

# Erie Canal Boat Discovered in Oswego River



The wreckage of what is believed to be an original Erie Canal boat has been discovered in the Oswego River south of Fulton, New York, USA. Jim Kennard and Roger Pawlowski located the canal boat while searching the Oswego Canal with very high resolution side-scan sonar equipment built by DeepVision, Sweden.

The canal boat has sunk deep into the bottom of the Oswego River with less than a foot of its upper structure visible. The sonar imagery has provided excellent details of the size, shape, and the deck structure of the vessel. Early canal boats prior to the 1850's were limited in length to 78 feet as the locks of the original Erie and Oswego Canals were built to only 90 feet. The size of this canal boat was determined by sonar measurements to be approximately 13.5 wide by 75.5 in length. The size of this canal boat is consistent with those being utilised between 1830 to 1850, prior to the canal locks being increased in length. These were shallow boats with a draft of only 3.5 feet.

The shape of the canal boat hull shows that it has a rounded bow (bull nose) and a square stern. There is some evidence of either side rails or a portion of the hull protruding above the river bottom. The tiller appears to be intact and remains at the centre of the canal boat stern.

Kennard has consulted with the NYS Department of Historic Preservation and the Erie Canal Museum in Syracuse, NY to determine the vintage and type of canal boat. From the sonar imagery it would appear this is probably an Erie Canal line boat, designed to carry freight, passengers as well as livestock. Line boats were slower, travelling about 60 miles per day, and generally ran only during the daylight hours. In the early 1830's half of the boats on the Erie Canal were line boats.

The shipwreck search/survey of the Oswego Canal was conducted this Fall and funded by the Oswego Maritime Foundation. Historic shipwrecks abandoned and embedded in New York State underwater lands belong to the People of the State of New York and are protected by state and federal law from unauthorised disturbance.

Jim Kennard 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 over the past 35 years. In 1983 he discovered a unique horse-powered ferryboat in Lake Champlain. In May 2008 Jim Kennard and Dan Scoville discovered the British warship HMS Ontario, the oldest shipwreck ever found in the Great Lakes, and in late September 2008 a rare 200-year old "dagger-board" schooner.

Roger Pawlowski has been diving on shipwrecks in the northeast and Florida for the past ten years. He is a retired Air Force Reserve pilot and flew missions in Desert Storm. In 1980 while flying a practice mission over Lake Ontario he witnessed a small aircraft plunge into the lake. His details of the incident and location helped Kennard locate the aircraft which was several miles from shore and in over 100 feet underwater. Pawlowski is an electrical engineer and runs his own engineering consultant business.