

By Charles Ipcar, ©2018 2/17/18
Tune after traditional "When I First Came to This Land"
Key: C (5/G)

The Katahdin's Battle with the Gale

C-----F-----C
As we steamed out from Bangor Town,
----F-----C-----G--G7--C
For Boston Harbor we were bound;
-----F-----C
The seas ran high as we shoveled coal;
F---G--G7-----C
We did what we could!
-----F-----C-----G-----C
And we called that coal, "Bless My Soul!"
-----F-----C
And the old *Katahdin*, she steamed good;
F---G--G7-----C
She did what she could!

Off Cape Porpoise we were assailed
By a raging Nor'east Gale;
Running low on coal we turned to wood;
We did what we could!
And we called that wood, "You Burn Good!"
And we called that coal, "Bless My Soul!"
And the old Katahdin, she steamed good;
She did what she could!

As the Gale increased its blow,
Our birch cargo was running low;
So we took ax to the cabin doors;
We did what we could!
And we called those doors, "Almighty Roar!"
And we called that wood, "You Burn Good!"
And we called that coal, "Bless My Soul!"
And the old Katahdin, she steamed good;
She did what she could!

Next we sighted old Boone Isle,
And in her lee we steamed awhile,
The doors were gone, we tossed in chairs;
We did what we could!
And we called those chairs, "We Don't Care!"
And we called those doors, "Almighty Roar!"
And we called that wood, "You Burn Good!"
And we called that coal, "Bless My Soul!"
And the old Katahdin, she steamed good;
She did what she could!

We steamed all night till the wind went down;
Then set course for Portsmouth Town;
The chairs were gone, we tossed in hams;
We did what we could!
And we called those hams, "Great God Damn!"
And we called those chairs, "We Don't Care!"
And we called those doors, "Almighty Roar!"
And we called that wood, "You Burn Good!"
And we called that coal, "Bless My Soul!"
And the old Katahdin, she steamed good;
She did what she could!

Now we're moored at Portsmouth Pier,
We bid farewell to every fear;
Let's raise a glass to ham and wood;
We did what we could!
Let's raise a glass to the old steamship,
Come wind or wave, let her rip!
"To the old Katahdin, she steamed good;
She did what she could!"

And we called those hams, "Great God Damn!"
And we called those chairs, "We Don't Care!"
And we called those doors, "Almighty Roar!"
And we called that wood, "You Burn Good!"
And we called that coal, "Bless My Soul!"
And the old Katahdin, she steamed good;
She did what she could!

Notes:

Katahdin Steamboat Story

Portsmouth Herald:

The steamboat *Katahdin*, bound from Rockland, Maine, to Boston with 35 passengers and freight aboard, nearly foundered and sank off Boon Island January 9th, 1886, in a raging northeast gale. The *Katahdin*, a side wheeler of 1,234 tons and 241 feet long, first ran into the gale off Cape Porpoise...

The steamer *Katahdin* on the night of January 9th, 1886, entered a fierce gale while en route from Boston to Bangor, Maine. *Katahdin* battled high seas for 10 hours, exhausting her coal supply. To keep her engines and pumps running the crew then burned the ship's furniture, non-structural bulkheads, and cargo including a large shipment of hams.

The photo below shows *Katahdin* limping into Portsmouth, New Hampshire after the gale.

NavSource:

This is the steamer *Katahdin*, one of the best-known and longest-lived New England steamers. On the night of January 9, 1886, while en route from Boston to Bangor, she was caught by a fierce gale. She managed to stay offshore, clear of perilous shoals and surf, but she still suffered terribly. *Katahdin* battled high seas for 10 hours, and in the process burned her entire coal supply. To keep her engines and pumps running it was necessary to feed the hungry boilers whatever fuel could be found, including all the ship's furniture, cargo, and non-structural bulkheads. The fuel situation was so desperate that even a shipment of hams was considered worthwhile fuel! *Katahdin* is seen here limping into Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the morning after the gale. Although badly battered and many miles short of her destination, she has at least survived the storm, and will be repaired.

Storms and Shipwrecks of New England, p. 153:

The experience of the paddle-steamer *Katahdin* during the blizzard of January 1886, on the route from Bangor to Boston, gives an idea of what the *Portland* must have gone through before she foundered in the 1898 gale.

On January 9, 1886, the *Katahdin* left Bangor for Boston. Running into a heavy gale off Cape Porpoise (Maine), her master, Captain Homer, decided to take no chances and ran to sea. Reaching the vicinity of Boon Island, he tried for shelter and failed. All night long the terrific blast from the northeast continued and the *Katahdin* kept her head into the wind. The fuel was entirely consumed, however, and a shipment of spoolwood (birch logs), excellent for fuel, was also used. Finally, the ship was driven to a position near the Isle of Shoals. By this time all the spare fixtures and been thrown into the fires had the dismantling of staterooms began.

Frank A. Garnsey of Bangor was the freight clerk:

“I never expected to see land again. I was going down to the engine room and met Captain Pierce. I asked him how long we’d stay up and he said: ‘The old *Katahdin* won’t last another hour.’ When we began to fill, a list of passengers and crew were made out and placed in a bottle. I was pulling down stateroom doors when land was sighted; everything else had been consumed.”

The *Katahdin* had sighted Portsmouth Harbor; a short time later, visibly battered and bruised, her houses wrecked, her cargo burned, and her bulkheads smashed in, she limped into safe harbor. Captain Pierce said that it had been a dreadful experience. “I never expected to see shore again. The only thing that saved us was a shift in wind which beat down the seas and gave us a chance to get into Portsmouth.”