

A dark, blue-tinted underwater photograph of a shipwreck. The scene is dimly lit, showing the skeletal remains of a vessel's hull and various pieces of debris scattered on the seabed. The overall atmosphere is somber and mysterious.

The Shipwrecks of Cape Elizabeth

Shipwrecks at a Glance

Preventing shipwrecks- a core reason for building lighthouses

- Ram Island Ledge- built in 1905 after 1900's *Californian* shipwreck

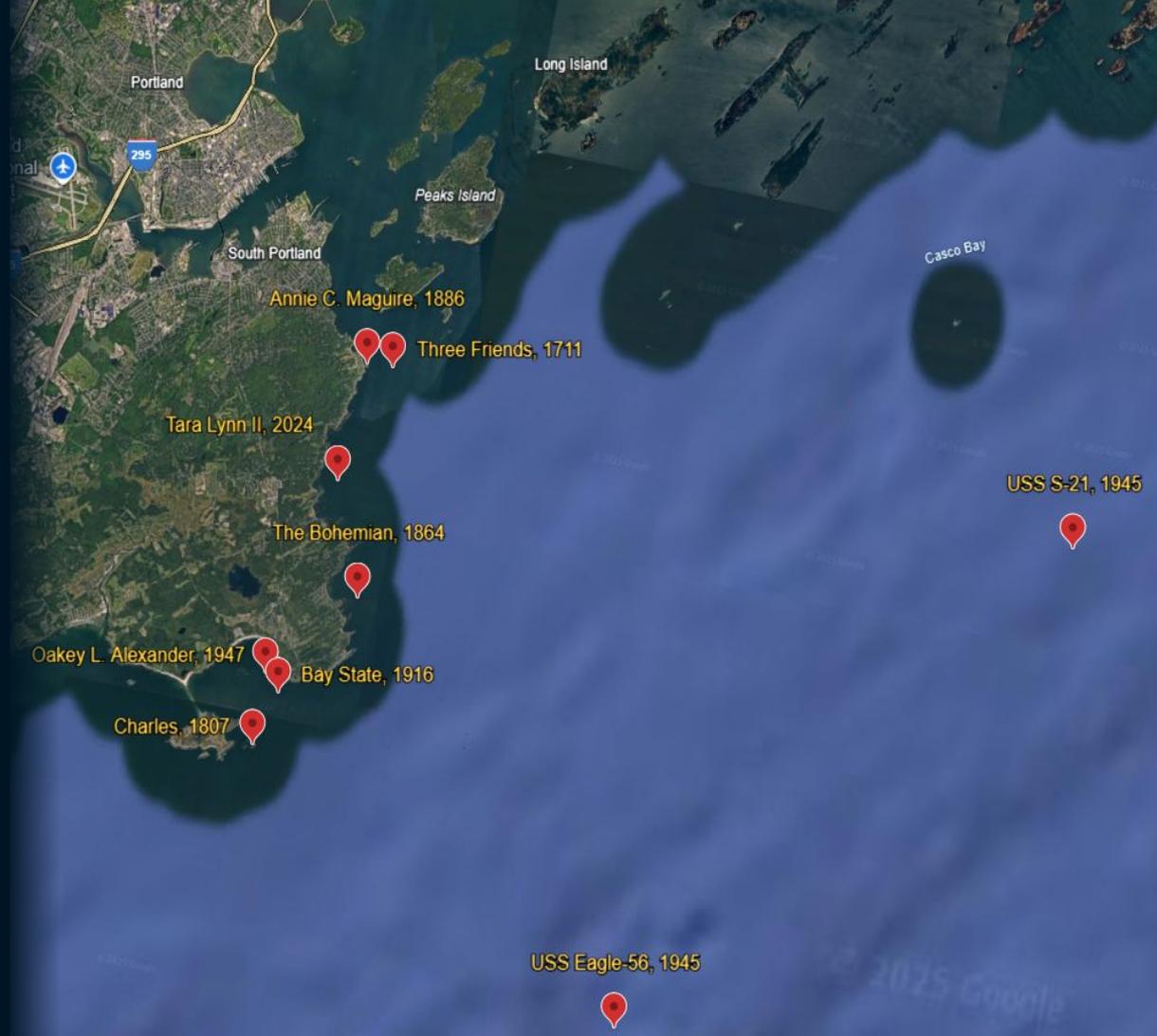
Nearly 100 ships have sunk off the coast of Cape Elizabeth. Why so many?

