

Thrilling Rescue At Sea Recalled

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Thrilling Rescue at Sea Recalled Aged Antigonish Sea Captain Has Coveted Reminder of Adventure

Captain A. MacDonald, Aged 94, was master of Brigantine which rescued the crew of the Coronet in 1881 – was presented with a silver teapot by Queen Victoria.

Antigonish, July 14 – Presented by Her Majesty's Government to Captain A. MacDonald, of the brigantine "Trust" of Maitland, N.S., in acknowledgment of his humanity and kindness to the ship-wrecked crew of the ship "Coronet", of Liverpool, which was abandoned at sea in Nov. 1881.

On a solid silver teapot with an ebony handle, the property of Captain Angus MacDonald, of Ballantyne's Cove, Antigonish County, is the above inscription. Captain MacDonald, who is now 94 years old, spent the greater part of his life at sea, serving thirty-eight years in the foreign trade. The writer recently had the pleasure of interviewing the aged mariner, who by the way reads the newspapers each day without the aid of glasses. He was at home in his cozy cottage at Ballantyne's Cove, nestled back on the slope of Cape George, overlooking the "home waters" of St. George's Bay.

Fifty-two trips across the Atlantic were made by him. A year or two before the harrowing rescue at seas of the captain and his wife and the crew of seventeen men of the full-rigged ship "Coronet", for which act the late Queen Victoria rewarded him, Captain MacDonald had assumed command of the brigantine "Trust", 595 tons. T. and E. Kenney, of Halifax, were the managing owners.

A Fateful Trip

In November 1881, the "Trust" sailed from New York with a cargo of petroleum for San Sebastian, Spain. "We fell in with the ship "Coronet" about half way across the Atlantic," said the aged captain, in narrating the thrilling experience in July 1927, 46 years later. "We were ten or twelve days at sea when a severe nor 'west storm broke, accompanied by hail. Late in the evening the "Trust" was running under light canvas. It was almost dark when the watch called out, "Wreck!" We saw a dismasted ship about half a mile away. I ran up the main rigging to get a good look at her. There was no sign of life aboard. Captain MacDonald then proceeded to investigate and ran as close as possible to the helpless ship, keeping the "Coronet" on the port side to clear the "Trust" of wreckage.

The wind was blowing with hurricane force accompanied by a fall of large hailstones. It was not until the “Trust” was passed the derelict that any sign of life was seen on board the doomed ship. At that moment the crew of the “Coronet” came out of the fore-castle deck and raised their hands as a sign of distress.

Was Stripped Clean

It was observed that the ill-fated ship – she was between 1400 and 1500 tons – was stripped clean; her spars, her cabins, the rigging, other parts, and her deck load of lumber were missing. “She was breaking up amidships, and had no way to show a light,” said Captain MacDonald.

“That was the last we saw of her that night. About noon the next day we got sight of her again, to the leeward of the “Trust”, over a mile away. The wind was moderating a little, but the sea was still very rough.”

It was not safe to bring the “Trust” close enough to attempt to throw a line to the ship. The brigantine carried three boats, one of the m larger than the others. Captain MacDonald resolved that he would not leave the human beings on the ship, whose end seemed so evident, if a rescue could possibly be affected. This was a difficult thing to do. “It is pretty hard to see eighteen or twenty of your fellowmen suffer death if there is any way to prevent it, isn’t?” he said.

Life Boat Launched

Finally, after encountering much difficulty, the large life boat was launched, the mate, a young Irishman from Dublin, being in charge. He had three sailors with him. Risking their lives, they rowed their tiny craft over the mountainous waves and approached as near as it was considered expedient, to the waterlogged ship. Owing to the danger of losing their lives and their boat being swept against the side of the hull of the “coronet”, they stood off some distance and managed to reach the ship with a line. One by one the captain, his wife and officers and members of the crew slid down the line and were picked up by the occupants of the boat. Some of the m en even jumped into the sea and were rescued.

Make Two Trips

It required two trips by the boat of the “Trust”, which stood by “as near as was safe”, to effect the rescue of every man on board the “Coronet”. The same danger that confronted the lifeboat near the side of the “Coronet” had to be over-come when the rescued woman and men were being transferred to the brigantine. To meet the situation, Captain MacDonald ran a line equipped with life buoys from the yardarm of the “Trust”, and one by one those whose lives had been saved were hauled on board by means of a block and tackle. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when the brigantine squared away. During the gallant rescue, the waterlogged “Coronet” was fast breaking up, and rolled about helplessly in the sea like a log, the big waves breaking over her. It was dangerous

to those on board to appear on deck, and they congregated under the forecastle deck, dropping into the sea or sliding down the lifeline as favorable opportunities occurred. The rescue of all hands on November 18 was made just in time, as the ship had been wrecked nineteen days previously, and the eighteen people who composed the personnel were suffering intensely from hunger, thirst and exposure.

Had Narrow Escape

The Captain, a Welshman, between 60 and 70 years old, a large fleshy man, was the last to leave the vanishing ship and narrowly escaped drowning. A few seconds after he slid down the lifeline leading from the "Coronet" to the boat a huge wave enveloped him and almost capsized the rescue craft.

So busily engaged in preventing the threatened tragedy were those on board the small boat that they were not able for a short time to give any attention to the drowning captain. He, however, had presence of mind and all the while gripped the lifeline. When taken from the water he was unconscious, and as soon as he was hoisted on board the "Trust", Captain MacDonald rendered first aid and removing the water from his lungs, revived him. The captain's wife was in a pitiful state when rescued. She was wearing a pair of knee-high leather boots and was unconscious. Her feet and legs were swollen so badly that it was necessary for Captain MacDonald to cut the boots off. He wrapped her in warm blankets and put her in a bunk and fed her himself for several days with a spoon. Knowing the danger of giving too much food to starving people, Captain MacDonald first administered to the Captain of the wrecked ship, and the first and second mate's draughts of rum: while the woman and the members of the crew were allowed a limited quantity of coffee. Later on, they were all given food, which was gradually increased in quantity. They were also supplied clothing by Captain MacDonald.

