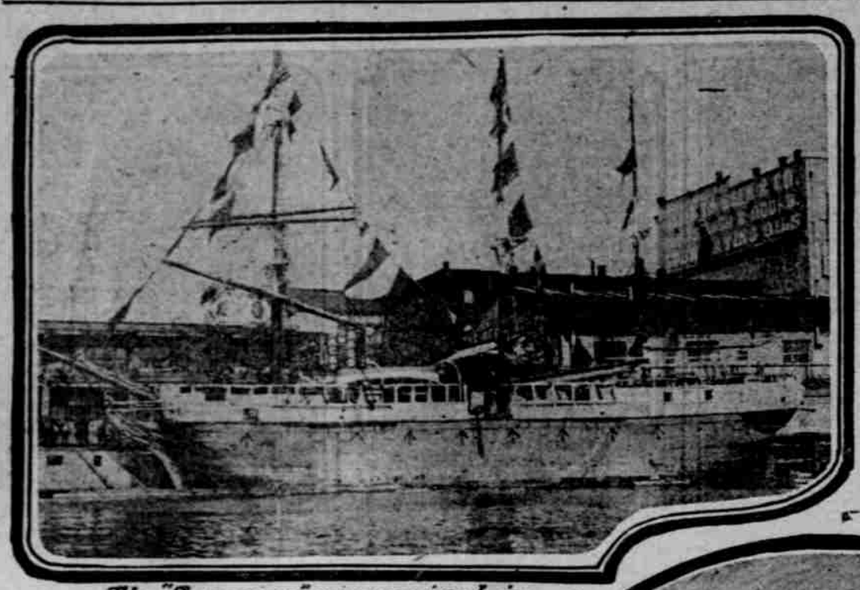
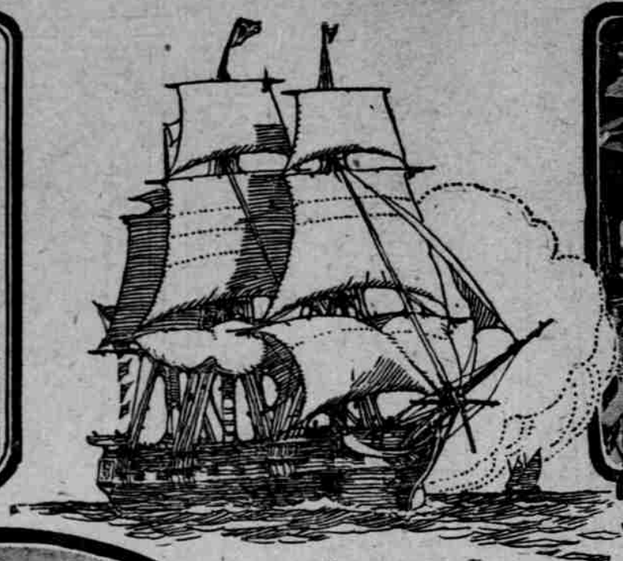
OLDEST SHIP AFLOAT IS VISITING IN PORTLAND'S HARBOR

Built in Burma in 1790, Success Began Remarkable Career as Proud East Indian Trader and Ended as Last of Infamous British Prison Fleet in Australian Waters.



