

# Maiden voyage



*Revolutionary War-era boat, made by hand with authentic materials, takes to Lake George*

By **PAMELA A. BROOKS**  
*Special to The Post-Star*

**LAKE GEORGE** ♦ Past and present came together in the cold rain Sunday as a Revolutionary War-era gunboat replica was christened and launched on the gray-brown waters of the lake.

About 100 people shivered and tried to protect their video cameras from the rain while capturing Scott Padeni of Ballston Lake, dressed in period clothing, as he stepped into his wooden boat and set sail for the first time.

A dozen or so other reenactors helped set the scene as the 23-foot gunboat, christened the "General Arnold," made its way off a boat trailer and onto the open waters off Million Dollar Beach.

"It floats!" yelled Padeni as the boat rocked and the crowd cheered.

Through the project, Padeni said, he developed greater appreciation for the efforts of Gen. Benedict Arnold and the conscripted Army troops who, in 1776, built 16 similar ships at Whitehall (then known as Skenesborough) in a mad scramble that took only 2-1/2 months.

Arnold's tiny armada, fighting in the Battle of Valcour Island, is credited with delaying the British invasion for a year and setting the stage for American victory at the Battles of Saratoga in 1777.

"I was driven by what they accomplished in that short time," said Padeni, an archaeologist and re-enactor with the 1st New York Regiment. "I put thousands of hours in between Thanksgiving and today."

Padeni said he knew naming the boat the "General Arnold" would be considered controversial, but said his admiration for the man's tactical ability outweighed Arnold's eventual disgrace as a traitor.

Padeni added that he's studied Arnold

Photo by Erin R. Coker

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# Gunboat replica makes its debut on waters of Lake George

## ◆ GUNBOAT

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extensively, through letters and journals written by the general.

"I've been in his head for a long time. There's no defense for his later actions," Padeni said. "Congress treated him poorly, but they did that to a lot of other generals who didn't betray their country."

"I wish Arnold had been killed at the Battle of Saratoga instead of just wounded in the thigh. He died a broken man in England in 1801."

Nothing seemed broken about the boat Padeni created from pine, white oak and spruce.

He said the construction materials, including nails that were hand-forged by a blacksmith and a hand-sewn sail, were as authentic as he could make them.

Ed Bethel, of Glens Falls, a re-enactor and commander of the Inland Mariners Society, said Padeni's boat joins six other historically accurate boats that are used around the area during re-enactments.

The group is affiliated with the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum in Vergennes, Vt., where the boats are kept when not in use.

"War was basically called off during the winter, and the boats would be filled with rocks and sunk so they couldn't be captured by raiding parties," said Bethel. "We haven't figured out how they brought them back up yet."

Underwater storage for the wooden boats kept them in perfect condition, he said, since the wood would swell and make them watertight when they were next used.

Padeni said before the launch he expected the General Arnold would "leak like a sieve" on her maiden voyage.

But after seven or eight for-



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Despite the chilly weather, a crowd gathers Sunday afternoon at Million Dollar Beach on Lake George to inspect the General Arnold, a replica of a Revolutionary War gunboat, before its launch on the lake.

*"It floats!"*

### SCOTT PADENI

Ballston Lake archaeologist and re-enactor, upon the launch of the Revolutionary War-era gunboat replica he built

with up to six crew members aboard, he said he was surprised at how little water the craft took on.

"We only had to pump it out about every half-hour," Padeni said. "I'm still glowing. We fired the cannon several times, once at the Minne-Ha-Ha's port side."

"We heard them talking about us on the loudspeaker and thought the tourists would



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ABOVE: Re-enactors gather around the General Arnold before its launch Sunday afternoon at Million Dollar Beach in Lake George. RIGHT, TOP: The boat's creator, Scott Padeni, grins as the boat is shown. CENTER: Padeni, center, climbs into the boat as he and his crew prepare to sail. BOTTOM:

