Purpose: To research, locate, and document the undiscovered historic ships in Lake Ontario.

Background: For over 350 years ships have traversed Lake Ontario transporting goods and people. The remains of some of the oldest ships that still exist in the Great Lakes are located in Ontario. The oldest shipwreck discovered in the Great Lakes is the British warship, HMS Ontario that foundered in 1780 in Lake Ontario was located by our team in 2008. There were many sailing ships on the lake during the period from the late 1700’s through the early 1900’s. Some of these ships never made it to the port of their destination. Unfortunately, there are no drawings available of the construction of these old ships. By locating these historic shipwrecks we are able to provide details of their construction and cargo. As we examine our sonar and video recordings we are able to write the final chapter of these ships.

Results: This past year has been an extraordinarily successful shipwreck search season for our exploration team. In mid-June the team discovered the Canadian schooner Royal Albert that foundered in 1868 when its cargo of 285 tons of railroad iron shifted bursting the seams of the ship. One week later we found the 2nd oldest shipwreck to be discovered in the Great Lakes the sloop Washington that sank in a storm west of Oswego, New York in 1803 with a cargo of East India goods and groceries. In September we returned to a shipwreck that we found in 2013 but had eluded our investigation into its identity due problems with our remote operated (ROV) vehicle at the 350 foot depth. This season with an improved ROV system we identified the wreck as a very rare sailing craft, the scow-sloop Black Duck, which foundered in a gale in 1872, the only fully intact vessel of this type to have been found in the Great Lakes. Read the details below and view videos of each of these shipwrecks on our website: www.shipwreckworld.com

Schooner Royal Albert

On Sunday evening, August 9, 1868, the Canadian schooner Royal Albert departed Oswego, NY loaded with 285 tons of railroad rails and headed due west for the Welland Canal and then on to Toledo, Ohio. Underway for just a few hours and off Fair Haven the conditions of the lake were such that the heavy cargo of rails shifted causing the seams of the ship to burst. The Royal Albert quickly filled with water and sank. The crew barely had enough time to launch a yawl and escape the sinking ship. They were successful in making it to shore in the small boat and returned to Oswego the next day.

The Royal Albert was built in 1858 in Oakville, Ontario by shipbuilder, John Simpson. The registration information for the ship shows a length of 104 ft. with a beam of 23 ft. and depth of 9 ft. The vessel description is given as a fore and aft schooner with two masts and a square stern. The Royal Albert had
several Canadian owners in the ten years after it was built. The last owner, H.C Bolland of Oswego NY, appears to have acquired the ship only a year before it was lost. The *Royal Albert* was sold to Mr. Bolland for $10,000 but was insured for only $7000.

**Discovery of the schooner Royal Albert**

In mid-June during our continuing search for shipwrecks off the southern shore of Lake Ontario we came upon the wreck of the *Royal Albert*. Using high resolution *DeepVision* side scan sonar the wreck was surveyed from several different viewpoints to determine size and shape to aid in its identification. The area around the wreck site was also surveyed to determine if pieces of the ship had fallen off and were resting on the lake bottom nearby. Once the side scan sonar survey was completed we had enough information from the sonar imagery to send the *VideoRay Pro IV* Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) down to explore the shipwreck in detail.

**Identifying the shipwreck**

Identification of a shipwreck is typically based on several factors including size, shape, type, location, and the conditions that caused the wreck. From our database of over 600 ships wrecked in Lake Ontario we found only one schooner with two masts that sank off the Fair Haven area with the dimensions we had measured. It appears that the *Royal Albert* went down stern first as wreckage is observed at the stern. Over time the masts have fallen over. The forward mast is lying off the starboard side of the ship and the main mast is back off the port side. The boom of the main mast lies across the cabin roof. Some of the railroad rails can be seen in the aft hold.

*Schooner Royal Albert shipwreck in Lake Ontario – watercolor painting by Roland Stevens*
Sloop Washington

The sloop was enroute from Kingston, Ontario to Niagara, Ontario, Canada with a full cargo when it foundered during a gale on Lake Ontario in 1803. The Washington is believed to be the oldest confirmed commercial sailing ship to exist in the Great Lakes. It was the first sloop built on Lake Erie and the first to sail in both Lakes Erie and Ontario. Sloops only existed for a limited period of time on the Great Lakes as they were replaced by schooners which had two or more masts and were much more efficient to operate.

