

NOAA Maritime Archaeologist James Delgado,
Atlantic City Teacher and Diver Steve Nagiewicz
to Lead Talks on Deep Sea Shipwrecks March 19

Stockton Event Features Stories of RMS Titanic

Steve Nagiewicz, a Stockton Environmental Science graduate who has logged more than 4,000 dives over the past 25 years, worked with Stockton's Marine Science and Environmental Field Station and the New Jersey Historical Divers Association to map the Robert J. Walker shipwreck.

One of Nagiewicz's early dives was to the Walker, before it had been officially identified. "It was called the 25-dollar wreck [based on a legend that the coordinates were sold by a lobster fisherman to local wreck divers] or the Mason's paddle wheeler because of the broken pieces of Mason-brand china that divers found on the wreck at the time," he explained.

NOAA identified the century-and-a-half-year-old sidewheel steamer, the largest single disaster in its history, as the Robert J. Walker during a surveying mission in June 2013 after Hurricane Sandy.

The Walker, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was the site of a scientific expedition to reconstruct a piece of maritime history this past summer. Nagiewicz helped to map the wreck with Steve Evert, manager of Stockton's field station and assistant director of Academic Labs, Dr. Peter Straub, professor of Biology, Dr. Mark Sullivan, associate professor of Marine Science, and students Chelsea Shields, Jamie Taylor and Walter Poff. Vince Capone, owner of Black Laser Learning, advised the sonar team and data processing. Advanced volunteer divers from the New Jersey Historical Divers Association and NOAA conducted the follow-up dives and physical measurements in August 2014.

The expedition utilized Stockton's extensive array of underwater sensing equipment to provide side scan sonar imaging of the wreck site and subsequently to develop a preliminary map for diving operations. Students engaged in Dr. Peter Straub's Summer Intensive Research Experience (SIRE) program collected and interpreted sonar data to serve "as a benchmark for which the government will now periodically assess the wreck over the next however many years," Nagiewicz said.

"One day the wreck will be gone," and that could be as soon as 100 years, he said.

"This summer saw the first association of recreational divers and academic institutions working with the government to assess a historical site. The work brings closure to an accident at sea that was never investigated, kind of lost in time," said Nagiewicz.

The corroding remains of the Walker and the Titanic remain at the bottom of the sea, but their stories have been rescued from the depths thanks to cutting-edge marine technology and dedicated researchers.

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