

RMS *Republic* (1903)

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RMS *Republic* was a steam-powered ocean liner built in 1903 by Harland and Wolff in Belfast, and lost at sea in a collision six years later while sailing for the White Star Line. A CQD distress call was issued on the new Marconi radio device, the first recorded, resulting in the saving of around 1500 lives. Known as the "Millionaires' Ship" on account of the number of well-known and immensely rich Americans who traveled by her, she was described as a "palatial liner" and was the flagship of White Star Line's Boston service.^[1]

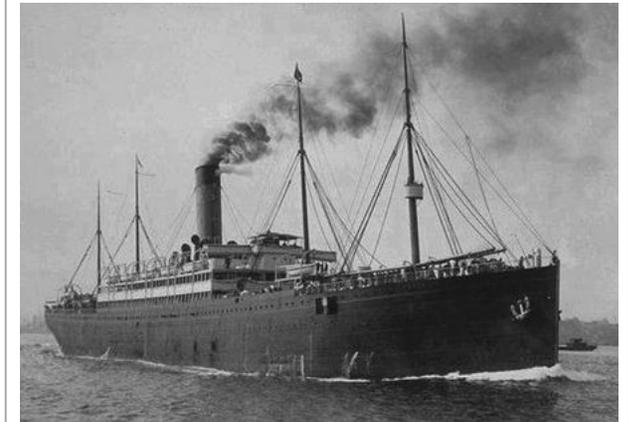
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History

White Star Acquisition

The ship was originally built in Belfast, Northern Ireland for the International Mercantile Marine's Dominion Line (a sister company to the White Star Line) and was named *SS Columbus*. She was launched on 26 February 1903 and made her maiden voyage in October 1903 from Liverpool to Boston.^[2] After two voyages with the Dominion Line, the *Columbus*, along with three other Dominion liners; *New England*, *Commonwealth* and *Mayflower* were sold to the White Star Line for use on their new service between Liverpool and Boston. The *Columbus* was renamed *Republic*, the



History



United Kingdom

Name:	<i>Republic ex-Columbus</i>
Operator:	Oceanic Steam Navigation Company d/b/a White Star Line
Builder:	Harland and Wolff Shipyards
Yard number:	345
Launched:	26 February 1903
Christened:	<i>Columbus</i>
Completed:	12 September 1903
Fate:	Sank at 8:40 pm on 24 January 1909 after a collision with SS <i>Florida</i> at 5:40 am the previous morning.

General characteristics

Tonnage:	15,400 tons
Length:	570.0 ft (173.7 m)

second ship under White Star livery to hold the name (White Star's original *Republic* of 1872 had been sold to the Holland America Line in 1889 and renamed *Maasdam*), while her three fellow former Dominion liners were renamed *Romanic*, *Canopic* and *Cretic* respectively.

Career

Republic made her first crossing under White Star from Liverpool to Boston on December 17, 1903, arriving in Boston December 27. In January 1903, she made her first crossing from Boston to the Mediterranean via Gibraltar, making calls at Sao Miguel in the Azores, followed by the Italian ports of Naples and Genoa and ending at Alexandria, a voyage which often took up to three weeks to complete one-way. In November 1904, she inaugurated White Star's Mediterranean-New York service. White Star intended this route for two purposes; first, they sought to establish a market for cruising opportunities for wealthy American passengers, as her spacious and luxurious accommodations in First and Second Class attracted scores of wealthy vacationers, thus earning her the nickname "The Millionaire's Ship". Second, and more predominantly on her westbound crossings, White Star sought to tap into the massive Italian immigrant trade. The *Republic*, with a Third Class capacity of 2,000, proved to be immensely profitable on this route, as when she sailed for the United States on any given trip, Third Class was often booked to capacity, and sometimes beyond. A vast majority of Italian immigrants who sailed by White Star boarded *Republic* and the other ships at Naples, along with smaller groups of Greeks, Austrians, Slavs, Turks and Syrians. White Star's placement of Sao Miguel on their Mediterranean services also opened them up to traffic from Portuguese immigrants as well. Over the course of the next four years, *Republic* spent the winter and spring months running on White Star's Mediterranean-New York service alongside the *Cretic*, while during the summer and fall months she would sail on the Liverpool-Boston route together with the *Cymric* and *Arabic*.

