

Rise & Fall of the Star of Bengal: Coming Soon

Transcript Release Date: August 28, 2022

September 1908: the Star of Bengal wrecks off Coronation Island.

111 men die. No one is held responsible.

Wrangell History Unlocked presents a new 5-part series: Rise & Fall of the Star of Bengal.

Come back in time, and around the world, for the true story of the sailing ship that crossed the globe, became one of Alaska's worst disasters, and reminds us of the time when canned salmon was king.

For the Rise and Fall of the Star of Bengal is a story of truth, lies, legends, and a mystery sitting at the bottom of the sea.

You've never heard the Star of Bengal like this.

New episodes every week September 2022.

Subscribe to the podcast or learn more at WrangellHistoryUnlocked.com/star.

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Hey everyone, it's Ronan. I know it's been a little while, but I haven't forgotten you. In fact, I've been working really hard on bringing you something special.

About a year ago, I began seriously researching the Star of Bengal.

As some of you may know, the Star of Bengal was a sailing ship that left Wrangell in 1908, carrying canned salmon and 138 men. While being towed out to sea, the ship encountered a storm, and was wrecked off Coronation Island. 111 men died and only 27 survived. Most of the dead were Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino cannery workers returning home at the end of the season.

It's a dark chapter in Wrangell history, one that reaches across southeast Alaska and down the West coast, and one I felt was important to tell. It turned out to be darker, and have more twists, than I ever imagined.

So, I'm excited to announce the next phase of this podcast. In September 2022, we'll release a five-part series, Rise & Fall of the Star of Bengal. Our first episode premieres on Friday, September 2nd, entitled "A Star Is Born." New episodes each Friday in September after that.

I'll do my best to tell you the story, as I understand it. But mostly, I hope to reawaken the memory of the Star of Bengal. My goal is to make listeners feel like they're really there. We'll recreate sequences with music and sound effects to make history come to life. You'll hear eyewitness stories, told in their own words.

To give you a taste of what's ahead, here's a short preview from Episode 1. I hope you enjoy!

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The masterful history of canned salmon in Alaska, Tin Can Country, features a description of the canning process from government agent Howard Kutchin. Here's an abridged version.

The fish are carried on the vessel's deck, and are pitched upon the wharf.

The butcher, seizing a fish by the tail, with one stroke beheads it; with another sweep of his long, sharp knife he removes the back fins; with a quick twist he throws up the belly and slices off the under fins; one swift cut lays it open, and about two or three scrapes take out the row and entrails; another cut removes the tail; and all of the body fit for use is pushed into a tank of fresh water.

The slimers hook the fish from the water and carefully complete the cleaning operation. It goes into another tank of water, and after being taken from this is placed upon a draining table.

They are dumped on the floor beside the cutter, which has a revolving carrier on the principle of an endless chain, with receptacles taking one fish each. This passes under a cylinder with four blades, which cuts the fish into five pieces. The three inner pieces are pushed into a long incline spout, which carries the meat to the filler.

The meat is fed into a hopper by two men.

The cans come down a spout from the loft in an endless stream. Before the cans are sent down one-quarter of an ounce of salt is put in each.

They are poured out at the other end onto a table surrounded by eight or ten Chinese men, who in turn clean off any scraps, weigh an occasional can... and put in or take out meat as occasion requires.

They are passed on to men who place a bit of scrap tin on top of the meat. This is done to protect it from the muriatic acid which is used in soldering vents.

They go along to the toppers, who place the tops by hand.

They are... carried to the crimping machine which fastens the tops on.

The cans go into a chute, a groove in one side of which is filled with molten solder, which is kept in a liquid state by a row of jets of flame. As the cans roll along they take up all the solder required to render them air-tight.

They run under a stream of water to cool and harden the solder. The tops have small vents in them to permit the escape of gasses.

The vents are soldered up. The trays are submerged in hot-water test kettles, and leaks detected by bubbles. The trays run on a tramway into the steam chests. Here the first cooking is done, the cans remaining in the chest from forty-five minutes to an hour.

Each can is vented with a wooden hammer with a short sharp nail in its head. The steam and water spurt up a foot or more.

The holes are at once soldered up by two men.

Cooking is repeated for one hour. The racks are submerged in lye kettles to remove all grease and dirt. They are scrubbed and put under a stream of cold water.

The trays are... left twenty-four hours to thoroughly cool. The cans are again tested for leaks by an expert operator, who taps each one on the top with a tiny hammer.

The cans are transferred to the lacquer vats, dipped into a preparation composition of rosin and turpentine, which gives them the golden brownish color.

The cans are piled in great pyramids. After labeling, they are left until the paste is thoroughly dry. They are once more tested and are ready for the case.

Learn more about Rise & Fall of the Star of Bengal at wrangellhistoryunlocked.com/star.

<credits>

Both songs from the Wikipedia Commons:

- Vivaldi's Four Seasons performed by the Wichita State University Chamber Players
- William Tell Overture performed by the United States Marine Corps Band.