

Exploration of Lake Nipissing continues

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Sailors following the shoreline of the lake, from time to time, see a float with a diver's flag: a red rectangle with a diagonal white line. The men and women swimming in the greenish water below hope and pray that motorboats will stay at least 30 metres (100 feet) away from the dive site as an emergency ascent of a diver might lead to a collision with a moving boat or whirling propeller.

What is it these people in the black or blue rubber suits are looking for? Some are fish-watchers and will spend hours observing the movement and nesting behavior of perch, bass and sunfish. I have found that even small bass and sunfish are quite territorial and will bite the hands and toes of people getting too close to their nestsites. While underwater photography adds greatly to the enjoyment of a dive, I have found it almost impossible to take good photographs in Lake Nipissing due to the presence of silt and algae. These algae form the food of fresh water clams or mussels that can be seen in concentrations as high as 10 per square metre. Lake Nipissing's clams are extremely useful as they strain the water and remove algae and small bits of plant and animal wastes. While mussels are not as mobile as fish, they are able to move themselves across a sandy bottom in an upright position, leaving tracks with interesting circular patterns or short straight lines.

Where the silt is shallow, boulders can be seen that range in size from 30 cm to 10 metres or more across. These rounded rocks were at one time carried by glacial ice and dropped when the glaciers melted about 10,000 years ago. Near islands, divers can follow rocky ridges which have also been worn smooth by the action of ice and water. In some locations, such as the mouth of the French River and South Bay, the layer of sand covering the bottom is very thin. Fishermen dropping an anchor may break through the sand and expose deep layers of soft grayish clay that settled slowly in prehistoric times.

WRECK EXPLORATION

The mystery of shipwrecks appeals to all underwater explorers and a good many have lost their lives penetrating the deep and cold waters of the Great Lakes. Hull planks, square nails, bottles, logging chains and parts of steam engines are occasionally found in the lakes and rivers of Nipissing District. Many of these artifacts are single items, not part of an identifiable set, and end up in private collections when local museums have no proper marine exhibits.

From time to time, a shipwreck is located which is partly intact, can be identified and provides information on the technology of earlier shipbuilding methods and steam propulsion. Three such wrecks have been discovered in Lake Nipissing: the John Fraser which burned and sank in 1893, the Ganton D, which burned and sank in 1930 and the West Arm which struck a shallow reef and sank around 1905. Encouraged by Bruce Goulet, Mayor of North Bay in 1972, divers of the North Bay Aqua Jets planned an operation to raise parts of a shipwreck for the local museum. Under the leadership of Joe Barrio and John Holman, the divers channelled their energies into the recovery of artifacts of the

John Fraser, a side-paddle wheeler built at Sturgeon Falls for the Davidson and Hayes lumber company in the 1880s. A steam-driven waterpump, an outstanding example of the state of technology of the 1880s, the white oak rudder, anchors and the steering wheel, were raised without accidents, though not without difficulties. These and many other artifacts of the John Fraser can now be seen in the Nipissing Room of the North Bay Area Museum.

Generally-speaking, archeologists do not approve of the type of salvage operation conducted by the North Bay divers in 1972 for the local museum society. They usually advise to leave the remains undisturbed until perhaps a large-scale operation can be organized by an Ottawa or Toronto-based

After investigating the remains of the steamtug Ganton D in Callander Bay in 1978 I decided that this was an ideal wreck to partly dismantle and reconstruct in the limited space available in the North Bay Museum. Although the ship had burned to the waterline in 1930 and nearly all of the engine had been removed and sold as scrapmetal in the depression years, enough of the hull was still present to make a proper historical investigation and salvage worthwhile. In 1978 and again in 1979, many hours of actual diving time were spent on mapping the wreck and its major parts using an underwater grid of yellow rope, a measuring tape, grease pencils and large blackboard laid in the bottom of the hull. This map is providing us with information on the dimensions of the former tugboat, the construction methods used and

grounds of the North Bay Area Museum. The propeller is now on exhibit in the Nipissing Room and the driveshaft can be seen near the entrance to the museum. North Bay divers who have given freely of their time and energy in raising heavy parts of the Ganton D are Steve Doherty, Al Winfield, Anita Vandenhazel, Bob Mills, Peter Koziol, Val Klimov, Dennis Morin, Doug Bremner, Rod Slattery, Mark Vandenhazel and Harvey Renaud.

