

by Donald B. Type Typellon  
**SHIPWRECKS ...**



HIGHLANDS, COAST OF CAPE COD  
MASSACHUSETTS



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# Shipwrecks on Cape Cod

THE STORY OF A FEW OF THE MANY HUNDRED  
SHIPWRECKS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED  
ON CAPE COD

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By

ISAAC M. SMALL

For fifty years Marine Reporting Agent  
for the Boston Chamber of Commerce

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North Truro, Highland Light, Mass.

January 1st, 1912



To the summer visitor this book  
is respectfully dedicated

## PREFACE

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I hardly know whether to call this a preface or part of the story, it seems rather too long for the former and too short for a chapter of the latter, but I may as well follow the general rule and call it a preface.

Friends have often said to me, "Why don't you write some stories concerning shipwrecks which have occurred on Cape Cod?"

Perhaps one of the strongest reasons why I have not done so is because, to describe all of the sad disasters which have come under my observation, during my more than half a century of service as Marine Reporting Agent, at Highland Light, Cape Cod, would make a book too bulky to be interesting, and a second reason has been the difficulty of selecting such instances as would be of the greatest interest to the general reader.

But out of the hundreds of shipwrecks which have become a part of the folk lore and history of this storm beaten coast I have finally decided to tell something of the circumstances connected with the



loss of life and property in a few of the more prominent cases.

The descriptions herein written are only just "unvarnished tales," couched in such language that even the children may understand, and in order that there may be a clear understanding of how I came to be in close touch with the events of which I write, it is perhaps necessary to state briefly a few facts concerning my life work here.

So far back as 1853, the merchants of Boston, desiring to obtain rapid and frequent reports concerning the movements of their ships along the coast of Cape Cod, were instrumental in causing the construction of a telegraph line from Boston to the end of Cape Cod, and a station was established on the bluffs of the cape at Highland Light, this station was equipped with signal flags, books and a powerful telescope, and an operator placed in charge, whose duty it was to watch the sea from daybreak until sunset, and so far as possible obtain the names of or a description of every passing ship. This information was immediately transmitted over the wires to the rooms of the Chamber of Commerce, where it was at once spread upon their books for the information of their subscribers.

When the boys in blue were marching away to southern battlefields at the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861, I began the work of "Marine Report-

ing Agent," and now on the threshold of 1912, I am still watching the ships.

A fair sized volume might be written concerning the changes which have taken place in fifty years, as to class of vessels and methods of transportation, but that is not what I started to write about.

My duties begin as soon as it is light enough to distinguish the rig of a vessel two miles distant from the land, and my day's work is finished when the sun sinks below the western horizon. Every half hour through every day of the year we stand ready to answer the call of the Boston office, and report to them by telegraph every item of marine intelligence which has come under our observation during the previous half hour. With our telescope we can, in clear weather, make out the names of vessels when four miles away. When a shipwreck occurs, either at night or during the day we are expected to forward promptly to the city office every detail of the disaster. If the few stories herein told serve to interest our friends who tarry with us for a while in the summer, then the object of the writer will have been attained.



## LOSS OF THE JOSEPHUS

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The first shipwreck of which I have any personal recollection was that of the British ship "Josephus," which occurred about the first of April, 1849. The terrible circumstances attending the destruction of this ship were so vividly impressed upon my childish mind, (I was four years of age at the time) that they are as plain in memory as though they had occurred but yesterday.

This vessel stranded during a dense fog, on the outer bar, directly opposite the location of the present Highland Life Saving Station, about one mile north of the Highland Lighthouse. She was a full rigged ship from some port in England, bound to Boston, and carried a cargo of iron bars. Losing her bearings during a protracted fog and severe easterly gale her keel found the sand bar half a mile from shore, immediately the huge waves swept her decks, and the ship was doomed to destruction.

In those days no life savers patrolled the beach to lend a rescuing hand and the first intimation of the disaster was when, during a temporary rift in



the fog the light keeper, from the cliffs discovered the stranded ship. The alarm quickly spread to all the neighboring farm houses and to the village, from all directions men came hurrying to the beach, hoping in some way to be able to aid the suffering sailors on the wreck, which by this time was fast being smashed to pieces by the thunderous waves which pounded upon her partly submerged hull, her masts had already been torn from her decks and with tangled rigging and strips of sail thrashed her sides in a constant fury, many of her crew had been crushed to death and their bodies swept into the boiling surf. When the spars went down others could be seen clinging to such portions of the wreck as yet remained above the angry waters, and their screams for help could be heard above the wild roar of the awful surf, by the watchers on the shore, utterly powerless to render the least assistance. At this moment down the cliffs came running two young men, just home from a fishing voyage, they had not even stopped to visit their homes and families, but hearing of the wreck had hurried to the beach. Lying on the sands of the shore was a fisherman's dory, a small boat, about twelve feet in length, such as small fishing vessels use and carry on their decks.

