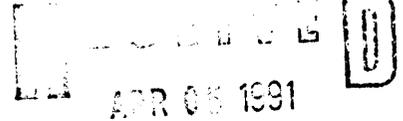




United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name \_\_\_\_\_  
other names/site number J Street Wreck

2. Location

street & number Foot of J Street, Sacramento River  not for publication  
city, town Sacramento  vicinity  
state California code 06 county Sacramento code 067 zip code 95814

3. Classification

|  |  |                                     |                  |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Ownership of Property                            | Category of Property                     | Number of Resources within Property |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> private                 | <input type="checkbox"/> building(s)     | Contributing                        | Noncontributing  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-local            | <input type="checkbox"/> district        | _____                               | _____ buildings  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site | <u>1</u>                            | _____ sites      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal          | <input type="checkbox"/> structure       | _____                               | _____ structures |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> object          | _____                               | _____ objects    |
|  |  | <u>1</u>                            | _____ Total      |

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
Kathryn Guethart 3/26/91  
Signature of certifying official Date  
California State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet. Antoinette Blue 5/16/91  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)

fn Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
TRANSPORTATION: water-related

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
VACANT: NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

NA

foundation NA

walls

roof

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

A shipwreck which may be the storeship Sterling lies under 30 feet of water, perpendicular to the shore, in the Sacramento River, California. The vessel remains extend 82 feet, 7-inches from the floodwall of the river at the foot of J Street in the City of Sacramento. The Sacramento River, a freshwater stream, is 400 feet wide and flows from the Sierra Nevada range southwest into San Francisco Bay. The vessel is partially buried beneath five to ten feet of rip-rap composed of small to medium sized cobbles and large granite blocks. [1] The vessel remains are also partially covered by a second wreck, which may be a flat-bottomed riverboat or barge. The bottom around the wrecks is composed of sand, silt, and gravel. Numerous ceramic and glass artifacts and iron debris, including pipe, ore carts, wire, and parking meters litter the immediate riverbed.

Sterling as Built

As built in 1833, Sterling was a 201 28/95-ton brig, 88 feet, 2 1/2-inches in length, with a 23-foot, 1 1/2-inch beam and an 11-foot, 1 1/2-inch depth of hold. Her registry documents describe Sterling as having two masts (brig-rigged, both masts were square-rigged) one deck, a square stern with no galleries, and a billethead. [2] Built for the coastal trade, Sterling was a small, beamy, bluff-bowed vessel sheathed with copper. Her registry documents record no major alteration or reconstruction in her sixteen-year career prior to the California Gold Rush.

Vessel Remains at the Site

The vessel which may be Sterling lies on her port side in 10 to 30 feet of water and extends perpendicularly from the river bank to a point 82 feet, 7-inches from the floodwall at the foot of J Street. The starboard side of the vessel is visible for approximately 44 feet before gradually disappearing beneath rip-rap; the last visible frame on the starboard side appears at 38 feet, 7-inches from the floodwall. At this point the hull disappears beneath rip-rap. [3]. The keel is evident near the bow and joins the stem, which rises approximately 10 feet before

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Maritime History

Architecture

Commerce

Transportation

Archeology: Historic/non-aboriginal

Period of Significance

1849-1855

Significant Dates

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The wreck which lies at the foot of J Street, which may be the remains of the brig Sterling built in Massachusetts in 1833, is of NATIONAL significance because of her association with the California Gold Rush. This event undeniably shaped the economic history of the United States, the development of the Pacific Coast, and the founding of the major ports of San Francisco and Sacramento. Her participation in maritime commerce and transportation on the eastern seaboard prior to the Gold Rush contributes to her NATIONAL significance. As approximately 60% of her hull remains intact, she is of NATIONAL significance as an excellent example of early 19th century coastal sailing craft naval architecture. Documenting her construction will yield important information on early 19th century shipbuilding. Moreover, her interior will likely yield abundant artifact deposits documenting her role as the only known surviving Sacramento storeship and dispersion point for goods entering the gold fields from around the world.

The remains of the second vessel at the site are considered a non-contributing element.