Beam:	67.8 ft (20.7 m)
Draft:	34 ft 1 in (10.39 m) .
Depth of hold:	24 ft (7.3 m)
Propulsion:	twin propeller
Speed:	16 knots (30 km/h)
Capacity:	2,830 passengers
Crew:	300

Collision with SS *Florida*

In early morning of 23 January 1909, while sailing from New York City to Gibraltar and Mediterranean ports with 742 passengers and crew and Captain Inman Sealby (1862–1942) in command, *Republic* entered a thick fog off the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Amongst the passengers were plenty of illustrious people such as Mrs. Sophie Curtis, wife of George M. Curtis, Mrs. Mary Severance, wife of Cordenio A. Severance, Professor John M. Coulter with wife and children, General Brayton Ives, St. Louis millionaire Samuel Cupples, and Mildred Montague, Countess Pasolini. Travelling in first class were also Mr. Leonard L. McMurray, who, in 1915, would survive the sinking of the Cunard liner *Lusitania*, and Mrs. Bessie Armstead Davis, daughter-in-law of senator Henry G. Davis of West Virginia with two children.

Taking standard precautions and maintaining her speed, the steamer regularly signaled her presence in the outbound shipping traffic lane by whistle. At 5:47 a.m., another whistle was heard and the *Republic's* engines were ordered to full reverse, and the helm put "hard-a-port". Out of the fog, the Lloyd Italiano liner SS *Florida* appeared and hit *Republic* amidships on her portside, at about a right angle. Two passengers asleep in their cabins on *Republic* were killed when *Florida's* bow sliced into her, including liquor wholesale manager Eugene Lynch's wife Mary and banker W. J. Mooney. Eugene Lynch was critically injured and died as a result of his injuries at Long Island College Hospital, Brooklyn, January 26. On *Florida*, three crewmen were also killed when the bow was crushed back to a collision bulkhead.^[3] Six people died in total.

The engine and boiler rooms on *Republic* began to flood, and the ship listed. Captain Sealby led the crew in calmly organizing the passengers on deck for evacuation. *Republic* was equipped with the new Marconi wireless telegraph system, and became the first ship in history to issue a CQD distress signal, sent by Jack R. Binns.^[4] *Florida* came about to rescue *Republic's* complement, and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service cutter *Gresham*^[5] responded to the distress signal as well. Passengers were distributed between the two ships, with *Florida* taking the bulk of them, but with 900 Italian immigrants already on board, this left the ship dangerously overloaded.

The White Star liner *Baltic*, commanded by Captain J. B. Ranson, also responded to the CQD call, but due to the persistent fog, it was not until the evening that *Baltic* was able to locate the drifting *Republic*. Once on-scene, the rescued passengers were transferred from *Gresham* and *Florida* to *Baltic*. Because of the damage to *Florida*, that ship's immigrant passengers were also transferred to *Baltic*, but a riot nearly broke out when they had to wait until first-class *Republic* passengers were transferred. Once everyone was on board, *Baltic* sailed for New York.

At the time of *Republic's* sinking, ocean liners were not required to have a full capacity of lifeboats for their passengers, officers and crew. It was believed that on the busy North Atlantic route assistance from at least one ship would be ever-present, and lifeboats would only be needed to ferry all aboard to their rescue vessels and back until everyone was safely evacuated. Unlike the later RMS *Titanic* sinking, this scenario fortunately played out flawlessly during the ship's sinking, and the six people who did die were lost in the collision, not the sinking itself.

