War of 1812. The Story of the Schooner *Nancy*," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records*. Vol. IX (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1910), 81.

<sup>81</sup> Turner to Sinclair, July 28, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>82</sup> Gilpin, *War of 1812 in the Old Northwest*, 244.

<sup>83</sup> McDouall to Prevost, August 14, 1814, *Select British Documents of the War of 1812* vol. 3 part 1, ed. William Wood, 273-276.

<sup>84</sup> Gilpin, *War of 1812 in the Old Northwest*, 245.

<sup>85</sup> Sinclair to the Secretary of the Navy, August 9, 1814, Cruikshank, "An Episode of the War of 1812," 102.

<sup>86</sup> McDouall to Worsley, July 28, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Croghan to McArthur, August 23, 1814, in Cruikshank, "An Episode of the War of 1812," 112.

<sup>89</sup> Worsley to Worsley, October 6, 1814, in Snider, ed., *War Log of the Nancy*, 47.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Croghan to McArthur, August 23, 1814, in Cruikshank, "An Episode of the War of 1812," 112.

<sup>93</sup> Sinclair to the Secretary of the Navy, September 3, 1814, in Cruikshank. "An Episode of the War of 1812," 114.

<sup>94</sup> Worsley to Worsley, October 6, 1814, in Snider, ed., *War Log of the Nancy*, 47.

<sup>95</sup> McDouall to Drummond, September 9, 1814, in *Select British Documents of the War of 1812* vol. 3 part 1, ed. William Wood, 276-282.

<sup>96</sup> North West Co. to Prevost, November 17, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

<sup>97</sup> Prevost to North West Co., December 14, 1814, RG8 C Series, NAC.

## CHAPTER V

### AFTER 1814

After fire consumed its rigging and upper works, *Nancy*'s charred hull remains settled into the shallow muddy water of the Nottawasaga River. The schooner was facing upstream, into the current, and when the hull settled into the riverbed she drifted slightly towards the left (north) bank of the river. The schooner's hull remains created an obstruction in the river's current, and silt began to settle out in front of the wreck. These silt deposits continued to grow until a small island formed in the river.

The location of *Nancy* was never truly forgotten. Numerous inhabitants of the area reported seeing the remains of the vessel in the Nottawasaga.<sup>1</sup> Apparently the submerged timbers were even used as a crib where loggers stored small rafts of timber before floating them out into Georgian Bay. Due to the logging and clearing of homesteads along the banks of the river during the late nineteenth-century, the water level in the Nottawasaga River dropped several feet. This exposed more of *Nancy*'s timbers and several local inhabitants described seeing the sternpost of the vessel standing above the surface of the water.<sup>2</sup> In 1906, a vacationer from Toronto named W. C. Freeman retrieved a piece of wood from *Nancy*'s remains that was fashioned into a gavel for the Canadian Club of Canada.<sup>3</sup>

The Canadian historian C. H. J. Snider first visited the remains in 1912, while he was gathering information for his book, *In the Wake of the Eighteen-Twelvers*.<sup>4</sup> Snider found the schooner's hull on the southeastern shore of the island that had formed around it. The port side of the vessel remained submerged and was partially covered with bulrushes and water lilies. The starboard half of the schooner was buried into the side of

the island and covered by two to three feet (.6-.9m) of soft soil. Snider also mentioned that the sternpost of the vessel was visible, and that it appeared to show damage from both ice flows and the axes of local inhabitants.

During the first half of the twentieth century the area along the Nottawasaga River and the shore of Georgian Bay became a popular summer destination for vacationers from Toronto and southern Ontario. A small town was founded on the spit of land separating the Nottawasaga River from Georgian Bay that became known as Wasaga Beach. As more people traveled to this area, interest in the story of *Nancy* and her crew continued to grow.

In August of 1924, Dr. F. J. Conboy, a dentist on vacation in Wasaga Beach, began searching the shores of the Nottawasaga for clues of the schooner's location.<sup>5</sup> The first item that Conboy found was a cannon ball that he discovered on the shore opposite of the small island in the river. Having read *In the Wake of the Eighteen-Twelvers*, Conboy immediately turned to Snider for assistance. Upon examining the object, Snider informed Dr. Conboy that it was a twenty-four pound cannon ball that had probably been fired by the American squadron that attacked *Nancy* in August of 1814.

This discovery piqued Doctor Conboy's interest and he asked Snider for instructions on how he could find the schooner's hull remains. Snider outlined the location of the wreck as he remembered it from his visit in 1912. On returning to the Nottawasaga in 1925 Dr. Conboy was unable to locate the hull, despite having Snider's directions. Dr. Conboy's failure to locate the schooner's remains was not due to poor instruction from Snider, but by the fact that the water table of the Nottawasaga River had



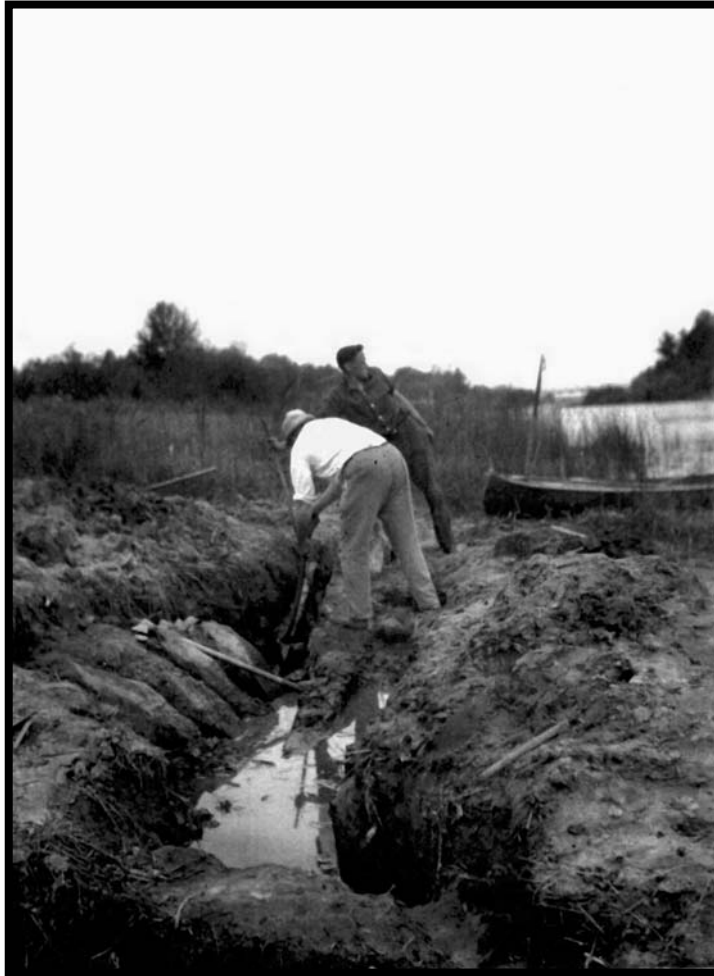


Figure 10: Initial excavation, summer 1925.  
Queen's University Archives.

dropped several feet since the historian's visit in 1912. This change in water level was due to the opening of the Chicago Drainage Canal in year 1925, which lowered the water level of Lake Huron by almost two feet (.6m).<sup>6</sup>

After further investigation Dr. Conboy located the hull remains about 25 feet (7.6m) from the water's edge. Bulrushes and a couple feet of silt covered the hull. In July Snider visited the wreck site to help Dr. Conboy make a more complete investigation of the hull (figure 10). With the assistance of several men from Wasaga Beach, Snider, and Conboy began uncovering the wreck from the stern forward.<sup>7</sup> This first examination

proceeded slowly. As the excavators moved forward along the keelson the hull remains were covered by an increasing amount of mud. After uncovering approximately half of the vessel they found that the remainder was below the water table, and further excavation was postponed.

This initial excavation recovered numerous artifacts. In the stern of the vessel a number of ceramic artifacts were unearthed. These included the cabin china, which Snider describes as decorated with gold stars, green leaves and a flowing blue pattern. Several of these plates were found to bear the mark "BE 7" on the bottoms. In addition to this a number of fragments from earthenware and glass vessels were recovered in the cabin area.<sup>8</sup>

Snider reported that a brass musket lock was also found in this area, and includes a picture in his report (figure 11). It was stamped with the maker's name, T. ASHTON. However, upon examination it becomes clear that this is actually a cannon lock. Research has revealed that the piece was manufactured by Thomas Ashton of London who was a contractor for the Royal Navy from 1803 to 1818.<sup>9</sup> There were also numerous brass fasteners recovered, most likely buckles from shoes, belts, and clothing. A large number of small iron nails, were found among the charcoal in the after end of the vessel, probably finishing nails used for the decoration of the cabin. Several fragments of cast iron plate approximately one quarter inch thick were found, and were attributed to the cabin stove by Snider.

As the excavation continued forward a bulkhead was encountered which separated the cabin from the hold. Forward of this partition evidence of *Nancy's* cargo of provisions and other supplies became evident. Amidships bushels of bones were found,

in fact, Snider reported that the mud in this area of the hull smelled strongly of rotten flesh. Though one of these bones was originally identified as a human wrist bone, they were later correctly identified as the bones of “defunct porkers.”<sup>10</sup> Among the bones the burned remains of barrel staves were also located.

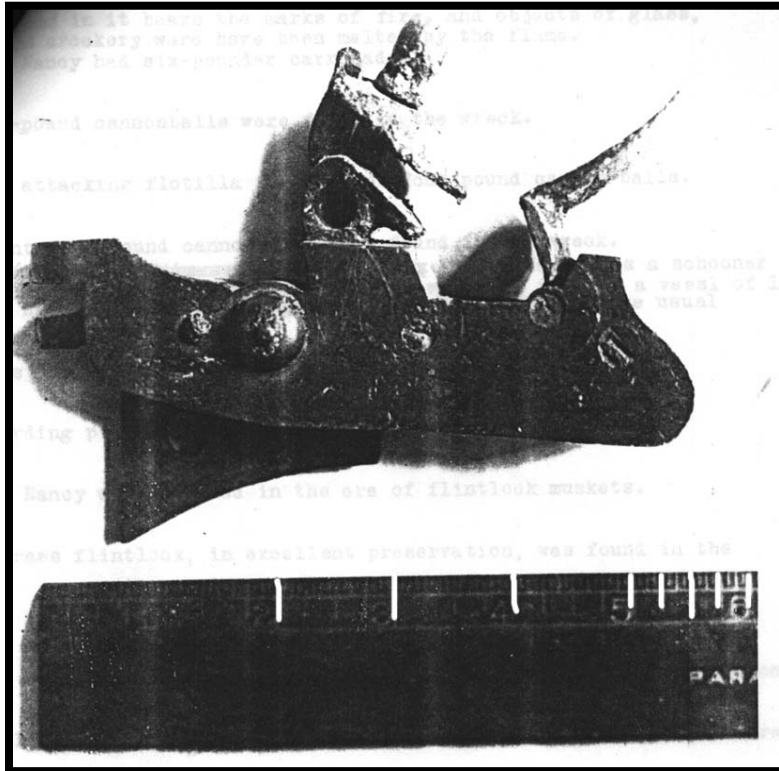


Figure 11: Cannon lock.  
Snider, *A Report on the Schooner Nancy*, 102.

It was also in the cargo hold area that evidence of *Nancy*'s cargo of 157 barrels of flour was found. Snider reports that the stench of fermented flour was very strong in this area and that several clumps of flour were actually found in the mud. Again the remains of dozens of barrels were found among the chunks of flour. In addition to flour and pork,

several large clumps of lead were also uncovered, most likely bags of musket balls that had melted into a single mass during the fire that consumed the schooner.

Various elements of the schooner's rigging and upper works were also found during the initial excavation of *Nancy's* remains. Several large iron hooks were recovered with their thimbles attached. An unspecified number of bolts, hatch handles, rope fragments, ringbolts, belaying pins, and miscellaneous iron fragments were found.

Five cannon balls were also recovered from the charcoal in the bottom of the hull. Two were 24-pound shot and the other three were 6-pound balls. Snider was certain that the American squadron must have fired the 24-pound shot during *Nancy's* final engagement in 1814.<sup>11</sup> This seems highly improbable as the narrow spit of land between the Nottawasaga River and Lake Huron protected the schooner, and it is unlikely that the American vessels were capable of hitting *Nancy* in her hiding place. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I believe that *Nancy* was armed with two 24-pounder carronades and two 6-pounder long guns, which would account for all five of the cannon balls found among the hull remains.

Additional finds also tell us something of the personal armament of *Nancy's* crew. In addition to the mislabeled cannon lock that was found in the stern of the vessel, two iron boarding pike heads and remains of their shafts were found. This was a common weapon on Royal Navy vessels used in the fast and furious combat of boarding actions. An axe head with the Royal Navy's broad arrow mark was also found, but it is unclear from the description whether this was a utilitarian tool or a weapon (or perhaps both).

After the initial investigation in 1925, Dr. Conboy petitioned the Canadian government to set aside the island as a historical site, and a memorial to *Nancy*. Conboy

even hoped that the hull remains might be completely excavated and placed on display either on the island, or in the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto.<sup>12</sup> The government's initial response was to assign Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Fraser, the provincial archivist, to make a survey of the site and produce a preliminary report. They also assigned a constable to take charge of the remains to prevent the continued removal of artifacts.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, information regarding the history of the site from the first excavation through its raising and initial display is fragmentary. The Government's plan to raise the hull and display it in Toronto met with considerable resistance from local residents who wanted the vessel to stay in the area. Nevertheless, the government of Ontario did tender bids for the raising and the Georgian Bay Shipbuilding and Wrecking Company of Midland, Ontario was selected for the task. The actual raising took place during the summer of 1927 but the specifics of the operation are not known (figure 12). It is clear however, that the preservation and display of the hull remains had significant political support based on the members of government who attended the official opening of the museum on August 14, 1928. In attendance were: G. S. Henry, Minister of Public Works and acting premier, Dr. F. Godfrey, Minister of Health, and the Attorney General W. H. Price.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 12: The raising of the schooner *Nancy*, Summer 1927.  
Queen's University Archives.

It appears that after raising the hull remains were enclosed in a “tin barn” which Snider complained was insufficient for such an important historical relic. The hull remained in this enclosure, under the control of the Department of Lands and Forests into the 1960's. In 1968 a new museum facility was constructed and *Nancy* was displayed beside the new building and marginally protected by overhead tarps. The management of the remains and site officially became a part of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park in 1976. A glass enclosure was built around the wreck to protect it from the elements in 1983 (figure 13). The vessel is still displayed in this structure today (figure 14).<sup>15</sup>

In June 1997, a group of five graduate students from Texas A&M University's Nautical Archaeology Program traveled to the Nancy Island Historic Site to record the hull remains (figure 15). Prior to this examination *Nancy* had been subjected to cursory examination by model builders, very little of which found its way into the public record.<sup>16</sup> The goals of the 1997 field project were to thoroughly document the construction and shape of *Nancy*'s hull for use in reconstructing the vessel on paper. To this end, over the course of ten days the team of archaeologists recorded thousands of measurements, completed dozens of preliminary drawings, and took more than 200 photographs.

