

The Shipwreck Watch

A Journal of Macquarie Island Shipwreck Stories

Volume 9

1898

‘All Hands safe- Tremendous Battle with Seas’: *Gratitude*

Sealing businessman, Joseph Hatch, literally sank a small fortune in the Macquarie Island penguin and elephant seal oiling industry. His ketch, *Gratitude*, was the first of his sealing vessels to be wrecked on the north-east coast of Macquarie Island.

New Zealand’s finest sailing ketch

The magnificent sailing ketch, *Gratitude* left Bluff, New Zealand, for Macquarie Island on 12 October 1898 under the command of Captain Neil McDonald. She had six crewmen aboard. Sixteen days later, the *Gratitude* anchored near Joseph Hatch’s sealing station at the Nuggets on Macquarie Island. A party of men rowed ashore with supplies for Hatch’s sealing operations.



The *Gratitude*. Photo by J.L. Hatch from J.S. Cumpston, *Macquarie Island*.

On 30 October 1890, galeforce winds blew up. Captain McDonald decided he would head the vessel out to sea in search of shelter. The next day he anchored the vessel at the south end of the island and landed sixty empty oil casks before sailing back to Nuggets Point.



Sealers unloading barrels at the Nuggets, c1912. Photo H. Hamilton, Mitchell Library, State Library of N.S.W.

The weather settled again. On 3 November, the crew landed cargo from the *Gratitude*. A heavy easterly swell arose the next day. On 8 and 9 November, heavy seas broke over the decks. By 10 November, the wind and seas were so dangerous that McDonald considered beaching the *Gratitude* to protect the property on board and the lives of his men.

Early in the morning of 10 November 1898, the *Gratitude* shipped a heavy sea. Life belts were handed out an hour later. At 9 A.M. another huge wave broke on board, damaging the ketch. The anchor lost its hold or the chain parted. The *Gratitude* drifted swiftly towards the reef.

The crew set the jib, hoping the wind would blow the bow around so they could head for the shingle beach and avoid the rocks.

The cable slipped and the Gratitude surfed to shore.

Another party of Hatch's sealers helped the crew to disembark and there was no loss of life.

Rough weather continued for two days after the beaching. The *Gratitude's* side was badly damaged. Sailors and sealers worked hard to save the stores and what was left of the cargo. Shingle was banking up inside the wreck, so the men took everything perishable to safely.

Late in November, waves threw the wreck above the high water mark. Both bilges burst, timber shattered, her rudder, main boom and mainsail were washed away and the boat smashed. The castaways took all other sails and gear ashore and placed anchored the wreck to prevent it from drifting out to sea.

When the *Gratitude* did not return to Bluff, Joseph Hatch leased the New Zealand steamer, *Tutanekai* for 180. The *Tutanekai* anchored in Nuggets Bay on 17 February 1891 and landed stores for the shipwrecked crew. The sealers then rafted 263 casks of sea elephant oil to the *Tutanekai*. Two days later the shipwrecked crew went aboard. The *Tutanekai* visited Campbell, Bounty and Antipodes Islands before returning to New Zealand.





The Wreck of the Gratitude in 1909. Photo J.K. Davis,
from J.S. Cumpston, *Macquarie Island*.

The wreck of the *Gratitude* was a great loss to Hatch. He bought her in Sydney in 1890 for 1300. At the time of the wreck she was insured for only 400.

References

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