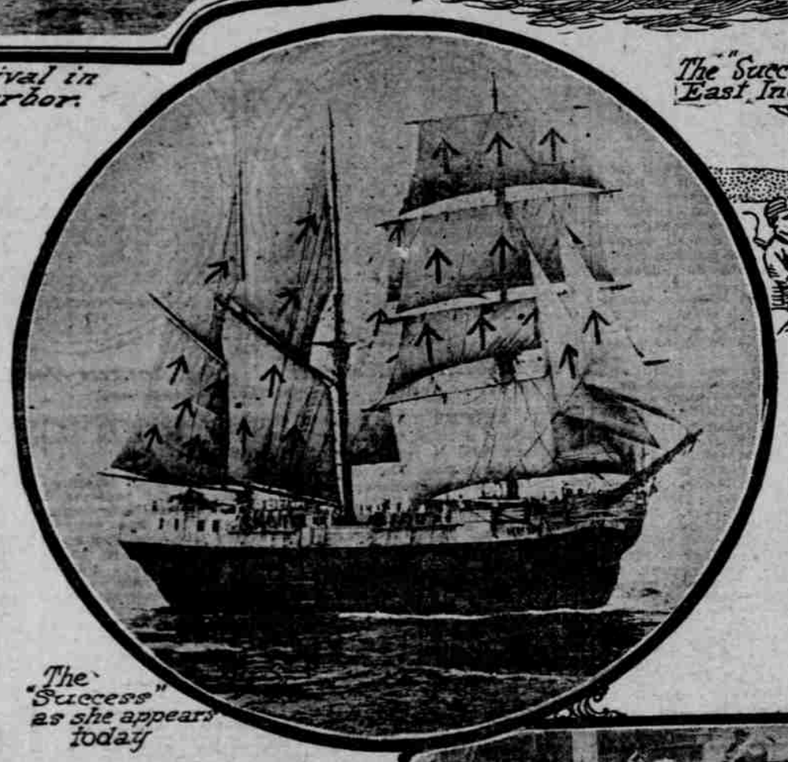
The "Success" on arrival in Portland Harbor.



The "Success" as an East Indiaman

Deck View of the "Success"

Capt. D. H. Smith



The "Success" as she appears today

The Triangle, showing method of branding prisoners

SOME students of prison reforms have held that capital punishment must have been preferable to a cruise as a convict aboard the British prison ship Success.

Admitting that most of the appalling things are true that have been told of life aboard, to thousands visiting the vessel during the past few days at the foot of Yamhill street, it would seem as if the unfortunates confined there would almost have welcomed death.

Yet the career of the Success has not been wholly given to scourging and killing of criminals. When she first took the water, which her history fixes as in 1790, the ship was the pride of her owners. Built at Moulmain, British Burmah, her start was made under the shadow of the old Pagoda, which Kipling has immotarized. Coolies did the work, though they were selected for their craft, and students of early woodwork have traced designs and admirable fittings that attest to the fact that those who constructed the ship were far from being dense serfs.

She is built of teak throughout, and so celebrated is the wood of the ship that a piece was cut from her and placed in the Royal Museum at Greenwich, London, being marked "Timber taken from the old Success," and admitting its superiority to that of British oak.

Early Career Honorable.

The old convict vessel is of 565 tons, 135 feet long, 29-foot beam, copper fastened and three-nailed throughout. She is as stout and staunch as ponderous beams and huge iron knees can make her, while further stiffening was unintentionally added to her by the rows of convict cells that run on both sides of her two decks, the material of these cells being thick enough to form the sides of a good, strong ship.

For 10 or 12 years after she was launched the Success had an honored and adventurous career, sailing the Indian seas, engaged in the spice, ivory and tea trade and carrying many an Indian Prince and nabob, for the traces that remain to this day show elaborate heraldic devices, gilded scrolls, quarter galleries decorated with massive and artistic carvings and escutcheons from stem to stern, all going to show that she led the way in the fleet of that time as one fit for kings. She then carried her own guns, for rings, portholes and bolts are still shown, and it is also on record that she resisted and beat off an attack of a French ship, La Rosa, in the Bay of Bengal. Great shot marks near to the water line show where the French pirate's fire was received. On another occasion her Lascar crew mutinied and the captain signaled to Fort George, Bombay, for assistance. The signals were mistaken, and instead a cannon was fired at the Success, which, striking the mainmast (still in the ship and showing where the shot struck), brought down some of the upper spars, which fell on the mutineers, killing two and wounding several.

Ship Lost Caste.

In 1802 the Success fell from caste and became an "ocean hell," a devil ship, which, instead of harbering the high and mighty potentates of the gilded East, became the home and the scourge of England's worst criminals, the born malefactor as well as the unfortunate whom a horrible penal system manufactured into a convict and an outcast.

It was then that these rows of gloomy horror-haunted cells were built for the reception of her human freight, to be carried in them without sunlight, without ventilation, almost without food, with the scantiest of raiment and the utmost infliction of cruelties and depredation across the 16,000 miles that separated England from her new colonies in Australia. On an average, and this fact is authenticated by official documents, 33 per cent of the unfortunates embarking on the Success and her sister-ships died before anchor was dropped at their destination in Australia. Of those surviving the fearsome voyage few were strong enough to go ashore unaided. With occasional intervals of more or less honest trading the Success was thenceforth regularly chartered by the British government, when the pressure of convicts in her home prison became too great, to carry the unfortunate white slaves to the Antipodes.

