The mere mention of any so-called ghost ship usually conjures up visual images of either fictional haunted ships...like THE FLYING DUTCHMAN...or real derelicts found adrift with their entire crew unaccountably missing...like the MARY CELESTE.

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN is a legendary, albeit mythical ghost sailing ship that supposedly can never make port. Reports of supposed sightings over the past several centuries claim the vessel glows with a ghostly light. Superstitious sailors feared that the mere sight of this phantom ship was a portent of doom.

The MARY CELESTE was a merchant ship, discovered in the Atlantic Ocean in 1872. Unmanned and obviously abandoned in great haste, she was still under sail and on course for the Strait of Gibraltar. One lifeboat and her small crew were never found. They left behind all their personal belongings. No one knows why they left a perfectly seaworthy vessel.

And then there’s the SS BAYCHIMO...which falls into a unique ‘ghost ship’ category all her very own.
The BAYCHIMO was a modest sized steel-hulled cargo vessel built in 1911 for a German shipping company. She started out life as a coastal steamer. Built in Gothenburg, Sweden, her original name was ANGERMANELFVEN. Measuring 230 feet long, she displaced 1,322 tons and was powered by a triple expansion steam engine that gave her a top speed of ten knots.

Her initial service was on trading routes between Sweden and Hamburg, Germany. At the end of World War I, she became a part of Germany’s war reparations and was turned over to the British Government to help compensate that country for its wartime shipping losses.

The famed Hudson Bay Company acquired her in 1921. Renamed BAYCHIMO, she operated out of Vancouver, Canada. Her new name honored the tiny community of Bay Chimo, located on Canada’s northern shore.

Over the next decade, she completed nine successful voyages along the north coast of Canada, visiting the numerous trading posts there. Her primary role was to trade provisions for fur pelts with Inuit (Eskimo) natives living on the shores of the Arctic Ocean in Canada’s Northwest Territories.

Modifications to the renamed vessel for that service included the addition of ‘modern’ radio equipment and an unusual antennae array strung between her masts and funnel. The multiple rings visible in the following image separated several parallel parts of the ship’s fairly fragile radio antennae.

![Image of BAYCHIMO](image)

Shown above while docked in Vancouver, she routinely carried a good-sized cabin cruiser on her weather deck just forward of the bridge. This watercraft was used to provide access between the ship, when anchored, and trading posts located on inlets too shallow for her to enter safely.
In addition, a large and boxy enclosed and heated crow's nest was installed high on her foremast. Here, in relative comfort, crewmembers could be on the lookout for dangerous pack ice when navigating the icy waters of the Arctic Ocean.

One can only assume that the BAYCHIMO flew an array of colorful nautical signal flags when approaching trading posts to add a little excitement to the Inuit people’s otherwise stoic existence. In addition, part of the attraction of the vessel’s periodic calls at trading posts was the opportunity for the natives to go onboard ship. The following images of such visits were taken in the 1920s.
The BAYCHIMO’s steel hull had minimal ice-breaking capabilities. Her structure and propulsion system were no match for the much feared Polar pack ice that could surround and then crush an unwary vessel. Nevertheless, it was often necessary for her crew to place their vessel in such potentially dangerous situations in order to accomplish their assigned tasks.

One seaman, left, wrote of his 1927 adventures aboard the trading vessel thusly:

"...lost in impenetrable blankets of fog, stuck on shoals, cornered by bergs and forced to retrace our course over many miles to find a more promising lead of 'open water.'"

The BAYCHIMO successfully operated under such conditions for ten years. But in 1931, huge floes of unusually thick Arctic ice drifted south earlier than it had in decades. On October 1, 1931, she ran out of open water...and luck. An unexpected storm hit the ship on her return voyage to Vancouver and pushed the ice all around the ship, trapping it. The nearest safe haven was Barrow, Alaska; reachable only by ski-equipped aircraft.

