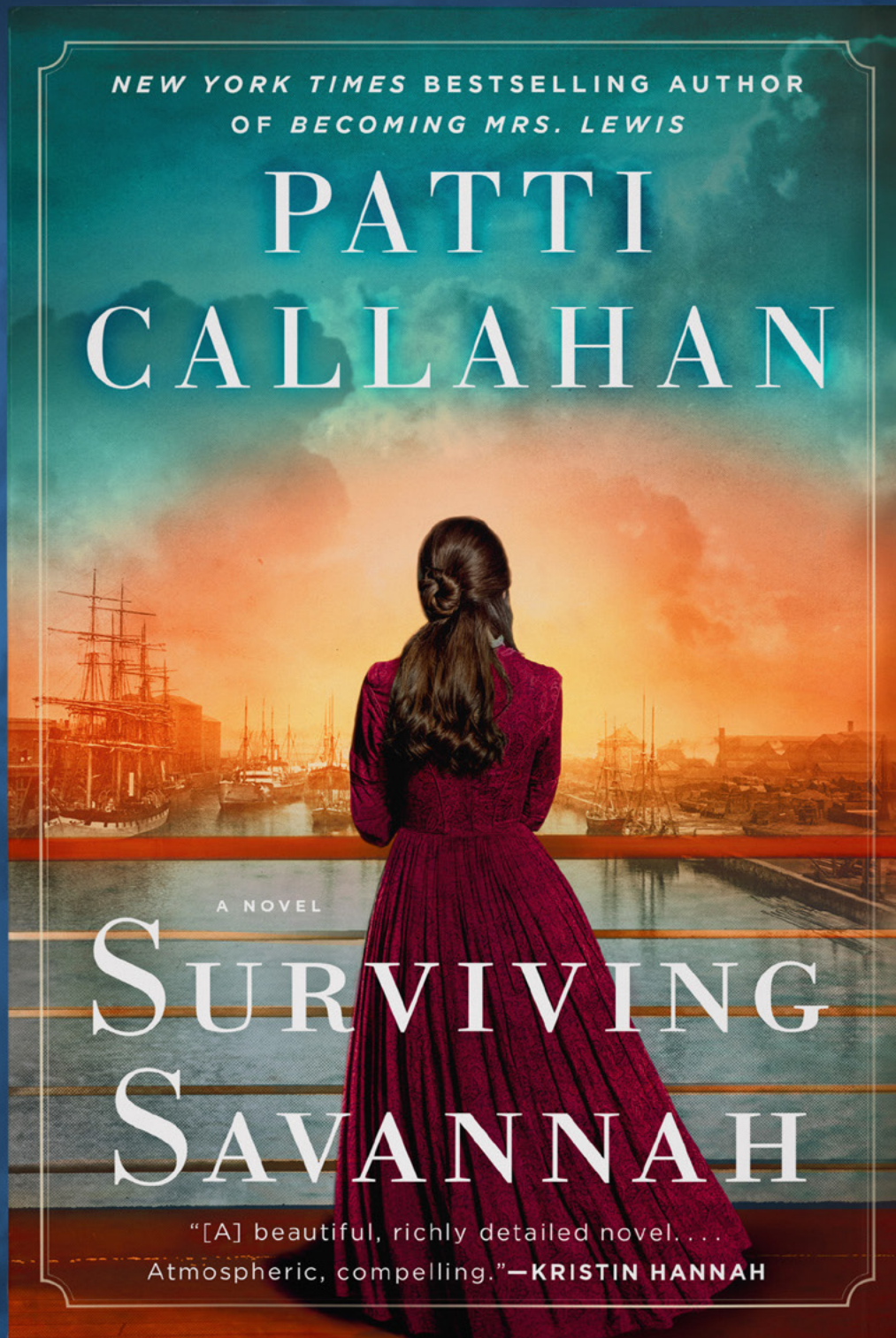


# BOOK CLUB KIT





## DEAR READER,

Discovering untold stories is like having a great secret whispered in your ear. And this was one of those secrets!

*Surviving Savannah* was inspired by the true and forgotten-to-time saga of a luxury steamship with the nickname the *Titanic* of the South. But her real name was *The Steamship Pulaski*. One June night in 1838, she exploded off the coast of North Carolina while carrying the elite of Savannah and Charleston who were headed north for the summer.

