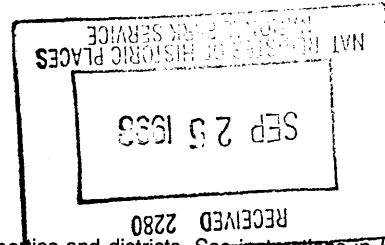


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



1268

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Phoenix, Shipwreck

other names/site number VT-CH-587

2. Location

street & number Colchester Shoal/Colchester Reef  N/A not for publication

city or town Colchester  N/A vicinity

state Vermont code VT county Chittenden code 007 zip code 05446

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ewa Milbertson, National Register Specialist September 21, 1998  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

11/5/98  
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation/water-related

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Landscape/underwater  
Recreation & Culture/outdoor recreation

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: sidewheel steamboat

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation  
walls  
roof  
other wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1*Phoenix*, Shipwreck  
Chittenden County, Vermont

The *Phoenix* rests on the bottom of Lake Champlain between Colchester Shoal and Colchester Reef in Colchester, Chittenden County, Vermont (Figures 1 and 2). The vessel lies upright in 60 to 110 ft (18 to 33.5 m) of water. The *Phoenix* is the oldest surviving example of a sidewheel steamer in the world. Archaeology conducted on the vessel and numerous historical accounts contribute to our understanding of its appearance in the early nineteenth century. The steamboat was built in Vergennes, Vermont, for the Lake Champlain Steam-boat Company. From historical records, we know that the *Phoenix* originally had a length of 146 ft (44.5 m), a maximum beam of 27 ft (8.2 m), a depth of 9.25 ft (2.8 m) and registered at 336 tons (Ross 1930:31). A possible act of arson resulted in the abandonment of the vessel after it burned to the waterline and all the machinery was removed. The vessel retains most of the aspects and qualities of integrity. Approximately forty percent of the vessel is still intact.

After an extensive preliminary archaeological survey of the vessel during the early 1980s, archaeologists have a better understanding of how the vessel was constructed and operated. One of the largest problems faced by the builders of the *Phoenix* was how to construct a hull capable of supporting the weight and stress of the steam engine. The keel, which was laid first, has an overall length of approximately 125 ft (38.1 m). Traversing the keel are sixty-six full frames. Most of these frames, excluding the amidship frame, share the same characteristics. Each frame consists of three timbers: a floor timber that crosses perpendicular to the keel and two futtocks, one on each side of the vessel. Forward of the amidship frame, the futtocks are attached to the aftermost face of the floors. The floors and futtocks measure 7 to 8 in (17 to 20 cm) in both molded and sided dimensions. The amidship frame is easily identified on the wreck because it is much larger than the rest of the frames and it has no futtocks attached to it. Although the amidships frame's molded dimension remains consistent with that of the other floors, its sided dimension is 10 in (25 cm). The distance between the center points of each floor average 21 in (53 cm). The actual space between frames range from 6 to 8 in (15 to 20 cm). A keelson, bolted through the frames to the keel, provided the *Phoenix* with additional longitudinal strength. The massive 120 ft (36.6 m) timber nearly stretches the length of the hull. Two stringers also rest upon the frames running parallel to the keelson. The stringers were 10 in (25 cm) square and were used to support the heavy steam engine and boiler. Although these timbers no longer exist, a minimum length of 84 ft (26 m) can be calculated from the remnants of the fasteners used to secure the stringers to the frames. The stringers were the final significant components used in the construction of the *Phoenix*'s basic hull structure.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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*Phoenix*, Shipwreck  
Chittenden County, Vermont

The rounded bottom of the *Phoenix* is a deviation from the traditional design of Robert Fulton's early Hudson River steamboats. The excavators of the wreck were "impressed by the steamer's round bottom, which flared up and out to form the sides—not unlike the shape of a whaleboat" (Davison 1981:55). Fulton believed:

With regard to the formation of ships moved by steam I have been of the opinion that they should be long, narrow and flat at bottom, with a broad keel as flat a vessel will not occupy so much space in the water; it consequently has not so much resistance (Sutcliffe 1909:134).

Like many early steamboats, the *Phoenix* was propelled by both steam and sail. Originally, the *Phoenix* was constructed with a single mast and bowsprit. The only remnant of the ship's masts or rigging is a mast step notched in the keelson. The mast step has a length of 16 in (41 cm), a width of 6 in (15 cm) and a depth of 8 in (20 cm). The step is notched 19 ft (5.8 m) aft of the forward edge of the keelson. Thus, the mast would have been located approximately 30 ft (9.1 m) from the bow.

