



by **BRUCE MASTERMAN**

WAITING FOR

The A.J. Goddard lies exactly where it fell to the bottom of the lake, intact and loaded with the personal possessions of the crew and their tools.



LIKE EVERYONE ELSE afflicted with Gold Rush Fever, Seattle businessman A.J. Goddard had visions of making it rich in the Klondike in the late 1890's.

He was so confident that he purchased the *A.J. Goddard* and *F.H. Kilbourne*, two 50 foot steamboats made in San Francisco, and had them shipped to Alaska. From there, both ships were hauled in pieces over mountain passes to the head of the Yukon River and assembled at Bennett, BC.

For the next four years, the Goddard hauled gold miners and supplies along rivers and lakes that led to the Klondike capital of Dawson City. The Kilbourne plied waters closer to Whitehorse.

But the Goddard's mission ended tragically on Oct. 12, 1901 when the 54-ton ship was on a routine supply trip. A severe fall storm sent her to the bottom of frigid Lake Laberge.

Trappers camped on the shore somehow rescued two crew members; one managed to swim close to shore and the other was found clinging to the sternwheeler's ice-coated pilothouse. Three others drowned. Their bodies washed ashore the following spring and were buried by the North-West Mounted Police.

WHEN THE WRECK WAS
FOUND, THE BOILER
DOOR WAS STILL OPEN,
WITH LIGHTLY CHARRED
WOOD STILL INSIDE.



AND THE SHIP DISAPPEARED FOR 107 YEARS

The steel-hulled Goddard settled upright on the silt-covered bottom of the lake. For the next 107 years, its exact location was a mystery that perplexed local historians like Doug Davidge, president of the Yukon Transportation Museum in Whitehorse.

His search started in 1985, when he and a local archeologist used basic fish-finding sonar equipment in an unsuccessful attempt to pinpoint the Goddard's watery grave. Twelve years later, in 1997, using more sophisticated equipment, he narrowed down the general location of the wreck.

Then, in 2008, another sonar survey showed an unidentified wreck at the north end of the lake. Davidge lowered an underwater camera from his

canoe, and immediately saw the paddles of a steamboat's sternwheel. He was convinced it was the Goddard.

But with freeze-up quickly approaching, he sat on the find until ice-out the following spring. On June 2, 2009, Davidge returned with an international team including local and international members of the Institute of Nautical Archeology, and Canadian Jim Delgado, a world-renowned underwater archaeologist. The National Geographic Society co-sponsored the expedition.

Diving in calm waters just two degrees warmer than freezing, the team dropped about 35 feet. Davidge was the first to actually see the wreck, and also the first to touch it. He clutched the railing with a gloved hand.

"It was very exciting for me," notes Davidge, 54. "A nice reward in a sense."

Photo by: Larry Bonnett

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FOR THE MISSING WOODEN
PILOTHOUSE THAT HAD
RIPPED OFF AND FLOATED
AWAY AS SHE SANK.



Photo by: Larry Bonnett

A WELL-PRESERVED WRECK

What really amazed the team was the Goddard's condition. It was in one piece, except for the missing wooden pilot-house that had ripped off and floated away as she sank. Scattered on the deck and on the nearby lake bottom was an assortment of hand tools, steam fittings and leather boots and shoes.

In another 19th century wreck found recently at the bottom of the Baltic Sea near Finland's Åland Islands, Finnish scientists found five bottles of dark beer. Finland's VTT Technical Research Centre is trying to determine the recipe used in the brewing, in the hope they can re-brew the ancient beers.

Although there was no beer found on

the Goddard, there was one particularly haunting discovery. As the ship encountered trouble 108 years earlier, the crew had shoved more wood in the fire box to boost its power. When the wreck was found, the boiler door was still open, with lightly charred wood still inside. An axe that had been used to chop the tow line from a small barge loaded with supplies still rested on the deck.

AN UNDERWATER TIME CAPSULE OF THE GOLD RUSH ERA

In 2009 and 2010, teams of divers – mostly volunteers – recovered 28 artifacts, including: a gramophone player and three plastic records; corked bot-

tles of ink, antacid and vanilla extract; a brass miner's lantern; brass steam whistle; and footwear. All artifacts will be displayed at the Yukon Transportation Museum.

The Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa studied the plastic records and found that they were: *The Harp that Once thro' Tara's Halls*, recorded in 1897; *Ma Onliest One*, recorded in 1896, and *Rendez Vous Waltz Berliner*, recorded by the Metropolitan Orchestra in 1897.

"The recovered artifacts reveal intimate details of life on a small, functional Yukon sternwheeler," says Elaine Taylor, Yukon's minister of Tourism and Culture. "To have the opportunity to learn about the music those on the Goddard would have enjoyed, gives us a window into Yukon's past and one small piece of the culture of the day."



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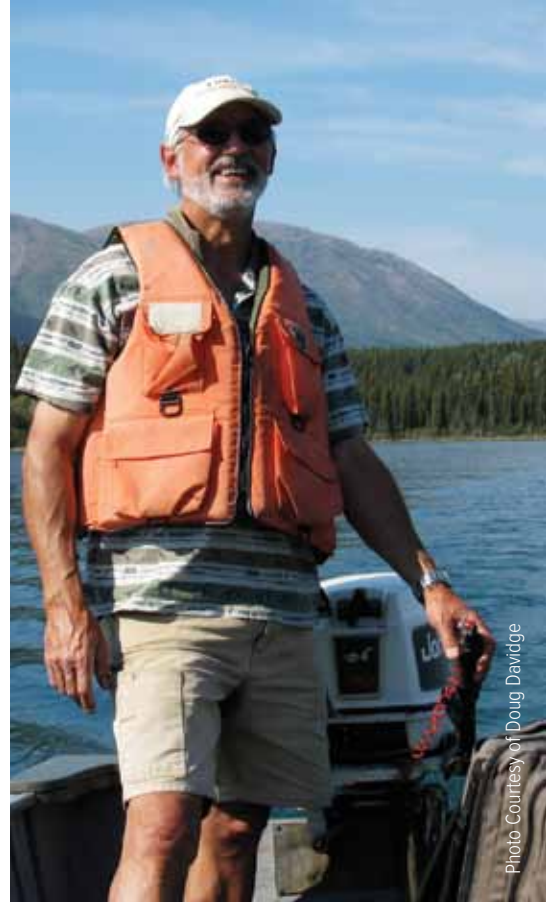


Photo Courtesy of Doug Davidge

Doug Davidge cruises Lake Laberge, which is really just a 50 mile long widening of the Yukon River.

The shipwreck was designated a Yukon Historic Site in June 2010. Anyone wishing to dive to visit the wreck requires a permit from the Cultural Services branch. A local company offers guided dives to the site.

Davidge says that, for now at least, there are no plans to raise the Goddard. It would be costly, at least \$1.5 million, and risky as the ship could break apart.

But its true historic value lies in the fact that although there are dozens of broken and abandoned steamers in and along Yukon's rivers, the Goddard represents the best preserved undamaged ship from the Gold Rush era.

History didn't record if A.J. Goddard found the riches he sought, but the discovery of his namesake ship is like striking gold to folks who care about such things.

Just ask Doug Davidge. *West*

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