These men were Daniel Cassidy and Jonathan Collins, immediately they seized this boat and rai- it quickly over the sands to the edge of the surf;

the watchers on the beach stood aghast, and when they realized that these men intended to launch this frail skiff into that raging sea strong cries of protest arose from every one, "Why men," they said, "you are crazy to do this, you cannot possibly reach that ship, and your lives will pay the forfeit of your foolhardy attempt." But in the face of the earnest pleadings of their friends and neighbors they pushed their boat into the gale driven surf and headed her towards the wreck, their last words were, "We cannot stand it longer to see those poor fellows being swept into the sea, and we are going to try to reach them." Standing with my mother and holding by her hand on the cliffs overlooking the scene I saw the little boat, with the two men pulling bravely at the oars, they had hardly gone fifty yards from the shore when a great white cataract of foam and rushing water was hurled towards them, the next instant it buried men and boat under its sweeping torrent as it swept onward towards the beach with the overturned dory riding its crest; two human heads rose for a moment through the seathing sea, only to be covered by the next on-rushing wave, and they were seen no more. Darkness soon settled over the terrible scene, the cries of the despairing sailors grew fainter and ceased, while the mad waves rushed unceasingly towards the shore. The watchers, believing that every sailor had perished, turned



away and sought their homes with sad hearts. The light keeper, Mr. Hamilton, coming down from the lighthouse tower at midnight, where he had been to attend to the lamps, decided to visit the beach again, thinking possibly that some of the bodies of the lost sailors might drift to shore. What was his surprise to find upon a piece of the cabin of the ship, which had washed ashore, a helpless sailor moaning piteously, still alive but suffering terribly from the hardships he had endured, he had been scratched and torn by the broken timbers through which he had been washed and driven.

After great exertion and a long struggle the light-keeper succeeded in getting the unfortunate sailor up the cliff and to the lighthouse, where the man was put to bed and a physician sent for, he finally recovered, but he was the only man of that ship's company of 24 souls who escaped with life, these and the two men who attempted a rescue, made a total death list in this disaster of 25.

It is a far cry from 1849 to 1872, and the broken timbers of many a lost ship, and the whitened bones of hundreds of dead sailors lie buried in the drifting sands of this storm beaten coast, between those dates, but as we cannot here present the details of more than a very few of them, we only select those having especial and somewhat different features and so pathetic as to stand out more promi-

nently than those of a lesser degree of horror, though it would be hard to describe a shipwreck on this coast devoid of suffering, death and destruction.



## THE CLARA BELL

On the afternoon of March 6th, 1872 a moderate wind was blowing from the land across the sea, the sun shone full and clear, a great fleet of sailing vessels urged forward by the favoring breeze made rapid progress over the smooth sea towards their destination. In the late afternoon as the sun approached the western horizon it settled behind a dark and ominous cloud, that was rising towards the zenith and casting a dark shadow over all the sea.

The two masted schooner Clara Bell, Captain Amesbury, with a cargo of coal for Boston had that morning sailed out of the harbor of Vineyard Haven and passed across the shoals of Vineyard Sound, moved rapidly up the coast and by ten o'clock that night was nearly opposite Highland Light. The wind which had been only fairly strong up to this time rapidly increased in velocity, and snow began falling thick and fast.

The wind rapidly increases to a gale, when the vessel had reached a point two miles north of High-

land Light the wind suddenly changed to north and in a short time became a howling gale, the fast falling snow hid all the lights and the surrounding sea from view, and the temperature dropped to zero. In trying to make an off shore tack the vessel was struck by a huge wave, forced shoreward and with an awful plunge the schooner struck the bar a fourth of a mile from shore. It was now nearly midnight, the sea though running fierce and wild had not at this time reached monstrous size and Captain Amesbury thinking that his only hope for life depended upon getting away from the schooner, decided to make an attempt to launch the ship's boat. After great exertion upon the part of himself and crew they succeeded in getting the boat over the vessel's side, and his crew of six men and himself jumped in and cast off the line that held them to the vessel, but not two strokes of the oars had been taken when the cockleshell, borne like a chip on the top of an on-rushing wave was thrown bottom up and her crew were struggling in the icy waters. Captain Amesbury and one of his men were carried on a towering wave rapidly towards the shore, but before they could gain a foothold the remorseless undertow had drawn them back into the swirling waters. With the next oncoming wave the sailor was thrown shoreward again and succeeded in grasping a piece of wreckage and by its aid managed to crawl away



from the jaws of death, not so fortunate the captain, who with the other members of his crew were swept away in the freezing sea and seen no more. The sailor finding himself safe beyond the reach of the mad sea on the sand swept and desolate shore started to find shelter. In his struggles to reach the shore one of his boots had been torn off and lost, he was coatless, without covering on his head, thoroughly drenched, his clothes freezing to his benumbed body and limbs. In the blinding snow storm which had now set in in dead earnest with a cold so intense that it nearly took his breath away, this poor fellow started out to find if possible some human habitation; he could make no progress against the freezing gale so was obliged to turn towards the south and follow the direction of the wind. Over frozen fields through brush and brambles that tore his bare foot at every step, over the ever increasing snow drifts, through bogs and meadows and hills and hollows he struggled until the coming of daylight, then a farmer going out to his stable in the early morning found this unfortunate, frozen and exhausted sailor standing in the highway a short distance from the Highland House, so dazed by his terrible night of torture that he could not speak or move, he was carried into the farm house and the writer was one of those who helped to revive him. We were finally made to understand that he had

come from a shipwreck on the coast and that all of his shipmates were drowned. Leaving him to the care of the women of the household I hurried with others to the beach believing it possible that even yet there might be some other unfortunate still alive on the wreck.

After a somewhat exhausting trip over the drifted snow and the frozen beach we reached the stranded vessel which had in the meantime been driven by the huge seas completely over the sand bar upon which she struck and the constant pounding of the waves had driven her high and dry upon the main beach. We walked onboard dry footed and passed down the cabin stairs, there in the cabin stove burned a nice cheerful fire and all was dry and warm. The haste of Captain Amesbury and his crew to leave the strong vessel for a little frail skiff had cost them their lives, and this has been so often the case, it would seem that sailors so often exposed to the dangers of the sea would realize when brought suddenly into positions of extreme danger by the stranding of their ship, that their only chance for life lay in staying by their vessel, rather than taking the chances afforded by a small boat in the wild sea; if their large and strong vessel cannot stand the shock certainly the little boat cannot. Many men have gone down to their death in the sea because of too great a faith in the ship's boat.



