



Pirate treasure has a never ending lure for old and young. Here a party of summer visitors from Chester peer into the depths of the famous Money Pit on Oak Island, reputed hiding place of Capt. Kidd's gold. The late President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States, as a young man, plied pick and shovel in a treasure hunt on this spot.

FILE
GREENE

NOVA SCOTIA'S TREASURE ISLAND

by Irving C. Whynot

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ALMOST as regular as the tides that guard the island's mystifying secret, the pirates of a once romantic era return in ghostlike form to rattle their golden chains and pieces of eight tantalizingly across the pine-studded knolls of Oak Island, off Nova Scotia's south shore.

The tall oaks that gave the island its name have long since died. But livelier than ever, and gaining new life each year, is a legend—fortified by enough facts to be mysterious and a lot of guesswork — that deep in the rocky soil lies a pirate's treasure worth as much as five million dollars.

It's a riddle that has led to what is undoubtedly the world's longest, most expensive—and least rewarding—treasure hunt.

There are scoffers and cynics; but for every one there is another convinced that some day an ingenious shaft—now known as the "money pit"—that has helped shield the secret that lies below for more than 150

years will be conquered. The shaft, in fact, is the only tangible evidence of buried treasure, and if it doesn't hold treasure nobody as yet has come up with a suitable alternative explanation of its purpose.

But there are many who believe in the buried wealth, enough in fact to pour an estimated quarter-million dollars into unsuccessful hunts for the unknown prize.

It's an enigma complete with all the trimmings of a swashbuckling movie pirate; strange fires and unsolved deaths, secret codes and guardian ghosts.

Companies have been formed to seek the hoard, and gone bankrupt; men with shovels and others with heavy, modern drilling equipment have tried to solve the riddle, and failed; men have dreamed of the treasure, and spent their savings trying to turn their nocturnal vision into cash.

Three, perhaps, have had some actual knowledge to what lies deep in

the now-famed pit. They disappeared, or were killed, before they could tell their tales.

But almost every year now since three young men first stumbled onto the tiny island and found clues that pointed to buried wealth, someone has tried to uncover what they hopefully dream is an untold fortune.

As Americans flock into the summer resort village of Chester not far away and talk wistfully of pirates and buccaneers, a good many of the local residents nod their heads knowingly, figure the "silly season" is on again and repeat what they've often said before: "The only treasure on Oak Island is the one being spent digging all those holes."

It's come to such a state that signs had to be put up warning visitors to "Beware of Holes". Oak Island now is a business, as well as a major tourist attraction. And unless someone hits pay dirt soon it's likely to remain that way for some time to come be-

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cause the mystery, like wine, seems to be improving with age.

The strangest part of the whole thing is that no one knows for sure what they are seeking, or for that matter if there is anything buried at all.

The most popular and publicized theory—and the least likely—is that the pit holds the ill-gotten riches of the notorious pirate Captain William Kidd.

But there is no authentic record that Kidd ever sailed the Nova Scotia coast, and even if he or some other pirate did, there's little likelihood they could have masterminded construction of the intricate money cache.

A more likely theory is that the treasure, if there is one, was buried by the French garrison of Louisbourg, on Cape Breton Island 300 miles north of Halifax.

During the Seven Years War (1756-63), the French government sent £2,000,000 to Louisbourg to rebuild the fortress there. And it's possible that the garrison carted it off to Oak Island for hiding rather than risk its loss to the English. French army engineers, for instance, could have designed and supervised construction of the shaft.

Some people, including the late President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States, believed that the deeps might contain the crown jewels of France which King Louis XVI tried to take out of the country in 1791. But history records that Louis was captured long before he reached the French coast.

These theories, however, also have loopholes. For instance, the coconut fibre found in the shaft and connecting drains to the sea must have come from the tropics and it's doubtful if the French ships had sailed there.

There are even some people who say that pirates never cruised this part of the Nova Scotia coast but Desbrisey's *History of Lunenburg County* discounts this contention. The author recalls that in 1701 the French had a garrison at the mouth of the LaHave River and Governor Brouillon invited a hundred ships of pirate sail to Mahone Bay to defend the colony against attack from the British, then in possession of the Louisbourg fortress. Mahone, incidentally, comes from the French term *ma-honne*, a low, rakish craft popular with coast pirates.