This statement of significance is based on the discussion which follows:

**Sterling's Role in Pre-Gold Rush Maritime Commerce**

The brig Sterling was built by Samuel A. Frazar of Duxbury, Massachusetts, in 1833. Frazar was a part owner of the vessel along with George P. Richardson of Duxbury and Jonathan Bush of Boston. [1] Sterling's early career was largely undocumented; she apparently was frequently employed in the coastal trade. In 1838 Frazar sold his interest in the vessel to Jonathan Bush and

See continuation sheet

1

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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Please see attached.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreeage of property .1

**UTM References**

A 

|      |   |   |   |         |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------|---|---|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1    | 0 | 6 | 3 | 0       | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4        | 2 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Zone |   |   |   | Easting |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |

B 

|      |  |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|--|--|--|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|      |  |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

C 

|      |  |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|--|--|--|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|      |  |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

D 

|      |  |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|--|--|--|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|      |  |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

See continuation sheet

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

Beginning at the northwest corner of the foot of J Street, thence running due west 300' into the Sacramento River, then 90 degrees due south 50', thence 90 degrees to the southwest corner of the foot of J Street, then 50' due north to the beginning point.

See continuation sheet

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**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries encompass the remains of the vessel and the immediately surrounding area.

See continuation sheet

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**11. Form Prepared By**

---

name/title James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian  
organization National Park Service date May 20, 1987  
street & number Box 37127 telephone (202) 343-9528  
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20013-7127

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ending at an abraded and worn scarp joint. The port hull is buried beneath silt and sand; the starboard hull extends to a level just above the waterline near the sheerstrake; beyond this level, the frames and outer hull planking are missing. The hull is copper-sheathed, and the stem near the keel is overlaid with lead sheathing.

A shackle for a single bobstay is attached to the stem; the bobstay is missing, apparently the vessel was down-rigged prior to her sinking. Bar style chainplates (which generally date prior to 1860) lie loosely scattered around the starboard hull; one chainplate, attached to a fragment of ceiling planking and frame by a chainplate bolt, lies loosely wedged between two frames on the starboard hull. Surviving preventer bolts for chainplates are attached to frames approximately 30 feet aft of the stem on the starboard hull.

Two iron hawse pipes, originally set into the hull with lead, lie detached from the hull alongside the bow. The starboard hawse has stud-link anchor chain passing through it, one end running into the bow, where it disappears into silt and gravel, the other end running for a short distance before it disappears into the river-bed. The vessel was anchored when she sank. [4] Inside the hull, which lies open because the decks are missing, at least one breasthook remains in place with its eking, butting into the stemson at a 45 degree angle. The interior of the hull is heavily silted and numerous glass, ceramic, and metal artifacts litter it. [5] The stub of a mast lies in situ, apparently stepped, in the area of the chainplate preventer bolts. It is believed that this is the foremast of the vessel. The rip-rap, which fills the hull beyond this point, and the second wreck lying over the hull preclude further investigation of the interior at this time. The remainder of the vessel, including the stern, are presumed to lie beneath the rip-rap as the run of the hull and frames continue into the bank at the same elevation until they disappear into the slope of the rip-rap. The rip-rap, placed at the site in 1914 when the floodwall was constructed, indicates a pre-1914 date of deposition for the wreck.

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The bluff-bowed appearance of the wreck, the seemingly exclusive use of copper fastenings in her construction, the copper sheathing, and the bar style chainplates indicate an early 19th century date of construction for the vessel; these factors, the historical accounts of Gold Rush storeships sinking on the river front of Sacramento, and the deposition beneath the rip-rap are strongly indicative of a Gold Rush era vessel. The ocean-going nature of the vessel, as attested by her copper sheathing, also speaks for a Gold Rush origin; after the Gold Rush hydraulic mining so heavily silted the Sacramento River that ocean-going craft were all but excluded and the river became the domain of shallow draft, flat-bottomed vessels.

