

ADVERTISING

A Service of The Seattle Times Company

NWsource | NWclassifieds | seattletimes.com



# LOCAL NEWS

Home delivery  
Contact  
Search archive

Your account | Today's news index | Weather | Traffic | Movies | Restaurants | Today's events

NEWS / HOME

Saturday, October 25, 2003 - Page updated at 12:00 A.M.

LOCAL

Politics

Eastside

Snohomish County

COLUMNISTS

Nicole Brodeur

Sherry Grindeland

Inside Politics

Inside The Times

Here and Now

The Rev. Dale Turner

BUSINESS/TECH

NATION/WORLD

EDUCATION

OBITUARIES

SPECIAL PROJECTS

OPINION

SPORTS

ENTERTAINMENT

HEALTH

TRAVEL

NORTHWEST LIFE

PACIFIC NW  
MAGAZINE

COMICS / GAMES

PHOTOGRAPHY

NWCLASSIFIEDS

SERVICES

NWSOURCE

## Sunken mystery vessels launch plenty of theories

By [Natalie Singer](#)  
*Seattle Times Eastside bureau*

When the grandfather of Carl Nordstrom III was just 18, he spent a summer piloting a ferry between Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, running supplies to the Seattle, Lake Shore and Eastern Railway. That was 1888, two years before the steam scow sank in a violent Christmas Day storm.

Since then, the barge-type vessel Squak has sat somewhere at the bottom of Lake Washington, lodged in the muck with coal cars, airplanes and other sunken relics of the past. Now Nordstrom, a Normandy Park retiree who has researched some of the region's maritime history, is wondering if the Squak has been found.

He's just one of many maritime historians, boat enthusiasts and regular folks around the region whose imaginations have been captured by an investigation this week into the identity of three mystery vessels on the bottom of Lake Washington.

"I don't know how many calls I got today from people who said, 'I know what that is,'" said Patrick Clarke, with the state Department of Transportation (DOT) bridge and structures office.

This week, DOT sent divers to the bottom of the lake to investigate two sunken barges and a 160-foot-long vessel that planners worried would be in the way of cable anchors for a new Highway 520 bridge.

Archaeologists are using data collected from a depth of nearly 200 feet to identify the mystery vessels. A report is due in a few weeks. Planners have already learned from the dives that none of the craft contained any machinery or oil that might pose an environmental hazard if the sunken objects were moved or destroyed.

In fact, not much of anything was left in the decaying boats, which have been



[enlarge](#) COURTESY OF CARL NORDSTROM III

An old photo shows the Squak, which ferried passengers on Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish in the 1880s. Those who wanted to come aboard waved a flag from the shore to get the captain's attention.

[E-mail this article](#)

[Print this article](#)

[Search archive](#)



[enlarge](#) HARLEY SOLTES / THE SEATTLE TIMES

A model depicts the steam scow Squak that Carl Nordstrom III's grandfather once piloted on Lake Washington. Nordstrom wonders if divers found its remains.

### LOCAL NEWS SEARCH

Today  Archive

[Advanced search](#)

ADVERTISING

sitting just north of the bridge for decades.

While transportation officials wait for answers, speculation about the vessels' identities abounds. Some think the barges are from the Navy. Some are convinced the ship is an old whaling schooner. Others have wondered about sunken treasure.

The public excitement over the submerged objects didn't come as a surprise, said Jamie Holter, public information officer with DOT. "Everyone loves a mystery ... and everyone has an affinity" for Lake Washington, she said. "It's like discovering something really cool in your back yard that you never knew about."

After hearing about the expedition, Nordstrom began wondering if one of the barges was the Squak, one of the first vessels used to transport people and materials across Lake Washington and Squak Lake, now Lake Sammamish.

According to a history of the Squak printed in The Issaquah Press, the barge worked on a flexible schedule, and when people wanted a ride they waved a flag from shore to get the captain's attention. When the boat rounded a point along the route to Issaquah, the captain blew the craft's whistle as many times as there were passengers on board, notifying the inn at the landing how many hot meals to prepare.

"It sounds like it could be it," said Nordstrom, who has a model of the original barge that his grandfather, George C. Spalding, captained.

But the measurements may not match up. The Squak was 41 feet long, according to historical reports. The barges examined this week each appear to be 60 feet long, said Clarke.

Perhaps one will turn out to be a successor to the Squak, instead. After it sank, the Squak was replaced by the Elfin, a 60-foot ship that traveled from Yarrow Bay to Kirkland on the east side of the lake and then to Seattle, according to information compiled by [historylink.org](http://historylink.org). The Elfin was destroyed by fire in 1900.

Another theory, this one about the identity of the sunken 160-foot schooner, might be more on track.

Jeff Hummel, who produces training materials for marine-navigation software, thinks the barges belonged to the Navy and that the other craft is the Fresno, a whaling vessel from the 1920s that caught fire in Meydenbauer Bay, headquarters for American Pacific Whaling in the 1920s and '30s. He said the Fresno was later scuttled near Kirkland.

Patrick, with DOT, said Wednesday's dive showed that the boat was filled with gravel. "That pretty much tells us that the vessel had been scuttled intentionally," he said.

Divers with cameras took note of the curvature of the hull and measured rib spacing, clues that will help identify the schooner. They also saw signs of fire damage on the bow of the vessel, but Clarke didn't want to assume anything before the archaeologists' report is ready in a few weeks.

"There were multiple ships named the Fresno that operated in the area, and a few of them were scuttled," he said. "It's a good lead, a good place to start."

*Natalie Singer: 206-464-2704 or [nsinger@seattletimes.com](mailto:nsinger@seattletimes.com)*

[Home delivery](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Search archive](#) | [Site map](#) | [Low-graphic](#)  
[NWclassifieds](#) | [NWsource](#) | | [The Seattle Times Company](#)

[Copyright © 2004 The Seattle Times Company](#)

[↑ Back to top](#)