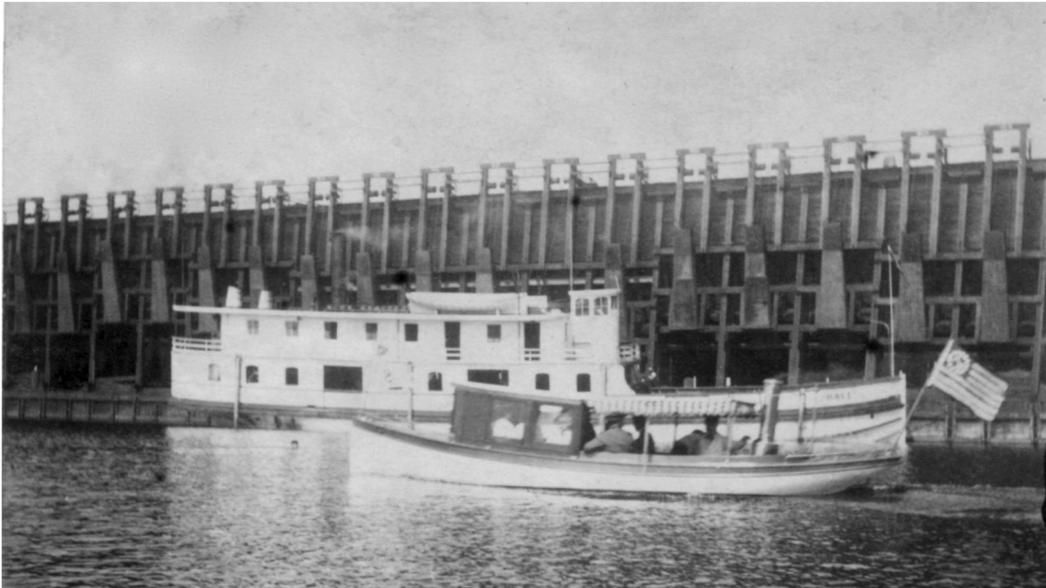


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Schooner Days MCCXV (1215)
By C. H. J. Snider

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE JOHN E. HALL



The steamer John E. Hall (U.S. No. 76790, 139' x 28'6" x 10'9", 343 gross tons, 279 net tons, built at Manitowoc, Wisc., 1889 by Hanson & Scove. Last owned by Thomas Donovan of Oswego. Foundered off Main Duck Island. She is shown behind the steam launch in foreground at the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad trestle in Oswego. Richard Palmer collection.

HALF Prince Edward county, it seemed, poured down the cedar-lined peninsula of Salmon Point, of which Wicked Point is the prong, when wreckage began coming into Little Sandy Bay on Dec. 19, 1902, the long ago year of the Pennsylvania coal strike and Ontario fuel famine.

The steamer *John E. Hall*, and her tow, the ex-schooner *John R. Noyes*, had been missing for five days by then. Ever since that cold still morning when Amos McDonald, keeper of the Wicked Point light, had watched them getting under weigh for Deseronto, after sheltering all night. And now at daylight Amos had sighted a hull of – pounding to staves off the point, and the wreckage was rolling into Little Sandy Bay with the breakers. It was the *Noyes*, he was sure.

NO SURVIVORS?

No survivors were clinging to the wreck. No bodies were to be seen, either floating or on the sand. But pitiful mementos of a missing crew washed in. There were bags and bags of large hickory nuts, which the boys had bought for presents when they were in Toledo up Lake Erie. There was a lady's reticule, with an address inside it. Sarah Jane Mouck found it.

“Uncle Henry” McConnell, veteran lake mariner, started a stampede when he said that every Oswego vessel used to have a \$20 gold piece put in the mortice of the mast step before the foremast was first stepped. That was true, as an old time custom, but Uncle Henry had already scraped the gravel out of the mortice and found nothing. Perhaps because the *Noyes*’ foremast had already been lifted out when she became a barge. Perhaps because the *Noyes* had not been built in Oswego originally.

But everybody piled about the wreck to search when the hint got ‘round, and one man broke a leg between the timbers in retrieving a new pair of pants among clothing that had been left. A great quantity of new ceiling timber was gathered on the beach, part of the *Noyes*’ recent rebuild.

Mrs. Mouck charitably wrote at once to the address in Buffalo which she found in the reticule. Imagine her surprise to get a grateful answer back from the owner, the vessel’s cook, who told her the *Noyes* crew were all alive and safe.

WHAT HAPPENED

They had lost the *Hall*, or she had lost them, in the snowstorm of Dec. 14. After hours of plunging hopelessly at the end of a towline which disappeared in the whiteness, the *Hall*, invisible ahead, had blown four blasts, which meant “Cast off!” It was, also a danger signal, a distress signal. The captain of the *Noyes* obeyed. It was all he could do. His own father was aboard the *Hall* and in command of steamer and tow.

For some time they were near enough to the steamer to hail, and to be heard, but they could not make out what was the trouble. They concluded that she was only able to make headway against the gale without them and they were to look after themselves while she tried for Oswego. She had been trying to tow them across the lake towards that port for shelter, when she found they could not make the Bay of Quinte.

THREE PAIRS OF HANDS

With great difficulty Capt. George Donovan, the mate Jim Ryan, and the one sailor, George Premo, managed to get the one sail left to the *Noyes* set, and she reeled and rolled before the nor’easter all night, making the land west of Pultneyville in the morning, 15 miles below Charlotte.

The three men then let go both anchors, to keep her from driving on shore. She leapt and dove terrifically in the seas, and the anchor chains sawed down her hawsepipe chocks, and began to tear the bows out of her.

Not strong enough to weigh the anchors, the three men slipped the cables and let her fall off. The wind hauled more southerly, so that she did not drive ashore, and she blew out into the lake again. The Charlotte lifesavers started after her, and caught up with her twenty-five miles up the lake. The crew were by this time completely exhausted. The galley had been stove in, the vessel was leaking, and they were beyond pumping.

The lifeboat took off the three men, and the woman cook, Mrs. Ryan, and even saved both the two dogs Capt. Donovan had with him.

SAVED THE DOGS

It was a long pull back to Charlotte, but the lifeboat, a fine power craft, made it before night. The crew left all their belongings in the *Noyes*. The crew left all their belongings in the *Noyes*.

A tug could yet have saved the vessel. The wind had gone round to the westward, and was blowing another gale. But that gallant old schooner, "the best that ever left the trestle" in Oswego, rolled and pitched and lurched all the way back to Wicked Point, where lightkeeper Amos McDonald had watched her towed away a week before. Her sidewise track from where the lifeboat left her to Wicked Point would be about sixty miles. She could not have been leaking very badly, when she was able to float all that distance, with 500 tons of coal in her hold. But Wicked Point, which had given a lee of sorts while the wind was easterly, was just an anvil upon which she was bound to be cracked up by the seas set up by the westerly gale. So she ended, in her 30th season. She was built in Algonac, Mich., in 1872.

The Oswego tug *Charley Ferris*, searching for the *Hall*, a week later, found wreckage of her north of the Main Ducks, east of Prince Edward County, and some more washed in on Stoney Point, on the south shore, on Dec. 20th. Her engine must have given out and her seams opened up in the terrific rolling. She went down in mid lake in deep water.