After the *Phoenix* burned in 1819, the Lake Champlain Steam-boat Company quickly salvaged the engine and boiler. Large iron mounting pins located on the keelson and stringers assisted in the identification of the original placement of this engine. The pins indicate that the engine was positioned amidship, almost one-third the distance from bow to stern (Davison 1981:49-50). It is known from historic records that the *Phoenix* was powered by a crosshead or steeple engine (Figure 4). As a result, the paddle wheels must have been aligned next to the engine. Lead solder used to join iron pipes was discovered between the frames under the engine area. These lead droppings were created as a result of the fire or during regular repairs to the steam engine.

An area of brick, just abaft the pins, is believed to be part of the firebox that supported the vessel's boiler. This deduction coincides with contemporary illustrations of the vessel showing the location of the ship's stack. The stack would have been directly over the site of the boiler and firebox. A second pile of bricks, forward of the engine, is believed to be the foundation of the ship's cooking stove in the crew's quarters.

Very few artifacts were found on the *Phoenix*. Most likely all the usable parts and objects were removed while the vessel was stranded on Colchester Reef. A collection of ceramics was recovered from the vessel and recorded during archaeological surveys (Hight

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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*Phoenix, Shipwreck*  
Chittenden County, Vermont

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1985). One of the objects recovered from the wreck shortly after the fire was the ship's bell.  
A local historian claimed:

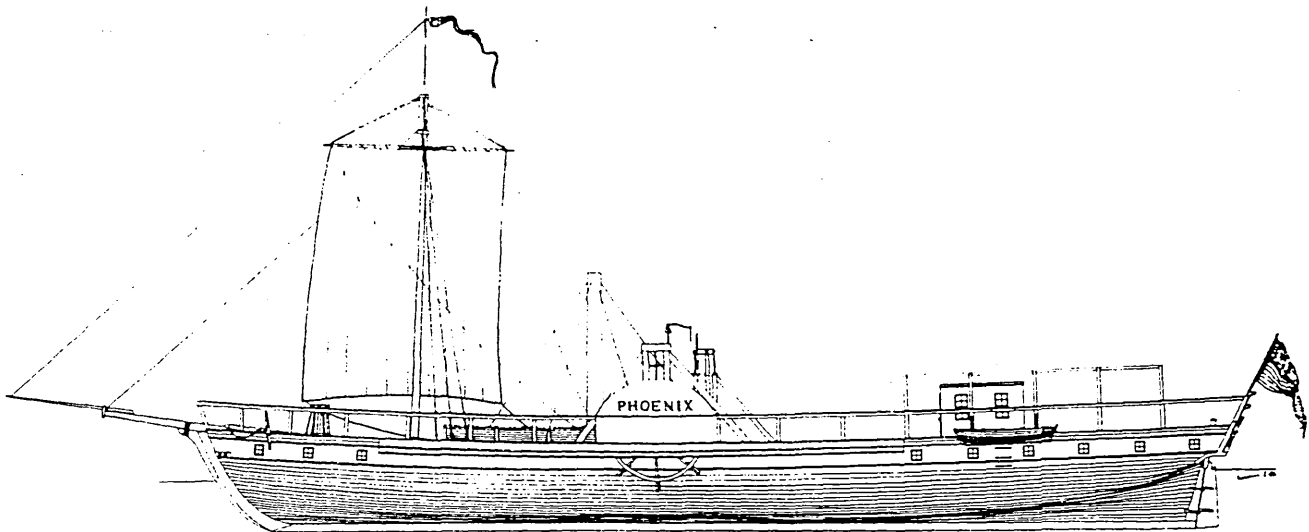
The steamer's bell, which rang the alarm of the fire on that fatal night, by a strange happening of events found its way to the tower of the Presbyterian Church of Danville, Illinois, the home town of Hon. Joseph G. Cannon, for many years the Speaker of the House of Representatives at Washington (Ross 1930:35).

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*Phoenix*, Shipwreck  
Chittenden County, Vermont



Lake Champlain Transportation Company steamer *Phoenix* which plied the lake for four years until destroyed by fire in 1819. The drawing is based upon archaeological measurements of the hull and contemporary plans of similar steamers.

Figure 1: Reconstructed view of the steamboat *Phoenix* based upon archaeological and historical research (drawn by Kevin J. Crisman, 1986).