The sailor who escaped with his life from this wreck finally recovered after the amputation of three toes and a finger.

People have sometimes said, "Are there no romances connected with shipwrecks?" Fiction writers have often distorted the facts sufficiently to be able to weave about the incidents of a shipwreck some romantic story, but most of the disasters which overtake those who go down to the sea in ships to do work on the great waters, partake so much of the elements of tragedy that there is little room for the entrance of romance into the situation. In almost every instance where ships are overwhelmed by the storms and the seas the cold hard facts are so distressing that every other feature, except the one of suffering is lost sight of and only the thought of drowning men takes possession of the senses. The following story, though bearing the color of romance had a sad and heartbreaking ending.

## LOSS OF THE SHIP PERUVIAN

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Over the North Atlantic ocean and the coast of Cape Cod on the night of the 26th of December 1873 swept a gale and storm so fierce and wild that even dwellers of the coast were surprised.

• With almost hurricane force the wind driven sea rushed in mountainous waves towards the outlying sand bar and hurled themselves with a terrific roar on the sands of the beach.

Many weeks before from the smooth waters of the harbor of Calcutta the American ship Peruvian had passed out into the deep sea and with a blue sky and favoring breeze had spread her white sails and headed for home on her long voyage.

Beneath her decks was stored a valuable cargo of sugar and block tin and Boston was her destination.

The ship was in command of Captain Charles H. Vannah. And she carried a crew of 24 men. With such a bright departure they were anticipating a quick and safe voyage. All had gone well with ship and crew until this fateful December morning, all day long the snow had fallen thick and fast, driven



over the deck of the ship and through her rigging by the ever increasing gale. Riotous waves lifted the big ship to their crests only to plunge her the next moment into the depths of the deep hollows as they tore madly away in the approaching darkness.

Capt. Vannah had been unable for 24 hours to obtain an observation, but he knew that his ship was approaching the coast of Cape Cod. Hoping every moment that some slight abatement in the storm might give him a chance to pick up some outlying beacon or the glimmer of some friendly lighthouse he kept the ship's head to the north with all the sail upon the spars that they could stand without breaking. Higher and stronger ran the seas, wilder and more terrific blew the gale, often across the ship's decks swept the huge waves, while all about them the dark skies lowered and the angry waters swirled, when suddenly, just before midnight with a terrible plunge and an awful crash the ship struck the sand bars of the dreaded Peaked Hill Shoals, nearly a mile from shore, then utter confusion reigned on the ship. Up to that time only occasional seas had swept her decks, now the huge waves in torrents constantly swept her and pounded unceasingly her breaking decks. Boats, deck fittings and every thing movable was swept away in the darkness and the turbulent sea, her crew driven to the rigging found there only a temporary place of escape, soon came a mountain-

like wave, overtopping all those which had preceded it and thundered over the doomed ship, tearing away all of her masts and portions of her deck, hurling the entire ship's crew into this mass of thrashing wreckage and churning sea, and their last sad cries were hushed in the mad seas that covered them.

With the first glimmer of approaching daylight men hurried to the outer beach believing that some terrible disaster had occurred, they found the shore for miles covered with portions of the cargo and many broken timbers of the lost ship, but owing to the distance from shore to where the ship went down only three bodies were ever recovered, and those only after many days of washing about in the surf.

Out there across yonder bar, where you see the waters curl and break into a ripple, forming a white line against the blue of the sea beyond lies the sunken and sea-washed hull of the once stately ship; in that sparless hull and the rotting and sand covered timbers you cannot recognize the majestic vessel that only a few short years ago sat out there in all her splendor and with her strong sides seemed to defy the elements.

That blue water, so quiet now, and breaking with such gentle ripples on the shore, does not give you the impression, that in a few hours with a change of wind, it could be lashed into fury, and with towering,



foam capped waves dash upon the beach with the roar of a Niagara.

The storm is o'er, and all along the sandy reach,  
The shining wavelets ripple on the lonely beach,  
Beneath the storm washed sands and waves of blue,  
There rests unclaimed, the members of the lost ship's crew.

Captain Vannah had been a seafaring man all his life. In a pretty little town, nestling among the granite hills of New Hampshire he had known and loved a dear young girl; for several years they had planned that when his sea voyages were ended he would come to claim his bride and would sail the seas no more. He had secured a fair competency and had promised her that this should be his last voyage. He wrote to her when his ship sailed out of that far eastern port, advising her of the probable date of his arrival at Boston. She had made all arrangements to go down to the city and meet him when his ship should be reported as approaching the harbor.

She daily scanned the ship news columns of the papers, and on this December morning she knew his ship must be nearing port, but in her sheltered home she did not realize what a terrible storm was sweeping the coast.

Only those who have been suddenly overwhelmed

with a paralyzing blow can appreciate what, with ruined hopes, this young girl felt, when she opened the daily paper only to read in great black, cruel headlines these words, "Ship Peruvian goes down off Cape Cod, and all hands are lost."



*Francis*  
BARK FRANCIS

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The same storm that carried the Peruvian and her whole ship's company to destruction drove the North German Bark Francis to the same fate only three miles farther down the coast, but though sad enough in some of its features this disaster was not attended with the appalling loss of life that accompanied the loss of the Peruvian.

These two vessels sailed from the same port in Calcutta only a few days apart, and had almost been in sight of each other during the long voyage.

The Peruvian was so unfortunate as to become involved in the shallows of Peaked Hill Bars, while the Francis, in the deeper waters to the south was driven by wind and sea over the outer line of bars and finally grounded within two hundred yards of the beach, her hull was of iron and she soon settled firmly into the sand.

