Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
Woods Hole, MA 02543
Phone: (617) 548-1400
Telex: 951679

24 March 1986

Mr. Ronald R. Ericson
87-81 257 Street
Floral Park, NY 11001

Dear Mr. Ericson,

Thank you very much for your recent letter. Despite your experience and capabilities, I am afraid that I cannot include you as part of the crew on the next TITANIC mission as there simply is no more room. I do thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert D. Ballard
Senior Scientist
Deep Submergence Laboratory

RDB:mva

MARY VON ALT

MAR 12 1986

Mr. Ronald R. Ericson
87-81 257 Street
Floral Park, N.Y.
11001

2/26/87

Dr. Robert Ballard
Woods Hole Oceanographic
Institution
Boston, Massachusetts

SEND COPY OF FULL LETTER

Dear Sir,

In the Summer of 1984 I participated for the S.S. Lexington in Long Island Sound with Clive Cussler and Numa. Complete information is enclosed.

I saw you on the Today Show at Expo Center in Florida on Thursday, Jan 16, 1985. You talked about going out to the Titanic in the spring of this year.

I would very much like to know if I could possibly sign on as part of the crew of a Richard.

The following people you can use as my References.

(1) Clive Cussler NUMA

(2) Frank Braynard 76 Op Sail
U.S.M.M. Academy
Long Island, N.Y.
(516) 676-0733

(3) Captain Steve Bielander
Nine Quiet Court
Miller Place, N.Y. 11764
(516) 928-3849
(516) 379-5619

(4) John Lorit Ph.D.
Science Museum of Long Island
1526 N. Plandome Rd.
Manhasset, N.Y. 11030
(516) 627-9400
(516) 676-0471

(5) Larry Green

(6) Rick Meir
Grumman Data Systems Corp.
(516) 575-7140
(516) 346-2243

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West Islip, N.Y. 11795

TRIANGLE MARINE AND COMMERCE INC.
COMMERCIAL DIVING • ULTRASONICS

Lawrence Green
Robert G. Borthwick
Ronald Erickson

(516) 669-7911
Telex 960 127 SwiftNYK

(7) John Glendenning
U.S. Navy Ret.
28 Hurond Road
Bellrose Village, N.Y.
(516) 352-0579

Thanks Very much

Ronald R. Irwin
(718) 343-2437

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EXPLORATION LECTURE SERIES
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Monday, January 7, 1985

Zeff Loria
Long Island
N.Y.

DISCOVERY OF THE SIDE-WHEEL STEAMER LEXINGTON, OR, MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY AT WORK.

In the year 1840 the side-wheel marine steamship LEXINGTON, carrying a large number of passengers, burned and foundered in the waters of Long Island Sound some miles offshore, between Port Jefferson Harbor and Bridgeport, Connecticut. Most of the passengers were carried to their deaths as the ship sank.

During the summer of 1983, one hundred and forty years later, NUMA, the National Underwater and Marine Agency, undertook a full scale search to locate the ship's hull. The effort was spearheaded by Clive Cussler, founder and Chairman of the Agency, and Zeff Loria, Project Director. Both are Fellow members of the Explorers Club.

The LEXINGTON was recognized as unique in that it was one of the earliest sea-going steamships built, and as such its technology is - as yet - not fully understood. The archaeology of the LEXINGTON is not a simple curiosity to tell us more about things we already know of. A scientific study of this wreck promised to give more information about early steam technology, and hence about the roots of early American industrialism. In a sense this shipwreck was an archive of such early technology and associated material culture.

Zeff Loria undertook to direct the successful attempt to locate the hull of the LEXINGTON, a ship owned by Cornelius Vanderbilt. In addition, Zeff, a cinematographer, documented on film and on video the entire project, for use in educational television. Prior to this project, he launched and filmed the search on the Atlantic Coast, off Long Island, for another sunken vessel, the steamer SAVANNAH. Zeff has a Bachelor's degree in Electronic Engineering and in Aeronautical Engineering, with graduate work in laser technology. He is a pilot, with single engine and multi-engine ratings, and he is an experienced diver, holding a Captain's license. He is thus well prepared for the tasks and exploration work that NUMA specializes in. In cooperation with the Vanderbilt Museum in Centerport, L.I., Zeff is planning a study of the possibility of raising and transferring the LEXINGTON's hull to the Museum. The story of all of this, accompanied by motion picture film, will be part of Zeff's presentation about a fascinating undertaking.

Erwin Streisinger
Vice-Chairman
Lectures Committee

VANDERBILT'S SHIP DISCOVERED,
TREASURE TROVE AWAITS SALVAGE

Contact: Susan Rynne
212-247-7000
ROOM 701

Hold For Release Until:
11:00 AM, October 12

on The U.S.S. Entrepid

Lost beneath the waters of Long Island Sound over a century ago, the once prized ship of Cornelius Vanderbilt has finally been found. Right on the bottom, the LEXINGTON lies laden with treasures and the personal belongings of those who perished with her. The [illegible] steamer was once touted as the finest ship of her time, and for decades the Bridgeport Ferry has made daily runs over her grave.

Known as the "White Lady," the ship [illegible] both graceful and [illegible], and consumed the TITANIC of [illegible]iod. Then, a fire transformed the [illegible]NGTON into a drifting inferno, claiming the lives of rich and poor alike, and ending the career of one of the most elegant and powerful ships ever to run along the East Coast.