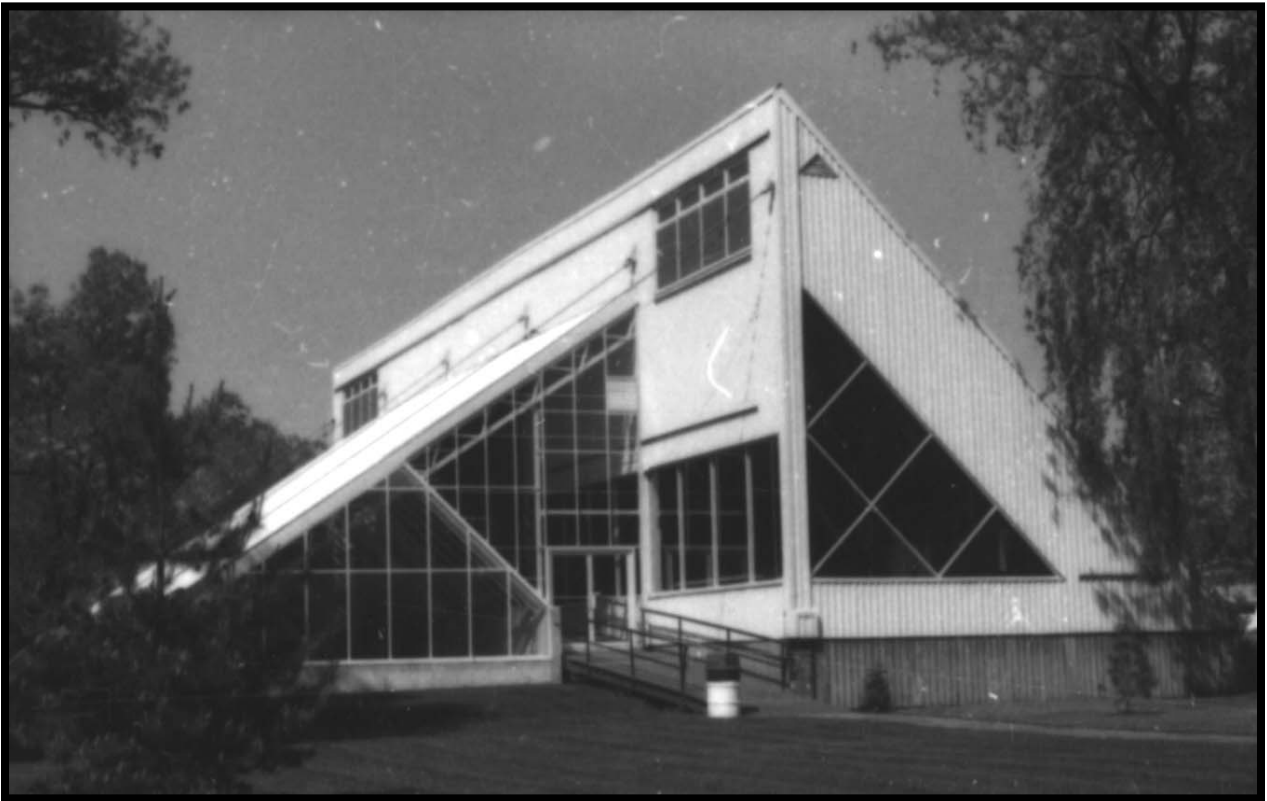


Figure 13: The building which houses *Nancy*'s remains.  
Photo by Christopher R. Sabick.



Figure 14: The hull remains from the mast step forward.  
Photography by Christopher R. Sabick





Figure 15: 1997 Survey crew. Left to right: Brian Atchison, Eric Emery  
Chris Sabick, Erich Heinold, Chris Patlevony.  
Photography by Eric Emery.

Documentation of the hull began with the establishment of the main baseline along the keelson. This baseline was used to record features on the keelson, apron, deadwood, mast steps, and stem, and to locate the floors. Secondary baselines were set up on the bottom of the keel, between the cement cradles which hold the *Nancy*, and were tied in to the main baseline. These were used to measure the keel and stem, and to locate the hull sections recorded by the team.

The shape of the hull and arrangement of the frame timbers were recorded at nine

locations along the length of the hull. The hull curvature was recorded on the outer hull planking using a digital goniometer. This instrument consists of a digital carpenter's level mounted on a 1-foot wide plexiglass base. The goniometer was “walked” up a baseline laid on the hull planking and the number of degrees off level was recorded every 12 inches (30.5cm). The baseline established for each of these sections was also used to record the width, thickness, fastening patterns, and gap between each of the hull planks.

The frame construction of the nine sections was recorded from the interior of the hull using baselines established along the inner face of the floors, futtocks, and ceiling planking (figure 16). These baselines allowed the dimensions of the floors, futtocks, filler pieces, and ceiling to be

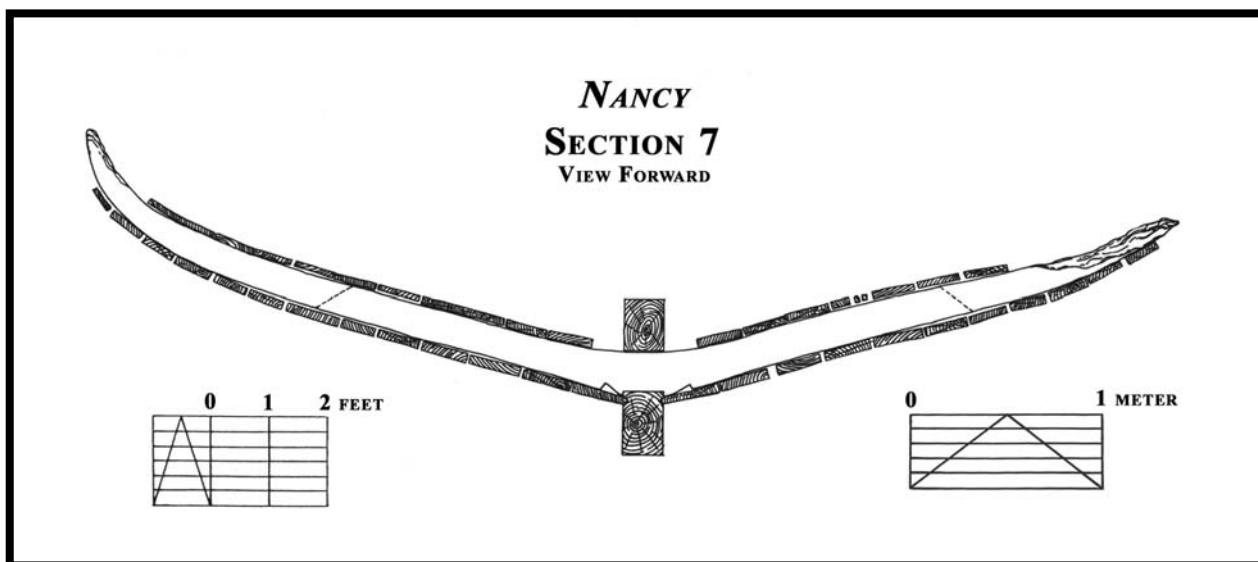


Figure 16: A cross section of *Nancy*'s hull.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

recorded. In addition to basic dimensions, the location, type, and size of all fasteners and fastener holes was also documented. Gross dimensions of the hull timbers not recorded in the nine sections were also taken.

In addition to the numerous measurements, a detailed sketch was made of the entire wreck. This image proved invaluable in the reconstruction process because it recorded general shapes and features of numerous timbers that were subjected to intensive study. Photographs were taken of all timbers and interesting features of the hull, and also proved valuable in filling in any gaps in the recording.

The 1997 survey team recorded a tremendous amount of data about *Nancy's* hull remains. These data, in conjunction with the description of the excavation of the schooner by Snider, form the basis for the reconstruction and analysis of *Nancy's* construction and hull form.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> C. H. J. Snider, "A Report on the Schooner *Nancy*, 1789-1925," (Archives of the Province of Ontario, 1925), 84

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>4</sup> C. H. J. Snider, "In the Wake of the Eighteen-Twelve; Fights and Flights of Frigates & fore-'n'-afters in the War of 1812-1815 on the Great Lakes," (New York: John Lane company, 1913).

<sup>5</sup> Snider, "A Report on the Schooner *Nancy*, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 113, 118.

<sup>9</sup> D.W. Bailey. British Board of Ordnance Small Arms Contractors, 1689-1840 (North Wales: W.S. Curtis Publishers, Ltd; 1999) 34.

<sup>10</sup> Snider, "A Report on the Schooner *Nancy*, 127.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Island Historic Site Personnel, conversation with author, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Island Historic Site Personnel, conversation with author, June 1997.

## CHAPTER VI

### HULL DESCRIPTION

The hull remains of *Nancy* display a high level of workmanship in its construction details. Timbers are tightly fit and well fastened. The use of old growth wood of exceptional quality is evident, particularly in the keel, stern knee, and stem. All frames are fashioned from naturally-curved compass timber with few knots or other deformities. All these facts suggest that John Richardson and the party of shipbuilders who accompanied him to Detroit in 1789 were superb practitioners of their craft.

The extant remains of *Nancy* are 68 feet (20.7m) long, with a beam of 22 feet (6.7m) at its widest point (figure 17). The timbers are in a good state of preservation and the wood retains a considerable amount of structural integrity. Though still quite strong the wood does show evidence of drying, the surface of many of the timbers are checked and cracked and the seams between planks have opened up to one half inch (1.3cm). The hull is supported athwartships by three cement cradles, and longitudinally by a steel “I” beam that runs under the keel. Additional wooden supports hold the delicate timbers of the bow in position. Unfortunately there has been some minor sagging between the cement buttresses. Though the majority of the timbers retain their original surfaces, many of the upper hull members show evidence of erosion caused by their long immersion in the flowing waters of the Nottawasaga River. This erosion has also destroyed almost all evidence of the charring that occurred immediately prior to the sinking of the vessel.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the hull in its present condition. The chapter progresses roughly in the order by which *Nancy* was originally assembled.

For readers who are unfamiliar with the rather intricate language of ship construction the Appendix contains a glossary of nautical terms.

### **Keel**

*Nancy's* 59 foot, 9 inch (18.2m) keel was made from a single timber, amidships its dimensions are 13 inches (33cm) molded and 8- $\frac{3}{4}$  inches (22.2cm) sided. At the forward end of the keel the timber swells to 14- $\frac{3}{4}$  inches (37.5cm) molded and 9- $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (24cm) sided at its scarf with the stem, before tapering to 6- $\frac{3}{8}$  inches (16.2cm) molded and 9- $\frac{3}{8}$  inches (23.8cm) sided at its forwardmost point. Toward its after end, the keel tapers to 12 inches (30.5cm) molded and 8 inches (20cm) sided. The upper surface of the after end of the keel is mortised to accept the tenons of the sternpost and inner sternpost, neither of which is present. Shallow mortises on either side of the keel show the impressions of a pair of fishplates, which are also missing. These plates would have given the juncture of the keel and sternpost an added measure of strength. The rabbets of the keel, the grooves cut into its sides to seat where the garboard strakes, run from the stem to a point 14 inches (35.6cm) from the keel's aftermost end.

The underside of the keel is pierced in 25 places. It appears that all of these holes were plugged with treenails at one time. In several cases the plugs have fallen out and it can be seen that the bolts are recessed about 2 inches (5cm). 22 of the holes correspond with bolts which attach floors to the keel, they are located at floors: I, H (2 bolts), G, E (2 bolts), C (2 bolts), B, A, Midships, 2, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18(2 bolts).

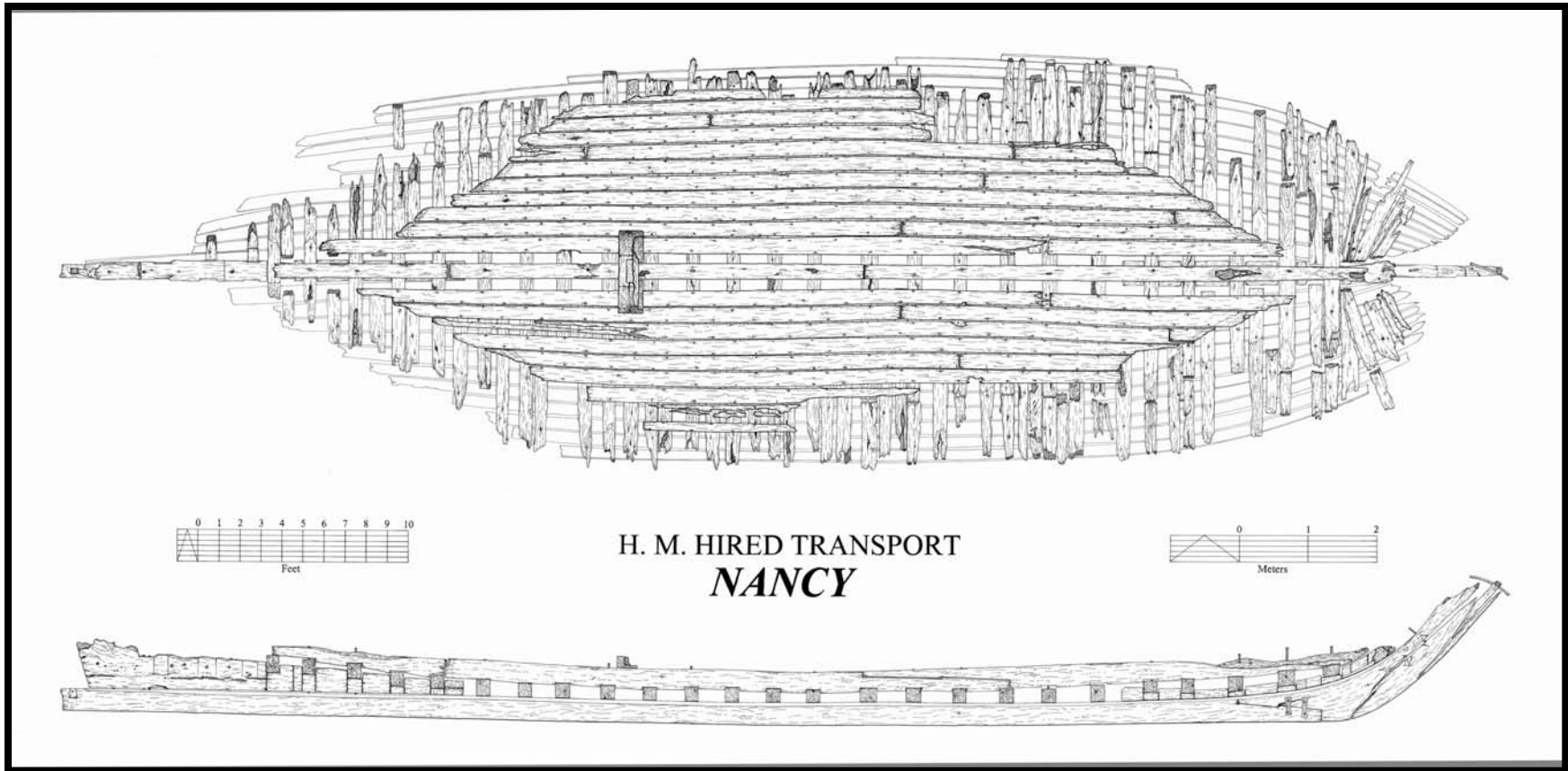


Figure 17: *Nancy* site plan.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

Below floor D there is a hole in the keel, but it appears to be empty. Additional empty pilot holes are found next to the bolts attaching the Midship frame, and frame A.

