

The Famous Mystery Ship—Mary Celeste

The story (or stories) of this ship are covered in a book published by J.B. Lippincott Company of Philadelphia and New York in 1942—"Mystery Ship—the Mary Celeste In Fancy and In Fact", by George S. Bryan.

The ship was built at Spencer's Island, township of Parrsboro, Cumberland County, Nova Scotia, and was launched as "The Amazon" on May 18th, 1861. She was driven ashore near Glace Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and "abandoned to the salvors" in September, 1867. Records appear inadequate to give explanation of how she reached an Eastern United States port and, by June, 1868, was entered on an official list of United States merchant vessels as "Mary Celeste".

Benjamin Briggs became Captain in the Fall of 1872. With his wife and 2-year old daughter aboard, he sailed out of New York Harbour on November 7th, bound for Genoa, Italy. On December 13th, the "Mary Celeste" was sailed into the port of Gibraltar by three of the crew of another ship which had found her "total abandoned and derelict" at a point about midway between the Azores and the Coast of Portugal. Nobody knows what had happened to the "Mary Celeste" or what became of anybody who had been aboard her when she left New York. This is the incident that constitutes THE MYSTERY which has been the basis of many stories—a leading one by A. Conan Doyle before his days of fame began.

Quoting Mr. Bryan in the preface to his book: "The Celeste was no 'painted ship upon a painted ocean'—she was real. Her story, though, was puzzling; and in certain of its highly embellished forms it held an almost preternatural quality that at once tantalized and

charmed. In the ensuing pages we shall consider bewildering details: the Celeste overtaken and, when boarded, sound from truck to keel, all shipshape and undamaged, and under full spread of canvas; her galley fire still warm, and food upon the stove; wash hung to dry in the fo'c's'le, with the crew's money, papers and razors lying about; spread on cabin table a half-eaten meal, including a dish of porridge, a boiled egg sliced open at one end, three cups of lukewarm tea; beside these an uncorked bottle of cough-mixture.

"A watch ticks, hanging from a nail over the Captain's berth. On a desk in the mate's cabin is a piece of paper, on the paper an unfinished sum. The cash-box has not been touched; the cargo appears to be in good order; the pumps are dry. There is no lack of food or drinking water—no sign of fire or panic or disorder. Yet every soul that was aboard has vanished into the unknown without a trace."

By September, 1873, the "Mary Celeste" was back in New York. For the years following until 1884 she was registered at various ports under various owners and skippers—finally (August 4, 1884) registry was at Boston. She sailed from that port for Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on December 16th, 1884. She was "lost by stranding" on Rochelois Bank, in Gonave Channel, Haiti, on January 3rd, 1885. The Courts of Massachusetts heard and considered charges of barratry and conspiracy to defraud insurance companies against skipper and shippers.

Mr. Bryan says: "After a troubled history and when less than a quarter century old, Mary Celeste, in her way no less famous than was the Bounty, left her Nova Scotia timbers within the domain of Voodoo. There, a dark spot in the 'long white lines of breakers,' she crumbled on the reef. Up north, in villages around Minas Basin, people talked of that day in May of '61 when Joshua Dewis launched

the Mystery Ship.

The basis of Painting reproduced on this Calendar is the only known picture of Mary Celeste. It hung in a marine museum located within a few miles of where the Amazon (later Mary Celeste) was built.

The above was taken from the back of a picture which is now hanging in the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia. The picture is titled "The World Famous Mystery Ship MARY CELESTE" and was painted by Leslie Victor Smith.