When Horses Walked on Water: Horse Powered Ferries in Nineteenth-Century America.
KEVIN J. CRISMAN and ARTHUR B. COHN

The history of America’s inland waterways has, for many years, suffered from much neglect when compared with the vast volumes on seafaring and naval enterprises along America’s coasts. Kevin J. Crisman and Arthur B. Cohn work toward rectifying that imbalance by paying tribute to one of the least understood pieces of our inland waterways history—horse-powered ferries. Crisman and Cohn’s work examines the life and times of the Burlington Bay Horse Ferry Wreck. The wreck first appeared as a side-scan sonar image in the survey data of two New York researchers conducting a shipwrecks survey of Lake Champlain in 1983. In 1984, the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation and the Champlain Maritime Society sponsored the first on-site investigation of the vessel, which researchers believed were the remains of one of the lake’s little-known horse propelled boats.

The archaeological team found the horseboat 15.24 m (50 ft.) below the surface. The hull, found listing a few degrees to starboard and partly buried in the lake floor, was in remarkable condition—“the sort of wreck that every diver and nautical archaeologist hopes to see at least once in a lifetime” (p. x). Obviously, the site held much potential. In 1989, the site was opened to divers as an “underwater preserve,” or archaeological park, and the Division for Historic Preservation authorized a multi-year archaeological study of the wreck. The Lake Champlain Maritime Museum and the Institute of Nautical Archaeology at Texas A&M University spent the next four years documenting the wreck and its contents (pp. ix-xiii). The project concluded with a wonderful artifact collection, the first-ever glance at a little known hull construction, and the text at hand.

Crisman and Cohn have not only documented a wreck site, they have also produced a much-needed work that is both fascinating and well written on a vital piece of forgotten American history. The book is divided into two central sections: Part I (chapters 1-8) outlines the history of horse-powered boats, and Part II (chapters 9-11) details the archaeological findings specific to the Burlington Bay Wreck.

 Chapters 1 and 2 outline the evolution of horse-powered machines from the earliest times through the eventual development and arrival of horse-powered boats in North America. Most useful in those chapters is the depth of documentary research that illustrates the progression of animal power from simple use to complex design strategies harnessing animal power via vertical treadmills, capstans or windlasses, and the horse whim. Each chapter is well documented with written and illustrative sources. The text chronicles the first horseboat designed by Prince Rupert of the Rhine in 1680 and follows this initial European success well into the 18th century. It closes with the coming of the horseboat to the lakes and rivers of North America, where the design and use of the animal-powered craft had to battle for both public popularity and economic sponsorship with the emergence of the steamboat.

Chapter 3 ushers in the final acceptance of horse-powered transportation in America with the 1814 launching of Moses Roger’s horse ferry from Manhattan to Long Island (pp. 32-33). The age of the North American horse ferry had begun. Chapter 4 chronicles the stories of three different horseboat (or teamboat) ventures in the United States and Canada after the initial 1814 success. That particular chapter is representative of why this text is so noteworthy. The three entities discussed—the Halifax Teamboat Company, the Samuel Wiggins venture, and the William Bird experiment—represent different corners of North America (Nova Scotia, Missouri, and Georgia), thus making this a broad, rather than a strictly regional, study. Chapter 5 discusses the transition from the whim-propelled ferries to Barnabas Langdon’s 1819 development of the horizontal-treadwheel horseboat. Langdon’s design changed the nature of horse-powered craft in North America—a legacy which would last through 1840.

 Chapters 6 and 7 solidly place horseboat use on the Hudson and Lake Champlain, thus setting up the historical context for the archaeological work on the Burlington Bay Wreck. Chapter 8 brings the history and technological advances of the horseboat full circle by introducing the final design—the treadmill mechanism that kept horse-powered boats useable through the end of the 19th century.

