

## Old Copyright Deposits Enrich Understanding of History Today

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*The double-hand steering wheel is perhaps the one found at Orleans on the Cape. The rope shown in the photo may be the source of initial speculation that the wheel was lashed when it could no longer be controlled.*

Two storms approaching each other over the eastern seaboard on Saturday, November 26, 1898, gave a yellow cast to the late afternoon sky. The *Portland*, a side-wheel paddleboat passenger steamer lying at harbor at India Wharf in Boston, had been taking on freight during the day. As evening approached, passengers, many of whom had celebrated Thanksgiving in Boston, began boarding to return home. In spite of storm warnings, newly promoted Captain Hollis Blanchard cast off the lines and turned the steamer toward the open sea.

In the night, as the *Portland* made its way north toward Portland, Maine, the two storms, one from the Great Lakes area and the other from the south, met. The result was devastating wind velocities approaching 100 miles per hour, heavy waves, and freezing temperatures. The last sighting of the *Portland*, by then badly damaged, was at 11:45 PM.

When the 291-foot-long ship sank, those aboard never had a chance. All passengers and crew, a total of 192 people, were lost. By Sunday evening, wreckage and bodies began washing ashore on Cape Cod. The disaster resonated throughout New England, especially in Portland, where many family members awaited their loved ones.

On December 19, photographer Thomas E. Marr filled out his claim to copyright in photos of pieces of the ship. Marr was a well known Boston society photographer whose subjects included Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner mansion and paintings. The Marr photos of pieces of the *Portland* were uncovered by the 2006 Junior Fellows in boxed copyright deposits that had not been opened in over a century.

The archives maintained by the Copyright Office, including records of registrations and deposits, are an important manifestation of America's cultural heritage and are a consequential supplement to the Main Catalog of the Library of Congress as a research tool. They may also enrich our understanding of historical events. ©

*In 2003, NOAA began an underwater survey of the Portland, which had been located in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Small items such as this bit of decor are not visible in the acoustic survey of the wreckage.*

