

Granite State News — July 29, 1976

Scuba divers' find recalls old tragedy

by Carter MacMillan

Scuba diving and snorkeling are some of the many pleasures our big lake offers summer visitors, at least two young men from Baltimore, Bill Chambers and John McWilliams, have found it so. Some six summers, from their place at Clark's Point, they have "snorkeled" various spots in the lake, interested in the odd and different underwater world to be seen through a diver's glass.

Last summer, diving near light buoy No. 12, which marks dangerous Goose Egg rock, down through the clear water they could dimly make out an odd shape that was definitely not a rock. Closer examination proved unmistakably that it was a ship's large propeller, larger than anything one would see on the lake today. Heavily encrusted with rust and marine growth, it was far too heavy to move.

Anxious to trace its history, they came to Melvin Historical Society museum, and were referred to Mrs. Marion Horner Robie, as an authority on Lake history. Word was not immediately obtainable, but Marion received the inquiry, and later wrote them that evidently the propeller must have been from the wreck of the steamer Seneca, a scow-shaped vessel built in Melvin Village about 1862, and wrecked on Goose Egg rock in a violent storm shortly thereafter—engine and boiler salvaged and used

later in the steamer Ossipee, but the propeller never recovered.

Marion received no reply at that time, but this summer she did - "would the museum be interested in seeing the find, and doing something about it?" The museum would, and Marion at once set the wheels in motion.

Tom Hunter was contacted, and quickly volunteered his help, and more specifically the use of his paddle-wheel work boat, the Kitty Bell. So last Friday afternoon an interested little party set out on the Kitty Bell for Goose Egg rock. The

divers quickly located the propeller, it was attached to the power lift of the Kitty Bell, and soon rose, dripping and rusty, from its sleep of over a century.

It was of cast iron, over six feet in diameter (the slower rotating steam engines of those days needed larger wheels to get the driving effect), and it weighed at a guess well over a ton. Brought in to Melvin River, the propeller was transferred to a land power unit (they certainly know how to handle heavy bulks up here) and soon was deposited on the side lawn of the Melvin Community Church.

Predacious souvenir hunters

manage to purloin almost everything movable up here, but we hope this is one artifact they will not get away with. The Melvin Historical Society officers are planning to mount the propeller on a concrete base on the lawn in front of the museum. They certainly appreciate the help of the scuba diver discoverers, Tom Hunter, and the others who so successfully procured this interesting relic.

Note: - The Tuftonboro Historical Society would appreciate it if anyone having old newspaper references or information on the wrecking of the Seneca would so advise them.

Big Lake Wrecks Intrigue Divers

"Some of the best fresh-water wrecks outside the Great Lakes," is attributed to Lake Winnepesaukee by Russ Bellico, the author of a fascinating article in the September issue of Skin Diver magazine entitled, "New Hampshire's Lake of Lost Ships."

Of all the lakes in the state, Lake Winnepesaukee, the largest, has attracted the most skin divers. The article notes its 274 island, 183 miles of shoreline and depths of 170 feet.

"The best wreck in the lake, and probably the best in any lake in the northeast, is the "Lady of the Lake," the author comments. He continues: "Launched in 1849,

she was 125 foot steamer with a 35 foot beam. As the most efficient transportation of its time, Lady plied the lake for most of the remaining 19th century carrying both freight and passengers. On a Sunday morning in 1895, two other ships, the Maid of the Isles and the Mineola, were given orders to tow the retired and dismantled Lady out and sink her in a deep part of the lake near Rattlesnake Island. As the two boats tried to tow her out of Glendale Cove, the old steamer suddenly rebelled, lurched violently, and sank right in the cove. She sits upright today, with her hull completely intact in 32 feet of water between Pig Island and the Glendale Shore. The

Lady's deck is wholly intact except for a small portion of her stern and where her exposed beams radiate into a mosaic pattern...."

Skin diver excursions to other notable wrecks in the lake include the following description: "An excursion to the steamer Belknap was one of my first dives over 11 years ago. She sank in 1841 while towing a raft of logs near the middle of the lake. During a sudden storm she was literally blown into the jagged rocks of a small island where she sank to the bottom. The island has been called Steamboat Island since then, and the remnants of her hull lie right off the north side of the tiny island in some of the

clearest water in the Lake. I will never forget my first dive there: we spent the first ten minutes snorkeling in search of our scuba equipment that kept dropping overboard from our borrowed rowboat.

