

This past winter as I was walking along the beach with my hat pulled down over my ears and my collar turned up against the chilling wind I was surprised to spy a quantity of onions, apples, cabbages and assorted other fruits and vegetables scattered along the high tide line. I never did find out exactly where this flotsam came from, though it probably was originally in a container that was washed off the deck of a passing freighter. I gathered a few onions and as many apples as I could carry. They were fresh and tasty.

In days gone by the unfortunate fate of sailing schooners that ventured too near our coast was also the cause for the occasional and unexpected delivery of lumber, food, livestock and all manner of other goods to our island.

My father recalls a ship laden with bananas that wrecked on the beach when he was a small child. By his account, everyone on the island had baskets, boxes and sacks filled with bananas, a fruit that normally was scarce in this isolated village. He also recalls stories of the time a schooner loaded with silk top hats ran aground and broke up in the surf. I can only imagine the scene—men, women and barefoot children traipsing around the narrow sand lanes from house to house showing off their new headwear. Sunday morning church services were very likely a sight to behold.

Not all that many years ago, in the mid 1970's, crates of shoes bound for Jim Jones' ill-fated compound in Guyana washed ashore. Frequently, in the days following, conversations along the road or in the Post Office were focused on trading shoes in the hopes of locating a complete pair that not only matched, but suited one's tastes.

My great-grandfather, James Howard, was the keeper of the Life Saving Station at Hatteras Inlet at the turn of the twentieth century.

Keeper James Howard:



Recently I discovered the following, unattributed account of the wreck of the "Pioneer." Although Keeper Howard features prominently in the story and the date is given as August, 1920, my great-grandfather died in 1904. I am certain this account actually refers to the wreck of the wooden steamer "Pioneer" hailing from Philadelphia which, according to

official records, "wrecked on Ocracoke Beach, 15 miles SW of station, about 5 hundred yards from land. Sunk -went all to pieces....all saved....Vessel total lost....about 5% of cargo saved." This was on October 14, 1889.

The wreck of the Pioneer:

"It was like manna from heaven when the vessel 'Pioneer,' a heavily loaded wooden freight steamer, was wrecked off Ocracoke in a violent storm back in August, 1920 [actually, October 14, 1889]. Everything from Bibles to cabbages floated ashore. Hams, bananas, barrels of flour, casks of alcohol, bladders filled with snuff and a great deal of canned food came into the Island, which was flooded by the tide, and everywhere folks were knee-deep in water sweeping up valuable debris as things washed by them.

One old fellow threw away his old shoes when he spied a new pair drifting toward him, only to find the new ones were both for the same foot. One woman gathered up enough bladders of snuff to fill a barrel which she proudly kept upstairs in her house for all to marvel at. She happily contemplated a future with a plenteous supply of snuff.

The entire crew of the 'Pioneer' was saved, and they joined the islanders in rescuing the cargo. 'Come on over to my house-there's plenty to eat' was the cry of the generous native to any stranger around, for the wrecked cargo had yielded more than enough to supply the island with a day's rations.

The late Theodore S. Meekins, prominent Manteo real estate and insurance man, saw the wreck of the 'Pioneer' and remembered these incidents concerning it. He believed the 'Pioneer' was the last wooden steam vessel seen in these parts, and when it hit it went into pieces and sank almost immediately. The ship struck during the daytime and was plainly visible from the shore. The observers on shore could see the boat break into pieces and disappear into a raging sea.

Mr. Meekins recalled the auction held in connection with that part of the cargo not taken by the natives during the storm. There were only two magistrates on Ocracoke and both were fighting each other for the privilege of selling the cargo. A 50-gallon container of alcohol to be auctioned off had been considerably decreased by the frequent visits of natives down to take a little drink or two.

Finally, a few days before the auction, Captain Jim Howard stopped them by planting himself firmly on top of the barrel and guarding it with his life. When the barrel was brought up for sale at the auction Captain Jim was astride it, and he was sold with the

barrel. He bought it himself for five dollars.

So keen was the auction that one barrel of flour brought six dollars. And after the sale the strangers who had come down to Ocracoke for the auction were treated grandly by the natives before time to depart."

Be sure to stop by Village Craftsmen and say hello next time you are visiting the island. You can see Keeper Howard's photo inside the shop along with a brief Howard family history.

Until next time, we wish you a fun and enjoyable summer vacation no matter where you spend it.

Philip and the entire staff at Village Craftsmen