

= USS Philadelphia (1776) =

Philadelphia is a gunboat (referred to in contemporary documents as a gundalow or gondola) of the Continental Navy . Manned by Continental Army soldiers , she was part of a fleet under the command of General Benedict Arnold that fought the 11 October 1776 Battle of Valcour Island against a larger Royal Navy fleet on Lake Champlain . Although many of the American boats in the battle were damaged in the battle , Philadelphia was one of the few actually sunk that day . On the days following the main battle , most of the other boats in the American fleet were sunk , burned , or captured . She is one of a few such vessels used during the American Revolutionary War to be raised .

In 1935 , amateur military marine archaeologist Lorenzo Hagglund located her remains standing upright at the bottom of Lake Champlain , and had her raised . Bequeathed to the Smithsonian Institution in 1961 , Philadelphia and associated artifacts are part of the permanent collection of the National Museum of American History , in Washington , D.C. , where curator Philip K. Lundberg was responsible for arranging her initial display . The vessel is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic Landmark .

= = Background = =

The American Revolutionary War , which began in April 1775 with the Battles of Lexington and Concord , widened in September 1775 when the Continental Army embarked on an invasion of the British Province of Quebec . The province was viewed by the Second Continental Congress as a potential avenue for British forces to attack and divide the rebellious colonies , and was at the time lightly defended . The invasion reached a peak on December 31 , 1775 , when the Battle of Quebec ended in disaster for the Americans . In the spring of 1776 , 10 @,@ 000 British and German troops arrived in Quebec , and General Guy Carleton , the provincial governor , drove the Continental Army out of Quebec and back to Fort Ticonderoga .

Carleton then launched his own offensive intended to reach the Hudson River , whose navigable length begins south of Lake Champlain and extends down to New York City . Control of the upper Hudson would enable the British to link their forces in Quebec with those in New York , recently captured in the New York campaign by Major General William Howe . This strategy would separate the American colonies of New England from those farther south and potentially quash the rebellion .

The only ships on the lake following the American retreat from Quebec were those of a small fleet of lightly armed ships that Benedict Arnold had assembled following the capture of Fort Ticonderoga in May 1775 . This fleet , even if it had been in British hands , was too small to transport the large British army to Fort Ticonderoga .

= = Fleet development = =

During their retreat from Quebec , the Americans carefully took or destroyed all ships on Lake Champlain that might prove useful to the British . When Arnold and his troops , making up the rear guard of the army , abandoned Fort Saint @-@ Jean , they burned or sank all the boats they could not use , and set fire to the sawmill and the fort . These actions effectively denied the British any hope of immediately moving onto the lake .

The two sides set about building fleets : the British at Saint @-@ Jean and the Americans at the other end of the lake in Skenesborough (present @-@ day Whitehall , New York) . While planning Quebec 's defenses in 1775 , General Carleton had anticipated the problem of transportation on Lake Champlain , and had requested the provisioning of prefabricated ships from Europe . Because of this planning , the British were able to assemble a fleet that significantly overpowered that of the Americans . In total , the British fleet (25 armed vessels) had more firepower than the Americans ' 15 vessels , with more than 80 guns outweighing the 74 smaller American guns .

The American shipbuilding effort at Skenesborough was overseen by Hermanus Schuyler (possibly a relation of Major General Philip Schuyler) , and the outfitting was managed by military engineer

Jeduthan Baldwin . Schuyler began work in April to produce boats larger and more suitable for combat than the small shallow @-@ draft boats known as bateaux that were used for transport on the lake . The process eventually came to involve General Benedict Arnold , who was an experienced ship 's captain , and David Waterbury , a Connecticut militia leader with maritime experience . Major General Horatio Gates , in charge of the overall defense of the lake , eventually asked Arnold to take more responsibility in the shipbuilding effort , because " I am intirely uninform 'd as to Marine Affairs . "

