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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Refloating Steamer Big Job After Gale

By NEIL A. MATHESON

THE NOVEMBER STORM of 1906 drove five craft ashore on the North side of Prince Edward Island with destructive impact to the ships and loss of life to many of the crewmen.

I say "the storm of November" because one can't pinpoint it to any one day or even days. An old issue of The Patriot says in part:

"The storm was a succession of fierce gales which blew most of the time from the North and Northeast, and were usually attended by rain."

Apparently some eight inches of rain fell from November 1 to November 17 – it rained every day of that period with the exception of two.

The Turret Bell, a large steamer, was driven ashore at Cable Head in the early morning of November 2. Other victims of that storm were the barques Olga and Sovinto and the schooners Orpheus and the A.J. MacKean.

The Turret Bell was a steel steamer of 2,210 tons, was 297 feet long with a 40-foot beam and 21 feet deep as the old Patriot issue of November 29, 1906, put it. She was valued at \$100,000 and insured for about three-quarters of that amount.

Far From The Water

THE PICTURE the old Patriot carried showed the steamer was standing upright though she was perhaps 200 yards or more away from the water.

My friend Walter O'Brien spoke of this incident recently, and I recalled immediately that I had discussed it in detail with Freeman Leslie, St. Peters not long before his death several years ago. I was unable, though, to recall what he told me about how the Turret Bell was refloated.

So it was helpful to talk with Emery MacEwen of Convoy, Mt. Stewart R.R. 2. The explanation of Mr. Leslie came back to me as soon as Mr. MacEwen said that powerful jacks were used. The ship was lifted up to the limit of the height of the jacks, then a powerful tug would pull the ship in the direction of the water until she was back on the ground again. Then the operation of jacking her up would start all over again.

I do not remember the names but Mr. Leslie told me that one company had tried unsuccessfully to refloat the steamer. I believe they wasted most of a summer in the attempt – before the other one took over and finally got her back into the water.

The old Patriot story says the Turret Bell was carried some 200 yards inland by the storm the night she was blown and washed aground. The captain and the crew stayed aboard her, as they felt there was no further danger to them. But a later storm, on the night after she ran aground, and on the following night, "an exceptional high tide together with the heavy wind had carried the steamer so far in that she was only 20 yards from the cliff".

Captain's Wife Aboard

AN OLD SUPERSTITION says it is bad luck to have a woman on board and the Turret Bell's captain had his wife aboard at the time of the storm. There must have been some muttering among the crewmen.

The Turret Bell was on her way from Montreal to Port Hastings, Cape Breton in ballast when she struck. Her Master, Capt. Mercassen, could not tell how he was so far out of his course, or the course he should have followed.

Old timers in the St. Peter's – Cable Head area can take the visitor to the "Turret Bell road" that was built to haul supplies and equipment to the site of the successful refloating attempt. Tom Ledwell took me there once.

Fierce gales had been blowing and the weather had apparently, in his opinion at least, partly accounted for the "very thick" [word(s) omitted?], said the Patriot writer of 54 years ago, which [caused?] great error in course.

The Patriot printed a special supplement to tell the stories. Further reference will be made in a future column to the wrecks that are not described here.

Orpheus Was Smaller

THE ORPHEUS, 88 tons, was carrying a load of dried fish from St. John's, Newfoundland to Port Daniel, Quebec when she ran aground. Caught in the terrific November gale the captain at first tried to take shelter as he anchored "under the land, off St. Peters.

"But the anchor chains parted and the captain, finding it impossible to work his ship off from the land, decided to run her ashore.

"As the weather became thick and the land was obscured from view, he set the reef riding sail, two reefed foresails and the outside jib. Being unable to make any headway for the time, and finding it out of the question to get to sea, the captain steered again to the land, and at five o'clock on a Sunday morning the vessel struck bottom off Priest Pond and about one mile west of Campbell's breakwater."

All five men, including the captain managed to get to shore.

The cargo of 2,400 quintals of fish was sold to Matthew and MacLean, Souris, Dr. F.S. McDonald, also of Souris and F.W. Bissett, Halifax.

The hull, masts and the rigging were purchased at public auction by Captain Thomas Kickham of Souris.

Exotic Hawaiian Blooms

I'VE REFERRED in the past to the flowering plants of many readers. Today I want to talk of some at the Matheson home in Mt. Stewart, where Ella and I are living at present.

The more glamorous flowers are in a bouquet we received from Capt. Jack Crelling, our son-in-law who is with the U.S. Army in Vietnam. He had the flowers sent from Hawaii for Christmas.

They look very beautiful indeed on our coffee table in the living room.

The bouquet consists of two Flame Gingers, one Bird of Paradise, several Anthuriums, three Woodroses, enough leaves to shape and arrange the bouquet, and complete the picture, except for the real glamour pieces, three Miss Joaquin-Vanda

Orchids. Instructions which came with the bouquet from the colorful Pacific Isles says, "Float the orchids in the vase or use them separately for a half-piece or as a corsage". The florists even seat a diagram indicating the best arrangement to show to advantage.

IN NOVEMBER I received a box at the office that contained two African Amaryllis bulbs – I'm sorry I do not now have the name and address of the senders.

We potted one bulb and gave the other to a neighbor. The beautiful blooms came out just in time for the Christmas season. Our blooms are an attractive shade of red. I'm sorry that I do not have the correct shade name for you.

The showy blooms measure up to eight inches across, and there are five of them. The first bloom on our plant was discarded early this week. The other was just coming out when this was written on the last day of 1969.

It's been a really good year for us at the Matheson home, despite a spell of illness in the summer.

My earnest hope for 'Across the Island' readers is that 1970 may be a better year than the past one, or at least as good. If it is Happy and Prosperous – the traditional greeting – so much the better. I know, unfortunately, though, that it cannot be happy and prosperous for everyone.