

On the Water

Stories from Maritime America

Seasickness, a frolick, and storms

Louisa Susannah Wells describes conditions in the North Atlantic during a voyage from New York to London in 1778.

From Louisa Susannah Wells, *The Journal of a Voyage from Charlestown to London*. (New York: New York Times, 1968 reprint of 1906 ed.), pp. 49-52.

On Saturday morning (my Birth Day) October 17th 1778 my uncle and his son and I took boat at the Albany Pier, to go on board our Ship, which then lay in the North River, off the Battery. At twelve o'clock we weighed anchor, and bore away for the Narrows; and under no small apprehension of not getting Down in time, as the Fleet had sailing Orders. Next morning, by daylight, we espied the ships getting under way, to the joy of every one on board, as we had all considered New York as our Prison for the ensuing Winter. I have since heard that it was so severe that heavy Artillery and Ammunition Waggon were transported to Jersey on the Ice of the North River. The Wind changing, we had time to drop Anchor in the midst of the Fleet at the Hook about Noon. As to myself, I kept my Birth day sorrowfully enough—"in settling my accounts at the ship's side." Sea sickness is a great drawback to travelling by water.

The first week of our Voyage we were becalmed, and the second, baffled by contrary Winds. The third, we were obliged, frequently, to ly to, for twelve hours on a stretch for the dull Sailors, to come up, and others, who through obstinacy, or carelessness, had ran foul of each other in the night...At length we gained the Banks of Newfoundland. The Sea-gulls and Penguins were pleasing sights to us. We then reckoned between Sixty and Seventy Sail of Ships, and other Vessels.



Here we waited almost two days, getting Soundings, bringing up the Fleet, and catching Cod Fish. Having so much Company, it did not seem as if we were at Sea, where the wide expanse of Sky and Water soon tires. Every day, excepting when we had a Storm, we spoke to some of our Friends. We once came so near in calm Weather, as to hold conversations without the speaking Trumpet, and the time when (the *Echo* a ship in which were some frolicksome persons) they began pelting us with Turnips, which we returned with Apples. (Frolicking is an universal phrase throughout America, Bahamas and Bermuda—in the West Indies.)

After we left the Banks we had very Stormy Weather insomuch that, for three days together, we were obliged to keep our Dead Lights in, and burn Candles, night and day below. From this time we never had a Chair in the Cabin. They were lashed to the Stern of the Ship, by my Uncle's orders. The Deck of the Cabin was very wet from shipping very heavy seas, which made their way, down the Stairs, notwithstanding all our care. I could no longer keep above, and once, on entering the cabin, the Vessel gave a heel to the Starboard Side, which set me running to leeward. My Uncle, who was in his bed, started up, with such agony in his countenance, that I shall never forget it. The Chairs were pushed under the bed with their feet outwards. He, nor I, expected nothing less than that, one of the feet would strike against the pit of my stomach! providentially my whole body went against the bars, and there I was transfixed with Terror! All the passengers assisted in throwing the chairs upon Deck, and we sat on Trunks during the rest of the passage.

How do you think I made shift to pass my time? I can assure you I was obliged to exert all my Philosophy; which, together with the Guitar, made 'the heavy Hours' supportable. I have already told you that we had no conversation and I detested cards. Frequently, for two or three days together, I have been obliged to keep my Stateroom, merely for fear of having my bones broken. I was unable to sit up, without being lashed to the bed or trunk on which I sat. . .

