

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

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## LIGHTNING



S415 Lightning  
PortPhillipCorioBay  
HistoricView



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### Location

off Yarra Street Wharf, Geelong, Corio Bay

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S415

### Date lost

31/10/1869

### Official number

24316

### Construction material

Wood

### Hull

Clipper. All the knees in the hold, hooks and pointers were of white oak, well seasoned. The knees in the 'tween decks were hackmatack (American larch). Hard pine for scantlings and lower deck; upper deck white pine. Iron and copper bolts for fastenings.

### Propulsion

Sail

**Number of masts**

3

**Length/Breadth/Depth**

243.00 Feet / 42.00 Feet / 23.00 Feet

**Builder**

Donald McKay

**Year of construction**

1854

**Built port**

Boston, Massachusetts

**Built country**

USA

**Registration Port**

Liverpool

**Date lost**

31/10/1869

**Departure**

At anchor

**Cargo**

Wool, tallow, copper, leather, wines  
,500 bales wool, 98 casks tallow, 25 bales leather, 179 tons copper ore and other cargo  
Had previously imported livestock, including rabbits

**Owner**

Bought by Thomas Harrison in 1867, but still sailing under Black Ball Line owned by James Baines.

**Master**

Capt. Henry Jones

**Cause of loss**

Burnt to become a total wreck whilst taking on cargo of wool

**Statement of significance**

<p>The Lightning is historically significant for being one of the fastest wooden ships ever built, the first clipper built in the USA for British owners and being the worst shipping disaster in Geelong's history. It spent its whole career carrying cargo and immigrants from England to Australia.</p>

## **VHR history**

The wreck of the Lightning caused by fire was the worst shipping calamity in Geelong's history. That a fire had broken out was discovered at about 1 am. Water was pumped into lower hold in an attempt to douse it but the efforts of local volunteer fire brigades were unsuccessful. The blazing ship was towed away from the Yarra Street Wharf by James Deane's tug Resolute . Attempts to scuttle the vessel by boring holes and cutting the outside planking also failed. The Volunteer Artillery had also been unsuccessful in attempts to sink the vessel to put out the fire. The wreck was finally removed with explosives. The Lightning finally sank at about 6 pm. Location about 200 yards from Wharf in 25 feet of water. Geelong's Centenary celebrations included a re-enactment of burning of Lightning . Built by the celebrated shipbuilder Donald McKay, the Lightning was the first clipper built in the USA for a British firm. In 1862, returning to Liverpool, it struck an uncharted rock in Rip. No water entered vessel but, on arrival at Liverpool, a rock 6 feet long was found sticking through its timbers and beginning to work loose. Under Capt. 'Bully' Forbes, the Lightning made its first voyage to Australia in 77 days, and on its return voyage made it in a record 64 days. It had the dubious distinction of carrying, free of charge, early consignments of introduced animals, including rabbits, sent to Thomas Austin of Barwon Park, Winchelsea. The Lightning's entire life was spent on the Australian run carrying immigrants and cargo.