Every avenue of approach to the beach was blocked with snow, huge drifts covering every highway and hollow. There were no mortar guns and no life saving crews then, and no boats of any kind on

the outer beach available. At the shore on the bay side of the cape was a whale boat, a boat sharp at both ends and about eighteen feet in length; this boat might afford possibly safe means of reaching the imperilled crew on the ship, but to get it to the scene of the wreck was a problem, finally through the united exertions of twenty strong men the boat was drawn to the edge of the pond in the village of North Truro, then dragged over the frozen surface of the pond to the highway near the Post Office, where a pair of horses was attached to wheels, the boat mounted on them and the journey to the outer beach and possible rescue was fairly begun; when snow drifts were not too deep horses and men hurried the boat along, when great drifts were encountered shovels were brought into use and a way broken for the horses, then on again, ever in the face of the storm swept moors towards the ocean, across the gale swept hills and snow covered valleys the party struggled, until finally at ten o'clock in the forenoon, almost exhausted they reached a point on the beach opposite the wreck.

A volunteer crew manned the boat, willing hands helped to push the boat through the foam covered surf, the men bent to the oars and the trip to the side of the bark was made in safety.

Captain Kortling, of the bark had been ill in his cabin for many days and it was with no little diffi-



culty that he was finally lowered helpless into the rocking and pitching boat, which the thrashing sea threatened every moment to dash to pieces against the iron sides of the ship. Brought to the beach and landed, Capt. Kortling was taken in a farm wagon and hurried to the Highland House. Weakened by disease and worn out by the terrible exposure of the wreck and the storm he lived but four days after reaching shore, and his remains lie buried in the Old Cemetery on the hill, near the west entrance. The other members of the crew, twenty in number were rescued without mishap.

In a few days tugs and lighters were brought to the scene of the wreck and the work of attempting to save the cargo was begun. A large part of her cargo was sugar in great straw mats, these in the process of hoisting out of the hold of the vessel frequently became broken and the sugar sifted out upon the deck, some twenty-five men were required to assist in this work of hoisting out the cargo and placing it upon the lighters. As it was not practicable for these men to go ashore at noon-time they were obliged to take their dinners with them to the ship, generally a small pail or basket sufficed for carrying the noon meal, when these men left their work at night the overseer in charge of the work of unloading would tell the workmen that they might fill their lunch baskets with the loose sugar which had sifted

out of the broken mats and take it home. In the beginning their pails as a rule held two or three quarts, but when it became known that the dinner pails could be filled each night on leaving the ship the size of these lunch pails and baskets increased amazingly, from a receptacle with a three quart capacity they soon rose to twenty-five and even fifty pounds capacity, so that the boat in her last trip to the shore was in danger of being swamped with the great weight of lunch baskets. This abuse of a privilege resulted in the cutting off of the supply, although many workmen had already secured a year's supply of sugar for their families when the shut off edict was issued.

This vessel seemed to offer the wreckers a good proposition as an investment and a company was formed with the purpose of making an attempt to raise and float the vessel. They purchased her of the Insurance Companies, into whose hands the ship had fallen, then they spent hundreds of dollars in trying to get her from the sand bar, finally after many weeks of preparation everything seemed ready, a powerful tug was engaged to stand by and be ready to pull the ship away as soon as she floated, big steam pumps were installed on board and all was expectancy, then after a full day's steady pumping by the great pumps on her deck, suddenly the big ship stirred in her bed and rose to the surface with a



bound, then a great shout went up from the assembled crowd on the beach and from the interested investors on the bark's deck when they believed their venture was about to be crowned with success, but this quickly turned to dismay when the ship as suddenly as she had come to the surface sank back again beneath the sea, from which place she never moved again, and the shifting sands soon covered her.

The rocking of the ship by the waves and the storms that beat over her on the sand and coarse gravel of the bed of the sea had worn holes through her iron sides where her masts were stepped into her keel, and immediately the ship rose from the bottom a great torrent of water poured in through these openings, flooded the entire ship again and carried her back into the sandy bed where she had so long reposed. For many years in the ever changing sands the jagged sides of her ever diminishing hull would be exposed only to be buried by the next great storm that swept her.

## LOSS OF THE GIOVANNI

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A northeast gale and furious snow storm was sweeping the coast of Cape Cod and hiding the great sea in its smother all through the day of March 4th, 1875. Late in the afternoon, during a momentary breaking away of the storm filled clouds a great vessel was discovered fast upon the outer sand bar nearly three miles north of Highland Life Saving Station. It proved to be the Italian bark Giovanni, Captain Ferri, from Palermo for Boston, with a cargo of sumac, nuts and brimstone, her sails were blown away, her rudder broken. She was in a position to be pounded to pieces before another sunrise, her crew was almost helpless from exposure to the cold storm. The crews of Life Saving stations 6 and 7 were promptly at the scene of the wreck, but owing to the snow bound conditions of the roads and the almost impassable state of the beach, added to the great distance from the Life Saving stations it was a task almost beyond the power of human endurance to get their boats and beach apparatus to the shore opposite the scene of the disaster, but as soon as the



position of the vessel was clearly determined, and it was recognized what kind of gear was necessary in order to aid the men on the ship they hurried to their stations, and after hours of almost superhuman exertions, dragging their beach carts, mortar guns and apparatus through heavy snow drifts, that had to be broken out before they could proceed, over sand hills swept bare by the driving gale, through meadow bogs and brush covered ridges they finally reached the beach in the vicinity of the wreck. No attempt was made to launch the life boat, as such an effort, in the face of all the terrible conditions that prevailed, the awful sea and the distance of the vessel from shore would have been foolhardy in the extreme, and would only have added to the death roll the lives of the life-savers, without accomplishing the saving of a single life.

