



A Disaster Recorded on the Seafloor Palmer-Crary Shipwreck Backgrounder



The Frank A. Palmer, the largest 4-masted schooner ever built (1897), and the Louise B. Crary, a five-master (1900), were two vessels heading into Boston on December 17, 1902 with cargoes of coal loaded in Newport News. What appears to be a disastrous miscalculation on the part of the mate of the Crary, who was at the helm, led to the loss of both schooners. One hundred years later, scientists from the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and National Undersea Research Center used a side scan sonar unit to image the wrecks, which sit locked together for all time on the seafloor.

During the Summer 2002 research cruise to image the wreck of the Steamship *Portland*, scientists from the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and the National Undersea Research Center were able to devote time to image another interesting target.

John Fish and Arnold Carr of American Underwater Search and Survey, who had provided the coordinates for the *Portland*, offered another set of numbers. This new location was the site of a double wreck -- which they determined was the *Frank A. Palmer* and *Louise B. Crary*. They noted the location of the wrecks but did nothing more with the information as they focused their attention on the continuing search for the legendary steamship. Their coordinates for the *Palmer-Crary* wreck corresponded with a large anomaly on the U.S. Geological Survey seafloor habitat maps of the Sanctuary.

The sonar image that came back to the research vessel astounded marine archaeologists on board. Not only are

the two schooners sitting upright on the bottom, but they appear to be locked together just as they sank (according to reports of survivors). It even appears that at least one of the masts may still be in place (lower portion of ship on the right). The hatches to the cargo holds of the two ships are also apparent in the image (*Crary* to left and *Palmer* on right). Future cruises will gather more detailed side scan and video images of these important submerged cultural resources in the Sanctuary.



A side scan sonar image shows the wrecks of the Louise B. Crary (left) and Frank A. Palmer (right) sitting on the seafloor of the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS image).