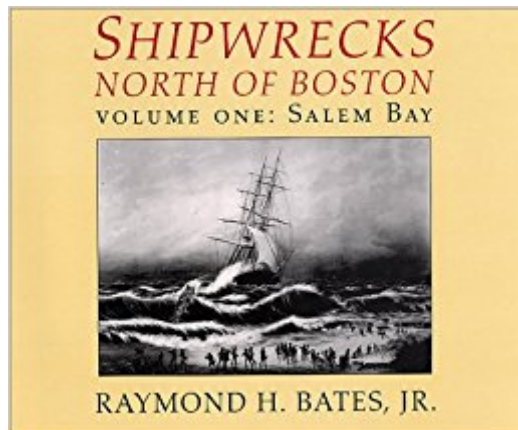




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Shipwrecks North Of Boston, Vol. 1, Salem Bay



Synopsis

A richly illustrated history of shipwrecks in Salem Bay, north of Boston.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Salem's historic role as a major world port, combined with treacherous geography and unpredictable weather, has made Salem Bay the site of hundreds of shipwrecks. In the first comprehensive book on the subject, diver, historian, and shipwreck enthusiast Raymond H. Bates, Jr., writes vividly about everything from the loss of a British frigate in 1710 to the tragic fate of men on a rescue mission during the twentieth century's most destructive storm. He has also compiled the most complete list to date of shipwrecks in the waters off Salem recorded since the seventeenth century. Bates writes: "As a diver, I've grown intimately familiar with the undersea topography of the North Shore; the mud-bottomed harbors, the gravelly depths leading out into the bay, and the particularly beautiful granite formations farther out, especially the ledges of the Outer Breakers. This rock varies in color from white to brown (though Halfway Rock is red), and the flowering sea anemones that grow along the underwater ledges look graceful as they sway in the water. However beautiful the granite rocks might be, they are treacherous for oceangoing vessels besieged by storms or other dangers."

Excerpt from Shipwrecks North of Boston, Volume 1: Salem Bay From the introduction, "A Diver's Point of View" The Human Drama of a Shipwreck The plight of people on board a sinking vessel is

human drama of the first rank. Especially during the age of sail, a voyage at sea entailed potentially life-threatening challenges. A combination of capricious weather, the difficulty of maneuvering with sails, rudimentary navigational technology, and lack of modern communications made sea travel a much riskier affair than it is today. In order to prevent shipwrecks, a series of lighthouses, light beacons, and buoys was set up along the North Shore to warn sailors of ledges, shoals, and other hazards. To reduce the destruction when shipwrecks did occur, many towns, including Nahant, Swampscott, and Marblehead, staffed lifesaving stations, and groups such as the Humane Society assisted those whose lives were affected by losses at sea. In New England, winter weather could be a deadly enemy to a crew at sea. Northeasters were especially brutal and could begin without warning, whipping up raging swells, freezing the ship's rigging, stiffening the sails, and adding a burdensome weight of ice to the vessel. The crew would pound this ice with wooden mallets to lighten the ship. Poor visibility could make navigating by sight simply impossible; the crew could determine its position only by compass and by taking soundings (throwing a weighted line overboard to determine depth and the type of bottom - rocks or sand). Even after dropping anchor, ships could be dragged into hazards by the wind. If a ship struck a ledge or shoal during a storm, the situation could quickly become desperate. Underwater ledges on the North Shore can rip a ship apart in short order. The lifeboats carried by the ship often proved useless in a gale, capsizing or breaking apart when they hit the water. If the wreck was within reach of land, the local lifesaving station might attempt a rescue by boat or by breeches buoy. Rescue by breeches buoy involved shooting (by cannon) a line with grapples into the ship's rigging and then using this line as runner for a large bucket (the buoy) that could transport one person at a time from the ship to the shore. Of course, shipwrecks often resulted in tragic deaths. As a last resort, survivors on board a sinking wreck might tie themselves to anything that floated, but in brutally frigid winter waters, few survived. In hopes that children might eventually be saved, a mother or father might climb into the rigging with a child and secure the child there with ropes. On more than one occasion, rescuers who arrived at a wrecked ship after a storm had passed found such bodies dangling off the rigging, covered with a glaze of ice. Shipwrecks also caused economic disaster. Owners could insure the ship, its cargo, both, or neither, and some tales of shipwreck include the lament that the ship was uninsured. A wrecked vessel could sometimes be salvaged; a ship would draw up on either side of the wreck and together would use lines, blocks, and tackles to pull the wreck to shore. Some vessels were repaired and relaunched. Salvage divers are first referred to as early as the 1820s and 1830s; they retrieved bodies and cargo. These early divers wore leather or oiled canvas suits. They breathed through hoses attached to their helmets, getting air pumped from a leather bellows above the water.

By the time of the Civil War, such diving operations were well established. Newspaper coverage of shipwrecks expressed the shock and horror that these disasters evoked. The continuing fascination with shipwrecks in our time stems partly from the fact that they tell such dramatic tales of human beings struggling against the elements. In this book I've gathered the stories of many shipwrecks of the North Shore. Instead of the pirate's treasure chest I had dreamed of in my youth, this trove of history is the fortune I've amassed from years of study. I have tried to use care in separating fact from fiction, probable explanation from exaggeration. Since the historical record is not complete in detailing the facts about each wreck, I inform the reader when I am making my best judgment rather than reporting a provable fact. I also hope to hear from readers who may have more information about any of the shipwrecks I describe here - or others. I imagine that I'll be studying shipwrecks for a long, long time yet. - Raymond H. Bates, Jr., Marblehead, Massachusetts, July 2000

This is a complete and easily read book by a person who, obviously, knows this subject. It's written chronologically which makes it easy to find an individual entry as well as being able to read it from cover to cover. Mr. Bates is to be commended for putting together this history. I doubt anyone else would take the time to produce such a localized view of "Shipwrecks North Of Boston".

Shipwrecks North of Boston is a fine book that contains many short stories of tragedy at sea, all of which happened in close proximity to one of America's major ports. The two or three page stories relate the loss of some significant vessels while a table lists hundreds of vessels lost through the centuries. Some great old photos as well.

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