FROM SHIPWRECK TO MUSEUM DISPLAY

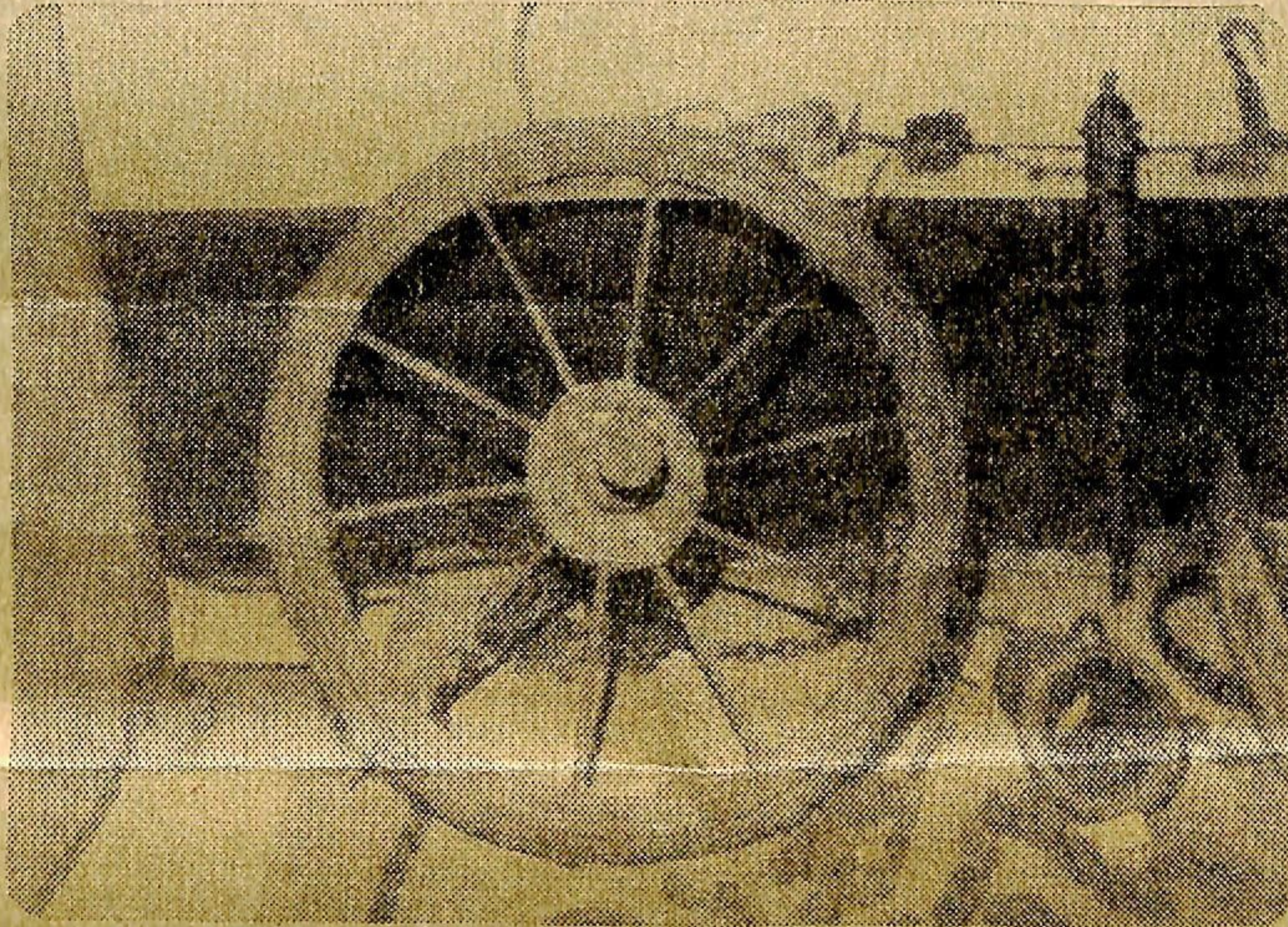
In the summer of 1979 Nipissing University College sponsored a Young Canada Works Project with the title "Transportation on Lake Nipissing." As part of this project John Bullard (West Ferris Secondary School) and Dan Hefkey (Ecole Secondaire Algonquin) have each spent some 30 hours retrieving artifacts for the North Bay Museum. They also separated 4.5 metres from the bow-section of the wreck and floated this to shore using a number of air-filled barrels. At the museum they carefully cleaned and preserved the wooden and metallic artifacts and assisted Bill Goudreau (Canadore College) in the construction of a simulated underwater environment.