The presence of a mast 30 feet aft of the stem indicates a two-masted rig; a three-masted vessel would have her foremast closer to the stem in a vessel of small size. The run of the hull is fairly established at the area of the chainplates, indicating that midships is located nearby; it is estimated that the 44-foot exposed portion of the hull represents approximately one-half of the ship, which would be an estimated 90 feet in length. The foremast would be stepped in an appropriate area for a 90-foot long vessel with two masts. While the hull is partially buried and has begun to collapse, the estimated beam is between 20 and 25 feet as determined by rough measurements in the hull near the foremast. The starboard hawse timbers are still in place on the bow, indicating the approximate depth of hold at the hawse's placement, roughly 12 feet from the keel. The forward areas of the bow are heavily damaged and the bow is twisted at a different angle from the rest of the hull. The vessel appears to have been partially dismantled or broken up, which would account for missing decks, the nearly uniform level of the surviving starboard hull, missing breasthooks, and possibly the damage to the bow. These factors, as well as the approximate vessel characteristics of a 90-foot length, 20- to 25-foot beam, and 12-foot depth of hold, and an apparent two-masted rig, would not conflict with an identification of the wreck as the remains of the partially broken up, 88 x 23 x 11-foot brig Sterling. Conclusive evidence of the vessel's identity is not available at this time, however.

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Second Vessel at the Site

The second vessel at the site lies atop the presumed Sterling remains. This vessel, constructed of a softer wood than the first wreck, is entirely iron-fastened and is not sheathed. The remains were deposited at the site on top of the first wreck after 1914; excavation around the second vessel's starboard hull indicates she lies atop the 1914-deposited rip-rap. [6] Not much of the second vessel survives; 63 feet of the port side, with a box-like bottom and sides, and the stern are visible. A portion of the starboard hull lies buried in silt and debris which have tumbled down the river bank. The bow is missing. The remains of three bulkheads are discernible inside the hull, as are three rudder posts and steering rods. No machinery or propulsion system of any type is present. The vessel has been tentatively identified as a late 19th or early 20th century flat-bottomed river craft which burned and sank. The interior of the hull is heavily charred. [7] A 1932 fire immediately across the river at Broderick destroyed a number of river boats and dozens of smaller barges and craft; the second vessel at the site may be a victim of that conflagration. [8]

1  
Espey, Huston & Associates, Spatial Limits of Two Historic Shipwrecks, J Street Area, Sacramento, California. (Austin, Texas: Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc., 1984) pp. 11-12.

2  
Works Progress Administration, eds. Ship Registers of the District of Plymouth, Massachusetts, 1789-1908. (Boston: The National Archives Project, 1939) p. 131.

3  
Espey, Huston & Associates, pp. 14-15.

4  
Ibid., pp. 14-16, pass. and personal observation.

5  
John W. Foster, An Assessment and Treatment of Impacts to Historic Shipwrecks in the Sacramento River. (Fair Oaks, California: Foothill Archaeological Services, 1985) p. 7.

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6  
Espey, Huston & Associates, p. 17.

7  
Ibid., pp. 17-18 pass.

8  
Edward Galland Zelinsky and Nancy Leigh Olmsted, Upriver Boats--  
When Red Bluff was the Head of Navigation. (San Francisco:  
California Historical Society, 1985) pp. 38-39.

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George Richardson, and Sterling's original master, Jonathan Smith, was replaced by Jonathan Twinning. [2] By this time Sterling had entered into the coastal packet trade, running between Boston and Philadelphia for the Union Line (later the Regular Line). The Union Line, established in February 1821, may have previously employed Sterling. Sterling, when operated by the Union Line, sailed every Saturday throughout the summer. Sterling continued these regular sailings for the Union Line through 1841. [3]

In 1843 Sterling was sold to new owners, Ezra Forster and James Briant, and her home port was changed to Beverly, Massachusetts, under the command of Charles J. Lovett. [4] Sterling probably remained in the coastal trade under Briant and Forster until the discovery of gold in California in 1848 altered her career.

#### Sterling in the California Gold Rush

News of the California gold discovery reached the eastern seaboard in the fall of 1848; by December of that year the demand for vessels to carry passengers and freight to the "new Eldorado" had reached a fevered pitch. On December 30, 1848, Sterling's ownership changed once more as she was readied for a voyage to San Francisco. James Briant assumed a new partner, Capt. Edmund K. Gallop of Beverly. Gallop would command the vessel. [5] Sterling was the first vessel to depart the small fishing port of Beverly for California's gold fields. On January 3, 1849, Sterling cleared Beverly with seven passengers and freight; one of her passengers, Edward P. Briant, was apparently a relative of owner James Briant. [6] Nothing is known of Sterling's 180-day passage to San Francisco by way of Cape Horn. She arrived at San Francisco on July 1, 1849, with her passengers safe and "cargo to order." [7] Unlike many larger Gold Rush arrivals, the tiny vessel could easily navigate the upper reaches of San Francisco Bay and the rivers which pierced California's heartland and led to the "gold diggings." By late August 1849 Sterling was reported up the San Joaquin River at the port of Stockton. [8] From Stockton Sterling moved to the Sacramento River and the bustling Gold Rush port of Sacramento, where she was reported moored on the river's "North Bank" on July 15, 1850, along with 62 other