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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*Phoenix*, Shipwreck  
Chittenden County, Vermont

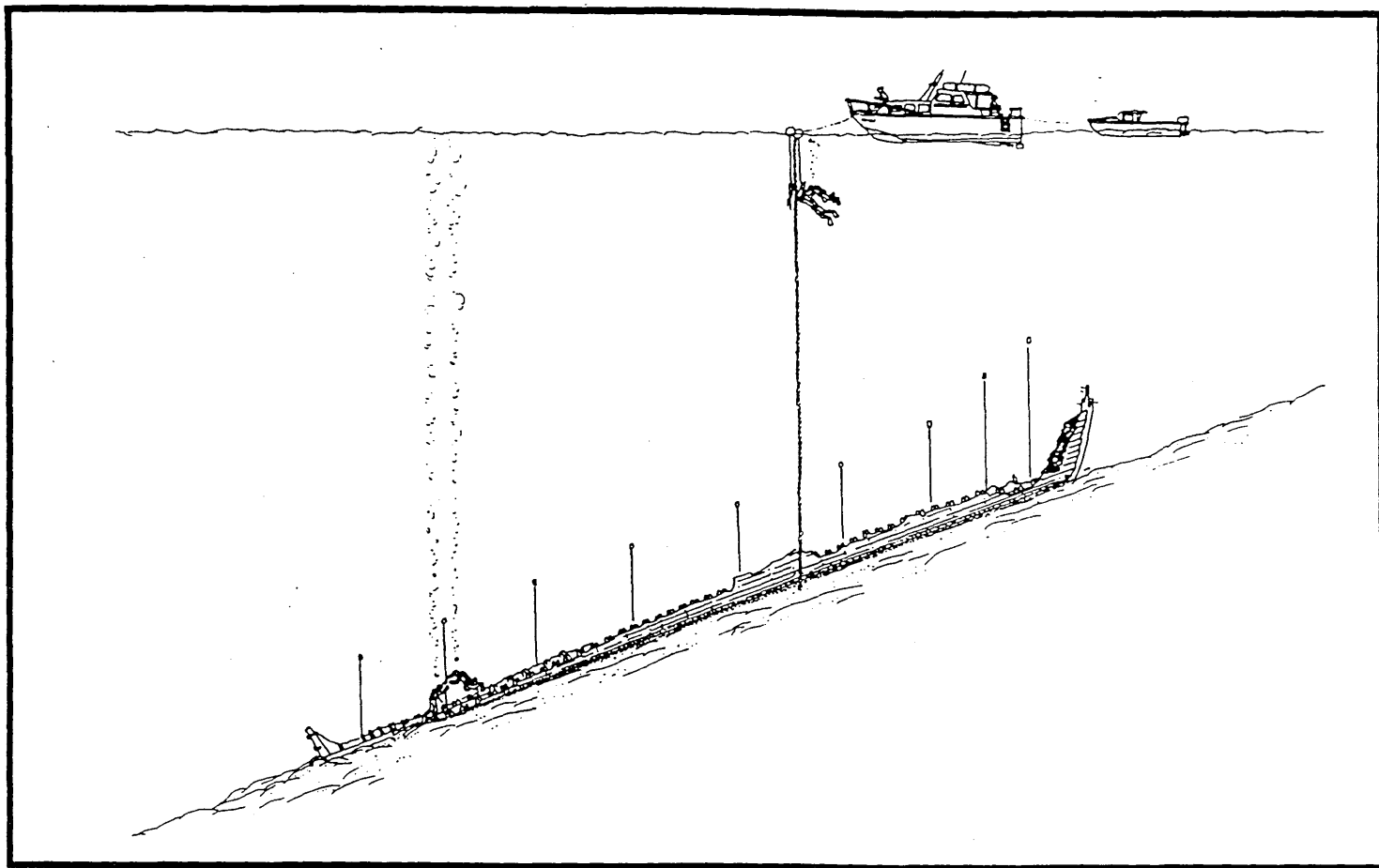


Figure 2: The wreck of the steamboat *Phoenix* (drawn by Kevin J. Crisman, 1981).

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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*Phoenix*, Shipwreck  
Chittenden County, Vermont

