

NOVEMBER 7, 1946

A STRANGE INCIDENT

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Chatham

All New England remembers the big November storm of 1898, the storm in which the steamer Portland was lost. Cape Cod particularly remembers it, for it was off the Cape Cod shore the Portland went to the bottom, and it was upon the Cape Cod beach that the tragic and gruesome evidence of the disaster was thrown up.

A month or more had passed since any new discovery had been made, so on a bright Saturday morning, unusually warm for December, Clarence, with one pocket full of cookies and another full of apples, started for a walk on the great outside beach at Orleans. He meandered along as a boy will, now close to the line of surf, now back against the dunes, zig-zagging here and there, until all at once from behind a large pile of sea-weed, the flutter of something white caught his eye. Hastening to investigate he found to his horror the body of a young girl, clad only in a night gown and one black stocking. She must have been lovely; her features had been scarcely marred, and her hair, now so pathetically matted with seaweed and sand, was long and golden. Not knowing just what to do, but feeling that he must help in some way, the boy took off his coat and covered the body. Then he set out post haste for the Undertaking Rooms in Orleans.

Men drove a cart to the beach and brought the body back with them. Clarence went, too. For some strange reason, perhaps because the victim was so near his own age, perhaps because the discovery had been his, the happening held for him a horrible fascination. Back at the Undertaker's, all that could be done was carefully attended to. Then a discussion arose as to which casket would be the most appropriate. The boy, who still lingered to see the body laid out, eyed the caskets critically. There was one that in his eyes was more attractive than the others. Somehow he felt that in it his friend, for so he had begun to think of her, would find a sweeter repose. "This one," he pointed, "Oh, please take this one." The older men debated, "Well, if that is the way the youth sees it, why not?" The body of the young girl was carefully arranged to the best possible advantage.

As was customary in such cases, a detailed description of the body was sent to all the Boston and Portland papers. Before too long an interval had elapsed, word was received from Maine that relatives had seen the account and were coming to Orleans to view and claim the body. In due time they arrived, but for some reason best known to themselves, they objected to the coffin in which the young girl had been placed and ordered her body removed to one of their own choosing. Clarence felt badly about it. His mind insisted that his friend would have been happier in the casket chosen by him. Just why, he did not know. Perhaps youth can best understand youth. So they took her away, and all that remained was a half sad, half sweet memory, for oddly enough the boy did not forget. Sometimes when he was in the vicinity of the Undertaker's shop he went in and viewed the spurned casket regretfully.

Late that Winter, due to neglect of a bad cold, Clarence contracted pneumonia. It was a hopeless case from the very first, although the doctor did all that he could. Clarence died. When arrangements for his burial were being made, all agreed that the coffin he had selected for the young victim of the wreck, was the most appropriate one in which to bury him. So, in a casket of his own choosing the boy was laid to rest in the little Cape Cod cemetery. The curtain descended on a strange incident of the memorable Portland disaster of November, 1898.

DECEMBER 30, 1948

Fifty Years Ago

From Files of The Register

December 10, 1898

Up to the present writing 35 bodies from the wreck of the steamer Portland have been cast ashore on the Cape from Truro to Chatham. Because of the interruption of railroad and telegraphic communications, Medical Examiner S. T. Davis had to traverse the long, weary distance from his home in Orleans to Provincetown by wagon, to view the three bodies that were first washed up on the beach in the vicinity of Highland light and which were taken to Provincetown. When Dr Davis was notified he started from Orleans at once, over the road, behind a strong pair of horses. The doctor arrived at Provincetown in an exhausted state, but the two horses died of fatigue and exposure.

The Harry Tyler, a vessel of 250 tons loaded with wrapping paper valued at \$17,000, was wrecked off Brewster during the late storm, having been driven within half a mile of the shore. Her crew of five men were rescued by Messrs Fred Young, Willie Bassett, Charles Briggs and Burgess Bassett, in two light dories, with considerable risk to themselves. The crew were cared for by several families in North Brewster and in a short time were in their usual good health.

