

Commodore Rodgers

By Marie Burnett

At approximately 7:00 o'clock Sunday morning, November 19, 1837, the 298 ton American whaleship Commodore Rogers, Captain Henry S. Howland, grounded at Monterey during a heavy gale..

The Commodore Rogers, which was owned by T. & A. Nye of New Bedford, left New Bedford on a whaling expedition June 1, 1836 and arrived at Monterey on Wednesday November 2, 1837, with 900 barrels of oil. On November 8, while the Captain was on shore, a tremendous off-shore squall struck the ship causing her to drag her anchors out into deep water. Her crew let her anchors slip and ran the vessel out under a reefed foresail. The French frigate Venus, responding to signals of distress hoisted by the crippled vessel, helped the Commodore Rogers get underway.

Five days later, on November 13, 1837, she returned to port at Monterey where she was supplied with an anchor. Sometime during the next five days she attempted to leave the port but was unsuccessful.

At dawn on the morning of Saturday November 18, 1837, the Commodore Rogers was standing out of the Bay with a fine breeze from the north and east. Between 9:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m., the wind shifted to the northwest and the vessel's progress out of the bay was slowed considerably. By 2:00 in the afternoon she was off the point in a heavy swell. There was a light wind which had "every appearance of dying away calm. Half an hour later, her head put round as if standing in", and she seemed to have lost the ground she had gained earlier. At about 3:20 the Commodore Rogers "came to right" ahead of the Toward Castle. At 10:00 p.m. that evening, the wind, picked up and was blowing strong in squalls from the northwest.

By daylight of Sunday November 19, 1837, the Commodore Rogers had lost her mizzen mast. By 7:00 a.m. her fore topsail was loosed and she was quickly run onto the beach, head foremost. She immediately swung round, broadside to the sea. Both of her remaining masts then went over the side and she began to roll.

The Captain deliberately grounded her on the beach in order to save her cargo. Had he attempted to keep her sailing, it is likely that she would have been forced onto the shore at the bottom of the bay where the surf broke with tremendous force and where there would have been little hope of saving her or any part other cargo.

After the Commodore Rogers struck, a group of soldiers arrived on the beach opposite her to guard the wreck. At 11:00 a.m., Faxon Dean Atherton boarded her and found her rudder broken away from the pintles and tearing away from her stern. He also observed that "as she jumped and pitched, her deck appeared to move in an undulating manner fore and aft as if in an earthquake."

A week later, on Sunday, November 26, 1837, the hull, spars, rails, rigging, and cargo of 900 barrels of oil were sold at a public auction. The three and a half gallon barrels of oil were sold for \$10.00 each to Captain Emmett of the ship Toward Castle. The hull of the ship, which contained about 100 barrels of provisions, was sold for \$66.00. Stores of bread sold for approximately \$10.00, 600 barrels of shooks (barrel staves) and ten tons of hoops sold for \$283. Masts, spars, rigging etc. were sold for \$15,000 total on "approved bills." Most of the wreck was purchased by John Coffin Jones, Jr.

Sources Cited

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