

Following is Part II of the gripping & dramatic story of a 19th century tragedy, one of the greatest sea disasters in the history of the North Carolina coast, as told by Walter Howard, Ocracoke native, in 1952.

The story is related in two parts.

THE WRECK OF THE "STEAMBOAT HOME," 1837

by Walter Howard

Summary of Part One: (Old "Kade" Williams tells how, in October of 1837, a survivor of the wreck of the steamboat "Home," relates the tragic tale of a violent storm at sea. The "Home" springs a leak and all efforts to bail the water from the hold are ineffective. The captain steers toward Ocracoke's beach but runs aground on the outer breakers. The most harrowing part of the tale commences as lifeboats are dashed to pieces when passengers and crew attempt to save themselves from the powerful waves. The survivor, Mr. Hussy, continues his story.)

Part Two

Death Rode the Waves

"A slight agitation was, however, apparent in the general circle. Some few hurried from one part of the boat to another seeking a place of greater safety. Yet most, and particularly those who had the charge of wives and children, remained quiet and calm observers of the scene before them. The boat, at length strikes-it stops-and is as motionless as a bar of lead. A momentary pause follows as if the angel of death shrunk from so dreadful a work of slaughter. But soon the work of destruction commenced. A breaker with a deafening crash swept over the boat carrying its unfortunate victims into the deep. At the same time a simultaneous rush was made towards the bow of the boat. The forward deck was covered. Another breaker came with irresistible force and all within its sweep disappeared. Our number was now frightfully reduced. The roaring of the waters, together with the dreadful crash of breaking timbers, surpassed the power of description.

"Some of the remaining passengers sought shelter from the encroaching dangers by retreating to the passage on the lee side of the boat that led from the after to the forward decks, as if to be as far as possible from the grasp of death.

"The destruction of the boat and loss of life was doubtless much more rapid than it

otherwise would have been from the circumstance of the boat keeling to windward and the deck, which was nearly level with the water, forming an inclined plane upon which the waves broke with their full force. A large portion of those who rushed into this passage were ladies and children with a few gentlemen who had charge of them. The crowd was so dense that many were in danger of being crushed by the irresistible pressure. This passage contained perhaps thirty or more persons consisting of men, women and children with no apparent possibility of escape. Enclosed within a narrow aperture over which was the deck, and both ends of which were completely closed by the fragments of the boat and the rushing of the waves. While thus shut up, death appeared inevitable.

"Already both decks were swept of everything that was on them. The dining cabin was entirely gone and everything belonging to the quarter deck was completely stripped away, leaving not even a stanchion or particle of the bulwarks. All this was the work of about five minutes."

Paddlewheel House Quickly Demolished

"The starboard wheelhouse, and everything about it, were soon entirely demolished. As so much of the ceiling forward of the starboard wheel had fallen during the day from its place, the waves soon found their way through all that remained to oppose them and were a few minutes time forcing deluges into the last retreat of those who had taken shelter in the passage already mentioned. Every wave made a frightful encroachment on our narrow limits and seemed to threaten us with immediate death. Hopeless as the condition of those thus hemmed in, yet still no a shriek was heard from them. One lady begged earnestly for someone to save her. In time of such alarm it is not strange that a helpless female should plead with earnestness for assistance from those who were about her.

"Another scene witnessed at this trying hour was still more painful. A little boy, the son of Hardy B. Croom of New Bern, N.C., was pleading with his father to save him but the unhappy father was too deeply absorbed in the other charges that rested upon him even to notice the imploring child. For at that time, as near as I could see from the darkness of the place, his wife hung upon one arm and his daughter of seventeen upon the other. He had one daughter besides, near the age of this little boy, but whether she had been washed overboard at that time I am not certain.

"After remaining here some minutes the deck overhead was split open by the violence of the waves which allowed me an opportunity of climbing out. This I instantly did and assisted my wife through the same opening. As I had now left those below, I am unable to say how they were lost as that part of the boat was very soon completely destroyed. Their further

sufferings could not have been much more prolonged."

