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Spectators gather to view the damage done to the Cliff House from the *Parallel* explosion, 1868.

The Wreck of *Parallel*

The San Francisco-built schooner *Parallel* served as a “work-a-day” vessel hauling cargo along the Pacific Coast beginning in 1868. On 13 January 1887 *Parallel* left the Golden Gate headed for Astoria, Oregon with a cargo that included 42 tons of black powder.

The ship fought against head winds and a strong tide for two days before Captain Miller ordered the crew to abandon ship near the rocks at Point Lobos. The nine men made it safely to Sausalito while *Parallel* grounded near the Cliff House at the future site of Sutro Baths.

Rescuers from the Life-Saving Station found no crew on board. They posted watchmen and retired for the night, unaware of the ship’s explosive cargo. At 12:34 a.m. on January 16 after hours of being tossed against the rocks, the explosives detonated, demolishing the ship, damaging the Cliff House, and sending debris over one mile in all directions.

According to local newspapers, the next morning more than 50,000 people gathered to view the scene of destruction.