

Historic artifacts returned to Plattsburgh area

Lake artifacts donated to local museums by filmmaker

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Staff Writer – September 16, 2007

PLATTSBURGH -- Several artifacts recovered from the depths of Lake Champlain decades ago have returned home.



The objects, ranging from a well-preserved musket from the mid-1700s to a tea kettle found on a shipwreck near Point au Roche from the mid-1800s, were removed from their watery graves in the 1970s by a Canadian film crew.

Those reminders of the lake's past have been donated back to the community by Dr. Kenn Feigelman of Deep Quest 2 Expeditions, the filming company from Ontario that spent two summers in search of evidence from both the battles of Valcour and Plattsburgh.

"Thank you for accepting these artifacts," Feigelman said during a presentation at the Battle of Plattsburgh Museum on the former Plattsburgh Air Force Base Tuesday night. "This is being done because it had to be done. This is where they belong."

Using homemade metal detectors, Feigelman and his crew spent the summers of '73 and '74 cataloging artifacts that littered the lake bottom where American and British sailors fought during both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

"The visibility back then was between zero and nothing," Feigelman noted. "We were working in very dark, very cold, very spooky conditions. If you held your hand in front of your face, you'd be lucky to see your fingers."

The lake bottom was covered with a thick layer of silt, hiding most of the artifacts buried there.

Although many have since been taken by treasure seekers, Feigelman believes more objects remain hidden than have actually been identified.

Today's divers have developed a sense of ownership for the lake's artifacts and diligently protect items from being absconded. But in earlier diving eras, salvaging objects found on the lake bottom was a common practice.

"I knew Ken when he was a young, brash Canadian who had come down here to go diving, and he was very good at it," said Frank Pabst, a longtime local resident and diver.



"Ken has done a magnificent job of not only recovering items but documenting and protecting them," he added, noting that it brought a tear to his eye to see the Canadian crew leaving with artifacts from the lake but with the comfort that they'd be better taken care of than if someone else were to find them on the lake bottom.

"When I got a call from Ken that he'd like to see these items come back to where they belong, I was ecstatic."

Feigelman and Pabst both belonged to local diving group decades ago called the Wreck Raiders, and a lot of their efforts led to the discovery of many lost artifacts.

In fact, Feigelman said his film crew had first discovered the enormous anchor from the British Flagship Confiance on the bottom of Cumberland Bay in 1974.

The crew had attached a plastic bottle to the anchor that floated some five feet below the lake surface.

But subsequent efforts to relocate the anchor proved futile.

Local divers rediscovered the anchor in the mid-1990s, and it now sits at City Hall in Plattsburgh.

Feigelman also donated a large number of slides taken during the 1960s and 70s of artifacts being discovered on the lake bottom, including pictures of two cannons from the French and Indian Wars found near Cliff Haven in the late 60s.

Keith Herkalo, president of the Battle of Plattsburgh Association, said the artifacts received will be catalogued and placed in either the Battle of Plattsburgh or Clinton County Museum collection.

Deep Quest 2, out of Kingston, Ontario, has been involved in a variety of worldwide projects. Feigelman, a native of Montreal, has led more than 100 explorations in waters across the planet.



Current and upcoming projects include documenting the endangered Florida manatee, investigating coral reefs in Panama and exploring Mazinaw Lake in Bon Echo Park for aboriginal pictographs.

Feigelman also plans on returning to Lake Champlain next summer to document diving activities now taking place at Valcour and Cumberland Bay.

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