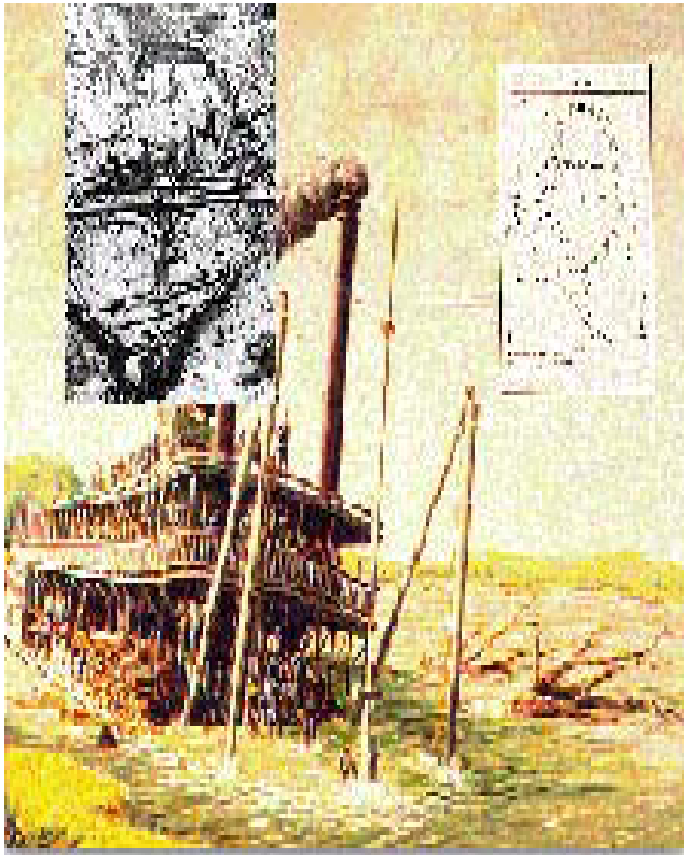


## Steamboat Bertrand

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge/Iowa



**Figure 15. Painting of the Bertand as it sank in 1865**

The Steamboat Bertrand Collection housed at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge is the only public collection in the country that features the excavated cargo from a sunken steamboat. The steamboat *Bertrand* was traveling to the goldfields of Montana carrying an estimated 250 to 450 tons of cargo when it hit a snag and sank in the Missouri River on April 1, 1865, north of Omaha, Nebraska. In 1968, the steamboat was located and excavated over the next two years in a collaborative venture by entrepreneurs Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell, archaeologists with the National Park Service and the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife (now called the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

The cargo removed from the steamboat's hold includes in excess of 200,000 objects that have been conserved and cared for since their discovery and excavation. Unlike most public or private collections, the items from the *Bertrand* are unused, mostly intact, and securely-dated 19<sup>th</sup> century artifacts. The collection is a time capsule of artifacts used on the western frontier at a momentous time in the nation's history: the Civil War would end less than two weeks after the accident and the westward expansion was evolving from transitory wealth seekers to people more set on establishing more permanent towns and settlements. A significant aspect of the collection remains its research value; it included food containers, shipping crates, fish and pig bones, tools, hardware, armaments and clothing -- the type of specimens that can help determine the chronology of other historic archaeological finds.

This fascinating collection offers numerous educational opportunities and has engendered several partners, including the Loess Hills Alliance, Department of Tourism/State of Nebraska, and Department of Tourism/ State of Iowa.