- Entryway into Portland Harbor
- Treacherously rocky coastline
- Fog from cold waters
- Rough Nor'easter storms
- Human error...



Nine Shipwrecks of Significance

1. Three Friends (1711)
2. Charles (1807)
3. Bohemian (1864)
4. Annie C. Maguire (1886)
5. Bay State (1916)
6. USS S-21 (1945)
7. USS Eagle-56 (1945)
8. Oakie L. Alexander (1947)
9. Tara Lynn II (2024)



Three Friends

October 16th, 1711

- A trade ship sailing to Boston from Scotland
- Stopped at New Casco Fort for resupply, in present-day Falmouth
- Set sail again during a storm—struck a ledge off Portland Head
- All 27 onboard the ship drowned.
- A salvage party spent many days recovering cargo around Ship Cove
- Shipwreck forgotten until its cannons were discovered by Peter Benoit in 1971



Charles

July 12th, 1807

- A schooner returning to Portland from Boston
- In thick fog at midnight the ship hit Watt's Ledge, by Richmond Island
- Of the 22 onboard, 16 drowned
- Captain Jacob Adams died while swimming back to save his family.
- Cabin boy Thomas Phillips drowned while being rescued
- Lydia Carver – “the Ghost Bride of Crescent Beach”



Bohemian

February 22nd, 1864

- A steam ship, sailing to Portland from Liverpool, England
- 99 crew and 219 passengers onboard
- Haze caused the crew to think they were further from the shore
- The ship struck Alden's Rock- alert bell had recently been removed
- Distress signal mistaken as fanfare for Washington's birthday
- 42 people died, including 16 from a tragic lifeboat accident



WRECK OF THE "BOHEMIAN" AS SEEN THE MORNING AFTER SHE SUNK.

Annie C. Maguire

Dec. 24th, 1886

- A clipper previously named *Golden State* (1853-1883). One of the fastest ships of its kind
- Sailing from Buenos Aires to Quebec that December
- Caught in a winter storm offshore
- The ship crashed right against the rocks off Portland Head Light.
- The Strout's Christmas feast was devoured by the half-starved crew
- The ship was eventually lost to the sea during a New Year's Day storm



Bay State

September 23rd, 1916

- A steam ship, running the Portland & Boston line– built in 1895
- Caught on the shallow ledge at McKinney's Point, during an early morning fog
- All aboard were rescued by breeching buoy
- As the ship could not be moved, it sat there for several months
- Became a temporary tourist attraction
- Storms eventually broke and battered the wreckage away