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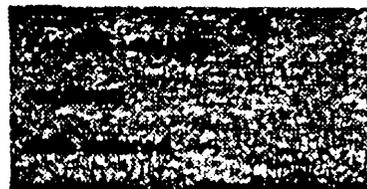
vessels. [9] At Sacramento, Sterling was converted into a floating warehouse or "storeship." Sterling was one of some thirty Gold Rush storeships moored off Sacramento, housing merchandise and businesses. The high costs of building materials and construction made the conversion of hundreds of laid-up vessels a profitable Gold Rush venture at the ports of San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, and Benicia. The account books of the Harbor Master at Sacramento record regular monthly payments of levee dues by the owners of the "Store Ship Sterling" through 1854. [10] Sterling was for a time moored between K and L Streets in 1851. Her location was probably shifted, as were the moorings of the other storeships. [11] By December of 1854, though, Sterling's days were coming to an end. She was reported "Drying up...Like the old toper among a lot of empty gin and whisky casks, the bark [sic] Sterling is daily becoming drier and drier" as business declined. [12]

Sterling sank at her moorings during the winter of 1855. In October and November, 1855, the City of Sacramento contracted with various parties to clear the partially submerged hulk. Work commenced on October 11, 1855; by October 17 "skinning of the exposed side was completed yesterday, and the disjointing commenced....," while pumps attempted to clear the holds of water to float her free of the mud. [13] On October 26 it was noted that "Mr. H. Horton, subcontractor for raising the hulk "Sterling," was engaged in stopping leaks, by means of submarine armor in the larboard [port] side of the hulk, preparatory to pumping it out and cutting it into sections for removal." [14] Work evidently went slowly, for on October 29 it was reported that gunpowder would be used to break Sterling up "or at least [have] the effect of loosening her in her bed [so] that the disjointing process may be facilitated." [15] The gunpowder was partly successful in breaking up part of the bow; on November 2 the "cutwater, breasthooks, and forward paraphernalia ...were landed...on the levee." [16] Finally, on November 16, Sterling reportedly was "dragged piecemeal from her moorings. Ald(erman) Polley said so, and his brothers of the Council concurring, the contractors have been voted the full measure of their bond, but we are reliably informed that the job has been a losing one." [17] The mud which enshrouded Sterling's hull had created great

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difficulty, and the silted hull was probably not completely removed, just cleared and broken down to the river bed, which by that time was heavily silted. The difficult salvage, with little "return" in salvage from a partially broken up hulk, would have made the job a losing proposition. Sterling's obituary was panned by a waggish newspaper editor who lamented her disappearance from the Sacramento scene and his columns:

Though other ships may come  
and other bards may sing,  
Strange matters oft transpire  
Here's health to thee, STERLING!

Here's a hand for those who love thee--  
Here's a smile for those who hate,  
A sigh for those who don't deplore,  
Thy twisted, watery fate!

Great scarcity of items  
May make reporters sulk  
But when we have our columns full  
We'll drink to thee, "old hulk." [18]

#### Archeological Potential

Maritime archeological research in the United States has not generally concentrated on generic American craft of the early 19th century. Those years saw the development of large numbers of "typical" American craft such as the coastal packets (of which Sterling was one example), coastal schooners, clipper ships, and the "Downeasters." The survival of a large portion of the architecturally intact remains of the vessel presumed to be Sterling offers a unique opportunity to observe the naval architectural technique used in a small, ocean-going Massachusetts brig of 1833 and to check materials used and methods of construction against treatises on 19th century shipbuilding to assess what may be regional variation in practice, "representational," typical, and individual preference on the part of the master carpenter and his shipwrights and hence

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work toward a more detailed understanding of early 19th century American wooden shipbuilding.

