

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

I recently found some interesting information on the loss of ships on the shores of Humboldt, Mendocino and Del Norte counties from Eighteen Fifty through Nineteen Sixty Four. I have heard about a number of shipwrecks on our coast but I had no idea of the magnitude. In Humboldt County, from Eighteen Fifty to Nineteen Hundred, a span of fifty years, there were fifty seven ships lost due to collision, grounding and foundering compared to one hundred sixty six (almost three times as many) lost on the Mendocino Coast. Most were sailing ships but not all. In Eighteen Sixty, the two hundred foot side wheeler Northerner struck a rock off Centerville Beach with the loss of thirty eight lives. In Eighteen Sixty Three the tug Merrimac flipped in the Humboldt Bay entrance with the loss of her total crew of eighteen. In Eighteen Eighty Eight the steam schooner Mendocino wrecked on Humboldt Bar with the loss of a child. During the next fifty years, Nineteen O One through Nineteen Fifty, fifty three more vessels were lost in Humboldt compared to thirty in Mendocino. In Nineteen O Six the sailing schooner 'Corinthian' went down with all twelve aboard. In Nineteen O Seven, the same year the steamer Corona ran aground on Humboldt Bar with the loss of one life, the steamer Columbia, the first ship equipped with electric lights, collided with the steam schooner San Pedro off Shelter Cove resulting in the loss of eighty seven. In Nineteen Sixteen, the ocean liner Bear struck rocks with a loss of five. The four hundred twenty six foot Navy Cruiser U.S.S. Milwaukee went aground on Samoa Beach in Nineteen Seventeen with a crew of four hundred thirty eight. No lives were lost. In Nineteen Twenty One, the ocean liner Alaska struck Blunts Reef with a loss of forty two lives. In Nineteen Thirty One, the schooner Brooklyn capsized on Humboldt Bar with the loss of eighteen. Nineteen Forty One saw the tanker Emedio torpedoed by a Japanese submarine off Cape Mendocino with a loss of five. From Nineteen Fifty One through Nineteen Sixty Four, twelve more ships were lost in Humboldt compared to five in Mendocino, making a total of one hundred twenty two ships lost in one hundred and twelve years in Humboldt and two hundred one ships lost in Mendocino for the same period. Why the huge amount of ships in Mendocino? The county had no safe harbors and the sailing ships anchored or tied up off shore to load and unload becoming victims of heavy seas and treacherous currents that broke mooring lines and dragged anchors. This same one hundred twelve years saw eighteen vessels wrecked in Del Norte County which included the tragic loss of two hundred forty four lives when the steam side wheeler Brother Jonathon ran onto St. George Reef just west of Crescent City. Over the years, improved vessels and maritime navigation drastically reduced ship loss. That's the good news.

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