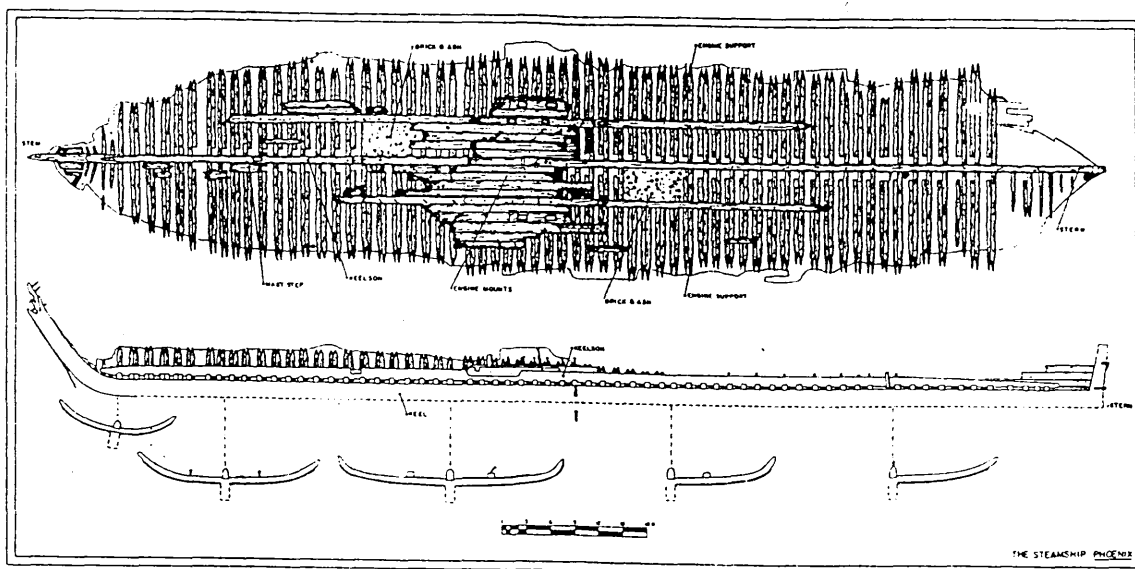


Figure 3: Scale drawing of the *Phoenix* remains (drawn by Kevin J. Crisman, 1981).



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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*Phoenix, Shipwreck*  
Chittenden County, Vermont

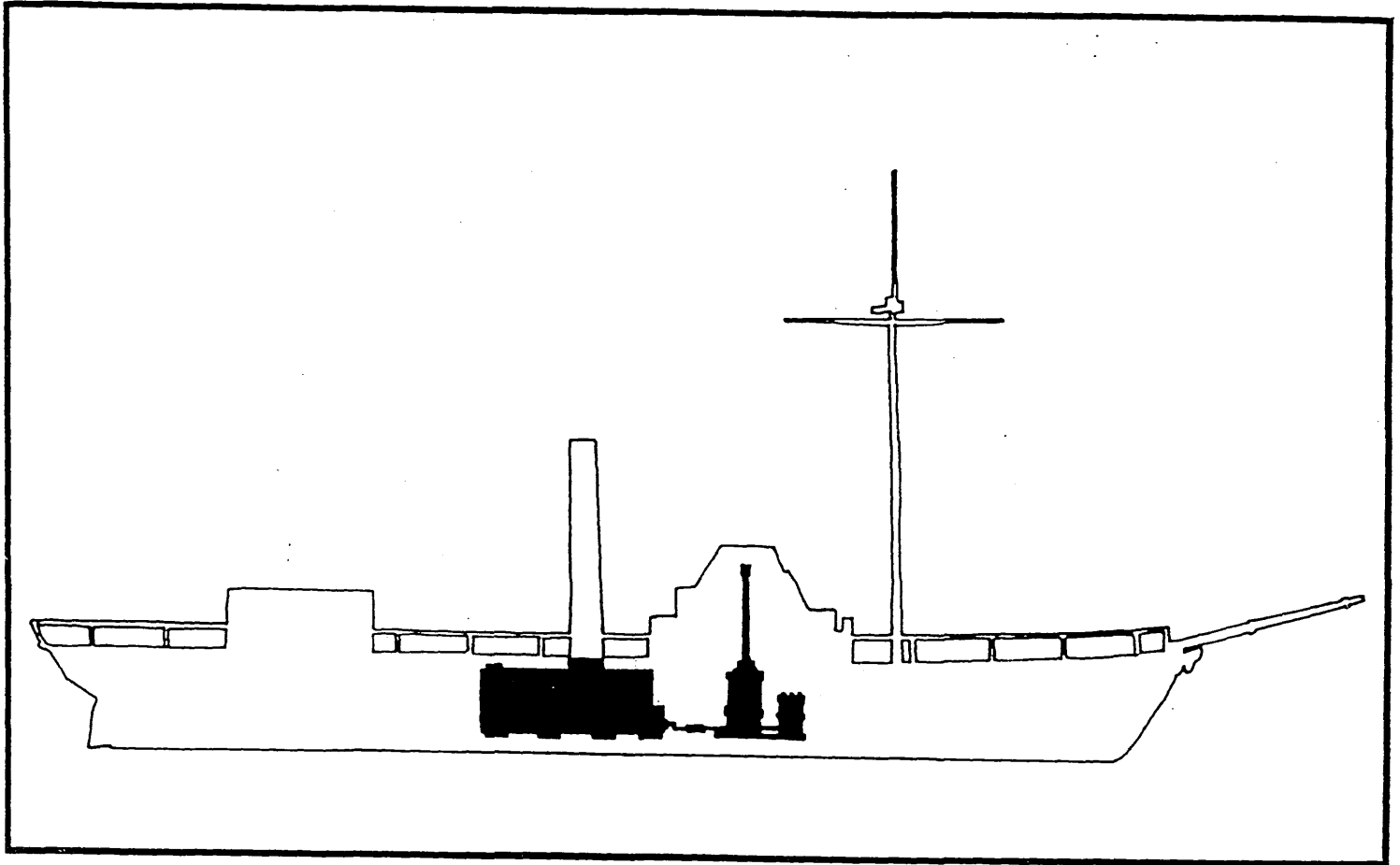


Figure 4: Outline view of the steamboat *Phoenix* with its boiler and engine highlighted (drawn by Kevin J. Crisman, 1981).