The presence of materials inside the hull may offer archeological evidence of the types of goods stored in a Sacramento Gold Rush storeship. The excavation of the interior of the vessel may offer a unique archeological perspective on the role of the storeship as well as the process of material cultural infiltration from various world ports to Sacramento much as the excavation of the San Francisco storeship Niantic did in 1978. While Sterling may have been largely "cleaned out" prior to her sinking, some goods must have remained inside and were not salvaged due to silting and ruination by flooding. Detailed archeological investigation of the vessel's remains and interior in the future most probably will yield information important to assessing Gold Rush activities on the Sacramento riverfront between 1850 and 1855.

1

Works Progress Administration, eds. Ship Registers of the District of Plymouth, Massachusetts, 1789-1908. (Boston: The National Archives Project, 1939) p. 131.

2

Works Progress Administration, eds. Ship Registers of Boston, Massachusetts, 1831-1840. (Boston: The National Archives Project, 1939) p. 768.

3

Carl C. Cutler, Queens of the Western Ocean. (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1961) p. 420.

4

Ship Registers of Boston, Massachusetts.... p. 778.

5

A. Frank Hitchings, comp. Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts. (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1906) p. 176.

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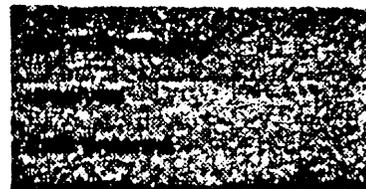
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- 14  
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- 15  
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- 16  
Democratic State Journal, November 2, 1855.

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18

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Hitching, A. Frank, comp. Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts Salem: The Essex Institute, 1906.

MacGowan, Joseph A. The Sacramento Waterfront, 1848-1875 Sacramento: Sacramento Museum and History Department, n.d.

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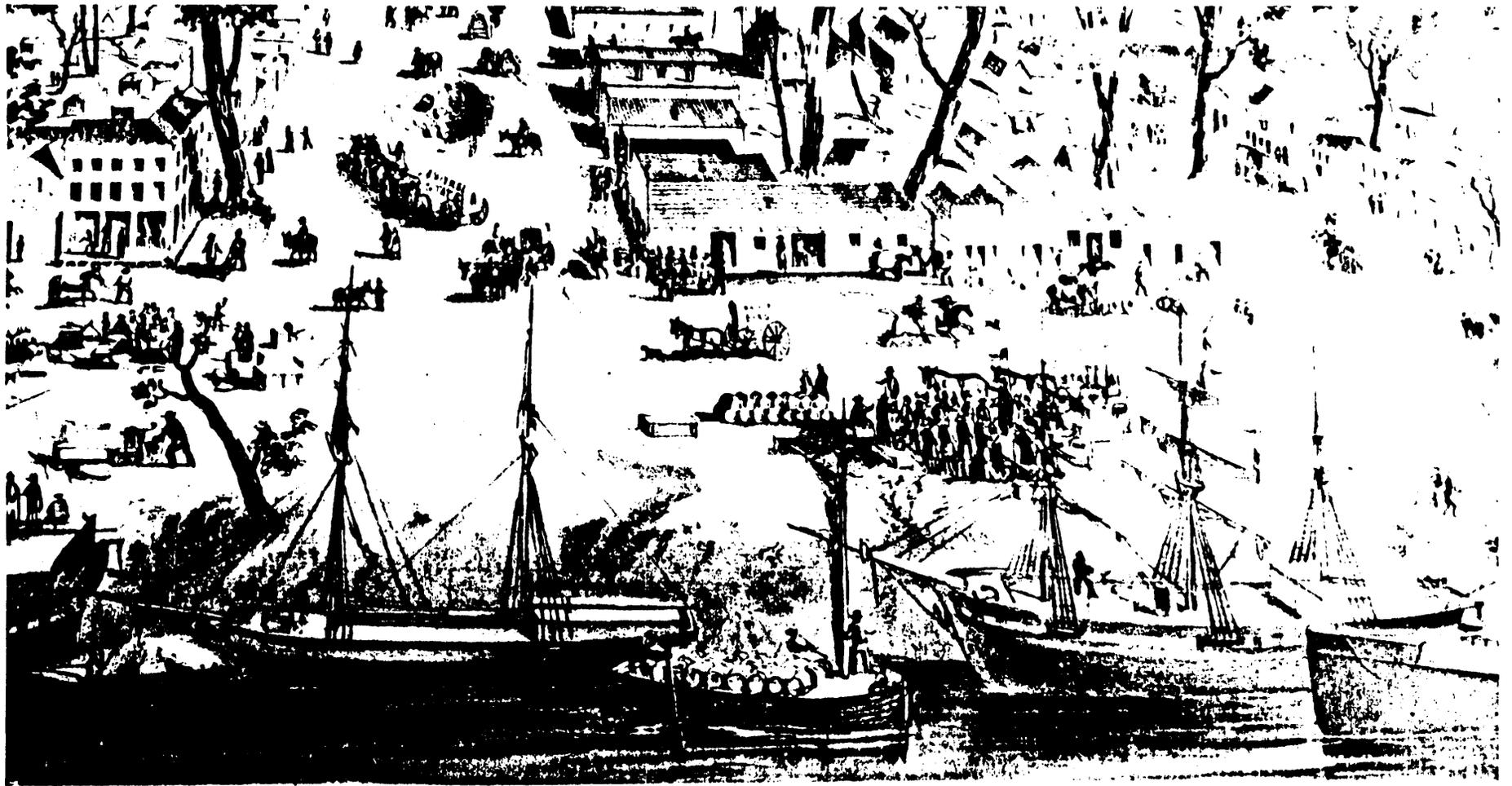
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Sacramento Union  
Sacramento Democratic State Journal  
San Francisco Daily Alta California

