

= SS Winfield Scott =

SS Winfield Scott was a sidewheel steamer that transported passengers and cargo between San Francisco , California and Panama in the early 1850s , during the California Gold Rush . After entering a heavy fog off the coast of Southern California on the evening of December 1 , 1853 , the ship crashed into Middle Anacapa Island . All 450 passengers and crew survived , but the ship was lost .

Winfield Scott has been the object of numerous salvage operations since the crash , and currently rests underwater as part of the Channel Islands National Park and Marine Sanctuary . The Winfield Scott wreck site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places .

= = History = =

= = = California Gold Rush = = =

The discovery of gold at Sutter 's Mill in 1848 brought thousands of people to California in search of fortune until the late 1850s . Since neither the Panama Canal nor the First Transcontinental Railroad had been constructed , people emigrating to California from the Eastern United States had three main routes of passage . They could travel over land , which was expensive and dangerous , or they could sail the roughly 14 @, @ 000 @-@ mile (23 @, @ 000 km) route around South America . This was more attractive to some but no less dangerous , due in part to the rough waters of the Drake Passage . In addition to the inherent dangers of either route , the journey often took as long as six months to complete .

The third route involved traversing the jungles of the Isthmus of Panama , then departing via the southern coast of Panama . While this cut the length of the sea journey in half , ships to ferry passengers from Panama to San Francisco were not commonplace . As a result , many had to wait months to complete the second half of their journey . To fill this growing need for swift passage from Panama to California , shipbuilding activities increased dramatically .

= = = Construction and service = = =

Winfield Scott (originally to be named Placer) was constructed by the shipbuilding company Westervelt and MacKay of New York , and was completed in March 1850 . The ship was named for the celebrated United States Army general Winfield Scott (the stern was built with a bust in his likeness) , and she was launched on 27 October 1850 . An announcement in the October 20 edition of the New York Herald stated that " We understand that no expense has been spared to secure strength , safety and speed ... " Her hull was wooden with double iron bracing and was made from White oak , Live oak , Locust , Redcedar and Georgia yellow pine .

The steamer , owned by Davis , Brooks and Company , initially transported passengers on the New York @-@ New Orleans route . In 1852 , the ship 's ownership was transferred to the New York and San Francisco Steamship Company Line , and she arrived in San Francisco on April 28 , 1852 . Once there , she began taking gold seekers , nicknamed argonauts , on the Panama Route (between San Francisco and Panama) . After the demise of the New York and San Francisco Steamship Company Line (which had been renamed as the New York and California Steamship Company in May 1853) , the ship 's ownership was again transferred on July 8 , 1853 , this time to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company .

= = = Last voyage = = =

Winfield Scott , bound for Panama , departed from San Francisco on the morning of 1 December 1853 . In addition to her complement of passengers and crew , the ship was transporting a shipment of gold bullion worth an estimated US \$ 2 million . The ship 's progress was slowed in the afternoon

when repairs had to be made to a leaking boiler , but she had resumed course at full speed . Later that evening , Captain Simon F. Blunt navigated the ship into the Santa Barbara Channel in an effort to save time . Captain Blunt knew the channel well , having helped survey the area a few years previously .

At approximately 11 PM , the ship encountered a heavy fog , and ran aground into Middle Anacapa Island (approximately 400 miles from port) . Her speed at the time of the wreck was estimated at 10 knots (19 km / h ; 12 mph) . She struck the island bow first , and when Capt. Blunt attempted to back away the stern was struck , removing the ship 's rudder . With the ship taking on massive amounts of water and unable to steer , all aboard , perhaps as many as 500 people , began scrambling for land . The ship was completely evacuated in approximately two hours , and the survivors spent the first night camped on a pinnacle of rock that measured 50 by 25 yards (46 by 23 m) . The next day they moved to a larger piece of land on the island .

One of the passengers , Asa Cyrus Call , recalled " a terrible jar and crashing of timbers ... I hurried out on deck , where my attention was fixed on a wall of towering cliffs , the tops of which were hidden by the fog and darkness and appeared about to fall and crush us . All round was the loud booming of angry breakers surging about invisible rocks . "

On 2 December , the steamship SS California , returning to San Francisco from Panama , was alerted to the presence of the wreck survivors by the smoke of a gun they had fired . California rescued the women and children , as well as Winfield Scott 's complement of gold bullion . On 9 December California returned to rescue the remaining passengers . The crew stayed behind to recover as much of the mail and passenger luggage as possible . Winfield Scott , however , had sustained too much damage and was left in the waters of the channel .

= = Wreckage and salvage = =

The remains of Winfield Scott are located under 25 ? 30 feet (7 @ . @ 6 ? 9 @ . @ 1 m) of water in the Channel Islands National Park and Marine Sanctuary . The wreckage site was verified in 1981 and was registered with the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 . The site is protected by California and United States law , which prohibits divers from removing any part of the wreckage .

A salvage operation was undertaken in 1894 , utilizing San Pedro . Much of the iron machinery , as well as hundreds of copper bolts , were recovered . An additional salvage operation during World War II recovered additional iron and brass for the war effort .

The remaining wreckage is considered important from an historical perspective , as it represents a tangible example of mid @ - @ 19th century shipbuilding . Although much of the wooden hull has long since disintegrated , some of the machinery is still relatively intact .

Between 1853 and 1980 , more than 140 shipwrecks were documented in the Channel Islands National Park Marine Sanctuary . As of December 2000 , twenty sites had been located . The prevailing currents and weather conditions of the area make it a dangerous place for navigation .

= = Legacy = =

= = = Light beacon = = =

Shortly after the wreck , the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey recommended that a permanent lighthouse facility be built on Anacapa Island . Due to a lack of funding , the installation (an unmanned acetylene beacon on a fifty @ - @ foot tower) was not constructed until 1912 . The tower was replaced by a lighthouse in 1932 .

= = = Impact on local ecosystem = = =

One possible lingering effect of the Winfield Scott 's wreck was the introduction of black rats to the ecosystem of the Channel Islands . While the wreck is one possible source for the arrival of rats on

Anacapa , another is the later construction of a lighthouse . The first mention of rats on the island is in 1907 .

The black rats were a major disruption to the local wildlife on Anacapa Island and are still a problem on San Miguel Island . The black rats were successfully eradicated from Anacapa Island by 2003 , with a controversial program that involved an aerial application of the rodenticide brodifacoum , the first such eradication in the United States . The program cost nearly \$ 1 million .