### **Stem**

At its forward end the keel is hook scarfed to fit the stem of the vessel, a juncture strengthened by two pairs of fishplates, which are fastened through the sides of the keel-stem assembly. A 1-inch (2.5cm) diameter stopwater is present at the after end of the scarf, this plug stopped water from seeping along the seam to the interior of the vessel. The stem is made of sizable piece of naturally-curved timber. The aftermost end of the stem is 4 inches (10cm) molded and 8- $\frac{1}{4}$  (21cm) inches sided, the timber broadens to 21 inches (53cm) molded and 7- $\frac{1}{4}$  (18.4cm) inches sided forward of the scarf, and reaches its maximum molded dimension of 23- $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (59.7cm) as it curves upward. From this point the timber tapers to a molded dimension of 20- $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (52cm) and sided of 5- $\frac{1}{4}$  inches (13.3cm) where the knee of the head begins, and to 16- $\frac{1}{4}$  inches (41.2cm) molded and 5 inches (12.7cm) sided where the worked surface ends (from here the stem is eroded to a point). Five iron through bolts are used to join the stem, apron, keelson, and gripe into a single unit. The starboard surface of the stem has the roman numerals “IV” and “V” carved faintly into it (figure 18). These are draught marks, which showed the captain and crew how much water their vessel was drawing. Presumably additional marks were originally present but the flowing waters of the Nottawasaga have erased them.



### **Knee of the Head**

Only a 5 foot, 6- $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (1.7m) fragment of the knee of the head remains. The knee of the head is a timber that was attached to the forward face of the stem with through bolts that supported the head rails and the figurehead of the vessel. The knee of the head was flat scarfed into the stem, and the timber swells from a molded dimension of 1- $\frac{5}{8}$  (4.1cm) inches at its base to a maximum dimension of 3- $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (8.9cm) (the upper end of the timber decreases in size due to erosion). The timber is sided 5 inches (12.7cm) over its entire remaining length.

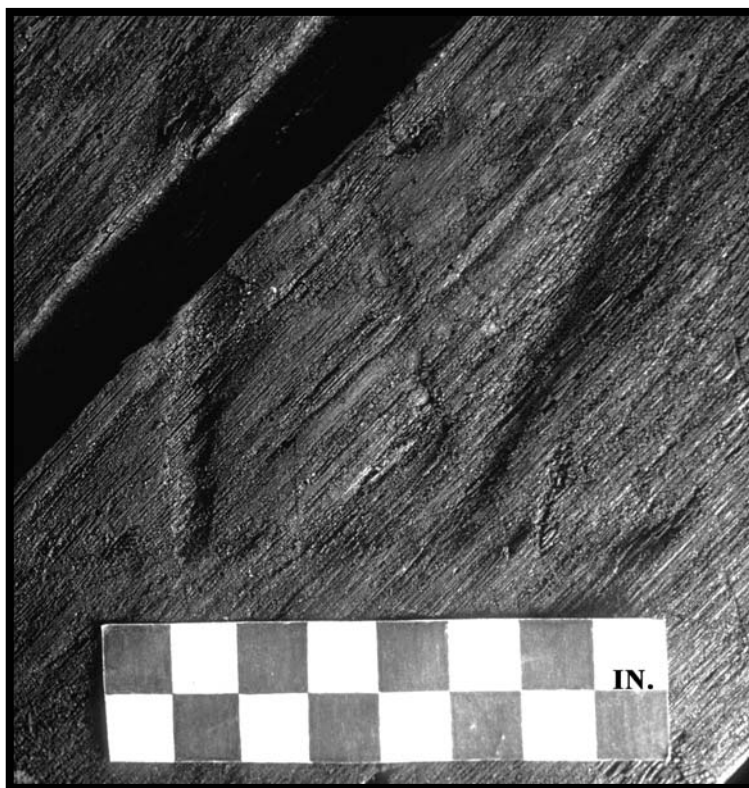


Figure 18: Four-foot draft mark.  
Photography by: Christopher R. Sabick.

## Sternpost

*Nancy*'s sternpost has not survived, but it is possible to gauge the dimensions of this timber from the after ends of the keel and deadwood. The sternpost presumably was sided to match the after end of the keel, 8 inches (20.3cm), and it is estimated that it was molded 12 inches (30.5cm). The mortise into which it was seated measures 9-1/8 inches (23.2cm) long, 3-1/2 inches (8.9cm) wide, and 3-1/2 inches (8.9cm) deep. A mortise is also present for an inner sternpost and it is estimated that this timber was sided 8 inches (20.3cm) and molded 4 inches (10.1cm). The mortise for the inner post is 3-1/2 inches (8.9cm) square and 3-1/2 (8.9cm) inches deep. Unfortunately, from the existing remains it is impossible to determine the height of these two timbers though the angle of the rake of the sternposts forward face can be determined from the angle (72°) of the after face of the deadwood.

## Stern Deadwood

The sternposts were supported by a single large piece of deadwood (figure 19). This timber was bolted to the top of the keel and seated the eight aftermost floors (11 to 18) in *Nancy*'s stern. This must have been a truly impressive timber when it was complete. The deadwood extends along the keel for 17 feet, 9-5/8 inches (5.4m), terminating 16 inches (40.6cm) from the after end of the keel. At its forward end the deadwood is molded 8-5/8 inches (22cm) and sided 10-3/4 inches (27.3cm). Aft of the notch for Frame 15, (9 feet, 4-1/2 inches [2.9m] aft of its forward end), the timber becomes trapezoidal in section with its lower third beveled to seat the garboard strake. The timber increases in its molded dimension from fore to aft and at its current (incomplete) terminus

is molded 2 feet, 4 inches (70cm) and sided 10 inches (25.4cm) at its widest point. The deadwood was attached to the keel by nine iron through bolts; eight of which also attached floors (frames 12, through 18). The grain pattern on the after end of the deadwood makes it clear that this timber was fashioned from naturally-curved timber, perhaps a tree trunk with a thick lower branch. In its original form the vertical extension, or knee, of the deadwood fit against the inboard face of the inner sternpost. The fact that the deadwood, and stern knee could be shaped from a single piece of timber must have provide *Nancy* with a particularly sturdy stern assembly. It also indicates the size and condition of the trees that were available to Richardson and his shipbuilders.

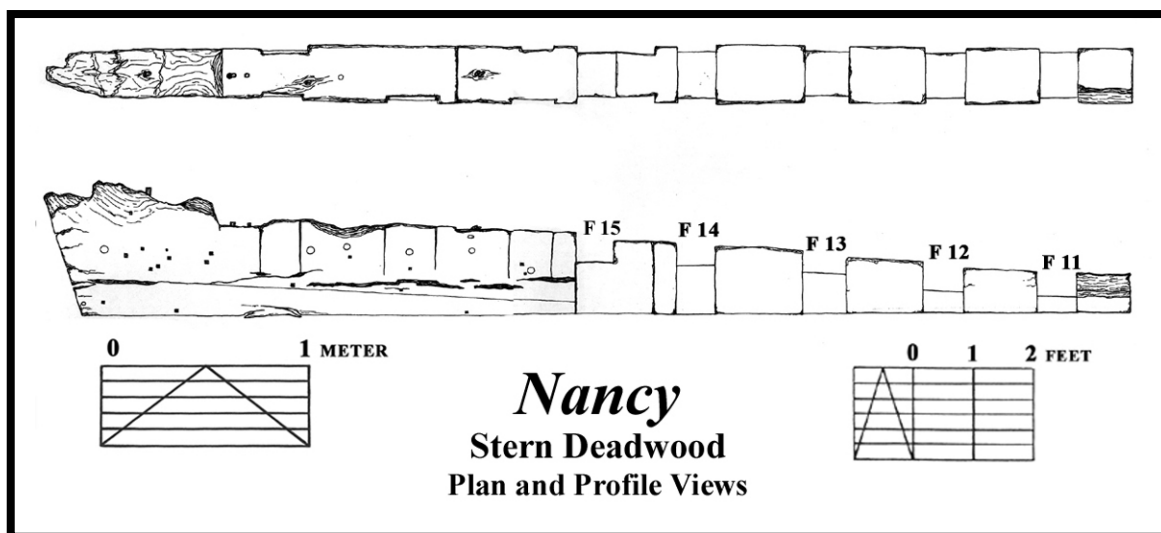


Figure 19: Stern deadwood, plan and profile views.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

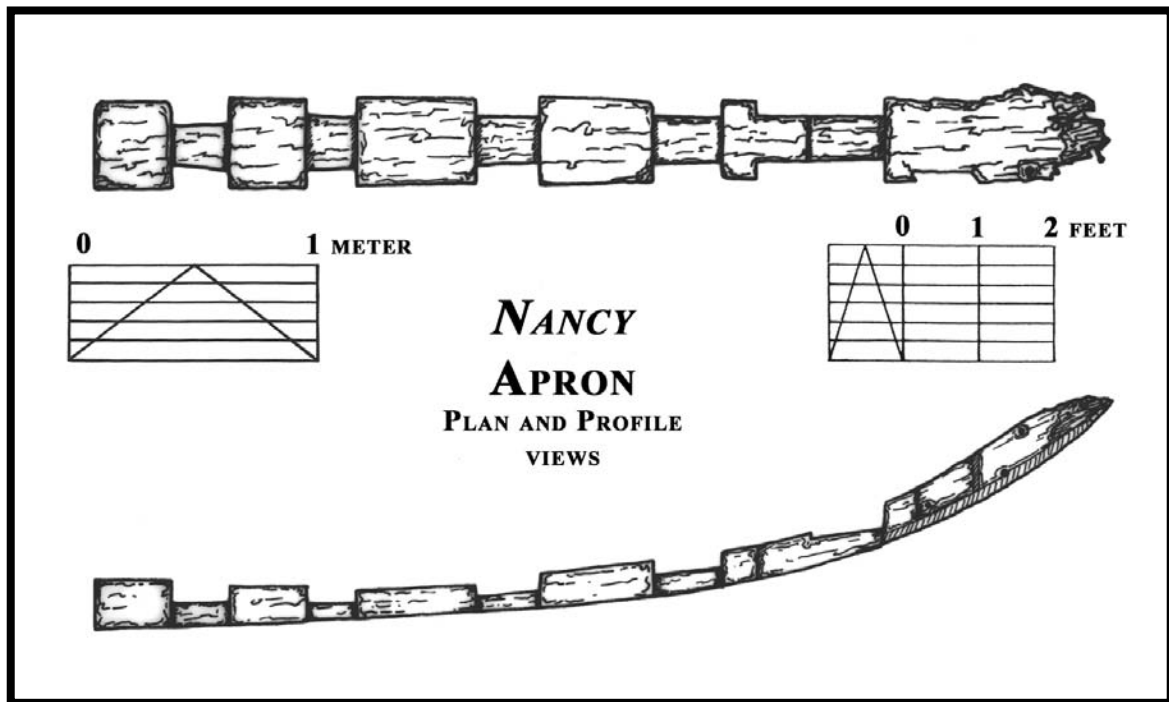


Figure 20: Apron, plan and profile views.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

## Apron

The keel-stem scarf was reinforced from above by the apron (figure 20). This timber is 13 feet (3.9m) long, 7 inches (17.8cm) molded, 15 inches (38.1cm) sided and was cut from compass timber to fit the inside of the stem. It is notched, both on its sides and top, to seat five floors (Frames E-I), and its upper end was notched on the sides to fit cant frames (two notches have survived). Its top is heavily eroded, but it clearly extended further up the stem. The timber was fixed in place by six iron through bolts.

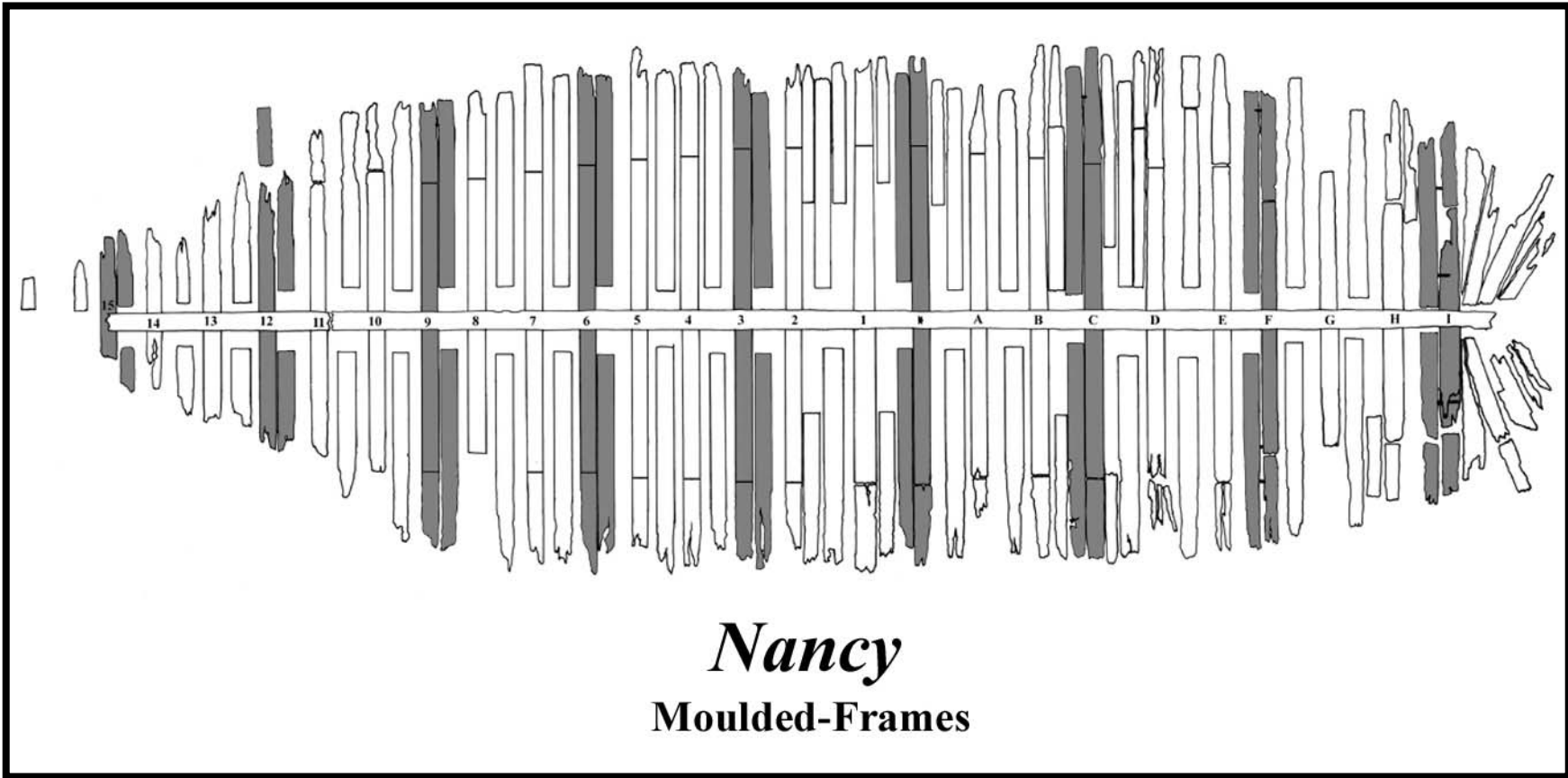
## Framing

The lower elements in *Nancy's* framing system are extensively preserved, with the exception of those in the stern of the vessel, several of which are missing altogether. *Nancy's* construction displays two different types of frames; moulded frames and regular frames, as well as additional timbers used as filler pieces. The moulded frames and regular frames each consist of a floor and associated futtocks, though the arrangement of these timbers differs between the two types. The filler pieces are not directly associated with the frames and, in fact, may have been added sometime during the vessel's extraordinarily long career to reinforce the aging hull. They may also have been added to support taller bulwarks and frame gunports.

