Civilizing Savage Seas: Ship Stewardesses and the Second British Empire

a talk by Julia C. Stryker
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The stewardesses on the great ocean liners like the Titanic represent one of the more familiar and iconic images of women at sea. Rather than a first foray, however, uniformed steamship stewardesses represent the refined result of a century of policy and practice, which grew and changed along with and in reflection of the attitudes and priorities of the British Empire in the nineteenth century. Retroactively written out of early-century seafaring, this talk will discuss who ship stewardesses were, their roles aboard ship, and how the changes wrought by the rise of steam redefined women at sea from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the First World War, through a series of stories of disaster at sea, beginning with cannibalism aboard the Francis Mary in 1826, through the Ocean Monarch fire of 1848, and finally the Titanic disaster of 1912.

2pm Wednesday, 24 July
Maritime History Archive, HH 1013

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