Flogging Was Common.

The barbarities practiced on these voyages seem almost unbelievable. Official records and the histories of the time, as preserved on board the Success, relate them in such a matter-of-fact manner that one can only wonder at the callousness of the mind to human suffering.

Flogging was more regular than food on the Success, and the art of flaying his brother man alive was brought to a fine pitch of excellence by the professional flagellators, generally recruited from the convicts themselves.

The severity of the infliction depended upon the separation of the tails by the fingers of the flagellator before the scourge was hurled over his head, and brought down with terrible precision upon the back of the prisoner. Being equally dexterous with either hand, 12 lashes were administered with the right and then 12 with the left, so as to "cross the cuts" most cruelly.

If the convict flagellator, from a merciful feeling, tried to favor his victim by allowing the strands to fall together with a dull thud upon his back, the pompous official, in all the glory of gold-braided authority, standing watch in hand, would shout, "Comb your cats, my good man, comb your cats." If the flagellator failed to do so, another would be found only too willing to fill the odious office, and the one who had given offense would be triced to the triangle, as hundreds had been before him, and flogged for "insubordination."

Official returns from Hobart Town, Tasmania, show that the total number of lashes inflicted during a period of two years was 33,723. Men were flogged for idleness and neglect of duty; while eight women were flogged at the gangway, the soldiers and sailors of the guard taking it in turns to ply the awful "lash."

The flogging frame and triangle now on board the vessel are the originals that were used, and the evidence of those who witnessed the revolting sight of a struggling, shrieking criminal in the throes of the lash, usually allowed that from that point forward the reformation of the convict became a distant probability.

An idea of a flogging is given in the following description of an eyewitness:

"One man was sentenced to receive 300 lashes, and the method of punishment was such as to make it most effectual. Two men were appointed to flog—one a right-handed man and the other left-handed. They stood on each side, and I never saw two threshers in a barn move their flails with more regularity than these two man-killers did—unmoved by pity, and rather enjoying their employment than otherwise. The very first blows made the blood spurt from the man's shoulders, and I felt so disgusted and horrified that I turned my face away from the cruel sight. . . . I could only compare these wretches to a pack of hounds at the death of a hare; or tigers who torment their victims before they put them to death. I have witnessed many horrible scenes, but this was the most appalling sight I have ever seen. The day was windy, and I protest that, although I was at least 15 yards from the sufferers, the blood, skin and flesh flew in my face as the executioners shook it off their cats. The man received the whole 300. During the time he was receiving the punishment he never uttered a groan; the only words he said were: 'Flog me fair; do not strike me on the neck.' The hapless wretch knew that he might sue in vain for further mercies."

Some Became Inured.

Another, a youth of 20, was also sentenced to receive 300 lashes. The first hundred were given on his shoulders, and he was cut to the bone between the shoulder blades, which were both laid bare. The doctor (who had always to be in attendance at a flogging) then directed the next hundred to be inflicted lower down, which reduced the flesh to such a jelly that the doctor ordered him to have the remaining hundred on the calves of his legs.

Others became, through constant flogging perfectly inured to all pain. It is related of one convict named Ahearn, undergoing a sentence of a hundred lashes, that he bore his flogging without a wince or murmur, even counting aloud the number of each lash, and at the last one coolly cried, "Domino." Another, who boasted of a record of 1000 lashes in his lifetime, was triced to the triangle, and fairly cut to pieces with the lash. On being released, he confronted the officials defiantly with, "Now I'll fight the best man amongst you!"

Some convicts on board had undergone from 500 to 800 lashes, and more than one could boast of as many as 1500.

In regard to the original flogging triangle on board it is said that it was discarded in favor of the flogging-board (also shown), as it was found that the convicts used to batter their heads against the posts to render themselves insensible to the punishment.

Doctor Describes Horrors.

