

FARA HEIM FOUNDATION

THE BATTLE OF HUDSON BAY 1697



Painting of The Battle of Hudson Bay, 1697.
Image: The MacDonald Stewart Foundation

THE BATTLE OF HUDSON BAY:

In 1697 Captain Pierre Le Moyne D'Iberville engaged three ships at York Factory on Hudson Bay in what is now Manitoba, Canada. The 118 ft, 50 gun Le Pelican attacked the 118 ft, 52 gun HMS Hampshire, the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) Royal Hudson's Bay with 32 guns, and the HBC Dering with 36 guns. After a lengthy naval battle the HMS Hampshire was sunk with all hands lost, Le Pelican was beached to avoid sinking, and the Royal Hudson's Bay was captured and then lost in a storm. The final resting places of the wrecks have never been found. Artifacts have washed ashore over the centuries.

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The 17th century is an important part of Canadian history. While European exploration, trade, and settlement had been occurring since Icelandic interaction in 1000AD only in the 1600s were European countries actively developing settlements in, taking resources from, and trying to be the conqueror of North America. Within 200 years of this naval engagement Canada would be formed but most of what is now Canada was as independent as it was in 1697. By learning about the cultures, the people, and events surrounding the Battle of Hudson Bay we have a window into the genesis of Canada.

The HMS Hampshire, lost during the battle with all hands onboard, has never been found. As a significant event in the early history of Canada the location must be protected and declared a national historic site. If future archaeological investigation is completed on the Hampshire we may be given a glimpse into the daily lives of the crew of a 17th century Royal Navy frigate.

THE PEOPLE

Captain Pierre Le Moyne D'Iberville, Le Pelican

Pierre's father, Charles, immigrated to "New France" in 1641 from Dieppe where the family acknowledged they were originally Vikings. Pierre, born around 1661 in what is now Montreal, was a fierce Canadian sailor and soldier whose resourcefulness and adaptability illustrates the physical and moral strength required to survive and prosper in the wilderness of North America. Part of his success was learning several indigenous languages and learning how to live and travel in the wilderness. In 1698 Pierre was the first person to sail into the Mississippi river, founded Mobile and Baton Rouge, and helped his brother found New Orleans and Louisiana. He died unexpectedly from an illness in Havana, Cuba in 1706.

Captain John Fletcher, HMS Hampshire

John was a career naval officer for Britain. He had commanded the Hampshire in the West Indies for years before returning to England. He was then ordered to Hudson Bay to escort the annual HBC shipments to/from York Factory. A Navy investigation of the sinking suggests the sinking was due to a combination of battle damage, hitting a shoal, and a weakened hull from time in warm Caribbean waters.

Captain Nicholas Smithsend, HBC Royal Hudson's Bay

Nicholas was a career HBC employee. He had sailed many HBC ships to and from England transporting furs. For several years prior to 1697 he had been part of the annual voyages to Hudson Bay where York Fort had changed hands repeatedly.

Captain Michael Grimington, HBC Dering

Michael was a career HBC employee. He spent over 20 years sailing between the Thames River and Hudson Bay. During one trip to Hudson Bay in 1687 he was captured and taken to Quebec. The French Canadians didn't want to release him as he was a master navigator and they wanted him to teach them how to navigate Hudson Bay. It took royal intervention to ensure his release and he was finally transported to La Rochelle to be returned to London.

Henry Kelsey - York Fort, Second-in-command

Henry was a career HBC employee. In 1691 he traveled from present-day The Pas, Manitoba to the great plains of present-day Saskatchewan and is thought to be the first European to see a bison. During the turmoil in Hudson Bay he was captured several times by the Canadians. He also later conducted expeditions into the Arctic where he met the Inuit. He ended his career as Governor of York Factory, then Governor of all of the Hudson's Bay settlements, returning to England and dying there in 1724.



Last remaining building at York Factory.
Image: Fara Heim Foundation

ABOUT THE SEARCH FOR THE HMS HAMPSHIRE:

The battle was viewed from shore and recorded in the daily logs of York Fort. Eyewitness accounts from both sides provide critical information that identifies the Hampshire search area. The accounts of the battle state that the Hampshire sunk upright in one piece with the masts still clearly visible. The debris field of heavy items like cannon and ship components will be localized and close to the initial site of the wreck.

Two characteristics of Hudson Bay help our search. First, the bottom of Hudson Bay is fairly smooth and sandy. Second, there is not a lot of natural metal under the bottom of Hudson Bay. We expect to be able to clearly identify the wreck site using a multi-beam sidescan sonar and magnetometer survey. We have an excellent international team consisting of commercial underwater survey professionals, maritime archaeologists, and underwater recovery experts. The team leads are Fellows of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society and The Explorers Club.

EXPEDITION PHASES:

Fara Heim is proposing a private/public partnership to search for the Hampshire with Parks Canada, the Canadian War Museum, and the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. All data collected will be shared and search protocols will be developed to ensure protection of this culturally and historically important site.

PHASE 1.

Electronic search using airborne magnetometer - We will use a twin-engine aircraft and commercial magnetometer technology to detect offshore magnetic anomalies. The Hampshire metal (cannon, ship components) will produce a detectable anomaly. The data collected will be analyzed to identify high potential search targets for Phase 2. This phase is expected to require a maximum of 3 days of airborne search.

PHASE 2.

Electronic underwater survey using ship-based sensors - We will use commercial sidescan sonar and magnetometer to survey targets identified in Phase 1 to create a data package for analysis and identification of the location of the HMS Hampshire. This phase is expected to require a maximum of 14 days of search including travel to/from the search area from Gillam, MB.

PHASE 3.

Underwater archaeological activity - Once the Hampshire location is electronically identified a plan will be collaboratively developed based on the requirements of the Canadian and UK governments. The Hampshire was sunk with all hands lost and is a gravesite. The vessel is also an untouched archaeological historical site. Any underwater archaeological activity will only be completed within the constraints of a mutually agreed upon plan. If there are no funds to recover and preserve artifacts the only activity may be to create a national historical site to protect the wreck site and artifacts of the Hampshire. Phase 3 will only be completed with approval from the necessary governments, a professional team, proper funding, and is expected to last years.

**FARA HEIM is seeking financial
sponsors for the expedition.**

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Please contact David for more information.

EMAIL: david@faraheim.com
PHONE: 262-960-2959

Bears having lunch on site of suspected Pelican location
Image: Fara Heim Foundation