

Stolen Heritage: the Grand Theft of the Hamilton and Scourge

Gary Gentile



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HOW THE CITY OF HAMILTON AND THE ONTARIO ARCHAEOLOGICAL LICENCE BUREAU CONSPIRED TO STEAL TWO U.S. NAVY WARSHIPS FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD. The War of 1812 was ravaging the countryside when two U.S. Navy warships - the Hamilton and the Scourge foundered in Lake Ontario in a sudden nighttime squall. Seventy American sailors drowned in darkness. Both shipwrecks were discovered off Port Dalhousie, Ontario in 1975. Factions within the U.S. Navy immediately asserted American ownership. In 1979, title to the wrecks was transferred from the Navy to the Royal Ontario Museum, which, like a clearing house, quickly transferred title to the City of Hamilton. As a condition of custody, the City promised to conduct scientific studies and archaeological assessments of the sites, after which it would consider the possibility of raising the wrecks as tourist attractions. Now, a quarter of a century later, the City has done absolutely nothing to honor its pledge. Worse, it has taken an active stance in preventing others from conducting studies. After twenty-five years of apathetic treatment, the wrecks are still rotting away on the lake bed, suffering from the ravages of zebra mussels and inevitable natural decay. Stolen Heritage is the saga of one American's attempt to visit these relics of his country's heritage - a heritage that was usurped by bureaucratic fiat. Those who control these historic sites would rather see them decompose than permit anyone - including Americans - to see or photograph them. This book is a story of conspiracy, double dealing, lies, and deceit: an ugly trip through the political machinations of the City of Hamilton's corrupt bureaucrats, and the manipulations of individuals within the Ontario Archaeological Licence Bureau.



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