"Winnepesaukee also offers several undiscovered steamboat wrecks. The wreck of the Mount Washington I has never been found. She was built in 1872, resembled the Lady of the Lake, and had a length of 178 feet and beam of 49 feet. The ship burned to the waterline at Weirs dock in the winter of

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1939 after the stove in the adjacent railroad station set the whole place on fire. The remaining hull was towed out to the deeper water of the harbor and sunk. No one has located the main wreckage to date, but a diver showed up recently at the dive shop with a porthole from the sunken Mount. (There are no regulations in New Hampshire regarding relic hunting—it's 'finders keepers' right now.)

"Early in the 1860s, a smaller steamer, the Seneca, smashed on Goose Egg Rock in Moultonboro Bay during a heavy windstorm. Her engine and boiler were salvaged, but the badly damaged hull was abandoned. I found the Goose Egg all right, but never located the Seneca."

The article concludes: "There are many other barges, small steamers, old lake cruisers, and other assorted vessels scattered throughout the lake to keep divers busy. Restaurants, lakeside motels, boat liveries, are also abundant since Lake Winnepesaukee has the distinction of being the first summer resort in America."



Sept. 13-1977

Seneca's Propeller Recovered

TUFTONBORO — Two young divers were snorkeling around Goose Egg Rock in Moultonboro Bay last summer. In the clear water between a treacherous rock and buoy 12 they could faintly see the silhouette of a large propeller in the sand below.

After consulting a local historian knowledgeable of Winnepesaukee history, the divers learned they had found the remains of wreck sunk there many years ago, the Seneca.

Marion Horner Robie of Melvin Village has confirmed the wreck has indeed been found, and the cast iron propeller now sitting on a granite slab in front of the Tuftonboro Historical Society is evidence of that discovery. She was the local historian consulted by William Chambers and John McWilliams of Baltimore, Md., when they discovered the propeller.

In July of that year she was among those who rode out to Goose Egg Rock aboard the Kitty Belle barge, a ship owned by Tom Hunter of Melvin Village, which hoisted the propeller from the lake

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Huge Propeller

Marion Horner Robie, a Melvin Village historian, stands besides the Seneca propeller found off Goose Egg Rock in Moultonboro last summer. Although the wreck has finally

been discovered, and the powerful propeller restored and preserved, the mystery surrounding the Seneca wreck still remains unsolved.

Sidewalk Boogie

Wednesday, October 12, 1977

Old ship propeller now set as permanent exhibit

A large propeller believed to be from the wreck of the old Lake Winnepesaukee steamer "Seneca" has been restored and installed on the grounds of the Tuftonboro Historical Society in Melvin Village.

A granite slab to the left of the Historical Society building provides the pedestal for the more than six-foot diameter propeller, which was rediscovered in 1975 and raised last year, being restored over the winter by Robert Ramsbotham at Ram-Z-Marine.

It was found by two summer residents, William Chambers and John McWilliams, off Geneva Point in Moultonboro, while they were simply looking for fish. Marion Horner Robie, Melvin Village historian, says that they approached the Historical Society shortly afterwards with the idea of raising the heavily encrusted cast-iron propeller, but that it wasn't until the next year that Tom Hunter was able to recover it.

Little is known of the "Seneca", which was built in Melvin Village in the early 1860's, or its eventual fate. Mrs. Robie has found only one reference to it, in Edward Blackstone's Farewell Old Mount Washington, a chronicle of 19th century steamboats on the lake. Blackstone records that the ship



was built for Uriah Hall, who may have been from Sandwich, and that the vessel was wrecked on Goose Egg Rock, one of a large number of rocks and shoals near Geneva Point.

What caused the Seneca's wreck is not known, but Mrs. Robie noted that in later years the "Belle of the Isles", which called at the Winnepesaukee Inn on Geneva Point, sometimes

had difficulty navigating around the same shoals.

The boiler and engine were salvaged from the wreck and used in the "Ossipee", a freight hauler during the latter 19th century. The propeller, though obviously a valuable part, was not found until more than a hundred years later.

Restoring the find involved

removing heavy rust deposits, of which a few fragments were saved as testimony of its antiquity, and repainting. With that work completed, it became a weighty addition to the historical society's collection.

The propeller will remain on year-round display, evident even to the most casual of passers-by.