



# NOTHING STAYS THE SAME

HOW THREE OUT OF FOUR VINTAGE VESSELS HAVE MET UNPLEASANT ENDS

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Over the past few years, *Sea Classics* has been covering four vessels near Stockton, California. All four have historic context but in today's society few people realize the importance of preserving history while even fewer care. So, it is with heavy heart that we have to report that three of these four vessels have either been sunk or scrapped.

It appears that USS *Mazapeta* was sunk on 4 September 2023. Built as Yard Tug 181 (YT-181), the all-wood vessel was of the *Woban*-class and was laid down by the Gibbs Gas Engine

Company of Jacksonville, Florida, on 7 August 1942. She was placed into service on 12 August 1943. Twice she was reclassified — as Yard Tug Big-181 in May 1944 and, again, as Yard Tug Medium-181 in February 1962.

*Mazapeta* was originally assigned to the 3rd Naval District based in New York City. In 1944, she was transferred to the 12th District in San Francisco. Except for the period between May 1947 to September 1950 when she was in the Reserve Fleet out of service at Mare Island, she performed miscellaneous tugging and ship assist

services for that district into 1976. On 1 June 1976, she was decommissioned from the Navy Register and six days later sold at a scrap auction.

The new owner was Sanders Towing of Benicia, California, and they paid \$99,101 for the ship, changing its name to *Leross* and adding her to their working fleet of tugs in the Bay area. In 1982, they changed the name again, this time to *Gail L. Sanders*.

On 18 September 1998, she was sold to Rich Williams and Ron Ihle. After a brief time being berthed at Fulton Ship Yard in Antioch,

California, she was towed a few miles to her new home at Big Break where she sat untouched for ten years.

In early June 2008, SF Tugboats learned that this ship, which still had a lot of life, was going to be scrapped. SF Tugboats saved her and spent a month working on the tug before sailing her to a new home in Alameda.

However, her period of restored glory was brief. For about the past seven years, the historic tug has been stationed at the end of Eight Mile Road in Stockton. In September 2023, she sank. Chris Willson, former owner of the *Aurora* (to follow), commented: "When I came out, it was starting to roll and there was nothing that could be done." Of course, the various government agencies began investigating to see how much hazardous chemicals were aboard. It was estimated that about 1600 gallons of petroleum products were on the ship when she rolled over.

The US Coast Guard began actively working with the city of Stockton to transfer the tug to a contractor who will scrap the vessel. However, they could not find the most current owner of the ship. It was being used as a museum and for military ceremonies. Willson commented, "The veterans would come out here for a week, sometimes two weeks at a time, and work on the vessel, go clear through it. People with a heavy skillset for these kinds of vessels and they would hold their reunions on board and try to relive some of their Navy years. It's going to be gone forever and that is very sad."

The HMCS *Chaleur* (MCB-164) apparently sank sometime in September 2021 (these events often go unreported). This *Bay*-class minesweeper served with the Royal Canadian Navy during the Cold War years. She entered service in 1957 as a replacement for the WWII-era minesweepers that the RCN was using at the time. She was originally ordered as a replacement for sistership *Chaleur* (MCB-144) that had been transferred to the French Navy in 1954. Her first assignment was on Canada's west coast and in 1972 she was re-designated as a patrol escort.



USS *Mazapeta* (YT-181) underway during acceptance trials at Jacksonville, Florida, during 1943.



Massive wheel on the *Mazapeta* during 1943.



*Mazapeta* (YT-181) alongside APL-29 in San Francisco Bay during 1948.

The *Aurora* nestled in with *Mazapeta* and *Chaleur*. It seemed that owners thought that by putting three vintage ships together, then perhaps more could be done to save them. They were wrong.