USS S-21

March 23rd, 1945

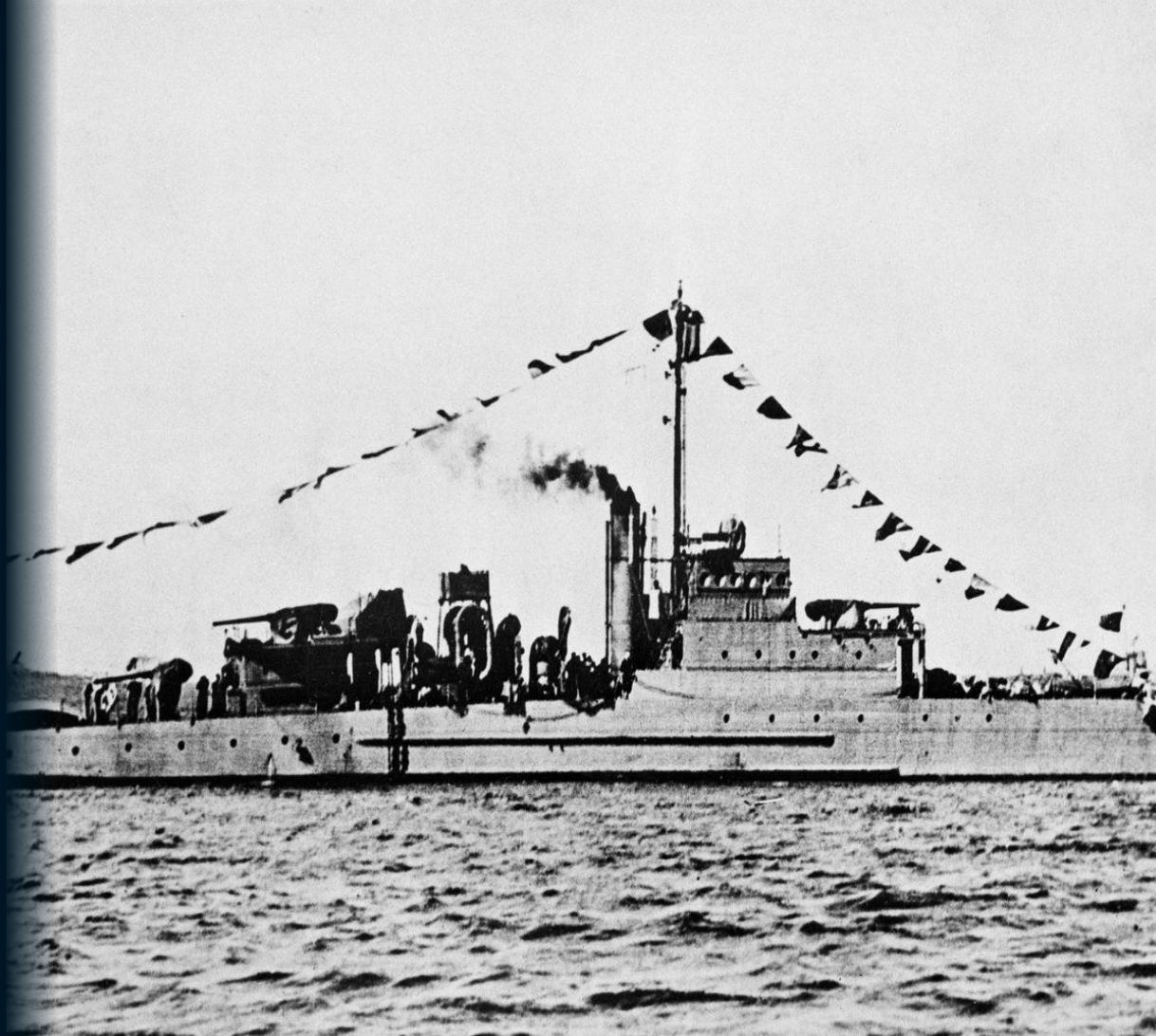
- An S-Class submarine
- Served in a 1928 expedition that helped pioneer Marine Geophysics
- Served in locations such as the Panama Canal, Pearl Harbor, and New London, CT
- Used during WWII as a test target for submarine detection
- Gifted to the UK's Royal Navy in late 1942, and served until returned to the US Navy in 1944
- Deliberately sunk for target practice



USS Eagle-56

April 23rd, 1945

- An Eagle-Class patrol boat
- Served Naval Air Station Brunswick in 1945
- The ship was suddenly torpedoed around noon by *U-853*
- Only 13 of its 62 sailors survived.
- The Navy claimed that a boiler explosion caused the wreck
- The Navy finally declared the wreck as a military casualty in 2001.
- In 2018, the shipwreck was finally discovered– with its boiler intact.



Oakey L. Alexander

March 3rd, 1947

- A freight ship- carrying 8,200 tons of coal from Virginia to Portland
- The ship got caught out a sea in a major winter storm.
- A wave described as 80 feet high snapped the bow off from the ship
- The crew sailed the vessel directly into the shore, catching ledge off McKinney's Point
- All crewmembers were rescued by breeching buoy
- Some of its coal and most of the hull was eventually salvaged



Tara Lynn II

January 13th, 2024

- A 49-foot trawler hauling over 5,000 pounds of catch
- The boat's navigator fell asleep at the wheel, as its autopilot directed the boat into shallow waters
- Ran aground near Trundy Point
- Record-breaking storm surges made exiting the boat unsafe
- Ultimately rescued by the Cape Elizabeth FD's WET Team
- Dragged to shore and dismantled a week later



Concluding Thoughts

Despite the recent wreck of *Tara Lynn II*, major futures wrecks are unlikely.

- Seafaring is much safer today
- Lighthouses function as cultural symbols of a bygone era
- Debate over continued service of warning buoys and alert bells
- A record 153 cruise ships sailed to Portland in 2024– over 200,000 people

The waters off Cape Elizabeth should be appreciated as a graveyard.



Further Reading and Resources:

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