



Stockton Marine Researchers Digitally Archive the Historic Robert J. Walker Shipwreck

Ship's Final Resting Place Off Atlantic City on National Register of Historic Places

***For Immediate Release; [with link to photos; please credit:](#)
Susan Allen/The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey***

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Off Atlantic City, NJ - From the stern of the R/V Gannet, one of Stockton's four research vessels, Walter Poff, a Marine Biology major from Blackwood, NJ, signals thumbs-up to Dr. Peter Straub, professor of Biology, who is manning the controls of a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) named Shearwater.

After checking the lights, lasers and camera focus, Poff launches .

The ROV propels downward 85 feet to the 132-foot Robert J. Walker, a U.S. Coast Survey steamer that sank to the silty bottom over a century and a half ago, after colliding with a commercial ship. With the Civil War fast approaching, a cause for the wreck was never earnestly pursued.

A team of marine researchers from The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey is partnering with recreational divers to assist the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in mapping the Walker shipwreck, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in April.

Stockton students are working alongside faculty members and staff from the college's Marine Science and Environmental Field Station through the Summer Intensive Research Experience (SIRE) program to help digitally preserve the historic site about 10 miles from the Absecon Lighthouse in Atlantic City. This summer they are creating high resolution video, side scan imagery and a map of the seafloor's depth around the wreck.

"We are painting a picture of what's invisible," said Steve Evert, manager of the college's field ***-more-***

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station and assistant director of Academic Labs.

Sea bass and tautog were probably the first to discover the shipwreck, but it wasn't until the 1970s that recreational divers and fishermen found the site. Structures on the seafloor attract marine life such as the northern star coral, mussels and fish, making shipwrecks prime fishing waters and an attraction to divers.

While on a surveying mission after Hurricane Sandy, the Thomas Jefferson, a NOAA ship, dedicated two days using sonar and divers to confirm that the wreck was truly where 20 crew members of the Walker were lost at sea in what NOAA calls its "largest single disaster in the history of NOAA or its predecessor agencies."

There are a handful of other wrecks in the vicinity, but distinct features such as a paddle wheel and square portholes were evidence that it was surely the Walker, explained Straub. Questions still remained after the two-day investigation, so NOAA reached out to the New Jersey Historical

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waters of the Atlantic. The series of scientific dives will “ground truth” Stockton’s data, explained Evert.

“This is much more than a normal class,” said Jamie Taylor, a Marine Biology major from Berlin, NJ, who was well aware of the Walker wreck prior to this summer. Taylor worked at American Diving Supp