

Geelong & District Insolvency Competition

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Insolvent: Captain John HAYES

Submitted by

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Captain John Hayes, Mariner – Insolvent.

In 1852 Geelong was a thoroughfare, Corio bay was becoming cluttered with shipping, some abandoned by their crew, and people were flocking to the gold fields of central Victoria. In some ways at this time Geelong was earning its nickname of “the Pivot”. The town was the turning point, people arrived, equipped themselves, and left heading north. Geelong was only in its infancy; the first settlers only arriving in the mid thirties; it was a very scattered settlement with two main areas of habitation, one on the coast of Corio Bay, the other alongside the River Barwon. The town was rough with few substantial buildings and as yet little character.

Yet when Captain John Hayes sailed into Corio Bay as Master of the “Go Ahead” that year he saw the potential for himself as the Master of a small vessel in coastal trade around Port Phillip, trading between the competing towns of Melbourne and Geelong in the newly promoted State of Victoria. The small vessel in which he had entered the bay was just the type of vessel needed to cross the bar which blocked entrance to Corio Bay to larger vessels which were forced to offload at Point Nelson and their goods and passengers carted to the township some miles away.

His vision of the potential was what caused him to settle in Geelong and confine himself to serving on small vessels for the next 37 years, abandoning any plans he may have had to follow in his father’s footsteps in the great ocean going fast Clipper ships.

In having established his wife Ann and family in Geelong he proceeded to trade in various vessels around Port Phillip including the “Amelia” and the steamer “Reliance”. In this later ship he was involved in the attempt to tow the “Sea Nymph” from the rocks at Cowies Creek. 1868 His father arrived to retire and be near his son, Captain John Hayes senior at retirement was Master of the clipper ship “The Flying Eagle”

Perhaps it was his father’s or his wife’s failing health, or his growing family that made Captain John decided to invest in a role on land. He sought and secured a Publican’s Licence for The Hayes Family Hotel on the corner of Malop and Bellarine Streets.

In 1871 He in Partnership with another well known Captain of the Mosquito Fleet; the small vessels of the Bay Trade, became agents for The Melbourne and Geelong Lighterage Company. They arranged seasonal excursions to Clifton Mineral Springs in the “Kangaroo”. Their greatest venture for the year though was the purchase of the 26 ton NSW built Ketch the “James and Amelia” an old but sound ship very useful for the bay trade.

It is now that many things turn black for the Hayes family. On the 12th May 1872 Ann was delivered of a still born daughter in their residence at the Hotel. The family mourned for the loss of this their ninth child. Then on the 13th September of the same year the Ketch “James and Amelia” dragged its anchor in a storm while waiting to unload its cargo of timber for the new jetty at Drysdale, with Captain John Hayes Senior as Master. The vessel went on to rocks and became a complete loss, with only portion of the load being salvageable. To add to their concerns the Hotel business was failing and there seemed no way to resolve their finances.

In January 1873 John Hayes filed a schedule in Geelong for insolvency, due to the loss of the "James and Amelia" and its Cargo and bad debts associated with the Hayes Family Hotel. Assets were given as £318/- with debts of £408/-.

The Insolvency resulted in the loss of his co-agent position and the transfer of the hotel and licence to another. But despite the shipwreck there were still ship owners who were willing to engage John as Master of their vessels, so he was able to have continued employment sailing in vessels like the "Elfin" and "Miranda" for many years.

1873 finished with family sadness again with the death of his father at John's home in Pakington Street, Newtown. Then in June 1877 when in giving birth to yet another child, their eleventh, Ann succumbs to her ill health and leaves John with a baby to care for. Fortunately the elder children are older and able to care the infant while John pursues his trade. He loses his eldest child in 1883 aged 26 years. In 1887 he passes from our record.