For over one hundred and eighty years, this story has been hidden, both literally and figuratively. Then along came a shipwreck-hunting crew who found the wreck a hundred feet beneath the waves, thirty miles off the coast of Wilmington, North Carolina. While the team went deep to bring up the artifacts and treasure of this beautiful ship, I dug deep to bring up the stories.

My exhilarating hunt for the forgotten story began.

While her artifacts were being discovered, I rushed to the Ships of the Sea Museum and to the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah. With the articles and accounts spread before me, I chose one family who brought the disaster into focus: an aristocratic family from Savannah. The father was a dashing and famous figure who owned the ship and boarded that June morning in 1838 with his wife, six children, niece, and sister. I sifted through piles of newspaper articles, personal accounts, letters, and journal entries.

Finally, after years of research, I put together a complete story of that calamitous night, and one family in particular.

*Surviving Savannah* grew into a dual timeline novel with a modern-day woman named Everly Winthrop, who curates a museum exhibit for the ship's artifacts. With her own survival of a great tragedy haunting her, she desperately wants to solve some of the mysteries and unravel some of the myths surrounding the sinking. Eventually Everly's research leads her to the family of eleven who boarded together, and the extraordinary stories of two women: a known survivor, Augusta Winthrop, and her niece, Lilly Dawson, who along with her child was never found.

Dearest reader, I set out to not only tell you the story of the *Pulaski*, its passengers, and its tales of survival but also bestow honor on the courageous tales of women and what they did to endure in the face of tragedy. I explored the role of fate, family histories, and the myriad ways we survive the surviving.

I hope you become as immersed in the story as I was! Happy Reading!

*Patti Callahan*



# *A conversation with* **PATTI CALLAHAN**

## **What inspired you to write this novel?**

Originally I was inspired by the *Pulaski* tales of survival, how the city of Savannah was part of this story, and how the Lowcountry was affected by this tragedy. I was also inspired and curious about the transformation of each passenger and the ways that each survivor not only lived through the explosion but also chose to live their lives after the sinking.

How, I wondered, do some come to live better lives and others turn toward bitterness and cruelty? Who do we become after such great loss?

And then, everything shifted because after a hundred and eighty years, along came a shipwreck-hunting crew who found the remains of the *Pulaski* a hundred feet beneath the waves, thirty miles off the coast of Wilmington, North Carolina. While the team went deep to bring up the artifacts and treasure of this beautiful ship, I dug deep to bring up the stories.

My exhilarating hunt for the forgotten story began.

## **What kind of research was required to write the novel? Did anything surprise you?**

The research was as fascinating as it was extensive—from the archives at the Georgia Historical Center in Savannah and the Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum to books, newspaper archives, personal accounts, and letters, I read everything that I could get my hands on.



I devoured books on steamships and Savannah in the 1800s. I read about the rich history of the colonization of Savannah with General Oglethorpe. I walked the streets of Savannah and visited museums and artifact collections. I interviewed shipwreck experts and became enchanted with the world of wreck salvaging and treasure hunting.

During this journey, I was surprised over and over, but one surprise that opens the novel is the true narrative about a fifteen-year-old passenger named Charles who survived the sinking to become a slave trader with a horrific reputation. As he grew into a man, he earned the nickname “the Red Devil.” How had this young boy survived to become so cruel? I wanted to know.

Finally, after years of research, I put together a complete story of that calamitous night, and one family in particular.




**Your story follows three women—Lilly and Augusta on the ship in 1838, and Everly in present day. Which of the three women did you relate to the most and why?**

While I was writing each section I always felt the most connected to the woman I was writing about at the moment. I don’t think I felt more for one woman than another, but of course our modern-day character, Everly, felt more relatable only because I know today’s Savannah and I know today’s southern norms and ideas. The historical narratives were almost two hundred years old, and yet I still felt as close to Lilly and Augusta because their plight and their desires and their inner lives feel familiar. As far as women have come in their roles in society, there is still the struggle for independence and agency. There remains the need to burst through familial and collective norms to build a life of one’s own.

All three women had their own tragedies, hardships, and losses to navigate. All three needed to discover how they would make meaning and purpose out of their situation. All three found out what they were truly made of and if they wanted to merely survive or if they wanted to thrive and build new lives.

