

# All the Horrors Seem to Happen at Night

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### **James Moody's First Atlantic Crossing**

Spectators agreed the fire that raged through the New Jersey shore on May 29, 1904 was second in ferocity only to the catastrophe of June 1900. That fire, four years before, had destroyed three vessels belonging to the North German Lloyd Steamship Company. This latest blaze – the fifth since 1900 - again threatened German liners.

It started in the freight yards of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad in Jersey City and would destroy six piers and at least two dozen barges, causing damage estimated at one million dollars.

A strong south wind made the work of the tugs and firemen extremely dangerous, as sheets of flame shot out every few minutes from the piers. Many of the firefighters were painfully burned, especially the bucket men who, despite the terrible heat and great volume of the flames, stuck to their posts as long as possible.

For a time, it seemed the firemen would not hold the flames south of the Jersey City line. The managers of the German steamship piers in Hoboken called out their fire departments and drenched both piers and ships to try to protect them from glowing ash and cinders. As they worked, the southern tower on the Lackawanna Passenger Station and the roof of the Hudson Press Building blazed. The fire was less than a block distant from the Hamburg-American piers, where the transatlantic liners *Moltke*, *Prinz Oskar*, *Pretoria*, and *Grosser Kurfuerst* were lying. Just south of them lay the new piers of North German Lloyd, rebuilt after the 1900 fire, where the palatial *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, the *Trave*, and the *Bremen* were docked.



Thousands of people flocked to vantage points on the New York side of the river. Five thousand gathered at the Barrow Street Recreation Pier, the press of sightseers becoming so intense several people, including two children, were knocked into the water.

At 7.30 pm the Iron Steamboat Company's *Taurus*, arriving from Coney Island with more than

1,000 passengers, attempted to dock at the West Twenty-Second Street Pier. In their eagerness to view the fire passengers crowded to one side, and the *Taurus* threatened to capsize. The captain yelled orders as the boat listed heavily and women and children screamed in terror. Cries from those watching on the pier exacerbated the panic in the air. For a moment it seemed the *Taurus* might sink, but the crew managed to make her fast. The captain, breathing a sigh of relief, commented 'I have never seen anything like that in all my experience.'<sup>1</sup>

Watching this apocalyptic vision – eventually brought under control with no loss of life – was a 16 year old British brassbounder, a ship's apprentice.

As he observed the sheets of flame lick skywards, comparatively safe in a launch from the Seaman's Mission, James Paul Moody might have reflected on the ocean crossing that had brought him to New York. He had been witness to ferocious storms at sea, accidental death, conditions aboard ship that had driven a fellow apprentice to suicide and now an inferno that raged before him. 'All the horrors seem to happen at night', he wrote, little suspecting what lay in store eight years hence.

It was not an auspicious beginning to a career at sea.

ACCOUNT OF APPRENTICES ON BOARD.						
Christian and Surname of the Apprentice at full length.	Year of Birth.	Nationality * (If British, give birthplace.)	Registry of Indenture.		Date of joining or date of discharge of the apprentice.	Date, Place, and cause of leaving this Ship, or of Death, if the Apprentice remains to be stated, to be filled up by the Master.
			Name of	Part of		
Chas. Claud Humphreys	1885	Wales	1892	Spool	signed on 25/1/04	Indefinite
John Marshall	- 86	Wales	1902	-	1902	1902
Thomas Walker Legg	- 86	Wales	1902	-	1902	1902
Frank Haywood	- 87	Wales	1902	-	1902	1902
James Paul Moody	- 87	Wales	1902	-	1902	1902
Bernard Neal Doubleday	- 87	Wales	1902	-	1902	1902

Extract from Agreement and Account of Crew, *Boadicea* 1904 – 05  
(National Archives, Kew)

The voyage began just over three months earlier, as newly indentured apprentice James Moody joined the *Boadicea*. The 1,824 ton iron and steel vessel dated from 1887, the year Moody was born.

