

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 16/11/18

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## S.S. CASINO



S108 Casino ApolloBay HistoricView  
dateunknown



S108 Casino ApolloBay  
AnchorOnsurface dateunknown



S108 Casino ApolloBay Artifact  
15/06/1999



S108 Casino ApolloBay Hull 15/06/1999



S108 Casino ApolloBay Sidedetail  
15/06/1999



S108 Casino ApolloBay WreckDetail  
15/06/1999



S108 Casino SitePlan diveinfosheet  
1992

### Location

Apollo Bay

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S108

**Date lost**

10/07/1932

**Official number**

86361

**Construction material**

Iron

**Hull**

21 Deck, (pt iron), 4 Bulkheads (7"), well deck. Single ended boiler 120 lb grate surface 115 sq ft, Heating surface 1188 sq ft. 3 plain furnaces. Water Ballast: forepeak tank, 17 tons, deep tank 14 feet- 24 tons. As originally built: three masts, s

**Propulsion**

Steam - Screw

**Engine specification**

Inverted two cylinder compound engine 17 1/2" x 36 1/" x 24" stroke, 65 HP, single ended boiler 120lb per sq inch, grate surface 45 sq feet, heating surface 1188 sq ft, 3 plain furnaces

**Engine builder**

Gourlay Bros & Co., Dundee.

**Number of masts**

3

**Length/Breadth/Depth**

160.40 Feet / 24.10 Feet / 10.20 Feet

**Builder**

Gourlay Bros. & Co, Dundee

**Year of construction**

1882

**Built port**

Dundee

**Built country**

Scotland

**Registration Number**

1 of 1882

**Registration Port**

Port Fairy

**Date lost**

10/07/1932

**Departure**

Melbourne

**Destination**

Apollo Bay, Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Portland

**Cargo**

240 tons of general cargo, more than half of which was sugar. Also carried were canned goods, condensed milk, drapery, raw hides, newsprint, barrels of beer.

**Owner**

Belfast & Koroit Steam Navigation Co

**Master**

Capt. J.G. Middleton

**Weather conditions**

south-easterly gale; heavy swell

**Cause of loss**

Heavy swell caused vessel to bump on anchor which pierced forward hull.

**Passenger comments**

Mrs H. Convery, Apollo Bay; Jane Greer (11yo), schoolgirl, Portland

**Number of crew**

17

**Crew comments**

Chief Engineer and Superintendent W. Newlands, Second Engineer H.W. Lee, First Officer Orlando Binnie,

Second Officer MacDermid, Fireman Peter Wiltshire, Purser S. Stretton, Stewardess Helena Gill, AB Peter Murray, AB Michael Foley, AB M. Foley Jnr, AB M

## Statement of significance

The SS Casino is historically significant for its vital role in the Western District coastal and passenger trade. This significance is enhanced by the longevity of the Casino's service to this trade - it was wrecked on the eve of celebrating its 50th anniversary. In September 1998 the wreck of the SS Casino and its associated relics were permanently specially declared to be of historic significance. Of the total of eighteen steamships that served the Western District between 1854 and 1939 there are only four of these vessels represented in the Victorian wreck resource: the SS Champion, TSS Coramba, SS Julia Percy (SS Leeuwin) and the SS Casino. The Casino and Champion are the only two of these wrecks that are located in the Western District, and the Casino is the only one of these that has been located and is accessible to divers.

## VHR history

The SS Casino was launched at Dundee, Scotland in February 1882, built to order for the NSW North Coast-Sydney trade by Mr B.B. Nichol of the Newcastle and Hunter Steam Navigation Company. On its delivery voyage from England to Sydney via the Cape of Good Hope, after depleting its coal bunkers, the Casino was forced to call into Warrnambool. While in Warrnambool, it attracted the attention of the owners of the recently formed (in 1882) Belfast and Koroit Steam Navigation Company (B.K.S.N.Co) who were seeking a suitable vessel, and who successfully bid for and purchased the Casino for 14, 250 pounds. Thus the Casino never saw the town on the Richmond River in NSW after which it had been named, but was returned immediately to Victoria where it spent the next fifty years and some 2500 voyages trading between Melbourne and the ports of Victoria's Western District.