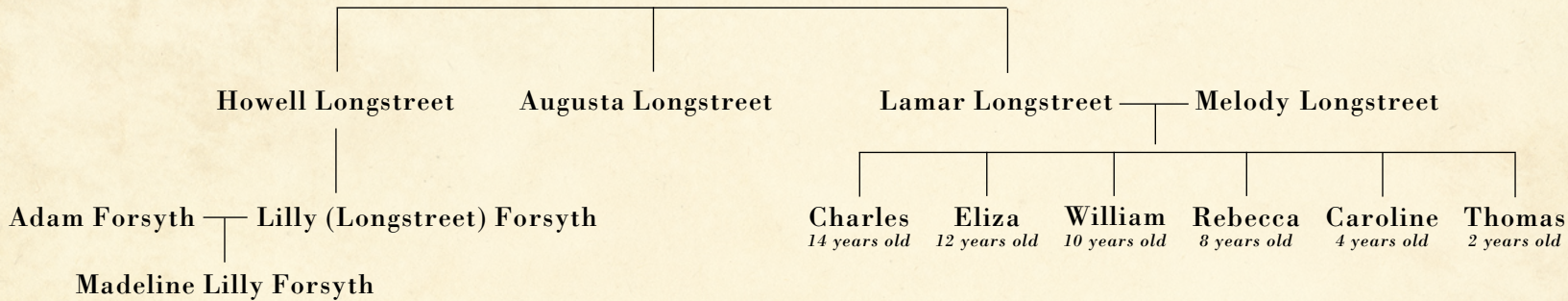
---

**PATTI CALLAHAN** is a *New York Times* bestselling author and is the recipient of the Harper Lee Award for Alabama’s Distinguished Writer of the Year. She is the co-creator and co-host of the web show and podcast *Friends and Fiction*.

PattiCallahanHenry.com •  AuthorPattiCallahanHenry •  PCalHenry  
 PattiCHenry •  PattiCalHenry



# THE LONGSTREET FAMILY TREE





**FOR BALTIMORE AND SAVANNAH.**  
**STEAMER PULASKI, CAPT. DUBOIS.**

For the greater convenience and despatch of travellers, going North and South, the Savannah and Charleston Steam Packet Company have had built at Baltimore, a splendid Steamer, called the **PULASKI**. No expense has been spared to have a vessel to answer the purpose she is intended to accomplish. Her engine is one of the best ever made in this country, of 225 horse power; her boilers are of the best copper, and of great strength. She has ample accommodations and every thing that is requisite for the comfort of passengers. Her qualities as a vessel, for ease, safety, and speed, are superior to any Steamer that ever floated on the American waters. This superb Steamer will begin her regular trips to Baltimore, touching at Charleston, on Wednesday, 2d day of May next, and on every other Wednesday thereafter, from Baltimore and Savannah. The Pulaski will run as follows:

FROM SAVANNAH.	FROM BALTIMORE.
On Wednesday, 2d May.	On Wednesday, 9th May.
Do. 16th do.	Do. 23d do.
Do. 30th do.	Do. 6th June.
Do. 13th June.	Do. 20th do.
Do. 27th do.	Do. 4th July.
Do. 11th July.	Do. 18th do.

And so on during the season.

Her arrival at, and departure from Charleston, will be as follows:—

**GOING TO BALTIMORE.**  
 She will arrive at Charleston on Wednesday, and depart on Thursday morning, at 6 o'clock.

**RETURNING FROM BALTIMORE.**  
 She will arrive at Charleston on Saturday morning, and depart one hour after so as to reach Savannah the same evening. And so on during the season.

By this arrangement, passengers will be but one night at sea, and one night in the Chesapeake.