The origin of the money shaft, and the treasure, therefore, is as much a mystery today as it was when

first uncovered. But this much is certain: whoever buried anything there did it so it would be next to impossible to recover.

Husky George Greene, an expert petroleum engineer financed by a group of wealthy Texas oilmen, was the latest to find this out in his attempt to solve the pit's well-guarded secret last in 1955.

Incidentally, it was Greene's uncle, John W. Shields, a successful Oklahoma City real estate broker, who financed the 1904 search in which the late President Roosevelt, then a young lawyer, was associated.

Using the most modern of oil drilling rig, Greene sank four holes without striking his goal: a concrete vault which he figures holds the treasure. But he did find the clues that have spurred others in their efforts: layers of wood at regular intervals down the shaft, and strange cavities.

"You know," he said, "some people are silly enough to say that there can't be a concrete vault at the bottom of this pit. They argue that there was no such thing as concrete in early days. But they should think back to the days of the Romans. They had cement.

"But I don't think Captain Kidd was ever here. If there's any treasure there it is probably Peruvian stuff brought here by the Spaniards.

"Others say that there's nothing at all. Well, either someone went to an awful lot of trouble to plant those platforms or there are an awful lot of liars in the world."

Beaten by the arrival of winter weather, but not convinced that the treasure is lost forever, Greene clamped a cigar in his mouth and a look of determination on his face as he sailed away from Oak Island, and promised:

"I'll be back." He said the holes he bored "haven't proved or disproved the legend about buried treasure. But they have convinced me that I should come back again."

If he, or anyone else, does find the treasure they will have to split it three ways: five per cent to the province, a cut to island-owner M. R. Chappell of Sydney, N.S., and the rest for themselves. Greene's agreement called for a 45 per cent slice for Chappell.

A successful businessman, Chappell bought the southern third of the island in 1948 to continue a family association dating back to 1795. He won't say how much he paid.

"Only two people, the fellow I bought it from, and myself, know

that; and we agreed to keep it to ourselves," he said.

He has been offered a sale on several occasions but turned them down flat. Asked to name a price, he replies: "There isn't one; it just isn't for sale, at any price. I'd be a fool to sell now."

Is he convinced that there is a treasure on Oak Island?

Evasively, he says only: "I'm convinced there is a mystery there to be solved.

"But it seems to be an intangible asset," he says. "Everything I buy seems to go up in value ten or fifteen times."

When he does return, Greene will be only another in a long parade of those who have tried—and failed—to solve the mystery of the little island. There have been seven organized attempts, and many smaller ones.

Back in 1795, Oak Island was just one of 365 islands of assorted sizes in sheltered Mahone Bay, 43 miles from Halifax. A mile long and a half-mile wide, it was not inhabited when Daniel McInnis, Anthony Vaughan and Jack Smith beached their canoe on the eastern shore and set out to explore the oak groves.

About 400 feet inland, in a cleared spot, they found a single great oak, one of its larger lower limbs sawed off some distance from the trunk. They found marks on the limb, and surmised they could have been made by a block and tackle hoisting a heavy object.

They reported later that the tree bore "curious marks and figures," apparently made with an axe. Under the tree was a depression in the grass, about 12 feet in diameter.

Their imagination fired, they gathered tools and returned to the island to start digging. The depression, they found, outlined a shaft in the hard clay. The soil was loose and they made good headway until striking a layer of heavy oak planking at a depth of ten feet. They removed this, then struck another layer of oak at twenty feet, and still another at thirty.

Tired, and unable to go further without aid, they returned to the mainland to enlist help. But they were met instead with tales that the island was haunted by a fearsome apparition that emitted sulphurous fires at night, and that the island rang with weird groans and shrieks.

They found one woman who recalled that her grandmother had told of peculiar lights on the island in 1720. The braver spirits of the settlement got near enough to see the



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outline of men moving around two huge bonfires. Two men set out to land and learn the intruders' identity—and never returned.

With such opposition, McInnis, Vaughan and Smith wore themselves out trying to enlist aid and find capital. In manhood, McInnis and Smith settled on the island. Smith's wife, however, wasn't happy with the idea and when her baby was due insisted that it not be born on the island.

