

## *The crossing of the Atlantic in the 17<sup>th</sup> century*



Everyone knows today, that a steamship of about twenty thousand tons, takes less than a week to cross the Atlantic.

It is very difficult, when we live in the materialistic conveniences of this century, to guess about what might have been the terrible inconveniences suffered by our ancestor during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The little boats of the seventeenth century, short, light, built of wood to a length of 75 to 100 feet, with open deck to manoeuvre them, and a lower deck which extended the length of the boat to which one descended to by steep set of stairs... This lower deck had to house all but three or four persons, the captain and the pilot were at the stern.

The cramped space was abominable. It was necessary to fill it with barrel of fresh water, boxes of food, lard or salted fish, and a minimum of kitchen supplies and bedding. Each of the passengers and crew had some personal baggage. The worst was the necessity to bring live animals.

During nice weather, access to the upper deck rendered life tolerable, but on stormy days, the lower deck was closed by a trap door in order to protect the people and baggage from the wind and large waves. It became a black box without aeration. The presence of animals which were more or less clean, the fever and vomit from the sick, the smell from the pails which served as toilets, the odor from the lamps which offered a minimum of lighting, all of which at times breed epidemics, so often that on many crossings deaths were registered.

“It’s a long time ago, three centuries. However it could be beneficial to know the situations of the past... at least to appreciate the courage of the founders of our country and to appreciate the nice things about our times<sup>1</sup>.”

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<sup>1</sup> Julien Déziel, *Médaillons d'ancêtres*.