A Brief Note on a Previously Unrecorded South Florida Shipwreck: The Iron Queen (1849)
By Christopher Eck

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While conducting some other historical research, I came across the following brief note (see Figure 1) on a shipwreck that was published in the Bahamian newspaper, The Nassau Guardian and Colonial Advertiser, on Wednesday, November 21, 1849.1 Having worked for the Broward County Historical Commission when the agency was awarded a state grant to conduct an inventory of known shipwrecks and marine archaeological sites in 2006, I realized that this was a vessel whose loss had not been recorded in any other published sources relating to wrecks along the South Florida coast.2

Figure 1. The Nassau Guardian and Colonial Advertiser, Wednesday, November 21, 1849, p. 3, col. 4. Courtesy of Paper of Record.com.
In 1849, the mouth of the New River – which has shifted over time – was not open in its present location at the entrance to Port Everglades; rather, it was several miles south about where Sheridan Street meets the Intracoastal Waterway in the City of Hollywood. If this is an accurate reference point by which to measure the distance, “about 25 miles north of New River,” then it is likely that this British-flagged ship went ashore somewhere between Pompano Beach and southern Palm Beach County.

From this website it was also learned that the Iron Queen had been launched in Aberdeen in 1841, after her construction by the firm of Bowman, Vernon & Co. of Aberdeen, which built some of the earliest iron-hulled vessels to be sailed in the world. Her initial owner was an Aberdeen lawyer named James McHardy.

She is described as having had one deck, three masts, no galleries and been adorned with a female figurehead. The website has information on the ship only between 1841 – the time of her launch – and 1849, which matches with the facts presented in the brief newspaper piece. The website notes that the data on the ship’s design, configuration, dimensions and masters came from Lloyd’s Register of Shipping.

The masters of The Iron Queen were: Master Thomas Leisk (1841), Master O’Brien (1845), Master Pasley (1846-1847), and Master J. Jeans (1848-1849). Beginning in 1848, the owners were Robinson & Co., London, with that city being the ship’s home port registration.

Her dimensions are described as a length of 99.7 feet, a breadth of 25.7 feet, a depth of 15.2 feet and a gross tonnage of 349 or 350 tons. She is known to have made runs to Havana (1842), Mobile (1842), Galveston (1842, where she grounded on the bar), Rio de Janeiro (1845), Singapore (1846-1847), the Baltic (1848-1849), and Belize (1849), before she wrecked off the south Florida coast.

Though no other article of her loss has yet been found, it is likely that her wrecking was a total loss. The Aberdeen shipbuilding website has no further information on the ship after 1849 and another contemporary publication, a report published for the British House of Commons in 1851, states that the owner (A. Robinson) petitioned the British government for a return of the duties paid on “tobacco, tea, & c.” that had been carried aboard the Iron Queen.

Perhaps there is a fateful irony with the ship’s name, the Iron Queen, as it comes from the moniker that (Scottish to be more precise) yard.
Appendix, No. 2.

A RETURN for the last Three Years to the present Time, showing the Applications which have been made to the Commissioners of Customs by Merchants and Others, in such Cases, to be allowed Credit for Pricking Notes in respect to the Articles Spirits, Tea, Tobacco, and Wine: or granted Duplicate: stating the Names of the Parties, the Dates of their Applications, the Dates of the Receipt of the same at the Petition Office, and the Dates of the Commissioners' Orders thereon; also the particular Nature of the Application in each Case, with Observations explanatory of the Cause in any Instance in which delay occurred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Applicants</th>
<th>Dates of Application</th>
<th>When received at Petition Office</th>
<th>Dates of Commissioners' Orders thereon</th>
<th>Nature of Application in each Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law, Ogilvy &amp; Co.</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>Credit for pricking notes for 240 galleons, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davitt &amp; Moore</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>Credit for pricking notes for 240 galleons, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. &amp; C. Todd &amp; Co.</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>Credit for pricking notes for 240 galleons, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lockhart &amp; Co.</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>Credit for pricking notes for 240 galleons, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesswright &amp; Mathis</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>Credit for pricking notes for 240 galleons, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knight &amp; Co.</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>Credit for pricking notes for 240 galleons, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Thomson &amp; Co.</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>Credit for pricking notes for 240 galleons, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Robinson</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>28 June 1849</td>
<td>Credit for pricking notes for 240 galleons, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations explanatory of the Cause in any Instance in which delay occurred.

Figure 4. Extract from the Second Report of the Select Committee of Customs that shows the request for a credit for duties paid for goods on the Iron Queen. Courtesy of Google Books.

Odysseus gives to Persephone, the queen of the underworld. After eight years of peregrinations ranging from Scotland to Southeast Asia, to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, this Scottish-built iron barque wrecked on the shores of South Florida and appears to have been a total loss. Discovering her name once again gives life to her memory, just as Persephone could seasonally arise from her home in Hades and return to the land of the living. After more than 160 years, it now may be possible for someone living in South Florida to find and identify her long-lost remains somewhere along the area’s sunlit shores.

Credits: Images for the Customs Report and The Civil Engineer and Architect’s Journal come from the massive book-scanning project undertaken by Google Books. The image from the Nassau Guardian comes from the research service Paper of Record. Text for the articles about the Iron Queen in Asia comes from images scanned by the National Library of Singapore.


2. This wreck was unknown at the time of the shipwreck archaeology inventory undertaken by the Broward County Historical Commission in 2007, nor listed in Steven D. Singer’s well-known guide on wrecks in Florida, Shipwrecks of Florida — A Comprehensive Listing (2nd ed.) Sarasota, FL: Pineapple Press, 1998, or other known recently published sources.


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.


8. The Iron Queen was noted as being involved in a lawsuit following her arrival in the port of Penang in June 1846. There were two brief articles published in the Singapore newspaper, The Straits Times, concerning her that are reprinted here. The Straits Times (Singapore), 24 June 1846, p. 2, “The barque Iron Queen from London arrived at the above port [Penang] on June 9th, and was expected shortly to quit for this port.” (<http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Article/straitstimes18460624.2.5.aspx> accessed February 1, 2010).

This was followed by another short notice on 2 September 1846, p. 3, which read: “The case of the barque Iron Queen was again argued in the Court on Saturday and Monday last, when the validity of the power of attorney sent out from England relative to the affairs of the vessel was disputed on technical grounds – the Hon. Mr. Church did not give judgment but referred the case to the Recorder at Penang.” (<http://newpapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Article/straitstimes18460902.2.10.aspx> accessed February 1, 2010).

9. Ibid.