

## The Hard Luck of the Steamer Tampa

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The Steamer Tampa was one of six wooden sister ships launched in 1890 for the grain and coal trade. On November 21, 1898 the 291-foot, 1,972-ton ship found itself overwhelmed by a Lake Superior storm with winds that gusted to over 100 miles per hour. Even with 2,700 tons of coal in the cargo hold, and heading into the wind at full speed, the Tampa found itself being pushed backward toward the rocky coast of the north shore. In a desperate attempt to save his ship, Captain Leonard turned towards shore and tried to get behind the small island where the present day Silver Bay is located. Unfortunately they ran hard aground on a rocky reef there first. Fearing the ship would slide off into deeper water, the Captain ordered the crew to take to the lifeboats. They rowed in behind the island and waited there adequately protected until the ferocious winds abated. Eventually, when it was safe, they rowed the short distance to Beaver Bay and from there summoned the salvage company. It took a great effort to free her from the reef. When the final bill came in it exceeded a whopping \$50,000. Unfortunately for the owners this was more than the ship was worth at the time.

During the following year in 1899 the vessel was rebuilt adding even more expense. Three years later on April 29, 1902, the Tampa was making its way through a heavy fog with the schooner Aurora being towed behind. Both ships were loaded with coal and headed to Duluth. Eyes strained to see anything in the featureless white ahead. The men in the pilothouse watched the compass carefully and plotted their position accordingly. This was all to no avail since there are areas along the north shore where underwater magnetic attraction causes the compass needle to deviate. Suddenly without warning the Tampa ran hard aground on the rocks. The alert crew onboard the schooner Aurora spun the ships wheel hard and avoided ramming into the stern of the stranded steamer.

Both ships were now grounded on the east side of Stony Point. The wreck had occurred on Tuesday and the Aurora was released by the Salvage Company the following day. The Tampa's cargo of coal needed to be removed first before she could be recovered. After three days of difficult work, the Tampa was finally free of the rocky grasp of Stony Point. This time the recovery bill came to \$10,000 excluding repairs to the two ships. The rugged coastline at Silver Bay and Stony Point had cost the shipping company over \$60,000 in just three years. On the brighter side however, the Tampa had narrowly escaped destruction twice and no lives were lost. Maybe she was in fact a "lucky ship" after all.