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The treacherous Peaked Hill Bars - 1940

Coast Guard Surfman Leads Solitary Life on Cape Beach

Lonely indeed is the lot of the Coast Guard surfman who patrols each night the stretch of Cape Cod beach assigned to him. But many prefer it to duty on the sea in that, as one put it, it "gives a man time to chew things over."

Those who have camped on the beach know the sound of his passing in the night, the jingle of his equipment, the squeak of the flare swinging at his belt.

Sometimes, a surfman will be accompanied by his dog, but if the beach happens to be a particularly soggy one, a dog is a hindrance even though good company.

Walking is hard because most of the Outer Cape beaches are soft. It is like walking through slush in Winter, the surfmen say. A dog soon gets sore feet. But in the Winter when the beach has frozen, the long patrol can be finished quicker and with less fatigue.

The surfman's job is akin to that of a policeman making his rounds. Not only must he watch for distress flares rising out of the sea, but he must also squelch beach fires, and report anything amiss along his beat.

Few appreciate the surfman. To many he is just a solitary figure along the beach, seldom seen close at hand who walks in a perfunctory fashion along the shore. Few realize his job is one of extreme responsibility, that he is a man trained to meet the exigencies of the sea.

Moon-Cussers

Moon-cussing is a more or less mythical occupation said to have been indulged in by settlers of the lower Cape, from Chatham on down to Provincetown. Ships lured ashore in the dark of the moon could be looted at leisure, if the moon came out unexpectedly from behind clouds it would be roundly cussed-hence the name. Henry C. Kittredge has written an entertaining book on "Moon-cussers of Cape Cod". Cape Codders deny there was ever any moon-cussing on the Cape. Wreckage gathered from the shore, or honest salvage from an abandoned ship, was a different thing, and many a Cape Cod home has relics of ships wrecked on sandbars along the back side.

1871

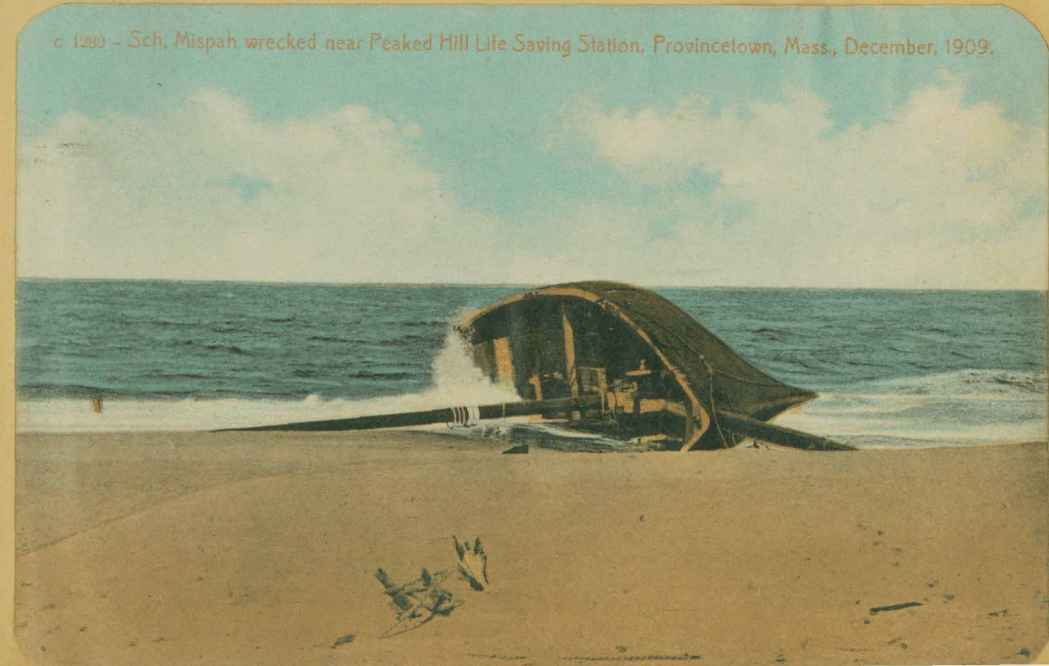
Schooner Ellen Rizpah (whaler), Capt. White of Provincetown, is reported at Dominica, having lost all her boats and every movable thing on deck in a gale on the 13th—Schooner Arizonia (whaler), Capt. Higgins, Provincetown, lost stern boat in gale. Schooner B. F. Sparks, Capt. Bell, lost flying jib in same gale.

March 20, 1884: The south patrol from the Peaked Hill Bars Station, just before 8 o'clock in the evening, sighted a steamer running too near the bar for her safety. He warned her off with a signal flare when she quickly sheered off and signaled acknowledgement by blinking her running lights.

The schooner Mary Matheson, of Provincetown, bound from the Potomac River to New Haven, Conn., with a cargo of oysters, was rammed and sunk on the night of January 19, 1884, by the steamer Katahdin, the crew of six men were rescued by the steamer and landed at New Jersey. The vessel was a total loss.

From 1907 to 1917 there were 156 wrecks along the "backside", or more than one every month for a decade.

NEARLY 4,000 ships have perished in the shallows, tides, fogs and gales off Cape Cod.



c 1280 - Sch. Mispah wrecked near Peaked Hill Life Saving Station, Provincetown, Mass., December, 1909.