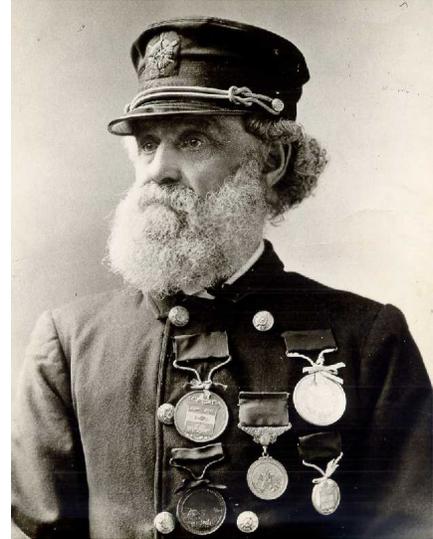


Joshua James

Joshua James (1826-1902) was born in Hull, Massachusetts, and lived his entire life in this small, seaside town. He lived to be 75, devoting 60 of those years to saving over 1,000 lives from shipwrecks at the mouth of Boston Harbor. James and the surfmen from Hull's Massachusetts Humane Society and U.S. Life Saving Service crews were the best in the world--and renowned for their deeds. Amazingly, no one ever died in a rescue in which Joshua James participated.



Born on November 22, 1826, James was the ninth of twelve children. His mother, Esther Dill, was from Hingham, while his father, William James, had emigrated from Holland as a young man. According to lore, Joshua learned to “hear the land speak” at an early age, distinguishing among shorelines in Hull and its surrounding islands by the different sounds of waves washing against their rocky shores and shoals.

In April 1837, Joshua witnessed his beloved mother's death in a shipwreck in Hull Gut, only a half-mile from safe harbor. He is said to have resolved then, as a ten year-old boy, to spend the rest of his life ensuring that no one else would ever suffer his mother's fate -- or his own. Five years later, in December 1841, Joshua leaped aboard a surfboat manned by the local Humane Society crew heading toward the ship Mohawk being “hammered shapeless” off Allerton Beach; he would continue to save lives for the next six decades.

Like many Humane Society volunteers, Joshua earned his livelihood from the sea, fishing, salvaging, lightering (ferrying goods from ship to shore), and transporting paving stones to Boston from Hull's shores. In 1859, when he was 32 Joshua married his 16 year-old fourth cousin, Louisa Lucihe, of Hingham. Six of their ten children reached adulthood.

During the 19th century, the Port of Boston saw a rapid increase in shipping traffic, becoming for a time the busiest in the nation. Typically, up to 100 ships a day passed in and out of the narrow and rocky Nantasket Roads shipping channel

that led from open ocean into the growing port. Since Hull is a peninsula pointing north into Boston Harbor like a protruding finger, its shores ran the length of the channel. Due to the region's destructive Northeast storms, an inordinate number of wrecks occurred, driving hundreds of vessels ashore while putting thousands of lives in peril.

In 1876, Joshua became the Boat-Keeper of Hull's busy Humane Society lifeboat crews. In 1890, upon completion of the new Point Allerton U.S. Life Saving Service Station, Joshua was appointed Keeper. He was 63 years old, 18 years beyond the services' limit of 45. However, due to his unequalled lifesaving record, and considerable petitioning by townspeople of Hull and his allies in the Service, the age restriction was waived. Over the next 13 years, Joshua and his crew saved another 540 lives. To fill his shoes with the town's volunteer lifesavers, Joshua's son, Osceola, became the Humane Society Boat-Keeper.

On March 19, 1902, Joshua was reeling with distress over a major disaster on Monomoy Island off Cape Cod. Two days earlier, all but one of the Monomoy Life-Saving Station crew had died during a rescue attempt, drowned by the panicking wreck victims they were endeavoring to save. Ordering his men into their boats for practice early on the 19th, for the second straight day of hard drilling, the Point Allerton crew tested a new self-bailing, self-righting surfboat. After working at the steering oar for over an hour, Joshua ordered the boat ashore, and then collapsed on the sand, dying instantly. Local legend claims that the world-famous mariner uttered the words, "the tide is ebbing..." with his final breath.

The lifesavers' extraordinary legacy, embodied in their motto, "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back," is an enduring reminder of their commitment and valiant selflessness. Joshua and his crewmates were men of profound courage, skill, and compassion, true models of heroism in their time and ours.

Important Dates in Joshua James's Life

- * Born: November 22, 1826
- * Mother Died: April 3, 1837
- * First Rescue: December 15, 1841, The Mohawk
- * Medal: 1850, Humane Society Bronze for rescue of crew of French brig L'Essai

- * Humane Society Keeper: 1876 (at 50)
- * Medal: 1885, Humane Society Silver Medal for "brave and faithful service of more than 40 years in the lifeboats of the Humane Society," and \$50
- * Rescues: Great Storm of November 25-26, 1888; 29 men, 6 ships
- * Medal: Humane Society Gold Medal for Great Storm of 1888
- * Medal: Congressional Gold Lifesaving Medal for the Great Storm of 1888
- * Opening of Point Allerton Station: March 1890 (at 63)
- * Rescues: Ulrica, December 16, 1896
- * Rescues: Portland Gale of November 27, 28, 1898; 20 lives, 4 ships
- * Died: March 19, 1902 (at 75); 540 people assisted in 13 years at Point Allerton