Shortly after the "Trust" bore away from the "Coronet", a storm broke from another direction and it was believed that the water-logged ship did not survive many hours. At all events she was never heard of again. One of those rescued was a man named Flynn, who claimed to belong to Antigonish County.

Bound to Liverpool

The wooden ship "Coronet", of Liverpool, England, was bound from St. John, N.B., loaded with cargo of lumber for Liverpool when she encountered a storm about half way to England. For nineteen days she was buffeted about by the mountainous seas and the wind, her spars, cabins, rigging, parts of her deck, other works and deck load missing. All of the food that the nineteen people on board had to eat in that time was a little pig which had survived the ravages of the wind and sea, and a barrel of wet flour. All other provisions, and the cabins, the forecastle, galley, the lazarette, the stoves, were all washed away. There were days when nothing was eaten. At other times when it was reasonably safe to attempt it, anchor chains were coiled up in such a fashion as to make a fireplace; food was prepared from the port and flour. There was no drinking water, and the only liquid that was drunk during those nineteen days of anguish was provided by melting snow and hail.

Could Not Speak

Neither the captain nor his wife, who was younger than he, was able to speak for some time after they were rescued. The first and second mates and members of the crew were also very weak and fatigued.

The rescued party were on board the “Trust” for two or three weeks before they were delivered to the British consul at San Sebastian, Spain. They were landed at Port Bezanges, a few miles from San Sebastian, and were taken to the British Consulate at the last-named place by train.

When the “Trust” arrived off Port Bezanges, a severe storm was raging. Two ships had been wrecked there the day before. The official flag was hoisted, warning the “Trust” to haul off. Owing to the fact that the wind was blowing a gale on shore, the warning came too late to be acted upon. Port Bezanges was situated on a bar harbor. It was dangerous. Owing to the storm it was impossible for a pilot to proceed to the assistance of the brigantine. The mate of the “Trust” had been in and out of the harbor several time, however and Captain MacDonald decided that there was but one course to pursue – to take a chance on making port.

Climbing the Rigging

“It was blowing a lively gale in the Bay of Biscay, and we couldn’t keep off. We put everything on her and made for the harbor,” said the venerable master of the brigantine. Leaving the captain and mate of the “Coronet” and two of the men of the “Trust” at the wheel, Captain MacDonald went high up in the rigging, taking all the ships papers with him, in the hope of saving them in the event of a disaster. From that position he kept a lookout for shoal water as best he could under the circumstances – the sea being a veritable boiling whirlpool – and piloted the brigantine to port. Some of those on deck said afterwards that they believed the “Trust” had grazed one of the ledges, as they felt her shake – Captain MacDonald said that he hung away up in the rigging giving orders, the wind blowing a gale, and with seas coming on board he could not say if she struck or not.

Hit by Tidal Wave

Shortly after the nineteen survivors of the “Coronet” were delivered to the British consul, the “Trust” proceeded to San Sebastian, where she was anchored according to the official port instructions and regulations. She was only there a week when a tidal wave damaged her.

The silver teapot was sent by Her Majesty’s Government to the Governor General at Ottawa, who forwarded it to Lieutenant-Governor Archibald, of Nova Scotia. Captain MacDonald was publicly presented with the late Queen’s gift of appreciation “in acknowledgement of his humanity and kindness” at the Court House in Antigonish. The members of the crew were rewarded with sums of money.

Forgets Crew’s Personnel

Captain MacDonald does not remember the names of his crew. The mate was a native of Dublin; the second mate, a Dutchman, while most of the able seamen were from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The cook belonged to Sydney, N.S.

The master of the "Coronet", and his wife were natives of Wales. The woman told Captain MacDonald that seven other ships were sighted by those who were facing death for 19 anxious days on the wrecked "Coronet" before the "Trust" came to their rescue. Whether any of the seven sighted them, they could not say.

Captain MacDonald is a son of the late John MacDonald and Mary MacPherson of Georgeville, Antigonish County. His father's parents were among the earliest Scottish settlers at Pictou, while his mother was born in Scotland. He is the last of a family of eleven.

Got \$16 A Month

He began going to sea as a boy, being engaged in the costal trade. In 1860 he got his master's papers and sailed deep sea for almost forty years in the employ of Halifax, Pictou and Antigonish ship-owners. He received \$16 a month as first mate: and the most he ever got as a master was \$65 a month. Before retiring to his farm at Ballantynes Cove, he served as captain of the government ferryboat Mulgrave plying between Mulgrave and Point Tupper on the Strait of Canso for four years, beginning in 1893. Captain MacDonald was married forty odd years ago to Miss Margaret MacNeil of Georgeville. Six children are living, being Mrs. James MacEachern, Ballantyne's Cove; Miss Catherine MacDonald, at home; Rev. Sister M. Austin, of the Order of St. Martha, Antigonish; John MacDonald, conductor, Revelstoke, B.C.; Colin F. MacDonald, Ballantyne's Cove; and Angus, at home. Two daughters and a son have passed on. There are fourteen grandchildren also and a wide circle of friends. Captain MacDonald is remarkably bright and active for his years. Only last week he visited Antigonish for a day.

He is one of the very few of the survivors of Antigonish County captains who sailed the seas of the world in a proud period of "Wooden Ships and Iron Men." The ships, their master and crews have vanished from the face of the waters like phantoms in the night.