Phoenix, Shipwreck  
Name of Property

Chittenden County, VT  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Archeology: historic, non-aboriginal

Architecture

Maritime History

Transportation

### Period of Significance

1814-1819

### Significant Dates

1814

1815

1819

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Sherman, Jahaziel

### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum

Phoenix, Shipwreck  
Name of Property

Chittenden County, VT  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 2.88

**UTM References**  
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 6325610 4934440  
Zone Easting Northing  
2         

3           
Zone Easting Northing  
4           
 See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**  
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**  
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Scott McLaughlin, Underwater Archeologist  
organization Lake Champlain Maritime Museum date February 20, 1998  
street & number RR #3, Box 4092 telephone (802) 475-2022  
city or town Vergennes state VT zip code 05491

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**  
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Vermont Division for Historic Preservation  
street & number National Life Building, Drawer 20 telephone (802) 828-3051  
city or town Montpelier state VT zip code 05620-1501

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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*Phoenix, Shipwreck*  
Chittenden County, VT

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### *Summary*

The shipwreck of the sidewheel steamer *Phoenix*, which was launched in 1815, is an important part of American, Vermont, and local history. The *Phoenix*, located in Lake Champlain within Colchester, Vermont, is eligible for National Register listing under criteria A, C and D. The *Phoenix* retains most of the aspects and qualities of integrity under each criteria. Approximately forty percent of the vessel is still intact. The areas of significance within these criteria are archaeology, architecture, maritime history and transportation.

Criteria A: The invention of the steamboat marked the beginning of a new era in maritime history and transportation. No longer was a vessel depend upon the wind to provide it power. Sidewheel steamboats enabled the transport of cargo and passengers on set schedules with a shorter traveling time. They became an important element in the transportation network of the United States during the nineteenth century. The sidewheel steamboats of the Champlain Valley, including the *Phoenix*, played an important role in proving the reliability and economic benefits of steamboats.

Criteria C: The *Phoenix* is the oldest remaining hulk of the earliest class of steamboats in the United States. The *Phoenix* embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type and method of construction of early steamboats.

Criteria D: The *Phoenix*, launched in the spring of 1815, became the second steamboat to operate on Lake Champlain. The wreck of the *Phoenix* is the oldest known remains of a steamboat in the world. The vessel is an example of the struggling beginnings of a new technology. The archaeological and historical research conducted on the *Phoenix* has provided a great insight into the design, construction, function and operation of the early steamboats. Researchers have only completed a preliminary survey of the historical documents and remains of the *Phoenix*; by no means have the resources been exhausted. There still remains numerous questions raised during its preliminary survey that have remained unanswered. The *Phoenix* wreck has the potential to yield more historical significant data.

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*Phoenix*, Shipwreck  
Chittenden County, VT

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## *Archaeology/Architecture*

The archaeological study of the *Phoenix* has been the effort of a number of researchers. This research has been vital to the understanding of how early steamboats were designed, constructed, functioned and operated. The *Phoenix* is the oldest surviving example of the earliest steamboats in the world. The wreck was discovered on September 4, 1978, exactly 159 years after its burning and grounding on Colchester Reef, Colchester, Vermont. Between 1980 and 1985, the Champlain Maritime Society (CMS) conducted a preliminary analysis of the vessel's remains and artifacts found within the hull.

The *Phoenix* was one of the first steamboats in the world to combine characteristics of both steamers and sailing vessels. The early steamboats were long, narrow and flat bottomed. Even though they had masts and sails, these were useful only when the wind was nearly astern. Most of the early steamboats were designed for river navigation. They were not adequate for navigation on open waters. The *Phoenix* was designed with a rounder bottom for a deeper draft. This along with a single mast stepped well forward, enabled the vessel to tack against an unfavorable wind when it was not under steam power. The ship was designed and constructed by steamboat captain and shipwright Jahaziel Sherman along the Otter Creek in Vergennes, Vermont. The vessel is very significant because of the insights which it can provide researchers into the designs and construction techniques used to accommodate steam technology. The hull of the *Phoenix* has provided and is likely to provide more detailed information concerning early steamboats by conducting a detailed archaeological and historical survey of the vessel.

## *Maritime History/Transportation*

The invention of the steamboat marked the beginning of a new era in ship evolution and transportation. Early attempts by John Fitch to build and operate a steamboat resulted in economic failure. In 1807, Robert Fulton launched the first commercially successful steamboat, the *North River*. Following the construction of the *North River* on the Hudson River, steam powered ships began to appear in other areas of the United States. Lake Champlain, an important inland waterway, was the home of the second steamboat to be regularly operated in commercial service.

