

SS Princess Sophia Exhibit Opens in Skagway

Skagway was the starting point for the fateful voyage of the *SS Princess Sophia* on October 23, 1918. After the arrival of the last train of Yukoners bound for southern ports, the *Sophia* left Skagway a few hours late. This delay was the start of a series of events as the ship found herself steaming in the dark of Lynn Canal in a horrible snow storm headed right for Vanderbilt Reef.

Around 2 a.m. on October 24, the ship struck the massive reef north of Juneau, where it then sat perched for almost 40 hours, with the hope that it would either float off at high tide, or the storm would abate enough to allow lifeboats to be lowered and sent to rescue boats waiting nearby.

Tragically, the storm worsened, and between 5 and 6 p.m. on October 25 the ship was turned by the wind and driven across the reef. She broke apart and sank, with all 350-plus passengers and crew perishing in the oil-slicked, icy waters. Only a dog made it to shore alive.

Despite being the single largest shipwreck in terms of loss of life off the western coastline of North America, the sinking of the *SS Princess Sophia* has been largely forgotten in our history. The headlines at the time were dominated by the end of World War I, however the loss of so many Yukon and Alaska workers and friends devastated the region for years.

To honor those victims and commemorate the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the *SS Princess Sophia*, committees in Skagway and Juneau, working with the Maritime Museum of British Columbia, developed museum exhibits for their communities.

A grand opening for the Skagway exhibit was held at the Arctic Brotherhood Hall on May 7, and the exhibit then moved to its permanent home in the gallery area at the Skagway Museum.

Visitors to the museum can walk around a central pod with eight panels that tells the story about the ship, the people and cargo aboard, and chronicles her final, fateful voyage and aftermath. Near that exhibit are three interactive touchscreen video monitors. One tells this engaging story in video vignettes, another lets you take a tour of an animated vessel, and the final monitor displays a video book where you can turn pages and read about many of the victims.

The Skagway Museum is located at 7th and Spring Street in the stone McCabe building and is open daily in the summer.

The Juneau exhibit is scheduled to open at the Alaska State Museum on June 1, 2018. The Juneau committee and Pioneers of Alaska also are raising money for a memorial plaque project at Eagle Beach State Park.

Skagway's *SS Princess Sophia Committee* also is planning a memorial plaque and storyboard to be dedicated in Centennial Park on the anniversary of the sinking in October. Watch for announcements in conjunction with Skagway's Fall Festival.

Major contributors to date have been the Municipality of Skagway, Margaret Frans Brady Fund, White Pass & Yukon Route, and Alaska Marine Lines.

You may still donate to these memorial projects through this Special Projects Fund.