Manuscripts

Harbor Master's A/C, Sacramento, 1851-1854. Sacramento History Center.

Goodman, John B. III "California Gold Rush Encyclopedia," 1950-1985. Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.



SACRAMENTO CITY C

FROM THE FOOT OF J. STREET,

California Gold Rush  
Shipwrecks Thematic Group  
J Street Wreck  
Sacramento River, Foot of J Street  
Sacramento, California

Historic Photograph  
Negative on file at  
Golden Gate National  
Recreation Area,  
San Francisco

1849 lithograph showing the river bank at the foot of J Street. A brig is moored at the wreck site. View east.

Photograph Number: 1 of 5.



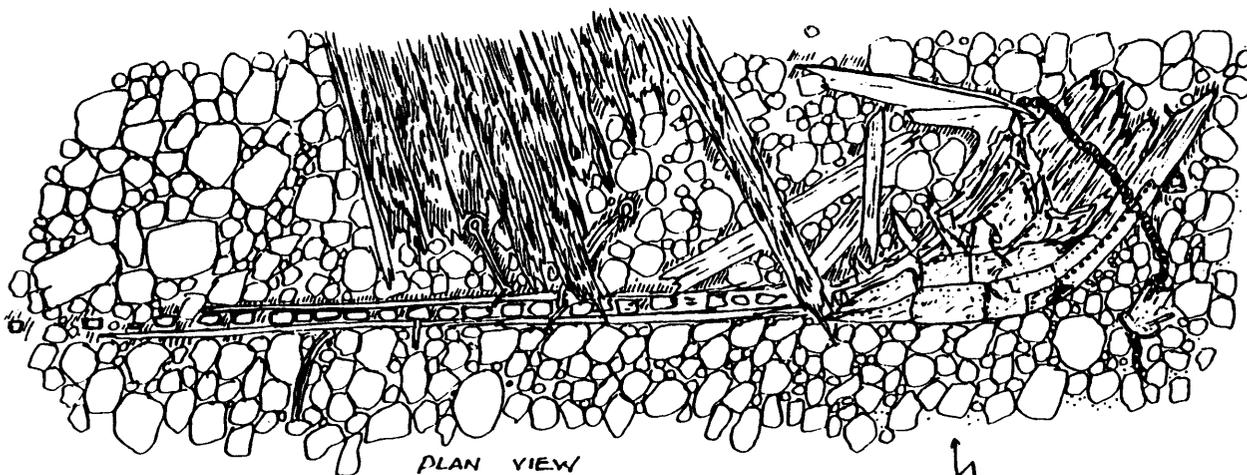
California Gold Rush  
Shipwrecks Thematic Group  
J Street Wreck  
Sacramento River, Foot of J Street  
Sacramento, California

Historic Photograph  
Negative on file at  
Golden Gate National  
Recreation Area,  
San Francisco

View of wreck site, 1986. The vessel lies in the gap  
between the two wharves.

