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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Yankee Gale's Story Is Death, Destruction

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MANY PEOPLE have talked to me of destructive storms that have struck this province and its offshore areas in the days that are gone. The Yankee Gale of 1851 is one of them; so called because many New England vessels were destroyed with heavy loss of life.

Sheldon Drew, Brockton, Massachusetts, U.S.A. sent me a magazine "Yankee" recently, through his brother-in-law, Manford Beer, Hampton who is a long-time friend. Incidentally the "Yankee" story is written by Roland H. Sherwood, Pictou, one of the Maritimes best known writers.

Frank J. MacNutt, Malpeque, a former MLA, sent me "A Sketchbook" – the man who compiled it is not identified – which has a comprehensive story, and Frank has added some interesting touches from legends which have been built up around the disaster.

The storm struck late Friday night, October 3, after an afternoon and evening of ominous calm, and a night so dark survivors said "we could feel the darkness."

An unusually large number of ships were scattered over the area of the Gulf that lies in the crescent the Northern concave side of the province creates. They pointed to sea in mid-afternoon as veteran Masters sensed an approaching storm. But there was no wind to move them, and when the wind did come, the old Sketchbook says, "there was nothing but darkness, and no lights to direct."

'Light Guided Ships Through Storm'

A FEW did escape around North Cape and Chester Woodside, Margate recalls hearing the older folk speak of the great storm – he himself is now over 80 – and they told of "a guiding light" that took the few boats around the Cape, though the night was inky black. And that, suggests Mr. MacNutt, may be the reference in an old poem he sent me.

"Some few rode out that dreadful storm; Perhaps by Providential care."

By Saturday morning, the old story said, "vessels by the hundreds were being dashed on shore" and how is this for an effective bit of descriptive writing:

"Mountainous waves rioted in maddened career, the beach a maelstrom of foam, the rain almost a deluge, the noise like a continuous peal of the most awful thunder, while the land shook with the tremendous impact, both wind and waves clapping their hands in riotous mirth at the work of destruction . . . The commotion was truly sublime, great roiling billows being wrecked on the strand with a crash easily heard 10 miles away in the country side."

People along the shore watched with awe as one vessel after the other was hurled to destruction.

IN ONE CASE the crew tied lines to empty casks, tossed them overboard and a few made their perilous way to shore at Rustico, when their dismantled vessel was driven aground. Hours later a tremendous wave lifted the hull bodily and drove it so close to shore, others were saved.

Three vessels were driven ashore within a mile of each other, with 36 bodies in them. Other vessels were hurled on the shore with bodies of dead crewmen fastened in the rigging.

### Almighty Defied – Ship Disappeared

THE “FAIR PLAY came ashore at Tracadie, minus seven crewmen. They were the captain, his three sons and a brother-in-law.” The Franklin Dexter – she was from Dennis, Maine – [four words or more blank on copy]. She had belonged to a Captain Wickson, and his four sons and one nephew had been part of the crew. The bodies were buried at Cavendish but Wickson came to the Island later, had the bodies exhumed and placed in a large box which was placed aboard the Seth Hall which sailed for Boston.

The ship was noted for her “size and magnificence” but she was never heard from again. This “finest vessel in the fleet” had ridden out the major storm, but she never reached [a few words blank on copy], apparently, with all hands on board. One story says she ran into another vicious storm. But a legend that gained some credence along the Northside of this province says her captain when leaving the Island boasted that once he got to sea “The Almighty couldn’t wreck him”.

The damage was all but indescribable, “The Sketchbook” story said. There was serious damage on land, as well as at sea. The tide flooded areas never before seen under water, waves flung their caps aloft on fields where harvest had only recently been gathered. Scores of bridges and milldams were carried away, buildings and fences – snake fences of poles would be used then – and great forest trees were blown down by the storm. Travelling was impossible for days, because of the trees blown across the roads.

### Appalling Sightings Seen Along Coast

APPALLING SIGHTS were seen along the coastline when the storm had blown itself out. Windrows of wreckage were piled along the shore; all except 50 vessels were smashed so completely they were indistinguishable.

Among the wreckage were 60 barrels of flour that miraculously had not been broken; there were quantities of fish loose and in barrels. There were trunks, clothing, books, musical instruments, wrecked chronometers, barometers, etc., and the whole was hopelessly entangled with cordage and sails, or partly buried in the wind driven sand. In addition there was every manner of gear and equipment associated with fishing.

After the dead bodies had been gathered “rows of cadavers” could be seen in barns as people along the shore did their best to prepare them for burial. The bodies were nude as their clothing had been torn away in the furious battering from the storm.

FROM THE Eastern part of the Island to Savage Harbor 15 vessels had been driven ashore, also a large barque from Europe in ballast. Seventeen others had been driven

ashore between Savage Harbor to Richmond Bay; 24 had been driven ashore in The Bay, and seventeen others went ashore between there and North Cape.

Old stories often linked acts of pillage and malicious scavenging to the aftermath of all too many sea disasters. But this time there was none of that. All along the coastline, the old story related, the inhabitants were out on the shore in a concerted effort to salvage as much useful property as possible, and where possible restore it to the rightful owners.

Not only did the Island's North shore residents prepare the lifeless bodies for burial, they supplied the coffins and saw to it that the last sad rites were administered.

To the survivors the residents opened their homes, as well as their hearts, fed and clothed those the storm had left destitute – death and utter destruction had been spread along 100 miles of coastline. In the words of "The Sketchbook" story "they did all that kindness could suggest to relieve the unfortunates cast on their shore."

### N. England's Thanks Were Extended

OLDER READERS will recall that thousands of Island-born young people went to the New England States in earlier days. Perhaps even as early as 1851 there were some Islanders in New England, at any rate there was naturally warm appreciation of the many acts of kindness following the disaster.

One Charles L. Williams, Master of the schooner "Belle" said he was speaking on behalf of all his fellow New Englanders when he expressed "hearty thanks for the kindness, sympathy and assistance received from the inhabitants of Princetown Royalty . . . we shall ever feel under the greatest obligations, as their hospitality was extended in such a way as to cause us to feel we were among friends who exercised Christian virtues that would put to shame many of our own countrymen."

Williams added that the "300 men from American vessels cast ashore in Richmond Bay, had received every attention that could possibly have been rendered them had they been wrecked within sight of their own dwellings."

There were those who suggested that the terrible storm, with its destruction and loss of life, was punishment for the fishermen because they had been working seven days a week. If every violation of the Sabbath Day now were punished by a storm, the weather hereabouts would be rough indeed.

### E. MacLeod Replies To Capt. Maguire

Everett MacLeod of Borden has written to refute certain statements made in a letter from Capt. John R. B. Maguire, Senior Master, retired, on the Borden-Tormentine car ferry service. The statements were quoted in this column of December 23. I was in Sackville on business yesterday and did not have time to get Mr. MacLeod's letter ready for this column. However it will be in the correspondence column on the editorial page in Friday's Guardian.