

THE LOSS OF THE *POLAND* 1840

Notes on Some Few of the Wrecks and Rescues During the Present Century by Robert Bennet Forbes

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I have received from a relative of one of the "Poland's" passengers a copy of a letter to the Boston "Courier." I extract a part of the long and interesting account "See sailed from New York for Havre on the 11th of May, 1840, under command of Captain Anthony of New Bedford, with 63 persons, comprising passengers and crew. On the 16th came a storm of thunder and lightning; they were in Lat 41 ½°, Long. 58 ½°. At about 3 P.M. the ship was struck by lightning.

An examination showed that the lightning had gone down by the foremast and set the cotton cargo on fire. It was not until several hours after the stroke that it became certain that she was on fire. Mr. Delano, the first mate, and the steward, went into the run, but came out uncertain as to whether the ship was on fire or not. But ere long it became certain that she was, and all hands went to work throwing over the cargo. On taking off the lower fore-hatch the awful fact became apparent that much fire existed; and everything was done to close up every aperture and thus try to smother the fire, and preparations were made for getting out the boats.

The cabin was full of gas and every one had to be brought on deck. Captain Anthony quietly and coolly gave his orders, and they were punctually obeyed. Provisions were put into the long-boat and she was hoisted out; the women and children were first put into her, and the other passengers, except three.

So great was the confidence up to this time that the fire would be put out that the children were undressed and put regularly to bed; but when the awful fact became known we got everybody on deck. When the hatches were closed the gas percolated into the cabin and rendered this necessary. The other boats were got out and keepers placed in them.

When the long-boat was veered astern there were 35 persons in her. Knowing that she could not contain any more, we were anxious for the coming day, to know how the rest of us would be cared for in the smaller boats; it was quite certain that they could not carry those that remained. Fortunately, the first night there was little wind, and the ship was hove to. After the long-boat was hoisted out, the steward saved from the cabin the captain's watch and his chronometer and some money; but the gas drove him out. We walked the deck all night; Captain Anthony was busy going about and stopping up every crack; confidence was expressed that the good God would not leave us to perish.

The ice-house on deck was full of good things, and the cook was kept busy cooking for the supply to the boats. Evening came, and nothing was in sight. The decks had by this time become quite warm near the mainmast on the starboard side, but towards night the heat lessened and our hopes were revived.

About ten, Sunday night, most of the people were asleep on deck. The sufferings of the people were intense, for they felt like people confined upon a burning mine without power to escape. Captain Anthony laid down near the writer and slept. On awakening he took my hand and said he felt that we should be saved; he had had a pleasant dream.

The weather had now changed, and the people in the long-boat became alarmed; and Mr. B. Wainwright hailed and suggested their being taken on board. Captain Anthony requested them to wait for daylight. The fire had evidently increased; the pitch was coming out of the seams; and we looked momentarily for the breaking out of the flames. It was now thought advisable to take in the boats and put the ship before the wind in hopes to find some vessel.

When the people from the long-boat came on board it was found that from their cramped condition they had suffered more than we; their feet had been constantly in the water, and their bodies wet by the spray.

Mrs. Wainwright had held one of her children in her arms the whole time. Mrs. Arfridson was nearly exhausted, and her infant nearly dead for want of its natural food; some had been seasick all the time, and their situation cannot well be imagined. Said was made, and we steered to the N.E.; and at noon we were in Lat.40°, Long. 56°. The ship was found to have leaked a good deal, and the pumps brought warm water. At 2 P.M. on this day a said was seen, and we bore up to her. She proved to be the 'Clifton.' of Boston, Capt. I.B. Ingersoll, bound from Liverpool for New York, with 240 steerage passengers. To Captain Anthony's inquiry, Ingersoll said, "Come all on board, and bring what provisions you can." The 'Clifton's' boat was soon alongside, and the transfer began; the sea was rough and the wind increasing, and the task was dangerous; and for six hours the two boats were passing to and fro. By 9 o'clock we were safely transferred, and the 'Clifton' went on her way. At the time the last boat left the 'Poland,' her deck was too hot to stand upon. An effort was made to get out stores from the deck-house, but on opening the door, the heat drove the men away. On board the 'Clifton' we met with the most cordial reception; we had lost pretty much all our clothing, and the chests of the sailors and others were freely opened to clothe us. The writer of this narrative winds up by saying that to Captain Anthony all the credit for the preservation of the passengers was due; the card published by the passengers does him no more justice, and might well have been stronger. It was said by some that the ship might have been scuttled, but those who said so knew that it would have been dangerous. The passengers and the crew deserve all praise; from first to last there was order and regularity."

This comprises all that the passenger says. To this I have only to remark that the opening of the hatches, and thus giving vent to the fire, was a mistake, and the chances for extinguishing the fire were lessened.


The *Poland* (564 tons) was one of William Whitlock Jr's 14 packet ships that made up the Havre Whitlock Line he operated from 1823 until 1864.

William Whitlock Jr is part of the WHITLOCK16 family, a descendant of Thomas Whitlock who left Salisbury, Wiltshire in 1641 age 18.

New York Evening Post
 New York Shipping Notices
 October 30, 1839

The *Poland's* Last Voyage
 Scheduled May 8, 1840

**FOR HAVRE.
 UNION LINE.**



To sail from New York on the 8th, 16th, and 24th,
 and from Havre 1st, 8th, and 16th of every month.

	From New York.	From Havre.
LOUIS PHILLIPPE, J. Castoff,	16th Oct.	1st Dec.
	8th Feb.	16th March.
	24th May.	8th July.
IOWA, Wm. W. Pell,	24th Oct.	8th Dec.
	16th Feb.	1st April.
	8th June	16th July.
BURGUNDY, D. Lines,	8th Nov.	16th Dec.
	24th Feb.	8th April.
	16th June.	1st Aug.
RHONE, J. A. Wotten,	16th Nov.	1st Jan.
	8th March.	16th April.
	24th June.	8th Aug.
DUCHESSE D'ORLEANS, A. Richardson,	24th Nov.	8th Jan.
	16th March.	1st May.
	8th July.	16th Aug.
VILLE DE LYON, C. Stoddard,	8th Dec.	16th Jan.
	24th March.	8th May.
	16th July.	1st Sept.
SULLY, W. C. Thompson,	16th Dec.	1st Feb.
	8th April.	16th May.
	24th July.	8th Sept.
EMERALD, Geo. W. Howe,	24th Dec.	8th Feb.
	16th April.	1st June.
	8th Aug.	16th Sept.
SILVIE DE GRASSE, L. Wiederholdt,	8th Jan.	16th Feb.
	24th April.	8th June.
	16th Aug.	1st Oct.
POLAND, C. Anthony, Jr.	16th Jan.	1st March.
	8th May.	16th June.
	24th Aug.	8th Oct.
ALBANY, J. Johnston, Jr.	24th Jan.	8th March.
	16th May.	1st July.
	8th Sept.	16th Oct.

These vessels are all of the first class, and ably
 commanded, with elegant accommodations for pas-
 sengers, comprising all that may be required for com-
 fort and convenience, including wines and stores of
 every description. Goods sent to either of the sub-
 scribers at New York, will be forwarded by these
 packets free of all charges, except those actually in-
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C. BOLTON, FOX & LIVINGSTON,
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