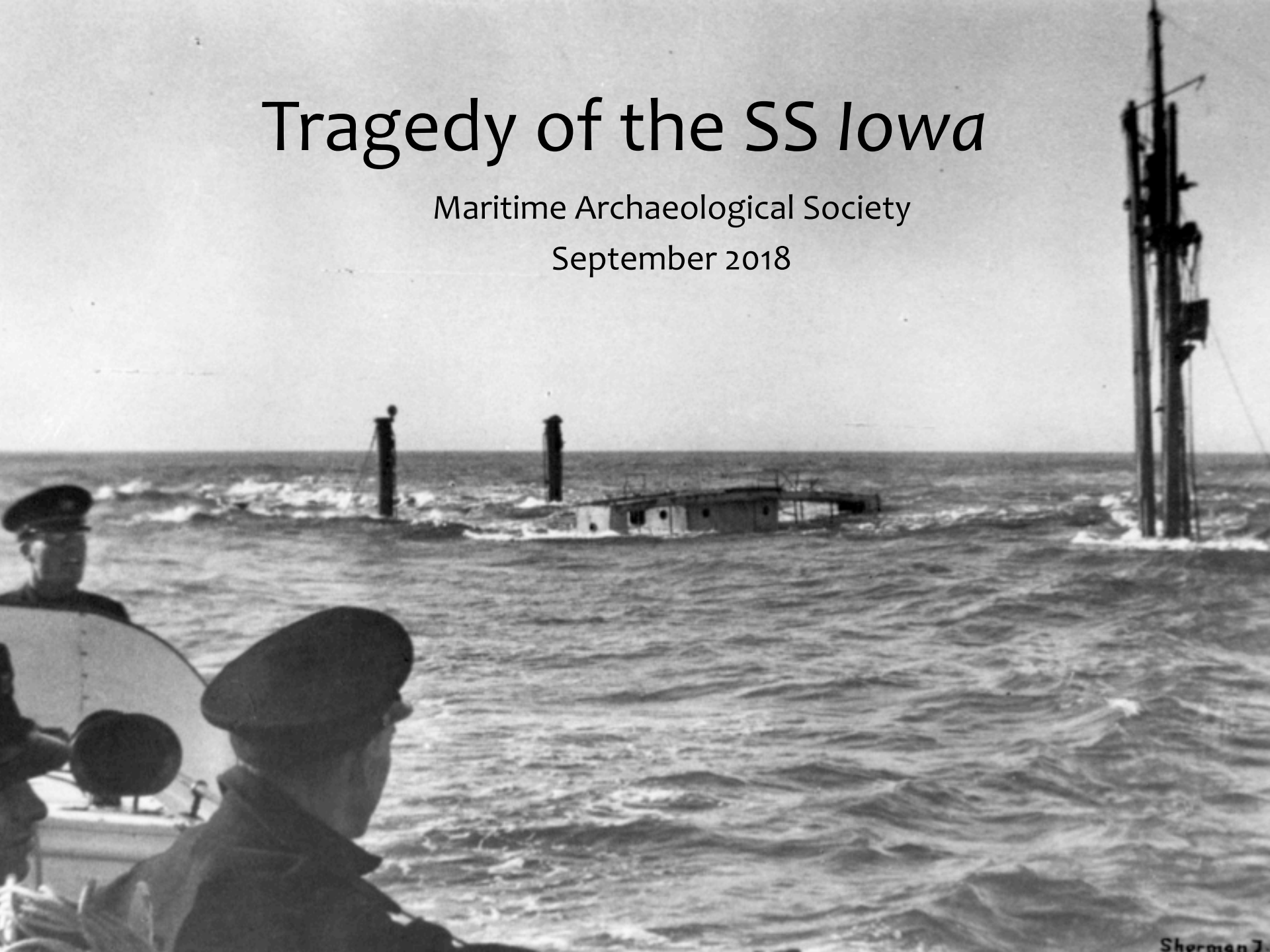


Tragedy of the *SS Iowa*

Maritime Archaeological Society

September 2018



The Project

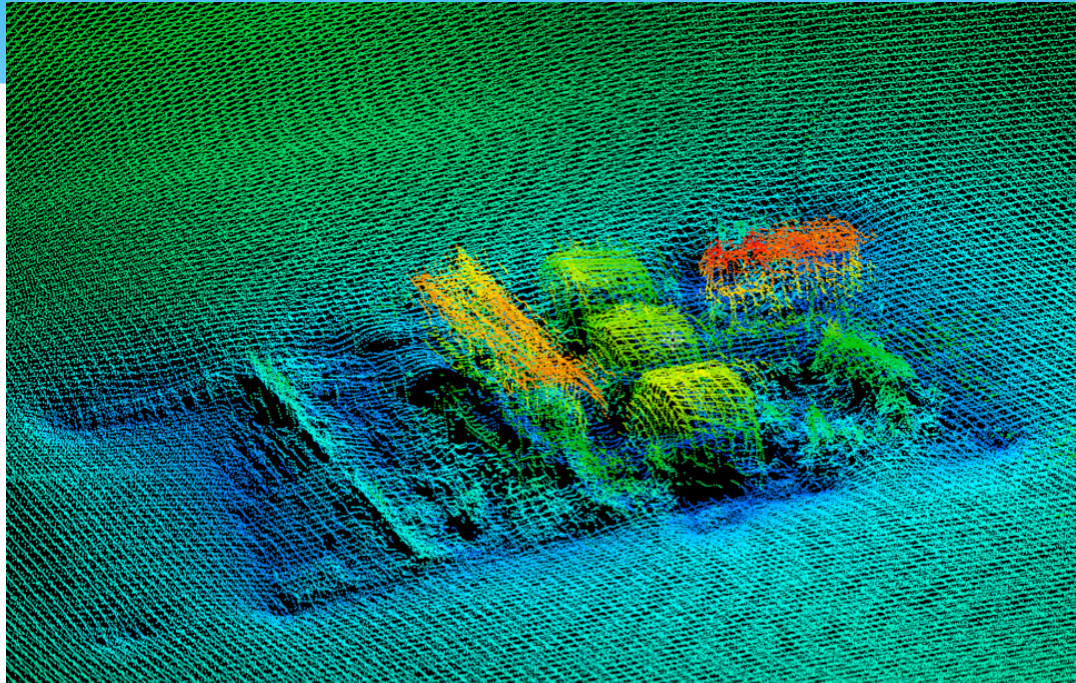


Image courtesy of USACE

- * The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers identifies underwater anomalies using multi-beam sonar in the Columbia River and on the Columbia River Bar.
- * The sonar images from the Peacock Spit were sent to the Maritime Archaeological Society
- * MAS researchers identified the images as the midsection of the *SS Iowa*.

Research Questions

MAS research questions to be answered by this project include:

1. What were the circumstances of the vessel's loss?
2. Do photos, drawings, paintings etc. of the vessel/site exist before, during, or after the wrecking process?
3. What are the details of the site in its current condition?
4. What are/were the site formation processes based on archaeological and historical research?
5. Is the site eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places?