The remains of 25 of *Nancy's* 28 floor timbers are present, the three aftermost floors are missing, while those forward of frame 14 are preserved for their entire length. The floors are spaced an average of 25 inches (63.5cm) on their centers, and range in size from 9 inches (22.9cm) molded and sided to 7-½ inches (19cm) molded and 8 inches (20.3cm) sided over the keel. The arms of the floors range in length from 6-½ feet (2m) to 2 feet (60cm) from the centerline of the keel. Floors D through 9 are notched underneath to fit over the top of the keel, while those forward of D fit over the apron, and those aft of 9 over the deadwood. These interlocking notches form strong junctures, many of which are still tight, attesting to the skill of the shipbuilders. Small, triangular limber holes are also found on the lower surfaces of the floors, one on each side of the keel; these would have allowed water that collected between frames to flow aft to the pump well. All but six floors (F, 1, 3, 4, 9, and 11) are, or were, attached to the keel or

keelson (or both) with iron bolts. In addition to the keel or keelson, the floors in the bow (E-I) are attached to the apron, and those in the stern (12-18) are bolted to the deadwood.

Ten of *Nancy's* 28 frames are mould frames, consisting of the forwardmost and aftermost frames (I and 18) and every third frame in between (F, C, Midships, 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15). The mould frames consist of floors with first futtocks laid directly alongside, and fastened to them. Second and third futtocks are diagonally scarfed to their upper ends (figure 21). From the midships frame forward the first futtocks are located aft of the floors, while mould frames abaft the midships section have their first futtocks attached to their forward faces. The futtocks and floors of the mould frames are fastened together with iron bolts. Curiously, many of these bolts were driven into the timbers at an angle (figure 22). Closer examination of the mould frames suggests that these timbers were originally joined with horizontal treenails and later replaced, or reinforced, with the iron bolts. This fact is evidenced by the presence of broken treenails and treenail holes on the sides of several of the mould frame assemblies. Unfortunately, these original fasteners can only be confirmed on frames F, Midships, and 12 because intact ceiling planking obscures details of the others. The downward angle of the iron bolts can be explained by the fact that they were added after the vessel had been built and therefore there was no room between the frame timbers to drive them horizontally. Conversely it is hypothesized that the horizontal treenails were employed during construction when ample room was available for their proper installation.



*Nancy*  
**Moulded-Frames**

Figure 21: *Nancy*'s moulded-frames.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

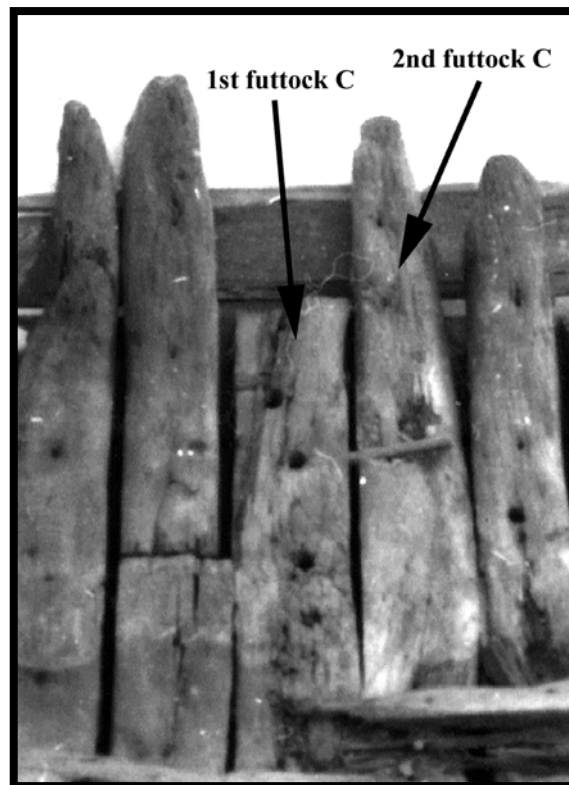


Figure 22: Iron bolt fastening first and second futtocks frame C, starboard.  
Photography by Christopher R. Sabick.

*Nancy's* regular frames differ from the pattern of its moulded frames in that the first futtock is not directly adjacent to its respective floor, but is separated from it by 5 to 8 inches (12.7-20.3cm) (figure 23). The first futtock of the regular frames is not attached to the floor in any way, and is, in fact, it is only fastened to the hull planking. Second and third futtocks, where present, are diagonally scarfed to the floor or first futtock. Like the moulded frames, the regular frames abaft of midships have their associated first futtocks forward of them, while in frames forward of this point the futtock is aft of the floor. There is one exception to the pattern of the regular frames, Frame 1 does not have a first futtock associated with it.



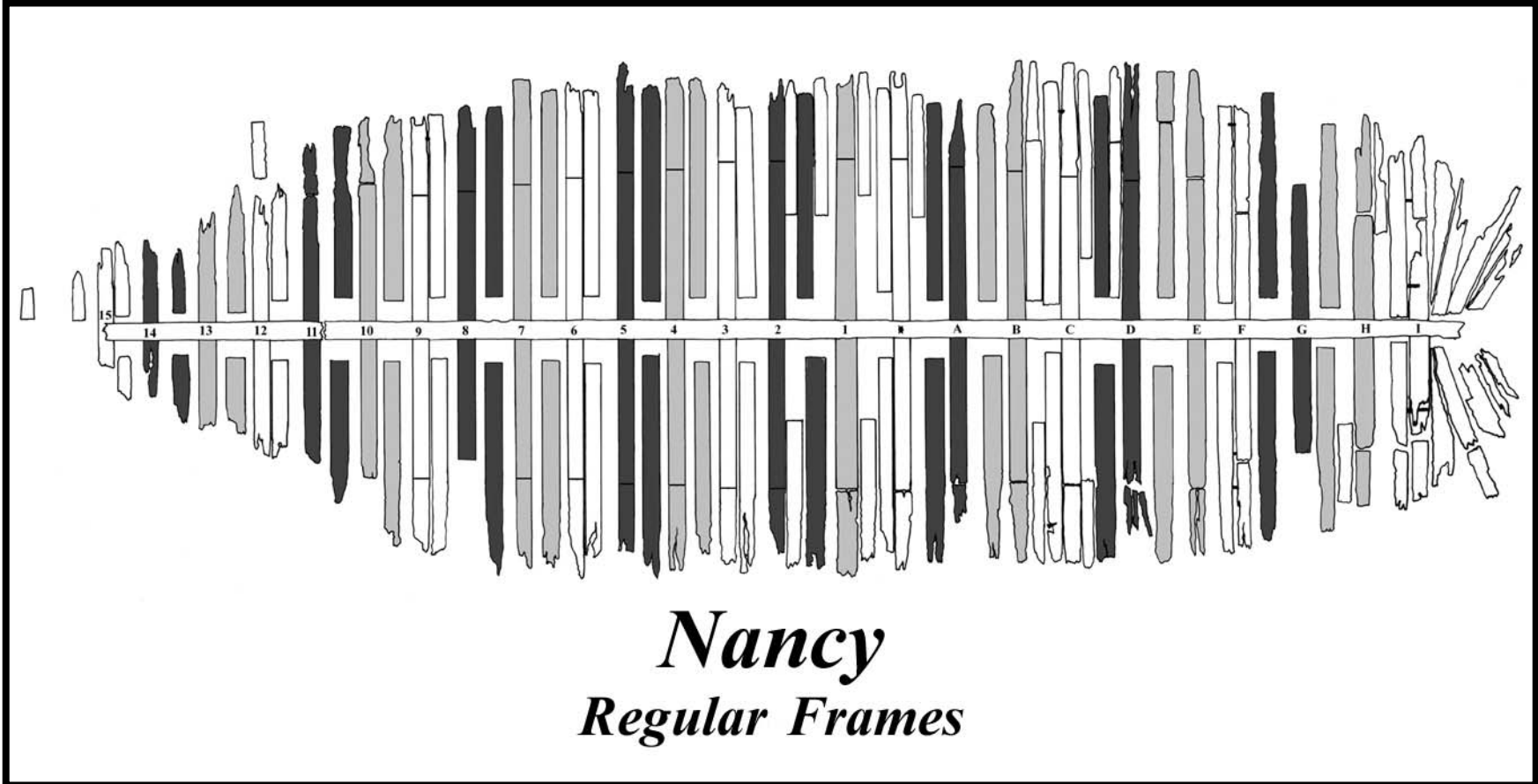


Figure: 23: *Nancy's* regular-frames.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

The first futtocks of both the moulded and regular frames average 8 inches (20.3cm) molded and sided and their heels are located 7 to 10 inches (17.8-25cm) from the sides of the keel. The extant first futtocks range in length from 14 inches (35.6cm) to 8 feet (2.4m). The precise dimensions of the second and third futtocks are harder to determine due to timber erosion and the fact that many are partially covered by the intact ceiling. However, they appear to have been similar in size to the first futtocks (8 inches [20.3cm] square) and their remains are from 2 to 3 feet (60-90cm) in length.

The middle and forward portions of *Nancy's* framing system are further reinforced with the inclusion of filler pieces. On the port side of the hull there are an additional 10 timbers that do not fit the framing pattern while on the starboard side there are 5 filler pieces (figure 24). On the port side of the hull filler pieces are located between floor 2 and its first futtock, on the forward and aft faces of floor 1, between the midship floor and the first futtock of frame A, between floor B and the first futtock of frame C, between floor C and the first futtock of frame D, between floor D and its first futtock, and in the bow between floor H and the first futtock of frame I. On the port side the filler pieces are found between floor 2 and its first futtock, between floor 1 and the midships frame first futtock, between floor B and the first futtock of C, between floor C and the first futtock of D, and in the bow between floor H and its first futtock. None of the filler pieces are attached to the frames, only to the hull planking. The majority of these pieces start a 4 to 5 feet (1.2-1.5m) from the centerline of the keel. However in three cases on the port side the filler pieces are nearly as long as the futtocks of the made and regular frames. It is unclear whether these pieces were installed during the

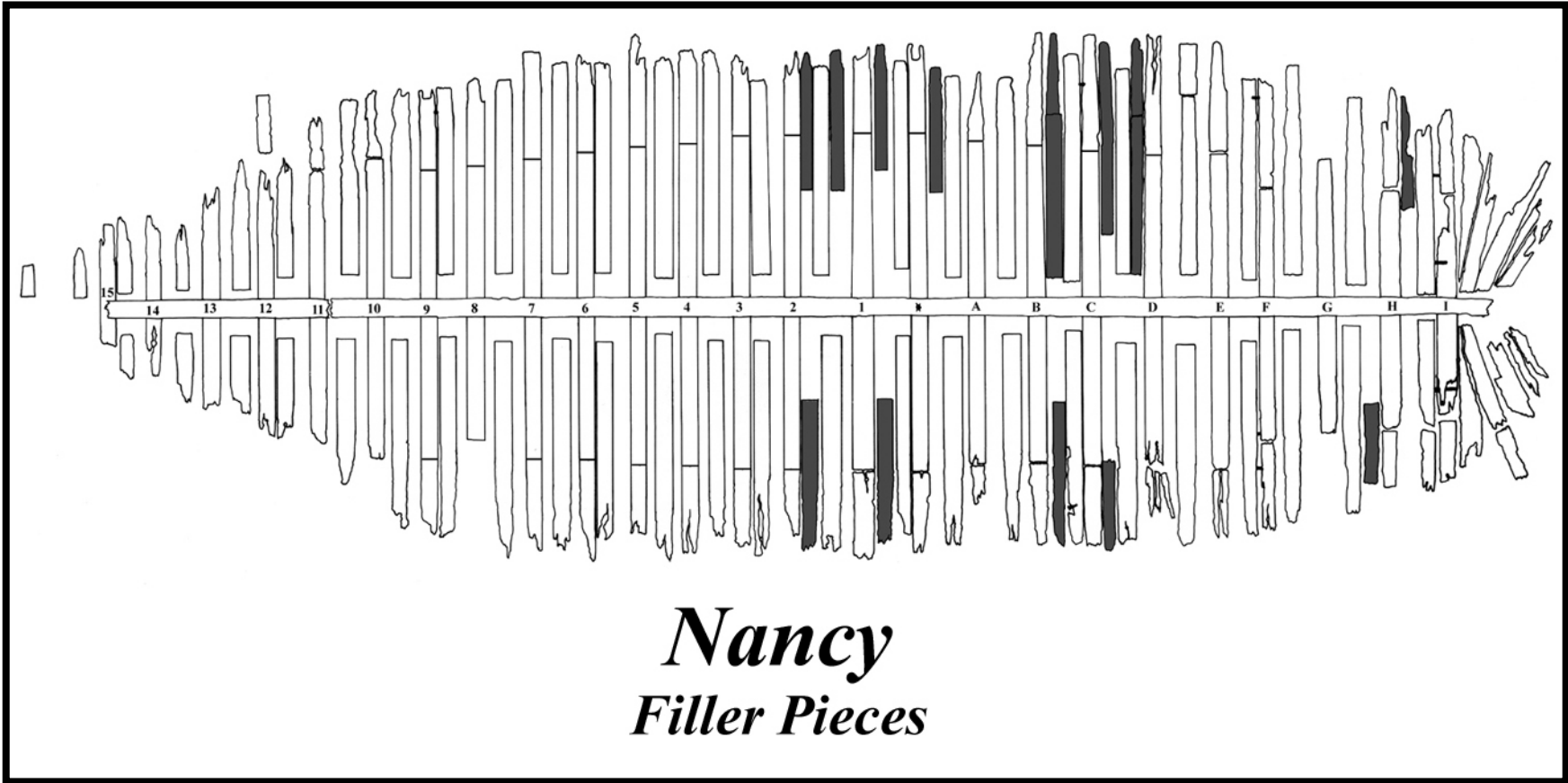


Figure 24: *Nancy*'s filler pieces.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

construction of the vessel or if they were added later to reinforce *Nancy*'s hull during her 25 year career on the lakes.

The remains of four pairs of radial cant frames are also present in the bow of the schooner. One of the cant frame pairs is seated into notches in the sides of the apron, the heels of the remaining six cants simply butt up against it. The heels of the aftermost bow cant timbers taper to a point on their inboard ends and their sides parallel the forwardmost floors.

A considerable number of the frame timbers have empty holes on their surfaces which apparently once held fasteners for attaching the hull planking (figures 25 and 26). The size of the holes, ½-inch (1.3cm) in diameter, and the lack of iron staining in the wood around them, suggests that the hull planking was originally fastened with treenails.

