

BLOCKADE RUNNING

The following was written around 1900 by Thomas Mann Thompson. Miss May Phelps, his granddaughter who had the original in her possession, granted permission for the article to be used. Miss Phelps resided in Southport, NC. This article first appeared in the NEWSLETTER February 10, 1964.

You have asked me to tell you something that seems more like a dream than a reality. I have forgotten nearly all about my blockade career. As well as I remember I began running the blockade the last of February, 1864. Left here on the Steamer "Emma" as passenger for Nassau. When arrived there was made pilot on her, made three trips in and out, making seven trips in all. I ran the blockade on the "Emma" including the time I was a passenger. I then joined the Steamer "Flora", made two round trips on her, joined Steamer "Florie" came out from Bennington, sprung leak, returned, joined Steamer "Thistle" ran blockade one time on her then joined Steamer "Atlantic", then joined Steamer "Armstrong" ran three times on her, joined Steamer "Let Her Be", ran six times on her, joined Steamer "Coquett", ran one trip on her, joined Steamer "Index" ran three times on her, went out on Steamer "Elizabeth" and ran blockade one time on her. I ran blockade from February 24th, 1864 until a few days before the fall of Fisher. Made 34 trips and was fortunate enough never to have been captured.

I came in on the Atlantic once when there were thirteen of the Yankee blockaders in sight all around the bar in about two hundred yards of each other. I picked out the widest space between them and came full speed between them. They fired at us but did no damage. Another time, I came in by one of them that was anchored in the channel on the bar so that I had to come within about five feet of her and never a sound did I hear from her. I thought at first I would run into her and sink her but saw that I could pass within a few feet of her without running ashore; so I thought it better to get by if I had room, than to take the chance of disabling our ship and being captured by the enemy.

Once we were fired on by a ship and the ball passed between the _____ and myself; he was standing on the bridge about four feet apart. It staggered both of us but it was a spent ball or it would have stunned us. It fell about fifty yards beyond the ship. Another thing happened, _____ came in by the blockading squadron in the daylight and all this took place while I was running the "Atlantic." There is one thing which I wish to mention, not of myself but one of the old Smithville's bravest of boys. It was on the steamer Armstrong from Bermuda bound to Wilmington, NC. We had a heavy northern gale, the ship was laboring very hard, we had to carry a heavy pressure of steam, and our steam pipe burst. The Engineer, fireman and all left the engine room and ran on deck. We were then left to the mercy of a heavy wind and sea. I had just gone down to my room when I heard the squealing of the steam and run up to the deck, at the leadsman coming for me. He said the Captain wishes to see me, as I went into the pilot house. He said, "what is the best to do, she will roll herself all to pieces." I said to hoist the jib and get the ship before the wind. He did so and all this time, she was steam from stem to stern. The engineers and firemen began to look around to see if any of the men were missing; if so, they were scalded to death. All were found, but the Smithville boy had disappeared. When they did venture down they found the oiler (the Smithville boy) at work with his white lead and canvass. He had the pipe nearly ready to get steam up again. It was not his duty to repair the damage, though he took in the situation and knew that the pipe must be fixed at once to save the lives of all on board and the ship, also. The boy was an engineer by trade and was in Bermuda without work. We had a full number of engineers, so I prevailed on the Captain to give his oilers place. This brave boy was George Price. After we got steam up, we had to go under light pressure and by this time, the wind had moderated. We sighted land next morning to the southward of Charleston. We came slowly along until about fifty miles of Cape Fear, we got close to the beach and came to anchor so that we could do a little more to our steam pipe. Just before

anchoring, we saw a signal just at the point of woods on the beach. It was Federal soldiers, seven in number, who had been captured by the Confederates and had made their escape, and reached the coast thinking they could get to a Federal ship. They were nearly starved. We showed them the Confederate flag. They came down to the beach and waved us to take them on board. I took a boat and crew and brought them to the ship. We fed and clothed them because they were nearly naked. We gave them all they wished to eat. We also had seven of Morgan's men on board, who also had been captured by the Federals and taken north and had made their escape to Halifax thence to Bermuda. Two Lieutenants and five privates, we fitted them with a weeks provisions and landed them with our mail. This was done for fear of getting captured on putting into harbor. Of course, the Federals were held prisoners until turned over to General Whiting in Wilmington, which was done three days after landing. We got steam and passed on our way and crossed the bar a half hour afore sundown, repaired the broken pipe when was the duty of others, and I was at home before dark.

