

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

MORE TALES OF SHIPWRECK

Recalling the fate of the schooners
"CAROLINE", Archibald McNair, Master,
and "CHERUB", John Magray, Master,
and of the brig, "BELLEROPHEN", John
Vibert, Master, as recounted under
oath in PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF DECLARATION
AND PROTEST before the Gaspesian Notary
and Sheriff, Martin Sheppard.(1800-1884)

Ken Annett

THE SCHOONER "CAROLINE"

It was Archibald McNair of New Richmond, Master Mariner, and the late Master of the schooner "CAROLINE", 53 tons, together with the Chief Mate, Nathaniel McNair and Seaman, Thomas Johnston that testified, under oath, as to the fate of the "CAROLINE". Their schooner was, in 1832, "lying bulged and a complete wreck on the shore in a small cove near the River commonly known as the River Esquimaux on the North Shore of the River St. Lawrence."

On Saturday, November 19th., 1831, the schooner "CAROLINE" sailed from the Port of Québec with a general cargo of goods, provisions and effects, outward bound for New Richmond and the Port of Dalhousie in Bay Chaleur. Her Master testified that the schooner was "light, staunch, strong, well and sufficiently manned, provided, equipped and furnished with all things needful and necessary for the voyage".

The voyage downriver proceeded normally until noon of Monday, November 21st., when the wind rose from the East bringing with it a dense fog. It was decided to seek shelter at Bic - the "CAROLINE" found good anchorage there in five fathoms of water in the lee of Bic Island at dusk.

By the evening of November 22nd., the wind had risen to gale force, accompanied by driving snow. Extraordinary swells began to roll into the anchorage in the lee of Bic Island causing the "CAROLINE" to strain and labour exceedingly. A fluke of the best bower anchor broke and the vessel began to drag from her anchorage. A second cable and anchor were put out but the wind and swell were so strong that the "CAROLINE" continued to drive from her anchorage. Her Master decided to stand out to sea under close reefed foresail. Through a night of terrible memory the "CAROLINE" sailed into the storm - wind at gale force, heavy seas and a continuing fall of snow. Visibility was zero. Though the crew hove the lead constantly they were unable to get soundings that might have helped to fix their position.

SHIPWRECK

Shortly after noon on Wednesday, November 23rd., the "CAROLINE"

struck with great violence on a sunken reef of rocks near Esquimaux River on the North Side of the River St. Lawrence - a reef that extended out from shore for a quarter of a mile. The high seas forced the schooner over the reef into shallower water beyond where she struck bottom, loosening and unshipping the rudder. An attempt to anchor failed when the chain cable to the bower anchor snapped, leaving the "CAROLINE" to drive on "an almost perpendicular and iron-bound shore ". She struck with such extraordinary violence that barrels and puncheons of cargo in the hold forced their way through the bottom of the vessel and floated off. The vessel bulged, went to pieces, with the sea making clear breach over her and the tide flowing in and out of her.

CASTAWAY

In imminent peril of their lives the crew of the "CAROLINE" succeeded in reaching shore. They found themselves stranded on a rocky, barren coast, seemingly destitute of inhabitants or habitation. Wet, cold and miserable they set to work to erect a shelter with lumber from the wreck and to collect there such cargo that washed ashore. The vessel's carpenter, James McKenzie, and two members of the crew remained there at the wreck site through that winter to guard the salvaged cargo.

RETURN HOME

Captain Archibald McNair and the other members of the crew of the "CAROLINE" eventually obtained passage to Riviere-du-Loup on the Pilot Schooner "SWALLOW". From there they walked overland to New Richmond at a season of the year when travel was most unfavourable. Having endured great hardship they finally reached New Richmond on December 30th.

The witnesses to the deposition of Archibald and Nathaniel McNair and Thomas Johnston were Hugh Montgomery and Michael Ferguson.

THE SCHOONER "CHERUB"

On the morning of July 10th., 1831, the schooner "CHERUB", 59 tons, of Yarmouth, N.S., lay at anchor off Little River on the coast of Bay Chaleur. Her Master, Captain John Magray, and his crew, including Joseph Durkee, Mate and Seamen Richard Ackerly and Levi Rogers had been coasting in Bay Chaleur since June 13th., engaged in trade and traffic. By July 10th the "CHERUB'S" cargo had been greatly lightened but the precaution was taken to put out her best bower anchor and cable for anchorage off Little River.

