

U. S. Ship Savannah  
At sea, May 10<sup>th</sup> 1847.

To the Honourable.

The house of Representatives  
of the United States.

The memorial of the  
undersigned, a portion of the Officers and crew of  
the late U. S. Schooner Shark, in behalf of  
themselves (and their late shipmates now serving  
in other ships of the Pacific Squadron - Res-  
pectfully sheweth,

That by the shipwreck of the  
late U. S. Schooner Shark, your memorialists  
were thrown upon the shores of Oregon, with the  
loss of all (and every thing they possessed. And as a  
Court of Inquiry into the circumstances of said  
shipwreck has exonerated them from all blame  
or neglect of duty, your Memorialists most  
respectfully appeal to your honourable body, for  
just (and moderate remuneration for their losses  
taking into consideration the extraordinary expenses  
they were subjected to in consequence thereof.)

Neil M. Harrison, St. Command.  
W. J. French Lieutenant  
Wm. Hollis Acty Purser  
J. M. Maury Capt. Mast  
Alex. Carter m. mate  
Wm. Irons Capt. of Castle  
J. S. Humphreys Gun. Mate  
Peter Richie B. Mate  
William Powers. Capt. of Top  
William Drake Quarter Gunner  
Alex. Blatow Pur. & M.

Augustus Stevens Surgeons Steward  
Charles Bailey Dr. Master.  
Wm H Tracy Yeoman  
James Needham Cap. Hold  
John Brown Dr. Gunner  
John Mammen gr. Master  
John Baptiste Ships Cook  
Anthony Smith Seaman  
Wm Lloyd Seaman  
John Long Seaman  
Edw. Jones O. Seaman  
George Scott Ordinary Sea  
Gilbert A. Cotton O. Sea.  
Henry Foyan O. Seaman  
George Nations O. Seaman  
W. Harris Eds.

Documents accompanying Memorial  
of the Officers and Crew of the  
Late U.S. Schooner Shark.

viz:

Official report of the Lieut. Commdg.  
Extract from Minutes of Court  
of Inquiry

Letter from Commander in  
Chief of Pacific Squadron.

Astoria, Columbia River  
September 21<sup>st</sup>. 1846

Sir,

I have had the misfortune to lose by Shipwreck at the mouth of the Columbia River, the U. S. Schooner Shark, and with feelings subdued by this distressing event take up my pen to communicate the following particulars. -

Orders dated April 1<sup>st</sup>. 1846 from Commodore Sloat, commanding the Pacific Squadron, required me to ascend the Columbia River for about a hundred miles from its mouth, and so perform the duties assigned me as to leave the River again by the 1<sup>st</sup> day of September. Having complied with the preliminary part of this order, I endeavoured fully to complete it by leaving Fort Vancouver at daylight of August 23<sup>rd</sup>, but in consequence of stopping three days to assist the Am: Barge Toulon aground on the sands a few miles below Vancouver, and being obliged to feel my way down the River against head winds and without chart or Pilot, I did not reach the Anchorage in Baker's Bay (which is just within Cape Disappointment) until the 8<sup>th</sup> of September. I remained at anchor here until 4 P. M. of the 10<sup>th</sup> when the wind freshened up from the N. W. and although the afternoon was somewhat hazy, and the tide (being the first of the ebb) not at its most favourable stage

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stage, still remembering that it would be later and more unfavourable next evening and that the morning breezes would never serve to take us out, I resolved to get under way and go to Sea before the shades of the evening rendered the landmarks indistinct. -

I had been on the summit of the Cape in the forenoon, from whence the water on the bar appeared smooth with very moderate breakers on the sands and confident in my knowledge of the direction of the channel (having kept mid channel in entering the River in July) I could think of nothing to impede my safe passage to Sea other than those unavoidable dangers, consequent upon the change or failure of the mind or the unknown and unexpected action of the powerful tide. - The wind was aft in passing the Cape and just there the tide set broad out to the Westward; on getting under the lee of the Cape, the wind became very baffling, blowing in puffs and requiring the yards to be frequently braced on different tacks; - fearing that we should be swept on Peacock spit, which is an extension of sand to the Eastward of the spot upon which the Peacock was wrecked in 1841, I hauled more to the Eastward to bring Green Point on with the Cape astern, and having stationed an officer to look out (the mainsail being in my way) and inform me when Point Adams and the land about Youngs Point called back = scumb hill, was nearly in range, and perceiv =  
= ing

the breeze on the water ahead, steady, I stood along confidently about S.S. E by compass, which course gradually closed Green Point behind the cape, and at the moment I deemed myself far enough South to clear the North breaker and before the officer had reported the rocks comb <sup>Point Adams</sup> nearly in line I hauled upon the Starboard tack; but to my amazement the water which had never been less than five fathoms shoaled suddenly and we struck! - Uncertain whether we were on Pease's spit or the South breaker, and moving ahead and thumping as the swell alternately rose and fell beneath us, I ordered the weather anchor let go (chain stopped at 15 fathoms) with the view of checking her advance upon the sands until I could sound around for the channel.

