Huron, USS

by Kathy Carter, 2006

The USS Huron remains one of the most famous shipwrecks in North Carolina’s Graveyard of the Atlantic. A man-of-war steamer, the Huron ran aground off Nags Head in the early morning hours of 24 Nov. 1877 while on a routine survey expedition from New York to the Caribbean via Key West. A failure to adjust course to account for a slight eastward curve of the coastline caused the 541-ton, steam-powered ship to ground on a reef just off the beach. High seas broke apart the barkentine-rigged vessel over the course of the predawn hours. Of 16 officers aboard only 4 survived, and 85 of 115 crewmen perished.

The wreck happened just two miles from one of seven lifesaving stations erected on the Outer Banks in 1874, but it occurred after the lifesaving season of the summer and fall had ended; observers on the beach could do little more than watch the Huron’s destruction. Mourned nationally, the tragedy led to reforms in the U.S. Lifesaving Service, including extension of the lifesaving patrol season and construction of additional lifesaving stations along North Carolina’s coast and elsewhere. The remains of the vessel lie submerged off Nags Head.

References:


David Stick, Graveyard of the Atlantic: Shipwrecks of the North Carolina Coast (1952).

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