In an official paper issued by Dr. White, a government physician of Sydney, is a description of the condition of the Success and its inmates at the close of the voyage. He said that when he went on board he found dead bodies still in irons below amongst the crowds of the living:

"A great number of them were lying, some half and others quite naked, without either bedding or unable to turn to help themselves. The smell was so offensive I could hardly bear it. Some of these unhappy people died after the ship came into the harbor, before they could be taken on shore. Part of these had been thrown into the harbor and their dead bodies cast upon the shore and were seen lying naked upon the rocks. The misery I saw amongst them is inexpressible."

The ship continued its career of infamy without change until 1852, when swifter vessels were employed in the transportation of convicts. She was in that year stationed at Fort Williamstown, about nine miles from where Melbourne was then beginning to grow, as a "hulk" or floating prison for the convicts engaged in building that fort. Even then she was a horror and plague spot of iniquity. The regime of her sailing days was in no way improved; if anything more refined cruelties were perpetrated. For example, the cleanliness and health of the prisoners were better looked after. They were then valuable as labor, and consequently the "compulsory bath" was installed, and into this wretches fresh from a flaying at the triangle were flung and biting salt water scrubbed into the gaping gashes on their backs with hard-bristled brushes. The Success had her complement of "refractory" prisoners who were immured throughout the long days and nights in the noisome cells in the dark depths of the lower hold, except for a few brief moments daily when they were allowed on deck fully ironed and dragging a 72-pound punishment ball as a deterrent to their jumping over the seven-foot bulwarks and ending their miseries in the waters of Melbourne Bay.

Commander Is Assassinated.

The infamous John Prince, Inspector-General of New South Wales, became commander of the Success, and so fierce were the horrors that he piled upon the miserable wretches under his charge that the culmination was in his assassination and the subsequent abolition of the transportation system.

The usual method of boarding the hulk was by an ordinary gangway ladder, and on stepping over the waterways the visitor would be challenged by an officer stationed to guard the entrance to the commandant's quarters. The warders gained access from deck to deck by means of iron ladders fixed vertically, but the prisoners, encumbered by the weight of their irons, had to be raised and lowered in batches of five at a time—often quarreling and fighting—in a rough lift, which passed from the lower to the main deck through the forward hatchway. The wooden wheel with an endless rope and the ingenious chocks that formed the raising apparatus of this lift still hang above the iron-barred hatchway.

In order to completely isolate the Success, and prevent the escape of any prisoners, there was a cordon of buoys moored round the yellow-painted hulk at a distance of 75 yards. Any person entering the circle without proper authority or not being possessed of the countersign, rendered himself liable to being shot at sight.

Only the prisoners of better behavior, who were confined in the 'tween-deck cells, were taken off every day to work at the quarries, from whence came the stone with which the pier was built, a lasting monument of convict labor.

On the lower deck were the absolutely hopeless characters, men who were considered utterly irreclaimable, and who were confined in separate dens. Here, too, were the condemned cells, in which those who were doomed to die passed the brief interval in a chamber of darkness, from which even death must have proved a welcome relief.

Darkness Ruined Sight.

The "unsafe 60" prisoners were never allowed on shore under any pretext. Their only exercise and opportunity of enjoying a breath of fresh air was restricted to one hour in every 24, when they were marched from stem to stern upon deck. Exceptionally high bulwarks prevented them seeing aught but the strip of blue Australian sky directly overhead, the white-winged gulls, as they glided over the vessel, seeming to mock the prisoners in their heavy chains. From long confinement in the dark cells the eyesight of the convicts was generally ruined. The sudden transition from their black dens to the dazzling sunshine, in their hour's respite, was more bewildering than the sensation experienced by the miner on emerging into daylight after some hours' sojourn in the bowels of the earth.

The sight of the prisoners at exercise was saddening in the extreme, each man half stooping beneath the weight of the links with which he was encumbered. The marked desperadoes were closely watched by special warders and marched straight up and down, whilst the others made the round tour of the ship by crossing over to the opposite side on reaching the fence at either end. The course they followed can still be perceived by tracing the grooved pathway worn into the original planks of the deck.