The fore and aft sails were taken in, while the Whale Boat was lowering from the mast and as the greatest despatch was necessary, I myself shoved off in the Boat to sound. It took me but a moment to decide that we were on the south breaker, while endeavouring to regain the topel against a strong tide, I perceived her moving ahead the cable having parted, and in obedience to my signals the 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant W. Schenk promptly made all sail and endeavoured to put her about, but in consequence of the swell and tide upon the weather she missed stays and he was obliged to wear; while performing this evolution, I got alongside and

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as we had a fine working breeze and no longer thumped the bottom but came rapidly to the wind on the Starboard tack I entertained the hope of getting into water deep enough to anchor without fear of striking at low tide. - We heeled up at  $\frac{1}{2}$  E but fixing my eye upon distant points of land it was apparent that we were moving very slowly and that in the direction of the breakers on the middle sands; the tide took points on the weather bow and running with a velocity of five or six knots. - While on this tack we never had over  $3\frac{1}{2}$  fathoms water and as it had still to fall a fathom I dare not anchor drawing as we did 12 feet 10 inches and having already struck in quarter left three. - I thought of a resort to the blazon channel, but the water everywhere appeared so shoal to leeward, and I had no sure land marks to guide me (indeed the thought by the most experienced persons on the Columbia that its western entrance has of late years closed up) that to attempt it appeared like accelerating a catastrophe already painfully imminent. -

As we shoaled the water therefore on the middle sands, we had no alternative but to tack ship to the S. d. of N. d. which brought the South breaker on the lee bow; but the overwhelming strength of the tide, now rushing upon the weather beam, soon forced us to tack again to the Northward. - The Schooner usually so rapid

rapid and sure in stays performed this evolution from impediments of swell and current in a very sluggish manner and having lost her headway lay subject to the action of the South Easterly tide for some minutes, so that we lost much ground and could make but a short stretch to to the Northward, when it became necessary to put her head once more to Seaward. The wind now favoured us a point and going along N by S  $\frac{1}{2}$  S and sounding regularly in  $3\frac{1}{4}$  & 3 fathoms with a transient cessation of breakers bordering our course, I indulged the hope that the direction of the tide might have somewhat changed and we might slip past out in safety; but this pleasurable sensation lasted only for a moment; from 3 fathoms the leadsman gave  $2\frac{1}{2}$  and we then struck violently on a bank having only 10 feet water; the helm was put up & the mainsail taken in and as her bow fell off grating slowly over the sands the yards were squared and squaresail set in hopes of forcing her in the direction of the tide through the breakers which now curled over her starboard broadside. - It was now 7 o'clock; the Schooner lay with her head S by E rocked and surged by the swell so violently that for fear of losing the foremast I took in the squaresail & foretopgallant sail and settled the foretop-sail yard on the bap. -

We could now entertain

no

no hopes of saving the Vessel, unless her stability withstood the shock of the Sea until the return of high water, and as this was more than could be reasonably expected and the Masts seemed in momentary danger of going over the side, the Gig was carefully hoisted out, and I ordered Acting Purser Hollins to take all his Books and papers and a bag of specie, Assistant Surgeon Hudson with the sick (six persons) and my clerk Mr. John M. Maury into her to make their way to Point Adams. - The tide having taken a more Westerly direction jammed the Gig alongside so that when she attempted to shove off, she was swept forward and coming in contact with the Bower Anchor was stove and instantly filled, the Officers and men with great difficulty recovering the Vessel. Dr. Hudson holding by the end of a wet and slippery rope, often submerged to the shoulders was about to relinquish his hold from fatigue, when an active seaman secured a running bowline about his person, by which he was saved, the gig with her gunwales visible drifted to sea, nor could I venture to send the Whale Boat for her valuable freight on account of the surf. -

The tide had by this time attained an irresistible force, so much so that the Whale Boat which had been ordered to keep a position inshore of us protected by our hull from the Sea, was three carried fast us into the midst of the breakers outside  
and

and after being some time lost sight of en-  
 -tirely and supposed to have swamped or  
 gone to sea, was by her own fine qualities as  
 a <sup>Boat</sup> <sup>and by</sup> ~~Sea~~ dint of the good management and  
 rigour of her crew (a set of Whaling lads)  
 brought back to her place in safety. -