The LEXINGTON was elite, a marvel of craftsmanship. In 1840, she took her place high above the finest and fastest ships built at the time. A sidewheeled paddle steamer, the ship could cruise at about 14 knots. One report from 1840 put her top speed at 23 miles an hour. Contrasted with other vessels of her day, the LEXINGTON was like an SST compared to a DC-10.

Cornelius Vanderbilt had [illegible]XINGTON built heavy, to take the pounding of rough seas. Such [illegible]ng was the [illegible]t she navigated the Sound continuously for four years, never having to seek safe [illegible] from even the harshest storms of the cold New York waters.

The LEXINGTON was built for service in Vanderbilt's shipping [illegible] personally gave daily instructions during the entire

(more)

construction of his most valued ship. Although designed to withstand high seas, in the Vanderbilt style, she was elaborately luxurious. Even floor timbers were a rich composite of oak, pine and chestnut. The LEXINGTON was 205 feet long and 22 feet wide.

Upon her completion, Vanderbilt commissioned his younger brother Jacob to become the LEXINGTON's first Captain. The ship was first launched in April, 1835.

For nearly five years, the LEXINGTON made daily runs from New York City to Stonington, Connecticut -- until January 13, 1840, when a bale of cotton foolishly placed too near a smokestack ignited. Within minutes, the ship was engulfed in flames. At once, terror and mass confusion struck aboard ship. Passengers and crew were forced to choose between death by fire or the freezing waters of the Sound. The LEXINGTON, still churning through the water at high speed, swamped lifeboats as they were launched. Attempts from shore to save the doomed passengers failed, as a low tide caused rescue boats to run aground.

Cries for help and pleas from the dying could be clearly heard by crowds on both the Connecticut and Long Island shores. A boiler exploded, and those on land watched helplessly as the ship burned and drifted for eight hours. Some drowned. Some burned. Others froze to death. Detained by his publisher, the young poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow missed his scheduled voyage on the d ned steamer by less than one hour.

"There was nothing anybody could do in those days, on that January night," explains Clive Cussler. "It was the worst steamboat disaster up to that time -- an estimated 151 people died. The

(MORE)

LEXINGTON did not hit an iceberg like the TITANIC, but the ship was the MORRO CASTLE of its era."

Because of the sudden, flaming death of the LEXINGTON, and the horrible memories of those on shore who stood in shock for hours while the tragedy ran its course, ghostly legends and myths have continued to this day. Over many years, people along the Sound have reported seeing a fiery specter burning on the water -- a wraith-like apparition of a ship that quickly vanishes.

Although the wreck was raised to the surface on September 30, 1842, two years after the disaster, chains and cables cradling the ship snapped, and the LEXINGTON plummeted back into the water. During her brief return to sunlight, salvagers were able to recover only one of the ship's buckets -- which contained a 30 pound chunk of silver melted by the holocaust that extinguished the life of the LEXINGTON. Today, the 480 ounce lump of silver is worth about $5,000.

Later attempts to raise or even find the LEXINGTON were unsuccessful. Even her location on the bottom became a mystery as if the ship had vanished. Searchers gave up the quest, and in time, the ship and her sad fate passed from memory.

The LEXINGTON was carrying a cargo of silver coins, reported to be worth anywhere between $18,000 and $40,000 -- in 1842 dollars. Today, the value of the lost cargo would be anywhere between $100,000 and $200,000.

"I've always been interested in challenging and solving the unknown and this, as far as New York goes, is one of the greatest mysteries of the sea," Cussler says. "Most other ships which have gone down under tragic circumstances with substantial loss of life

(MORE)

have been found -- but the LEXINGTON's fate seemed sealed forever. After the first salvage attempts failed, she appeared to have simply vanished. But the LEXINGTON was not forgotten."

The tragedy captured the imagination of a young painter, Nathaniel Currier, who produced a portrait of the burning ship that later brough him to prominence, even before the beginnings of his partnership with James M. Ives.

The recent discovery of the LEXINGTON's gravesite did not begin at sea, but in historical research spanning nearly two years, tracing documents in Washington, D.C., New York and Connecticut. Starting with old maps, eyewitness accounts and coroners' reports, NUMA chased the ghost of the LEXINGTON.

Combining data on currents, drift patterns and the ship's last course, the Cussler search team simulated the last few hours of the LEXINGTON's ill-fated voyage, letting their research vessel drift as the paddle steamer may have some 140 years ago. After many weeks of searching the Sound, using sophisticated electronic scanning equipment, a sonar device picked up an image. Upright on the bottom, its decks and timbers exposed, the LEXINGTON had returned from the past. Clearly visible, the ship's paddlewheels protruded up through the sea floor, some 150 feet beneath the water's surface. Divers descended.

"The main part of the ship seems to be intact," Cussler explains. "The LEXINGTON stands up from the bottom anywhere from 10 to 15 feet." According to Cussler, timber samples were carefully taken from the wreck and immediately dispatched to wood experts at the University of Pennsylvania for chemical analysis and dating. Initial reports confirm the sample to be carbonized and over 100 years old -- and the type of

(MORE)

wood most commonly used on the LEXINGTON.

"We were astounded to find the ship literally wrapped in bronze cable and chains that have turned green over many years under the water. These cables provide very strong evidence that the wreck is indeed the LEXINGTON, since in 1842, the year they tried to raise her, they didn't have steel.

"This ship was Vanderbilt's prize, an historic tragedy, and the only remaining steamer that we know of from that era. The LEXINGTON is no longer a ghost, but a treasure of American history now waiting to be raised," Cussler states.

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