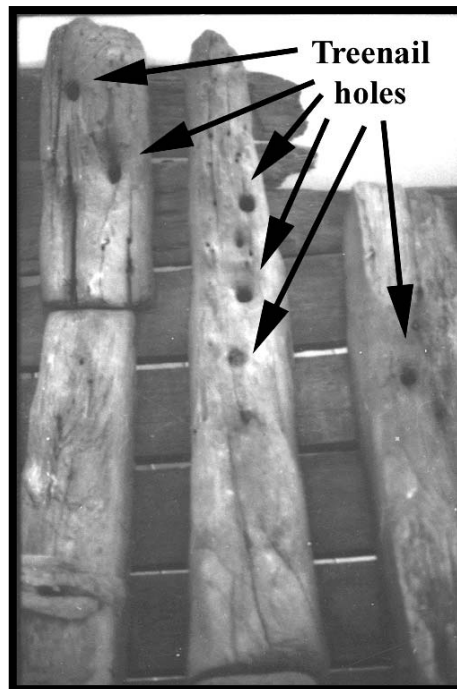


Figure 25: Port side frame timbers displaying empty treenail holes.  
Photography by Christopher R. Sabick

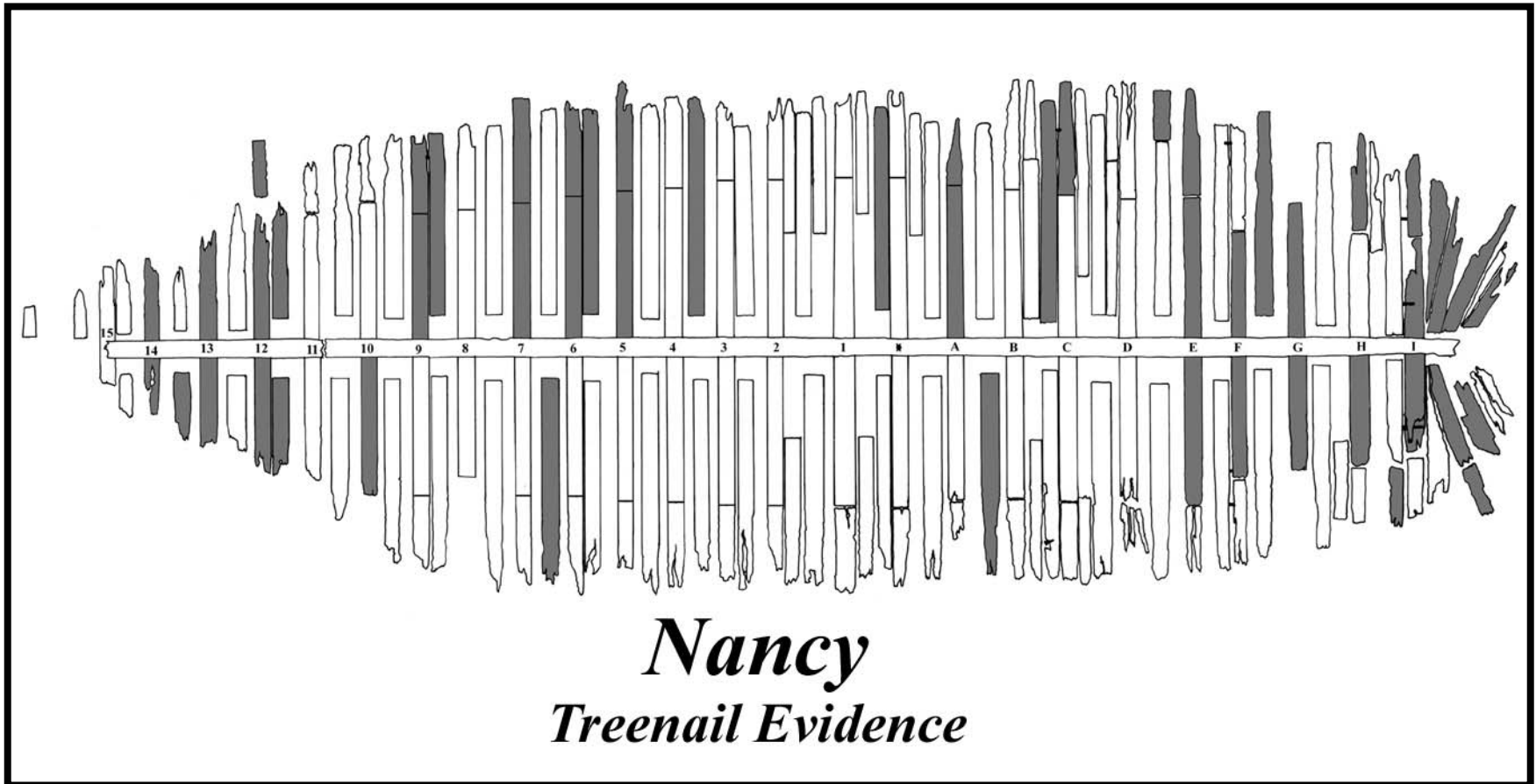


Figure 26: Timbers in *Nancy*'s hull that show evidence of former treenail fasteners.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

These holes only appear on timbers from the moulded, cant, and regular frames, not on any of the filler pieces, which may be evidence that the fillers were a later addition.

### **Keelson**

The keelson extends for 53 feet (16.2m) and is molded 12 inches (30.5cm) and sided 9 inches (22.9cm). This structural element is composed of two timbers fastened together amidships by a 7 foot (2.1m) long hook scarf, the forward section is 24 feet (7.3m) long and the after piece is 35 feet (10.7m) in length. A significant break in the keelson is located at floor 11 that may have occurred during the raising of the hull remains. Between frames 7 and 8, a semicircular notch is cut out of the port side of the keelson, it measures 14-½ inches (36.8cm) long, 3-1/8 inches (7.9cm) wide, and 4-½ inches (11.4cm) deep. This was most likely the well for the schooner's single pump, mentioned by Captain Mackintosh in his logbook entries describing the severe storm *Nancy* encountered in October of 1813.<sup>1</sup>

The keelson is fastened to the majority of the floors (I, H, G, E, C, A, Midships, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, and possibly 16, 17, and 18) with ¾-inch (1.9cm) diameter bolts. Most of these bolts fasten keelson, floor and keel (as well as the apron in the bow and deadwood in the stern), though frames 5, 7, and 14 appear to be fastened only to the keelson. The junction of the floors with the keelson is further strengthened by notches on the lower surface of the keelson which fit over the floors. These notches are only 1 to 2 inches (2.5-5cm) deep, but fit snugly over the floor timbers locking them in position and helping to prevent hogging. Notching the keelson in this way would have been time

consuming for the shipbuilders, but is further evidence of the craftsmanship that went into *Nancy*'s hull.

One feature lacking on *Nancy*'s keelson is any evidence of stanchion mortises. Stanchions would have been used as additional support for the deck of the vessel. Typically these timbers were pillars that extended from the bottom of the deckbeams to the top of the keelson, however there is no evidence of any attachment points for the stanchions on the top of the keelson.

### **Mast Steps**

The fore mast step was a simple mortise cut into the keelson, located between frames F and G. Unfortunately, this area is heavily damaged and eroded, and only a single worked surface is visible. It is therefore impossible to determine the dimensions of the mortise. Just forward of the pump well, between floors 6 and 7, rests the remains of the main mast step (figure 27). The mast step consists of a large semicircular block of wood (4-feet [1.2m] wide, 14  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inches [37.5cm] in height, and 13  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inches [34.3cm] long) notched underneath to fit over the keelson, a type often referred to as a "saddle" mast step. The lower surfaces of the mast step are cut at an angle to rest on the ceiling planking. Though a large portion of the mast step has been broken off, it is apparent that a large rectangular mortise, measuring 13 inches (33cm) wide, 4-  $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (12.1cm) deep, and 5 inches (12.7cm) long, was cut into its upper surface. This mortise would have received the squared off heel of the mainmast.

The fact that the main mast step is not fastened to the hull leaves open the possibility that this is not its original location. This possibility is further reinforced when

pictures of the hull recovery are closely examined. In figure 28, a picture taken by C.H.J. Snider during the hull raising shows that the main mast step has been lifted off



Figure 27: Main mast step, view aft.  
Photo by Christopher R. Sabick

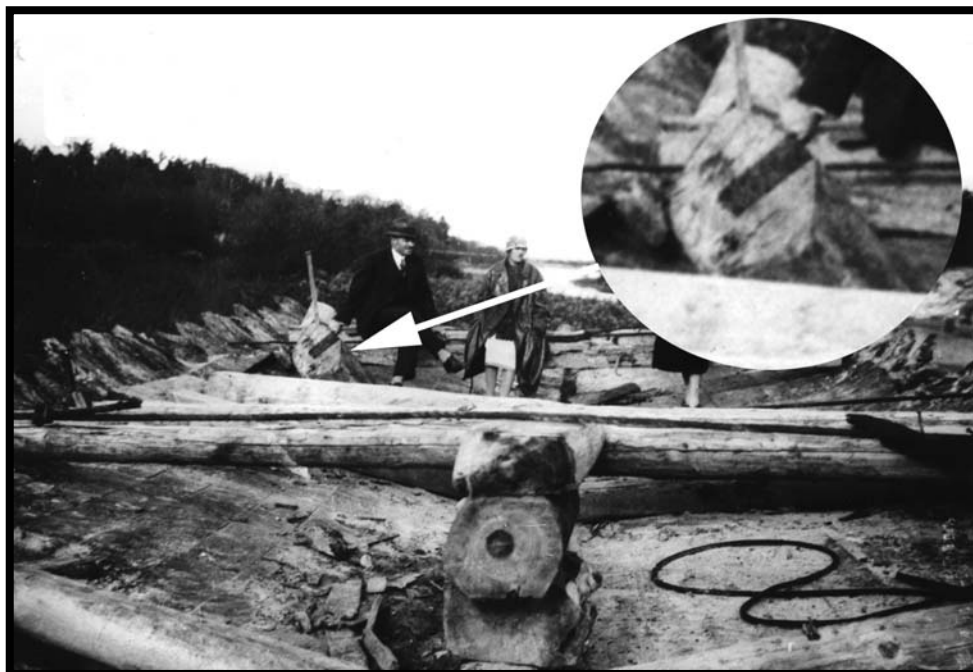


Figure 28: Photograph of *Nancy*'s raising with inset of the displaced mast step.  
Photograph courtesy of Queen's University Archives



the keelson and placed on the starboard side of the hull remains. That being said, its current location is logical and there is no evidence on the keelson or ceiling planking to suggest that it was originally located somewhere else.

### **Planking**

The hull planking of the schooner averages 2 inches (5cm) thick with individual timbers ranging in width from 6 inches (15cm) to 10 inches (25cm). Each strake is composed of only two planks, again attesting to the large trees available for use in the construction and repair of the schooner. The strakes are fastened to the frames with ½-inch (1.3cm) square iron spikes. Spikes to fasten the hull planking were driven into each frame timber they crossed alternating from the top of the plank to the bottom. Drying of the planking since the raising of the hull has opened the seams between planking revealing remains of caulking. cursory examination of the caulking reveals that it consisted of a fibrous material, probably hemp, and tar.

The planking contains numerous repairs suggesting that it was relatively old at the time of the vessel's sinking. A total of seventeen graving pieces are present in the outer planking. Most are quite small, with the largest being 15-¾ inches (40cm) long and 3 inches (7.6cm) across. In all cases the damaged or deteriorated wood was cut cleanly out, the graving piece put in its place, and fastened to the frames with small (1/4-inch square) iron spikes.

## Ceiling

The ceiling planking is well preserved, averaging 1-½ inches (3.8cm) thick and from 7 to 9 inches (17.8-22.9cm) in width. Individual ceiling strakes are composed of one to three planks, with two planks on the port side reaching 36 feet (11m) in length. Like the planking, the ceiling is attached to the frames of the schooner with ½-inch (1.2cm) iron spikes which alternate from the bottom to the top of the plank between timbers. Four limber boards are present along each side of the keelson. These planks were not fastened to the floors below them to allow easy access to the bilge for cleaning. Unlike the hull planking, the ceiling shows no evidence of repair or patching. This may suggest that these planks were replaced at least once.

The use of exceptional ship building timber, and the high quality of craftsmanship evident in the remains of *Nancy* demonstrate that she was assembled by skilled ship carpenters. Perhaps the best testament to the quality of materials and shipbuilding skill employed in its construction is the extraordinarily long career of the schooner. Freshwater vessels were notorious for their short life spans, as demonstrated by this quote from George Heriot written during his travels in the early nineteenth century:

As all kinds of timber have a tendency to decay, much sooner in fresh, than in salt water; a vessel navigating the lakes, will not last above six years, unless she be made to undergo considerable repairs. As those in the employ of government receive no repairs in their hulls, they are generally laid up at the expiration of that period, and are replaced by other vessels entirely new.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that *Nancy* traveled the Great Lakes for 25 years suggests that she must have been expertly built and regularly maintained. While little is known of the men who

pieced the schooner together on the banks of the River Rouge, or the crew who maintained and repaired it during its long career, the hull remains on display at the Nancy Island Historic site are mute testimony to their skill and hard work.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> C.H.J. Snider, ed., *Leaves from the War Log of the Nancy* (Toronto: Huronia Historical Development Council, n.d.), p27.

<sup>2</sup> George Heriot, *Travels Through the Canadas Containing a Description of the Picturesque Scenery on Some of the Rivers and Lakes; With an Account of the Productions, Commerce, and Inhabitants of Those Provinces* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1971) , p132.

## CHAPTER VII

### RECONSTRUCTION AND ANALYSIS

The thorough documentation of *Nancy* adds a tremendous amount of data to the small pool of information relating to early lakes vessels. Therefore, it is important to understand the similarities and differences that exist between *Nancy* and her contemporaries. This comparison will look at other vessels from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from both fresh and salt water to better understand *Nancy*'s hull form and construction details. I will also explain the steps taken to reconstruct the missing portions of *Nancy*'s hull.