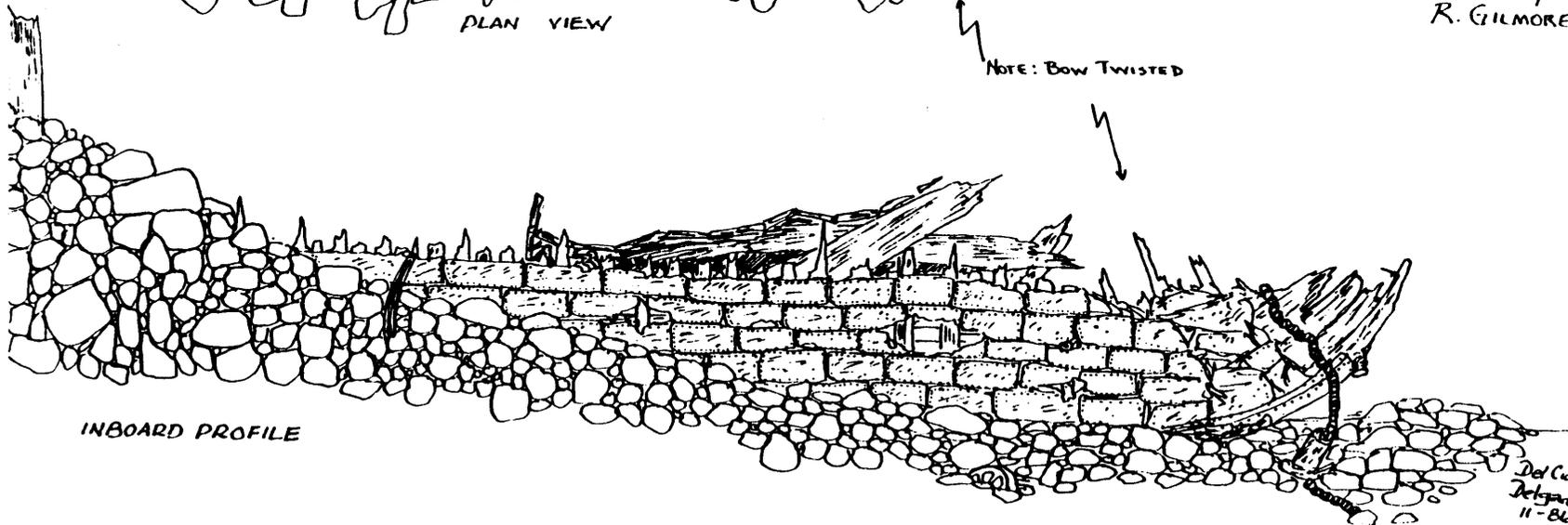
Photographer: James P. Delgado

Photograph Number 2 of 5.



PLAN VIEW

NOTE: BOW TWISTED



INBOARD PROFILE

BRIG STERLING (1833)  
Sacramento, California  
(not to scale)

recorded by:  
J. P. Delgado  
M. T. Mayer  
R. GILMORE

Del Cuyper/  
Delgado  
11-86

California Gold Rush  
Shipwrecks Thematic Group  
J Street Wreck  
Sacramento River, Foot of J Street  
Sacramento, California

National Park Service  
Photograph  
Negative on file at  
Golden Gate National  
Recreation Area,  
San Francisco

Drawing (not to scale) of exposed vessel remains.

Photograph Number: 3 of 5.