Lake Champlain connected the Eastern Canadian, Great Lakes, and New York City markets. Steamboats were used to carry or tow everything from livestock to Presidents.

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Chittenden County, VT

These vessels were in use in the Champlain Valley from 1808 to 1954, but their construction peaked during the middle of the nineteenth century, and then declined in the following decades as the railroads and highways consolidated their hold on America's inland transportation system.

Robert Fulton's successful results on the Hudson River inspired many businessmen in the Champlain Valley to invest in steam powered navigation. Among these men were John and James Winan of Burlington, Vermont. The Winan brothers were commissioned to build a "larger and finer" boat than the Fulton's *North River*. In the summer of 1808, the Winan brothers launched the *Vermont*. This steamboat was the first steamboat to navigate the waters of Lake Champlain and it was both larger and faster than the *North River*. In addition, the *Vermont* claimed the honor of being the second steamboat to regularly operate in the world.

By 1811, Fulton had completed three additional steamboats. As a result, he captured a considerable amount of business along the Hudson River. Fulton's monopoly of steamboats began to upset many merchants and mariners. In an act of defiance, Elihu S. Bunker illegally built two Hudson River steamboats: the *Perseverance* and *Hope*. With the assistance of Abraham Lansing, John Townshend and Julius Winne, Jr., Bunker was initially successful; however, Fulton quickly charged Bunker with a violation of his monopoly. Bunker and his associates were clearly wrong and were soon brought to court. The State of New York ordered them to remove their boats, but allowed them to keep their steam engines and gave them navigational rights on Lake Champlain. A final stipulation required the men to "have at least one good and sufficient steamboat employed in navigating the said lake within eighteen months from the termination of the present war between the United States and Great Britain" (Fletcher 1910:36).

On March 12, 1813, the New York Legislature officially granted a group of men exclusive right to the navigation of Lake Champlain. The group included Lansing, Townshend, Winne and several men from Vermont. The members from Vermont consisted of Samuel Lansing, Joseph Alexander, Cornelius Van Ness, Guy Catlin and Amos Barnum. Together, they were chartered under the name of the Lake Champlain Steamboat Company. Immediately after the charter, the newly formed company began work on a vessel to compete with the *Vermont*, but the War of 1812 permanently interrupted the construction of the ship. Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough of the United States Navy bought the hull and converted it into a warship. The vessel was then outfitted for war and christened the *Ticonderoga*.

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Chittenden County, VT

A second attempt was made by the Lake Champlain Steam-boat Company to build an operational steamer at their Vergennes, Vermont shipyard in 1814-1815. The construction was directed by Jahaziel Sherman, a former pilot of Bunker's steamboat, the *Perseverance*. The vessel was launched in early 1815 and christened the *Phoenix*. The records of the Champlain Steam-boat Company indicate that the *Phoenix* cost over \$45,000 to complete. The vessel was 146 ft (44.5 m) in length with a maximum beam of 27 ft (8.2 m) and displaced over 336 tons. Originally, the *Phoenix* was outfitted with the rebuilt engine of the *Perseverance*. The engine delivered 45 hp and enabled the ship to reach a maximum speed of 8 mph (12.9 kmph). Evidence suggests that the *Phoenix* was outfitted with many luxuries and decorations. An advertisement for the *Phoenix* states "the proprietors of this establishment, have at very great expense, fitted up said Boats in the most convenient and pleasant manner" (Ross 1930:32). It is quite evident that the appearance and maintenance of the steamship were very important to the Champlain Steam-boat Company.

With the *Phoenix* launched, the company had one challenge to its future success—the competition of sailing merchant vessels. For almost thirty years sailing vessels dominated the trade on Lake Champlain. Most of this trade was controlled by one man, Gideon King II. Between 1790 and 1814, at least thirty vessels were built along the lake. The Admiral of the Lake, as King was called, had either advanced the money to build them or owned them outright.

King had a grudge against the steamship builders, for he felt they were taking business away from him. To aggravate the steamboat captains and passengers, King sailed circles around the *Vermont* taunting them and hurling insults at the lumbering steamboat. The launching of the *Phoenix* must have only irritated King more, as it cut into his profits.

The *Phoenix* operated four seasons on regularly scheduled runs between Whitehall, New York and St. Jean, Quebec. After the *Vermont* sank in October of 1815, the *Phoenix* became the only steamboat on Lake Champlain, providing a distinct advantage for the Lake Champlain Steam-boat Company. To deter further competition on the lake, the company built a second steamboat, the *Champlain* in 1816. Although this vessel was not as large or elegant as the *Phoenix*, it provided the company with a pair of vessels that could operate on opposite ends of the lake (Ross 1930:33).