Modern diving technology which includes the use of tanks of compressed air (scuba means "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus") has opened up a new world to daring men and women. When seen as tool, rather than an end in itself, scuba diving can be used to provide residents and tourists of North Bay with a window to the history of transportation on our lakes.

Simply placing artifacts in a room, however, does not make a museum exhibit. The public today expects a realistic three-dimensional experience with light and sound effects and informative literature. The graphic presentations of ships for two booklets to be published in September and the wall murals in the Nipissing Room were created by Michelle Labelle (WFSS), Dan McMullen (Canadore College) and Kim Vlahovitch (Canadore College). The historical research needed for the preparation of the literature was done by Simon Snow (Nipissing University) and the translating of this material into French, German, Italian, and Ojibway was arranged by Wanda Murray (Nipissing University). The 1979 summer project "Transportation on Lake Nipissing" was co-ordinated by Mark Haley (Acadia University) and has received donations in the form of artifacts from many residents of the area.

The successful completion of this museum-project has demonstrated that North Bay and area have become more self-reliant in many respects: we now have the educational institutes at the post-secondary school levels that assist our young men and women in fully developing their skills and interests in preparation for future employment and community service.

The bottom of Lake Nipissing contains much information on the geology, biology and human history of the district. Let us make sure that a good part of this heritage can be placed on exhibit in an enlarged museum for the enjoyment of all.



The steering wheel of the John Fraser, now in the North Bay Museum, shows the effects of 80 years of submersion in lake water.

museum. This would, in my opinion, make good sense if the wreck were located on the bottom of a deep lake in cold, oxygen-free water. Both wood and metals might be fairly well preserved under such conditions. Lake Nipissing, however, is shallow, with a relatively hard bottom and well-aerated. Metals, even massive propellers, may lose 50 per cent of their thickness in less than 50 years as we learned from the propeller of the steamtug Ganton D, which was raised from Callander Bay by helicopter in 1978.

For some reason or another, white oak planks and ribs are fairly well preserved in the water of Lake Nipissing. Although the outer two cm of the boards have turned black and seem to have lost all cell material but the cell walls, the interior of thick planks still has its natural color and we even found some that were dry in the centre. Such wood, when given immediate treatment with glycol, followed by several applications of wood preservative, can be easily prepared for museum exhibits.

the relative position of the boiler and steam engine.

Careful investigation of the wreck by divers revealed the following major parts: the keel and the lower four hull planks, an oak and steel rudder, the drive train of the steam engine consisting of the crankshaft, the driveshaft and a large propeller, the steam condenser, firebox grating, the solid steel towpost and a large number of smaller artifacts such as two lids of the galley stove in which the disastrous fire may have started in the winter of 1930-31.

On a cold day in November 1978, a few days before freeze-up when the water temperature was four degrees Celsius, members of a combined military and civilian dive team took turns removing sand from around the propeller shaft and connecting the propeller by means of heavy chains to a floating donut-shaped pick-up device. The crew of a military Chinook helicopter then lifted the prop and most of the driveshaft from the lake and placed the 1000 kg (2,200 lbs.) object on the