Lost in a storm on Lake Ontario

In early November 1803 the sloop Washington sailed from Niagara to Kingston, Ontario with a small group of area merchants on board. On November 6th the ship departed Kingston on the return trip to its home port. It was reported that the sloop was heavily loaded with general merchandise including goods and groceries from East India. Tragically the Washington was caught in a fierce storm and sank off of Oswego, New York. Portions of the cargo, pieces of the ship and her yawl were found the following day on shore.

Sloop Washington built near Erie, Pennsylvania

Construction of the sloop Washington began in 1797 on 4 Mile Creek by Connecticut carpenter Eliphalet Beebe for the Pennsylvania Population Company, an organization that was developing a tract of land just north of Erie, Pennsylvania. The Washington was a small sloop with a carrying capacity of 36 tons. The sloop was initially built to transport people, their belongings and needed supplies from the southern end of the portage from what is now Chippawa, Ontario near Niagara Falls. On September 15, 1798, the sloop was launched just north of the present city of Erie, PA. Its maiden voyage was to Fort Erie for supplies. The Pennsylvania Population Company took ownership of the sloop a month later on October 12th. Two names were proposed for the sloop, Washington and Lady Washington. The name Washington was chosen by the ship’s largest shareholder, Robert Hamilton, a merchant from Queenston, Ontario. It appears, however, that the sloop continued to be referred to as Lady Washington by some.
Sloop is sold to Canadian merchants

For the next three years the Washington sailed the eastern end of Lake Erie making frequent trips to Fort Erie to move merchandise and settlers between New York State, Canada and Erie, PA. By the end of the season in 1800 it was determined that the operation of the sloop was actually losing money and was put up for sale. In November 1801 the Washington was sold to a group of merchants from Queenston, Ontario.

Transported around Niagara Falls to Lake Ontario

In the winter of 1802 the sloop was transported around Niagara Falls over the portage road (a trail on land between two bodies of water) from Chippawa to Queenston and launched in Lake Ontario, making it the first ship to have sailed both in Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. The ship was mounted on runners and, with the use of rollers, was pulled by teams of oxen for a distance of approximately 8 miles to its destination. The trail between Chippawa and Queenston, called Portage Road, now carries motorized vehicles and passengers.

Final voyage of the sloop Washington

For the next two years the Washington would typically transport furs and local merchants (forwarding agents), from Niagara to Kingston, Ontario. Then the sloop would return to its home port with an assortment of goods such as flour, salt, tools, and household items. From the records that exist for 1803 it appears the Washington was making a trip nearly every month to Kingston starting in early April until its final voyage in early November.

On the 6th of November, 1803 the sloop Washington sailed out of Kingston harbor on her final return trip to Niagara. On board were the crew consisting of Capt. Murray, Peter Bouville and John Neach along with several passengers including Niagara merchants John Dun and John Boyd. After their departure a severe storm developed on Lake Ontario. Sailing vessels arrived at Niagara and not finding the Washington assumed that she had made it to the port of Oswego. Soon afterwards ships coming from that port brought the news that several articles of cargo, pieces of wreckage and her yawl were found on shore near Oswego. There were no survivors. Most of the cargo described as goods and groceries from East India and estimated at $20,000 had been purchased by Messrs. Robinson and Martin of Albany, NY. and Mr. Quetton St. George, a merchant from York (Toronto, Canada).

The Discovery

At the end of June our shipwreck search team was conducting a survey in the deep depths off Oswego, NY utilizing high resolution Deepvision side scan sonar. Almost immediately we came upon the sunken sloop. We made a number of scans with the side scan but the conditions were not ideal to deploy the underwater remote operated vehicle (ROV). From the sonar imagery we were fairly confident that we had discovered the sloop Washington, but we would have to wait another three weeks before the conditions on the lake were better for imaging with the ROV and confirmation of the actual wreck.

