

Victorian Heritage Database Report

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MARTHA

Location

Point Franklin, Cape Otway

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S453

Date lost

02/1858

Official number

31851

Construction material

Wood

Hull

schooner rigged with standing bowsprit, square sterned carvel built, no galleries, fiddle head

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

2

Length/Breadth/Depth

69.50 Feet / 17.80 Feet / 11.90 Feet

Year of construction

1847

Built port

Siam

Built country

Thailand

Registration Number

412 of 1857

Registration Port

Geelong

Date lost

02/1858

Departure

Melbourne

Destination

Parker River, Cape Otway

Cargo

stone, timber and supplies for Cape Otway lighthouse extensions

Owner

7/1854: Mr Emery, storekeeper, Hong Kong
 1/8/1854: Mr Beyfus, merchant, Melbourne
 2/8/1854: Thomas and Caleb J. Jenner, Apollo Bay Timber Co.

Master

7/1854: Capt. Charles Byron Chamberlain
 8/1854: Master John Lloyd
 10/1857: Master Lewis Hodge

Weather conditions

Easterly gale

Cause of loss

Ran ashore in a gale

Crew comments

unknown. Carried 9 crew on voyage from Hong Kong/ Adelaide-Melbourne and 6 crew on previous coastal voyages eg; Newcastle-Melbourne.

Statement of significance

The Martha is one of a small resource of Asian-built vessels wrecked in Australia built in the South-East Asian geographic region, as opposed to in the Indian sub-continent. It is the only vessel built in Thailand wrecked in Victoria. Although the site has not been located, if identifiable remains are found they will have high archaeological and technical significance on this basis alone, as no comparative research has been carried out on the design and construction for different types and sizes of South-East Asian built vessels. It has historical significance as a vessel owned by the Apollo Bay Timber Company involved in the Otway timber trade, and it represents an important, early phase in the development of both Lorne and Apollo Bay.

VHR history

The wreck and subsequent overland voyage of the crew of the Martha, who all survived, indicates the difficulties of operating coastal craft in this area - a rugged landscape with exposed anchorages and its attendant dangers and difficulties to navigation and communication. These risks were recognised by insurance companies who simply refused to insure vessels operating in the area. Built in Siam, Thailand in 1847, the Martha was a 109 tons net carvel built, square sterned wooden schooner with a single deck. Previously registered in Hong Kong and Melbourne, from 2 August 1854 the Martha had been registered to the Port of Geelong by its owners Thomas and Caleb Joshua Jenner of Apollo Bay, operating as the Apollo Bay Timber Company (ASRO Geelong Register, No. 26/ 1854). It was involved in the coastal and timber trade between the ports of Lorne, Apollo Bay and Geelong from August 1854 until it was wrecked. Between 1855 and January 1858 the Martha is also known to have made trips to and from Adelaide, Newcastle, Geelong, Apollo Bay, Queenscliff and Melbourne carrying timber, sundries, ballast and wool. The Martha was described as a well known schooner in Geelong (Argus 23/2 1858), and had been chartered to convey building timber and stone, and supplies for the Cape Otway lighthouse extensions. Departing Geelong on 6 February 1858 (ME&WT, 13 February 1858) Master Lewis Hodge of the Martha was anchored at the Parker River landing on the eastern side of Cape Otway. An easterly gale blew up and the Martha's crew attempted to beat the vessel out of the exposed anchorage, however they were blown ashore on the eastern side of Point Franklin and the vessel became a total loss. Captain Meyer of the Hamburg barque Alfred reported on his arrival in Melbourne that he had seen a large schooner with a white streak onshore, five miles east of Cape Otway (Argus 25 February, 1858). The Geelong Advertiser reported that: "Oèe news of this casualty was bought hither by some of the men who made their way overland to Geelong. No insurance can be effected on vessels going to this part of the coast, and a heavy loss must therefore fall on the Apollo Bay Company, to whom she belonged (reprinted in the Argus 23/2/1858). So far no wreckage has been located that has been positively identified as belonging to the Martha. It is predicted that broken up remains of the hull may be buried in sand near Point Franklin, although this site is subject to strong currents, sand movement and heavy kelp growth which would make the location of such wreckage difficult.