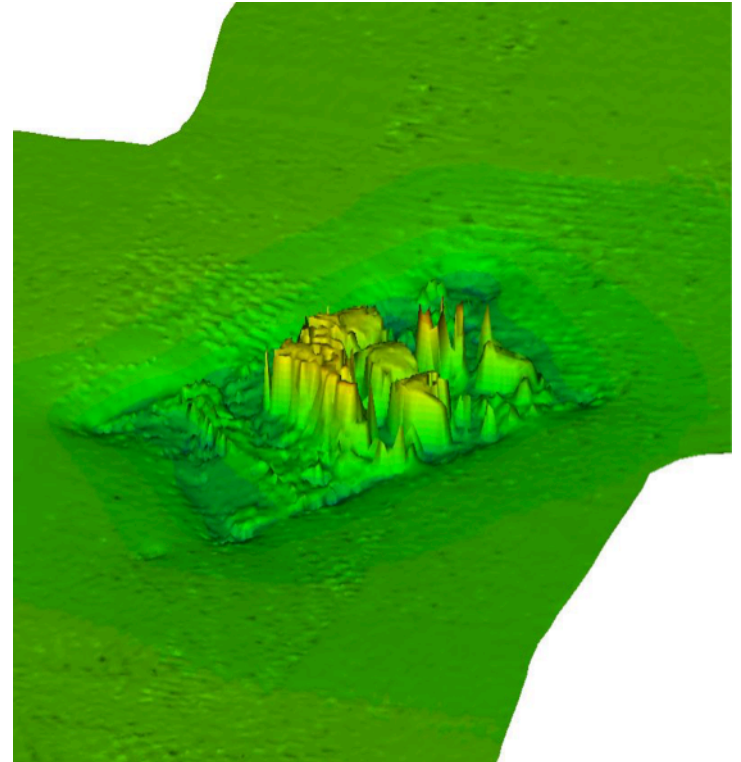


Image courtesy of USACE

Ship's History

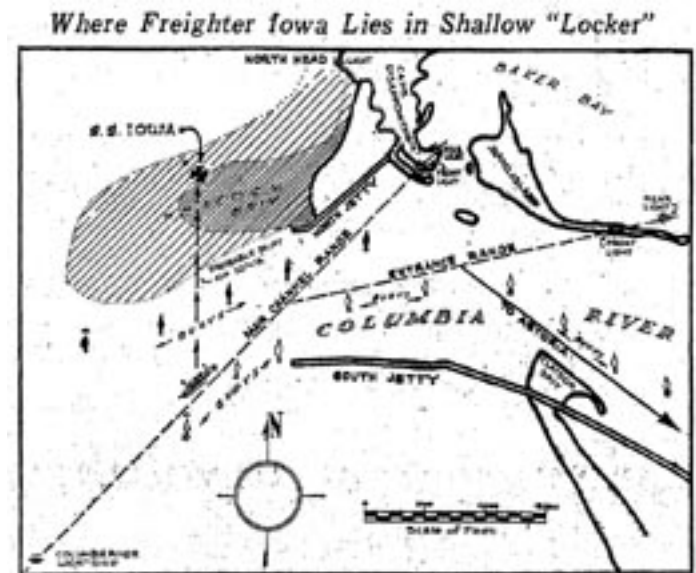
- * Constructed in 1919 as a service freighter in south San Francisco, California.
- * It was one of 18 standard type 1019 design steel-hulled cargo ships
- * Sailed for the States Steamship Company



Photo by Walter E. Frost
Courtesy City of Vancouver Archives

The Wrecking

- * SS Iowa left Astoria on January 11, 1936 and headed downriver toward the Pacific Ocean and onto San Francisco.
- * Winds picked up ranging from 47-72 miles per hour and were described as a southeast hurricane.
- * Strong winds continued and the SS Iowa was pushed by waves out of the main river channel north toward Peacock Spit where it broke apart and sank about a half mile north of the North Jetty and about a mile and a half from shore
- * The lookout at Cape Disappointment reported seeing the ship around 4 a.m. but did not report any problems.



The Oregonian, 1936

No Survivors

- * Attempts by the Coast Guard Cutter *Onandaga* to reach the ship were in vain as the cutter fought high seas that injured some of her crew.
- * A Coast Guard Douglas amphibian plane from Port Angeles flew over the ship in the morning and reported no survivors and that the ship was breaking up and the ship's cargo littered the sea where it sank.
- * Life boats from Point Adams and Cape Disappointment tried to reach the sunken vessel in search of survivors but were unable to board the ship due to high seas.