The Casino suffered the ignominy of a number of strandings on the coast, including groundings at Point Hawdon (Kennett River) and Warrnambool that required dry-docking for repairs. There were also other innumerable incidents at the Apollo Bay pier where swells caused hawsers to break and bollards to be pulled out of the deck. Being successfully refloated and repaired on each occasion, the Casino's reputation for robust reliability (not always strictly to schedule) - if not immortality - was finally lost on the eve of its 50th anniversary celebrations at Apollo Bay in 1932. The Casino approached the pier in a heavy swell, but struck the bottom several times. Captain John Middleton decided to draw off, anchor, and allow the vessel to come back to the pier on the cable. However, the vessel was found to be leaking badly after two big seas were felt to bodily lift the hull and dump it on the sandy bottom, and it was in imminent danger of foundering. An attempt was made to beach the Casino, but it heeled over and capsized about 400 metres from the shore. Over a number of hours, and as the easterly wind picked up after lunch, distressed Apollo Bay locals could only watch as the crew and passengers struggled for their lives, attempting either to swim ashore or cling to the upturned hull of the Casino. A local farmer Frank Barton rode a horse into the surf but couldn't get out to the wreck. A life-reel was manned but most of the survivors either swam in or floated in clinging to wreckage. By the end of the afternoon just three figures were seen clinging to the upturned hull, but in terrible sequence were washed off one by one, and all were drowned. Ten of the passengers and crew lost their lives.

As a young girl of eleven at the time living on a farm at Apollo Bay, Eleanor Slaven recalled watching the drama unfold from the moment of seeing the 'Cassie' "for some reason" turn around while berthing, then foundering. While her brothers and father alerted the Post Office and assisted with the rescue she watched the "awful" scene unfold through binoculars. She also described how their family did not take part in the pilfering of washed up wreckage that went on overnight by local ruffians (E. Slaven, pers.comm. April 2000).

It was later discovered by well known salvage diver Johnno Johnstone - who was friends with most of the crew and had undertaken numerous hull and propellor inspections on the Casino - that the Casino had been dumped onto its anchor and a fluke pierced the hull (Taylor: 45-50).

Following their catastrophic loss the Belfast and Koroit Steam Navigation Company stopped its vessels from using Apollo Bay as a port, and the Casino's wrecking was a death knell to coastal cargo and passenger transport in Victoria generally. Yet another tragedy involving the Casino's replacement Coramba remains one of Victoria's maritime mysteries, disappearing with 34 crew in one of the fiercest gales ever experienced in Victoria, when en route from Port Fairy to Melbourne in 1936. The Belfast and Koroit S.N.Co collapsed in 1939 with the advent of road communication.

The SS Casino has tremendous historical significance and played a vital role in the Western District coastal and passenger trade. This significance is enhanced by the length of the Casino's service to this trade - it was wrecked on the eve of its 50th anniversary. The final voyage of the Casino was typical of its regular route stopping at Portland, Port Fairy, Warrnambool and Apollo Bay. The steering wheel and port and starboard lights are on display at the Apollo Bay Hotel and the anchor is on display outside the Apollo Bay Post Office. The propeller and lifting davits are on display at one of its home port, Port Fairy's municipal parks. One of the company flags recovered from the wreck, step treads, seat cushions, the binnacle and artefacts representing the cargo it was carrying can be seen on display at the Apollo Bay Cable Station Museum.

The Port Fairy Gazette from 25th July 1932 contains an advertisement for the screening of "The Casino Wreck Film at Fairy Palace" on Wednesday Night.

The advertisement reads:

A graphic reminder of the popular coastal vessel, the Casino, whose days have been ended at Apollo Bay, is told in sound at Fairy Palace on Wednesday night next, when Cinesound Review present their special newsreel of the disaster. Scenes of the disaster, with the divers at work, are the chief incidents, but these are elaborated by the vivid description of the events leading up to the wreck and the heroic behaviour of the crew before the vessel capsized, graphically told by Mr Michael Foley, jun., whose father lost his life. This film should prove a very interesting attraction, and everyone should take advantage of this opportunity.

This further illustrates the importance of the event to the local western district, and also the significance of the salvage of the wreck.

Illegal salvors used explosives to blast the wreck and recover metal fittings in the 1970s. It is one of the wrecks in Victoria's Historic Shipwreck Underwater Discovery Trail. In September 1998 the wreck of the SS Casino and its associated relics were permanently declared to be of historic significance.

The site lies in nine metres of water on a flat sandy seabed at the northern end of Apollo Bay, almost opposite Wild Dog Creek. It lies about 400 metres offshore, on its port side, with its stern to the beach and bow towards the ocean. The hull is relatively intact at the bow and near the engine and boiler, but has collapsed towards the stern, exposing the propeller shaft, steering gear and engine. Other features of the site include lifeboat davits, bollards and masts, Remains of the ship's cargo such as fragile newspapers occasionally appear as sands move across the site, occasionally all but burying it.