The mortar gun, however, was made ready with all possible dispatch, though it was recognized from the first that no gun could carry a line that distance in the face of such a terrific gale. But the gun was charged, the charge exploded and out over the foam covered sea the shot line sped, only to fall spent in the wild sea more than a hundred yards short of the ship. The uselessness of further attempts along these lines was apparent, but the life savers again made ready with another line, hoping that the pounding sea would with the rising tide

force the bark over the sand bar and nearer the shore. But it now became evident that the ship was so firmly impaled upon the treacherous shoal that there was no hope of her being moved by sea or tide, and in fact it was but a short time later that there came to the shore evidence that the vessel was beginning to break up, as portions of her upper works and even some portion of her cargo could be seen between shore and wreck and was being driven shoreward by the savage seas that broke in fury over the sand bars. Just then two men were seen to leap from the deck house on the after part of the ship, into the roaring torrent that raged about them, for a moment they were lost to sight in the suds of the churned up sea, then as they appeared upon the surface they were seen to seize upon pieces of wreckage that floated near them, to these they clung desperately, at one moment buried from sight in the salt spume, the next moment rising to the top of a foam crested wave rushing onward and almost wrenching the plank to which they clung from their grasp; when more than two-thirds of the distance from wreck to shore had been covered the wreckage which had borne one of the sailors appeared upon the top of an oncoming wave, but there was no human form clinging to it, nature had made its last long struggle and the poor fellow had released his



grasp and dropped helpless into the wild sea that covered him forever.

The other man still retained his hold upon the frail support that bore him shoreward, now it was a question of only minutes, would his strength stay by him, could he hold on a moment longer, should his rapidly waning strength desert him now and his grasp relax he would be swallowed up in the sea instantly and no power could save him. Men rushed to the edge of the tide, even into the surf, grasping hands as a living rope, on came man and wreckage, as the broken water smashed down upon the sands strong hands reached out and seized the sailor before the relentless undertow could draw him back into its cruel grip. He was saved, but he was the only one of the whole ship's company of fifteen men.

Night shut in but we kindled a huge bonfire on the beach and patrolled the shore up and down all night, hoping that some other unfortunate might be brought in with the tide. Long before daybreak the shore for miles was strewn with flotsam and jetsam from the wreck which was being constantly rended by the sea; bags of sumac, bags of nuts and even casks of wine mingled and washed together in the surf, but not a human body, alive or dead was cast up by the sea. Every watcher on the beach believed that the ship had been entirely broken up, and that every person onboard had perished. Still we lingered

awaiting the coming of the sunlight; when it did come and objects were visible for any distance what was our surprise to see the after deck house of the bark still in place, and a portion of her bow and the stump of her broken foremast still standing, the huge waves were still smashing over her furiously. If we had been surprised at seeing any portion of the hull still standing above the water, we were dumb-founded when we saw a man jump from the bow near the broken foremast and swim through the fiercely raging waters to the after deck house, and in the face of the pounding sea that beat upon him, climb under a sheltering piece of the cabin that had not been torn away.

That a human being could live through such a night as that, in that icy water and retain his hold upon any part of those ice covered timbers and sea swept wreck seemed incredible. But the chapter of horrors was not yet complete in this wretched disaster. Piece by piece the sea tore away what remained of the wreck until nothing but the deck-house roof remained above the sea, as wave after wave hurled itself against the battered top it was seen to lift from its fastenings that held it to the submerged wreck and the next wave bore it off far into the thrashing sea. Then we saw, clinging to the few remaining pieces of the frame of the deck-house, with a death grasp, four members of the ship's com-



pany, but endurance had reached its limits and they were quickly swept from the last possible thing to which they could cling, and though they made a last heroic effort to seize some piece of wreckage, two of them did succeed in grasping some floating object and were carried for a considerable distance towards the shore, but their long and terrible exposure had so exhausted and chilled them that they could make no further exertion and the mad sea claimed them.

Some adverse criticism was directed against the men of the Life Saving corps, for their failure to rescue these sailors, but it was wholly unmerited as the Life Savers did everything in their power or that it was possible to do under the circumstances.

It was one of those terrible marine disasters, of which there are many, where man is a plaything in the grip of the sea when the storm king is abroad in his might.

