



The Gondola Philadelphia and the Battle of Lake Champlain (S. N. Arch)

John R. Bratten

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A veteran of the American Revolutionary War, the Continental gondola *Philadelphia* is the oldest intact warship currently on display in North America. After its recovery from the bottom of Lake Champlain in 1935, the fifty-four foot long *Philadelphia*, armed with three cannon and eight swivel guns, was moved to the newly constructed building housing what is now the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution.

Since then *Philadelphia* has testified to the heroic struggle between a hastily built fleet of American warships and an overwhelmingly superior British fleet on Lake Champlain in October of 1776. Although the Americans were defeated and *Philadelphia* sank, the shipbuilding race and naval contest of which the gondola was a part delayed the British invasion of the rebelling colonies for one year. The delay, according to most historians, gave the American forces much-needed time to muster a defense that ultimately resulted in the British defeat at Saratoga in 1777.

In the sixty-four years since the ship's recovery, no comprehensive analysis of this vessel or the associated artifacts has ever been produced.

In this fascinating work, archaeologist John Bratten details the gunboat's history, construction, armament, tools, utensils, personal items, and rigging elements. He takes advantage of contemporary records to describe the *Philadelphia*'s artifacts and presents for the first time an analysis of photographs taken during the 1935 recovery of the boat. Finally, he assesses the replica *Philadelphia II*, built at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum during 1989–91 in order to provide an opportunity to evaluate how the gondola was built, manned, sailed, and propelled by sweeps.

Through his careful analysis, Bratten offers modern readers a glimpse of the naval battles that ultimately helped to win the independence of our democratic nation.

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