In Part II, Chapter 9 takes the reader to the site of the Burlington Bay Wreck. The chapter revisits the original discovery of the vessel and then proceeds with four years of “digging for answers” with the archaeological excavations. Chapter 10 carefully catalogues the artifact collection and Chapter 11 discusses the relationship between the hull and the machinery of the horse ferry. Three appendices follow Chapter 11. Appendix A discusses Barnabas Langdon’s 1820 patent concession; Appendix B is a complete listing of
the artifacts found on the site; and Appendix C outlines the dimensions and scantlings of the horse ferry.

Crisman and Cohn have produced a valuable text. Their study is both informative and well written. The illustrations that accompany the text are numerous and well chosen. The archaeological illustrations, in particular, are well done and add significantly to the discussion at hand. One minor criticism: this text would be greatly enhanced with the addition of a few well-placed maps. The geographic area covered in the text is enormous but the first relevant map does not appear until Chapter 6. This is much too late in the text for an important point of reference. That minor criticism aside, Crisman and Cohn’s text fills in a major gap in American maritime history and is well worth reading.

ANNALIES CORBIN
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY (HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY)
UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO
MOSO C, ID 83844-3175

The Great Warpath: British Military Sites from Albany to Crown Point.
DAVID R. STARBUCK

University Press of New England, Hanover, NH, 1999. xv + 205 pp., 50 figs. $22.95 paper.

In this well-written blend of history and archaeology, David Starbuck presents an interesting summary of sites important in the French and Indian and Revolutionary wars, along the Hudson River from Albany to Crown Point, on what he calls The Great Warpath. He has personally excavated several of the historic sites along that pathway to explore many themes not adequately answered by historical documentation, such as status differences in a military context, fortification construction in relation to maps, fort and soldier’s hut details, and food consumption patterns.

Starbuck’s approach uses the exacting recording techniques of archaeology and a detailed knowledge of the historical documents to tell the story of how people at these sites once lived, toward the goal of making history come alive for the reader. He points out that relatively few definitive answers can be expected from archaeology; rather, it helps to provide a set of alternative explanations, from which the archaeologist chooses the one that best fits the data based on the preponderance of evidence. Starbuck believes that new stories can be told about 18th-century wars, and he does this well. He also offers vivid stories of his archaeological search for clues to the past, whether deep within wells with water gushing in, or recovering buckets of coins tossed into it by “well wishers” in later years, or examining timbers of a burned structure.

The book contains a helpful chronology of the French and Indian Wars and the American Revolution, a glossary of terms, and an index. There are no citations used, but at the end of each chapter there is a “Further Reading” list the reader can use to explore the chapter topic and, apparently, from which Starbuck obtained much he has summarized in the chapter. For the archaeologist looking for comparative quantitative data tables for pattern recognition, there are none.


This book is a reminder of the classic 1950 account of History Written with Pick and Shovel, by William Louis Calver and Reginald Pelham Bolton (1950, New York Historical Society, New York), who also visited Revolutionary War sites and left us a fine, valuable, visual record of the objects they recovered. Starbuck’s book presents us with a modern update of that approach on the threshold of the millennium. It is a valuable addition to the libraries of historians, archaeologists, and students interested in the history and archaeology of French and Indian and Revolutionary War fortifications.

STANLEY SOUTH
S.C. INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
AND THE INSTITUTE FOR SOUTHERN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
1321 PENDLETON STREET
COLUMBIA, SC 29208

The Union Plaza Downtown El Paso Development Archaeological Project: Overview, Inventory and Recommendations.
JOHN A. PETERSON, STEPHEN MBUTU, and MARK D. WILLIS, editors


The city of El Paso, Texas, is surprisingly rich with historical resources. Unlike many other sprawling Southwestern cities, and undoubtedly because of the Rio Grande and later the east-west transport corridor created by the railroad, El Paso occupies an area where for centuries diverse indigenous and conquering peoples journeyed, came into contact with one another, settled down, and through their combined efforts helped create a multifaceted urban place.

There are numerous historical, archaeological, and anthropological studies of the area’s lengthy and complex history, and the scholars responsible for this overview and inventory of the Union Plaza downtown area had an opportunity to transcend the standard fair of CRM reporting,