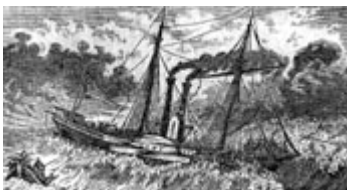
A Scene of Terror

"We were now in a situation which, from the time the boat struck, we had considered as the most safe and had endeavored to attain. Here we resolved to await our uncertain fate. From this place we could see the encroachment of the devouring waves, everyone of which reduced our thinned numbers and swept with it parts of our crumbling boat. For several hours previous the gale had been sensibly abating. For a moment the pale moon broke through the dispersing clouds as if to witness this scene of terror and destruction and to show the horror-stricken victims the fate that awaited them.

"While the moon yet shone, three men were seen to rush from the middle to the stern of the boat. A wave came rushing on. It passed over the deck and only one of the three was left. He had barely time to reach a large timber to which he clung when this wave struck him—and he too was missing. As the wave passed away the head of two of these men were seen above the water but they appeared to make no effort to swim. The probability is that the violence with which they were hurled into the sea disabled them. They sank to rise no more.

"During this time, Mr. Lovegreen of Charleston continued to ring the ship's bell which added to the gloom. It sounded like a funeral knell over the departed dead. Never before perhaps was a bell tolled at such a funeral as this."

The Wreck of the Steamboat Home:



Afloat on a Raft

"While in this situation and reflecting on the necessity of being always prepared for the realities of eternity, our attention was arrested by the appearance of a lady climbing up on the outside of the boat abaft the wheel near where we were. Her head was barely above the deck on which we stood and she was holding to it in a most perilous manner. She implored help. I ran to her aid but was unable to raise her to the deck. Mr. Woodburn of New York now came and with his assistance the lady was rescued. She was then lashed to a large piece of timber by the side of another lady. The former lady, Mrs. Shroeder, was washed

ashore on this piece of wreckage beside me. I had previously relinquished my place on the piece of wreckage and was compelled to get on a larger piece of the boat that lay near. This was almost immediately driven from its place into the breakers which instantly swept me from it and plunged me deep into the water. With some difficulty I gained the raft and continued to cling to this fragment as well as I could but was repeatedly washed from it, sometimes plunging deep into the water and coming up under it. After encountering all the difficulties that seemed possible to be borne, I was, at length, thrown on shore in an exhausted condition.

"At the time I was driven from the boat there were but few left. Of these four washed ashore with me were Mrs. Shroeder and Mrs. Lovegreen of Charleston, Mr. Cohen of Columbia, S.C. and Mr. Vanderace of New York. On reaching the beach there was no appearance of inhabitants but after wandering some distance I saw your light and followed it. I left the four I have mentioned sitting on the beach while I came to look for help."

And thus Mr. Hussy finished his story.

"While this man was telling his story", Kade continued, "someone in my family sneaked out of the house and gave the alarm that a steamer was ashore. It wasn't very long before everybody knew about it and the whole population of the Island (about 300 people) turned out. Men began to run by with lanterns and torches, screaming 'Wreck on the beach' and 'Vessel ashore'.

"All the men folk went down to the wreck that night. It happened about five miles up the beach at a spot called the 'Hammock.' As soon as the men arrived at the scene they started to pull the drowned from the water. My father said that the last thing he found was a drowned child, the same as he had seen in his dream that very night.

"The following day was a sad day for this Island as well as for the survivors. The menfolk had worked from four o'clock that morning until sundown. Every piece of canvas was used to sew up the dead in for burial, as well as all the bed quilts that were donated by the people here on the Island. Most of the dead could not be identified and were buried just as they had been washed ashore with their clothing and jewelry on. Their hands had swollen so it was impossible to get the rings and bracelets off. Diamonds, pearl necklaces and jewelry of all descriptions were buried with the bodies and still remain in the sand until this day."

"These earrings," Kade said, pointing with pride to her ears with the end of her toothbrush, "were taken from the body of one of the ladies who had washed up on the beach. My mother had a complete outfit salvaged from an old trunk on the boat. It was the prettiest

thing I had ever seen. The owner must have been a very wealthy lady. My mother never would wear it. She hung it upstairs where she could look at it now and then until it rotted away."

Having now finished her story, Kade removed the toothbrush from her mouth, fired one parting shot at the spittoon, toddled over to the window, looked out into the darkness and said in a voice almost inaudible, "God help the sailors on a night like this."