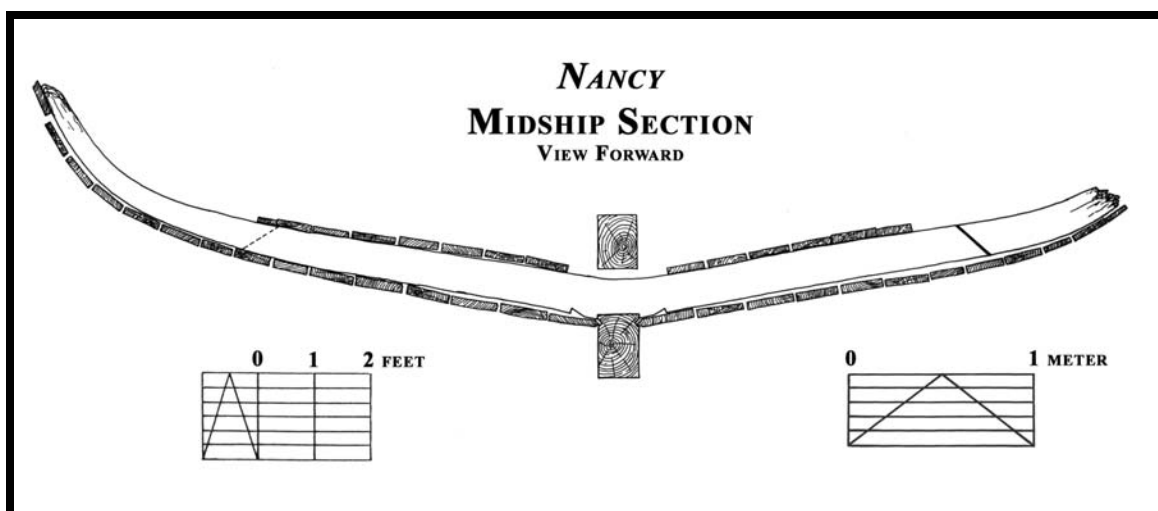


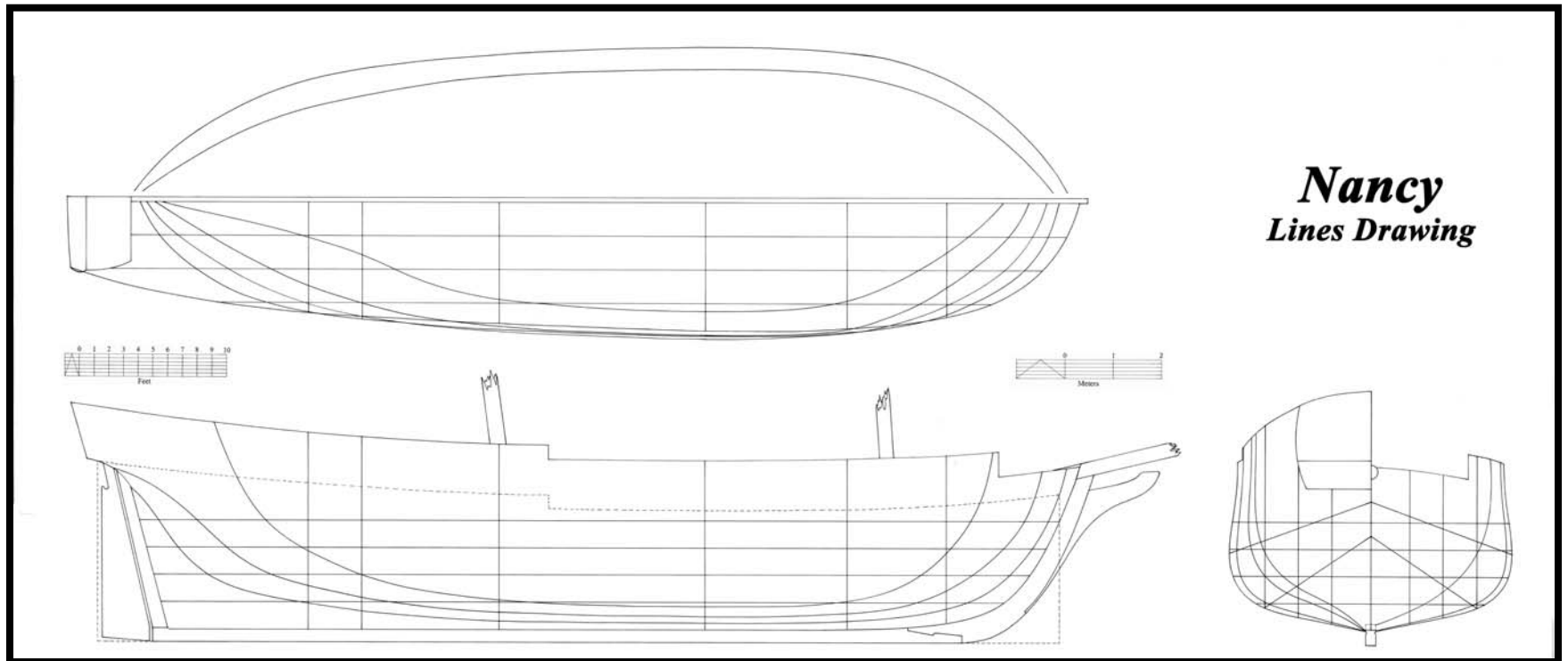
Figure 29: Cross section of *Nancy*'s mid ship frame, view forward.  
Drawn by Christopher R. Sabick.

### Hull Form

The nine frame sections taken during the 1997 recording project have been utilized as the basis for reconstructing the hull form of *Nancy* through the use of a lines drawing (figures 29 and 30). Luckily, the well preserved hull has allowed for the creation of a set of lines with little need for speculation except in the arrangement of the

upper works and stern details and in compensating for the minor hull distortion that has taken place since the sinking and recovery of the schooner. This drawing reveals a vessel with a full hull form amidships and a relatively bluff entry, but with a surprisingly fine stern. The almost “U” shaped midship section, with moderate deadrise, suggests that the vessel was tailored for its career as a merchant schooner. This full hull form would have allowed *Nancy* to carry a large amount of cargo for its length, in a stable, weatherly vessel, but it is doubtful that the schooner was a speedy craft.

*Nancy*'s full hull shape is typical of small merchant vessels, wherein carrying capacity and stability were considered more important than speed. The schooner shares this characteristic with a number of similarly-sized vessels, including the colonial commercial schooner *Halifax* built in 1765 (figure 31).<sup>1</sup> *Halifax* measured 58 feet 3 inches (17.8m) in length, had beam of 18 feet (5.5m) and a depth of hold of 8 feet, 10 inches (2.7m). The small ocean going schooner has a finer entry and rounded bilges in comparison to *Nancy*'s slack bilges, but its overall hull form is quite similar. The major difference between the two vessels lies in *Halifax*'s greater depth of hold, 8 foot, 10 inches (2.7m) to *Nancy*'s 7 foot, 6 inches (2.3m). *Nancy*'s shallower depth of hold is a regional adaptation to local sailing conditions. Sailing vessels on the Great Lakes typically had shallower draughts than their ocean going counterparts, due to the large number of shoals found throughout the lakes region. This fact is particularly true of *Nancy* which operated on the shallowest of the Great Lakes, Lake Erie, as well as in the confined, shallow water of the St. Clair River.



***Nancy***  
***Lines Drawing***

Figure 30: Lines drawing.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

Though similar to some ocean going schooners, *Nancy*'s hull shape differs markedly from others, like the schooner *Sultana*, built in Boston in 1767 (figure 31).<sup>2</sup> *Sultana* is a smaller vessel, measuring 49 feet, 4 inches (15m) in length, with a beam of 16 feet, 5 inches (5m) and a depth of hold of 8 foot, 4 inches (2.5m). *Sultana*'s midship shape is rounder than *Nancy*'s and the entry and exit are finer. The small Boston schooner was built more for speed than *Nancy*'s bluff hull. Again the ocean-going schooner had a greater depth of hold than *Nancy*, a luxury she could afford operating in the relatively deep harbors of the east coast.

Unfortunately, hull lines for contemporary lake merchant vessels are scarce. There is, in fact, a significant hole in the historical and archaeological record of early North American freshwater merchant craft. While a relatively large amount of data is available concerning military craft on the lakes from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the same cannot be said for trading vessels. However, an ongoing research project will help to fill this hole in the future. The documentation of the schooners *Hamilton* and *Scourge* in Lake Ontario holds tremendous potential for the understanding of early Great Lakes merchant schooners.<sup>3</sup> Both vessels were discovered in nearly perfect states of preservation in 1975. Due to their great depth, they rest in more than 300 feet (90m) of water, the schooners are out of the reach of recreational divers, but they have been thoroughly recorded with remote operated vehicles (ROVs) on two separate occasions. *Hamilton* and *Scourge* both sank during a squall on Lake Ontario in August of 1813, while serving in the American naval squadron.



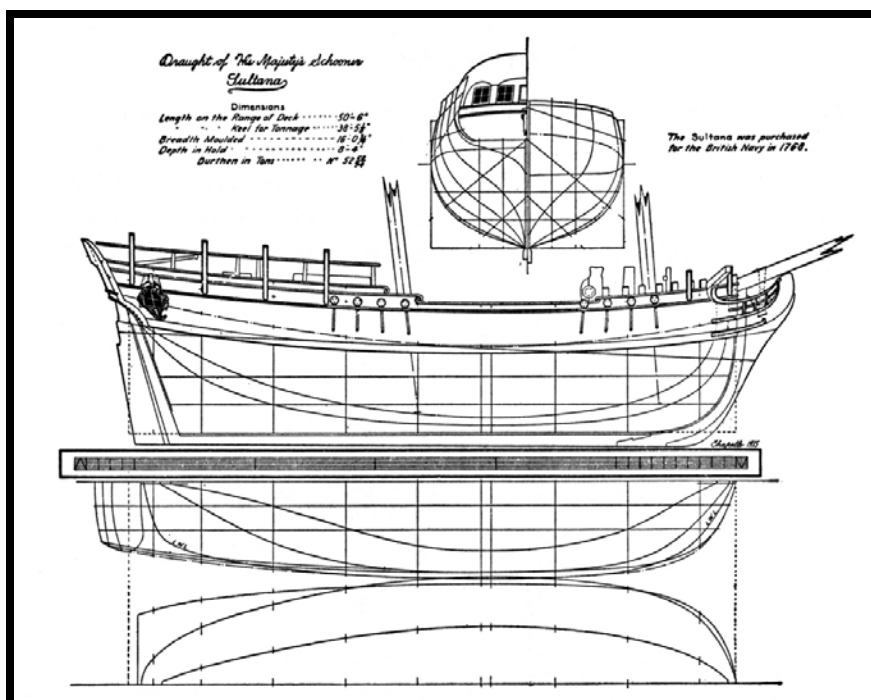
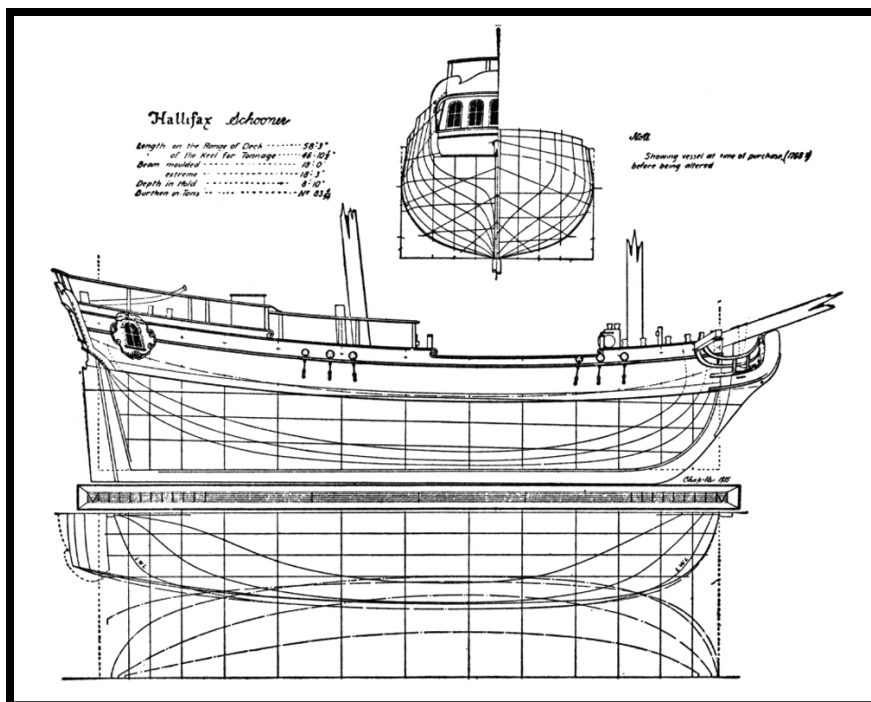


Figure 31: Lines drawings of *Halifax* (top) and *Sultana* (bottom).  
Chapelle, American sailing ships, 34, 42.

*Hamilton*, originally named *Diana*, was a 75-ton vessel built at Oswego, New York in 1809. *Scourge*, formerly *Lord Nelson*, was a smaller vessel of 45 or 50 tons built in Niagara, Upper Canada in 1810 or 1811. Preliminary hull analysis based on the video footage gathered during ROV surveys suggests midship shapes very similar to *Nancy*, although perhaps with more deadrise (figure 32). However, as this information is incomplete and based on video interpretation, without actual measurements, concrete conclusions are impossible to make at this time.

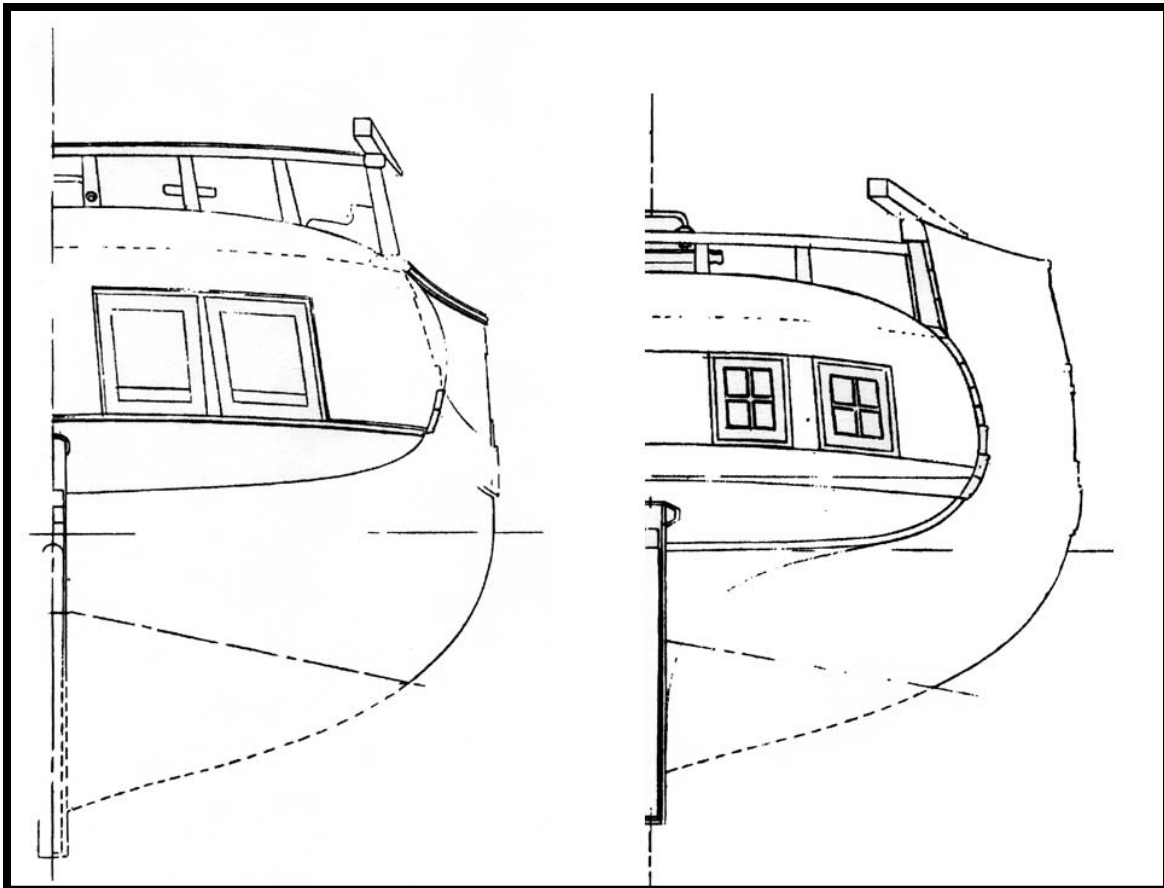


Figure 32: Conjectural hull shapes of *Hamilton* (left) and *Scourge* (right).  
Drawings by Ian L. Morgan.<sup>4</sup>

The remains of a small schooner recently located on the beach near Southampton, Ontario also hold tremendous potential for comparison with *Nancy*. Although the schooner has not been fully excavated and documented, researchers believe that this vessel may be the fur trader *Weasel* built in 1767. Further examination of the hull is due to take place in the summer of 2004, and it is hoped that information regarding the design and construction of the schooner will be available for comparison.<sup>5</sup>

The trading vessels that operated on the Hudson River in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may also be a valuable resource for comparison with *Nancy* and other Great Lakes schooners. Numerous small sloops and schooners carried cargo between the markets in New York City and the communities along the Hudson River. Vessels for this trade were first constructed by Dutch colonists in the seventeenth-century and later by British and American merchants. These sloops and schooners were prevalent in the Hudson River trade through the nineteenth-century.<sup>6</sup>

The vessels that plied the Hudson had to contend with many of the same operational hazards that Great Lakes sailing ships faced, including frequent shoal water and constricted sailing space. Unfortunately, detailed hull information on these vessels is also rare in the historical record and none have been examined archaeologically. Generalized information from historical sources tell us that these vessels shared many characteristics with Great Lakes merchant schooners such as full hull forms, shallow depth of hold, and lengths commonly in the 50 to 100 foot range (15-30m).<sup>7</sup> Future archaeological research in the Hudson River may reveal more detailed information,