Acquired by the Liverpool-based William Thomas Line in 1902, she carried general cargo on the long hauls in which sail could still compete with steam. Morris Jones was the *Boadicea's* master, a 40 year-old from Pwllheli, Wales. He had previously commanded another of the line's vessels, the *Cambrian Chieftain*. The First Mate, John Daniels, was also Welsh, and Second Mate K. Lovold was a Liverpool native. At just over 20 he was not much older than the apprentices on board.

The vessel officially sailed with six apprentices, the oldest of these, Charles Humphreys, having nearly completed his sea time. While waiting to sit his examinations he functioned as Third Mate. Another apprentice, John Marshall, had joined the vessel a year and a half previously and held seniority among the apprentices. Thomas Legg, Frank Haywood, Bernard Doubleday and James Moody, all similar in age, joined in late February. Doubleday hailed from Grimsby, where Moody's family lived, and the two signed on together on February 24.

Moody had completed his merchant service training on HMS *Conway* the previous December. His two years on board the training ship would count as a year towards the four years sea time he needed before sitting for his Second Mate's Certification with the Board of Trade. *Conway* cadets were much in demand, and there had evidently been no difficulty in placing him with the

well-regarded William Thomas line upon payment of his indenture bond.



**James Paul Moody**  
(Private Collection)

After a Christmas spent with family members, he returned to Liverpool, where he and some of his colleagues stayed at the Sailors' Home until the *Boadicea* – the 'Boa' to her crew – was ready to sail.

It was not a lonely departure when the *Boa* edged into the Mersey. An almost festive air prevailed, in defiance of hardships ahead. Moody had been to tea often with the local clergyman who visited the *Conway* boys, and a group from his household and friends from the Sailors' Home came down to the docks to see them off. 'We gave them 3 cheers as the last mooring rope was cast off, and then dipped the ensign 3 times' wrote James in his first letter home. It would be more than a year before he saw England again.



**Boadicea**

The weather for the first few weeks was 'splendid', although the three of the five apprentices were seasick, James among them. Although suffering intensely he was able to take some pride in the thought that 'I managed to keep on deck all my watches above, and was first of 3 to get better.'

Frank Haywood seems to have fared worst of all, and not just from mal de mer. Moody, who referred to him as a 'poor ninny', noted Frank had not had a single day without being seasick or homesick. 'I'm sure we all and all hands give him a fairly warm time to cheer him up' Moody wrote carelessly. Meanwhile Haywood's depression was not helped by the fact that one of the mates had taken a dislike to him.

For James – or Jim, as his shipmates knew him – the way was easier. He was already tall for his age, and had a resilience both natural and honed by early hardships, including the prolonged illness and death of his beloved mother in 1898. This helped protect him from bullying, as did his engaging personality. He had a natural charm which enabled him to stay on the right side of shipmates such as the steward, ‘which I find pays!’

Being on good terms with the steward was important for a hungry teenager engaged in heavy physical work. Initially he found some aspects of life at sea were not as hard as he had feared. The dreaded ship’s fare did not quite live up to its reputation – ‘Have started salt pork and beef which are not half as bad as I expected.’

The fair weather in which they began the voyage was not to last. On Friday March 25, as the rain and wind picked up, Moody and John Marshall were sent aloft to the main royal yard and spent an hour and a half making ropes fast. His *Conway* training served him well; three of his colleagues were not yet allowed to leave the decks as they were still prone to bouts of dizziness.