One other incident---a little chase when on Steamer, "Let It Be." We crossed the bar at eight o'clock one night, sighted a blockader in hot pursuit of us, lost sight of her in about an hour. We thought she had given up. Our ship was very deeply loaded and there was quite a sea, so that we were all awash from stem to stern. We slowed down so that we could go a little truer. Next morning, just as day begun to dawn, I walked astern with my glasses. There was Mr. Blue Jacket crawling along after us, about two miles astern. We had to go full speed again and there was a much larger sea than when we were inside. I think Capt. Nemo must have been along with us on that trip and that was the Nautilus that we read of, for we were as often under water as above. I think that fellow wanted cotton for he did not give up the chase until about four o'clock that afternoon. By that time, we were six or seven miles from him. He gave us sixteen hours chase of about one hundred and sixty miles.

The following item is from " Southport (Smithville) A Chronology Volume I (1520-1887) by Bill Reaves:

February 1864---Pilot C. C. Morse, of the "Advance" was paid \$3000 for a round trip, and a part of this was in gold. Pilotage on the river cost \$200 each way. A charge of \$300 was made for setting the range lights used both in going out and coming in. Most of the blockade-running ships were piloted by those living in Smithville or Wilmington. They were:

J. M. Adkins	Charles Craig	Henry Howard
J. W. Anderson	J. W. Craig	C. C. Morse
James Bell	E. T. Daniels	T. W. Newton
Joseph Bensel	Richard Doshier	J. W. Potter
Thomas Brinkman	Julius Doshier	John Savage
E. T. Burruss	Thomas Dyer	C. G. Smith
George W. Burruss	T. B. Garrason	Joseph Springs
J. N. Burruss	R. S. Grissom	William St. George
J. T. Burruss	Archibald Guthrie	Thomas M. Thompson
Thomas Burruss	John Hill	

April 1863---Richard Doshier was hired as a pilot to bring in a blockade runner from Nassau. His terms were \$3000 plus expenses at Nassau and back. Doshier decided not to make the trip and Joe Burruss was hired instead.

SOUTHPORT INNKEEPER WAS LEGENDARY LADY

By: Jennifer Moore, Star-News Correspondent

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With all the stories floating around about Southport's legendary Kate Stuart, it is not always clear which accounts are true and which are simply tall tales.

Born in 1844, "Miss Kate" helped her mother run the Stuart House and took over the inn business herself when her mother died in 1884. When Miss Stuart died in 1929, an obituary in the *Star-News* called her "the most beloved character of her native city," and "something of a Cape Fear institution," according to an article written for the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society by Southport native Brooks Newton Preik. Mrs. Preik, who lived in the Stuart House for a year as a child is the great-granddaughter of Miss Stuart's half brother Joseph Bensel.

"Since the 1800's, there has always been a tremendous interest in this woman," Mrs. Preik said. "She is legendary."

Some of the information circulating around about Miss Stuart cannot be confirmed. For instance that she was in love with Georgia poet Sydney Lanier. Some say that, while she was in her 60's, Miss Stuart jumped into the river fully clothed to save a drowning young girl. While the story is true—she saved Mary, the daughter of Captain Alex Hunter, a ship's master with the Clyde Line—Miss Stuart was only 24 at the time.

During the Civil War, pilots and captains of the blockade runners would often wait at the Stuart House for dark before they made their trips up the river. Miss Stuart's half brother Joseph Bensel was the pilot of a blockade runner himself.

A well-educated woman and celebrated cook, Miss Stuart was very involved in the community, serving as the first president of the Southport Civic Club.

The structure that became the Stuart House was built in 1772 and may have served as a magazine for explosives for Fort Johnston during the Revolutionary War. The building appeared in the 1926 edition of *Early American Inns and Taverns* but was destroyed by Hurricane Hazel in 1954.

