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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### Wreck Provides Interesting Story

By NEIL A. MATHESON

AN INTERESTING story came to me this month concerning the wrecking of the Sovinto back in 1906, and the attempts made to rescue seamen who were endangered on the wreck. There was also loss of life. The Patriot of November 29 of that year called it deplorable.

The four-masted barque, Sovinto of 1,615 tons left Ireland on September 1 for Campbellton, N.B., to load spruce deal for Melbourne, Australia.

Arriving at Campbellton on October 11 - they had nothing but bad weather and storms all the way and had lost some of her sails, her captain said – the Sovinto took on 1.5 million feet of deal.

The Captain said he could not say if he had some premonition of disaster but he did something he had never done before – he insured the freight for 1,240 pounds sterling and wired home to that effect.

They left Campbellton on Friday, November 2, stopped at Dalhousie which they left on Sunday morning. That evening they were eight miles from Miscou Point light. The sea was running heavily with the wind blowing strongly from the North.

### Storm Became Worse

SHORTLY AFTER eight the main upper topsail was blown away. Shortening sail they took down the fore upper topsail only to have the wind blow it away before it could be secured.

The mizzen upper topsail was furled. The jib and fore topmast staysail were blown to pieces. A little later the Cathead (it held the anchor secure at the bow) had broken loose and the starboard anchor was threatening to hole the ship. But the waves were breaking over the bow so heavily there was no chance to reach the anchor.

A great portion of the cargo of deal had shifted and were now almost on our beam ends, the captain reported.

The weather was thick, the wind increasing to a gale and the sea running high. The Sovinto now had only three lower topsails, one of which, the fore lower topsail, had started to give way.

### Before The Wind

THE CAPTAIN explained later that he had been afraid to put his craft on the starboard tack, for fear the anchor would hole her so he let her run before the wind, until they could get the anchor secured. They were also trying to clear some of the deck load (of deal) to get the braces cleared from the deck load.

Thinking he was near the Magdalene Islands and fearing he might run into them, he put her on the starboard tack. But the wind was blowing a hurricane – it was Nor-nor-east.

The perilous journey continued through most of Tuesday, November 6. That afternoon the captain gave each man a lifebelt – he was sounding regularly and found water depths of 29 fathoms at four p.m., of 28 fathoms at six o'clock. At eight o'clock that night, a sounding of 27 fathoms caused the captain to reckon "we would be clear of East Point".

### Ship Strikes Heavily

AN HOUR later the lookout man reported breakers – soundings revealed only seven fathoms. The captain ordered "let go both anchors" but the ship had struck heavily on the rocky bottom before the anchors could take hold.

Through Wednesday forenoon, strong and experienced seamen waited their chance to go out and rescue the men remaining on the wreck. Finally the seventeen crewmembers on the after portion of what had been the *Sovinto* got into their only remaining lifeboat and prepared to launch it – two men were at the davits to cut the boat free.

But calamity struck quickly. As soon as the boat touched the water, she was struck by three huge combers and she swamped. The men were tossed into the angry sea.

Some of the men started to swim ashore, some grabbed pieces of plank and tried to ride them to the shore.

### Casualties Were Heavy

ONE MAN DIED 100 yards from the wreck, one got within an estimated 20 feet from the shore when watchers saw his head disappear beneath the pieces of deal that were swirling around in angry water.

The steward and the cook were killed 400 yards east of the wreck – they were carried that far by the strong current. Three others were drowned near the ship, three got back on the ship, two remained on the stern, two others joined the three men on the forward section.

Some reached shore and were hauled in by the eager men on shore. The number is not discernible on the old, yellowed broken paper.

The Westerly current swept the living and the dead men to the eastward. Those on shore ran along the coast with ropes in hands, trying to drag to safety men who were washed close enough to shore, so they could catch at clothing, hands or any other part of them that would help in the grim fight for life.

"It was an agonizing spectacle", the old paper said, "to watch men drown when they were so close to shore, but the jagged rocks in the surf sometimes accomplished what the angry waves had failed to do."

One man on a plank was about three yards from shore, the story said, when he became exhausted and was swept to his death by the merciless undertow.

### Lifeboat Smashed

THE CREW was about to put the port lifeboat over the side when it was smashed by a heavy sea and carried away – all hands went immediately to the starboard lifeboat,

but by that time the ship had swung around broadside to the sea and listed heavily to port, so it was impossible to launch the lifeboat.

The captain and crew, finding the starboard cabins high and dry, spent the night in them. Four crew members were missing when the roll was called.

One of the men had been knocked overboard when the ship struck and he was able to swim to shore. Joseph Rose, a farmer at Priest Pond – his house was one-half mile from the shore – was awakened suddenly when a heavy body fell across the bed in which he and Mrs. Rose were sleeping.

Striking a light they saw a tall youth, in mud-covered oilskins who spoke in an unknown tongue. By signs, though, he indicated there had been a wreck, that there were 20 crew members on board.

Rescue efforts were inaugurated in the darkness of the night, though there was little the people on shore could do to help the men who were only several hundred yards away.

Daybreak revealed that the *Sovinto* had grounded on Carew's Reef, the most dangerous point on the coast. Had she struck a mere 50 yards farther east all the crewmen might well have been saved.

The bow had been twisted off her, and the severed hull was pointing to shore, with the stern pointing far out to sea. A great deal of wreckage, and some of the ship's supplies were washed ashore.

On Thursday noon two young men, Duncan Campbell, Campbell's Cove and Austin Grady, East Baltic rowed a boat out to the wreck and rescued two men who were still clinging to the afterpart of the ship. They made strenuous efforts to throw a line to the one man still clinging to the forward portion, but could not make it.

Finally the man, Kumlander, 22, seized a large plank and with it under him, leaped into the sea. This time the story was better as Kumlander managed to get ashore.

### Goose Showed The Way

THERE ARE various stories told as to how he managed it, but I like this one told me by a Charlottetown man who is a longtime acquaintance.

The story is that a farmer's goose had swum out to the forward part of the wreckage and that this man followed the goose's route as she returned, and in that way reached shore and thus escaped death from the pieces of lumber that had killed many others.

Well meaning veterans ashore had been waving their arms and shouting for him to take another route. Had he done so, he could have been killed, my friend tells me.

This is the first time I have heard this version of that old story, but I present it here as an interesting sidelight on a story that had little of interest save the death, destruction, hardship, suffering, anguish and loss.

