

Ships Lost at Sea

By Jeannette Holland Austin



sunken ship

For 169 years vessels crossed the Atlantic into the American colonies. The adventure cost numerous lives and property and vessels went down in storms and were caught on sand bars. Some vessels bound for Virginia, for example, found it necessary to unload their cargo in the ports of New England. When General Oglethorpe engaged the first vessel to the Colony of Georgia, the captain refused to go any further south than Port Royal. Hence, its passengers had to travel by foot into Georgia. Only today through the use of sonar equipment are we realizing that thousands of vessels sank in the shipping lanes traveling their routes from Europe and the West Indies to the American ports. An examination of the deed records of Sunbury, Georgia in Liberty County reveals contracts between ship

captains and colonists.

The content usually specifies that if the goods do not arrive by a date certain, or if the cargo is spoilt, that the captain will not be paid. There is good reason, because the seas were fraught with storms, hurricanes and sandbars. As one studies these deeds, it is quite obvious that deliveries were not always made in a timely fashion which prompted the captain to bring an official complaint. Ultimately, the resort town of Sunbury was destroyed by a hurricane about 1800.

A visit to the site is laughable. It is privately owned today and one cannot help but wonder how this remotely situated site between Charleston and Savannah housed more than 400 homes and a thriving economy. Yet the records reflect that it did. The loss of thousands of vessels during the colonial years means that the ships manifest and passenger lists also sank.

This means that the collection of Immigration records at the National Archives is but a small percentage of a truer picture and it serves to emphasize the need to examine more closely "all surviving" county records from the earliest times.

All of Charleston, South Carolina records are in tact, including affidavits and deeds pertaining to the affairs of the colonists. Although it is difficult to read 17th and 18th century documents, it is quite necessary, if ever we are to get to comprehend the whole picture and trace further back on the ancestors.

The growing collection of Pioneer Families affords the genealogist images of actual documents, such as wills, estates, marriages, deeds, etc. A subscription is offered under 8 Genealogy Websites, GeorgiaPioneers.com