As they paced the deck during this hour of comparative relaxation it was no uncommon event for one of the prisoners to make a bold dash for freedom or death. They scarcely expected to get beyond the cordon of buoys, but they were reduced to such a state of desperation that they preferred a watery grave to the treatment they received on board. When one of these "rushers" was overtaken in such an attempt he was invariably punished by having a heavy ball of iron weighing 72 pounds attached to his belt by a chain. This "punishment ball" is still preserved on board. In spite of its weight some of the convicts gained a wonderful dexterity in swirling it round them in a semi-circle at their feet and would nimbly step over the chain by which it was attached to the iron waist-belt, and could thus move from one part of the deck to the other with comparative ease born of long practice.

Convict Forged Irons.

As an additional punishment the eyes of the refractories on parade were sometimes bandaged, and gagging is shown to have been resorted to by the authorities, who appear to have exercised a fiendish ingenuity in the invention of means to break the convicts' spirits. The "black gag" consisted of a wooden bit in a leather bridle, the straps buckling around the convict's head and neck, and a perforation was made in the mouthpiece to enable him to breathe.

The prison dress was always plainly branded with broad arrows and distinctive numbers. The hair of each prisoner was clipped at frequent intervals, and they were always kept in irons. The blacksmith's forge was under the fo'c'sle head, where a convict son of Vulcan forged the fetters for his comrades in crime and fastened their clanking anklets with red-hot rivets. Examples of these chains are on board, varying from eight pounds to 72 pounds in weight.

White's "Convict Life in New South Wales" (which was compiled from government records and is considered a textbook on this subject) in referring to the leg shackles of the convicts says: "They were not removed when they went to the hospital, and not always when they went to their graves."

"Black Hole" Dreaded.

The corner cells on either side of the lower deck are the dreaded "black holes," in which prisoners who had been guilty of some breach of discipline or fractious conduct were punished by solitary confinement, lasting from one to 100 days, according to the gravity of the offense, and perhaps according to the state of the gastric juices of the inspector-general. These small and tapering torture chambers measure only two feet eight inches across. The doors fit as tight as valves and close with a "swish," excluding all air except what can filter through the perforated iron plate that was placed over the bars above the door in order to make the hole as dark and oppressive as possible. A stout iron ring is fastened about knee high in the shelving back of the cell, and through this ring the right wrist of the prisoner was passed and then handcuffed to the left hand, the consequence being that he was thus prevented from standing upright or lying down, but was obliged to stoop or lean against the shelving side of the vessel as it rolled to and fro at its moorings.

One hour's exercise a day was all that the prisoner of the "black hole" was granted, and the offenders underwent their sentences in an attitude that was of itself a refinement of torture. Starved, beaten and abused as they were, the wonder is that so many of even those hardened villains were able to endure punishment as they did.

Death Had No Terrors.

That the majority of them were callous and irreclaimable—more like wild beasts than men—is possible; but the treatment they were shown to have received on board, by the evidence given at a government inquiry, was such as to drive any man to desperation and despair. Constant application of the "cat," imprisonment in the "black hole" and other punishments were the instruments relied upon for producing a reform. No wonder that the scaffold on shore had no terror for these men. Death was a welcome release from the cruelties practiced on board the Success.

As an additional punishment on the prisoners a heartless practice was initiated during the reign of Inspector Price. Rations having been stopped, a steak was at times cooked at the end of the corridor on the deck, so that its appetizing odor could find its way through the bars over the doors of the convicts' dark cells and make their mouths water for the succulent meat, to which their stomachs had been strange for so long a time. Another fiendish invention was the cayenne pepper mill, which was worked as a special punishment by a prisoner, whose nose and eyes suffered severely from the pungent, burning dust. It would appear that instead of seeking to reclaim the convicts, the officers in power utterly destroyed all chance of reformation, and by their revengeful treatment eradicated any lingering germ of better nature that is generally to be found in even the most hardened ruffians.

In the larger cells on either side of the corridor the floor is worn into hollows and grooves close against the doorway by the constant jangling and friction of the prisoners' leg-irons, as they stamped impatiently, waiting for the stroke of the bell that marked the time for meals or exercise—a sad and silent testimony to countless hours of miserable endurance.

EXPEDITION TO ISLAND OF CANNIBALS RECALLED

Topographer in Forestry Office at Portland One of Few Men Living Who Visited Strange and Savage Land in Gulf of California.