A contemporary poster indicates that the *Phoenix* and *Champlain* carried passengers and freight from Whitehall, New York to St. Jean, Quebec, with several stops in between.

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Chittenden County, VT

Every Sunday and Wednesday at 2 PM one ship departed from Whitehall and the other from St. Jean. The fare for an adult traveling the length of the lake was \$10, with various fees for intermediate stops. A minimum fee of \$1 was required no matter how short the passage. Servants traveled for half fare and animals, not exceeding the size of a sheep, were permitted on the vessel, but they had to be tied forward of the capstan. Prices were delineated for particular freights. If a cargo item was not specified on the advertisement, then a rate of \$5.00 per ton or an amount determined by the captain was charged by weight or measure (Ross 1930:32).

During the summer of 1817, President James Monroe (fifth President: 1817-1825) traveled to New England to further his "Era of Good Feeling." Monroe attempted to unify the nation by diminishing the stressful after effects of the War of 1812. Throughout his trip, the President used steamboats for transportation on Eastern rivers and lakes. On July 26, 1817, the *Phoenix* had the honor of carrying President Monroe on the last leg of his New England journey. He boarded the *Phoenix* in Burlington, Vermont and then traveled across Lake Champlain to Plattsburgh, New York. After landing at Cumberland Head, President Monroe delivered a speech to the people of New York. Using the *Phoenix* to make this cross-lake trip was significant because it showed his trust and approval in this new technology and the growing strength of American science and technology.

The *Phoenix* had a very significant cargo in 1818, the remains of American Revolutionary War General Richard Montgomery. In July 1818, the *Phoenix* was called to serve the United States government in transporting Montgomery's remains. General Montgomery was a commander in the ill-fated Quebec Campaign of 1775. During a desperate attempt to capture Quebec City, a burst of grapeshot killed Montgomery. His body was buried in Quebec and the rebel assault was abandoned. It was later decided to recovery his body and bring it to New York for reburial at St. Paul's Church in New York City. The *Phoenix* transported Montgomery's body the length of the lake (Wood 1990:47-50). The *Phoenix* was probably chosen to transport Montgomery's remains because of the symbolism for which the new technology stood for in America: the strength, power and ingenuity of the nation for which Montgomery gave up his life.

On the night of September 4, 1819, the *Phoenix* left Burlington harbor bound for Quebec with forty-six people onboard (Crisman 1986:25). Jahaziel Sherman, the regular captain of the steamboat, was ill with a fever; so he was replaced by his twenty-one year old son, Richard Sherman, who recalled:



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Chittenden County, VT

We left Burlington at 11:00 PM, with everything in apparent good order about the vessel, a regular watch being kept at night. I remained on deck until we passed the reef of Colchester...passengers, I think, had all retired. Having been up all the night previous, I told my pilot to call me at Crab Island...and then went below to my stateroom, lay down and fell asleep, the wind blowing fresh from the northeast.

As the *Phoenix* sailed north towards Quebec, a passenger named John Howard, a special messenger for the Bank of Burlington, awoke and went to check on his valuable cargo, \$8500 in Montreal bills that he was taking to Canada to exchange. The money had been placed behind the bar for safekeeping with his son, D. D. Howard, who was a steward and barkeeper on the *Phoenix*. While checking the security of the money, John Howard noticed that the ship was ablaze.

He "at once aroused all the passengers in the gentlemen's cabin, and from thence rushing to the ladies cabin awakened all there, all got on deck as fast as possible-most of them in their night clothes." As people frantically made their way to the deck, a passenger recalled "a vivid light illuminated every object beyond the splendor of a noonday sun; I fancied it was the torch of death, to point me and my fellow travelers to the tomb."

Once on deck, the panic stricken passengers attempted to seize the lifeboats, but the captain, dramatically displaying a gun in each hand, prevented them from leaping into the lifeboats before they were lowered into the water. The first lifeboat was lowered to the water and boarded with about twenty people, including Howard's son with the money, most of the women passengers and a Col. Thomas, who took charge of the boat. The second life boat was cut away from the *Phoenix* before it could be filled, and eleven people were left onboard the burning ship. As the second life boat pulled away from the burning vessel, one passenger remembered "the cries for assistance from those who could not swim were pitiable..."

At least one of the passengers, a Mr. Hall from Middlebury, Vermont proposed they go back for the people left behind; but the plea was silenced by a man named McVien, the engineer of the steamer, who threatened "to knock the first man overboard with an oar who should rise to make the first attempt" at turning back. Captain Sherman and John Howard helped the remaining eleven passengers into the water on anything they could find that would float. With the assistance of planks, tables and other floating debris the abandoned crew and passengers tried to remain alive in the cold waters of Lake Champlain. Before help could arrive, six people lost their lives.

