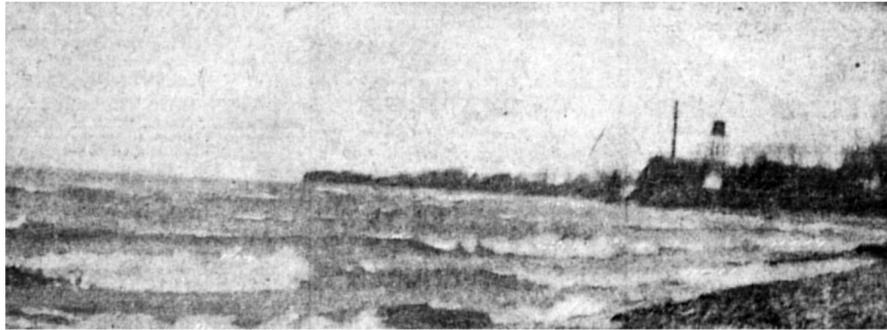


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Schooner Days, MXXVIII (1028)
By C.H.J. Snider

Fall Gales in Prince Edward



Rockbound County shore where the Thomas C. Street came to grief.

NEVER a November comes in rough like this one but Prince Edward county thinks of the wrecks which have strewn its south and western shores.

Fourteen freighters, light or laden with coal or oil or grain or package freight, lay in the lee of the False Ducks and the east coast of the county lately, sheltering from Ontario's fury.

Marshall Spafford of Point Traverse, whose father, Leroy Spafford had the lifeboat seventy years ago, said that in one fall gale he saw sixty schooners sheltering under the Point, Timber Island and the False Ducks. The *Frances Howard* dove into the seas till they washed off her deckload of cordwood and she had to run for Kingston.

At night their riding lights and cabin lamps made South Bay look like a large town. They were wind-bound there for a week, and ran out of provisions. Farmers drove cattle down and slaughtered them on the beach to feed them. The yawlboats came ashore empty and went back to their schooners laden with fore and hind quarters of beef, or whole hogs, cash sales over the counter of beach gravel. You could get beef for 4c a pound in those days.

One gale that will ne'er be forgotten in Prince Edward came in at midnight on the 6th of November, 1880. Andrew Pettingill of Rose Hall told us last week that that Sunday morning, the 7th, he woke to see three masts waving above the tree-tops. He was a little fellow of eight, but he knew something was wrong. No vessel could come that close in to shore. He met Wesley B. Phillips, later with the Trust and Guarantee Co., Toronto, but now dead these twenty years. Young Phillips had seen her first and given the alarm.

By this time a hundred people had forced their way against the raving wind to the beach at Spencer Point. It is an apex of the bombing area now, 2 miles west of Wellington.

There, close in, a great white schooner was in her death agony.

She lay parallel with the rocky shore, pointed east, rolling, twisting, grinding on the rocky

bottom only fifty feet out. One minute you could see all of her, and catch the tremor of her planks, weaving and twisting and spewing oakum. Next a mountainous billow would bury her in a tawny snowdrift. and spray mingled with sand and stones would be hurled in a broadside against the trees 200 yards back of the beach.

The crew of eight were freezing in the rigging. One clawed his way out along the ice covered foreyard. Every stitch of canvas had blown away, and patches of it were plastering trees half a mile inshore. He had a coil of rope over his shoulder, a leadline. From the yardarm, high in the air and twenty feet beyond the vessel's side, he hove the lead as for a dippy cast. It landed far enough up the beach for men to grab it before the next billow broke and surged past them.

With this leadline. and a heaving line with a cedar fender on the end of it, they managed to get a hauser [sic] ashore. and to rig a "whip" or endless line through a stout brace-block. The shore end of the lifeline was made fast around sturdy tree-trunks, but it had to be eased off and hove in again and again to save it from parting with the rolling of the vessel. Breaches-buoys made from the bights of rope were rigged on the lifeline. and one by one eight men rode it ashore. They were wrapped in blankets and hurried to farm houses. Most of them were frozen speechless, more dead than alive, but all recovered.

The captain came last.

"My gold watch is in my desk in the cabin." he gasped through the icicles in his beard. "It's worth \$100. Anyone that wants it can have it. I wouldn't take another \$100 to go back for it."

The vessel was the *Thomas C. Street* of St. Catharines Shickluna-built eleven years before. She was owned by A. M. Smith, Keighley and Baldwin, of Toronto. She was a full canal-sized schooner of 362 tons register, recently back from crossing the Atlantic to London with square timber from the lakes, and then to South America with coal. She had loaded 21,000 bushels of No. 1 wheat at the Northern elevator in Toronto for Kingston. This put her down to 11 feet, so deep she had to wait for the water to rise to get out of the Western Gap.

When the gale struck her at midnight she reeled down, but brand new sails went out of her like so much brown paper. The squaresail and two jibs were lost in quick succession. She had nothing left to steer by but the tight rolled scroll of her close-reefed square foretopsail. This held for awhile. but was not enough sail to give control. The seas were running down the lake faster than the ship and burst aboard, filling her up till they spilled over her rail.

She had bulwarks 3 feet high, capped by a monkey-rail all round, for ocean navigation. This high wall made a tank of her deck. The crew knocked out what bulwarks they could, to let the water gush overboard, but it burst in incessantly. She was in imminent danger of swamping by the bursting at her hatches and scuttles.

Capt. Spencer J. B. Phipps, of Port Dover, was her master. and Capt. Wm. Caradice of St. Catharines her first mate. They tried to get her under the lee of Nicholson Island. but when headed that way she took so much water aboard they knew she would founder. So they hauled

her out into the lake again, to clear Wicked Point, which was beginning to show its red and baleful lighthouse eye. But wind and sea said no, and tossed her sidewise on the beach below Rose Hall.

For all her writhing and twisting she held together until the gale went down. That gale sank, or greatly damaged twenty vessels on Lake Ontario, and drowned thirty sailors. All the teams in the county came alongside the *Thomas C. Street* when the ice formed around her. For weeks they were teaming salvaged grain out of her, as far as Brighton. Much of the cargo was saved but the ship herself was beyond salvaging. The wreck lasted for two years but broke up in another November gale, in 1882 or 1883. It was a great loss, for ship and cargo were worth \$30,000.