

"Pioneer" Wreck Yielded Bounty

Everything From Bibles to Cabbages Cast Ashore Capt. Jim Howard Saved His Liquor

By MARY MATTHEWS

It was like manna from heaven when the vessel "Pioneer," a heavily loaded wooden freight steamer was wrecked off Ocracoke in a violent storm back in August, 1920. Everything from bibles to cabbages floated ashore. Hams, bananas, barrels of flour, casks of alcohol, bladders filled with snuff, and a great deal of canned food came into the Island, which was flooded by the tide, and everywhere folks were knee-deep in water sweeping up valuable debris as things washed by them.

One old fellow threw away his old shoes when he spied a new pair drifting toward him only to find the new ones were both for the same foot. One woman gathered up enough bladders of snuff to fill a barrel which she proudly kept upstairs in her house for all to marvel at. She happily contemplated a future with a plentiful supply of snuff.

The entire crew of the "Pioneer" was saved, and they joined the Islanders in rescuing the cargo. "Come on over to my house—there's plenty to eat" was the cry of the generous native to any stranger around, for the wrecked cargo had yielded more than enough to supply the Island with a day's rations.

Theodore S. Meekins, prominent real estate and insurance agent here, saw the wreck of the

"Pioneer" and remembers these incidents concerning it. He believes the "Pioneer" to be the last wooden steam vessel seen in these parts, and when it hit it went into pieces and sank almost immediately. The ship struck during the day time and was plainly visible from the shore. The observers on shore could see the boat break into pieces and disappear into a raging sea.

Mr. Meekins recalls the auction held in connection with that part of the cargo not taken by the natives during the storm. There were only two magistrates on Ocracoke and both were fighting each other for the privilege of selling the cargo. A 50-gallon container of alcohol to be auctioned off had been considerably decreased by the frequent visits of natives down to take a little drink or two. Finally, a few days before the auction, Captain Jim Howard stopped them by planting himself firmly on top of the barrel and guarding it with his life. When the barrel was brought up for sale at the auction Captain Jim was astride it, and he was sold with the barrel. He bought it himself for five dollars.

So keen was the auction that one barrel of flour brought six dollars. And after the sale the strangers who had come down to Ocracoke for the auction were treated grandly by the natives before time to depart.

COAST GUARD AT ITS BEST IN RESCUE OF WELLS CREW OFF OCRACOKE SEPT. 1914

(Continued from Page One)

this time the wind had shifted on them again to the southwest, driving him towards the shore more swiftly but being a seaman-born, he bent on new sails made of 00 canvas, yet it met the fate of the other; went out of the bolt rope as fast as the wind could strip it, and in trying to keep the ship off the beach the top of the rudder head wrung off. Nothing now was left for the gallant captain, with both anchors, all his sails and his rudder gone, but to go where the wind and the waves would carry him, and to try and look out for the women, children, and the crew that were still entrusting their lives to his seamanship.

Now the picture shifts to a little wee bit of land on the north end of Ocracoke Island, and the south end also; to the life-saving crews that were watching the deep not knowing what was going on out there but an awful storm.

Roscoe Burrus, now a leading business man of Hatteras was on watch in the Lookout Tower at Hatteras Inlet and his eyes scanning the horizon dimly made out in the mist some poles. He made an alarm to the keeper, who within a moment was in the tower, one look convinced the old man they had work and a plenty of it on their hands for the next several hours. The keeper called the keeper of Durants Station, Capt. Homer Styron, and informed him what was about to take place, and requested that he come and bring all the help he could as it would all be needed.

In the meantime he ordered both horses hitched; one to the service beach cart and the other to the work cart and part of the gear transferred to the latter, in order that it would make it lighter on horses, as the sea tide was continually sweeping the beach and it looked like it was going to be a hard pull even if the surfmen could make it.

The keeper, David W. Barnett requested one of the surfmen, now a retired Boatswain (L), James H. Garrish, of Ocracoke, to take his pony and cart in order that the men could be abreast of the ship when it struck that the sailors might see that help was coming.