Her skipper, Captain John Cornwell and 29 other crew members stayed onboard for two weeks, hoping that when the weather abated, they could break free. But their vessel remained locked in the ice, her hull groaning under the unremitting pressure. Fearing she would be crushed, the crew abandoned their ship. Fifteen of them were airlifted to safely from an improvised air strip which the crew created on the ice.
The captain and the remainder of his crew set up a temporary camp on the ice near their stranded ship, still harboring hopes of freeing her if weather conditions improved. There they waited for almost a month, their only relief periodic and dazzling displays of Northern Lights that draped the sky in vivid colors.

But the unusual weather that had trapped the BAYCHIMO continued. A blizzard hit them on November 24th, erasing all signs of their ship. The following morning, when the weather had cleared somewhat, the ship had vanished completely.

Assuming that she had been sunk in the fierce storm, they were also evacuated by air and returned to civilization. Then, less than a week later, news reached the ship’s captain that a hunter had seen the BAYCHIMO afloat and drifting roughly fifty miles from where it had been abandoned.

Gathering some of his crew, the captain went on an airborne search for his vessel...and found it. After landing on an accommodating ice floe, they discovered the ship had suffered severe damage during its unmanned excursion. Believing the BAYCHIMO was no longer seaworthy and might break up and sink at any time; the crew hastily removed some of the vessel’s cargo of furs and returned to the safety of land.

Normally, the story would end here and the Hudson Bay Company would write off their loss and claim whatever insurance coverage they had, once their loss could be documented. After all, numerous other vessels that had encountered similar circumstances were almost always crushed by the ice and sank when warmer weather completed their destruction.

But instead, the BAYCHIMO, seemingly intact, was spotted adrift in different ice-choked locations hundreds of miles apart numerous times over a span of 38 years following her initial abandonment. Those sightings resulted in her being dubbed the ‘Ghost Ship of the Arctic’.
In 1932, an explorer caught sight of the vessel floating near the coast as he trekked by dogsled from Herschel Island in the Yukon Territory to Alaska. The next year, some Eskimos marooned on the ice by a storm took shelter in the BAYCHIMO for a week until the weather abated and they could make their way across the ice to their homes.

The ship was seen in September of 1935 and again in November of 1939 near Wainwright, Alaska. Both times she was boarded, but the ice that had surrounded and entrapped her had also lifted the vessel upwards, leaving her in a precarious position and thus defying any possible salvage attempt.

During the post-World War II era, the 'Ghost Ship of the Arctic' was sighted several more times by explorers and Inuit inhabitants of Alaska. In March of 1962, a group of Inuit kayaking in the Beaufort Sea caught sight of the ship, still floating aimlessly in those icy waters near the top of the world.

Lastly, in 1969, the ship was sighted for a final time, still intact, but trapped once again in pack ice somewhere between Point Barrow and Icy Cape, Alaska. The ship’s last reported general location is denoted thus: X on the following map of Alaska’s north shore.

The absence of any further sightings almost certainly means that the ship’s deteriorating condition eventually caused her hull to fail under the crushing forces of Arctic pack ice. Presumably, when the ice that had entrapped and then kept her afloat melted, it probably released her remains to sink to the seabed.

Probably...
But, even today, no one knows for sure if the ‘Ghost Ship of the Arctic’ is still afloat or lying wrecked somewhere on the Arctic Ocean floor. In 2006, seventy-five years after she was abandoned, the state of Alaska attempted to determine if the BAYCHIMO was still afloat or not. To date, that effort has been fruitless.

Rational people would assume, after all these years that the BAYCHIMO has followed to the bottom the dozens of other luckless vessels that have been lost in the Arctic Ocean. The majority of them are known to have sunk; the result of warfare, collision or being crushed by the ice that entrapped so many of them.

BAYCHIMO, on the other hand is an exception. The lack of any evidence as to her ultimate fate leads the imaginative, the superstitious and those that see paranormal phenomena lurking in every unexplained ending to conjecture that she may someday appear again out of the cold mist of the Arctic.

Stranger things have happened…

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