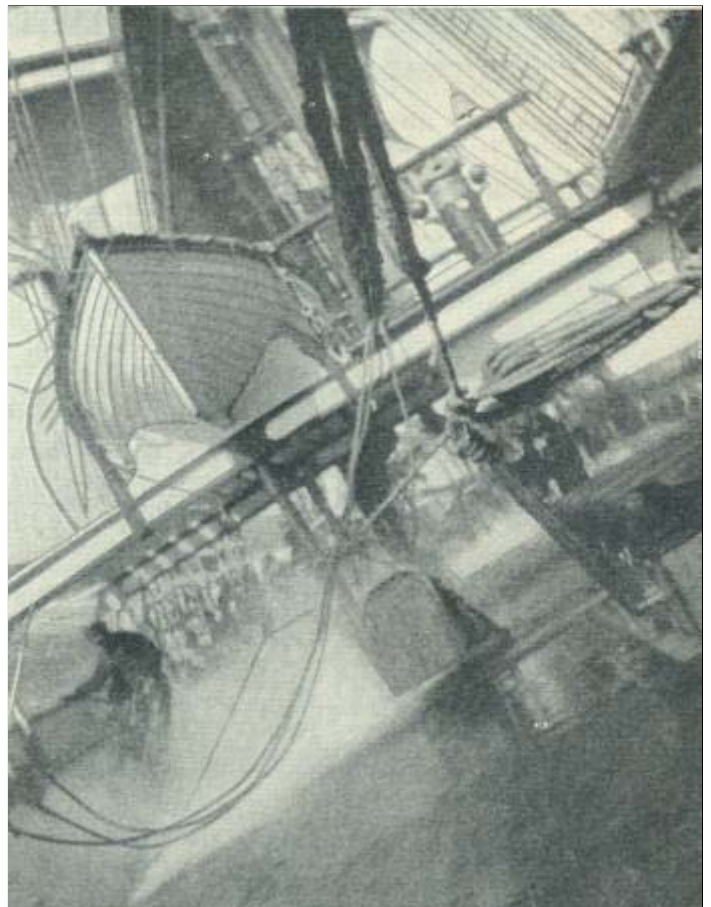
In spite of the threatening weather, he wrote on March 27 that the wind was pretty favourable and they hoped to be in New York in less than 16 days. Early that morning they passed a broken down steamer making distress signals. Unable to assist with the necessary tow, the *Boadicea* pressed on. The same day, it signaled a passing White Star ship. These crack liners caught the imagination of all apprentices, and Moody must have wondered if he, too, would serve in one if he passed the Board of Trade examinations and got his Master’s ticket.

Moody did not put pen to paper for another month. ‘Since I wrote on the other side of this five weeks ago,’ he explained when finally able to write again, ‘we have not had a single day’s fair wind, which means we have been going north and south nearly all the time instead of west. When I last wrote we were about 1,000 miles from land but after that we went back nearly to the west of Ireland. About 10 days out from Dunkerque it started to get stormy and we have only had about 3 days and nights since without having to wear oilskins!’

In the first three days of the storm, the *Boadicea* lost three sails. ‘It was an awful sight to see the great masses of canvas and rope rip up like silk with a noise like a train rushing through a tunnel.’ Captain Jones would not let his new apprentices leave the poop deck, so they stood and watched the men climb slowly aloft, trying to save as much canvas as possible. As the storm continued every hand was needed, and the apprentices could not be spared.

Again, Moody – who, with his *Conway* training, had marginally more experience at working aloft than the other first voyagers – was sent aloft with Marshall. ‘I shall never forget the first time I went up with the second voyage apprentice and about 10 men to take in the main sail. Oilskin suit and heavy sea boots on as well, and the mast swaying till the end nearly touched the water.’

On deck was no better as the vessel shipped heavy seas and then rolled, with the water



rushing across 'like an avalanche, sweeping everything away'. Ropes were stretched across the deck to provide handholds, but sometimes they found themselves swept off their feet, 'crash like a ton of bricks right into the scuppers with a white wave and perhaps 5 or 6 men on top of you.'



The boys, lacking experience in how to manage their wet weather gear, were drenched day in and out until they learned how to fasten their oilskins properly. Moody's sea boots were washed through until he tarred them. The water burst through their cabin door, and for five days a foot of water on the floor flooded their sea chests and the bottom bunks. When he finally had a chance to open his sea chest, it was full of water, with everything, drenched. He took the opportunity of a lull in the storm to dry the contents as much as possible, but his boots and some clothes had already turned mouldy.