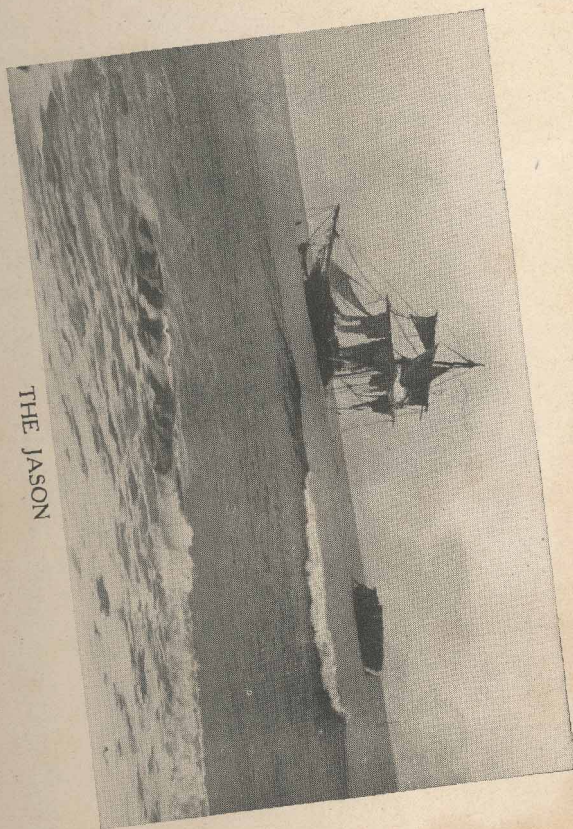
## THE JASON

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Late in the afternoon of Dec. 5th, 1893, the patrol of the coast guard of Life Savers of Nausett Beach, a few miles south of Highland Light, during a momentary break in the furious storm driven snow, saw the outlines of a great ship, not more than two miles from the beach, heading towards the Port of Boston under close reefed lower topsails, struggling with the grasp of giant waves which threatened every moment to overwhelm her. Soon again the increasing gale hid all the turbulent waters of the great sea. The winter night came on with rapid pace. All along the shore each Life Saving crew had been warned by telephone to watch with increased vigilance for a disaster which their experience had taught them was inevitable. Not a coast guardsman slept that night. All the boats and beach apparatus were made ready for instant use; the patrol watches were doubled; the men at the stations stood ready dressed, anxious, dreading but ever watchful and ready for the call which they expected to come at any moment.



At 7.15 a surfman of the Pamet River station rushed breathlessly and excitedly into the station and shouted "She is ashore, half a mile north of this station." All the stations were immediately notified. Then out into the storm and darkness and the blinding snow, along the gale swept beach where the flying sand cut their faces like knives, toiling through the yielding sand with their mortar guns and boats, hoping to reach the scene of the disaster ere it was too late, the Life Savers hurried. Chips and logs along the shore were gathered together and a huge bonfire kindled that those on the ship might know that every human effort was being exerted to aid them. By the glare of the light on the shore away over there in the awful night the faint outlines of the doomed ship could be seen, her great white sails being torn to shreds by the savage fury of the winter storm. Great torrents of gale driven sea swept her decks every moment. Her broken masts fell with a crash to her decks. Soon her iron hull was twisted and wrenched asunder; through her rended decks and battered sides floated portions of her cargo to the shore. The cries of her drowning sailors could be heard above the fury of the storm. The mortar gun of the Life Savers thundered again and again. The shots sped true to their mark and the life lines fell across the ship's hull, but her men could not reach them, so madly rushed the waters



THE JASON



between. Soon a surfman saw a dark object thrown up by the sea; it was a human being. He was quickly taken up by willing hands and hurried to the station, restoratives were applied and soon he was able to tell the story of the wreck:

"Our vessel was the British ship Jason, Capt. McMillan. We were on a voyage from the East Indies to Boston with jute bales. We did not know our position until we saw the land at four this afternoon. We tried, by crowding every sail upon the ship, to weather Cape Cod; we failed. There were 27 officers and men in our ship's company. I am the only one that lives; I saw all my shipmates perish when the mizzenmast fell."

Like many another shipwreck the irony of fate pursued this ship's company, when her keel was driven into the sand bar by the force of the mighty waves which hurled her forward, the only spot upon the whole ship which seemed to offer a place of refuge from the boiling surf which tore across her deck was the mizzenmast. Into the rigging of this spar every man hurried except the one man who was saved. He was swept from the rail before he could gain a foothold with his shipmates; but what they had hoped would be their haven of safety was their doom. Scarcely had they climbed above the maelstrom of rushing waters when the mast went down with a crash into the sea, killing



many of the sailors in its fall and drowning the others in the wreckage. The foremast stood unmoved by the winter's storms for many weeks. Could this unfortunate crew have reached this portion of the ship many of them would have been rescued on the following day.

Out there today when the tide is low, protruding through the sands of the bar and the white caps that wash them, are the broken fragments of the sunken ship looking like tombstones in the village churchyard. All along the shores of this wind swept and sea washed coast these half submerged and silent sentinels remind us that up and down this sandy reach the ever moving sea has covered hundreds of those heroic men who have gone down in ships on the great sea.

## LOSS OF THE STEAMSHIP PORTLAND

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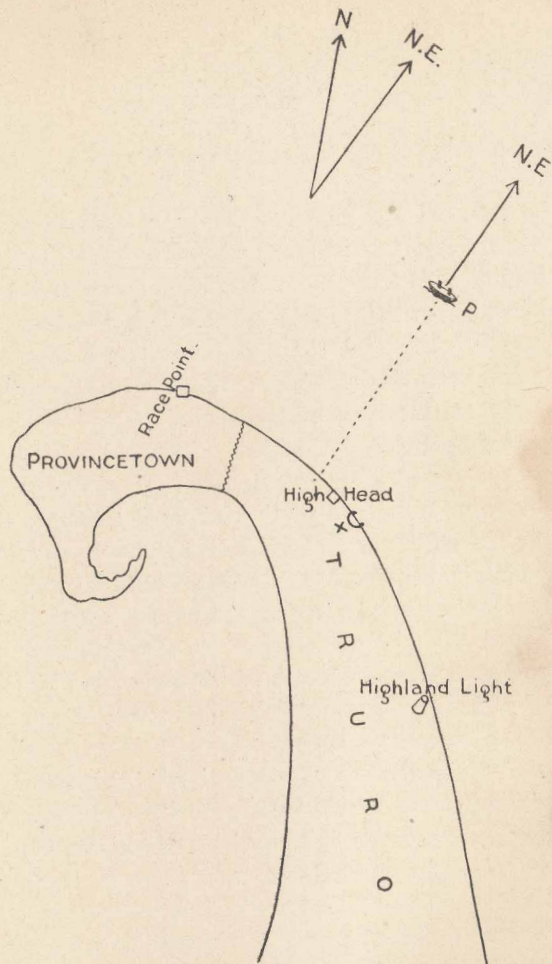
Among all the terrible disasters which have made the dreaded shores of Cape Cod known to mariners the world over, probably the worst of all was the loss of the steamer Portland, which sailed from her pier in Boston, on the evening of November 26th, 1898, on one of her regular trips to Portland, Maine, and before midnight of the following day her broken timbers, cabin fittings, large quantities of cargo and dead bodies lined the outer shores of Cape Cod, from Highland Light to Chatham. Not a person of her 175 passengers and crew survived the disaster.

