



SB-MH-002-2007

Portland Facts

Length: 291 feet

Maximum breadth: 68 feet

Depth of Hold: 15 feet

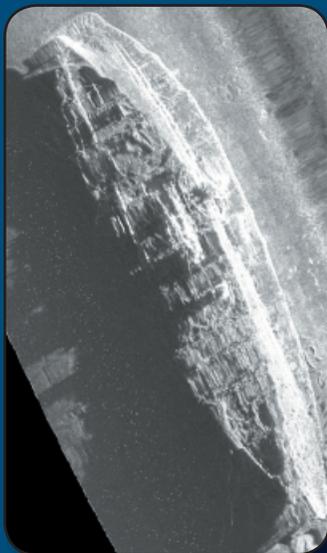
Passenger Capacity: 800

Builder: New England
Shipbuilding Company,
Bath, Maine

Owner: Portland Steam
Packet Company
(renamed Portland
Steamship Company)

Year Built: 1889

Year Lost: 1898



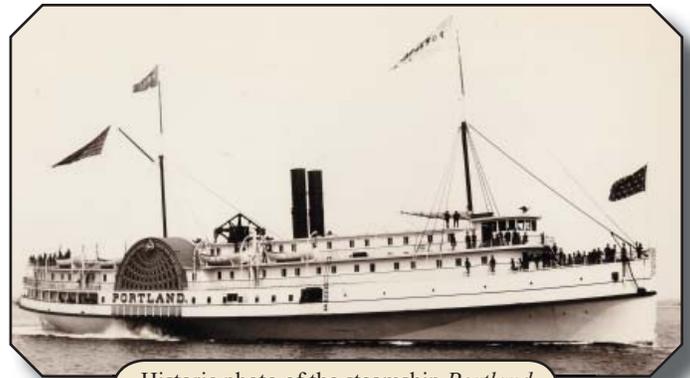
Side scan sonar image of the coastal steamship *Portland* NOAA/SBNMS and NURC-UConn



GERRY E. STUDDS
STELLWAGEN BANK
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Steamship *Portland*

In 2002, NOAA scientists confirmed the location of the wooden-hulled paddle wheel steamship *Portland* in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. One of the largest and most palatial vessels afloat in the northeast during the 1890s, *Portland* became known as “New England’s *Titanic*.” Its loss, with all hands – an estimated 192 passengers and crew – was New England’s greatest steamship disaster prior to the year 1900.



Historic photo of the steamship *Portland* courtesy of Maine Maritime Museum

For nearly nine years, the steamship *Portland* connected Boston, Massachusetts and Portland, Maine without much notoriety. The ship carried thousands of passengers and tons of cargo along the New England coast and earned the reputation as a safe and dependable steamer. But its shallow draft, paddle wheel design and wooden superstructure were no match for a powerful storm that battered New England and later became known as the “Portland Gale” after the ill-fated ship.

The location of the *Portland*’s final resting place remained a mystery for many years after its final departure from Boston on the evening of November 26, 1898. However, in 1989, researchers from American Underwater Search and Survey announced the steamship’s discovery, but were unable to provide conclusive photographs. Using coordinates provided by the firm, the first sanctuary mission captured striking underwater video that proved the wreck’s identity. The sanctuary, in partnership with the National Undersea Research Center at the University of Connecticut, has visited the site every year since 2002 to learn more about the tragedy.

In 2005, *Portland* was listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of its historical and archaeological significance. The steamship’s remains are the best preserved of any New England “night boat” found to date. Further archaeological research on the *Portland* will yield information about the vessel’s construction, the cause of its demise, and the passengers and crew who traveled and worked onboard the steamship.



Top: Dishware in the galley; Bottom: Bits used to tie the vessel up at port. NOAA/SBNMS and NURC-UConn

Computer-aided drawing of *Portland*’s remains (red indicates wood, green is metal, blue is sea floor).
NOAA/SBNMS

