

Is there treasure buried in the St Lawrence River?

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What do Captain Kidd, Napoleon and Lord Amherst have in common? They all are rumored to have buried gold and treasure around the Thousand Islands area. Long before New York became a state there were pirates who roamed the islands here to bury treasure that was pilfered. During the Revolutionary War, many treasures were buried in the ground of New York to be returned for later, which never happened. War, sinking ships, looting all seem to be contributing factors to the rumors of buried treasure. Here are a few stories I found.

During the French and Indian Wars, the defeated French sought refuge on Wellesley Island near Poplar Bay and the former site of the Hotel Westminster. There are numerous tales that the French buried an enormous sum of gold and other priceless artifacts in Poplar Bay or on the land. Only one Frenchman escaped from the aftermath of the fighting and before he returned to France, he drew a map and then gave it to his descendants upon his return. The map showed the location of the buried treasure and was last seen in 1914. If gold and treasures really were buried, chances are it is still there.

Another story has Captain Kidd, the infamous pirate sailing up the St. Lawrence River to Wellesley Island and burying his treasure at the site of two poplar trees. This sounds like the Poplar Bay story in that it involves the same type of tree as the name of the bay. However, Captain Kidd was notorious for burying treasure all along the east coast of North America from Florida to Nova Scotia! No treasure of his has been found.

One story tells of a payroll chest that was intended for soldiers of the Revolutionary War on a ship that was forced ashore in Chamont Bay. The chest was buried by a large oak tree, since it could not be carried, for safekeeping until a later date. The chest has never been found. A cache of 20,000 British Pounds is said to be buried near Point Peninsula which is in Chamont Bay.

In 1758, During the French and Indian War, a French ship was followed and fired upon by a British ship and retreated to Sandy Banks, close to the mouth of the St Lawrence. The captain headed for Little Sandy Bay and grounded his ship, commanded his soldiers to remove all the gold and treasure from the ship and burned it in the sand. The ship was originally headed for Fort Frontenac, now known as Kingston, and the crew set off on foot to the fort. It soon became apparent that they could not carry the treasure that distance and it was buried with specific description of the area. It was near a bridge and a cabin that were clearly marked on a map, and as the story goes, soldiers buried the heavy barrel of gold to return with reinforcements from the fort to retrieve it later. They arrived at Fort Frontenac only to find it had been attacked and destroyed by the British. The gold, now on British controlled land, was never recovered and apparently still lies buried where it was placed over 250 years ago.

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The *Sir Robert Peel* sank in the St. Lawrence River in 1838 at Collins Landing carrying a British payroll of \$150,000 and \$100,000 in gold and jewelry. Captain William Johnson and his crew disguised as Native Americans attacked the ship for retribution of the sinking of the *Caroline*. I could find no record of a treasure being recovered.

There are several Treasure Hunter websites listing known areas of lost treasure with little information. One lists an Unidentified British payroll ship that sank near the south end of Wolf Island with \$30,000 on board. There is no year or other information given. This listing is similar, to another listing the *S.J. Brooks* sinking in Sackets Harbor with \$180,000 in gold coins aboard, giving little for a treasure hunter to go on.

I found a story about Tiny Treasure Island on the St. Lawrence River between Louisville and Roseveltown. This tiny island got its name because legend has it that Lord Jeffrey Amherst a British Army Officer during the Revolutionary War had buried \$100,000 worth of coins somewhere on this island. I was not able to find this island on any current map and suspect it is what is now called Chimney Island near Ogdensburg? Read on.

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The legend of buried treasure by French soldiers on Chimney Island, near Ogdensburg has its own intrigue. In 1760, Fort Levis, as it was called at the time, was constructed on the 800-foot island called Isle Royale in 1759. The French had determined that the existing Fort La Presentation in what is now Ogdensburg was not enough to hold the St. Lawrence against invading British ships.

The wooden fort was armed with cannons, a moat, ramparts, and other defensive measures. It was commanded by Pierre Pouchot, who put up a week-long last stand when British Lord Jeffrey Amherst arrived commanding two British gunships, and a third commandeered from the French. After losing the battle, the new British rule renamed the island Fort William Augustus. At some point it was eventually named Chimney Island.

During the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway in the 1950s, much of the island, and the fort upon it, was dredged and destroyed. In 1959, it slowly sunk beneath the surface as flood waters for the new seaway rose. Today, all that remains is a small brush-covered Chimney Island with no visible traces of the historic fort.

According to a Watertown Daily Times article from 2014, the legend says that at some point before its capture by the British, payrolls for French troops were brought to Fort Levis. During the battle, Pouchot is said to have buried the gold on the island before the British takeover.

Legend has it that years later, a man claiming to be descendent of Pouchot's traveled from France to Ogdensburg. He hired a boat to go to the island and find the treasure. According to the story, he did find it, but his boat capsized when he was returning to shore. Unwilling to let go of the riches, Pouchot's descendant and the chest of gold sank to the bottom of the river.

River Pirate James Patterson may have buried a large cache in 1813 on the banks of Chippewa Creek in Hammond. People still search there, but no treasure has been found.

The best story, and possibly the most detailed is Napoleon's Gold, by Thomas PullyBlank. This is a summary of the book I found:

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After experiencing the harrowing events of 9/11, historian Tom Flanagan returns to his family's cottage on the Saint Lawrence River to gain some closure to the accidental death of his parents and brother and to find some meaning to the upheaval of his life. His return is both highly doubted and eagerly anticipated by the River Rat Reporters, a motley yet intriguing group of his father's former colleagues, summer neighbors, family members and drinking buddies. Together, along with Tom's former love and fellow historian Mindy McDonnell, the group seeks to complete his father's personal quest: the location of Napoleon's Gold, one of the great legends of the Thousand Islands. But others also seek the gold for their own personal gain and wage a battle against the group to control its reputed power. Through their personal tales of their involvement with his father's research, the River Rat Reporters each bring Tom one more piece of the puzzle, to unlocking both the mystery of Napoleon's Gold and the accidental deaths of his family.

This book is sub titled *A Legend of the St Lawrence River* and is on my winter reading list. We carry this book in our Book Shop and it is a popular choice.

I never have really paid much attention to the rumors of treasure in the St Lawrence River because to me, the River is the treasure. Like they say, *"If you are lucky enough to live here, you are lucky enough!"*

If you have any treasure stories, or have found treasure in the St Lawrence River, I would love to hear your story. Email me at info@alexandriahistorical.com.

From all of us, to all of you, enjoy the holidays and be safe.