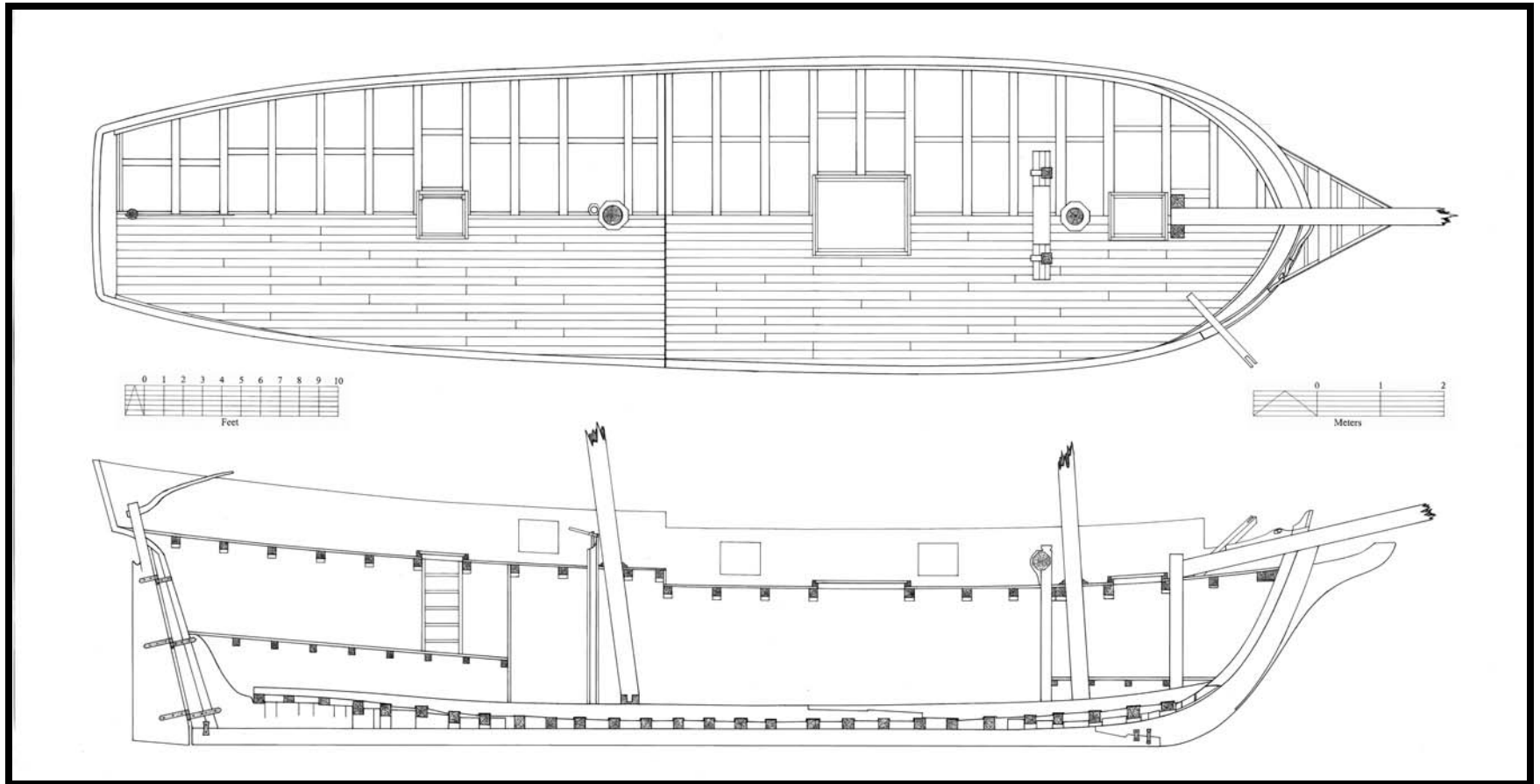


Figure 33: Construction drawing of *Nancy*.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick.

allowing a better understanding of the adaptation of salt-water ship design to the freshwater environment.

### **Reconstruction**

The lines drawing of *Nancy*, in conjunction with the hundreds of measurements taken during the 1997 recording, have become the foundation for a conjectural deck plan and interior profile of the schooner (figure 33). This drawing shows the vessel as it may have appeared during its working life. The extensively documented timbers of the lower hull required minimal adjustment prior to inclusion on the drawing. The only modifications that were necessary to this section of the hull were to compensate for distortion that has occurred since the vessel's sinking. This included adjusting for the hull sagging between the cement supports on which it rests, for timber erosion, and compensating for timbers that have pulled away from their original positions. The upper works, however, had to be recreated through a thorough study of similar vessels from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, careful examination of primary historic sources that describe *Nancy*, and descriptions of the excavation of the hull.

As *Nancy* is one of the only Great Lakes merchant schooners from the eighteenth century to be thoroughly documented, it was necessary to examine vessels of similar size and function from other areas and time periods. The only other lake merchant vessels to be studied from a contemporary period, which still possess their upper works, are *Hamilton* and *Scourge*. The upper works and deck layout of these two vessels were used as a guideline in helping to reconstruct *Nancy*. In particular the arrangement of the hatches, gunports, and the location of the step in the deck were copied

In its construction details *Nancy* also shares many characteristics seen on other lake vessels. *Nancy*'s mast steps (figure 34) are similar to those found on two other early lake vessels. The earliest of these is *Boscawen*, an armed sloop constructed by British

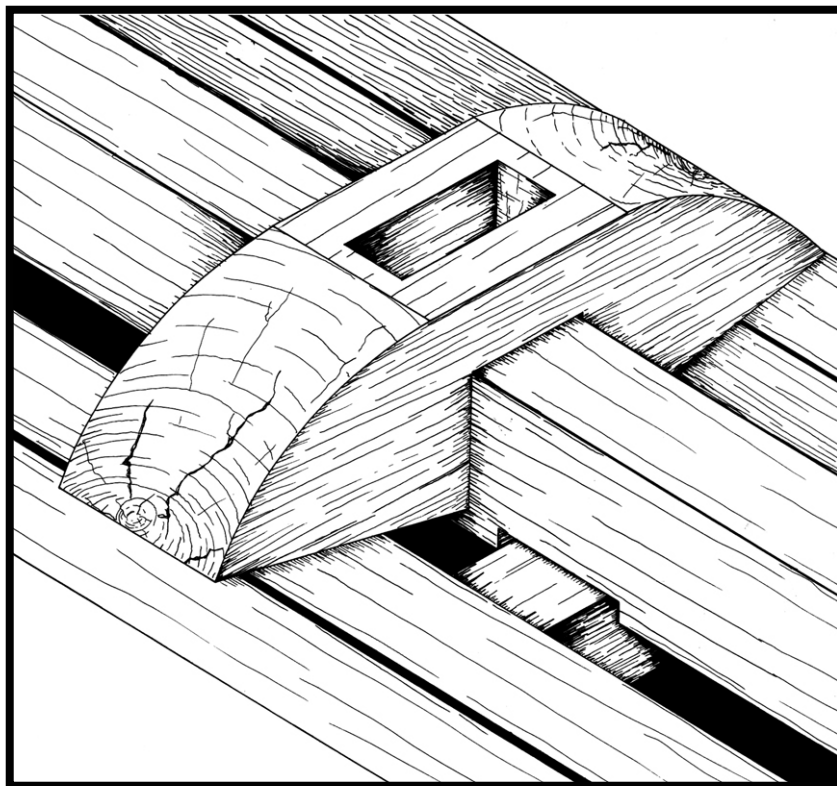


Figure 34: Perspective view of *Nancy*'s main mast step.  
Drawing by Christopher R. Sabick and Adam Loven.

forces on Lake Champlain in 1759 (figure 35).<sup>8</sup> *Boscawen*'s single mast was stepped in a saddle-type step that was notched to fit over the keelson like in *Nancy*. However, on *Boscawen* wedge shaped buttress timbers held the mast step in place on the keelson; there is no evidence of similar mast step wedges on *Nancy*. The mortise in *Boscawen*'s mast step passes completely through the block of wood, so that the heel of the mast sat on top of the keelson itself; on *Nancy* the mortise does not pass completely through the timber.

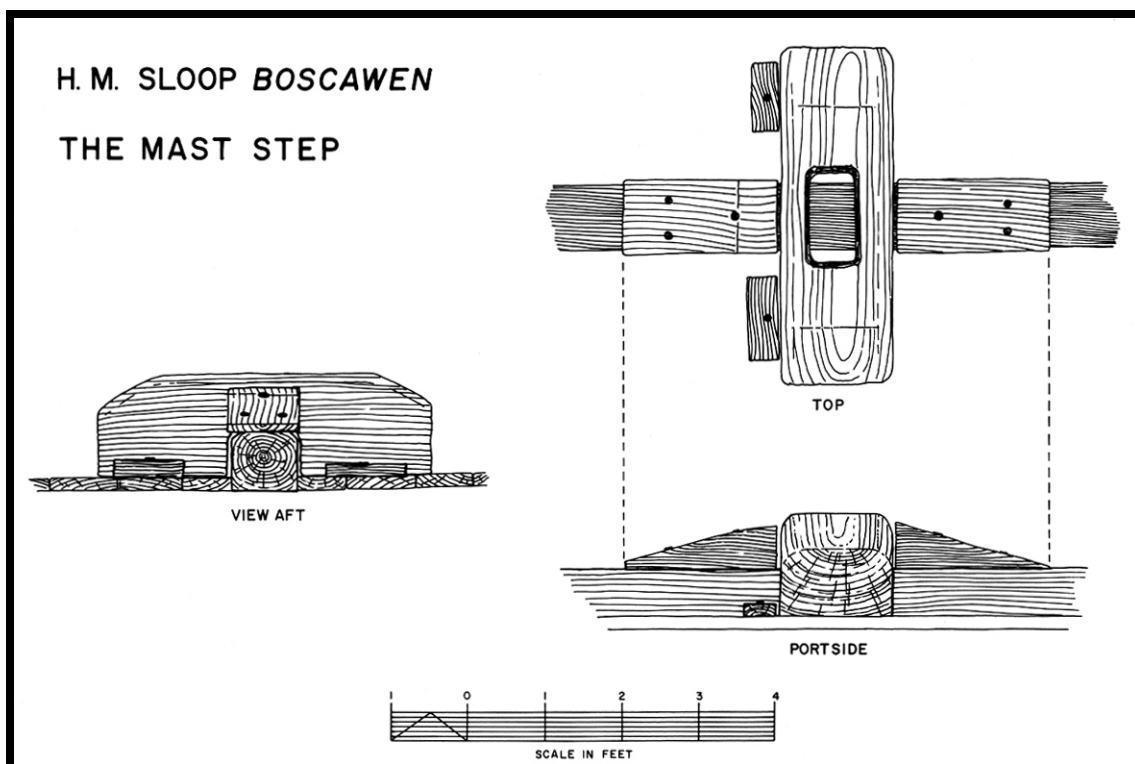


Figure 35: Mast step of H. M. Sloop *Boscawen*.  
Drawn by Kevin Crisman.

The remains of the small schooner located near Southampton, Ontario thought to be the trading schooner *Weasel* of 1767, has a saddle main mast step nearly identical to that found on *Nancy* (figure 36). The step for the foremast of this vessel was also mortised directly into the top of the keelson, like *Nancy*'s.<sup>9</sup> Further information on this vessel awaits a more extensive field investigation, and it will undoubtedly be a valuable vessel for comparison with *Nancy*.

I have reconstructed the location of *Nancy*'s main mast step between floors 6 and 7, where it is found on the hull remains today. Despite the evidence presented in Chapter VI that the mast step was moved when the hull was raised, its current location is logical. After comparing the overall lengths of other schooners and the placement of their mast steps the presence of a mast step between floor 6 and 7 was found to be feasible. While it

would also be reasonable to reposition the mast step slightly forward of its current location I have chosen to assume that the excavators returned the timber to the location in which they found it.



Figure 36: Main mast step from the South Hampton Beach wreck.  
Photo by Kenneth Cassavoy.

*Nancy's* framing pattern also deserves close examination. The pattern of timbers that make up the frames of the schooner is unusual, and suggests a particular construction sequence. Construction began with the laying of the keel and the addition of the stem, stern deadwood, and stern posts. Once the backbone of the schooner was complete the mould frames were assembled with trenails and spaced out along the keel. With the shape of the hull defined by these 10 frames the remainder of the floors were installed



and planking of the vessel began using treenails to fasten the planks to the schooner's skeleton. As planking reached the ends of the floors the free futtocks of the regular frames were added by fastening them to the planks and second futtocks were scarfed to the floors.

This construction style dates at least to early eighteenth century and is discussed in both English and French shipbuilding texts.<sup>10</sup> The employment of this framing pattern also has precedents in North America, as it is nearly identical to that found on *Boscawen* (figure 37).<sup>11</sup> The final construction analysis of this vessel is still underway, so it is unclear how many mould frames were used during the construction of this small sloop.

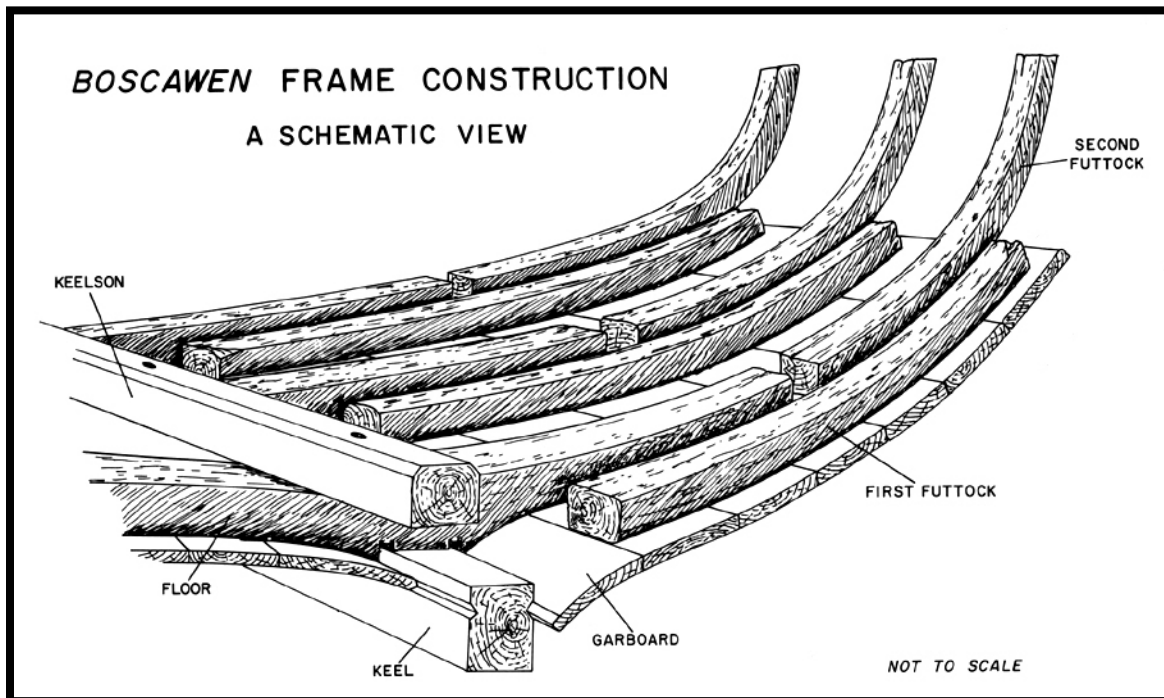


Figure 37: Framing pattern of *Boscawen*.  
Drawing by Kevin Crisman.

