

Braving the Seas



IT TOOK APPROXIMATELY two months for the schooner to reach the shores of the Americas. The trip was anything but smooth sailing. But, that is exactly what Captain Brophy had promised Mike and Aileen before they left the Southampton harbor. Many of the passengers suffered seasickness for the first three to four days until they became accustomed to the rocking and shifting vessel. Because of the close quarters the passengers were forced to endure, outbreaks of trench mouth, body ulcers, and even lice, plagued the immigrants.

Others suffered from scurvy, a dietary deficiency of vitamin C, brought on by the absence of fresh produce.

Because the ship made port only twice during the eight-week voyage the provisions they picked up while harbored had to be safe from spoilage. To purchase and eat fresh fruits and vegetables was out of the question. Thus, salted meat, aged cheese, stale bread, and hard tack made up their menu while at sea.

Several times while sailing across the Atlantic, bumboats traveling in close proximity requested permission to tie off to Sweet Magnolia. They wanted to sell their goods and produce to passengers. Captain Brophy would have none of it.

“Permission denied! Sail on or be sorry! I’ve had my fill of your cheap watered-down ale and your poison-laced food.” Captain Jack had been victimized before by spoiled goods such as meat, potatoes, greens and other produce these sea merchants sold to his crewmembers and passengers on other voyages. Although many of his crewmembers urged him to let them buy from the mobile merchants, the skipper refused to allow purchases of any kind while on the seas.

Consequently, because of the lack of fresh produce, many on Brophy’s boat experienced a range of symptoms associated with scurvy, such as rashes, hemorrhaging, bleeding gums, aching joints and dizziness. To treat this illness, Captain Jack distributed rations of lime juice to his passengers and siphoned from his stockpile of the barreled fruit juice located below in the

stowage of the boat. This homemade remedy seemed to do the trick as passengers recovered their health.

Sickness was not the only challenge for these seafarers. Floating icebergs in the early summer months, drifting down through David's Straights, made their way past the coast of Labrador into the Atlantic. These floating nuisances, if struck, could cause boats to sink. Typically, they could be spotted by a crewmember in the crow's nest. Unless of course there was dense fog. If the icebergs were not enough to strike fear in them, the sea storms were.

Bad weather, on several occasions, tested the mettle of Sweet Magnolia and its passengers. Gale force winds, high seas, and driving rains made for perilous sailing. One particular morning, just at the break of dawn, a squall arose.

There was thick fog lying heavy across the surface of the water. The sails were still for the lack of wind. Without warning, a violent storm declared war on Brophy's vessel and passengers. It unleashed its fury in the form of lightning bolts, sheets of driving rain, hail, and heavy winds. The ship was tossed about like a rag doll, and from bow to stern, Sweet Magnolia was assaulted and tested to the brink of destruction.

From the wheelhouse, Captain Jack bellowed out commands: "Passengers, in the hull! Crewmembers, to your stations! Batten down the hatches, mates! Batten

down the hatches!” This was not the skipper’s first storm upon the high seas. He did not want it to be his last. Brophy knew that his vessel was one mistake away from going down or flipping over. With powerful poise and great specificity, he gave forceful instructions to his crew. They quickly carried his orders out without a second of hesitation. These men knew Captain Jack had veteran seaman skills. Except for the good Lord, he was the only one who could save them. They gladly obeyed his commands.

The Quakers, who were huddled down below, were praying loud, desperate prayers to God. They asked that He calm the storm and save them from perishing. The moans and groans coming from the belly of the ship from these god-fearing believers, sounded as if there were a hundred women suffering the intense labor pains of childbirth - all at the same time.

But just when it seemed that things could not get any worse, they did. The unimaginable happened. The boat struck a coral reef as it was descending a twenty-foot rogue wave. The impact punched two holes below the vessel’s water line. Sweet Magnolia immediately began to take on water and became less and less navigable. Mike Reese, the schooner’s shipwright, was frantically summoned to the scene where he tactically hammered resin-dipped, cone-shaped wedges into each of the holes. Instantly, the pieces of wood swelled as they

absorbed the ocean's salt water, sealing off the leaks and averting a catastrophe. Crewmembers grabbed buckets and scooped up the torrent of water that had poured in from the sea, hauling it topside where they dumped it back into the ocean from whence it came.

For sixty long and life-threatening minutes, the crew and passengers of Sweet Magnolia battled the tempest. Then, as quickly as the morning storm had arisen, it subsided. The sea became calm and the schooner still. Immediately, Captain Jack gave a long and hardy blast on his bullhorn, which meant that there was smooth sailing ahead.

One by one, the passengers who had huddled together in the hull, praying, and at times, screaming out of sheer fear during the storm, emerged topside safe and sound. Indeed, Sweet Magnolia, along with her passengers, had been spared from a water grave. As the reality of their survival set in, everyone aboard, including Captain Brophy, became ecstatic. They knew just how close they had come to perishing. One of the crewmembers broke out his fiddle, which set the passengers to dancing. These people were celebrating the fact that they were alive. Even Brophy found a reason to smile. This time, as Aileen saw him grinning, the missing tooth did not bother her in the least. She had a new appreciation for the man who fought the storm on their behalf and won.

Mike, with the permission of a grateful and humbled skipper, read aloud to the crew and passengers the entire ninety-first Psalm:

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, *He is* my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely, he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, *and* from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth *shall be thy* shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; *nor* for the arrow *that* flieth by day; *Nor* for the pestilence *that* walketh in darkness; *nor* for the destruction *that* wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but* it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, *which is* my refuge, *even* the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in *their* hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will

set him on high, because he hath known my name.

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I *will be* with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.”

A prayer of thanksgiving to the Master of the Sea followed.

Two days later, from the crow’s nest, a crewmember spotted the port of New York. His announcement was met with loud cheers from those who stood on the deck below. The passengers of Sweet Magnolia felt a deep sense of relief as they finally saw a land mass and signs of civilization in the distance. These pilgrims had weathered sickness and life-threatening storms for the chance to begin a new life on a different continent. Their dreams were about to be realized.

New York was the main port-of-entry at the time for emigrants coming to the American colonies. But the Reeses, along with their thirty-five fellow passengers, crewmembers, and the skipper, had planned an island landing on the outer banks of North Carolina, known as Roanoke Island. This entry point was less crowded than the New York port and put the travelers closer to their desired inland destination of Raleigh, North Carolina. They reached their Roanoke landing three days after spotting the port of New York.