

Elizabeth ("Bett") Linton (1856-1910) was born in Wysocking, Hyde County, North Carolina. She married Ocracoke native and widower, Amon Howard (ca. 1820-ca. 1885). Two years after Amon's death Bett married another Ocracoker, Joseph O'Neal (1835-1907). Bett Linton had no children. She supported herself after her second husband's death by cooking for the men of the Hatteras Inlet Life Saving Station on the north end of Ocracoke.

In November, 1909, Bett Linton O'Neal dreamt that a number of German men came ashore at Ocracoke. Dreams were often interpreted by islanders as harbingers of things to come. The next morning Bett cooked a great many pineapple cakes for the surfmen at the station. When asked why all the cakes, Bett explained that she was certain they would be having company soon.

On November 29, 1909 the German steamship Brewster, on a trip from Port Antonio, Jamaica, to New York, loaded with \$7,000 worth of bananas, pineapples, oranges, and coconuts, was driven on shore fourteen miles from the Hatteras Inlet Station, between the Diamond Shoals Lightship and the beach. Capt. F. Hinz had mistaken the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse for the Lightship.

The Brewster, built by Burmeister and Wain in Copenhagen, Denmark, and owned by H. H. Schmidt, was registered in the port of Hamburg, Germany. Her value was about \$36,000. The ship's officers were Germans, and many of the crew were Jamaicans.

The wreck was spotted by Surfman #2, O. O. Midgett of the Cape Hatteras Life Saving Station. In addition to the Cape Hatteras Station (Acting Keeper Baxter B. Miller), three other Stations were alerted - Big Kinnakeet Station (Keeper A. T. Gray), Creeds Hill Station (Keeper E. H. Peel), and Hatteras Inlet Station on Ocracoke Island (Keeper D. W. Barnett).

Capt. Peel mustered his crew and launched their rowing lifeboat, but it sprang a leak before reaching Diamond Shoals. Peel and his crew were rescued by Capt. Miller's lifesavers. Several of Peel's crew were transferred to a nearby power fishing boat which then towed Capt. Miller's lifeboat near the wreck. Capt. Peel took charge of the Cape Hatteras boat, and made way for the steamship. When the lifesavers arrived at the Brewster they discovered that five crew members had already taken a yawl, and were on their way to the Lightship.

Recognizing the perilous situation (the wind had reached gale force, and powerful waves were breaking over the ship), Capt. Peel and Capt. Miller urged the crew of the Brewster to abandon ship. The steamer's captain, F. Hinz, and the remaining 27 sailors refused to leave the stricken vessel. Meanwhile, heavy seas continued to build, and the velocity of the wind

showed no signs of decreasing. For an hour the lifesavers, wet and cold, pleaded with the Brewster's crew to leave their ship.

Finally, one sailor at a time, clutching a tethered life ring, jumped into the churning ocean and made his way to the lifeboat. After nine men were pulled into the lifeboat the surfmen rowed through the breakers and transferred their charges to Keeper Barnett and his crew who had arrived at the scene, and were anchored some distance away in their 34-foot power lifeboat.

It required three trips to bring all 28 shipwrecked sailors to Barnett's boat. Finally, the power boat returned to the station, towing the Cape Hatteras lifeboat behind. Sixteen crewmen were taken to the Cape Hatteras Station, and twelve were cared for at Creeds Hill. On December 2 the shipwrecked sailors were taken off Hatteras by the U.S. Revenue Cutter Onondaga, which had been lying by since November 30, waiting for the sea to go down. The five sailors who had rowed to the Lightship were picked up on December 1 by the steamer Hermon which was on its way to Baltimore. By then only the Brewster's masts and smoke stacks were showing above water.

Capt. Peel and Capt. Miller each received the prestigious Gold Lifesaving Medal. Nine lifesavers received Silver Medals: W. H. Austin, W. L. Barnett, D. W. Fulcher, Y. O. Gaskins, I. L. Jennett, E. J. Midgette, O. O. Midgett, H. S. Miller, and U. B. Williams.

When the Brewster finally broke apart, copious numbers of coconuts, pineapples, oranges and bananas washed up on the shore of the Outer Banks. Islanders gathered the fruit, including bunches of bananas, which they rinsed off with fresh water, and hung up to ripen. So many bunches of bananas were retrieved by Ocracoke islanders that most of them could not be eaten before they began to rot.

The fate of the Brewster lives yet in oral stories told on Ocracoke Island as "The Wreck of the Banana Boat."

(This article is based, in large part, on a hand-written account of Bett's dream and the wreck of the steamship Brewster, written by Ocracoke native, Euphemia Gaskins Ennis, and given to me in August, 2014, with additional details gleaned from *The Graveyard of the Atlantic* by David Stick, and *Shipwrecks of Ocracoke Island* by Sonny Williamson.)