The use of mould frames has also been noted in the remains of the War of 1812 schooner *Ticonderoga*. Originally laid down as a steamboat on Lake Champlain, the unfinished hull was purchased by the US Navy in 1814 and finished as a 17-gun schooner in time to participate in the Battle of Plattsburgh Bay. *Ticonderoga*'s hull shape was originally defined by mould frames located at every fourth frame station. The remainder of the framing was inserted after the mould frames had been attached to the keel, these assemblies consisted of floors with unattached first futtocks.<sup>12</sup>

It appears that the internal structure of *Nancy* was reinforced by the addition of filler pieces between the original frames and futtocks. These timbers are clustered amidships and begin quite far from the centerline of the schooner suggesting that they were installed to strengthen the turn of the bilge. In addition to reinforcing the internal structure of the schooner, at some point the vessel was apparently re-planked, for the treenail fastenings were replaced with iron bolts and spikes. In the case of the moulded-frames bolts were employed to replace (or reinforce) the treenails that joined the frame elements. However, due to the close proximity of other timbers it was not possible to drive the bolts horizontally. Instead the bolts were driven at a downward angle (figure 38). In addition to this, the treenail fastened planks were replaced with strakes attached by iron spikes. The longevity of the schooner no doubt required replacing the planking at least once during her service on the Great Lakes. The use of treenails for the original fastenings may have due to the fact that iron fasteners, along with the majority of the rigging, was imported from the east, or even from England, making it very expensive.<sup>13</sup> Wood for fasteners, on the other hand, was readily available. The lack of treenail holes



Figure 38: Drift bolt driven at a downward angle.  
Photo by Christopher R. Sabick.

on the filler pieces further supports the idea that they were added after the construction of the vessel.

The reconstruction of *Nancy*'s living spaces is based on the historical record and Snider's description of the hull excavation in 1925. Apparently *Nancy*'s stern cabin was one of the schooner's most notable features. Several passengers transported on the vessel mention the "admirable cabin."<sup>14</sup> Snider gives a better idea of the cabin's size in his description of the artifact assemblage during the 1925 excavation. He describes finding china and other artifacts associated with the cabin to a point 20 feet (6.1m) forward of the sternpost. At this point Snider and Conboy uncovered the remains of a bulkhead separating the cabin from the cargo hold.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, no evidence of this bulkhead remains on the hull today.

The deck plan of the reconstruction is an educated guess based the layouts of the *Hamilton*, *Scourge*, and *Halifax*, and on hints gleaned from the historical record. The

presence of a windlass is confirmed in *Nancy*'s wartime log when Captain McIntosh described the schooner's predicament of October 1813. He stated, "We then took in sail & handed them, clinched the best & small bower around the mainmast, chocked the windlass from the deck and between the foremast & windlass bit..."<sup>16</sup>

The existence of gun ports on *Nancy* is based on the after action report written by Captain Sinclair to the Secretary of the U.S. Navy on September 3, 1814. In describing the artillery used by *Nancy*'s defenders Sinclair says "There were three guns on the block-house, two twenty-four pounders and one six pounder. I cannot say what was on the vessel as all her ports were closed."<sup>17</sup> I have reconstructed *Nancy* with bulwarks and ports similar to those found on *Scourge*. These would have offered minimal protection to the crews while they worked the guns.

Hatch placement is based on vessel comparison and logic. The "admirable cabin" undoubtedly had its own companion entrance from the quarterdeck. Similarly the forecastle would have had a small companion hatch allowing access to the cramped quarters and storage space below. The placement of the large cargo hatch is in the most logical place, between the masts above the hold.

It is, unfortunately, still unclear how *Nancy*'s design and construction fit into the larger picture of freshwater merchant craft from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is due to the lack of a sizable data set of other vessels for comparison. It is clear however, that the schooner shared many similarities with other small sailing craft from fresh and salt water. The hull shape is that of a common cargo hauler, and some of the construction details are shared with vessels of similar age from freshwater sites. But

the differences, particularly in the framing of the vessel, raise new questions that will only be clarified through further research, both historical and archaeological.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Howard Chapelle, *The History or American Sailing Ships* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1935), 34.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>3</sup> Emily Cain, *Ghost Ships Hamilton and Scourge: Historical Treasures from the War of 1812* (Toronto: Beaufort Books, 1983).
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Kenneth Cassavoy, conversation with author, summer 2003.
- <sup>6</sup> Paul E. Fontenoy, *The Sloops of the Hudson River: a Historical and Design Survey* (Mystic: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1994).
- <sup>7</sup> William E. Verplank, and Moses Collyer, *The Sloops of the Hudson River* (New York: Purple Mountain Press, 1984).
- <sup>8</sup> Kevin J. Crisman. "Struggle for a Continent: Naval Battles of the French and Indian War" *Ships and Shipwrecks of North America*. George Bass ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 142-147.
- <sup>9</sup> Personal Communication with Kenneth Cassavoy 2002
- <sup>10</sup> William Sutherland, *The Ship-builders Assistant* (Rotherfield, England: Jean Boudriot, 1989), 26-27. and Blaise Olliver, *18<sup>th</sup> Century Shipbuilding: Remarks on the Navies of the English & the Dutch from Observations made at their Dockyards in 1737*. (Rotherfield, England: Jean Boudriot, 1992), 357-358.
- <sup>11</sup> Crisman. "Struggle for a Continent" p 145.
- <sup>12</sup> Kevin, J. Crisman, *Schooner Ticonderoga*, Unpublished paper, 2004.
- <sup>13</sup> La Rochefoucauld Laincourt, *Travels through United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois and Upper Canada in the Years 1795, 1796 and 1797*. (London: R. Philips, 1799), 289.
- <sup>14</sup> Snider "A Report on the Schooner *Nancy*, 1789-1925" p 35.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p 113.
- <sup>16</sup> Snider, War Log p 28.
- <sup>17</sup> Sinclair to Secretary of the Navy September 14, 1813. in Cruikshank p 114.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSIONS

The diminutive size of *Nancy* is inversely proportional to her importance in understanding the history of early Great Lakes shipping. This small schooner is one of the earliest vessels from the Upper Lakes to be archaeologically documented and it truly opens a window on early shipping in this region. Unfortunately, the number of freshwater merchant ships with which to compare *Nancy* is quite small, and therefore it is difficult to ascertain exactly how the schooner compares with other lake vessels of this type. In the future, as more wrecks from this area and period are discovered and analyzed, a better understanding of its construction style will become possible.

It is apparent that *Nancy* shares some hull design and construction features with vessels from the same time period and of a similar size. Corollaries to some of her construction details can be seen on other vessels from the Great Lakes and from Lake Champlain. The hull form also bears a resemblance to other merchant vessels of similar size from both fresh and salt water. *Nancy*'s hull remains are also a testament to the talent of the shipwrights who constructed the schooner. With obvious skill and an abundant supply of quality shipbuilding timber they were able to construct a very practical and unusually long-lived schooner. Of course, *Nancy*'s long career is also a demonstration of the dedication shown by her owners and operators in maintaining the vessel. Evidence of some of this maintenance work is still visible today.

The path that *Nancy* sailed through late eighteenth and early nineteenth century history reveals that it played a supporting role in many of the important events of its time. As a fur-trading vessel it carried the manufactured goods of Europe into the interior and

returned with the wealth of the old northwest. *Nancy* helped to reduce shipping cost for Forsyth, Richardson and Co. and allowed the firm to successfully compete with the much larger and more powerful North West Co. When these companies joined forces the schooner continued to ply the trade route on Lakes Erie and Huron until the outbreak of the War of 1812.

As a military transport *Nancy* was vital in supplying various posts and expeditions throughout the Upper Lakes region. The vessel carried troops for the defense of Fort Erie and for the attacks on Fort Meigs and Fort Stephenson. And after the British defeat at the Battle of Lake Erie it became the only lifeline for the beleaguered garrison at Fort Michilimackinac. In August of 1814 *Nancy's* crew defended the schooner valiantly, fighting off superior forces for several hours, until destruction by fire became a military necessity.

From the history of this reliable little fur trader and military transport, the importance that sailing vessels played in the survival of the far flung outposts of the old northwest, both commercial and military, is abundantly clear. *Nancy* was present for many events that shaped the future of the Great Lakes Region. From its time carrying the merchandise of fur traders, to its fiery demise in the waters of the Nottawasaga River, to the raising and display of the hull in Wasaga Beach, *Nancy* witnessed the Great Lakes develop from nearly inaccessible frontier to one of the most important commercial waterways in the world.



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## APPENDIX

### GLOSSARY<sup>1</sup>

**Aft.** Towards or at the stern of a vessel.

**Apron.** A curved internal timber, attached to the lower end of the sternpost above the keel.

**Athwartship.** Across the ship from side to side, perpendicular to the keel.

**Bateau.** (plural **bateaux**) A lightly built, flat-bottomed, double-ended boat.

**Beam.** The side to side dimension of a vessel.

**Bilge.** The lowest point in a vessel's interior.

**Boat.** An open vessel, usually small and without decks, intended for use in sheltered water.

**Bolt.** A cylindrical iron rod used to fasten ship timbers together, usually headed on one end and slightly larger in diameter than the hole into which it is driven.

**Bow.** The forward end of a vessel.

**Bulwarks.** The sides of a vessel above its upper deck.

**Cabin.** The living quarters of a vessel.

**Cant Frame.** The frames at the forward end of a vessel that are not perpendicular to the keel.

**Ceiling.** The internal planking of a vessel.

**Cultural Resource.** Nonrenewable historical resources such as archaeological sites, artifacts, and standing structures.

**Cutter.** A single-masted fore-and-aft rigged sailing vessel with a running bowsprit, mainsail, and two or more headsails.

**Deadeye.** A round or pear-shaped block pierced by several holes, used mainly to secure and adjust the standing rigging of a vessel.

**Deck.** A platform extending horizontally from one side of a ship to the other.

**Deck Beam.** A timber mounted across a vessel from side to side to support the vessel's deck and provide lateral strength.

**Draft.** The depth of a vessel's keel below the waterline when the vessel is loaded.

**Floor Timber.** A frame timber that crosses the keel and spans the bottom of a vessel.

**Fore.** Located toward the front of a vessel.

**Fore-and-aft** From stem to stern or from front to back; oriented parallel to the keel.

**Frame.** A transverse timber or group of timbers that creates the skeleton of a vessel and to which the hull planking and ceiling are fastened.

**Futtocks.** The upper timbers of a frame.

**Garboard.** The external planking strake that is closest to the keel.

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<sup>1</sup> Glossary based on: J. Richard Steffy, *Wooden Ship Building and the Interpretation of Shipwrecks*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1994), 266-298.

**Graving Piece.** A wooden patch, or insert, let into a damaged or rotted plank.

**Gripe.** A curved timber joining the stem to the lower end of the knee of the head.

**Hold.** The lower interior part of a ship, where the cargo is stored.

**Hull.** The structural body of a vessel, not including the superstructure, masts, or rigging.

**Hull Plank.** A thick board used to create the outer shell of a hull.

**Inboard.** Toward the center of a vessel.

**Keel.** The main longitudinal timber upon which the framework or skeleton of a hull is mounted; the backbone of a hull.

**Keelson.** An internal longitudinal timber, fastened on top of the frames above the keel for additional strength.

**Knee.** An L-shaped timber used to strengthen the junction of two surfaces on different planes..

**Knee of the Head.** A knee or knee shaped structure, fixed to the forward face of the stem, that supported the head rails and figurehead at its upper end.

**Limber Holes.** Apertures cut in the bottom surfaces of frames on either side of the keel to allow water to drain into the pump well.

**Longitudinal Timber.** A long timber that runs parallel to the length of a vessel.

**Mast.** A large wooden pole that supports the sails of a vessel.

**Mast Step.** A mortised wooden block mounted onto the keelson into which the heel of a mast is seated.

**Molded.** The various dimensions of timbers as seen from the sheer and body views of construction plans. Thus the vertical surfaces (the sides) of keels, the fore-and-aft sides of the posts, the vertical or surfaces of the frames, etc. Normally, timbers are expressed in sided and molded dimensions because the changing orientation of timbers, such as frames, where “thick” and “wide” or “height” and “depth” become confusing.

**Outboard.** Outside or away from the center of a vessel’s hull.

**Plank.** A thick board used as sheathing on a vessel.

**Rabbet.** A groove cut into the sides of the keel into which the garboard is seated.

**Rigging.** Hardware and equipment that support and control the spars and sails of a vessel.

**Rudderpost.** A vertical timber to which the rudder is attached.

**Scarf.** An overlapping joint used to connect two timbers without increasing their dimensions.

**Schooner.** A fore-and-aft-rigged sailing vessel with two or more masts.

**Sheer.** The curvature of a vessels upper edge from fore to aft, as seen from the side of the vessel.

**Shoe.** A protective, sacrificial, timber attached to the bottom of the keel.

**Sided.** The dimension of an unmolded surface; the distance across an outer frame surface, the forward or after surface of a stem or sternpost, or the upper surface of a keel or keelson.

**Sloop.** A single-masted, fore-and-aft-rigged sailing vessel.

**Spike.** A large nail.

**Stanchion.** An upright support post.

**Stem.** An upward curving timber or assembly of timbers attached to the forward end of the keel.

**Stern.** The after end of a vessel.

**Stern Knee.** A timber that reinforced the joint between the keel and sternpost.

**Sternpost.** A vertical or upward curving timber stepped into the after end of the keel.

**Stopwater.** A wooden dowel inserted athwartships in the scarf seams of external timbers to prevent shifting of the joint or to discourage water seepage along the seams.

**Strake.** A Continuous line of planks, running from bow to stern.

**Treenail.** A round or multifaceted length of hardwood driven through planks and timbers to connect them.

**Through Bolt:** A cylindrical iron rod used to fasten ship timbers together usually headed on one end and slightly larger in diameter than the hole into which it is driven, and which passes completely through the timbers it joins.

**Tiller.** A handle attached to the rudderpost to steer a vessel.

**Timber.** In a general context, all wooden hull members, especially those that form the framework or skeleton of the hull.

**Transom.** The transverse part of the stern of a vessel.

**Underwater Archaeology.** The archaeological study of submerged cultural resources.

**Underwater Cultural Resource.** A nonrenewable historical resource that partially or entirely lies below water, such as submerged prehistoric archaeological sites, artifacts, bridges, piers, wharves, and shipwrecks.

**Vessel.** A watercraft, larger than a rowboat, designed to navigate on open water.

**Waterline.** The intersection of the vessel's hull and the water's surface.

**Windlass.** A horizontal drum winch mounted on the bow of a vessel and supported by bitts or brackets; used for tasks such as hauling anchors, stepping masts, and moving cargo.

## VITA

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### Education

Master of Arts Anthropology

Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas  
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Honors: Institute of Nautical Archaeology Scholarship  
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Bachelor of Arts      Anthropology

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Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana  
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### Professional Experience

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, Conservation Lab	1999 to Present
Ticonderoga Parade Ground Conservation Project	2001 to 2003
Valcour Bay Research Project Artifact Conservation	2001 to 2003
Mount Independence Artifact Conservation Project	2001 to 2002
Key Corp Plaza Artifact Conservation Project	2000 to 2001
<i>Confiance</i> Anchor Conservation Project	1999 to 2000
Conservation Research Lab , Texas A&M University	1997 to 1998
Lake Huron Shipwreck Survey Phase II	1998
Camp Hearne Archaeological Conservation Project	1997
Lake Huron Shipwreck Survey Phase I, Director	1997
Reader's Point Project	1994