

Tales from Colonial Queensland

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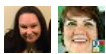
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Colonial Love Boat

One would hardly imagine that a voyage of over 120 days from Europe to the Australian Colonies in a wind driven sailing ship would be a pleasure cruise or a romantic adventure. But a report in the Brisbane press of 1862 revealed what could transpire between the sexes on board an emigrant vessel.



Northern Entrance to Moreton Bay ca. 1860

By all accounts the voyage had been largely without incident. A report of the voyage taken from the ship's "newspaper" was published in *The Courier*, which, not surprisingly, provided a glossy view of progress of the *City of Brisbane* on the long journey to Moreton Bay.

The City of Brisbane left Gravesend on the 21st and Plymouth on the 25th February, and has thus been exactly four months out from the latter port. In the early part of the voyage the winds were favourable, and a speedy trip was anticipated.

The line[1] was crossed on the 24th March, or 29 days from Plymouth. After crossing the Equator, nothing but "light winds," "headwinds," "calms," "doldrums," "catspaws,"[2] and such like vexations of the sailor's soul were experienced for 42 days, when the island of Tristan d'Acunha[3] was passed.

▼ January (2)

The
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es of an
Inveterate
Tippler

Colonial Love
Boat

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About Me



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K.C.(Ken)Sbeghen is a writer, cultural historian, and history consultant. He is a graduate of The University of Queensland, Australia.

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Immigrant ship at anchor ca. 1860s

Since then, with slight exceptions, pretty favourable winds have been met with, and an average run made. The City of Brisbane has outstripped the Erin-go bragh, which left Liverpool nearly a month before her, and the officers and passengers have reason to congratulate themselves that, although their voyage has not been a very speedy one, it has been a pleasant one, and terminated successfully.

No rough weather was experienced, with the exception of the gale on Monday last. In that "southerly burster" as the suitors term it; the "City" lost her foretop-gallant mast, which snapped just above the cross-trees, and had to run the whole day under close-reefed topsails. A few of the passengers were pretty well shaken up also, but otherwise no damage was done.

We are happy to announce there has been no sickness nor serious illness of any kind on board, and no deaths, while the population of the "City" has been increased by four births during the voyage.[4]



South Brisbane from the North bank (Thomas Baines) 1868

Perhaps the voyage of the *City of Brisbane* was all too easy, for it later was alleged by some of the more "respectable" emigrants on board, that the Captain and crew, perhaps with too much time on their hands, had enjoyed the company of some of the young lady passengers.

These allegations were soon being investigated by the Immigration Board and the *Courier* published a sensational report, which in the style of the times, only alluded to what had happened on board.

With reference to the City of Brisbane, Captain Morris, the arrival of which vessel in the latter part of June, we noticed in our last Summary, - we feel bound to state, for the information of her owners, and of intending emigrants, that an investigation has for some time been going on before the Immigration Board, in the course of

which the most revolting disclosures have been made with regard to the immorality and licentiousness prevailing on board throughout the voyage.

We have not yet been enabled to obtain a copy of the evidence offered at the investigation, but trust to be able to do so, and we shall then refer to the subject again. The vessel seems to have been, according to the statements of respectable passengers, nothing better than a floating brothel, and the captain and officers, so far from discouraging, participated in the libertinism which ruled on board.

The few passengers who looked with horror and amazement on the guilty conduct practised were compulsory auditors also of the most foul and profane language. Many a poor young woman will remember the scene of her seduction with remorse, and will yet have to reap the bitter fruits of her unfortunate voyage to this colony.



Between decks on an immigrant ship

We are speaking strongly, no doubt, but, should we ever be enabled to publish portions of the evidence, our readers will say that we might have written in far harsher terms. And now, notwithstanding the disclosures made during the investigation, notwithstanding the evident culpability of the captain and the surgeon, the Board can do nothing but represent the facts to the Government, and the Government in turn represent them to the owners of the vessel.

Under the regulations now in force, the captains and doctors of vessels are only entitled to a gratuity in the case of Government immigrants, and as the City of Brisbane brought out no passengers of this class no forfeiture of gratuity can be inflicted on the officers, nor can any proceedings be taken against them.

The only remedy for such a state of things appears to us to rest with the ship owners in the first place, and the Emigration Commissioners in the second - the former taking care that competent and respectable men are employed, and the latter bringing all emigrant vessels under their supervision and control.[5]

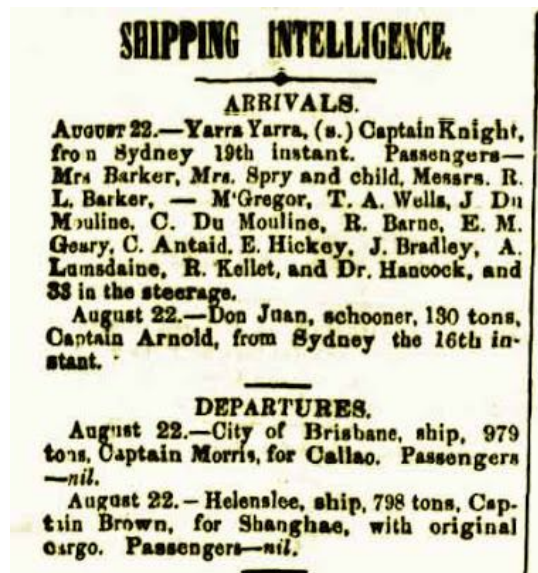
It appears that the Courier was not able to obtain or publish any of the salacious details but a letter from a correspondent signed simply "A Passenger" provided further particulars of the behaviour of the crew.

Without now entering into particulars, I may state here, in order to give a faint idea of the inconveniences and nuisances to which we were subject, that the arrangements and appointments in connection with the stores and the galley were very inefficient and incompetent, and that the numerous inconveniences hence arising were aggravated by the incivility, blackguardism, and insolence of the officers and their subordinates.

But all this sinks into insignificance compared with the fearful language and unchecked licentiousness which, there is but too much evidence to prove, prevailed during a great part of the voyage. But this is not all; for, through some mismanagement, liquor found its way one Sunday to the forecabin, which led to a serious mutiny, during which knives were drawn, and serious injuries inflicted upon one of the passengers and the first officer; the man at the helm left his post, and the lives of the passengers were endangered.[6]

A correspondent from Gladstone made very clear what should be done to the crew of the City of Brisbane.

I am delighted to find that the Courier is so disposed to guard the morals of the many hundreds of immigrants now landing on our shores. Your animadversions on the conduct of the captain of the City of Brisbane, and his licentious crew, were very opportune. For myself I would like to see those fellows strung up in a row on the yard-arm, as a warning to all future captains proceeding to Queensland ports.[7]



The Courier Saturday 23 August 1862

On August 22, after almost two months in port, the *City of Brisbane* finally sailed, bound for the port of Callao in Peru with a cargo of coal.

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- [1] The Equator
- [2] Rippled water surface.
- [3] Now Tristan da Cunha, an island group in the South Atlantic.
- [4] *The Courier* Monday 30 June 1862
- [5] *The Courier* 16,8,1862
- [6] *The Courier* Monday 4 August 1862
- [7] *The Courier* Saturday 30 August 1862

Posted by **K.C.Sbeghen** at 12:50 PM



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1 comment:

e Pam Garfoot February 23, 2013 at 1:02 PM

The book my sister and I wrote about our family history contains a couple of chapters about the 'City of Brisbane' voyage (sadly it does not reflect well upon our ancestors, but we hope they redeemed themselves in later life!).

Details can be found here: <http://www.digitalprintaustralia.com/bookstore/non-fiction/historical/making-them-real.html>

Pam Garfoot

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