Wreck of the Julia Ann

by
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Nautical Museum of Newport Harbor

The Wreck of the Julia Anne

Kiosk Documentary, Newport Harbor Nautical Museum
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The dialog attributed to Captain Pond and Esther Spangenberg were adapted from diaries and published letters.

Running Time: 3:10

Video of tall ship cruising at sea.

CAPTAIN POND (VO)
Twenty-seven days out - October 3 - I was on the lookout for land, wanting to pass certain dangerous islands before dark. At sundown no land could be seen from the crows nest, so at 8 o'clock I charged First Mate Coffin to keep the lookout, and went below. I'd been in my cabin not half an hour when I heard the yell, "Hard down the helm!" ... Captain Benjamin Franklin Pond.

Sounds of destruction. Loud cracking. Dramatic music. Indiscernible shouting.

CAPTAIN POND (VO)
I sprang to my feet but was nearly thrown upon the floor by the violent striking of the ship. Before I could reach the deck she was thumping hard . . .

Mellow seas.

NARRATOR (VO)
The night was black as ink when the San Francisco-bound Julia Anne, with its Mormon passengers and 185 tons of coal wrecked on Manuae [man-oh-WAY-uh]. A wealth of gold filled the captain's safe, payment for grains rushed to Australian miners during a severe food shortage.

Photos. More onboard destruction.

ESTHER (VO)
When I reached my cabin, mothers were screaming, children clinging to them in terror, furniture torn from its lashings, the ship lying on her side. The scene can never be erased from my memory. ... Esther Spangenberg, passenger.

Photos.

CAPTAIN POND (VO)
The sea had stove in the forward part of my cabin and washed away the starboard staterooms, taking with it two women and a child. I could see that the poor mother had lashed her infant to her bosom.

Photos.

ESTHER (VO)
A rope had been conveyed to the reef. A sailor fastened it to a rock, securing the other end to the ship. Many people made it to the reef - including me. I was badly bruised. My clothes were torn to shreds.

Photos.

NARRATOR (VO)
Standing in waist-deep water in the cold night, the survivors looked on helplessly at two terrified families afraid to venture off the ship. As the sea hammered down, the Julia Ann rocked back and forth ominously, finally breaking in half on the sharp corral. The bow, with its tons of coal and the captain's gold, slipped into the deep. The stern, relieved of that tremendous weight, shot straight up into the air and landed on the reef. The two families, miraculously, walked off unharmed.

Photos of tropical island.

NARRATOR (VO)
When morning broke, the bruised and frightened survivors set up a camp. As the weeks passed, life on the barren reef became miserable. The Mormons, who were excellent farmers, planted a garden. But it did not flourish in the poor soil. For food they relied on turtle, fish and birds, supplemented with coconut and some supplies salvaged from the ship. Their only hope for rescue lay in the repair of a battered long boat that had survived the ordeal.

Photos.

CAPTAIN POND (VO)
The nearest inhabited islands were the Society group, some 350 miles away. At daybreak on December 3, eight weeks from the day of the wreck, the wind was blowing in gusts from the favorable northwest. Heavy clouds hung upon the western horizon, and a cold rain rendered the entire aspect of nature unpromising. I hesitated long, but it was the first Westerly we'd had. I gave the order for our departure.

PHOTOS.

ESTHER (VO)
We watched the boat recede from view on the boundless sea, aware that our very existence depended upon it reaching some hospitable land. We passed a fortnight in anxious suspense, invoking God's blessing on the captain and the nine brave men who risked their lives in an open, crazy boat to try to bring us relief.

Photos.

CAPTAIN POND (VO)
Night or day, rain or shine, wind or calm, we plied the oars. On the fourth day we landed at Bora Bora. A large number of boats were there, the news of the wreck having spread like wildfire. When the schooner Emma Packer appeared off the harbor, I boarded her, and we sailed for the rescue of my poor fellow voyagers of the Julia Anne.

Photos.

CAPTAIN POND (VO)
Words fail me in any attempt to describe the scene that met me on Manaue reef as I sprang from the relief boat into the outstretched arms of those half-starved castaways.

A pair of antique spectacles on a table.

CAPTAIN POND (VO)
How did it happen? Our none-too-bright lookout saw a long white strip of water ahead and wondered what it could be. He was near-sighted, and thought he would go down into the forecastle for his spectacles, and of course before his return the ship had solved the mystery. Five lives lost, great anxiety and suffering, and a large amount of property destroyed ... all owing to the nearsightedness of a common sailor.