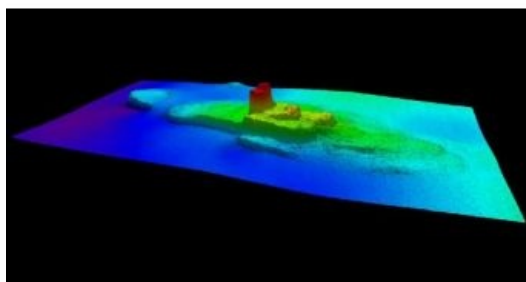


19th-century Shipwreck Rediscovered off Golden Gate Bridge



NOAA has located the underwater wreck of the passenger steamer *City of Chester*, which sank in 1888 in a collision with the steamer *Oceanic* in dense fog near where the Golden Gate Bridge stands today. The rediscovery of the wreck restores an important historical link to San Francisco's early Chinese-American community. Reports at the time initially criticised *Oceanic*'s Chinese crew in the racially charged atmosphere of the times. Criticism turned to praise, however, when the bravery of the crew in rescuing many of *City of Chester*'s passengers was revealed. The wreck was then largely forgotten, until now.

The 202-foot long steamship *City of Chester* had just left San Francisco and was headed up the California coast to Eureka with 90 passengers on 22 August 1888, when at around 10 a.m. it was struck by the steamer *Oceanic*. Impaled on *Oceanic*, which was arriving from Asia, *City of Chester* remained afloat for six minutes before sinking. Sixteen people died in the accident.

In May 2013, NOAA's Office of Coast Survey Navigational Response Team 6 (NRT6), in a 28-foot boat equipped with sonar, rediscovered what they thought was the *City of Chester* while surveying another nearby shipwreck, the freighter *Fernstream*, which sank after a collision in 1952. James Delgado, director of maritime heritage for NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, asked the NRT6 team to extend their survey to try and find the sunken steamer.

After working with historic data provided by NOAA historians, the Coast Survey team conducted a multi-beam sonar survey and a sonar target the right size and shape was found. The team spent nearly nine months sorting through the data. A follow-up sidescan sonar survey confirmed that the target was *City of Chester*, sitting upright, shrouded in mud, 216 feet deep at the edge of a small undersea shoal. High-resolution sonar imagery clearly defined the hull, rising some 18 feet from the seabed, and the fatal gash on the vessel's port side.

This NOAA team was not the first to find the shipwreck. It was 125 years earlier that the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, NOAA's predecessor agency which was charged with responsibility for charting the nation's coasts and harbours, believed it had located the *City of Chester* in early September 1888 by dragging a wire from the tugboat *Redmond* to snag the hulk.

A veteran salvage diver of the time, Capt Robert Whitelaw, also claimed to have relocated the wreck, sending a hard-hat diver down more than 200 feet in 1890 to report *City of Chester* nearly cut in two, with the tide running through the cut "like a millrace". No attempt was made to raise the wreck then and there are no plans to do so today.

Today, it is a protected site and a grave belonging to the state of California. The story of *City of Chester* will be shared with the public in a future waterfront exhibit NOAA will place at the sanctuary office at Crissy Field. The office is the former U.S. life saving service station built in 1890 in response to the *City of Chester* incident.