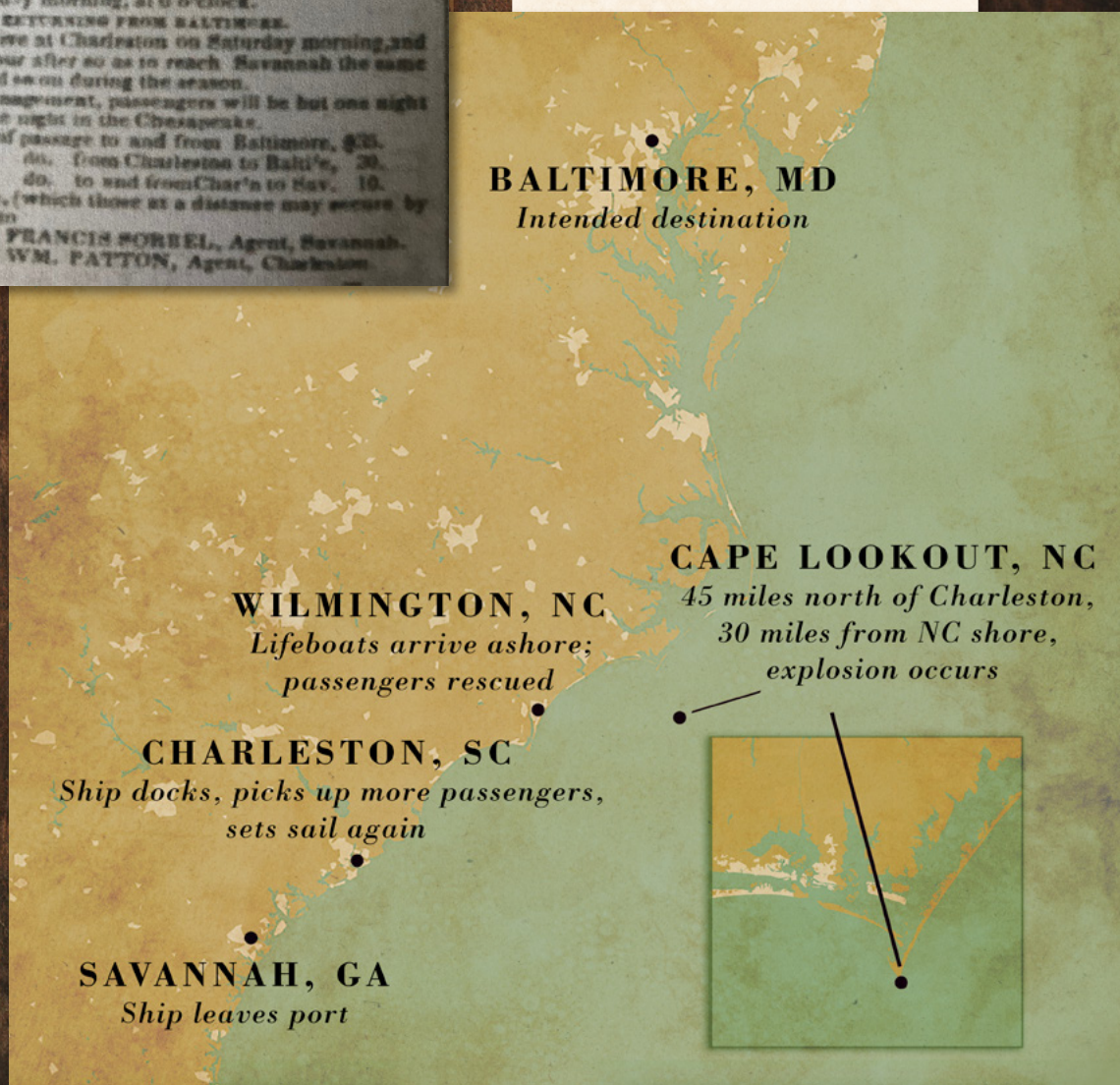
The rate of passage to and from Baltimore, \$25.  
 Do. do. from Charleston to Balt'e, 20.  
 Do. do. to and from Char'n to Sav. 10.

For Passage, (which those at a distance may secure by letter,) apply to  
**FRANCIS FORBELL, Agent, Savannah.**  
**WM. PATTON, Agent, Charleston.**

Ap 12

*Charleston Courier advertisement for the ship, April 1838*

Map of the ship's course





# Timeline

**SUMMERS IN SAVANNAH WERE BRUTAL.** From the heat to the insects, malaria, and general malaise, those who could leave for the north did so. In 1838, steam travel had become an alternative to the three- or four-day journey by land, which was both arduous and tiring with very few places to stay along the way. And this is where Gazaway Bugg Lamar enters the picture with his newly outfitted luxury steamship, the *SS Pulaski*, that would ply between Savannah and Baltimore with a stop overnight in Charleston (“Only One Night at Sea!”). Tickets went fast and the ship was full for each journey.