The awful hurricane which swept the coast of New England that fateful Saturday night and Sunday was the worst in the memory of living men, the wind attained a velocity of approximately one hundred miles an hour.

When the Portland steamed out of Boston harbor on that eventful Saturday night her captain did not anticipate that the storm would be more severe than the ordinary winter gale. She ran quickly down the smooth waters of the harbor, out by Boston Light,



the gale increasing every moment, she passed Thatchers Island and on towards Cape Ann, she could have made Gloucester harbor, but her master hoped the storm had reached its worst, not so, for every moment it grew more furious, the lights along the coast, one after another were now blotted out by the ever thickening snow, the great seas ran riot in the bay. Now it was too late to turn back, the ship plunged into the wild seas that rose like mountains before her, to have attempted to turn the ship about with her high superstructure when she would have fallen off into the trough of the sea would mean her speedy destruction. On she staggered in the inky darkness of the wretched night until the fury of the gale and sea checked her further progress, then their only hope lay in being able to keep the ship's head towards the wind. All through the long night and far into the next day, Sunday, the ship reared and plunged in the mad sea, slowly but surely every hour being carried nearer the lee shore of Cape Cod, drifting helplessly but ever with her bow to the sea. At 4 o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday the Life Savers at Race Point station heard two distinct blasts of a steamer's whistle, sharp and piercing, at ten o'clock that night the patrolmen from stations south of Race Point came upon great masses of broken beams, deck-houses, furniture,



x( Where wreckage first landed from SS Portland Sunday night.

P Place 5 miles N. E. of High Head Life Saving Station, where is it thought by all coast men the Portland went down.



boxes and barrels of freight and several dead bodies.

It is believed by men on the coast and familiar with storms and tides that the whistle heard by the Race Point Life Savers at 4 o'clock was the last despairing cry sent up by the doomed ship before the sea engulfed her and those onboard, and that between that hour and 7 o'clock that night the ship's total destruction was accomplished.

It is no doubt a fact that the ship was held to her course until suddenly her steering gear was torn away by some huge sea more vicious than those before, she immediately fell off into the trough of the sea, and amid the crash of broken timbers and the thunder of the awful sea the ship went down with all onboard.

There has been much speculation and prolonged search by the government and others to determine if possible approximately where this ship was swallowed up in the sea, the location of this terrible disaster has never been satisfactorily determined, but there is no question in the minds of sea coast men but that this ship went down somewhere between 8 and 12 miles north of Highland Light.

Out of the entire company of passengers and crew which went down with the ship only 60 bodies were recovered. Some of those found were fully dressed with life preservers upon them, indicating that the

wearers knew that their chances for life were slight indeed. Other bodies were entirely nude when recovered, showing that some of the passengers had evidently retired to their staterooms in the earlier hours of the voyage and were made so ill by the terrible pitching and rolling that they made no exertion to dress themselves before the ship went down.

It is believed that no less than 500 human lives were the sea's death toll in this awful hurricane that swept the shores of Cape Cod and Massachusetts Bay in that frightful storm.

This disaster will pass into the annals of Cape Cod's shipwreck history as the one which concerned the greatest loss of life from a single vessel.

The fury of such a gale can hardly be understood or appreciated by any one not having had personal experience with sea coast storms. As far as the eye could reach on that Sunday morning over the wild sea not the least bit of blue water could be seen for a distance of two miles from the shore, the whole ocean was a mass of seething foam, this driven shoreward by the gale would be caught from the beach by the wind and blown skyward high over the towering bluffs, then swept inland and break like great bursting soap bubbles in the fields hundreds of yards away.

Such was the force of this hurricane of wind that every window pane on the ocean side of our house



(the Signal Station at Highland Light) was blown in and smashed into a thousand fragments. Men exposed to the full force of the storm were blown from their feet and hurled about like blocks of wood.

Men of the Life Saving service were exhausted by their exertions in trying to cover their beats, and several of them were completely unnerved by their frequent trying experiences in dragging torn and sea-washed bodies from the surf. There were cases where some of the men of this service were made almost nervous wrecks by their almost nightly contact with the disfigured and unfortunate victims thrown up to their feet by the sea.

Destruction wide spread on land and sea was the result of this fearful storm.

Never had its like been seen before.

My daughter for a number of years was my assistant and the following story which originally appeared in the New York World, may be of interest in this connection:

## THE GIFT OF THE SEA

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A true tale of Cape Cod, written for The World by Lillian May Small, only official woman marine observer in the United States.

Fishing schooner Polly, Capt. Peter Rider, weighed anchor one spring morning in 1800 and sailed away from Provincetown. She was a staunch craft of eighty tons, bound on a fishing voyage to Chaleurs Bay.

Besides the captain there were on board Jot Rider, the captain's son; Ben Smith, broad-shouldered and strong as an ox; the two Larkin boys, ready to furl a gafftopsail in any weather; George Barnes, Tom Olsen, the Swede; Nick Adams, Bob Atwood, the cook and Ned, the "boy," a bright lad of ten years, Capt. Peter's nephew.