Captain Sealby and a skeleton crew remained on board *Republic* to make an effort to save her. Crewmen from the *Gresham* tried using collision mats to stem the flooding, but to no avail.^[6] By this time the steamers *New York* and *Lucania* (from Cunard) had also arrived, and waited while an attempt was made by *Gresham* to take *Republic* under tow. This effort too proved futile, and on 24 January, *Republic* sank. At 15,378 tons, she was the largest ship to have sunk up to that time.^{[7][8]} All the remaining crew were evacuated before she sank.

Rumoured cargo

There are many rumours that the *Republic* was carrying gold and/or other valuables when she went down. One rumour is that she was carrying gold worth \$250,000^[9] in American gold coins to be used as payroll for the US Navy's Great White Fleet.^{[7][10]} Another theory that she was carrying money for the relief effort for the 1908 earthquake in Messina, Italy.^[11] A third theory, put forward by Captain Martin Bayerle, is that



This picture was taken by Martin & Ottaway, a New Jersey marine consulting firm, after the *Florida* collided with the *Republic*.



The *Republic* sinking by the stern after having been hit by the Lloyd Italiano liner *Florida*.

she was carrying \$3,000,000 in gold coins as part of a loan to the Imperial Russian government.^[8] All of these values, of course, are in 1909 dollars when gold was \$20 per ounce. Today, the coin values would bring the recovery to at least many hundreds of millions of dollars, and some experts have estimated that the recovery (with proper marketing of the recovered coins) could approach \$5 billion or more, making the *Republic* salvage the largest treasure recovery of all time.^{[12][13]}

Rediscovery

The wreck of the *Republic* was found by Captain Martin Bayerle in 1981. She lies upright approximately 50 miles (80 km) south of Nantucket Island^{[7][8]} at 40°26′0″N 69°46′0″W in approximately 270 feet (82 m) of water. Two salvage expeditions in the 1980s attempted to locate the gold, but were unsuccessful. However, the ship contains many other treasures. In addition to the gold, many ship and personal artifacts remain. To date, however, none of the rumoured Tsar's treasure has been found.

The wreckage of the SS *Andrea Doria*, another liner sunk as the result of a collision with a ship, lies a few miles to the northwest.

The salvage continues

In 2011, Captain Bayerle's exclusive salvage rights to the wreck were reconfirmed by the United States District Court, District of Massachusetts. A re-survey of the vessel was performed during 2012 and MVSHQ is preparing for a major recovery effort during summer months of 2015-2017. A "section lift" of the vessel had been planned but recent surveys (2009) have determined that the ship is in such fragile condition that she would break up under any strain. Instead, Bayerle said he would excavate the section of the ship which contains the specie (bullion) room. In 2013, MVSHQ, Inc. retained Etoile Blanc Consulting, LLC to manage investment and media properties related to the anticipated RMS Republic recovery.

See also

- *Empress of Ireland*, which also sank as a result of a collision
- Treasure hunting (marine)

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External links

- CQD (<http://earlyradiohistory.us/CQD.htm>)
- The Hero of the Republic (http://www.jackbinns.org/jack_binns)
- Radio Broadcast, April, 1924, pages 449-455 (<http://earlyradiohistory.us/1924CQD.htm>)
- The Outlook, February 6, 1909, pages 294-297: THE TRIUMPH OF WIRELESS (<http://earlyradiohistory.us/1909rep.htm>)
- The American Experience |Rescue at Sea (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/rescue/>)
- R. M. S. Republic | Samuel Cupples House (<http://www.slu.edu/samuel-cupples-house>)
- Billions in gold? Former dive shop owner to salvage RMS Republic (http://www.rms-republic.com/in_the_news/mvt7_21_05.html)
- RMS Republic - Sad Times for Older Sister of Titanic (http://shipwreck.blogs.com/shipwrecks_historical_tim/2005/07/rms_republic_sa.html)
- Details of *Baltic's* effort to find *Republic* (<http://rms-republic.com/reference/ranson.html>)

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