Nothing could now be done  
 but await patiently a change of tide, for if  
 of the cutter and Launch had been hoisted  
 out, they must have perished alongside or  
 been swept out to sea. - I ordered all  
 hands sent aft and told the men that  
 "our circumstances required the most orderly  
 conduct on their part, and strict and prompt  
 obedience to orders, that the safety of the  
 vessel perhaps of our lives depended on it,  
 that we had as yet made little water and  
 that if she held together till full flood we  
 might get her again into ~~safe~~ <sup>at</sup> safety  
 but that all events nothing could be suc-  
 -cessfully accomplished but by cool united  
 exertions each man doing the duty of his  
 station": 9 P.M. the Pumps had kept her  
 free until this time but the Rudder was knocked  
 off and she was sorely distressed by the small  
 rolling heavily on the hard sand and shipping  
 seas, which filled her spar deck up to the  
 tops of the combings. - The Guns could not  
 be thrown overboard for fear of bilging her  
 upon them but the shot were thrown over the  
 stern and the water started below to ease her.  
 Half an hour later the Officer stationed below  
 came to inform me that the water was gaining  
 rapidly

rapidly on the pumps; - they were nevertheless kept going while every preparation for getting out the Boats was completed. -

Guns were fired at intervals for about an hour and a half with the view of attracting Indian canoes off to our assistance, our own boats being inadequate to convey us all ashore at a time. - at 11 P.M. We had five feet water in the hold, the Repel had evidently bilged and I considered her irrecoverably lost. My first object therefore was to save the lives of the crew; - the ebb tide was done, and with care and expedition the cutter was hoisted <sup>out</sup> the crew and men named to go in her got safely in, with Midshipman Simms in charge; The Launch followed under Passed Midsh. Mr. Lanchan having received a full cargo ~~of~~ Officers and Men, and the Whale Boat under Acting Master ~~Ballbak~~ also loaded with as many men as she would carry, succeeded the Launch; The Boats were ordered if possible to keep in sight of each other to render mutual assistance and although their route lay through breakers and darkness and a full of over four miles before them to Point Adams, I had but little doubt of their reaching it in safety and congratulated myself most heartily on getting so many of the crew out of the wreck. The Boats were ordered to return at daylight for those who were <sup>left</sup>; Lieutenant Schenck, Midshipman Bairdson and 21 men remained with

with me on board. -

We were in the act of cutting away the masts, when the first rollers of the flood tide threw the Schooner over on her Starboard beam and she sunk down two or three streaks of the deck under water. a few strokes of the Axe and the weather Rigging cut away, the masts went by the board which sensibly relieved the hull from its awkward position. - We were now however completely water logged, the water mipped with sand boiling up the hatchways. - The remaining Anchor was let go, to keep her from drifting into deep water, and nothing more could be done but provide for our personal safety. - Each man was directed to secure himself by some small cordage, all the spare spars were cut adrift and hung by a rope of small rope long enough to float above the deck should she either break up completely or be overflowed by the incoming tide. Fortunately the wind had died away and it was only at intervals that the swell broke into surf round about us. - We had sprung to head about  $\text{E N E}$  and as long as she lay on her side the Starboard Hammock netting afforded us dry seats, but as the tide rose she gradually righted and about 3 a.m. was on an even keel, mauling her bulwarks completely under water; we were thus restricted to the tops of the round houses on the quarter deck and the bowsprit forward, the heel of the latter above

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above the bright heads being amash. -

The creaking and crashing of Timber and planking below was often heard through the night and we could not hope that she would hold together many hours longer, but I heard no expressions of despondency from any quarter. -

At daylight our situation was sufficiently forlorn, the snow was increasing and began to break over the only retreat left us, and all eyes were anxiously seeking for the Boats, which soon after cheered us by their appearance. - The Launch lay on her Oars some distance off, while Mr. Bullock came along the quarter in the Whale Boat and in two trips conveyed us all safely away from our perilous position. -

I had commanded this little Vessel two years and five months to a day, and in all that time not the smallest untoward accident had happened aboard <sup>of her</sup> I leave it to you Sir as a Seaman and a Commander to judge what were my emotions upon looking for the last time upon the fragment of her still visible. -

No Officer or Man had been allowed to carry off more than the clothes he stood in, lest the boats should be overloaded, nor was it possible to rescue any thing from the hull of the Vessel. The Chronometer Box was at daylight seen floating in the Ward Room hatchway, and the Chronometers with a Sextant, a compass and a try square

blaf and a stand of colours were all the property saved either public or private.

It took the Launch seven hours pulling against the tide to reach Blatsof beach, after she arrived a general muster opened as that every man was safe.