Intending to send Barrish on to Ocracoke Station for help as they had no telephone any further south than Hatteras Inlet Station, leaving the crew under the command of Uncle Rob, the No. 11 man, to rush the apparatus as fast as possible, but when the keeper of Hatteras Inlet arrived abreast of the wreck the keeper, Williams, had in the meantime done the same thing that Capt. Barnett had done. He saw what was going to happen and he had rushed on ahead with one of his men, leaving his crew to follow up with the apparatus from Ocracoke Station.

But going for the apparatus was very slow even for good horses. For the crew had only gotten about two miles below the Station with the sea tide washing into the carts and the horses just could not pull the apparatus any further in the face of the wind and tide, so Uncle Rob hitched himself and the rest of the crew to the carts, and with the sea water above their waists, they dragged the carts to the scene of the wreck four miles further on.

Just turn to your imagination and think of walking six miles in water above your waist, helping pull a cart loaded, that large horses could not pull. By the time that the apparatus arrived from Hatteras Inlet, the apparatus and crew arrived from Ocracoke, the crew in a few minutes arrived from Durants and the unloading of the carts began.

The Lyle gun could not be placed on the beach as it would soon be covered with water, so the shot-line boxes were placed upon one another and the Lyle gun placed upon them, and the first shot was fired for the relief of the stranded crew and passengers consisting of women and children. But owing to a gale of wind blowing right into the mouth of the gun, the charge of powder having to be so heavy, the shotline burned off and the shot went on to sea leaving the line on the beach, this was repeated several times with the same result.

Capt. York, the master of the schooner was every bit a seaman. He soon saw the would-be rescuer's plight and the wind blowing directly on the beach, tied a line to a barrel and set it adrift, and this was going well to aid an early rescue as the barrel was coming with the line directly towards the men on shore but Capt. York had overlooked something. He had a negro seaman who had gone crazy the third day out. The negro saw the barrel drifting with the line and cut it in two, leaving their plight as bad as ever. Then Capt. York would not let a crazy negro beat him, so he got another line, made it fast to a dory and set her adrift.

That little boat was the liveliest thing into the sea one ever seen. Everyone would think the sea was going to get her, but when the roller would pass, the dory would still be on top and when at last she made the shore she only had about three barrels of water aboard.

Now the communication had

made with the ship; the whip line was bent onto the rope from the dory and the crew of the ship soon had hands upon the hawser that was to effect a rescue that would go down into history as being the greatest on the island of Ocracoke, and possibly the Atlantic coast, by beach apparatus operated by Coast Guards.

Capt. York noted the distance of his vessel from shore and knowing the great weight of some of his crew, and passengers, made for the crossstrees with the whip line, and himself with the aid of another big, fat Irishman remained there until the hawser arrived and saw that both was secured safely and properly and everything set for the breeches buoy to be sent off before, he signaled to the shore. Now, with the already tired men, who had on foot helped drag their beach apparatus six miles in waist deep sea tide had to set about dragging women, children and men ashore in a breeches buoy one at a time.

The buoy was sent for its first trip, and the signal was given to haul away, which was promptly executed as everybody wanted to know the name of the ship, where from, where bound, the number of passengers, if any, the number of crew, and all about the wreck in general. Well, the buoy arrived at the beach and the usual designated men assisted the man out and the usual question was asked, How many in crew?

The man replied, "Don't know," "What?" someone asked, "Don't know how many on board?" "Yes," he replied. "How many have you?" He said, "Don't know." So the order was given to "haul away," to send the buoy back and for some one to "watch that man," as they saw something had gone hay-wire with his mind.

Thinking to get the information from the next man ashore, they landed, the signal was soon given from the ship to haul away. The buoy was pulled about half way ashore, and nothing could be seen in it as the ship was over six hundred yards from the beach. It was quite a pull so the buoy was ordered hauled back to the ship for a passenger. This was done and upon its arrival at the ship the signal came to haul away.

When about half-way ashore nothing could be seen into the buoy so it was sent back to the ship the second time, and the signal came back to shore to haul away, which they did, the keepers being all of them old men, and tired from their labors, did not care for any jokes had hauled the buoy on to the shore thinking to find possibly a letter explaining to them why no one had come ashore, went down into the sea as far as possible to meet it, not thinking of children being on a sailing vessel, when a little hand was seen to extend over the side, waving a very cheerful "hello".

