

Salvage

The *Mazatlan Cosmopolitan*^[a] reported on 1 January 1863.

From the Wreck of the Golden Gate: The pilot boat *Potter*, of San Francisco, arrived here on Sunday last from Manzanillo, having recently visited the wreck of the steamship Golden Gate, T. J. L. Smiley, of San Francisco, who was one of the party accompanying the pilot boat on her expedition to the wrecked steamer, has given us some interesting particulars of the excursion. Mr. Smiley says portions of the wreck are still visible, but from observations made around and about it, he is of opinion that the sides of the vessel must have given way since the wreck, and that the treasure aboard the ill-fated steamer has drifted out, and been buried in the sand. The New York and foreign underwriters had been to the wreck endeavoring to obtain the treasure, but had abandoned the enterprise before the *Potter* reached the ground.^[6]

On 8 February 1863 the *Daily Alta* reported that the steamship *Constitution* had taken on board fifteen boxes holding \$820,000 that had been recovered by William Irelan during a spell of calm weather. He and a party of ten assistants had anchored a scow over the wreck. An engine was used to dredge up sand and other materials to expose the wreck. A steam pump and hose was used to clean off sand from the submerged boxes. A diver attached ropes to each box, and they were hoisted aboard the scow by machinery. The newspaper was optimistic that all the treasure would be recovered in the next two months. However, some had been stolen by a gang of Mexicans.^[6] In the end most of the gold was recovered and returned to Wells Fargo in 1863.^[1]

The wreck itself was covered by drifting sand.^[1] A contractor from Boston named C.W. Johnson visited the site forty years later and decided to attempt salvage. He built a pier to provide a platform for dredging equipment to avoid the problems of difficult currents, surf and winds. He claimed in an article in *Popular Mechanics* in May 1903 that he had recovered \$1,000,000. Soon afterwards, the pier was destroyed by a hurricane, although many of the pumps and other equipment were recovered. An unsuccessful attempt was made in 1931–1932 by the engineer Charles Pouliot. It is said by the local people that a man called Veralman found gold in the 1960s and built the Posada Hotel with the money.^[8]

The safe in the purser's office was finally located in 2003 under 9 feet (2.7 m) of sand by CEDAM, Conservation, Ecology, Diving, Archaeology and Museums. The beach is still being searched for gold by enthusiasts with metal detectors.^[1]