The ship's bulkheads and hull ran wet with water into the bunks. Until they gained their sea legs, many of the apprentices' meals were swept away as they carried them from the galley. One miserable evening their lamp went out, and in desperation the boys slept in the poop for three nights with oilskins on.

The worst of it came on the night of April 10 – an 'awful night', as James wrote. Out of the previous 96 hours he calculated he had only managed eight of sleep, half of that with clothes on.

Now standing forward, he was shouting above the wind to a crewman two feet away when they heard a dull thud on deck. Groping forward in the dark they found AB Victor Benninghaus had fallen from the foreyard.

Moody helped pick him up, and as he did so 'I felt one part of his skull grate against another!' His crewmates did what they could for him, but Benninghaus died the next night – 'crushed to bits'. An hour after Benninghaus fell from aloft Moody was sent to work on the same yard. He found a 'bit of cloth and a tingly bit of flesh hanging to a sharp wire.' With a detachment born of horror, his first thought was how his sister's little white kitten would enjoy playing with it.

Benninghaus was buried at sea the next day 'with a huge chunk of iron tied to his feet'.

As horrific as the voyage was for Moody, it was even more miserable for Frank Haywood. One of the officers turned out to be a bully, and was 'awfully down' on the young apprentice. Moody returned to their cabin one night and was barely in time to save Haywood from cutting his wrists with a sharp knife.

Although Moody prevented the suicide attempt on this occasion, the cry for help went otherwise unanswered and Haywood's colleagues, with their own concerns and fears, do not appear to have been sympathetic to his plight. No one seems to have intervened when the mate who had targeted Haywood frequently told the homesick boy that he should drown himself.

As the apprentices were getting up for their morning watch at 4.00 am on April 22, Frank leapt from the cabin and ran on deck with hardly any clothes on. His colleagues assumed he was going to relieve himself, and took no notice of his absence until 15 minutes later when he was nowhere to be found. At approximately 41° 14' N, 52° 57' W, Haywood had taken the bully mate's tormenting words literally and thrown himself overboard. His body was not recovered.

Moody recorded all these events on a night when the *Boadicea* was 'rolling too hard to ink'. Even Captain Jones conceded it had been an unusually hard passage, and 'you may be sure we think so'.

On 28 April 1904, they finally anchored off Sandy Hook, New Jersey. When they were moved up

river later the same day, it took all hands to pull up anchor. It seemed difficult enough then, but when they were moved again it was even more difficult – twelve out of a crew of 22 deserted upon arrival and three more followed in later days. Every hand that remained – mates, steward, cook and apprentices – had to work together to haul up the anchor. ‘I never had such a hard day in my life, pouring rain all the time’ Moody wrote. They came alongside Brooklyn late that evening, and had to do all the mooring themselves.



**New York postcard, one of many James Moody sent to family and friends**  
(Private Collection)

It was a dismal introduction to the New World, but there was excitement amidst the exhaustion – and not just at the fact that ‘things [are] awfully cheap here’. There were six letters waiting for him, invitations to go to the Seaman’s Mission any night he liked, 3 shillings a week pocket money, and the prospect of going over soon to the New York side.

One of the tasks to be completed before pleasure was a visit with Captain Jones to the British Consulate to report the two deaths on the *Boa*. Vice-Consul Joseph Smithers was given the official log and the version that the Captain chose to tell – namely that Haywood’s death was an accident.

This record of events was corroborated by the apprentices, and Smithers recorded: ‘I have inquired into the circumstances connected with the reported missing of the said apprentice, and am satisfied that he no doubt was drowned, correct entries of the circumstances in the official log book having been produced to me.’ Benninghaus’s death was recorded as another accident.<sup>2</sup>

The New York Times picked up on the story of the horrific journey and reported the deaths. It was speculated that a sudden lurch of the ship had caused Haywood to fall overboard. Moody sent a clipping home, writing across it ‘skipper dare not say suicide’.