Image courtesy of U. S. Coast Guard

The Investigation

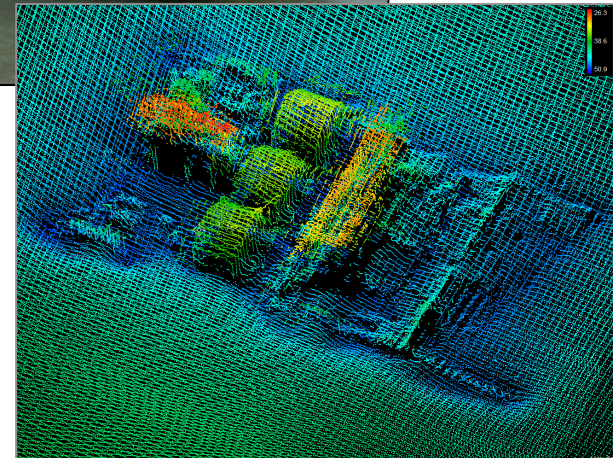
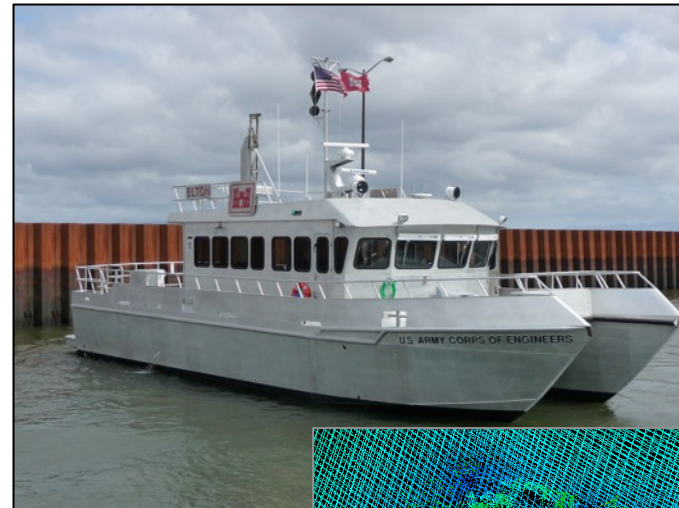
- * Two weeks after the wrecking, the U.S. Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation convened a hearing in Portland, Oregon.
- * Because there were no survivors to provide information, testimony was provided by three pilot bar captains who stated that they would not have taken the ship out in the rough seas.
- * Ultimately, Captain Yates was blamed for the loss of the ship and crewmen.



Image courtesy of CRMM

Sonar Survey

- * The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) research vessel *Elton* monitors the Columbia River channel and it's approaches using Multi-Beam Sonar.
- * One of the shipwreck images they recorded was near the historical position of the SS *Iowa* wreck.



Images courtesy of USACE

Examination of the Ship's Structure

- * MAS research volunteers examined the *Iowa*'s hull structure from references at the Columbia River Maritime Museum library.
- * They found a match between the sonar imagery and the ships structure.