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Upon landing on Providence Island, in Grand Isle, Vermont, Col. Thomas and D. D. Howard each took charge of a lifeboat and returned to the burning *Phoenix* in the hope of finding survivors. Five of the eleven people who had been left behind were rescued. Captain Sherman, the last to leave the steamboat, clung to a table leaf for two hours before he was picked up. After taking the remaining survivors to shore, the captain ordered his men to put aboard and go back to the wreck in hopes of saving others. The lifeboats rowed around the wreck several times, but after seeing no sign of life, they landed on Colchester Point.

The good and bad in human nature are never so apparent as in a crisis. Aside from the acts of bravery and cowardice that took place that night, thievery was a part of the drama as well. On arriving at Providence Island, D. D. Howard left his father's money with the remaining passengers for safekeeping before he returned to the burning *Phoenix*. In the confusion, someone stole the money. Sion Howard, another son of John Howard, arrived on one of the boats from Burlington and was sent to pursue the thief. He caught up with the man at Bells Ferry. When confronted, the thief refused to hand over the money and being armed with a knife, threatened to kill anyone who attempted to take it from him. After receiving no assistance from the onlookers, Sion armed himself with a club, confronted the man and demanded the money. The man gave up and was immediately arrested.

There are several theories for the reasons behind the *Phoenix's* catastrophe. The most widely accepted is that a candle was accidentally left burning in the galley. However, others chose to speculate that the fire could have been an act of arson. The sailing interest, who lost a significant portion of their business to steamboats, made no attempt to hide their disgust with Lake Champlain's steamers. These men openly displayed their contempt and at times were known to publicly threaten the steamboat owners.

The burning *Phoenix* eventually grounded itself on Colchester Reef, in Colchester, Vermont and burned to the water line. Afterwards, the steam engine was quickly salvaged by the Lake Champlain Steam-boat Company. During the winter, the charred remains of the steamboat were frozen in the ice covering the lake. In the spring, the *Phoenix* was dragged clear of the reef by the drifting ice; and it slowly sank into the murky waters of the lake.

The *Phoenix* is a notable example of a maritime tragedy that occurred during the dawn of steamboat technology. Like any new technologies, steamboats were plagued with problems that were widely publicized. The fear of a steamboat catching on fire or boilers exploding were common amongst the public. The *Phoenix* accident was used to exaggerate these fears and to turn people away from using steamboats. Unfortunately, this tragedy resulted in the

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loss of six lives, including four men, one women and a twelve year old boy. This tragedy resulted in the greatest loss of life of any commercial vessel accident on Lake Champlain. The wreck serves as a memorial to those who lost their lives during the accident. The *Phoenix* is also a testament of early steamboat tragedies and the problems that steamboats faced under public scrutiny.

The *Phoenix* is now one of the shipwrecks included in Vermont's Underwater Historic Preserve System. It is a deep dive and is enjoyed by experienced divers.

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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The *Phoenix* sank in deep water and now lies in 60 to 110 ft (18 to 34 m) of water along the sloping bedrock between Colchester Shoal and Colchester Reef, in Colchester, Chittenden County, Vermont. The vessel is approximately 1 mi (1.6 km) west of Colchester Point, Colchester and 2.5 mi (4.0 km) south of Stave Island, in Grand Isle, Grand Isle County, Vermont. The vessel is marked by one large yellow special purpose buoy during the navigational season. The buoy is maintained by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (VDHP).

Latitude: 44° 33.18' N

Longitude: 73° 19.86' W

A circle, with a 200 ft (61 m) radius around the *Phoenix*, is designated as the outer limits of the site boundary. The shipwreck lies in the center of this circle, which is an area of 2.88 acres (1.17 hectares).

## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

A survey has not been conducted to determine the extent of any artifacts separated from the vessel as it sank. A 200 ft (61 m) radius around the wreck will ensure that any scatter of artifacts associated with the wreck will be included within the site boundaries. The vessel is part of Vermont's Underwater Historic Preserve System and has a buoy placed along side the wreck during the navigational season. The buoy is used to guide divers to the wreck site and to prevent boaters from anchoring within a 200 ft (61 m) radius of the buoy. The 200 ft (61 m) radius is also the State of Vermont's designation as the safety zone around any diver's down flag. The boundary is sufficient to convey the significance of the site.

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Jones Rock

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**PHOENIX, Shipwreck**  
Colchester, Chittenden County, Vermont

Zone 18  
easting 632560  
northing 4934440

GRAND ISLE CO  
CHITTENDEN CO

L A K E

C H A M

APPROXIMATE MEAN LAKE ELEVATION 95 FEET

Law Island

Hogback Reef

Lighthouse  
Colchester Reef

Colchester Pt

Colchester Shoal

CLINTON CO  
ESSEX CO

L E

VERMONT  
NEW YORK

Ferris Rock

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211

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