

The following account comes from the Sacramento Daily Union, Volume 98, Number 126, December 25, 1899 (illustrations added):

TWENTY-ONE OF THE CREW DROWNED

British Steamship Ariosto Wrecked Off Cape Hatteras. They Tried to Reach Shore in a Small Boat. It Was Swamped and All Lost Their Lives—Captain and Eight of the Crew Saved by the Heroic Efforts of the Ocracoke- Life-Saving Crew Under Captain Howard—Worst Wreck on the Shore Since 1876.

CHICAGO, Dec. 24. —A special to the "Tribune" from Norfolk, Va., says: The British steamship Ariosto, Captain Baines, bound from Galveston to Hamburg, was wrecked at 4 o'clock this morning, six miles south, off Hatteras, N. C, and twenty-one of the crew were drowned. Captain Baines and eight of the crew were saved by the heroic efforts of the Ocracoke life saving crew, under Captain James Howard. Those who lost their lives attempted to reach the shore in a small boat, which was swamped shortly after it put off from the ship. Captain Baines and the eight men remained aboard and were landed by the life savers in the breeches buoy, but not until after a struggle which lasted all day. Wrecking tugs are on the way from here to the scene of the wreck and if they reach the stranded ship in time may save it, as the wind is in the wrecked vessel's favor.

The Ariosto wreck is the worst on these shores since the German ship Elizabeth went ashore in 1876, when fifty-five people were drowned. Thick fogs have prevailed along the Virginia and North Carolina coast for several days and a number of vessels have narrowly escaped destruction. Last night, however, the air was clear, but the wind averaged from forty to fifty miles an hour and the sea was furious around the point which has been designated as the "Grave Yard of American shipping."

The Ariosto, a vessel of 2,205 tons, sailed from Galveston for Hamburg, via Norfolk, on December 17th. The skipper, Captain Baines, and his crew, consisting of twenty-nine men, were all British. The Ariosto which had a general cargo, had all the way from port encountered heavy weather. The coast patrol from Ocracoke. was returning to the station about 4 o'clock this morning when he discovered a big ship ashore. He immediately lighted a signal to notify those aboard that they were discovered and ran to the station to arouse others of the life saving crew. Against the fierce wind the life savers dragged the heavy apparatus, consisting of the Lyle guns, breeches and car, and it was almost daylight when they reached the scene of the wreck. They could see the outlines of a big steamer, but could not accomplish anything until daybreak. The wind caught up particles of sand, which were blown into the faces of the life savers until their cheeks were cut as if by a rawhide. When

daylight broke the sailors were seen huddled together on the wrecked ship, waving their arms in an appeal to be saved.

To launch a boat in such a sea would have meant instant death, so the life savers placed their gun in position and fired. The Ariosto was some 1000 feet out and the line fell short. Line after line was fired to the stranded ship, but all failed to reach. In the meanwhile the waves were dashing over the ship and Captain Baines called his men together for a consultation, explaining to them that the chances were about even if they should take to the small boats or wait for the life saving crew to fire a line on board. So far as he was concerned, the Captain said, he would wait for the life savers, but he left it to the crew to decide among themselves. Eight sailors said they would “stick by the Captain.” These were saved. Twenty-one declared they were doomed if they remained aboard, and they left the ship in a small boat. All of them lost their lives. The boat in which the twenty-one men put off was one of the regular lifeboats. It was strong in ordinary weather, but a cockleshell in such a sea. The ship was tossing heavily, and with difficulty it was swung from the davits. The twenty-one men in their excitement had made no provision for the overturning of the craft, and one by one they clambered in, in haste to go to their deaths. Captain Baines and the remaining eight men from their perilous position watched the little boat put off, shouting luck to the departing sailors. Tossing about on the great waves, the sailors pulling a strong stroke, the boat seemed in a fair way of reaching shore, when a wave swept with might on the little craft, engulfing it. The twenty-one men were thrown into the sea, and although the watchers on shore were witnesses to the disaster, they were powerless to render aid. The sea swallowed the unfortunate men only for an instant, for they appeared high on the crest of a wave, making a last desperate fight for their lives. Finally one by one, they sank out of sight.



(Painting by Charlie Ahmen)

Captain Baines, on the wrecked vessel, as he saw his men perish—this mariner who had sailed the world over for twenty-five years—wept like a child. Meanwhile the Ocracoke life-saving crew stood its ground and continued firing lines to the stranded ship. About four hours after the Ariosto first struck a lifeline was cast over the ship’s side. Captain Baines

and his remaining men made it fast, and an hour later they had dragged the big hawser aboard. The life-savers slowly ran out the breeches buoy and it reached the ship in safety. Through the blinding spray the men were then one by one hauled to the shore, more dead than alive, and by nightfall all were safe.

When the disaster was made known here wrecking tugs started for the scene, and it is a matter of steam against time if they succeed in reaching the Ariosto before the vessel goes to pieces. The Ariosto was seven years old and was owned by R. McAndrews & Co. of London.

ANOTHER ACCOUNT. The Rescue of Survivors Attained With Much Difficulty.

CAPE HENRY (Va.), Dec. 24. — The Weather Bureau official at Hatteras, N. C, reports that the British steamship Ariosto, Captain Baines, from Galveston to Norfolk for coal, then to Hamburg, loaded with cotton, corn, wheat and meat, stranded on Ocracoke beach, six miles south of the Hatteras Weather Bureau Office at 4 o'clock this morning. The steamship carried a crew of thirty men. Twenty-one men abandoned the steamer and took to boats soon after she stranded. The boats were wrecked in the heavy seas and the entire twenty-one were drowned. Captain Baines and the remaining eight men were taken from the ship by Captain James Howard and crew of the Ocracoke life-saving station. The rescue was effected with difficulty, owing to the heavy sea, the landing taking almost the entire day. Captain Baines and the eight surviving members of the crew are now being cared for at the Ocracoke life-saving station. Some water is making in the hold of the vessel, but she is still in good condition and probably can be saved if prompt assistance is rendered. News Sent to Washington.



(Keeper James W. Howard)

WASHINGTON, Dec. 24.—Superintendent Kimball of the Life Saving Bureau, tonight received the following dispatch: "British steamer Ariosto, Captain Baines, stranded at Ocracoke beach at 4 o'clock this morning. Twenty-one drowned and nine saved in breeches buoy. HOWARD, Keeper.