

Los Angeles

By Katja Huebner

The Los Angeles was originally the Wyanda, built in 1866 in Baltimore as a government revenue cutter. The government sold the ship in 1873, and the San Francisco company, Goodall, Perkins bought it for coastal passenger traffic. The Pacific Coast Steamship Company, which acquired Goodall, Perkins, owned the Los Angeles at the time of the wreck. The ship, captained by H.D. Leland, had been rebuilt as a screw steamer in 1874 at a cost of \$100,000. The Los Angeles was 287 tons net, 493 gross. Its length was 107 feet, with a beam of 27.5 feet and a depth of hold of 11.2 feet. The Alta reported that the hull was in good shape. The Los Angeles was valued at \$60,000 at the time of the wreck, and was uninsured.

The Los Angeles was on its way north from San Pedro to San Francisco, carrying 49 passengers, 36 crew, and a cargo of wool and produce such as butter, oranges, grain, beans, and cheese. The vessel had a smooth voyage north and was running ahead of schedule. It left San Simeon at 2:50 p.m. on April 21, 1894; the weather was slightly hazy, the seas calm, and the winds light. The Captain set the course for Point Sur and, in the early evening when they were 5 miles southeast of Point Sur, he went below for a nap. He instructed the Third Officer to call him when the ship was off Cooper's Point, just south of Point Sur, where they needed to change course.

Around 8:30 p.m., at which time they were about 40 miles south of Monterey, the Captain and other passengers felt a bump and they rushed to the deck. A course change was ordered, but it was too late. The ship struck a sunken rock adjacent to Morro Rock, in full view of the lighthouse keeper at Point Sur. The vessel, stuck fast to the rocks, lay with her bow pointing northwest from the lighthouse, its starboard bow and quarter bearing heaviest on the rocks. The rocks continued to hold her for about 45 minutes as she filled with water, until a huge wave lifted her hull, completely filling it and she slipped into the sea.

Four lifeboats and a raft were launched as soon as she struck and most of the passengers and some crew escaped. Those left onboard, about 12 men, took to the rigging, which remained above water.

The steamship Eureka, in the area and running southbound, was alerted to the disaster by signals from the lighthouse. A lifeboat from the Los Angeles was spotted by the Eureka and those aboard were rescued. Two other lifeboats headed directly for shore. The men left in the rigging called to those in the lifeboats to save them, but apparently they were unable to return. Two hours after reaching shore, during which time several men had fallen from the rigging in exhaustion and drowned, Captain Maginnis of the wrecker Whitelaw, at the time a passenger on the Los Angeles, steered a lifeboat from shore to save them. A nameless Chinese man who drowned was said to have had \$400 in gold coin in his trunk.

The Third Officer was charged with criminal neglect and carelessness and was held responsible for the wreck because he had failed to call Captain Leland when they reached Cooper's Point. At the time of the wreck, the vessel was 4.5 miles north of Cooper's Point. The officer claimed that he missed seeing Cooper's Point, although he was familiar with the route. He maintained that he had followed the course the Captain had laid, but contemporary reports indicate that he had set the new course and the ship was, in fact, a mile off the regular course at the time of the wreck.

The San Francisco Call reported that the Los Angeles "was a complete wreck, its bottom torn out." However, Captain Maginnis was quoted as saying that he believed that as long as the ship was not pinioned, it could be salvaged.

Primary Sources

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