

## The Waterwitch

The Waterwitch had left St. John's for Cupids. She was a British built schooner constructed in Trinity Bay, Nfld. in 1869. She had one deck, two masts, a length stem to stern of sixty-nine feet, a main breadth of nineteen feet two inches, a gross tonnage of 62.30 and a net tonnage of 60.54. Charles Bowring, a merchant of St. John's was the owner of the vessel which was registered December 18, 1869 with the official number 59008.

The ship struck in the area of November 29, 1875. There were twenty-five persons on board, and of these, twelve, eight men and four women, went down with the vessel. The following letter from the Rev. Reginald Johnson, Church of England Minister of Pouch Cove, shows how the survivors of the Waterwitch escaped.

Parsonage, Pouch Cove, November 30, 1875

To the Editor of the Times

Dear Sir: We had a frightful wreck here last night. The schooner Waterwitch fip, St. John's to and belonging to Cupids, in the Bay, total loss. There were twenty-five souls on board out of which we saved only thirteen. I was on the spot soon after the terrible news reached the houses, and helped to haul up the survivors. Every man was hauled up fast to about one hundred fathoms of line, as the wreck could not be approached. We could hear their cries all night below us. It was frightful, the people here behaved nobly. Apply to Mrs. Bowering for a trustworthy list, which I have forwarded them, of lost and saved. Will probably write to you again.

In much hast and much trouble,

Yours truly,

REGINALD M. JOHNSON

P.S. Skipper's name, Samuel Spracklin - saved

LOST: Moses Spracklin, Johnathon Spracklin, William Spracklin, Elizabeth Spracklin, Amelia Spracklin, Priscella Spracklin, Thomas Spracklin, Samuel Wells, Elias Ford, George Iveny, Solomon Taylor and Joanna Croke.

SAVED Samuel Spracklin, Henry W. Spracklin, Samuel P. Spracklin, Thomas Spracklin, William W. Spracklin, Thomas Iveny, Henry Iveny, Samuel Rowe, Thomas Nosery (Noseworthy), William Wells, George Wells, James H. Wells and Richard Ford.

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The Rev. Mr. Johnson wrote to the Government also informing them of the casualty, and early on Wednesday morning sleighs were dispatched to Pouch Cove, taking down Mr. Lilly, Clerk of the Peace, with Mr. Dunphy of the Poor Office, to do all that the exigency demanded. In the evening accordingly the thirteen survivors were brought on here, and at the same time seven bodies of the dead that were also recovered. The living were cared for at lodgings, and the dead, being sent to Cupids at the desire of the survivors, by the steamer Cabot today.

We need hardly say, a feeling of the deepest sympathy has been aroused in every breast by those dreadful losses, and we trust the proverbial charity of our community will be extended to those whose claims now present so forcible an appeal.

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The following additional particulars relating to the wreck of the Waterwitch and the rescue of the survivors, have been furnished to the Public Ledger by a Correspondent:

At a late hour on Monday night last, a man named Langmead, living at the extreme north of the village of Pouch Cove, was aroused by shouts from some persons near his house. Lighting a lamp, and partially dressing himself, he opened the door and discovered three men, wet and well-high exhausted, who proved to be the Captain and two of the crew of the fore-and-after *Waterwitch*, of *Cupids*. He soon learned from them the sad news that their vessel had gone ashore in an adjacent cove, that a number of the crew had perished, but some were still clinging to the rocks. Getting the half-dead men into the house, and seeing them comfortably disposed, Langmead immediately started up the settlement rousing the inmates of the various houses as he went along, and telling them what had happened. It was not long before most of the persons on the north side of Pouch Cove, were up and many prepared to start, some by boat and others by land, for the scene of the disaster. This is a deep and narrow inlet or gulch about a mile and a half to the northwest of Pouch Cove, well called the "Horrid Gulch". In it the water is deep right to the foot of the shore, which is very steep. On the north side and at the "bight" of the gulch the rocks run up almost perpendicularly to the height of six hundred feet, as against them the sea dashes with tremendous force. On the north side they are somewhat less precipitous, and a narrow ledge runs close to the water's edge. On this ledge it was that the captain, his son, and two other men jumped, the others who were saved being on the other side in a position that I shall presently describe. Immediately opposite the ledge I have mentioned a peaked shelving rock rises, evidently broken off from, and close to the perpendicular cliff.