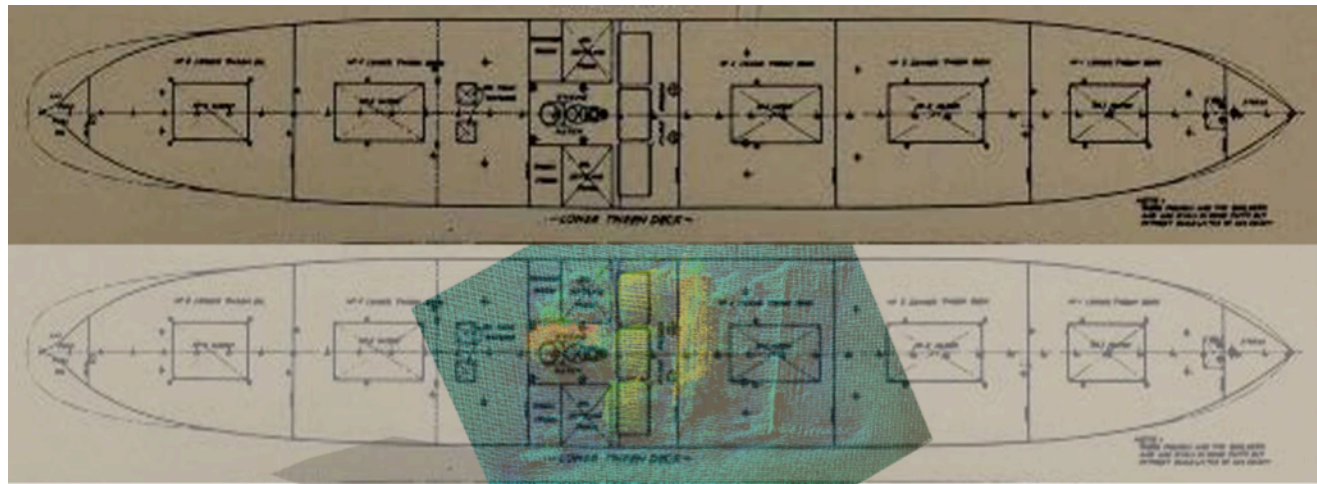


Image courtesy of CRMM and USACE

Site Formation Processes Identified

- * None of the pre-impact processes are evident from the current state of the wreck site.
- * The impact, recoil, and rescue phase processes cannot be determined because all hands were lost during the wrecking and their actions are unknown.
- * The Columbia Bar is a high-energy environment with fast currents and rapid movement of bottom sediments. Sonar images show the extent of the deterioration of the ship's structure. The ship's riveted hull and superstructure have been removed through corrosion and wave action.
- * Divers have not visited the SS *Iowa* wreck. The remaining wreckage is well outside the navigable channel on the Peacock Spit and is not in danger of deliberate salvage from the Army Corps of Engineers.
- * Natural formation processes will continue, and the wreck site will continue to degrade from strong currents and chemical corrosion until the site disappears. Because of the remote location and its challenging accessibility to divers, no cultural processes are likely to impact the site.

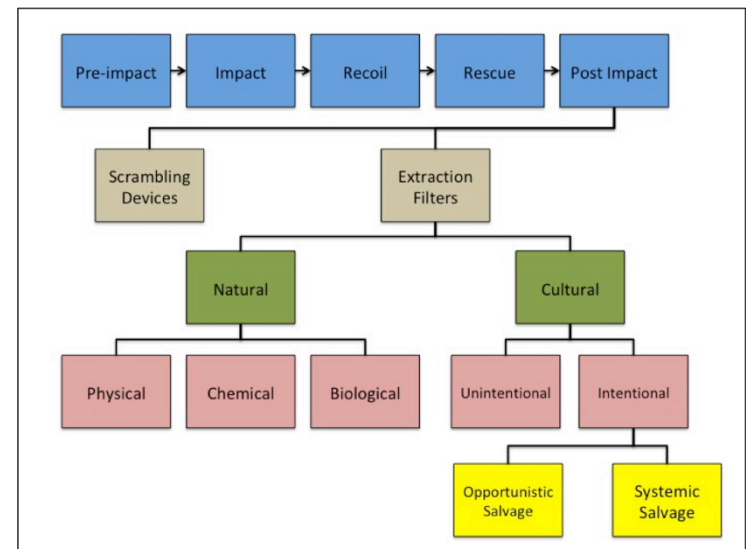


Image courtesy of Chris Dewey

Conclusions

- * Based on the comparison of the sonar images to the documented ship's structure, the site is most likely the SS Iowa.
- * The submerged vessel may contain the remains of crew members whose bodies were not recovered. The site was determined to be eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, under Criterion D.