They said to her, "Sis, we did

not think any one was in here," she very cheerful-like said:

"Well, you will know it the next time, for my mamma is coming." They did know it the next time, the hawser was tied at the crossstrees and on a vessel the size of the "Wells," put it a great many feet above the water.

When the little girl's mother started her long climb up the rigging, she made it o. k. until she got to the crossstrees. There she got hung and Capt. York had to pull her on through. She weighed about 260 pounds. They landed the lady all right but one thing was in their favor, it was not so cold, yet could enough after being dragged through the water to feel that you could enjoy being near a fire. The next person to be landed was a man with a child about one year old, who could say "daddy" and that was about all.

It was now dark; the wind was still blowing; the sea very high; the life savers still doing their work, nerves all strained; no dinner, no supper, no hot coffee; yet clothes, hands bloody and cut; their bodies wind-beaten.

Finally as they hauled on their ropes, the faint cry of a tiny child saying, "oh, oh, daddy" as the man would release his hand from the child's mouth and nose, after the sea would sweep over them, and it was done for a moment. He did this in order that the tiny child would not swallow any water. It was better for him to smother her for a minute, than the waves for the rest of Eternity. After the man and child had been taken out of the breeches-buoy, the man fainted upon reflecting on his experience but he was soon revived with a stimulant from the medicine chest with which Coast Guard carts are equipped. When this man had been revived, the operation of landing the rest of the crew was again taken up, and after all the passengers including women and very small children

were safely landed and the crew, Capt. Joseph York, the master, crawled into the breeches-buoy, he waved his red lantern and with a final flourish let it drop into the sea.

He had all he could do to take care of himself during the next few minutes, but no sea captain ever stood on the deck of a ship who understood or did more to comfort and to aid the rescue of his passengers and crew than did Capt. Joseph York. In his zeal he no doubt saved many lives. Now that all were on shore, the nearest Coast Guard station, or place of shelter was about six miles to the north but providence was bringing them succor, for the tide was falling, the wind had also dropped to a moderate breeze and the Life-savers not having rested a bit were on the job still.

As soon as the women and children had been landed, the keeper dispatched a man to take them to the Hatteras Inlet Station where they were met by the keeper's wife and the station cook who furnished them dry clothing, warm coffee, and a comfortable place where they

might nurse their bruises, which were many.

The men of the service were soon pulling their equipment back to their respective stations. Headquarters was promptly notified, the cutter Onondaga arrived next day and took all the rescued to Norfolk, except the master and his sister, and children, who remained to salvage their personal belongings from the wreck, which was later sold to a group of wreckers.

In the captain's personal belongings was a Saint Bernard dog, who was taken off the wreck and given to one of the surfmen, Edward Burrus, who is now retired. The dog's name was Jerry.

The crew from Durants assisted the crew from Hatteras Inlet to get their apparatus back to the station and with blistered feet and blood-dripping hands the old life-savers of 1914 went dully about their task of cleaning and stowing the gear in readiness for another rescue which followed a few short months after in which the entire crew was commended by Headquarters including the keeper's wife, who also assisted.

GOOSE SHOOTING CASE IN HYDE CO. COURT

Defendant Freed For Shooting Fowl That Ate His Oats and Beans

The Swan Quarter courthouse was crowded to capacity Monday to hear the case of State vs. Israel Blount tried. Blount was charged with obstructing game wardens in the discharge of their duties, by ordering them off his property. From the evidence presented, Blount was engaged in shooting Canadian geese that were eating his oats and beans, when the wardens swarmed down on him and attempted to take his gun.

J. C. Groce, recorder, ruled that a man had a right to protect his property to the extent of shooting and killing geese that were destroying his crops. And the case was dismissed. His Honor flayed the game wardens and served notice on them that in the future he would uphold any farmer of Hyde County in shooting wild geese that destroy thousands of dollars of crops in the county each year.

And he further said that if the farmer should kill geese destroying

his crops he must leave them on the ground and notify the game wardens to come and bury them, to prevent a menace to the public health. And, if the game wardens failed to do so he himself should be indicted.

At the close of the case order was heard to restore to the court as farmers cheered the decision and congratulated the freed defendant. Go. T. Davis, Hyde County representative, appeared for the defendant.

Pythons generally are sold to zoos by the foot. A 25-foot python sells for about \$40 a foot.

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