This was Ned's first trip, and he thought himself quite a man until the Polly had rounded Race Point and began to roll about in the great green swell of the turbulent ocean; then he wished himself back in Granny Rider's kitchen, where the open fireplace



kept a fellow dry, where the dishes didn't roll off the table, where things smelled good and clean, not like the nasty bilge water that washed about in the Polly's run, but where a boy could take off his boots when he went to bed, you know.

But he couldn't go back, so, with a quiet cry now and then, all by himself up in the bow of the Polly, where the men wouldn't see, he managed to brace up and help the cook down in the fo'cas'tle, and pull on the main sheet and reef and furl, anything except steer; discipline aboard a "codder" was as strict as on a man-of-war and boys were not allowed to handle the tiller. Favoring winds wafted the boat eastward along the northern coast, past jutting, rocky headlands and surf-washed spits, to an anchorage on the fishing banks. Three months the Polly swung at her anchors, at times idly upon the smooth waters, at times pitching wildly with a savage pull at the cable when the tempest beat down upon the stormy waters of that desolate coast.

But now the low-set hull told the story of a successful catch. The last basketful of salt had been "wet," the fishing lines were snugly coiled upon the reels. It was Sunday morning. Capt. Peter was no autocrat, and it was his custom to have "all hands" down to breakfast in the cabin on Sabbath mornings.

"Well, boys," said Capt. Peter, when all were gathered around the rough table, "we've got a

putty good trip under hatches, so arter breakfuss I guess we'll get the hook aboard and head the Polly for home."

If there was any one in that ship's company who felt his heart give a sudden bound of joyous anticipation it was Ned. Every day of all those long weeks Ned had scored the mental calculation, "one day nearer home."

From his thoughts of home he was startled by a human cry.

Again he heard it coming faintly across the smooth water.

Rushing to where his uncle sat, tiller in hand, for the Captain would allow no one but himself to guide the Polly out of that "pesky hole," Ned sang out, "Did you hear that, uncle? Somebody is crying for help out there toward that rock."

"Oh, nonsense, boy," replied Capt. Rider, as he gave the tiller a sharp pull to bring the Polly up a point, "guess you was asleep and had a dream."

"No, uncle, listen; there it is again, 'tis a baby's cry."

"Bless my skin, boy, I b'leve yer right; my hearin' ain't extra good, but I do hear su'thin off thar to wind'ard. But what in the world could a baby be doin' out thar? I don't see no vessel nor no boat. But we won't leave no martal round in this hole to drown."



"Here, George," he shouted, "you and Nick get the boat over and see if ye can find whar that distressed creeter is. And Ned, you kin go along to help. I'll put the Polly's sheets to wind and jog around so you won't lose us."

The tide-ruffled waters splashed and sparkled as the oars, in the hands of the hardy fishermen, rose and fell in unison.

"There, I hear it again," exclaimed Ned from his seat at the stern of the boat; "it comes right from that rock."

The oars sent the boat straight toward the huge rock, on whose sides the tide lapped with a soft rhythmic "swish, swish," gaining slowly, surely. Only a few feet of its slippery top remained exposed, and the water was creeping up inch by inch until soon only a swirl and a fleck of foam would mark the place of the hidden reef.

There on the shelving side of the rock, with the tide lapping her tiny feet, chilled from long exposure and crying bitterly, sat a little girl.

Rough but willing hands soon had the little waif safely in the boat. When they reached the side of the Polly Uncle Peter stood ready to receive the strange charge.

"Well, by hooky, boys," he exclaimed as he received from Ned's arms the little dripping form. "How could she've got on to that rock?"

"There's only one way I can 'count for it," said George Barnes. "Some devil wanted to get rid of her, and left her thar to drown."

"Well, I'd like to catch the chap that did it; either he or I'd go overboard," said Ben Smith.

Ned gazed wonderingly into the face of the little child, who now, somewhat reassured, lay smiling in the bunk where the crew had placed her after removing the water-soaked clothing.

"Well, boys," said Capt. Peter, after all that was possible had been done for the little charge, "we don't know whar this baby girl came from, and we ain't goin' to try hard to find out; we ain't very handy or well fixed for girl babies aboard the Polly, but, by hooky, we're a nuff site more human than the critters that left that tot out dar on the rock to be killed piecemeal."

The summer winds blew gently on the Polly; homeward she sped. One bright morning the anchor dropped and the codder was home again in the smooth waters of Provincetown Harbor.

Little Ruth (so the crew of the Polly had named her) had fared well on the voyage, and when the boat had been rowed ashore and the fisher wives and maidens had come down to welcome home their loved ones, great was their astonishment at what had come home with the Polly's fishermen.

Granny Rider, with her motherly face against



little Ruth's cheek, as she received the charge from Capt. Peter, almost forgot to kiss Ned, so interested was she in the wondrous tale. Over and over the story was told, and soon everybody knew of the baby girl that had come in the Polly.

Ruth was the joy of Capt. Peter and Granny Rider's home. Ned was never so happy as when playing with the little sea waif in Granny's kitchen. No one ever learned her history; no one apparently ever cared to do so. Those who go down to the sea in ships learn to leave many mysteries unsolved.

Summer passed into winter, winter into spring, and again the Polly sailed. Ned kissed his little playmate good-by and turned to the duties of the voyage. Years passed, the boy became a man, Capt. Peter turned the command of the Polly to Ned. Little Ruth had grown to womanhood. They no longer played together as children, but looked forward more eagerly to the homecoming as the years went by. One day in Granny's cozy home two happy hearts were joined, and on the sea of life their little bark sailed out on the summer sea of years.

Caledonia

Sperry Cook. S. Stanley Snow's  
Grandfather



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