The first party of rescuers started from the village about one in the morning, and reached the spot where the captain and his party had landed, and where he had left his son to keep in good heart the poor creatures on the other side of the gulch. Arrived there they could hear, through the darkness and drift, the screams of those so near them, whom they were so powerless to help; and would soon be afforded them. The names of the men composing this family are Robert Moulton, Thomas Noseworthy and Adam Noseworthy.



Meanwhile, other parties had reached the top of the cliffs on the other side and were endeavouring to devise plans for the rescue of those below. The only way possible was by lowering a man over the cliff by a rope, for by that means alone could the position of the shipwrecked men be known. A worthy man named Alfred Moores volunteered for this dangerous service, and accordingly a strong rope was fastened around him and he was lowered over the precipice. Three times was the brave fellow swung in the dark, but he was lowered, and half swinging, half sliding, along a steep "shoot" or crevasse in the rock, he succeeded in reaching a ledge immediately over the spot where the cries proceeded. Guided and supported by his rope other brave fellows now followed him, and took up positions between him and the top of the cliff, so as to be in readiness to help. The names of these were: David Baldwin, Eli Langmead, William Noseworthy and Christopher Mundy. At the top, with the end of the rope hitched around the three, was William Langmead. Others who helped were Rev. R. Johnson, Mr. James Langmead, Uriah Langmead, James Langmead, Jr., William Ryan, William Gould, Nathaniel Williams and John Sullivan. To get any idea of the luck of these men you must picture to yourself their position on the bleak hillside in the darkness and cold, clinging for dear life to a rope, the length of which from top to where Alfred Moores stood with the end around his body was 85 fathoms.

How to reach the poor men was the question. Away down below him 20 fathoms further, on the small jutting rock which I have described, Moores could now make them out through the grey dawn - eight poor creatures huddled as closely together as they would like, and clinging with all the power they possessed. Twice he threw down a hand-rope he had with him, and twice he had to haul it back. "In the name of God" he makes a third cast, and this time is successful, it had caught. A strong rope is handed down, made fast around the body of one of the men, and he is hauled up to where Moores stands. There this rope is untied, and helped along by those on the crevasse and supporting himself by the rope which supports them, he reaches the top, while the rope which hauled him up goes down for another. In this way all reach the top in safety and the skill and the courage of their rescuers is reward by success. But these are not all the survivors, for, on a ledge by himself, is

crouched a poor young fellow, who has been left til the last because supposed to be in the least danger. There, alone, some hundreds of feet from his companions, he has clung through the terrible night, half-dressed, hatless and with but one boot on. A rope is now flung to him; he has just strength left to fasten it around him and he, too, is safe. Soon all are in Pouch Cove, and cared for with the utmost kindness.

#### A SURVIVOR'S STORY

From one of the men rescued from the rock I obtained today the particulars: *"My name is George Thomas Noseworthy. When the vessel came into the gulch, and her quarter neared the rock, Henry Iveny and I jumped on it. The vessel then went out again and I think about 20 minutes after (though it may not have been so long) she came close again, and William Wells, Thomas Iveny, Samuel Rowe, William Spracklin and Thomas Spracklin jumped safely. We were not there very long before the craft smashed up. We heard no shrieks from those on board. All night it was thick, with the exception of about one hour, when it cleared, but it soon got showery again. We knew the skipper and some others were on the other side. We shouted and they shouted to us. We heard them say they could climb the cliffs if it was day, and begged them to try it once. When the help came we knew it for we heard the strange voices. We kept shouting all night. The spray dashed out over us. I was almost gone once. We had to...."*

All day yesterday the men were busy with their jiggers at the scene of the rescue, and got up a quantity of clothes and other articles. Up til last night, however, only one body was fished up - that of a young woman half dressed, which was identified as the body of the wife of Percy Spracklin., son of the captain and one of the survivors. Today six other bodies have been found and identified as follows:

