

# WEEKENDER



**Awash:** Swimmers pose with the Pollockshields; inset, photo of the wreck today by Ron Lucas.



**Rescue:** Water-sodden rescuers stand in the surf at Elbow Bay; inset, a portrait of Antone Marshall.

## Rescue in a September hurricane

### The wreck and rescue of the Pollockshields

Contrary to the precepts of Bermudians of old, I built my house high up on the hillside, rather than down in the valley as protection against the "hurricane", the name given by indigenous peoples of the central portion of the American continents to the great gusts of winds out of the Atlantic seas off western Africa. It is also partially built on a hill of sand, prehistoric granules of pinkish hue that ended up in some concrete mix after being excavated out of the landscape, complete with fossil shells of the type we use to gather from the cliffs at the end of Tee Street, down Devonshire way. Unlike houses of old, being limestone blocks welded together with lime mortars and white-wash for protection against the rain, my "house of sand" is replete with concrete blocks and tons of iron-reinforced concrete; not a traditional piece of stone to be seen anywhere.

This day, September 9, 2012, the new method of construction on an untraditional site met with the fury of a woman in the guise of the female-named erst-while "Hurricane Leslie", now but a large Tropical Storm. Storm, hurricane, or merely a tempest in a teacup, the wrath of Leslie was no mere trifling, nor a momentary burst of anger and spite milk. The Public Synopsis at Weather.bm at 1052 hrs was as follows: "Winds have been sustained tropical storm force, gusting to hurricane force at Commissioner's Point, which represents elevated and exposed areas of Bermuda."

The weather station is actually on the roof of Commissioner's House, the flagship of the National Museum, which has weathered many a Leslie and more for the last 185 years, though perhaps I should not write before the end of the latest lady to wreak her wrath upon these islands.

Leslie is pelting my "picture window" with such a waterfall



**Dr Edward Harris**  
Heritage Matters

“The Hurricane of 1915 commenced early on September 3rd after very sultry weather — calm sea and very rosy sunsets. Its full force was experienced from the N.E. to E. and continue for 4 days.” — **Terry Tucker**, “Beware the Hurricane!”

that the islands in Ely's Harbour have vanished into the mist. Such a whitout occurred over a wide expanse of the ocean surrounding Bermuda in the September hurricane of 1915, causing the wrecking of a loaded ammunition ship off Elbow Beach. In a non-sexist nomenclature, that storm immediately followed the devastating "Galveston Hurricane" of August 5 to 23, which claimed 405 lives in that coastal Texas town. Our beast of the sea has now been named "Major Hurricane 3" and it raged from August 27 until September 9, "deaths unknown", according to the archives of aerial activity for 1915 by the perhaps inappropriately named "Weather Underground" website. MH3 started in the mid-Atlantic, came up to Bermuda and unusually made a U-turn to the south, then turned north again, passing us by a second time to peter out in the northern Atlantic around the latitude of the State of Maryland; winds exceeded 111mph,



**Aground:** A painting captures the scene at Elbow Bay during the rescue of the crew of the Pollockshields.

The rescue operations began at daylight, with storm winds still blowing, and after four trips through the surf, all the crew was taken off the Pollockshields without loss of life.

making it a "Category 3" hurricane in modern jargon.

It was into those turbulent seas that the SS *Pollockshields* ran unwittingly in the days before radar and universal hurricane tracking. German-built in 1890 as *Herodot*, the vessel was sold in 1903 to the Hamburg American Line and named *Gracicia*. Requisitioned as a supply ship for the Great War, the *Gracicia* was captured off Gibraltar by the British and converted for an ammunition vessel for their anti-German war efforts as SS *Pollockshields*.

On August 22, 1915 out of Cardiff, the ammo-laden ship headed for Bermuda, with which it met in a disastrous way on September 7, having been in hurricane conditions for several days. The "fog" cleared and Captain Ernest Boothe found himself in shallow water on a lee shore; attempts to reverse against the storm winds failed and the ship ran firmly aground on a reef several hundred yards from safety. Thereafter began one of the most daring and suc-



**Sightseeing:** Tourists queue to visit the Pollockshields; inset, the ship's bell, "Grounded Bermuda Gale of 1915".

cessful sea rescues in Bermuda's history, spearheaded by the whaler, Antone Marshall (1880-1952).

Marshall had a whaling boat that he had imported from New Bedford and with a team of volunteers he transported the little vessel from its anchorage at Jews Bay to Elbow Beach, reaching the shore around 3am on September 8.

The rescue operations began at daylight, with storm winds still blowing, and after four trips through the surf, all the crew was taken off the *Pollock-*

*shields* without loss of life. Captain Boothe was less fortunate, as he was swept overboard; his body floated up several days later at Christmas Bay, Southampton.

Antone Marshall came from a long lineage of Acorean and New Bedford whalers, but eventually sold his equipment to Gunnison (Gunny) Astwood, Bermuda's last whaler. His family donated a painting of the *Pollockshields* rescue by Joseph Monk to the National Museum and Ron Lucas supplied a wonderful photograph of the ship, as

she lies among the reefs in modern times.

One photograph of the period suggests an early touristic interest in visiting the wreck of the *Pollockshields* and it is possible the Marshalls' whaleboat was kept at Elbow Beach for such a purpose for a time after the heroic rescue.

Edward Cecil Harris, MBE, JP, PHD, FSA is Executive Director of the National Museum at Dockyard. Comments may be made to director@bmm.bm or 704-5480.



**Azores:** Pico Island of the Azores; insets, launching of whaleboats and one photographed by Elizabeth Cardoso.



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