Surveying the Shipwreck

To be able to obtain the best imagery of the shipwreck we had to wait for a very calm day when the sun would be directly overhead. This allows natural light to illuminate the wreck so that the entire ship could be captured in the video image. The video survey was conducted using a VideoRay Pro IV underwater remote operated vehicle. The ROV approached the shipwreck from the bow where a long
protruding bowsprit came into view. Pawlowski piloted the ROV following the bowsprit forward to the starboard side of the ship where an anchor was seen hanging from the side. Moving up along the wreck the chain plates were clearly visible. In the bow area is a log type windlass now covered with quagga mussels as is almost all of the ship. A small hold is located just forward of the windless. The single mast of the sloop is still standing tall but the sails and rigging have long since rotted away. Just behind the mast is another hold larger than the one in the bow area. Behind the hold is what remains of a double bilge pump. The cabin has been extensively damaged with its roof lying just off to the port side of the ship. The long boom for the main sail lies across the deck and off to the port side. As the ROV approached the aft end of the ship it was obvious that the sloop went down stern first as there is considerable damage in that area. The roof of the cabin was probably torn off when the sloop hit the bottom of the lake floor. After the initial wreck survey, Pawlowski maneuvered the ROV to the middle of the ship and set it down on the deck. He was then able to take a radar like image of the sloop from which we were able to obtain precise measurements. The overall length of the sloop is 53 feet with a beam of 16 ½ feet. The depth of the sloop from the deck to the bottom of the keel has been estimated to be 9 feet.

**Historical significance of the discovery of the sloop Washington**

The sloop *Washington* is the oldest fully intact commercial sailing vessel to have been lost and found in the Great Lakes. The oldest military ship, HMS Ontario, was lost in 1780 and was discovered by our team in 2008. The *Washington* was the first ship to sail on both lakes Erie and Ontario. Previously there were no drawings or half hull model of the sloop *Washington* for archaeologists to study. Now with imagery and measurements there is a better understanding of the design of this very rare 18th century sailing vessel. Sloops on the Great Lakes were soon replaced by schooners which were much more efficient to operate.

Sloop *Washington* – shipwreck (photo by Roger Pawlowski)
Sloop *Washington* under sail – watercolor painting by Roland Stevens

Transporting the sloop *Washington* around Niagara Falls on the Portage Road (1799) sketch by Mark Peckham
Side scan sonar image of sloop Washington
(By Jim Kennard)

Stern damaged – sloop Washington
(photo by Roger Pawlowski)

Silt filled hold - sloop Washington
(photo by Roger Pawlowski)
The Black Duck - A Rare Sailing Craft Found in Lake Ontario

A rare sailing craft identified as a scow-sloop has been located in deep water off Oswego, NY. Only a small number of these shallow draft blunt bow sailing craft existed around the Great Lakes and were typically utilized on rivers or for short lake crossings. They were not constructed to withstand the high winds and waves on the open lake. The *Black Duck* may be the only fully intact scow-sloop to exist in the Great Lakes.

Caught in a northwest gale on Lake Ontario

The *Black Duck* loaded with a cargo of coal and general merchandise left Oswego, New York for Sackets Harbor on August 8, 1872. A strong wind was blowing during the departure of the ship but Captain Barney Everleigh believed that he could make the trip of a little over 40 miles by midnight. Within a few hours the winds changed and the little scow-sloop was sailing broadside to the gale force winds from the northwest. The captain changed course to steer up the lake to prevent the waves from coming over the side of the ship just as it sprung a severe leak. The *Black Duck* began to rapidly take on water. The pumps were manned but could not handle the flow of the incoming water. Captain Everleigh, his wife, and crew member Willie Decker prepared to leave the sinking ship. A small punt (a boat propelled by a pole) was cut loose prematurely and began to float away. Decker dove into the water and swam to the punt securing it before it was blown out of reach. Captain Everleigh and his wife jumped from the sinking ship and swam to the punt arriving almost completely exhausted. For the next eight hours the three of them lay in the bottom of the punt while the wind blew them to shore about two miles north of Port Ontario, New York.

The *Black Duck* was built on Wellesley Island in the St. Lawrence River in 1859. In 1870 Sackets Harbor merchants Barney Everleigh and John Jackson became the new owners. The scow-sloop was a small shallow draft vessel with a length of 51 feet, beam of 13 feet, and depth of only 4 feet. The *Black Duck* had a rated carrying capacity of a little over 21 tons.

