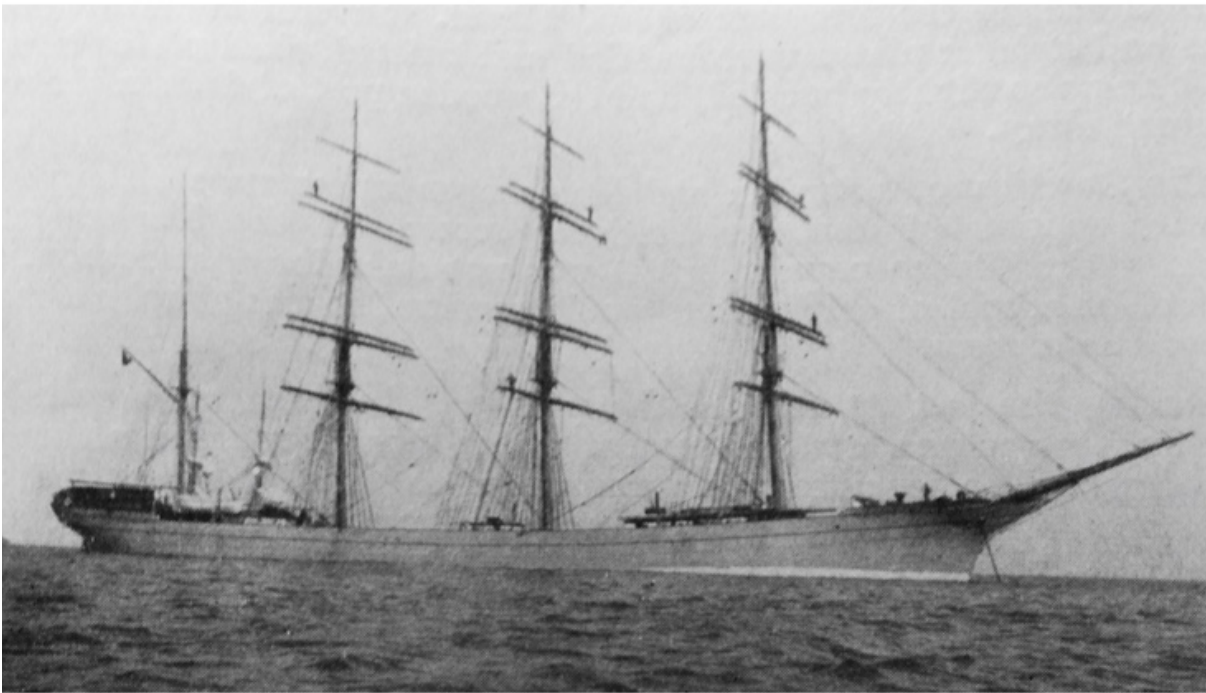


Fire on the sailing ship CE-DARBANK on her maiden voyage in 1892. An extract from the new book "Man the Braces"



The Cedarbank at anchor in San Francisco Bay, starting to bend on sails, with men on the yards.

Chapter 15 – The *Cedarbank* on fire

The beautiful Barque *Cedarbank* was built for Andrew Weir by Mackie and Thompson, Glasgow, in 1892. She was a steel 4 masted Barque, and was a sistership of the famous *Olivebank*, built at the same yard. Her tonnage was 2825 gross, and 2649 net. After 21 years service, she was sold out of the fleet in 1913 to a Norwegian owner.

On her maiden voyage, in June 1892, she loaded coal at Newcastle for San Francisco. Her cargo was 4,400 tons. She sailed at the beginning of March, but shortly after sailing she lost part of her masts off of the Australian coast after being caught in a cyclone. The cyc-

lone caused much damage on the Australian coast, and the *Cedarbank* had to return to Sydney for repairs, sailing again at the end of April.

Outside of the harbour, the winds were mainly SE'ly, and it was decided to take advantage and sail the northerly route across the Pacific. After 45 days at sea, strong fumes were then detected coming out of the ventilators, and later some hatches were taken off to allow painting of the coatings, when smoke was seen trickling up through the coal cargo. The temperature was taken by lowering thermometer down the masts, and as a result, it was decided to fight the fire at number 2 hatch first. The coal was stowed right up into the hatch square, and about 250 tons was dumped overboard so as to make a space, and to get near the seat of the fire. After three or four days, the men were overcome by fumes, so the pumps were started and water played over the coal until there was about 30 inches in the bilges where it was pumped out and recycled back onto the cargo. This was kept going for several days, until just after 12 midnight one night, and ten days after the fire was first noticed there was an explosion. This was in the fore end of number 2 hatch, and whilst a man was down below spraying water around. The flames burst up through the coal and blue flames continued to cover the coal.

The man who had been below scurried out of the hold, yelling and shaking, and with good cause. The nearest land was approximately 1000 miles away, and the situation looked serious. The *Cedarbank* at this point was in the North Pacific Ocean, above the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii)

All the hatches were put back on, and the hoses were directed down the ventilators. The excessive heat turned the water to steam, which after a further period appeared to put the flames out.

At daylight all the boats were swung out and fully provisioned in readiness for a long journey, and before dark on that day were put over the side and towed astern. Charts, chronometers, and all equipment was loaded together with two men for steering. After eight or nine days, after the fire appeared to subside, the boats were again hoisted up on davits where they stayed until the ship arrived in San Francisco.

The night before making the Farallones, outside of San Francisco, there were several heavy explosions. This was put down to the fresh breeze which had sprung up giving new life to the fire. Hatches were blown off, and a bizarre game ensued as the crew replaced them time after time as they were repeatedly blown off by the exploding fire! This happened despite the firm wedging to keep the boards in place. The crew began to feel confident however that they could make port this way.

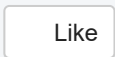
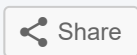
Every outlet was covered up to smother the fire as much as possible, and after 35 days in total fighting the fire, a tug was spotted looking for a tow. As the breeze was fresh and favourable, the tug's first offer was refused, but eventually a price of 70 dollars was agreed which was a cheap tow. Some 3 years later the same service cost the vessel 200 dollars. The tug captain did not suspect that anything was amiss, although with the boats swung out it was an unusual sight, except when carrying passengers. He then saw smoke coming out of the focs'le and asked the Mate what was going on. The Mate replied that it was probably the crew burning paint pots, and the tug only heard of the fire later from sources ashore. On the way in it was usual for shipping reporters to come on board for details of the passage, but when the fire was admitted, they returned to the boats alongside and conducted interviews from there.

Once in port, the *Cedarbank* was towed to mudflats by the same company, and two tugs with pumps provided, all at the normal rates. The exercise to pump water in and out took about 36 hours, after which she berthed alongside and discharged her cargo. It was then seen the fire had started in several places, and it was seen that coal and coke had fused together in the heat, standing up like a wall in number 2 hold. Beams and stringers were buckled, and the wooden deck in that area all burned away.

The American Australian and British papers all made fun of how the British ship had scored off of the American tug company, but as any shipmaster will attest, it was simply a matter of protecting the owner's interests.

The Captain was later awarded a gold watch by the underwriters for his actions.

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