

Portland

Continued

vomit up wreckage from the *Portland*, piling the shore between Peaked Hill Bars and Highland Light. The bodies came later. A coast watcher explained, "The bodies do not float as woodwork does, but the tide and waves push and roll them along the bottom until they reach shallow water, when they get into the undertow and are tossed up on the beach." They came in first at High Head and Pamet River, later all along the shore from Orleans to Chatham. Watches had stopped at 9:15.

Maine had escaped the full force of the hurricane, and people were puzzled when the *Portland* did not dock on Sunday morning. Word came that she had left Boston on schedule, and anxiety grew as General Manager Liscomb was unable to locate her during the day. On Monday and Tuesday relatives and friends besieged the offices of the steamship line, whose officials knew no more than they.

Even definite word that the *Portland* had gone down with all hands, while it plunged the city into mourning, did not dispel uncertainty; for the only list of passengers and crew went down with the ship. How many actually sailed that November night?

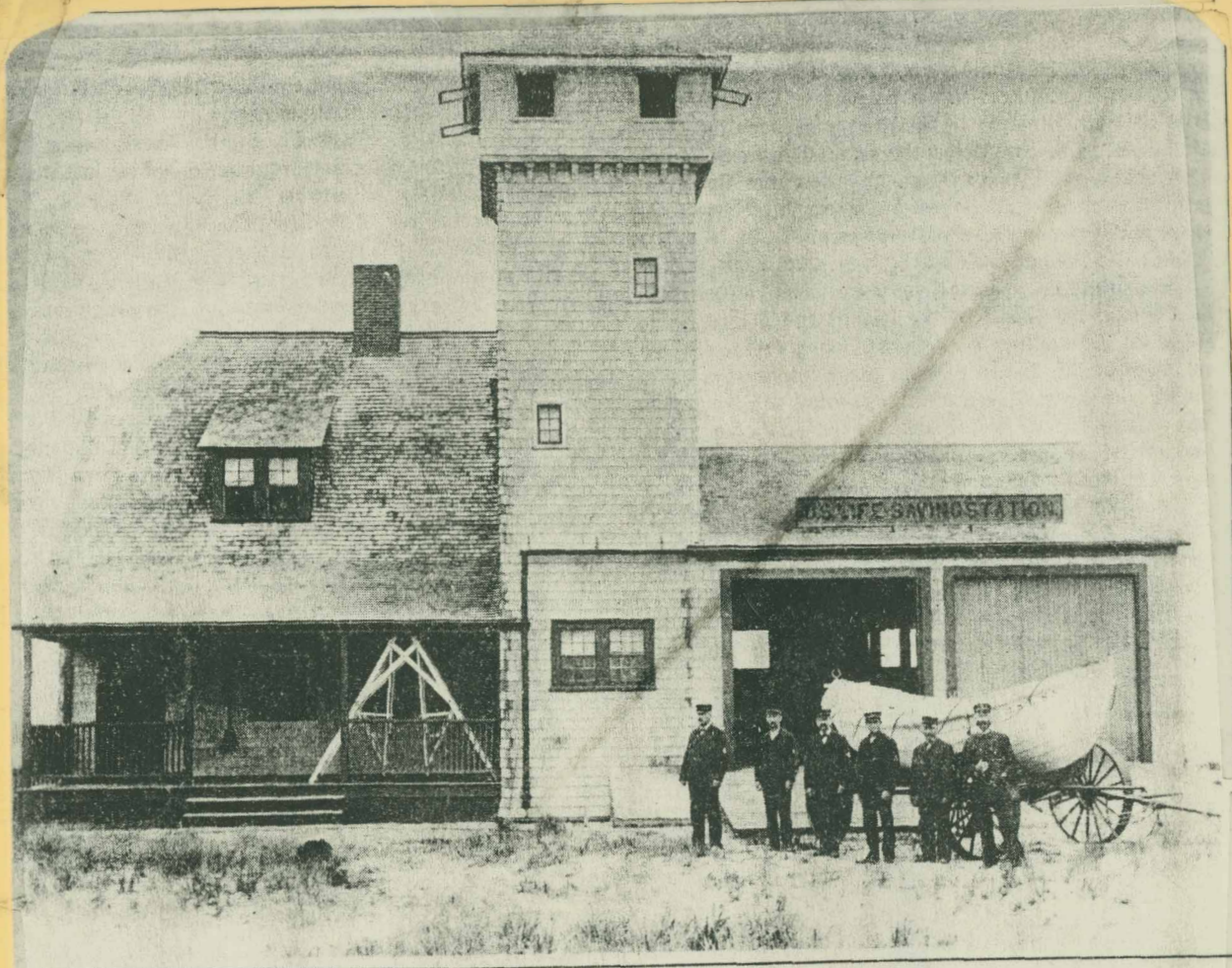
Some crew members had not; some passengers had cancelled their reservations or left the ship. Some missing were not placed on the list for months, even years. On November 26, 1956, a memorial tablet was presented to the Race Point Life Saving Station containing the names of 190 persons. It is estimated that only 30 to 60 bodies were recovered.

