
NO-MAN'S-LAND

by Joan Druett



Joan Druett,
author of
Island of the Lost

Miles separated them, so neither knew of the other. We asked Druett how she came to learn of this unusual adventure story.

The whole story was an enthralling adventure that took hold of our imaginations. The man, we learned, was named Captain Thomas Musgrave, and in December 1863, with a crew

of four sailors, he was stormbound off a desolate island in the icy Southern Ocean. Hurricane seas wrecked his schooner. One of the sailors saved them all by springing from rock to rock through the tempestuous waves, carrying a rope, which he tied to a tree.

All that summer, when the rain kept us indoors, my brother and my cousins and I played a game where we leapt from chair to chair, pretending to save the crew. When the weather was fine, we built huts outside, inspired by Captain Musgrave's story. The castaways had managed to survive nearly two years on the inhospitable island by building

a cabin from the wreckage, complete with a fireplace and a solid stone chimney, two small windows with panes (salvaged from the schooner), a wooden

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by Joan Druett
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EDITOR'S NOTE: *In* Island of the Lost, Joan Druett tells the true story of two groups of castaways on the same uninhabited island.

When I was a child in New Zealand, a poster on the wall of my school classroom showed two pictures from a book our teacher was reading to the class, called *Castaway on the Aucklands*. One was a sketch of some men with strange fur caps on their heads who were attacking snarling seals with cudgels. Though we were often warned not to approach seals on the beach, my classmates and I did not like this portrait of cruelty at all. But it was the other drawing that captured our attention—of one of the same men, now capless, lying exhausted on the deck of a very small boat. The sail above his head was patched and ragged. His right hand gripped the side of the little craft as he feebly lifted his head to view the coast of New Zealand. Knowing that this was the moment he realized that he had finally reached safety after a terrible passage through one of the most wicked seas in the world, we all shared his sense of relief.

floor, and stretcher beds. The captain and the mate even found time to write journals, using seal blood when they ran out of ink. When rescue didn't arrive after seventeen months, they built the boat that would eventually take Musgrave and two of his men some three hundred miles to New Zealand. Musgrave then sailed back to save the other two, so that all five lived to tell the tale.

Years later, after I began my own career at sea under sail—through the medium of hundreds of logbooks, journals, and reminiscences written by the captains, their men, and their women—I excavated every detail about these men's experiences. But it wasn't until I discovered that, in fact, Musgrave and his men were *not* alone on that desolate island that I came to understand the true extent of Musgrave's achievement. Another ship had wrecked on the opposite end of the *same* island while Musgrave and his men also were stranded there. The two parties were separated by twenty miles of rugged, ice-ridden, windswept terrain, so neither knew of the other. And how different their experiences! Instead of working together, the second group of castaways quarreled and split up.

Most died of exposure and starvation; some even turned to cannibalism. Out of the nineteen men who struggled ashore from the wreck, only three survived, rescued by a passing ship.

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—JOAN DRUETT

Musgrave and his party, on the other hand, deliberately strove to re-create the orderly life they'd left behind. Not only did they design and construct a substantial house: they also cured sealskins for blankets and clothing and turned sea lion leather into boots. They explored and charted the harbor, kept regular thermometer and barometer readings, and by establishing a strict domestic routine, they kept themselves civilized and decent. This amid year-round freezing gales and plagues of blowflies and sand flies to add to their misery. I was astonished to learn of these two sets of men who faced the same situation and yet handled the challenge so differently, with such different outcomes. As I began to write, it soon became clear that there was a lot more to this story than the simple adventure my classmates and I had revealed in. Human nature, both good and bad, was on full display. After all, in the end, what are we truly capable of when our wills are tested? ■