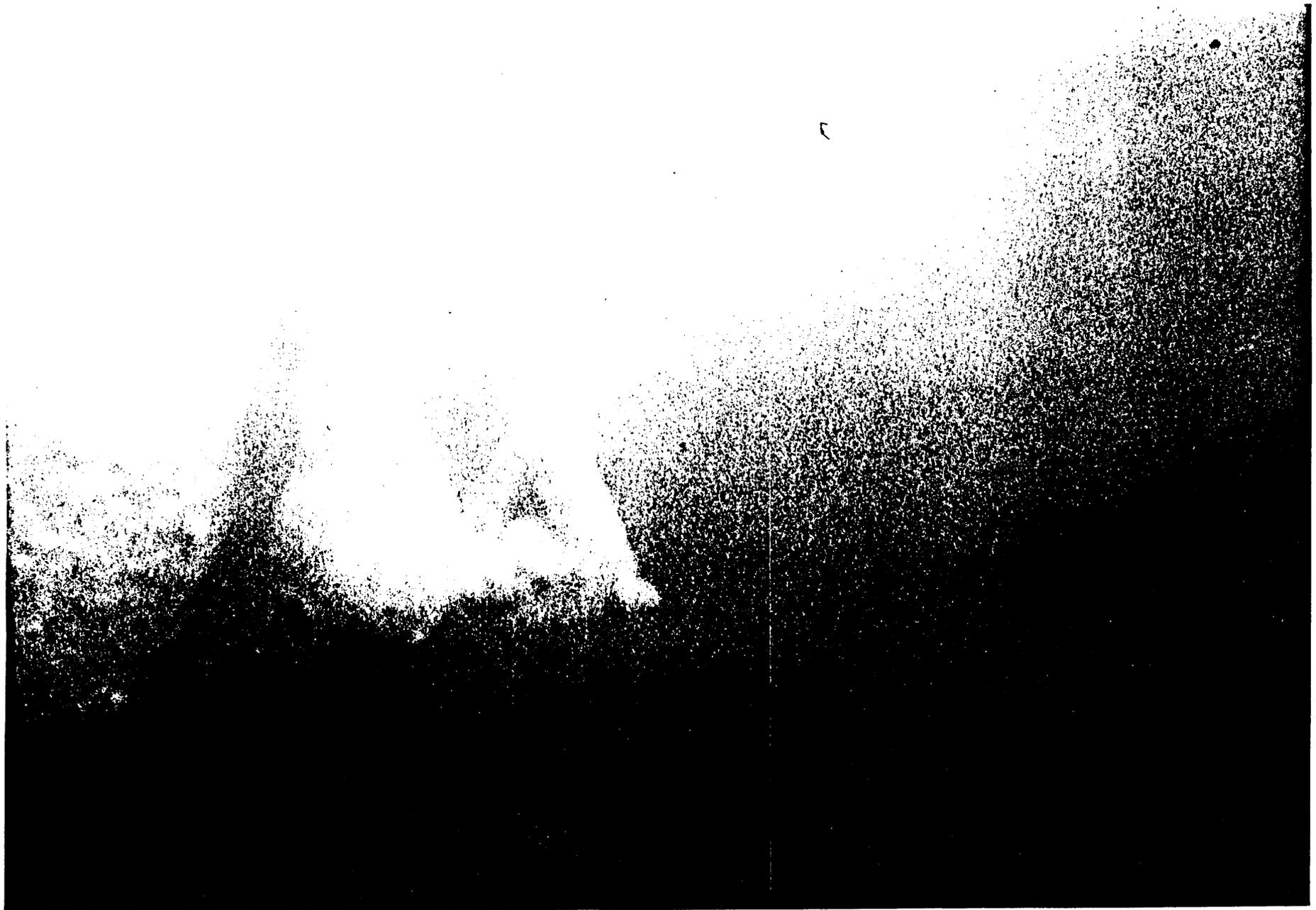
California Gold Rush  
Shipwrecks Thematic Group  
J Street Wreck  
Sacramento River, Foot of J Street  
Sacramento, California

California State Department of  
Parks & Recreation Photograph  
Negative on file at DPR  
Headquarters, Sacramento

Chainplate for foremast attached to preventer bolt.  
Note copper sheathing attached to outer hull planks.

Photographer: John W. Foster

Photograph Number 4 of 5.



California Gold Rush  
Shipwrecks Thematic Group  
J Street Wreck  
Sacramento River, Foot of J Street  
Sacramento, California

California State Department of  
Parks & Recreation Photograph  
Negative on file at DPR  
Headquarters, Sacramento

Bobstay shackle attached to stempost.

Photographer: John W. Foster

Photograph Number: 5 of 5.