



North Carolina Shark Attack Project

Note: The following is an article that describes a shark attack that occurred on October 1st, 1855, in the vicinity of Cape Hatteras in Dare County. This article appeared in the *Albany Evening Journal*, October 13th, 1855.

Rescue of Nine More of the Crew of the Ship William Penn.

The brig Excel, Captain Talman, arrived at Savannah on Monday afternoon, from N. York, having on the 1st of October, fallen in with the raft containing the two mates and seven seamen from the wreck of the William Penn, after having been twelve hours without provisions and water. This makes nineteen persons saved out of the twenty-five. Three are known to have been lost; two others were last seen on a boat drifting from the wreck, and have been probably rescued by some vessel.

We annex a very interesting letter from Mrs. Cole, the captain's wife, of the ill-fated ship, which we find in the Boston Traveller.

THRILLING NARRATIVE OF THE WRECK BY THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE.

We have received a letter from Mrs. Cole, the wife of Captain Cole, of the William Penn, which gives a very graphic description of the wreck of that vessel off Cape Hatteras, which has already been announced in our paper. The ship, it appears, ran aground on a shoal, on the morning of the 30th of September. The masts were cut away, and several vessels, one of them the steamer Nashville, which saw their signals of distress, went heedless by. We quote from the letter:—

As we were attempting to lower our boats four men were drowned in the breakers; and in the course of a very little time our three boats upon which we placed much dependence, were all capsized and taken adrift and our long boat broken up by the falling of the mast. Yet there was as much order and decorum among the crew as in ordinary duty on board ship. With cheerfulness they immediately went to work to construct a raft and furnished it with provisions, &c., as a dernier resort—although all felt that the final breaking up of the ship might not take place for twenty-four hours or more. We could distinctly see many people standing on the shore, looking on our forlorn condition.

But the day wore away, and the dreariness of night came on; when it was dark we showed blue lights, which signal we thought we saw returned from shore, but no kindly hand offered relief. The breakers now became fearful about our ship, which shook her like a trembling leaf, and about 9 o'clock in the evening we found our cabin filling, and knew the crisis must be near at hand. Permission was then given to all that choose, to repair to the raft. The first and second mate went forward, lowered the raft and seven men with them.

The captain chose to remain still on the ship, and repaired to the quarter deck with as many as liked to remain with him: and what was quite remarkable, out of our number of 20, we were equally divided—eight went with the officers and eight remained with the captain and myself. As we stood there watching the final breaking up, no one would have discovered the least trepidation or dismay; but there was perfect cool deliberation, each watching the pieces as they separated, and the captain constantly directing their attention to such as he thought would be safe to venture on, and saying, "Each of you select according to your judgment."

We took an affectionate farewell of each other and commended ourselves to the tender mercies of a compassionate God. Just before the bulwarks fell in, my husband says—"Boys, will any of you assist in saving my wife?" One noble sailor standing near him promptly replied—"That sir, is what I have remained here for, and I am ready to do anything." Just then came the final crash, and the captain gave me to this man, who with the assistance of another, dragged me on a piece of the wreck; this is the last I know of my husband; his foothold gave way and he sank into the waters, though the sailors saw him come up some distance off, on the mizzen mast.

The breakers were dashing over us terribly, and washing me off every few minutes. Two or three times I sank, expecting to rise no more, and resigned my spirit to Him who gave it—but by violent struggles and the aid of the men, I gained my position once more. Three of the sailors soon found one-half of the quarter deck whole and sound. This they soon gained, and threw us a rope to come to them, saying, "Not a man of you comes on board till Mrs. Cole is safely here."

My clothes had nearly all been torn and cut off, so that I felt the chill of the night air whenever the breeze sprang up, while the water was still washing over us, but they did all they could to make me comfortable and keep me as dry as possible. Our raft bore us safely over the breakers, and we very soon found ourselves in smooth water. Here were the nine afloat on the same piece of wreck, but where was the tenth? But I forbear—I trust I shall soon meet him in New York.

Morning dawned. Again and again our hearts were cheered by the approach of a vessel, and signals of distress were hoisted, but our hearts sank within us as each passed on its way heedless of our dismay. The day waned, and night was coming on, when we discovered a schooner not far distant. We made a desperate effort to hail her, and now, O merciful Providence, she lowered her boat, and it makes for us!

I shall not attempt to describe our emotions. For the first time I wept, and thoughts of my dear husband overcame me. We bade adieu to our raft; that was then surrounded by turtles, dolphins, and sharks, too ravenous to wait their time. A shark bit one of the sailors that had dropped his foot over the side.

On board the schooner Marcus, Captain Eldridge did everything for our comfort that lay in his power. We remained on board four days, and then he hailed the steamship Knoxville, bound to Savannah, and asked Capt. Ludlow if he would take us on board. "Certainly, bring them on board," we heard him say with prompt cordiality.

On board the Knoxville we received the kindest treatment; a contribution was raised for us, and on arriving at Savannah, Saturday morning, Capt. Ludlow took us on board the steamship Alabama, that was to sail for New York that evening, and now we are on board that finely conducted boat, approaching the delightful shores, in our entrance to New York. E. W. Cole.