

# Isabelita Hyne

By Marie Burnett

At 10:00 o'clock on the evening of Wednesday, January 1, 1856, the barque Isabelita Hyne, Captained by Calhoun, ran ashore thirty-five miles south of the heads in the bay of Maria Montez.<sup>1</sup> The Chronicle reported that she was completely destroyed by the breakers and had entirely disappeared from the shore two weeks later.<sup>2</sup> Yet according to the Alta, the hull, sails, rigging, anchor, chains, and materials of the Isabelita Hyne were sold for forty dollars on January 15, 1856 by T.L. Poulfere & Co. auctioneers; John C. Boyt, agent and underwriters; and McCondray & Co., consignors.

The cause of the wreck of the Isabelita Hyne was never determined, but there was some suspicion that the loss of the vessel was not accidental. Shortly after she grounded, a reporter for the Chronicle received a tip that there had been a mutiny aboard the barque. An "intelligent seafaring man, who had communication with persons from the wreck" disclosed to the Chronicle reporter that the crew had intentionally wrecked the Isabelita Hyne to conceal evidence of a mutiny. Although this "mutiny theory" has never been proven, it does explain some of the peculiarities of the wreck.

For example, it explains the mysterious disappearance of the barque's cargo consisting of tea, sugar and rice. It was thought to have been salvaged, at least in part, by Half-Moon Bay residents. However, the only resident in that vicinity was a Mr. James Desington, who lived opposite the shore where the Isabelita Hyne grounded. He owned four miles along the coast and he claimed that the vessel was not pillaged. He reports that, "on the contrary" he "placed his entire force of men and Indians together with his animals at the disposal of those who were endeavoring to offer relief to the persons and property of the disabled vessel." The disappearance of the cargo might indeed support the mutiny theory as it seems quite plausible that the mutineers could have elected to "salvage" the cargo themselves.

A mutiny aboard the Isabelita Hyne might also explain why Captain Calhoun's body was seen "lashed to some of the rigging with his head cut off" and why, several days later, only a "portion" of his body washed ashore. The only other crew member recovered from the wreck was the mate, Beatty, whose body washed ashore the same day as that of Captain Calhoun. Captain Calhoun had been ill for over half the Isabelita Hyne's long passage of 70 days from Hong Kong to San Francisco. (It seems unlikely that decapitation would have been part of his recovery or cure.) Additionally, during the entire voyage it appears he made only two log entries.

Another peculiar detail of the wreck was the disappearance of the ship's crew and their clothing, as well as the vessel's charts, papers, and compasses. Only the logbook was found when she was boarded shortly after her demise.

The Isabelita Hyne belonged to Nye Brothers and Company of China. She was built for the Rio trade at Philadelphia in 1848 by J. K. Hammils, Esquire. She was a clipper model of 331 tons, copper fastened throughout and "a very fast sailor, besides being very staunch." She made two voyages from New York to San Francisco. The first was a 125 day journey with Captain Samuel F. Dewing; May 18, 1851 to June 13, 1851. The second journey was made in 124 days with Captain Lamson; September 8, 1852 to January 10, 1853. It is also estimated that the Isabelita Hyne ran more China trade from 1853 through 1856 than any other vessel of her tonnage. Her loss was estimated to be \$120,000.00, cargo included. According to Martin E. Wallace, she was the first recorded wreck in Half-Moon Bay.

## Sources Cited

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