

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

The British iron barquo called the Iron Queen from Belize bound to London, with a cargo of mahogany and logwood, went on shore on the main of Florida, about 25 miles north of New River, in the latter part of October. Four of the Cay West wreckers have been to her, but the wood was so unwieldy, they could not save it.

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.



Figure 2. Portion of the 1839 map of Florida prepared by the U.S. Army’s topographical engineers that depicts the former location of the New River Inlet. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Map Collection.

In trying to learn more about the *Iron Queen*, several additional sources were discovered that provide more details about this mystery ship. The *Iron Queen* is listed on a Scottish-run website, “Aberdeen Built Ships,” that describes many of the vessels constructed in the shipyards of that coastal city. This source confirms facts related in *The Nassau Guardian* article: that she was, indeed, an iron-hulled barque built by a British

(Scottish to be more precise) yard.³ 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.⁴

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*.⁵

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.⁶

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.⁷ 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)⁸, the Baltic (1848-1849), and Belize (1849), before she wrecked off the south Florida coast.⁹

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*.¹⁰

Perhaps there is a fateful irony with the ship’s name, the *Iron Queen*, as it comes from the moniker that

IRON SHIPS.—“*The Iron Queen.*”—We find that iron, as a material for ship-building, is fast gaining ground. For steamers, iron has been a favourite for some time past; and there is not now one wooden steamer building at this port, while we observe there are two iron ones, of the first class, nearly completed, and, we understand, contracts are made for the building of three more. We are also now satisfied, that the only objection to sailing vessels of iron, namely, the getting foul during a foreign voyage, is completely removed. This is proved by the result of two voyages of the *Iron Queen*. This barque, 350 tons register, left the river Tyne in February 1842, with 42 tons of coals for Havana; from thence she went to Mobile for a cargo of cotton for this port. She has now completed another voyage, from this port to Galveston, in Texas, carrying 300 tons of salt out, and a full cargo of cotton home. She has been in the Graving dock, where she was visited by many persons, and she is found not to have strained a single rivet, although she struck heavily on Galveston Bar. There is no appearance of corrosion, the red lead being fresh on the plates; and neither shells, barnacles, nor any foulness, was on her bottom. This desirable result is caused by the simple application of a compound of tallow, bright varnish, arsenic, and brimstone, which effectually destroys marine, vegetable, and animal substances. *The Iron Queen* was built by Messrs. John Vernon and Co., of Aberdeen, and has proved very creditable to their skill as builders. The surveyors for Lloyd’s here are so well satisfied that there is no corrosion that they have classed her A. 1.—*Liverpool Albion.*

Figure 3. The article from *The Civil Engineer and Architect’s Journal*. *Scientific and Railway Gazette*. Courtesy of Google Books.

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 specific cases, to be allowed Credit for Pricking Notes in respect to the Articles SPIRITS, TEA, TOBACCO and WINE; or granted Duplicates; 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.

NAMES of APPLICANTS.	Dates of Application.	When received at Petition Office.	Dates of Commissioners' Orders thereon.	Nature of Application in each Case.	Observations explanatory of the Cause in any instance in which delay occurred.
Law, Ogilby, Moore & Co.	27 June 1846	27 June 1846	27 June 1846	Credit for pricking notes for 54 galls. wine, Ex Troubadore.	
Devitz & Moore - -	4 Oct. "	4 Oct. "	4 Oct. "	Credit for pricking notes for 57 galls. wine, Ex Alice Mand.	
H. & C. Tomlin - -	23 Oct. "	23 Oct. "	23 Oct. "	Credit for pricking notes for 3 quarter casks wine, Ex Athenian.	
Lockhart & Co. - -	21 Mar. 1846	21 Mar. 1846	21 Mar. 1846	Credit for pricking notes for 15 pascheons rum, Ex Etheldred.	
Chocwright & Miskin -	5 Apr. "	5 Apr. "	5 Apr. "	Credit for pricking notes for 18 casks wine, Ex Rising Sun.	
Knight & Co. - -	7 Apr. "	7 Apr. "	7 Apr. "	Credit for pricking notes for 2 casks spirits, 1 pipe tobacco, Ex Industry.	
T. Thomson & Co. - -	2 May "	4 May "	4 May "	Credit for pricking notes for 3 casks brandy, 1 cask wine, Ex Index.	
A. Robinson - -	16 May "	16 May "	16 May "	Credit for pricking notes for tobacco, tea, &c. Ex Iron Queen.	

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 in a long-forgotten article, though,

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.

1. *The Nassau Guardian and Colonial Advertiser*, Wednesday, November 21, 1849, p. 3, col. 4.

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.

3. "Aberdeen Built Ships," 27 lines (10 January 2009) <<http://www.aberdeenships.com/single.asp?offset=60&searchFor=barque&index=113227>>.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid; see also Auguste Morel, *Manuel de l'Assereur ou Vade-Mecum du Commerce Maritime*, No. 5, Paris: Chez l'Auteur, 1845-46, p. 387.

7. Ibid. and *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal. Scientific and Railway Gazette*, VI (1843), London: R. Groombridge, p. 163.

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://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Article/straitstimes18460902.2.10.aspx>> accessed February 1, 2010).

9. Ibid.

10. United Kingdom, House of Commons, *Second Report of the Select Committee of Customs*. Part III, Appendix. London: 1851, Appendix No. 2, p. 1493.