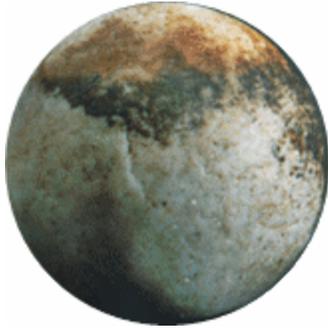


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Marbles From Shipwrecks

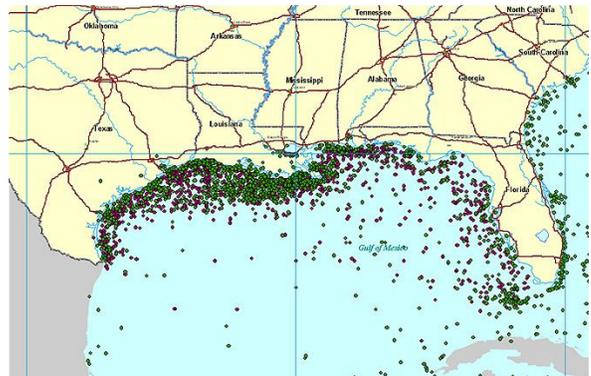
The most famous Shipwreck Marble is the unglazed china marble recovered from the wreck of the Titanic.



Marble from the wreck of the Titanic

However, this was not the only marble trying to make the trip across the Atlantic. As we all know, handmade marbles (glass and non-glass) were produced in Germany from the mid-1800s until after World War 1. Have you ever stopped to think how those marbles were transported to the United States? Cargo from Europe was, and still is, transported across the Atlantic Ocean by ship. Most German marbles were imported through New York or Philadelphia in the East, through Chicago via the Great Lakes, or through New Orleans and Galveston via the Gulf of Mexico. They were shipped in wood crates or barrels.

Ship transport in the 19th Century was a much riskier venture than it is today. Back then, ships were constructed of wood, or wood over an iron frame. They were powered by wind, or by steam (produced by boilers that were prone to explosion). There was no GPS to aid in navigation, no radio to receive changes in weather forecasts, no automatic updating of charts to record shifting sand bars. Shipwreck from storm, poor navigation or incorrect charts, was a constant threat. Just off the coast of Long Island are hundreds of charted shipwrecks, with thousands more uncharted and unrecorded. Shipwrecks dot the shores of the East Coast and the Gulf of Mexico.



Charted shipwrecks of the Southeast United States

So, it is no surprise that some cargos of marbles were lost in shipwrecks. What is surprising is that very few have been discovered.



Marble recovered from City of Houston wreck

The first wreck from which marbles were recovered was the *City of Houston* which was lost in a storm enroute from New York to Galveston off the coast of North Carolina in October 1878. The wreck was discovered by a diving company and marbles were recovered from it in July 1988. The marbles were sulphides and swirls. A number of these were sold for a time in the early 1990s by Lloyd Huffer. These marbles were accompanied by a certificate identifying the wreck and it's history.

There have been reports over the years of a small number of handmade German marbles recovered from a Great Lakes

steamship lost in 1865, and marbles recovered from a North Sea steamship that sank off the coast of Holland in 1895.



Sample of marbles recovered from Long Island wreck

In 2000, a wreck was discovered off the coast of Long Island. The diver recovered a number of marbles from the wreck site.

The diver was unable to identify the ship that was lost. There was virtually no wreckage on the ocean floor other than marbles, beer steins and porcelain doll heads.

He feels that there was a fire on-board because many of the marbles are fractured, indicating that they were heated and then cracked when the ship sank into the cold water. The wood crates/barrels either burned prior to the wreck or disintegrated in the intervening years, leaving the marbles to become scattered around the wreck site by the currents.



Sample of cracked marbles recovered from Long Island wreck

The glass marbles all have a pitted haze on the surface (you can see this on the *City of Houston* marble as well). This is called devitrification. Devitrification is a natural process that occurs on siliceous material (glass is mainly silica). The process occurs when the surface of the glass becomes partly crystalline as it absorbs moisture from the ocean. Devitrified glass has a frosty or cloudy appearance to it. Since the devitrification occurs evenly on the surface of the marble, a buff or

light polish will remove this layer, revealing the marble underneath. All of the glass marbles found in the Long Island wreck have devitrification on the surface. However, they do not have any chips or flakes.



Long Island wreck marbles after buffing



Long Island wreck marbles after buffing

In addition to glass marbles, the diver recovered a quantity of crockery and china marbles.

The salt-glazed marbles did not experience devitrification, so many of them are as Mint as the day they were produced. Some did become the home of marine life, as you can see from the image above.



Non-Glass marbles recovered from Long Island wreck

The shipwreck marbles from the *City of Houston* are difficult to find these days. Pete Caparelli of Land of Marbles purchased a quantity of the Long Island wreck marbles a few years ago and has been selling them through his website over the past three years. He has had most of them buffed so that you can see the marble, but he may still have unbuffed ones available.

You may come across Shipwreck Marbles during your collecting adventures.

Don't look at them as hazy marbles. They are an interesting footnote in marble collecting, illustrating the perils involved in get marbles from their place of manufacture to the children who would enjoy them.



Non-Glass marbles recovered from Long Island wreck