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Paddle boat 'The Onondaga' found at bottom of Seneca Lake

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**Debra J. Groom, The Post-Standard**
By

Postcard collection of Jim Kennard

The paddle boat "The Onondaga" on Seneca Lake.

Geneva, NY -- Ruins of an 1860 paddle boat named "The Onondaga" have been found in the depths of Seneca Lake near Geneva.

Divers and shipwreck enthusiasts Jim Kennard, of Perinton, and Roger Pawlowski, of Gates, both in Monroe County, found the remains last week. They said they were searching for shipwrecks in the lake in the summer of 2010 when they saw "the faint image of a large shipwreck" on their sonar.

They said the wreck of "The Onondaga" is in about 400 feet of water just north of Kashong Point and eight miles south of Geneva.

According to a news release, the steamer was built in 1860 as a towboat. Kennard said "The Onondaga" was one of the largest steamships operating anywhere in the United States during the Civil War, when it was used to transport Union troops down the lake to Watkins Glen on their way to Elmira and points south.

In 1870, it was rebuilt for the Seneca Lake Navigation Co. and renamed the ship "The Onondaga." It hauled passengers and freight the length of Seneca Lake for nearly 35 years.

The release states the ship was 175 feet long by 27 feet wide with a hull 9 feet deep. The Onondaga was powered by a 350 horse power walking beam engine. A cabin and top deck were added to transform the ship into a passenger steamer.

Sarah Kozma, research associate at the Onondaga Historical Association, said she believes it was named "The Onondaga" because steamers used in the Finger Lakes all seemed to be named either after lakes or counties, such as Ontario, Oneida, Seneca, Schuyler and Chemung.

When the ship came to the end of its usefulness in 1898, it was decided to put on a grand spectacle and blow up "The Onondaga" on Seneca Lake.

Kennard said nearly 5,000 people lined the shores of the lake from all over Upstate New York, including Syracuse, to

witness the event. Bands played, fireworks were set off and a hot air balloon flew by as "The Onondaga" was taken out into the lake, set on fire and then blown up with dynamite and blasting powder.

Flyers publicizing the event called it "A Never to be Forgotten Spectacle."

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