

## HAMILTON'S VERSION OF A "titanic" STORY by Robert Williamson

On Tuesday, August 8, a Naval Memorial Service was held at 7:00 p.m. at Confederation Park for the 1813 sinking of the "Hamilton and Scourge", two merchant schooners converted to American gun ships, the latter formerly the British ship Lord Nelson. They lie at the bottom of Lake Ontario and it is ironic that the world's attention is captured by the tragic June 18<sup>th</sup> implosion of the Titan submersible, "Ocean Gate" in the Atlantic at the Titanic's grave site. The death of its five-man crew, crushed under 12,000 feet of water, shows how dangerous maritime archaeology can be.

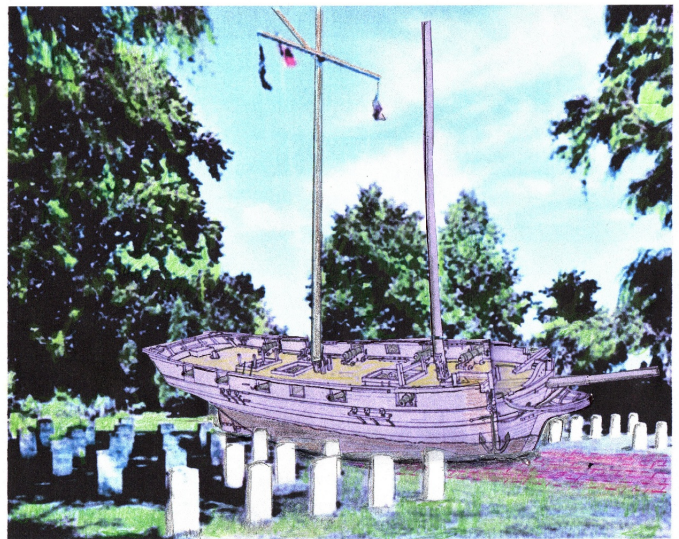
Nevertheless, in **1956**, the royal warship "Wasa" was recovered in Sweden; followed by the "Mary Rose", Henry VIII's flagship in **1967**. Consequently, recovering the two American schooners came to the attention of Dr. Tushingham at the Royal Ontario Museum and a keen amateur archaeologist, Dr. Daniel Nelson, a dentist from St. Catharines. In **1971**, Nelson made a major breakthrough with the discovery of the long lost Log of the "Wolfe", flag ship of the British navy squadron on Lake Ontario. He found it, ironically, in the Naval Archives of Washington, D.C. How it got there was a mystery left for me to research and resolve more recently.

The important point is that Dr. Nelson found information in the log, recorded by the Wolfe's navigator, some 200 years ago. It gave the approximate position of the American squadron at first light on August the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1813, as they performed a search and rescue for the crews of the sunken "Hamilton and Scourge" lost during a violent thunder storm that night. With the general location of the ships now known, the Canadian Centre for Inland Waters (C.C.I.W.) in Burlington was asked to provide a sonar equipped ship, commanded by Archie Hodge, a resident of Dundas, to pinpoint the exact location of the small ships, the equivalent of finding a needle in a hay stack. In **1972**, **Hodge** used a grid search pattern similar to that later employed by US Naval Commander and Oceanographer Dr. Ballard in his **1985** secret mission to locate two missing atomic submarines in the Atlantic while using the guise of searching for the Titanic.

Here the two stories are remarkably similar. The research ship, Porte Dauphine, used to find the two missing schooner gun ships was a former Canadian Navy training vessel on loan to (C.C.I.W.) until 1974. Lieutenant Commander Archie Hodge was a naval veteran who had spent WW II searching for

enemy submarines in the North Atlantic. Like the famous discovery scenario of Commander Ballard at the Titanic site in 1985, we can visualize our LCDR Hodge, catching the first images of the sunken schooners a decade earlier on Lake Ontario.

With their discovery, title of the sunken schooners was transferred to the Royal Ontario Museum in **1979**. Hamilton Mayor John MacDonald and, Alderman Bill McCulloch, both local naval veterans from Hamilton's Naval Reserve Division, urged the creation of the "Hamilton and Scourge Foundation" to protect, preserve, promote and display the city's exceptional naval legacy. It is now managed by the city's **Heritage Presentation Co-ordinator, Christopher Redford**. The five acre Memorial Garden in Confederation Park with historic plaques and headstones, is a window for Canada's designated National Historic Site, 900 feet deep at the bottom of the lake, a smaller version of a titanic disaster.



Lord Nelson drawn by Ian Morgan, courtesy Hamilton Scourge Foundation

While many have pondered the concept of raising the vessels for public display, the cost and danger of working at great depths are prohibitive. A reconstructed facsimile would be more practical and functional, but in the meantime, we will have to settle for my visual overlay of Ian Morgan's drawing of the Scourge on the established memorial park site. The vessel rests between the existing headstones representing the sailors who were lost. The image fits perfectly on the memorial flag mast initially installed to represent the Scourge (Lord Nelson).

*Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly to preserve Hamilton's Local Heritage.*