

## Fern, 1871

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Any of numerous flowerless, seedless, vascular plants of the class *Filicinae*, having fronds with divided leaflets and reproducing by spores.

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Builder: Delamater & Steack of New York, Newport, Rhode Island

Length: 160'

Beam: 27' 4"

Draft: 13'

Displacement: 548 tons

Cost: \$84,750

Commissioned: 27 December 1871

Decommissioned: 30 June 1891

Disposition: Transferred to the U.S. Navy

Machinery: Inverted compound condensing steam engine; coal-fired boilers; single propeller

Performance & Endurance:

    Max: 9.0 knots

    Cruising:

Deck Gear:

Complement: 12

Armament: None (as a lighthouse tender)

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### Tender History:

*Fern*, a 548-ton, 160-foot steel-hulled tender, was built by Delamater & Steack of New York in Newport, Rhode Island for use on the west coast. She entered commissioned service in 1871. After sailing around Cape Horn, she arrived in San Francisco in March, 1872, where she was assigned to the 12th Lighthouse District for use as a supply tender. In 1873 she was reassigned to the 3rd Lighthouse District.

She was rebuilt in 1878. The Treasury Department transferred her to the Navy on 30 January 1891; and commissioned 22 April 1891, Lieutenant Commander A. J. Iverson in command. *Fern* sailed the east coast, carrying coal and general cargo to various bases, locating and destroying by gunfire wrecks of ships obstructing navigation, and assisting in the pre-commissioning trials of new ships. After 22 January 1898 she was based at Key West to carry mail and supplies to the increasing number of ships which concentrated in the Caribbean as war with Spain threatened. When war began in April *Fern* continued her runs from Key West to the squadron off Santiago and to Guantanamo Bay. On 16 October 1898, *Fern* was transferred to the District of Columbia Naval Militia and decommissioned on 22 October. In 1904 and 1905 she was laid up at Norfolk, then repaired at Detroit for duty with the Minnesota Naval Militia. She was renamed *Gopher* on 27 December 1905. With United States entry into the first World War, *Gopher* was assigned duty as a practice ship at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, and on 30 May 1917 was returned to commission. She trained members of the Naval Reserve at ports in the 9th Naval District, principally Chicago, until she was placed out of commission 19 April 1919. *Gopher* was re-commissioned on 15 May 1921 for service with the Naval Reserve at Toledo, Ohio. On 1 October 1922 she was placed in reduced commission, and on 5 August departed for Boston. While in passage she rammed and damaged a lock in the Soulanges Canal and was apprehended and held by the Canadian Government at Quebec. Upon her release she was taken in tow by *Wandank*, but on 21 September 1923 she sank during a Northwest gale in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. *Gopher* was later decommissioned as of the date of her sinking.

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### Sources:

*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships.*

Douglas Peterson. *United States Lighthouse Service Tenders, 1840-1939*. Annapolis: Eastwind Publishing, 2000.

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