Thoughts of Haywood do not seem to have unduly troubled his former colleagues, although once they sailed again they were to find that the death had not altered the behaviour of the mate who was largely responsible. Eventually they would need to band together, threatening to do him violence if he so much as touched one of them. The man left the *Boa* later that year, and was not missed.

While in New York, Moody took full advantage of the social contacts offered at the Seamans’ Mission. He struck up a rapport with one in particular, a Mr. Selby. While to modern eyes the relationship seems incongruous - and possibly even sinister – there is no reason to doubt that

Selby's motives in befriending the young man were anything but philanthropic. Supporters of missions to seamen often took apprentices under their wing. Later in his first voyage Moody was to visit Newcastle on the Australian coast and developed a great affection for an entire family that took him into their circle and provided him with social contact with people of his own middle-class background in a strange city.

Selby took him to the most fashionable parts of the city, and Moody had a glimpse of life in 'the most swagger hotels, churches, clubs etc.' to which his benefactor had no trouble gaining access due to his social prominence. He introduced Moody to a man named Van der Lind, an odd gentleman whom Moody was intrigued to find out later was a millionaire.

In addition to often taking tea at the Mission, Moody did his share of sightseeing, visiting Central Park and landmarks such as the Flat Iron Building, which he noted was the tallest in New York. That same evening he went out on the Mission launch to watch the New Jersey dock fire.

On June 11, 1904 the *Boadicea* resumed her voyage, bound for Sydney, Australia. The Sailors' Society did not forget the apprentices, and each teenager was given a pile of magazines that Moody estimated were 'a foot and a half high.'

They did not forget him almost a decade later either, and when the Seamans' Church Institute unveiled their Lighthouse Memorial to the victims of the *Titanic* sinking in 1913, a friend at the Mission sent a copy of the Order of Service to Moody's family, hoping it would be a 'source of comfort, and to show you that dear old Jim has been again fittingly honoured, for his lovely and beautiful life'.<sup>3</sup>

After passing his Second Mate's certification in June 1907, Moody remained only briefly with the *Boadicea* before making the transition to steam in January 1908. He left the ship that had been his home for almost four years with barely a backwards glance: 'Don't know where the *Boa* is going to get and don't care if she goes where the Light Brigade charged either'.

In fact her end would be as futile as the doomed charge at Balaclava. She did not long outlive Moody himself – sunk by a German U-Boat in 1917.



**James Paul Moody**  
(Private Collection)

Moody visited New York again over the course of his career, as mate on a tramp steamer and as sixth, and then fifth officer, of the crack White Star Liner *Oceanic*. The contrast between his new berth and the old tickled him. 'Fancy steaming at 20 knots across the Atlantic. How different to the old sailing vessel *Boadicea* which took us 42 days to cross.'

He stayed in touch with his 'Yankee friend', and the two met more frequently in New York and London. The friendship almost saved his life – Selby wanted Moody to visit Paris with him in March 1912. Moody applied to the line for leave to do so, but the application was turned down. The White Star Line had other plans for the young officer, and he was transferred to the RMS *Titanic*.

'We can't have big ships *and* holidays!' wrote Moody good-naturedly. When the *Titanic* sailed

from Southampton on 10 April 1912 – the eighth anniversary of Benninghaus' death – Moody was aboard. But this time, it was he who was not destined to reach New York.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Sources**

Unless otherwise noted, all direct quotations are derived from the 1904 - 1912 correspondence of James Paul Moody.

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## **References**

1. 'Fire Destroys Six Jersey City Piers', *New York Times*, 30 May 1904
2. Agreement and Account of Crew, *Boadicea 1904 – 05*, National Archives, Kew, BT 99/2425
3. H Q Wood, Letter 16 April 1913 (Private Collection)

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