



# The Sinking of the SS Central America: The Tragic Story of the Richest Shipwreck in History

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures \*Includes accounts of the sinking written by passengers \*Includes a bibliography for further reading \*Includes a table of contents “Captain Herndon pointed to the thinning clouds and predicted that their breaking up portended an end to the storm. He spoke to the men at the pumps; he cheered the men in the bailing lines. He told them he thought the storm was abating, and that if they would just continue to bail until noon, the steamer might be saved. … Though the passengers received the captain’s comments with great cheer, Herndon knew his hope was false. He knew the sea would rise again and the wind would blow with even greater fury. He knew that a ship floating 750 tons of iron with water filling her hold, and more water constantly rushing in, could remain afloat but a short while longer.” – Gary Kinder, *Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea: The History and Discovery of the World’s Richest Shipwreck* There have been countless numbers of shipwrecks over the course of history, but few have had as great an impact as the sinking of the SS Central America in a hurricane in September 1857. The California Gold Rush was in full swing, state of the art steamer ships were used to transport the discovered gold back east, and the Central America was one of them. On its fateful voyage, the ship was carrying nearly 600 passengers and a huge haul of up to 20 tons of gold worth an estimated \$2 million at the time. On the way from Cuba to New York City, the Central America was caught in a Stage 2 hurricane that it never had a chance of knowing about ahead of time. With winds over 100 miles per hour, the hurricane ripped its sails, and the ship started taking on water while struggling to keep its boiler going. These conditions all but doomed the ship, and while over 150 passengers were ferried in lifeboats to another ship for rescue, the intensity of the storm kept the other passengers of the Central America away from salvation. When the ship finally sank, 425 passengers went down with it, and only a handful of survivors were picked up in the ensuing days. The loss of life was a big enough calamity, but the Central America had gone down with so much gold that it scared the American public, which was already beginning to deal with a financial downturn that culminated in the Panic of 1857. This was understandable given that the ship was carrying the modern equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars, and in fact, when 20th century salvage teams located the search and began bringing gold back up to the surface, they found one 80 pound piece that immediately became the most valuable piece of currency in the world. Naturally, lawsuits over the recovered gold sprang up, and the Central America has remained controversial ever since. *The Sinking of the SS Central America: The Tragic Story of the Richest Shipwreck in History* chronicles the tragic fate of the ship, the tribulations the survivors had to endure in the aftermath of the sinking, and its impact on the Panic of 1857. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the USS Indianapolis like never before, in no time at all.



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