Marlenah Spracklin

Johnathon Spracklin

Solomon Taylor

Elias Ford

George Iveny

Richard Webber



The spot where we were may be described as a trench probably not more than thirty or forty degrees of the perpendicular and some eighty or ninety fathoms deep, leading down to but not reaching by some ten to fifteen fathoms the rock on which the poor castaways were congregated. Our plan of operation then was to lower or lay down throughout the whole length of the trench one large rope as the backbone, if I may so express myself, or mainstay our future proceedings. Down this rope and fast to the far end of it proceeded and stood Alfred Moores, with a smaller hand line to connect with the rock below, whilst as those above could not see or hear distinctly what was going on below at intervals, down the trench and holding on to what I have termed the backbone rope stood to pass up directions, William Noseworthy, David Baldwin, Eli Langmead, William Ryan, Nathaniel Williams, Christopher Mundy, and Uriah Langmead. Then parallel with the main rope down the trench we passed a second line reaching as far as the end of the trench and to this the men were fastened and by this holding on, were able to assist themselves and were brought up to where the hauling party stood ready to receive them and furnish them first with some brandy and then with guides and assistants to the settlement. This hauling party consisted of John Sullivan, William Langmead, William Gould, James Langmead, James Langmead, Jr., William Ryan, Sr., Thomas Bassett and myself. Some however, had to leave us to help men through the woods.

It was thus eight poor shivering creatures were rescued from a watery grave. Another poor suffering man or woman (we did not know which) had yet to be saved and to do this the scene of operation had to be shifted. As before, Alfred Moores proceeded to the edge of the cliff secured by a rope and directed by the others from the north side of the gulch (for the lad could not be seen where we were) succeeded in dropping the end of the other line to where the lad lay. It was made fast. Many willing hands soon hauled him up to the top and he was carried (for he could not walk) to the house and the work of salvation was completed. The next care was to, if possible, recover the bodies. The Captain of the vessel left all in my hands. I secured the Wesleyan School room as the most fitting place for the dead. The first corpse was that of Elizabeth Spracklin and others were soon brought on shore.

Great kindness and sympathy have been extended towards the shipwrecked men. So far as means would allow, the people of the place have vied with one another in making them comfortable. Care is being taken, too, that the property picked up shall be fairly dealt with under the supervision of the Episcopal and Methodist Ministers, and the Roman Catholic schoolmaster. The articles, so far, have been collected, and entered in a book, with the names of the respective finders. Much credit is due to the Rev. R.M. Johnson for his forethought and promptness in dispatching news of the sad disaster to St. John's and for the kindness and zeal he displayed in caring for the persons and property of both the living and the dead.

In conclusion, Sir, I think you and your readers coincide with me in the belief that some substantial expression of the public appreciation of the human and courageous act which I have attempted to describe should be afforded the gallant fellows who hazarded their lives in accomplishing it; such acts, unfortunately, being in Newfoundland after done then rewarded.

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Another letter was written by the Rev. R. Johnson to the Hon. Colonial Secretary following the shipwreck on December 6, 1875.

The Parsonage, Pouch Cove, Dec. 6, 1875

To the Hon. Colonial Secretary,

Tiding of the wreck reached the parsonage soon after three in the morning of the fateful night. I started with Mr. John Sullivan, who had kindly and thoughtfully called me up. We reached the scene of the disaster about half past four in the morning guided and accompanied by Mr. James Langmead, William Ryan, William Gould, William Langmead, Eli Langmead, David Baldwin, Christopher Mundy, Uriah Langmead, William Noseworthy, Alfred Moores, Nathaniel Williams, James Langmead, Jr. and Thomas Bassett and at once set about devising means of rescuing the unhappy beings below, those cries we could hear plainly.



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Next morning accompanied by Mr. John Sullivan I started for the wreck, three more bodies were recovered, coffins were ordered, clothing was all brought to the schoolhouse. At 4:00 the next morning I locked the door of an empty schoolhouse the last recovered having left for St. John's.

The Captain's portmanteau said to contain a large sum of money was recovered. Next day four more bodies were recovered.

It is a matter of congratulations to me that no claim (unless for coffins and conveyance to town) has been made against the government. While the living were receiving the utmost kindness and attention in the houses, the search for their lost friends was proceeding with the greatest zeal. Large amounts of clothing having been recovered and forwarded with the survivors and I do think at this moment that there remains in Pouch Cove one article belonging to the wreck, kept back.

One body is still unfound and much good still beneath the water. Much credit is due to Police Constable Spracklin in whom I found efficient aid and I have commended him to the kindly consideration of his superior Officer.

Faithfully,

Reginald M. Johnson.