

Dec. 1, 1938

A Girl's Account

This week there came to The Provincetown Advocate a letter from Mrs. Annie Newcomb Spaulding of Greenwood, Mass., enclosing a "composition" written for her English class shortly after the storm when she was a young girl and living in Provincetown where she was born. It is entitled "A True Story" (written from Provincetown, Mass., in 1899—after the storm) and here it is as she wrote it at the age of fifteen years.

On the 27th of November, 1898 there arose a terrible storm. The wind blew east, and snow and rain fell in turn all day. On going to bed that evening no one suspected what a terrible sight would meet their eyes the next morning. This being Saturday night, we stayed up later than usual. The wind was howling without, and blinding snow beat against the windows. At length we undressed for bed, and after locking the doors, and making other preparations for the night, retired.

We slept as soundly as the wind would permit, as even our bedsteads rocked, and the old house creaked. In houses along the shore families slept as if in cradles all night.

Sunday morning I went down to the kitchen, and looking out of the window saw a large tree in an open lot nearby, torn up by the roots.

My sister and I waded through the drifts of snow to the fence, and as we looked down the street saw huge waves come rolling up as if they would sweep everything away. We ran home and told the rest of the family about it. Then we wrapped ourselves in the warmest clothes

we could find, regardless of looks, and started for the beach.

Flood Tide

All who were able were out looking after their property and talking about the ebb tide, which was at 12:15. Now it was 11 o'clock, and it seemed as though noon would never come.

As we looked out upon the harbor we could see vesse's, barrels, dories, boxes, and almost everything else imaginable, drifting by. Once upon looking out we saw a large shed on a part of a wharf, floating along, or rather being tossed about by the wild and angry waves, to the westward. Everyone spoke of it as resembling Noah's Ark.

Men who had vessels which were expected to be unfit for further use, as they were being driven ashore, were crying; women who had relatives out at sea were weeping, and children were crying for fear of being washed away.

At length, when ebb tide came, the storm seemed to be stilled and anxious men and women to gain courage.

There had been, during the storm, vessels driven into the harbor with men on board, who were clinging to the ropes and masts in hopes of being seen by the crew of the life-saving stations who made many brave attempts to rescue them, but which were all in vain as the waves were mountain high, and ready to devour them every time they pushed off from the shore. At last a crew of volunteers from shore was formed, who manned a seine boat, and with great difficulty and risk to their own lives, went to save others.

Freezing Weather

Some were taken off almost frozen to death, and others were found lashed to the masts, cold and stiff—dead.

In low houses people were wading around in their cellars trying to save some of their belongings.

The next morning, although the storm had cleared, and the sun shone brightly, still the joy that came from that fact was not to be had for long, for before noon the sad news of the loss of the Steamer Portland saddened the hearts of many. That large steamer, freighted with loads of goods and passengers, had sailed from Boston while the storm was brewing, hoping to reach her destination, Portland, Maine, before overtaken, but instead was dashed to pieces, no one knows just where. We on'y know that the shores from Provincetown to Orleans were strewn with wreckage and bodies from that ship. Bodies floated ashore everywhere, some being identified, others not. Loads of debris were brought from the "Back Side" into town. Almost everybody flocked to the outer shore to see what they could find.

This was kept up for many weeks after the terrible event which rested so heavily on the hearts of many, and which will not soon depart.

Annie Newcomb (Spaulding)