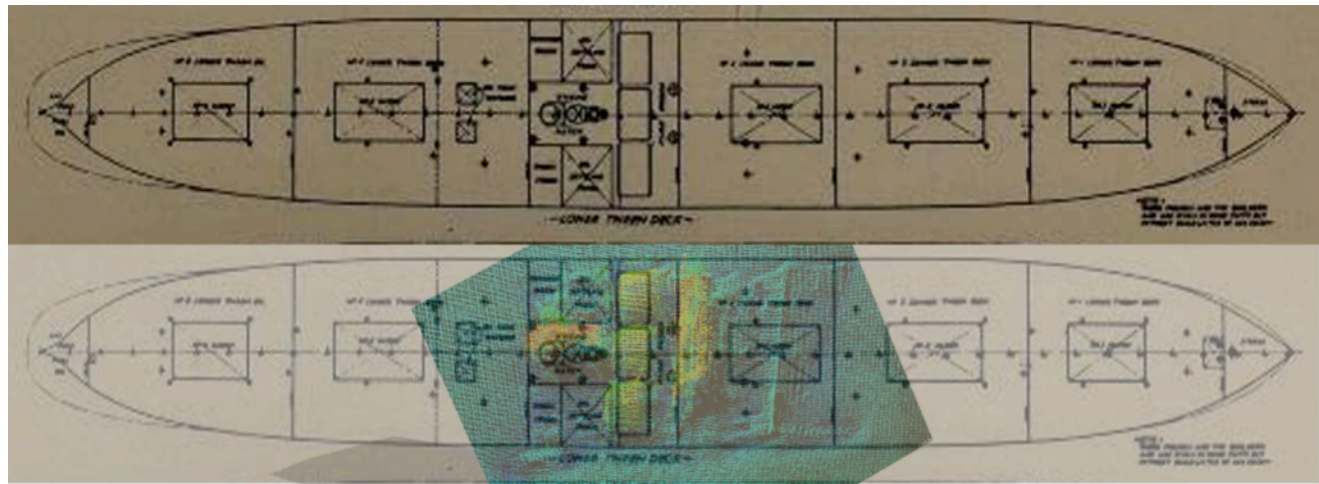
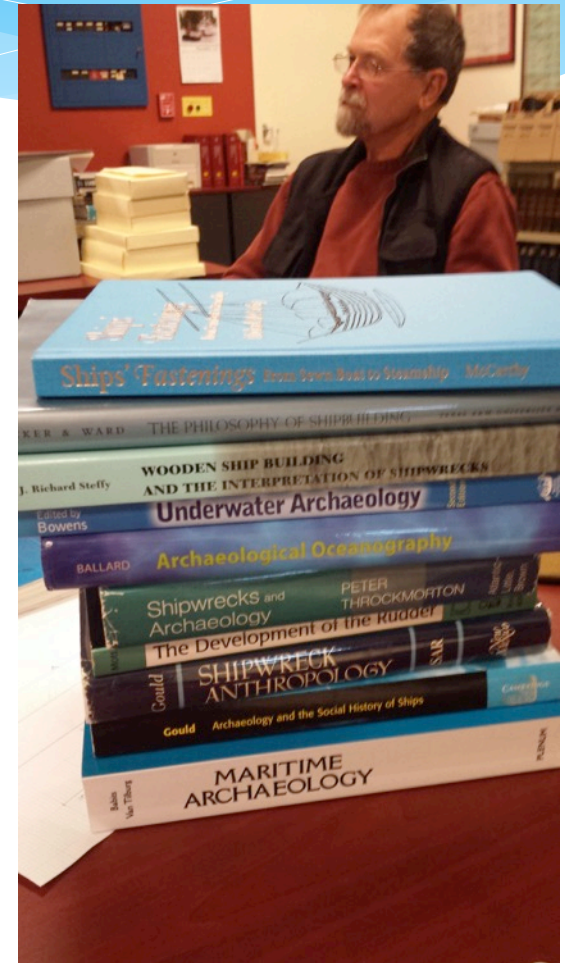


Image courtesy of CRMM and USACE

Report to Washington State Archaeologist

- * MAS has submitted a detailed report to the Washington State Archaeologist.



Contact



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