= = Construction of Philadelphia = =

Philadelphia was one of eight gundalows (also called gondolas in contemporary documents) constructed at Skenesboro . She was laid down early in July 1776 and launched in mid @-@ August . Constructed primarily of oak , she was larger than a bateaux at 53 ft 2 in (16 @.@ 21 m) long with a beam of 15 ft 2 in (4 @.@ 62 m) . She featured a single 36 @-@ foot (10 @.@ 97 m) mast with square @-@ rigged sail and topsail , and mounted three cannons , one 12 @-@ pounder (5 @.@ 4 kg) facing forward and two 9 pounders (4 @.@ 1 kg) facing port and starboard respectively . She also had mounting points for up to eight swivel guns , and was estimated by the Smithsonian to displace 29 long tons (32 @.@ 5 short tons ; 29 @.@ 5 t) . Late in her construction General Arnold ordered that her aft deck be raised in order to accommodate a mortar . This modification was apparently undone after the mortar exploded during test firing at Fort Ticonderoga . In order to maintain equilibrium , ballast rocks were probably used in the aft portion of the boat once the mortar was removed . For the relative comfort of its crew , the boat had a canvas awning aft of the mast and fascines were probably lashed to its sides to diffuse musket fire aimed at the boat .

= = Service history = =

Philadelphia was placed in service under a Captain Rice shortly after she was completed . Late in August General Arnold assembled his fleet and cruised provocatively on the northern stretches of Lake Champlain . On September 23 , in anticipation of the larger British fleet 's arrival , he stationed his ships in Valcour Bay , the strait separating the western shore of the lake from Valcour Island . When the two forces clashed on October 11 , Philadelphia was under the command of Benjamin Rue , and was part of the formation Arnold established in the Valcour strait . Early in the six @-@ hour fight the 12 @-@ gun schooner USS Royal Savage ran aground and was burned . Toward dusk the British guns holed Philadelphia with a 24 @-@ pound (10 @.@ 9 kg) shot and she soon sank . Darkness ended the action , and Arnold was able to slip away during the night . Many of his remaining ships were burned , sunk , or captured over the next two days as the British pursued him toward Ticonderoga .

In sea trials of the replica Philadelphia II , the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum determined that the boat was not particularly maneuverable : contemporary accounts of sailing the vessels include reports that the gondolas skipped across the waters of the lake , blown by the wind , and needed safe shelter when winds were high .

= = Raising the wreck = =

In the 1930s , Lorenzo Hagglund , a veteran of World War I and a history buff , began searching the strait for remains of the battle . In 1932 he found the remains of Royal Savage 's hull , which he successfully raised in 1934 . Hagglund followed up his discovery of Royal Savage with the discovery of Philadelphia 's remains in 1935 , sitting upright on the lake bottom . He raised her that year ; in addition to the guns and hull , hundreds of other items were recovered from the vessel . These relics included shot , cooking utensils , tools , buttons , buckles and human bones .

Philadelphia was exhibited at various locations on Lake Champlain and the Hudson River before becoming a long @-@ term display at Exeter , New York . Lorenzo Hagglund spent years searching for other ships in Arnold 's fleet , and raised another gunboat in 1952 . Funding for a structure to

house that find and the Royal Savage fell through , and that boat 's remains were eventually ruined through neglect and looting .

In the wake of that failure Hagglund approached the Smithsonian Institution to preserve Philadelphia , and in 1961 , bequeathed her and associated artifacts to that organization . According to the Whitehall Times , the remains had suffered more damage during their time above water than below . The boat and artifacts are now part of the permanent collection of the National Museum of American History , in Washington , D.C. She is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is designated a National Historic Landmark . She remains in precarious condition : as of 2001 the wood and iron fittings continued to show signs of deterioration despite attempts to stabilize them .

In 1997 , another pristine underwater wreck was located during a survey by the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum . Two years later it was conclusively identified as the gundalow Spitfire .