WILLARD D. JOHNSON, topographer in the Portland office of the United States Forest Service, who has seen 35 years of scientific service for the Government, is one of the few men living who has visited the island of Tiburon, in the Gulf of California, the strangest island in the world on acccount of being inhabited by the Seri Indians, the only cannibals in North America.

Although it was in 1896 that Mr. Johnson, as geographer in an expedition, was sent out by the Smithsonian Institution, his account of that isolated island, only 32 miles in length, is as interesting and unusual as if it were yesterday. Eighteen years have not affected a race of people unchanged by the thousands of years that preceded.

"A few years before the United States Government decided to investigate the Seri tribe on Tiburon Island a German expedition, imbued with a feeling of sympathy and kindness toward the poor, neglected and abused Seri Indians, landed on Tiburon and proceeded forward without guns," said Mr. Johnson. "The Seris, unaccustomed to such gallantry, dropped their bows and arrows and thus gave the Germans confidence in their judgment. After the Germans had advanced sufficiently from the shore to make their retreat somewhat difficult unless assisted by wings, the Seris picked up cobble stones and stoned the scientists to death.

"The Mexican government thought that it was time to investigate their colony in the deep, blue waters of the gulf and sent a Mexican naval expedition. The naval officers had heard of the fate of the Germans and couldn't find Tiburon Island, so the Mexican government sent a land expedition.

"The land expedition, nobody doubts, was sincere in its efforts to accomplish its purpose, but there were so many deserts to be crossed before reaching the shore oposite Tiburon, which was a few miles off, that the expedition got lost and finally came back without having visited anything worthy of mention.

"The United States was interested by this time and W. W. J. McGee, director of the bureau of ethnology, Smithsonian Institution was ordered to make up an expedition.

"We started from Tucson, Ariz., and visited various ruins and other places until we arrived at Hermosillo; there we fitted out for our goal, Tiburon.

"I built a boat, the only one we had, and we set sail up the coast, landing opposite the island on the mainland, a narrow channel, known as Infernal Strait, dividing the island from the mainland.

"Our advances were looked upon with suspicion by the Seris, for we carried everything to defend ourselves short of artillery, and this impressed our new acquaintances. Piles of little mirrors and baby dolls left in conspicuous places by us were greedily picked up by the Seris when we retired from the island, but the Seris simply wouldn't make friends of us.

"In their villages we gathered rude pottery, crude baskets and some magnificent specimens of coats made of beautiful feathers from fine-plumaged birds. But the gem of the Smithsonian collection was a native boat such as they used. It is called a Balsa boat, and is made of reeds worked together into two parallel cigar-shaped rafts. The reeds are held together by fibrous twine.

"To get one of these boats was not easy as they would haul them overland when we approached. Finally we came across a family fishing from one, and cut off their retreat from shore. After firing a few shots in their direction, the family dived into the surf and scattering like ducks, swam to shore. We confiscated this boat, which is now at the Smithsonian Institution.

"But it was impossible to make the expedition a complete success. The Seris wouldn't let us get near them, so that we had little opportunity to study their marriage and other customs. We had to gather our information from conjecture or do without it.

"One night a man named Mitchell and I decided to visit Tiburon and started to accomplish our purpose, but the wind blew us south to Alcatraz, or Pelican Island, 20 miles down the gulf. A heavy breeze carried us along and all we hoped for was to escape alive.

"Approaching Alcatraz Island, we observed through the darkness phantom forms, tall, white, ghost-like objects which disappeared and reappeared. We didn't know what to expect but couldn't do anything but go right with the wind, which bore down toward the 'ghosts.'

"It didn't actually take long, but it seemed an age, before we made out the ghosts to be geysers of water and spray, which shot up the grooves of the perpendicular strata as the waves dashed against the rocky cliff at its base. Between these two sentinels we shot and landed safely on a small beach, completely inclosed by perpendicular rock walls 100 feet high. The boat was turned over and over in the surf and the mast snapped with the first revolution, but we were not injured.

"On the following morning we made our way painfully back 20 miles, being obliged to paddle and trek all of the distance against a current. After three weeks' exploration on the island, the expedition returned to Washington."

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