The Purser was forthwith despatched to Astoria and succeeded in procuring from the Hudsons Bay Co. store, a blanket for each of us and one fraped the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> on the beach; the sick men were sheltered beneath the roof of a Mr. Summers. Three Officers with the cutter and beam were left at Point Adams to explore the beach for any articles that might come ashore from the wreck. - I moved up to Astoria with the beam and leaving them there indifferently sheltered, pushed on to Fort Vancouver where I was immediately furnished by the Honble. Hudsons Bay Co. with all needful supplies.

I feel it my duty to add that during the whole of this trying emergency the Officers and Men I had the honor to command gave me the most hearty and efficient support, the duties were carried on at their various stations in a prompt and orderly manner, and I believe it will be proven that every one "did his utmost".

To Captain Baillie of A. B. Majestys Sloop of War Modeste, lying at Fort Vancouver, I am under obligations for a prompt supply of necessaries, which he immediately sent down upon hearing of our misfortune.

Having presented you with the foregoing detailed statement, which can have no other recommendation than its fidelity, I trust Sir, by reference to the chart it will be intelligible to you that the disaster arose from no want of judgement or recklessness of danger, but from want of experience and thorough acquaintance with the tides at their various stages. -

I have the honor to request (and I do it most earnestly) that you will order a Court of Inquiry to investigate all the circumstances connected with this very serious event. -

With considerations

of high Respect,

I am Sir, &c. &c.

(signed) J. B. M. Morrison

To the,

Commander in Chief

U. S. Naval Forces

Pacific Ocean.

Post Scriptum. March 17<sup>th</sup> 1847. - In the foregoing report I ascribe the loss of the "Shark" to "my want of experience and thorough acquaintance with the tides", but upon rejoining the Squadron and procuring a copy of Walker's chart, which had been my principal guide and the only one furnished me by Government, it was at once apparent, had that chart been correct, my vessel could not have grounded where she did.

did, as will be seen by the following extract from the Minutes of the Court of Inquiry. -

Extract.

"Acting Master James L. Bullock was recalled.  
 "at the request of Lieut. Commdr. Hornison.  
 "Question by Lt. Commdr. H. - You have  
 "stated in evidence that the Shark ran down  
 "from Baker's Bay with safe Desappointment  
 "and Green Point in range, and that  
 "before bringing Point Adams on with locks =  
 "comb Mile the Repee struck. - Be good  
 "enough to fix the spot on Milkes' chart  
 "where these ranges cut and state what  
 "depth of water is there laid down? -

"Answer. - I have done so, and find  
 "4½ fathoms laid down on Capt. Milkes'  
 "chart. -

"Question by same. State the exact distance  
 "which appears on the chart between the point  
 "cut by these ranges, and the nearest sound-  
 "ing laid down, upon which a Repee draving  
 "13 feet water would bring up, estimating  
 "the tide at ¼ ebb. -

"Answer. She was 4000 feet (about ¾<sup>th</sup>  
 "of a mile) from any spot upon which she  
 "could have struck, according to Milkes' chart. -

In justice to Capt. Milkes  
 I will add that the sands about the mouth  
 of the Columbia are constantly shifting, and  
 hence a Survey which may have been seen =  
 = date five years ago, is now more than  
 useless - Respy. H.

(signed) A. M. Hornison.

Extracts from the Minutes of the Court of Inquiry, convened on board U.S. Frigate Savannah at Monterey, California, to investigate the circumstances of the Loss of the U.S. Sch. Shark, Lt. Commdg. Aziel M. Homison,

Lieut. M. S. Schenck, a witness before the court; -

" Question by Lt. Commdg. Homison. - Was it  
" possible to have saved any property Public  
" or Private, without imminent danger to the  
" lives of the Officers and crew? -  
" Answer. No, I think not. - "

Acting Master James B. Bullock, a witness before the court. -

" Question by the court. Was it possible to  
" obtain any Pilot in the vicinity acquainted  
" with the Bar of the Columbia? -  
" Answer. No. -  
" Question by Lt. Commdg. H. - Could any  
" property, public or private have been  
" saved, without hazarding to an extreme de-  
" gree the lives of some of the Officers & Men? -  
" Answer. I think it could not. - "

(Copy by Aiel M. Homson, 15)

U.S. Ship Columbus  
Monterey March 6<sup>th</sup> 1847

Sir,

I have the pleasure to transmit herewith a certified Extract from the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, convened by order of Commodore Shubrick to enquire into the loss of the U.S. Schooner Shark while under your command. -

I will add that from my previous knowledge of your character as an Officer I was quite sure that the enquiry would result, (as it has resulted) in entirely exonerating you from any blame whatever.

Very Respectfully  
Your Most Obedient

(signed) James Biddle -

Lieut.

Aiel M. Homson

U.S. Frigate Savannah.