In *Surviving Savannah*, I follow a fictitious family inspired by the very real family of Mr. Gazaway Bugg Lamar, who was a financier, banker, shipper, and much more. He was also one of the original founders of the Savannah and Charleston Steam Packet Company, eventually becoming the director. Just as in this novel, he indeed boarded with nine family members for the fourth journey of the *Pulaski*. Although I wandered a bit from the true story, there is plenty to read about this fascinating family, and you can find more in the resources in the back of the book. But there were, of course, many other families and many other stories of both horror and survival.

From the 1848 book *The tragedy of the seas; or, Sorrow on the ocean, lake, and river, from shipwreck, plague, fire and famine* by Charles Ellms.





*Here is a timeline of the true events as they played out that fateful summer of 1838.*

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 1838**

At eight a.m. on a balmy Wednesday morning, the *Pulaski* sets sail on its fourth voyage from Savannah, Georgia, under Captain Dubois and First Mate Hibbert. Ninety passengers and approximately thirty-seven crew are on board.

The ship later docks in Charleston, South Carolina, where sixty-five more passengers board.

**THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 1838**

The *SS Pulaski* sets sail at six a.m. from Charleston, South Carolina. The trip is going beautifully. The weather is lovely, the breezes refreshing. Nothing is expected to go wrong. Until it does.

At 11:04 p.m., with the ship approximately thirty miles from the shore of North Carolina, the second engineer pours cold water into a hot and empty copper boiler. The boiler explodes through the starboard side of the ship.

The horror begins.

Captain Dubois is never seen again after the explosion.

Some crew are killed instantly in the boiler room.

Passengers sitting on settees above the boiler room are killed or maimed by rushing steam.

Some are trampled by passengers rushing from their cabins to climb the companionways to the main deck.

The starboard side of the ship is blown apart. Most of the wheelhouse is missing or fragmented. The ship is suffering and sinking.

Passengers rush for the four lifeboats—two tarp-covered quarterboats hanging from davits on the main deck, and two yawls stored upside down on the deck.

First Mate Hibbert, who had been knocked unconscious in the wheelhouse, regains consciousness and helps lower the quarterboats to begin evacuation.

Passengers who find purchase in the two yawls find a new horror: the boats' seams



are cracked from sun exposure. They began to sink immediately in the large swells.

Some passengers make it back to deck. Others drown.

At 11:45 p.m., the quarterboat passengers watch the *Pulaski* break in half, tossing at least a hundred people into the sea.

Two pieces of the aft and the promenade decks break off in large chunks. About twenty-three passengers find flotage on each of these makeshift rafts.

Other passengers find settees, trunks, and loose wreckage, which they lash together to float upon.

## **FRIDAY, JUNE 15, 1838**

At three a.m., two quarterboats, with twenty-one passengers total, leave the site of the vanquished *Pulaski* and begin to row toward North Carolina, abandoning those still floating at sea to find help.

The two rafts of the aft and promenade deck fragments float at sea all day, adding survivors as they float up on debris.

Not another vessel came in sight for the entire day.

The two lifeboats row hard toward shore over harrowing breakers, losing five passengers to the sea.

That evening, they arrive near Wilmington, North Carolina, landing on a small spit of land called the Bermudas.

At ten p.m., those who did not drown in the landing are rescued by the kind citizens of Onslow County.

## **SATURDAY, JUNE 16, 1838**

The rafts bob on the sea. Days pass in stormy horror. Four vessels are seen, but without salvation.

Men on the promenade deck raft find one of the cracked lifeboats. They fix it using rope and clothing as caulk.

## **SUNDAY, JUNE 17, 1838**

Five men take the salvaged lifeboat and head to shore to send help for the others.



Once ashore, they could not convince anyone to go look for survivors, even with offers of money.

Another day and night pass for those floating at sea.

Some die from drowning. Others suffer and die from dehydration. Others fought for survival.

## **TUESDAY, JUNE 19, 1838**

On the fifth day, the schooner *Henry Cameron*, under Captain Eli Davis, spies the aft deck fragment and saves its passengers.

Captain Davis spends hours searching for more survivors.

He spies the promenade deck raft with only seven of the original twenty-three passengers remaining.

## **WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20, 1838**

Wilmington learns of the wreck.

## **SATURDAY, JUNE 21, 1838**

Eight days after the ship launched, Savannah first hears news of the wreck.

## **MONDAY, JUNE 23, 1838**

News of the wreck is reported by the *Charleston Courier*.

## **SATURDAY, JULY 5, 1838**

A day of mourning is designated for the City of Savannah.

