

100-Year-Old Mystery Wreck Identified as Canadian

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The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced in May that a team of divers led by a NOAA archaeologist has identified a mystery wreck in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary as a former Canadian warship. National Marine Sanctuary Program officials plan to nominate the site to the National Register of Historic Places.

In the summer of 2001, members of the Association of Underwater Explorers (AUE) dove an unnamed wreck, located in 230 feet of water off Islamorada, and reported it to Sanctuary officials as a shipwreck of potential significance.

Beginning in October 2001, AUE members joined NOAA, the University of North Carolina at Wilmington's National Undersea Research Center (NURC), and East Carolina University (ECU) staff for a series of archaeological surveys, led by NOAA project archaeologist Tane Casserley. NURC provided diving support for the operations, which were partially funded by a grant from the PADI Foundation, and the State of Florida consulted with NOAA in developing the research design.

Based on ceramics recovered from the site, measurements of the ship's length and beam and the distinctive ram bow, Casserley has been able to identify the ship with a high degree of certainty as the steamer *Queen of Nassau*, formerly the *Canadian Government Ship (CGS) Canada*.

"We intend to nominate the *Queen of Nassau* to the National Register because of her significant history, archaeological resources and site integrity," said LCDR Dave Score, Sanctuary Upper Region Manager. "The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is very dedicated to protecting this 100-year-old shipwreck and will continue efforts to document and monitor this site."

Marven Moore, manager of collections for the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Nova Scotia, describes the *Queen of Nassau/CGS Canada*, one of Canada's first naval vessels, as "the flagship of the embryonic Canadian Navy at the time, symbolic of the evolution of Canada from a dominion within the British Empire to a sovereign nation."

"The opportunity for archaeologists and marine historians to glean information from a wreck that is so remarkably intact is very rare," said Moore.

Vickers Maxim and Sons Ltd. in Barrow in Furness, England built the *Canada* in 1904 as a one-of-a-kind small cruiser for the Canadian Fisheries Protection Service. Known as the fastest ship in the fisheries protection fleet, the vessel became Canada's first naval training ship and later was commissioned in the newly formed Canadian Navy. The *Canada* spent World War I conducting convoys and naval patrols.

In 1919, the *Canada* was decommissioned, and in 1924, the Canadian government sold the vessel to Barron Collier, a wealthy Florida landowner, who renamed it the *Queen of Nassau*. When the aged ship proved too slow for service as an inter-island cruise ship, Collier made plans to sell it to Mexican interests, but the ship sank in 1926 en route to its final inspection in Tampa, after developing a leak.

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A bell-shaped object was found in the sand at the Queen of Nassau site.



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Since the survey team's initial dives on the wreck site, key artifacts may have been altered, and artifacts not previously in plain view lay uncovered. In addition, parts of the ship's structure appear to have sustained anchor damage.

In light of the perceived site disturbance, archaeologists working for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary recovered several artifacts deemed to be threatened, including ceramics, a mast light and a lantern top and base. In accordance with the programmatic agreement between the Sanctuary and the State of Florida, the Florida Division of Historic Resources is conserving the artifacts, which will be put on display in the Florida Keys to educate the community about the region's cultural heritage.

The National Marine Sanctuaries Act charges the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary with managing archaeological and historical resources in its waters to protect the public's interest. Disturbing, removing or possessing artifacts without a permit is illegal and punishable by a maximum civil penalty of \$119,000 per violation. For more information on submerged cultural resources in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, visit: floridakeys.noaa.gov.

NOAA's Ocean Service (NOS) and the State of Florida manage the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. NOS is dedicated to exploring, understanding, conserving, and restoring the nation's coasts and oceans. NOS balances environmental protection with economic prosperity in fulfilling its mission of promoting safe navigation, supporting coastal communities, sustaining coastal habitats, and mitigating coastal hazards. To learn more about NOS, visit: www.nos.noaa.gov.

Note: This article appeared in the Summer 2002 issue of the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, **Sounding Line**. For more information, visit: floridakeys.noaa.gov.



One of the artifacts recovered from the Queen of Nassau wreck was a portion of an oblong serving plate made in the USA.

Web Resources about Shipwrecks and the *Queen of Nassau*

NOAA History Home Page <http://www.history.noaa.gov/>

NOAA Ocean Exploration History <http://www.oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/history/history.html>

Association of Underwater Explorers --About the CGS Cananda <http://www.mikey.net/aue/canada.htm>

Marine Archaeology in Canada Waters <http://www.carf.info/kingstonpast/marinearchaeology.php>

The Canadian Encyclopedia-- Fisheries History <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm>

History of the Royal Candian Navy <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Barracks/1940/history.html>