LAKE GEORGE MIRROR.

"THE QUEEN OF AMERICAN LAKES"

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The Earl of Halifax

Lake George's Largest Warship

By Russell Bellico

SPECIAL TO THE LAKE GEORGE MIRROR

Following the defeat of an enormous British and provincial (American) army at Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga) on July 8,1758, troops remained at the lower end of Lake George engaged in building warships for a future campaign against French forces to the north. Ten days after returning from Ticonderoga, Captain Samuel Cobb, an experienced shipwright and commander of a Massachusetts company, recorded that he had begun "to Work on a Sloop." The vessel was built at a "shipyard at the southeast corner" of the lake, adjacent today's Million Dollar Beach and the Battlefield Park. Launched on August 10, 1758, the 100-ton sloop *Earl of Halifax* had a length of nearly 70 feet.

Period accounts vary slightly as to the number of cannons mounted on the sloop. Major General James Abercromby, the British commander in chief in North American, wrote that the vessel had 14 cannons, but Captain Joshua Loring, commander of the Lake George fleet, noted "Sixteen Guns, four pounders" on the sloop in 1758. Captain-Lieutenant Henry Skinner, an artillery officer who produced a detailed drawing of the vessels at Lake George in 1759, described the Halifax as a "Sloop of 14 carriage Guns." In addition to the cannons, a large number of swivel guns were mounted on the vessel.

On August 25 the *Halifax* made her first cruise on the lake, sailing as far as the Narrows. Upon returning, the sloop took part in the August 28 celebration of Major General Jeffery Amherst's victory at Louisbourg (Cape Breton Island). The "rejoicing fire" began with a barrage of cannon fire from the HALIFAX "followed by 21 cannon" from the shore of the present-day Battlefield Park.

After a second cruise on September 2, the NEW YORK GAZETTE described

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the sloop as "a pretty Vessel, and sails well." The HALIFAX would make four more cruises during September and October of 1758. According to Abercromby, the sloop was "not only for Protection and Security...but also...Cruising to and fro, up the Lake to watch and discover the Motion of the Enemy."

Because no substantial British fort existed at Lake George in 1758 (Fort William Henry had been destroyed by the French army in 1757.), British and provincial troops started preparations in October to withdraw from the lake. To safeguard the vessels from French raiding parties during the winter, troops sank most of them in the lake. After returning from her sixth voyage on October 18, the HALIFAX was brought to the "new wharf" at today's Battlefield Park and stripped of her guns and rigging and sunk.

On July 4, 1759, after ten days of arduous labor, the sloop EARL OF HALIFAX was raised and dragged to the Fort George wharf for refitting, including installing a new mast and remounting cannons. A few weeks later, the sloop served as an escort vessel for Major General Jeffery Amherst's flotilla of vessels that transported 11,000 troops, artillery, and supplies to Ticonderoga for the campaign to capture Fort Carillon.

After the French forts were taken at Ticonderoga and Crown Point, the sloop HALIFAX was relegated to transport duty on Lake George. On November 1, 1759, Captain Joshua Loring delineated the passenger carrying capacity of each vessel on Lake George to transport troops home or to winter quarters. The HALIFAX had the largest capacity at 200 passengers.

During the winter of 1759-1760, the HALIFAX was not sunk for safekeeping but was instead guarded by the garrison stationed at Fort George. On May 18, 1760, Amherst ordered the fort's commander to have the HALIFAX "bailed out"and prepared for service on the lake. The sloop ended her career on the lake in 1760. She was listed as "broken up 1760" and subsequently recorded as "Lay'd up and Decay'd." Although the sloop was a British vessel, the HALIFAX was built by American colonial shipwrights, manned by colonial sailors, and spent her career on one of the most well-known lakes in North America.

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