## **SUNDAY, JULY 13, 1838**

Savannah holds a memorial at the Christ Episcopal Church on Bull Street for those who perished. Nearly every family in the city had been affected in some way.



## Who Perished and Who Survived the True Sinking of the *SS Pulaski*?

Although the numbers of those who perished and survived vary slightly, the consensus mostly agrees on the following: **Of the grand total of 187–192 passengers and crew, a total of 128–133 lives were lost.**

**LIFEBOAT ONE WITH COUPER:** Eleven people aboard—all survived.

**LIFEBOAT TWO:** Eleven people aboard—one died at sea (the ship's fireman); five perished at landing; five survived.

**SALVAGED LIFEBOAT** with Gazaway Bugg Lamar that set off from the promenade fragment on day three: Most accounts say five people survived (although Rebecca Lamar's account states six).

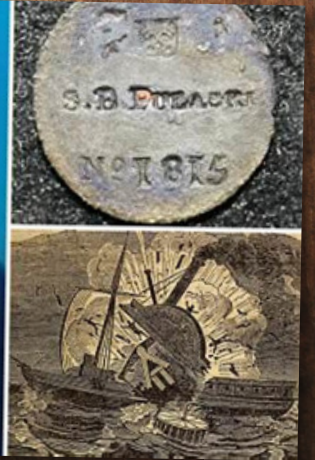
**TWO RAFTS RESCUED BY THE *HENRY CAMERON*:** Thirty survivors were rescued. The promenade raft began with twenty-three people aboard, and seven were rescued. This is the piece on which Rebecca Lamar and Charles Lamar survived (Gazaway's sister and son). The aft raft: Twenty-three people were saved.

**OTHER FLOTAGE:** Eight survived.



# ARTIFACTS

recovered from the wreckage





# Loss of The Pulaski

Behold yon steamer, gayest of the gay,  
As o'er the main she proudly skims her way;  
Stately she moves, with a majestic grace,  
And lofty bearing, to her destined place;  
And where is that? Vain mortals, do you know?  
Where is she bound? To pleasure or to wo?  
She wends her way, and lifts her lofty prow,—  
At her approach the obsequious waters bow,—  
The sea gods view her with their eager eyes,  
Intending soon to take her by surprise;  
But she, regardless of their foul intent,  
With banners flying, o'er the surface went.  
“Night, sable goddess, from her ebon throne,”  
Had o'er the waters her dart mantle thrown;  
‘The moon was waning, and the stars looked sad,  
And nature seemed in mourning garments clad;  
And while the steamer ploughs upon the deep,  
Where are her inmates? Safely locked in sleep.—  
One forms his plans for grandeur and display, —  
Another dreams of pleasures light and gay, —  
The infant slumbers on its mother’s breast,  
In happy innocence by her caress’d;  
The maiden dreams—of what I cannot tell—  
But Morpheus holds her in his drowsy spell,  
Yet some, perchance, we not in his embrace,—  
He flies the wretched, wheresoe’er the place.



But now comes on my horror-stricken tale!  
Shrink back my muse! No wonder that you fail.  
A scene like this can never be portray'd:  
O, come, ye Nine, and lend your tuneful aid;  
When nought was heard except the oceans's dash,—  
None thought of danger till they heard the crash!  
Tremendous! Then simultaneous shrieks, and prayers, and cries,  
Ascend at once to Him who rules the skies.  
In frantic agony a mother wild,  
Clasps to her breast a dear and only child,—  
He lifts his hands, and, with imploring eye,  
Cries, "mother, mother, must we, must we die?"  
Alas! The mother has not power to save,—  
They sink together 'neath the foaming wave.  
"My soul's best darling!" Cries a doating wife,  
"Help, help, my husband! Save, O, save my life,  
And our sweet child! O, God of heaven, save."—  
They sink together while they mercy crave.  
An urchin boy clings to his father's side,  
His curly locks all dripping with the tide,—  
"What is it, father? Tell me do, I pray,  
And O! Dear father do not go away."  
"I'll leave thee not, my son, my joy and pride,"—  
And the rude billows could not them divide.  
The maiden fair, the youth, and hoary heads,  
All lie promiscuous in the coral beds.  
Some few were saved to tell the mournful tale  
Of those whose loss so many hearts bewail.  
And where's the moral? Cannot we discern?  
Have we that useful lesson yet to learn,  
That God is just? And we're at His command,  
Who holds the mighty waters in his hand?—  
And though his judgements are above our sight,  
'Tis ours to bow, and own His ways are right.

