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## WICKED POINT and the *JESSIE*

WELL nicknamed "Wicked Point," a blunt triangle of sand and limestone projects itself into Lake Ontario from the west face of Prince Edward County.

It is known as Salmon Point on the Government charts, and until recent years it had a white lighthouse on it, sending a red danger warning across the waters every night from sunset to sunrise while the navigation season lasted.



Navigation has changed with the years, and the Dominion Government, ever eager to save a dollar on its lighthouse system, has darkened the light. It may have cost all of \$1,000 a year to keep up that Salmon Point light, and if that much has been saved by its darkening, the Government has that much more to spend on its \$1,000,000 radio commission.

Salmon Point earns its reputation for wickedness by the ugly area of concealed shoals which surround it. In the schooner days it was a really deadly menace, for sailing craft were often forced to fetch in close on the Prince Edward shore when trying to weather Long Point or Point Peter, the extreme southwestern projection of the county, a few miles from "Wicked Point." Salmon Point, to the stranger, presented the appearance of a generous headland which might offer anchorage and shelter in easterly winds. Local navigators knew better than to trust such appearances, and strangers acquired similar wisdom at the price of bitter experience.

Nowadays, when all lake navigation, except yachting and fishing, is done by steamers following compass courses which never take them near Salmon Point, this old Scylla of the Prince Edward County shore is left to gnash her teeth on the bones of long forgotten ships which were her victims in the last century. Ships of the present day give her so wide a berth that the Government does not consider maintaining the light is longer necessary.

The last lightkeeper was Amos McDonald of Woodrour, now [warden of the county]. He spent twelve years and a month at Salmon Point light, from 1897 to 1909, but he knew the point and all its wickednesses from boyhood. The most dramatic feature of the Mariner's Service at Cherry Valley a fortnight ago, when Prince Edward County bade farewell to its sons who were

going forth to their ships for the season, was Warden McDonald's talk on some of his memories of the old "Wicked Point," in schooner days.

Early in the 1860's came the earliest wreck he remembered, that of the schooner *International*, of Chicago. A stranger on Lake Ontario, she was bound down to Kingston with corn, and fetched in on Salmon Point in a gale, foundering on the west reef. Three of her crew were drowned.

The warden next recalled how, on the 23rd of October, 1870, another stranger, the *Jessie* of Port Stanley, on Lake Erie, was trapped on Wicked Point.

"She came into Little Sandy Bay, near the point, in the afternoon. She was a fore-and-aft schooner, loaded deep with thirteen thousand bushels for the foot of the lake. Those who saw her wondered how she got into the bay without striking on the bar, but she just cleared it by chance.

"What she was doing there at all we never knew. There was a wharf and storehouses in the bay, and barley used to be shipped out of it, but she seemed to be fully loaded and did not go to the pier. Instead she hauled down her jibs and came to anchor, with her lower sails standing. The wind had been light, from the south-south-east, and perhaps she decided to wait for a shift so as to let her clear Long Point or Point Peter. No one ever came ashore alive from her, so God alone knows what happened.

"Next day the wind did shift and came roaring in from the south-west. In all my years afterwards, tending the light, I never saw such a gale. It piled up seas like houses.

"The schooner tried to get out and failed. Probably she never got away from her anchors. She drove right in on the point, and the seas burst over her as though she had been a reef. She was quite close in, so close we could have talked to her crew from the shore, had it not been for that raving wind.

"We saw four men and a woman clinging to the mainboom, the highest part above water. We could not hear what they said, but they waved to us again and again for help. The brave farmers and fishermen launched their sturdy boats and tried time and again to get out to the wreck. They would only get to where the storm waves met the back-wash from the shore, and then the pyramids of white water would toss their boats to heaven and throw them over backwards, and they would all be spilled back on the beach.

"One man on board decided to try to swim for the shore. He was young, tall and very powerful. He made careful preparations for his battle. He was so close that I could see the color of his hair as he prepared for the plunge.

"I can see him yet, as in a nightmare. He climbed up on the rail and noted carefully the eddies the bursting seas made around the schooner, like a whirlpool. Then, watching his chance, he ran along the rail, and jumped clear. I watched him come up, and saw him rise from the water and shake the water out of his hair.

“He was a strong swimmer, and he struck out parallel with the beach, so as to take the best chance with the undertow. Hundreds were watching him, encouraging him, and running along the beach to where they thought he could make a landing.

“Twice he came in so close that he could stand up on the bar with the seas only as high as his waist. Twice he was swept out again by the undertow, before those on shore could grasp him.

“By this time the surf was full of tossing planks and whirling timbers, torn from the wreck. Every time he made a try for the shore the backwash would hurl a piece of wreckage at him. He was for hours fighting for his life. At last, weakened by his struggle, he failed to dodge a piece of the schooner’s rail, launched at him by an enormous sea. It struck him on the head, and he disappeared, sucked lakeward by the undertow.

“We found his body afterwards; and he was the only one, living or dead, who came ashore from the *Jessie* of Port Stanley.”

Records in the oldest marine registers extant – the Dominion Government one only goes back to 1873 – show that the *Jessie* was built at Port Robinson on the Welland Canal by that well known shipwright, Louis Shickluna, in the winter of 1854-5. She appears in the Globe’s register of 1856 as of 200 tons, and then owned in St. Catharines; confirmed by Thomas’ Register, 1864, as owned by P. Larkin, St. Catharines, and 312 tons measurement probably by the “old” American method, which made for larger tonnage. The earliest Dominion register carries her name although it was published three years after her wreck. This gives Port Robinson as her place of building and her dimensions, 121 ft. 6 inches length, 23 feet beam, and 10 feet depth of hold, 250 tons. As often happened the place of building was not the port of hail, and she appears to have been registered in Port Stanley, where she was owned in her later years. There was another *Jessie* on Lake Ontario trading into Port Whitby, in 1848. but beyond the fact that she was a smaller vessel no particulars are known of her.