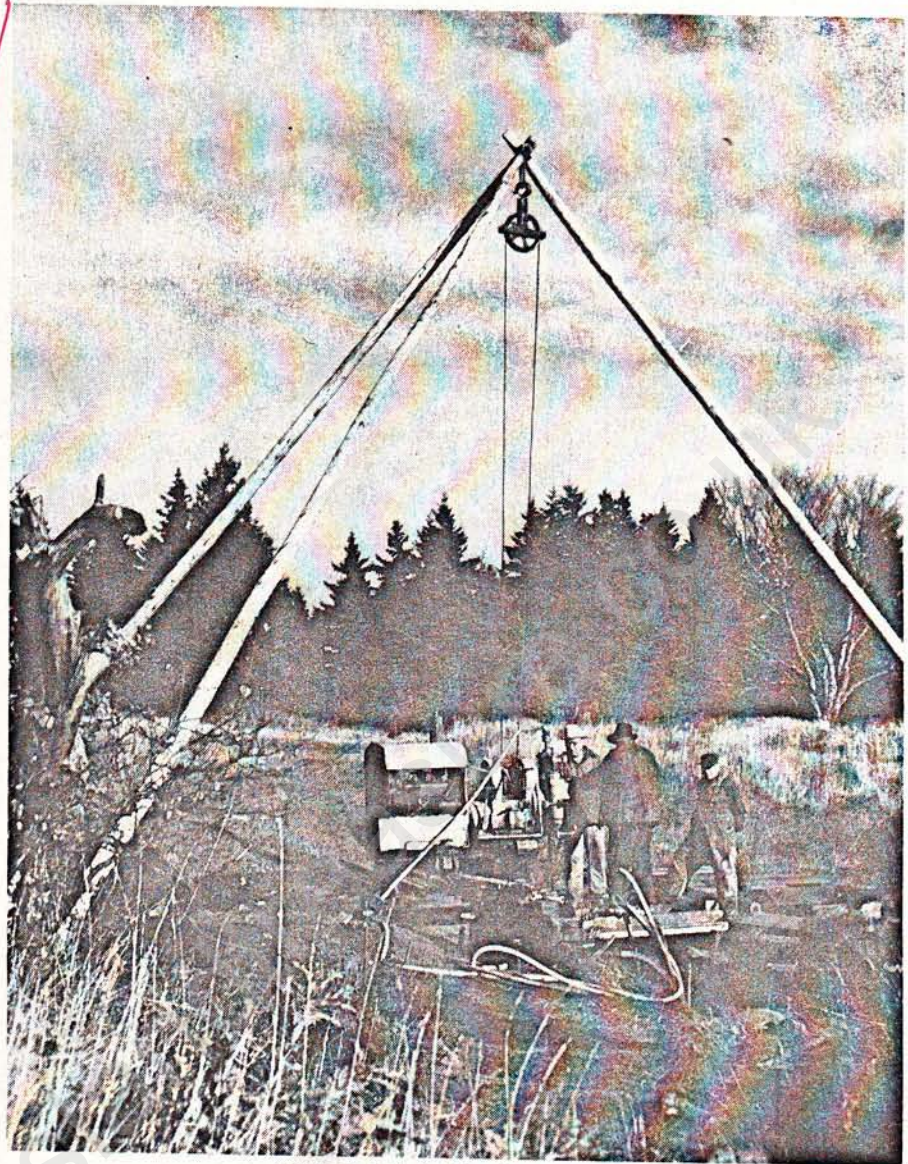
So Smith and his wife moved to Truro and lived with Dr. John Lynds until the baby arrived. The doctor, impressed by Smith's story of the island, returned with the family to their home and made an extensive investigation of his own. As the doctor was about to leave the island, Smith offered him payment for professional service. Dr. Lynds declined, and suggested instead he be given one share in a company to be formed to uncover the treasure. Thus was born the first of many companies formed for such a purpose.

This company managed to excavate to ninety feet, uncovering a layer of stout plank every ten feet. But at the ninety-foot level they found the strangest clue to date: a huge stone with an odd inscription. Rev. A. T. Kempton of Cambridge, Mass., said he took it to be a code devised by an Irish schoolmaster and read it to say: "Forty feet below two million pounds are buried." There's doubt, however, that Kempton saw the actual inscription, or was qualified to decipher it if he did. No one else ever was able to read the markings and for some years it adorned a fireplace in Smith's new home. Later it was sent to Halifax for study, and eventually wound up in a book-binder's shop for beating leather until the precious inscription was worn away.

