

Over the winter of 1850-1851, the beam-engined, sidewheel passenger and freight steamer MAPLE LEAF was built at Kingston for Donald Bethune and Company, of Toronto, for service on Lake Ontario and the upper St. Lawrence River. She was 173.2 (between perpendiculars) x 24.7 (inside the guards) x 10.6, and was launched on June 18, 1851. The steamer herself was a success, but the Bethune operations were plagued by financial problems, and in 1855 MAPLE LEAF was sold to the Lake Ontario International Steamboat Company, of Rochester, for the sum of \$50,000 - which was some \$20,000 less than she had cost to build. MAPLE LEAF was transferred to U.S. registry.

The only photograph ever known to have been taken on MAPLE LEAF was an ambrotype made by Edward T. Whitney at Charlotte, New York, on April 19, 1856. As well as numerous sailing vessels, the photograph caught the steamers MAPLE LEAF, HIGHLANDER, ONTARIO and NORTHERNER.

The new owner of MAPLE LEAF also ran into financial troubles, these related to the economic panic of 1857 and 1858, and in 1859 the steamer was sold to former company director, George J. Whitney, who soon resold her to Capt. George Schofield and associates.

The 1862 season was another bad one on the lakes, with the economy depressed, particularly as a consequence of the Civil War raging amongst the States. Brokers were, however, seeking any vessels available to assist in the war effort and, in August of 1862, MAPLE LEAF was sold and left the lakes. Her new owners were Bostonians who chartered MAPLE LEAF to the U.S. Army Quartermaster Department for use as an army transport.

In the pre-dawn hours of Friday, April 1st, 1864, MAPLE LEAF was on the St. Johns River of Northeastern Florida, inbound to Jacksonville on a voyage from Hilton Head. She was carrying a number of soldiers, together with the camp equipage and baggage of three Union regiments. Without warning, MAPLE LEAF struck a Confederate "torpedo", or what we would know better as a primitive "mine". Severe damage was inflicted, and the steamer sank up to the level of her upper (or "saloon") deck, in a position off Mandarin Point.

The following day, the Confederate forces responsible for the sinking of MAPLE LEAF boarded the wreck and burned off the superstructure. The wreck remained as it lay until the 1880s, when efforts were made to level the wreck as it was considered to be a menace to river navigation.

In recent years, the well-preserved wreck of MAPLE LEAF was rediscovered and extensively explored by divers. Numerous invaluable relics of life during the Civil War have been recovered and preserved ashore, although most of the wreck and its contents remain in their resting place, undisturbed. MAPLE LEAF is considered to be one of the most important existing relics of its period.

Now a book, entitled The MAPLE LEAF - An Extraordinary American Civil War Shipwreck, has been published by some of the parties involved in the discovery and exploration of the wreck. It contains numerous chapters dealing with the sinking of the ship and the wreck itself, but the longest of all of the chapters, written by longtime T.M.H.S. member Gerald T. Girvin, of Rochester, outlines in considerable detail the history of MAPLE LEAF when she operated on Lake Ontario. We would recommend the book as an addition to the library of anyone interested in early Lake Ontario steamboats or shipping of the Civil War era.

The 205-page book, with colour painting of MAPLE LEAF on the cover, is available in hardcover (U.S. \$32.50) or softcover (U.S. \$19.95), plus U.S. \$3.50 per copy postage and packing. (We are not aware of any additional costs to Canadian purchasers.) Interested parties should address St. Johns Archaeological Expeditions Inc., 4114 Herschel Street, Suite 105, Jacksonville, Florida 32210, U.S.A., or phone (904) 387-2308.