In Eastham, Mr John Clark's turnips, which he had taken out of the ground only a day or two before the storm, are completely covered by the debris.

Among Orleans sufferers by the gale were Asa F. Mayo, East Orleans, whose barn was blown down and horse and two cows killed; some 150 lights gone from the greenhouse of Mr A. O. Hurd; nearly 150 feet of the tin roof blown from the dwelling house of the late Aaron Snow; Henry K. Cummings, barn and cottage at the beach blown down. Those who have not pulled their boats up in Town cove will find what is left of them somewhere near Mr Sylvanus Eldridge's hen yard. Seventy-five chimneys of dwelling houses were blown off.

As soon as the storm moderated, hundreds of Provincetown men and boys went to work removing the wreckage from the shore and carting it to their homes for firewood. Hundreds of cartloads have been secured and the end is not yet.

Thursday, June 16, 1949

Steamer Portland
Figure Dies at 81

PROVINCETOWN, Thursday (P)—Sea Captain Antone Joaquim Souza, 81, last survivor of one group of mariners who first tried to solve the mystery of the sinking of the Steamer Portland in the blizzard of '98, died yesterday.

Souza and his mates spotted wreckage which was the first clue to the vanishing of the vessel with 176 lost in the November storm.

December 8, 1898

"The Advocate issues this week as a supplement two views of the late gale taken by Mr. and Mrs. I. A. Small with a small camera. One of which, a snapshot of Central Wharf, taken during a lull of a few minutes in the gale about 10 A. M. Sunday morning nearly an hour before high water, shows the wharf almost submerged and the buildings at the lower end that collapsed from the force of wind and waves. Steamer Longfellow was shown at Steamboat Wharf riding stern to the gale. It is a remarkably good view of the gale in the harbor considering the conditions under which it was taken. Next week the Advocate will present two more views taken the day after the storm."

Repercussions from the "Portland Gale" are given considerable space. Editor Hopkins mentions the many compliments received on the story of the gale, "It is hardly necessary," he says, "to state to anyone at all familiar with his writings that the account could have been written only by Mr. John M. Swift." Elsewhere he notes that the friends and relatives of the victims of the gale. Portland are reported to be greatly pleased at the courteous manner in which Medical Examiner Davis treats all inquiries concerning the victims of the wreck and the interest he is taking in identifying the bodies which have been found.

"It hardly seems possible, but residents of Provincetown living on Bradford St. did not know of the terrible local damage caused by the November gale of Saturday and Sunday until the following Monday Morning."

An anti-climatic note hidden among the personals is this: "The stormy weather of Sunday evening caused a rather small attendance at the different churches."

Those who have noticed our new storm signal tower, recently re-

placed after having been blown over a year ago may be interested to learn that in the Portland Gale it was also blown over and "the signals were blown to shreds."

"The hens belonging to the keeper of the Sandy Neck Lighthouse, which is opposite Barnstable, were swept away during the storm Sunday. Monday morning he received word that his hen house had floated ashore at Barnstable. He found the flock exhibiting strange signs which the philosophers of the town put down to seasickness."

"A large quantity of the wreckage of the Steamer Portland has been brought in town this week. A number of Provincetown citizens visit the back shore with horse and team every day(returning with large quantities of wreckage, much of which can be easily identified as parts of the ill-fated steamer. Thirty-eight bodies from the Portland have been found thus far. It will be impossible to identify any bodies that may now wash ashore."

There are sufficient notes in the Advocate this week to indicate that "business as usual" continued after the storm. "Mr. Frank Cook, whose rigging loft on Central Wharf was destroyed in the late gale, has rented the lower floor of the building opposite Masonic Hall." The dory fishermen made good wages, two men being paid \$24 for their day's catch, which was very good money for those times. "A representative of T. Wharf fish dealers has been in town looking for purchasable vessels to replace some of the Boston fleet lost in the gale of a week ago. Fish buyers were paying 4 cents for cod fish Wednesday."