The Scow-Sloop

This most unusual sailing vessel began to appear on the Great Lakes around 1825. The scow-sloop was a shallow draft sailing ship having a single mast, flat bottom, and a squared off bow and stern. The combination of the scow shaped hull and the sail plan of the sloop is what made this ship very unusual. Hence the name *Black Duck*! The width of the bow being slightly smaller than the stern. Scow-sloops were a very simple design and cheaply built and their length ranged from around 22 feet to over 95 feet. Typically the scow-sloop was utilized on rivers or short lake crossings for the transportation of lumber, sand, hay, and coal to ports that did not have a deep harbor. They could easily be run up on a beach to off load their cargos. There were a few scow-sloops that were used in the upper Great Lakes but most were found working on the eastern end of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. There are references to scow-sloops transporting goods on Lake Champlain, the Connecticut and Hudson Rivers and to ports along the Atlantic Coast. There were also some scow-schooners operating on the Great Lakes and in use on the west coast near the port of San Francisco.
In May 2013 while searching for shipwrecks in deep water north of Oswego, explorers Jim Kennard and Roger Pawlowski, ran right over the top of what appeared to be the mast of a shipwreck with a high resolution DeepVision DE-340 side scan sonar. In early July they deployed a small remote operated vehicle to survey the ship. The ROV reached one side of the ship but the extreme depth compressed the neutrally buoyant cable causing it act as a weight. This situation restricted movement of the ROV and only the rail and mast were able to be seen. For the next 3 years the team concentrated on other areas of Lake Ontario making a number of significant historic shipwreck discoveries. In September (2016) with a VideoRay Pro IV and an improved cable tether the team decided to go back to the unknown shipwreck that they had found. This time the team was able to survey the shipwreck and make the identification as the scow-sloop **Black Duck**.

The wreck of the **Black Duck** lies in a depth of nearly 350 feet of water. To illuminate the shipwreck a 25,000 lumen light was lowered just above the shipwreck. This allows video imaging with a minimum of back scatter from particles in the water when using just the lights on the remote operated vehicle. The **Black Duck** has a single mast which is still standing. Behind the mast is a single large hold with a center board trunk in its middle. This holds a pivoted center board that could be extended through the keel to provide greater stability when sailing in the open lake. The bow is squared off being only a few feet less in width than the squared off stern. A short bow sprit extends from the bow that would have held ropes that were used to hold a jib sail. An anchor extends from the bow. The cabin of the **Black Duck** rises up from the deck by a few feet and is just about as wide as the ship. A tiller arm can be seen lying across the cabin roof. Many of the sides of the cabin have fallen away. The davits that held the ship’s punt extend beyond the end of the stern and below them the rudder can be seen mostly buried in the lake bottom.
Cabin and tiller of the scow-sloop Black Duck
(photo by Roger Pawlowski)

Bow area - shipwrecked scow-sloop Black Duck
(photo by Roger Pawlowski)
Inside the cabin of the shipwrecked scow-sloop Black Duck
(photo by Roger Pawlowski)

Shipwreck Discovery Team

Jim Kennard (FN ’13) has been diving and exploring the lakes in the northeast since 1970. He has found over 200 shipwrecks in the Great Lakes, Lake Champlain, NY Finger Lakes and in the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Jim is the project director and operates the DeepVision Side Scan Sonar system.

Roger Pawlowski has been diving on shipwrecks in the northeast and Florida for the past 14 years. He is a retired Air Force Reserve pilot and flew missions in Desert Storm. Roger owns and flies the VideoRay Pro IV Remote Operated Vehicle.

Roland ‘Chip’ Stevens is a retired architect and working artist whose watercolors, many of which have been accepted into national exhibitions, are well known in the Rochester area. He has been a sailor for over 60 years. Chip views the sonar and video images and from them creates sketches and watercolors for our shipwreck reports.
Roland ‘Chip’ Stevens, Jim Kennard, Roger Pawlowski

Submitted by: Jim Kennard FN’13 - December 6, 2016