Manager Liscomb blamed Captain Blanchard, stating that he sailed against orders; other reports say the opposite. With no survivors, only the ship's log could reveal the story of her last hours. The U.S. District Court of Maine, in 1899, absolved both Captain Blanchard and the steamship line from blame, ruling that the loss of the *Portland* was an "act of God."

Wreckage from the *Portland* remained in many Cape Cod homes, and much was sold for souvenirs. The wheel of the *Portland*, authenticated by Captain Kelley of the Second District Life Saving Service and picked up from the beach by the crew of the High Head Life Saving Station, is in the Marine Exhibit Room of the Centerville Museum.

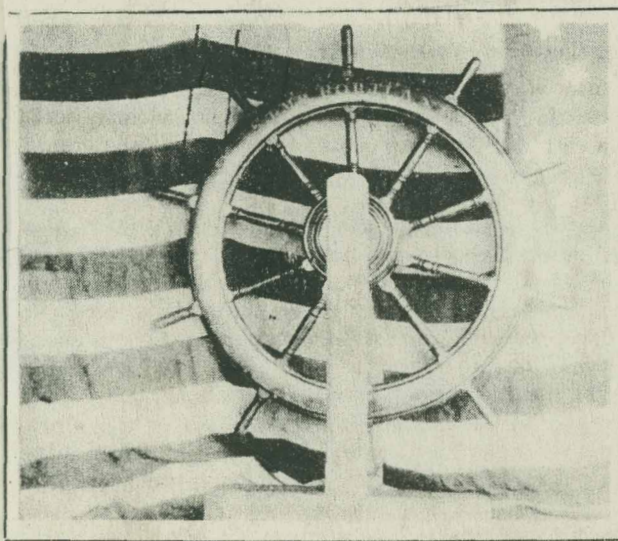
Over the years, fishermen's nets and scallop drags have brought up wreckage from Stellwagen Bank to Race Point, and speculation about her location has never ceased. Joe Amaral of Yarmouth Port, commercial diver and salvager, would like to find the *Portland*. "It would be the find of the century," he says, "but there is a lot of ocean bottom out there and we can't drag it all; we'd have to have a definite place to look."

So the wreck of the *Portland* remains, "off Cape Cod," with the thousands of ships that have foundered off her stormy Atlantic shore.



High Head Life Saving Station whose crew picked up the wheel of the 'Portland'

Captain Kelley, left



Wheel of the 'Portland'

November 27, 1883: Just before 8 o'clock at night the patrolman, on the western patrol towards Race Point Station, from the Peaked Hill Bars Station saw a vessel signaling "Where am I!" The patrolman realized the vessel was standing in too close to the beach and immediately burned a red signal flare. The vessel tacked and put offshore, repeating the "Where am I!" signal. The patrolman signaled back, giving the location and watched the vessel's lights disappear.

December 1, 1883: At 9 o'clock at night one of the patrolmen from the Peaked Hill Bars Station reported a vessel apparently ashore on the outer bar, about a quarter of a mile to the westward of the station. The lifesaving crew boarded her as quickly as possible, and found that she was not aground, but anchored very close to the bar in 16 feet of water. The captain reported that he had split some of his sails, and had come to anchor for the purpose of repairing the damage. She proved to be the schooner *Clara Jane*, of Lubec, Maine, having a crew of five men, bound from Perth Amboy to Boston with a cargo of pig-iron. She was in a dangerous situation and the sooner she could be got away the better. The lifesaving crew therefore helped repair the damages, and then got the vessel under way, saw her safely on a course for Boston, the captain thanking them warmly for their services. The surf was so heavy that the lifeboat half filled with water twice while returning to the beach, and narrowly escaped swamping.

November 30, 1884: One of the crew of the Peaked Hill Bars Station while out on the 8 o'clock patrol saw a vessel standing into the bar and in imminent danger. He burned a signal flare and the vessel seeing it immediately put offshore. The same vessel was also sighted by the patrol from the next station at Highhead and also burned a signal flare and reported the vessel had sheered off.

January 6, 1884: At about half past 9 o'clock in the morning a bark was observed by the crew of the Peaked Hill Bars Station with signals set standing in toward the land. They were unable to make the signals out, however, and as the vessel had come in dangerously close to the bar, the station crew ran up the International Code flags J. D. (You are standing into danger), when she quickly tacked and went offshore.