

THE HELENA

The *Helena*, a British ship of 620 tons under Captain H D SINCLAIR, with 14 passengers and a cargo of coals, 120 days out from Liverpool bound for California, first called into Stanley 19 September 1852 for water.

In a memorial dated 22 September 1852 from Berkeley Sound the crew and passengers wrote:
...That the ship is in such a leaky condition that it is as much as our united efforts could do to keep her above water until we reached this port and the captain cannot do anything to remedy the evil on the 7th until the 11th we expected every Hour the Ship to go down under our feet and had the Long Boat ready for Launching and by working night and day we managed to arrive here and the Capt he swore if he did not reach here in such a time he would take the Boat and five or six Sailors with himself a leave the rest to perish.

We the undersigned do Hereby Protest that the Ship Helena of Liverpool to San Francisco now riding at anchor in Berkley Sound is totally unfit to Proceed any further on her intended voyage without imminent danger of loseing both ship and all on board we have taken the present method of communicating with your Honours as we are denied all other means by the Captain and hope Your Honours will forgive us and we will Ever Pray.

Ships Company: William Durre, John Murphy, Joseph Murray ab, Vance Ritchie ab, James Thomas ab, Jhon Wilson ab, Joseph Martin ord, George Rolland ord, William Roberts ab, William Nelson ab, John Rasmussen ab.

Passengers: James Toole, James Lawler, Margaret Lawler & 3 children, Peter Hinde, Joseph Robinson, Isabella Kelly, John Byshe, Daniel O'Connell, Adolph Adler, John C Molony.

In a letter dated 30 September 1852, J R LONGDEN, Acting Colonial Secretary, wrote:
"I am directed by HE the Governor to inform you that he has received a memorial signed by 12 of your Crew and 13 Passengers stating that in their opinion your ship is from leakings, not in a fit condition to proceed on her voyage. As one of the memorialists is the Carpenter the Governor cannot suppose that the fears of the subscribers are altogether unfounded, and I am directed to inform you that it is HE's opinion that you should (without loss of time) bring your ship into this Harbour in order that a survey may be held to investigate her seaworthiness..."
[D6, pg 149]

On 1 October 1852 the captain wrote to the Governor RENNIE from Berkeley Sound:
May it please your Excellency. I have this day received your letter. And a copy of a memorial, signed by part of the Crew and Passengers, on board my ship. I was greatly surprised, as it is the first I have heard of the subject, no one having spoken to myself, or Officers, concerning this matter. I regret, that they did not mention it on my arrival here. Nor to have left it till the ship was upon sailing, and also to have done it in such a clandestine manner. It is apparently a Plot, to enable them to get on shore, (The Passengers, wanting Liquors, which, is against my rule.) and the Crew having but little clothing, they do not like to go round Cape Horn. The Passengers cannot be expected to know anything concerning the sea worthiness of the Ship. I should not have the least objection to the Ship being surveyed, feeling certain, that the Ship, will be found in good condition, and well supplied, If I not deem her sea-worthy, its not probable that I should, risk the life, of myself, and Sisters, also, the large amount of capital that I have invested in this Ship, which is not insured. To be detained, and expenses caused by a survey, through the caprice of the Passengers & Crew, I certainly shall protest against. The Ship has been sounded, in the presence of Mr Bayley, and the Water made in Fifteen hours, was one & a half inches, and inches was pumped out, in forty five minutes. I have not yet finished, the Top Work of the Ship, when I have done so, I shall proceed on my Voyage, and in case of the Crew refusing to go to sea in the Ship, I shall immediately come into Stanley or Sparrow Cove.

Trusting the measures I have taken, will meet your excellency's approbation. [H11, pg 67]

In a letter to the Governor dated 20 October 1852 John SOLE, the acting Colonial Surgeon and Emigration Officer wrote:

In compliance with your instructions, contained in a letter of yesterday's date, requesting me to enquire into the Justice of sundry complaints made to you by various passengers in the Ship Helena, bound to San Francisco, I have the honor to inform you that I this day have been on board the said Ship, and find as follows.

That the scale of provisions and necessaries, stated on the passengers tickets (with one exception) to be in my estimation insufficient to maintain them in health for so long a voyage, and further it appears to me that such scale of provisions &c to be authorized only for the passage from England to the Eastern side of North America.

There is no animal food allowed, neither has any lime juice been issued to the passengers, which article is absolutely necessary to preserve health during a long sea voyage. In consequence of which neglect, two of the passengers are now suffering from Scurvy.

The quality of the Bread which they are now using, is bad, some of it wholly unfit for human consumption.

Other bread which I have examined is wholesome, but even this is not so good as it should have been, had it been new at the commencement of the voyage.

From the testimony of the passengers and from what the Master of the ship himself allows, it appears to me that the passengers have been grossly deceived, either by the passage Broker, or others interested in the matter, for they were given to understand, that they should receive ample rations and necessaries for the voyage; and that the scale of diet on the tickets was nought, and that before sailing they were to receive another scale of provisions for the voyage. [H11, pg 76]

On 30 October 1852 Governor RENNIE instructed Mr McMURRAY to "Release all the prisoners belonging to the Ship Helena at the request of Captn Sinclair to be put on board of the ship." [D6, pg 160]

The *Helena* was cleared 5 November 1852 but her misfortunes continued as she then ran into and damaged the 1066 ton HMS *Trincomalee* as that ship was working out of Port William. [H11, pg 93]

The *Helena* was finally cleared 10 November 1852.

To date no further mention of either the ship *Helena* or Captain H D SINCLAIR has been found.