

1771

OLD REPRINT

# Breeches Buoy Brings Seaman Through Surf



Coast Gaurdsmen used rescue method employed scores of times from Peaked Hill shore to ships imperilled in "Graveyard of Atlantic".

*Shuttlemore*

## WRECK OF BRIG CLARA J. ADAMS

September 15, 1882: At about midnight the brig Clara J. Adams of Lubec, Maine, stranded on the east end of Peaked Hill Bar during the prevalence of a hard northeast gale, with thick weather. There was also a very high sea, and it was to sheer stress of weather in conjunction with a strong westerly tide setting into Massachusetts Bay that the disaster was due. The brig had a crew of eight men, and was bound from Booth Bay to Philadelphia, with a cargo of ice. She was discovered at 1:30 a.m. by the life-saving patrolman, who hurried to the station, two miles to the westward and gave the alarm, it being two o'clock when he rushed into the station and aroused his comrades. As the beach was in a terribly soft condition, one man was at once dispatched by the Keeper for the horse, while the others got the boat out on its carriage ready for a start. They hooked-up and started at a slow pace through the soft sand and at 3 o'clock they arrived abreast the

wreck. The horse was immediately sent back for the cart containing the breeches-buoy apparatus, the driver being told to make all haste he could. Nothing but the dim outline of the vessel, lying head on, could be seen amidst the tremendous confusion of the breakers upon the outlying bar, three hundred yards and more from the beach; and before a definite plan of action could be determined upon the Keeper and crew of the next lifesaving station west arrived upon the scene, the wreck was nearly halfway between the two stations. It was then half-past three o'clock, and the two Keepers at once joined in consultation as to the best course to be taken. The conditions were such that to launch a boat was unusually hazardous, and the distance and darkness rendered the prospect of successful communication by means of the short-line extremely doubtful. At this time word came that it was impossible for the now thoroughly jaded horse, owing to the bad condition of the beach, to haul the apparatus without more assistance. One station crew was detailed to render assistance and help the horse, while the other crew remained on

the scene ready with the boat for any emergency. The horse had come nearly to a standstill three-quarters of a mile off, and when the surfmen reached the spot some manned the drag-rope while others put their shoulders to the wheels, and by dint of hard pulling and pushing over the soft and yielding sand the apparatus was slowly brought to the scene of intended operations. It was still dark and stormy, and while waiting for day it was decided to bring an extra boat down. The other station crew, in turn, proceeded with the jaded horse for the spare boat kept at the boathouse between the stations for just such occasions as the present. The first glimmer of dawn now began to appear in the eastern sky. Although it was yet too early to see the vessel plainly, the men, in their eagerness to get a line to her, fired the gun as soon as it was ready. The shot missed its mark, either falling short or going wide, it could not be seen which. It was quickly hauled back and the line faked on the sand for another shot. With an increased charge of powder, the second missile passed directly over the vessel, but the line was chafed in two by

some part of the vessel's rigging over which it was dragged by the shot. The third shot was equally fruitless, the line parting over the vessel. It seems that the Keeper erred in using the smallest or No. 4 shot-line, having mistaken, in

the darkness, the distance of the vessel from the shore. Had either of the larger sized shot-lines been used, communication would doubtlessly have been established at once. At about the time the third shot was fired, the crew had arrived back at the scene with the extra boat. It was now seen that the vessel ere long must break up under the terrific strain to which she was being subjected by the tremendous combers which broke against and over her from one end to the other, the masts tottering as though ready to fall at any moment. The crew of the vessel could be seen clinging to the weather side of the fore-castle, peering anxiously towards the shore for help. They were indeed in deadly peril and the sight nerved the little band of lifesavers to extra effort. They realized whatever was done must be done quickly.

Both boats were therefore launched into the angry surf by being agreed before starting that one of the crews, with their lighter boat, would make a bold dash for the vessel, while the other crew, in the relief boat, should lay to just inside the heaviest line of breakers in reserve. It was a most anxious moment for all hands, both on shore and out on the wreck. To go alongside of the wreck would mean the instant destruction of any boat. The Keeper therefore approached as near as he dared and shouted for a line to hold the boat up to the sea, which was raging all about him. With the line from the vessel, supplemented by skillful use of the oars, the boat was kept in position long enough for the entire crew to be taken off. The lifeboat, nearly gunwale deep with its living freight, was now successfully backed into the beach, under convoy of the relief boat, the latter remaining near so as to be of service in case of a capsizing.

It was a gallant rescue and well and nobly done. The shipwrecked crews were conducted at once to the lifesaving station, where dry clothing and much needed refreshments were served; the scanty wardrobes of the surfmen being drawn on so heavily it was necessary for some of the men to stay in wet clothes. The brig was a total loss. The crew received shelter and care at the station for three days. Before departing for their

January 6, 1884: At about half past 9 o'clock in the morning a bark was observed by the crew of the Peaked Hill Bars Station with signals set standing in toward the land. They were unable to make the signals out, however, and as the vessel had come in dangerously close to the bar, the station crew ran up the International Code flags J. D. (You are standing into danger), when she quickly tacked and went offshore.

## THE BRIG ARDEN:

The Whaling Brig Ardent sailed from Provincetown for a cruise off the Western Islands. She was manned by the following persons, most of whom were citizens: Captain, Samuel Soper; mate, Hicks Smalley; crew, John Savage, Stephen Cashin, Thomas Stull, Jonah Gross, Amos Nickerson, Thomas K. Hudson, Solomon Crowell, Philip Rich, Cyrenius Smalley, Franklin Sartright, Elisha Hopkins of Rhode Island; John Austin of Boston. They met with good success and were on passage home when they encountered a severe hurricane on Sept. 28th, 1823, which hove the vessel down and washed off Cashin, Gross and Nickerson. The masts were carried away close to the deck, then the vessel righted, but was full of water, only a small portion of the after part being out of water, and there the remainder of the crew took refuge. The cargo of oil barely keeping this part from being submerged when the seas broke over it. Attempts were made to get into the cabin for provisions and water, but proved futile. An occasional rain squall gave them, by wringing out their clothes, a few drops of brackish water, and for food all they subsisted on was a few barnacles and an occasional small fish. One after another died from starvation and exposure and dropped off the wreck. After twenty-six days of untold suffering there were only five left, the captain, mate, Hudson, Rich and Cyrenius Smalley. The British packet Lord Sudmouth, bound for Falmouth, England, sighted the wreck and took off the sufferers, who could not have lived much longer. Everything was done for their comfort but the mate, Hicks Smalley died shortly after being taken from the wreck, the remaining four being barely saved. The last survivor was the late Phillip Rich, who died at an advanced age of 90, but who christened his granddaughter with a middle name of the ship that rescued them.

names, the officers wrote letters acknowledging their gratitude to the Life-saving Service, and extolling the bravery of the two crews in so fearlessly putting off, in the face of such overwhelming odds, to carry out the rescue.