**As printed in *Steamboat Disasters and Railroad Accidents in the United States*, Second Edition: pages 74–75.**





# CHATHAM ARTILLERY PUNCH

This traditional and potent champagne punch from Savannah was originally concocted by Georgia's oldest military unit, the Chatham Artillery.

---

## Ingredients

1 quart iced green tea

4 lemons (3 to juice;  
1 for garnish)

1/2 pound turbinado or  
light brown sugar

1 quart dark rum

1 quart brandy

1 quart rye or bourbon whiskey

3 bottles champagne

## Preparation

Pour the iced green tea into a large punch bowl or glass drink dispenser.

Juice 3 lemons through a strainer into the tea.

Add the sugar. Stir until dissolved.

Stir in the rum, brandy, and whiskey.

Cover and let stand at room temperature for at least 8 hours or for up to a week.

When ready to serve, add ice to the punch bowl/dispenser.

Thinly slice 1 lemon and add to punch.

Pour in the champagne and serve.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did you know about the sinking of the *Pulaski* before you read this book? Why do you think that stories like this get lost to time? What surprised you most when you learned about this shipwreck?
2. The stories of the *Pulaski* sinking were part of Everly's childhood. Her grandfather told and retold the story—adding bits and pieces of mythology and lore. Do you have family stories that are part of your heritage that have changed over time?
3. The Longstreet family (inspired by the true Gazaway Bugg Lamar family) boarded the ship all together. In hindsight, knowing the dangers of steamboat travel, should they have traveled separately? Were they taking unnecessary risks? Did you ever blame Lamar Longstreet (Gazaway Lamar)?
4. Augusta writes “If not for the tragedy...” and then she lists the things in her life that she cherishes; this is how she makes meaning out of something so awful. How do we make meaning of tragedy? How have you done this in your own life?
5. Much of this novel is about the kind of person someone becomes after a tragedy. We learn early on that Charles Longstreet (inspired by Charles Lamar, a real person) survived the explosion and the five days and five nights at sea. Twenty years later, he earned the nickname “the Red Devil.” What did you make of this? Do you know anyone who survived something terrible only to become someone who did horrific harm to others? Why, or how, do you think that might happen?
6. Maddox Wagner tells Everly: “Not everyone who survives trauma becomes a better person. The idea that surviving brings everyone to a new and better place is a lie told by people who need the world to make sense.” Do you agree with this? Have you or a loved one been through something that makes this statement ring true or false?
7. The city of Savannah is an integral part of the story—a character in its own right. Is there a city that is important to you? Does its tragedies and triumphs shape it? Do you believe that if you love a city, you must care about its complicated history?



8. Everly has been through her own loss and tragedy, and her grief has impacted her ability to engage or “thrive” in life. How do you think that working on the *Pulaski*’s curation and learning about the women who were on the ship affected her? Does learning about other people’s stories help us to understand our own? Do you seek out stories that are similar to yours? Or that are different?
9. How does the time period (1838) affect the rescue of those who survived the explosion? How might this story be different today?
10. What do you think of the portrayal of enslaved people in this novel?
11. One of the most heartbreaking scenes in the novel is when Augusta must choose between Charles and Eliza. How did this affect Charles’s story later in life? How did you feel when you read it? Did you wonder what you would have done?
12. Everly insisted on diving even though Maddox had a bad feeling about it. When Everly is narked on her dive, she hallucinates and sees her best friend. How does this impact her choices? Why do you think she felt she must see “what is below”? What is the difference between her desire to stay alive and her desire to live?
13. Everly blamed herself for Mora’s death, believing that she caused Mora to stand in the path of the oncoming car. How does guilt impact grief? Why do you think we blame ourselves when we really had no control?
14. The shipwreck was found 180 years later, and divers brought up the artifacts—in both the real-life story of the *Pulaski* and in this novel. What was the most interesting artifact for you? What do almost-200-year-old artifacts tell us about the people who boarded that ship?
15. What did you think of the endings for the three women—Everly, Augusta and Lilly—who narrate the novel? Which of the three women do you identify the most with? Did you expect their endings? Would you change any of them? Which part of their stories touched you the most? Which part challenged you?