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New Exhibits at Lake Champlain Maritime Museum Share Story of Vergennes Steamboat Pioneer

[Vergennes, Vermont, July 3, 2019]

This summer, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum brings the remarkable story of Lake Champlain's pivotal role in the Steamboat Revolution to the public through two new exhibits, "Jahaziel Sherman's Steamboats," and "The Archaeology of Lake Champlain Steamboats." In the early 1800s, steam navigation transformed American culture, and revolutionized trade and transportation worldwide. Lake Champlain was central to the Steamboat Revolution. "The rediscovery of the long-lost portrait of Captain Jahaziel Sherman of Vergennes, Lake Champlain's steamboat pioneer, is the springboard for these new special exhibits and a digitization initiative that will expand our knowledge and understanding of the Champlain Valley region's role in the birth of the Steamboat Era," says Susan Evans McClure, Executive Director of Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. "This only known likeness of Captain Sherman allows us for the first time to literally put a human face on this important chapter of our history."

After running a steamboat on the Hudson River in competition with inventor Robert Fulton, Sherman moved to Vergennes in 1813 to build and command the first boat of the Lake Champlain Steamboat Company. By 1832, Sherman had overseen construction and operations of six Lake Champlain steamboats: *Phoenix I*, *Phoenix II*, *Champlain*, *Congress*, *Franklin*, and *Water Witch*. Two of Sherman's vessels survive as Vermont Underwater Historic Preserves, and a third was recently identified at the Shelburne Steamboat Graveyard. In addition, the 1814 gunboat *Ticonderoga*, which survives on land at Whitehall, NY, was started as a steamboat in 1813 under Sherman's direction. Before the boat could be completed, it was acquired by the U. S. Navy to serve in Commodore Macdonough's War of 1812 fleet. The vessel was recovered in the 1950s as a relic of national significance.

Few details about the construction and operation of early steamboats survive, so the shipwrecks in Lake Champlain are a resource with special significance. "Captain Sherman was at the forefront of the world's steamboat revolution," says nautical archaeologist Kevin Crisman, Ph. D. who participated in field investigation of Sherman's *Phoenix* more than 30 years ago, and the 2016 discovery of *Phoenix II* at the Shelburne Steamboat Graveyard in 2016. "Sherman's *Phoenix* is the world's earliest studied steamboat shipwreck, and he also was deeply involved in steam navigation on the Hudson River, Lake George, and the St. Lawrence." The exhibit also showcases some of the newest technology used by nautical archaeologists during recent investigations of the lake's steamboat shipwrecks.

A Collections grant from the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership funded the exhibits together with a digitization initiative to help the Maritime Museum preserve and provide access to research resources that document the shipwrecks of this important era. Visitors can explore Jahaziel Sherman's world and the dawn of steam navigation at Lake Champlain Maritime Museum from May 25 through October 13. Find more information about Jahaziel Sherman's Steamboats at www.lcmmm.org.

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum

4472 Basin Harbor Road, Vergennes, Vermont 05491

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Caption: Portraits of Vergennes steamboat pioneer Jahaziel Sherman and his wife Harriett Daggett Sherman invite Lake Champlain Maritime Museum visitors to explore stories of the region's earliest steamboats.

Download image here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ibql0ya66d4lwzh/Visitors%20with%20Captain%20Jahaziel%20and%20Harriet%20Sherman%20-%20Lcmm%20Steamboats%20Exhibit%202019.jpg?dl=0>



Caption: The discovery of this chisel marked "S B Phoenix" during archaeological investigation of the Shelburne Steamboat Graveyard in 2016 confirmed the identity of the shipwreck where it was found as the 1820 steamboat *Phoenix II*. Photo courtesy of Carolyn Kennedy.

Download image here:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/nxevv4yeelsldo6/IMG_6851.JPG?dl=0



Caption: Steamboat *R. W. Sherman*, named for the oldest son of Captain Jahaziel Sherman, can be seen in the background of this 1859 image of the Shelburne Shipyard. Seen in the foreground, the remains of retired steamboats that have undergone salvage operations were studied by archaeologists to help identify the shipwrecks in the Shelburne Steamboat Graveyard. Courtesy, Kevin Crisman.

Download image here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/utaqlwguctulvze/Shelburne%20Shipyard%201859%20N.%20Courtesy%20Kevin%20Crisman.jpg?dl=0>

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About Lake Champlain Maritime Museum

Founded in 1985 to preserve and share the maritime heritage of the Champlain Valley, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum shares underwater discoveries and lake history with the public through engaging exhibits, dynamic hands-on learning opportunities, full-scale working replica vessels, and innovative on-water experiences. As a year-round educational service provider, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum connects with more than 2,500 Elementary and Middle School Students each year through valuable place-based learning, ecology and nautical archaeology experiences and other programming with museum educators. Lake Champlain Maritime Museum's 4-acre lakeside campus at Basin Harbor is open daily from late May through mid-October. Perkins Pier in Burlington is homeport for LCMM's canal schooner *Lois McClure*.

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