

## Mutiny, Murder and Mayhem!

Trouble was brewing on board the American whaling ship, the "Junior". The ship had been at sea almost six months with no sight of a whale. Conditions aboard were appalling. Food was disgusting, and shore leave had been cancelled since leaving New Bedford, for fear of desertions. Chief Officer, Nelson Probst, was an illiterate, cruel man who treated the whalers badly, while young Captain Mellon, on his first commission, was weak and ineffective.

It was Christmas night in 1857 when five members of the crew shot and killed their Captain and Third Officer. The Chief Officer, known as Mr Nelson, was also shot and seriously wounded, but managed to hide in the lower hold. The ship was now in the hands of the mutineers but they were beginning to regret their crime. They were whalers and had no idea how to navigate a ship. However, after five days, Mr Nelson, who had developed a fever leading to raging thirst, came out of hiding.

Cyrus Plumer, the leader of the mutiny, made a deal with Mr Nelson. If he navigated the ship to Cape Howe his life would be spared and the ship handed back to him. Having no option and delirious with fever, Mr Nelson accepted and guided the 'Junior' to Cape Howe.

Before disembarking in the lifeboats with the other mutineers, Plumer wrote a full confession in the ship's log, naming himself and four companions as the conspirators.

Nelson Probst reached Sydney on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1858 and alerted the authorities. Meanwhile Plumer and company had arrived in Merimbula claiming they were castaways from a shipwreck. Soon news of the mutiny reached the ears of the local police who rounded up the culprits and sent them back to America for trial.

None of the perpetrators were hanged for their crimes.

