The Lewtana

Created by: Zowie Caouette



1911 "The Speed Boat of Them All" | Montana History Portal The gasoline launch "City of Polson" was popular with folks in a hurry. As the steamboat era neared its end, the "City of Polson" was stripped of excessive weight and sailed, pushed and pulled up McDonald Creek to Lake McDonald in Glacier National Park and rebuilt to become a cruise boat there.


Hungry Horse News

Your Problems, Too

Saving the Resource

Less Mosquitoes

Where Not to Fish

Plant Organizing

Recalls Early Day Park Boats

Former Local Boys Back for Summer

Hungry Horse News Using New Type

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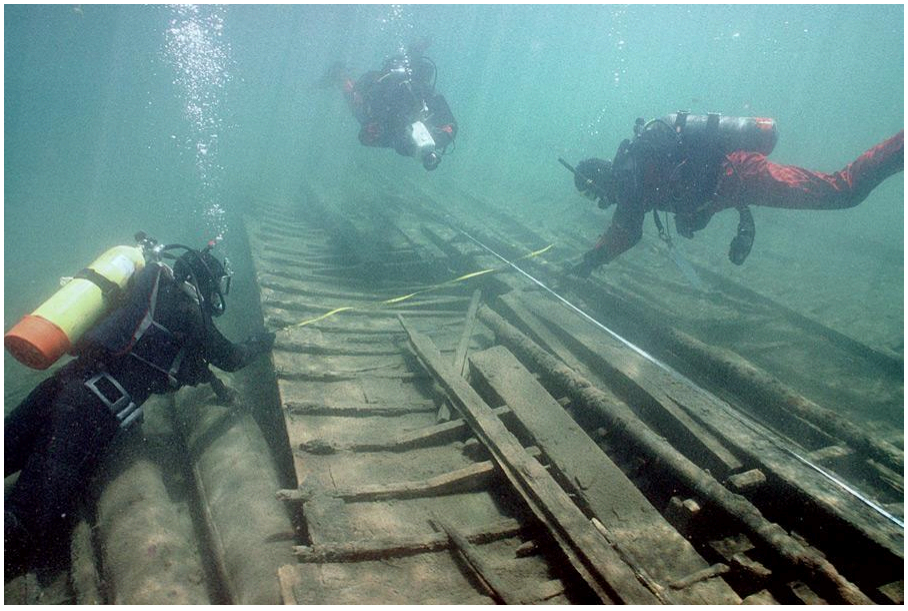
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Snowy poplins in frosted colors

The Macmillan

Hungry Horse news. (Columbia Falls, MT), Jun. 17 1955. Newspaper Article from 1955 with a section titled, “Recalls Early Day Park Boats.” In that section it says, “Swanson in about 1912 brought the City of Poison, a 60-foot boat from Flat-head lake that was rebuilt to 70-feet long and renamed the Lewtana”



The Underwater Frontier - Flathead Beacon Scuba divers inspecting underwater shipwreck in Lake McDonald using a tape measure.

Contextual Paragraph

In 1915, John Lewis (owner of the now present day Lake McDonald Lodge) and Frank Kelly (early homesteader), approached Captain JW “Billy” Swanson inquiring about the purchase of one of the fastest boat on Flathead Lake during 1910, the *City of Polson*. The boat was sold to the pair as passenger boat business had been declining on Flathead Lake. Rather than taking the more common route of transporting the *City of Polson* via railway, Swanson, who was required to transport the vessel to Lake McDonald, hired a crew of inexperienced men to transport the vessel via Flathead Lake, to Flathead River, to the Middle Fork, all the way up Lower McDonald Creek. The plan was to do so at high water in the spring.

The start of the trip went on without issues. Upon arriving to Bad Rock Canyon, the crew began to have a series of misfortunate. From a propeller being sent into the river when hitting a sandbar, a rowboat capsizing and being lost… they made it to Red Lick Rapids and used 1,800 feet of cable and small pieces of wood to pull itself over the boulders. In total, the trip took two weeks. The stretch from modern day Blankenship bridge to the mouth of McDonald Creek took two full days to navigate and was pulled over 14 sand bars.

After making it to Lake McDonald, the boat had another 11 feet added on to the already 62 feet. It was renamed the *Lewtana* after both Lewis and Montana.

After being in Lake McDonald from 1915 to 1926, the boat was no longer needed as the road to the Lake McDonald Lodge had been completed. It was burned and towed to sink in the lake.

Source: Plying the Water in America's Little Switzerland: The Role of Turn of the Century Lake Tourism in Glacier National Park, Montana Calvin H. Mires (Under the direction of Dr. Annalies Corbin) Department of Maritime History, December 2005.

Key Questions

1. Why do you think John Lewis and Frank Kelly wanted to bring another vessel onto Lake McDonald?
2. After hearing that it was transported by water to Lake McDonald, do you think that was the best way to get it there? Why or why not?
3. Would you have renamed the boat or kept its original name? Why or why not?
4. If you were to rename the boat, what name would you have chosen?
5. Do you feel that this was the best method of disposal for the Lewtana?
6. Do you feel historical artifacts should be protected? Why or why not?

Assessment

1. How do we decide what is worth preserving from the past, and what responsibility do we have to protect historic artifacts and the stories they tell?