The excavation was pushed to ninety-five feet where they found a solid wooden platform covering the entire shaft. It was Saturday night, so the men quit for the week-end. Monday morning, to their woe, they found the pit filled with water to within 25 feet of the top. Bailing made no headway, so they abandoned the shaft and sank another near by with the idea of running a tunnel into the treasure pit from below.

This time they got down to 110 feet and started to drive the tunnel before water came bursting through and they fled for their lives. Their funds, and most of their patience, exhausted, they gave up.

But in 1849, fortune fever was again fired by the California gold rush



Drilling at Oak Island treasure pit

and a new company sought the fabulous pirate pit's prize.

This time drilling was tried. The foreman, John Pitblado, had been given strict instructions that he should bring up the auger regularly and scrape off any particles for microscopic examination.

One day John Gamel, a shareholder and watchdog at the operations, saw Pitblado furtively bring up the drill and slip something into his pocket.

"What have you there, Pitblado," he asked. "Don't you think we should all see it?"

"Why, yes," said the foreman, "you'll get a chance at our next directors' conference."

The chance never came. Pitblado disappeared from the island during the night and was killed in a gold mine accident less than a month later. His secret died with him.

Earlier in this drilling, the augers bit through the platform at the 95-

foot level, dropped a foot and then went through four inches of oak, twenty-two inches of metal, then more wood. The supposition was that this was the treasure in sturdy wooden crates on regularly-placed platforms.

At this time the treasure-seekers also uncovered just how well the money pot was protected. On the shore of the cove, water had been sighted running out of the sand. Workers found an ingenious system of drains running inland, constructed of rocks and brown coconut fibre similar to bits brought up from the shaft by the augers. Workers found five such drains, similar to the fingers of a hand, leading toward the pit. Whether they were designed to drain the pit, or provide a system for flooding it, isn't clear.

But the hunt ended in failure as sea water rushed in through the drains, filled the pits and collapsed the tunnels. The bottom of what was



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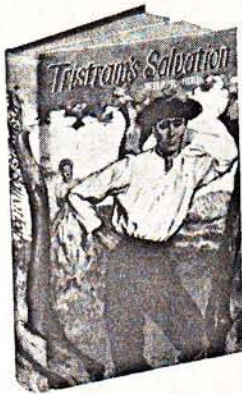
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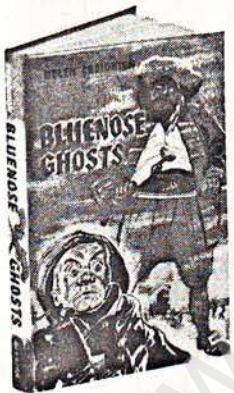


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believed to be the money room at the bottom of the shaft fell into a tunnel and soft mud and water drove out the workers.

In 1893, Fred Blair of Amherst started an association with the island and its treasure that was to last until his death, as a judge of the probate court, in 1951.

For a long time he held a lease on the island and was a strong believer that the pit held a fortune. In 1897, with his backing, new drilling was carried out. William Chappell—father of the present island owner—supervised the job and said his drills struck what he took to be metal in bars and coin at the 151-foot level. The drill also brought up a tiny bit of parchment with the letters "vi", "ui", or "wi" in black ink. It didn't help much to solve the riddle; the letters could have been in almost any language.

Since then a series of companies and individuals have tried their hand at solving the Oak Island secret. But the ingenious money pit, and fate, always seem to win.

In 1950, New York mining engineer John Lewis started out to conquer the pit with a twenty-ton steam shovel. The scow sank on the way to the island.

Some haven't been so serious in their intentions. In 1946, Nathan Lindenbaum walked into a New York radio station and paid \$125 at an auction for a map showing Oak Island's location. The station returned the money, gave him expenses, a pick and shovel and told him to try to recover the treasure.

He arrived in Nova Scotia with "tongue in cheek, pick in pack", took a few half-hearted swings at the frozen surface of Oak Island, and then scooted home to tell the radio audience of his experience.

Greene's effort was the latest, but not the last, in the long struggle to find an answer to the pit's secret.

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