A RISING STORM

During the morning of July 10th., the wind rose to gale force from the South-East with thick, hazy weather and rain. By noon a heavy sea was running on shore. The crew of the "CHERUB" put out another anchor and a cable of long scope. For a time the schooner rode safely in the face of the mounting storm.

By noon of July 11th., "...there came on a gale of uncommon violence from the South-East, increasing to a perfect hurricane..." About 8:00 P.M. the anchor cables broke and the schooner began to drive towards shore. The crew got the vessel underway with double-reefed sail, hoping to reach shelter and safe harbour at Newport.

DISASTER

Hopes were dashed when the "CHERUB" struck violently on a sunken sand bar off Pabos - some 400 yards from shore. An attempt to anchor failed - the sea broke with great violence over the schooner causing her to strain and take in water along one side, which bulged and opened. Pounded by the seas the "CHERUB" canted over and her remaining cargo began to wash shoreward. The crew cut away her masts and at the peril of their lives made their way to shore.

AFTER THE STORM

When the storm abated Captain John Magray had the wreck of his vessel examined by the Gaspesian Master Mariners and Shipowners,

Captains John Vibert and John Hannon and the Shipwright, Isaac Edward Man. Their considered opinion was that the "CHERUB" could never be got off or repaired.

Witnesses to the official deposition of the Master and crew of the "CHERUB" were Thomas Morris and Matthew Caldwell.

THE STORM

During the morning of July 10th, the wind rose to gale force from the South-East with thick, heavy weather and rain. A heavy sea was running on shore. The crew of the "CHERUB" put out another anchor and a cable of four ropes. For a time the schooner rode easily in the face of the coming storm.

By noon of July 11th, "...there came on a gale of wind from the South-East, increasing to a gale of violence. About 3:00 P.M. the anchor cables broke and the schooner began to drive towards shore. The crew got the vessel underway with double-reefed sails, hoping to reach shelter and safe harbor at Newport.

THE STORM

Hopes were dashed when the "CHERUB" struck violently on a rock and ran all the cables - some 400 yards from shore. In attempt to anchor failed - the sea broke with great violence over the schooner causing her to strain and take in water along one side, which bulged and opened, pounded by the seas the "CHERUB" rolled over and her remaining cargo began to wash shoreward. The crew cut away her masts and at the peril of their lives made their way to shore.

THE STORM

When the storm abated Captain John Vibert had the wreck of his vessel examined by the Assistant Master and Shipwright.

THE BRIG "BELLEROPHEN"

The 85 ton "BELLEROPHEN" was described by her Master, Captain John Vibert, Master Mariner, as a Brigantine Schooner or Brig. On November 21st., 1832, the "BELLEROPHEN" was to be found at Cape Despair, Bay Chaleur, loading the last of a cargo of dry or cured codfish and oil for delivery at Cork, Ireland. The completion of loading had to be abandoned when there rose a wind from the North-East, increasing to gale force, together with heavy sea.

Captain Vibert decided to run before the rising storm and seek shelter at Paspebiac. By evening the "BELLEROPHEN" found anchorage at Paspebiac in five fathoms of water.

THE STORM DEEPENS

By the morning of November 22nd., the gale had increased to hurricane force and snow was falling. The strain on the anchor cable of the "BELLEROPHEN" became so severe that the windlass was wrenched from its base. The cable was then fastened to the foremast but at 9:00 P.M., a particularly strong surge broke the cable and brought down the foretop mast. Captain Vibert then made sail enough to clear the points of New Carlisle and the "BELLEROPHEN" was swept out into Bay Chaleur in driving snow and mountainous seas.

WRECK

On Wednesday, November 23rd., in high winds and dreadful seas, the "BELLEROPHEN" struck a reef of rocks near Green Island. The shock unshipped the rudder and damaged the stern of the vessel. The masts and rigging were cut and let go - then the seas lifted the wreck over the first reef and it stranded nearer shore.. Soaked and stiffened with cold the crew succeeded in reaching the mainland. The "BELLEROPHEN" and its valuable cargo were a total loss.

SIGNATURES

The deposition on the loss of the "BELLEROPHEN" was signed by Captain John Vibert and Ph. Firouet and Francis Deaugie of his crew.

The witnesses were the Merchants, Thomas Savage of Cape Cove and Francis Mauger of Mal Bay.

THE STORM

By the morning of November 2nd, the gale had increased to hurricane force and snow was falling. The strain on the cable of the "BELLEROPHEN" became so severe that the cable was wrenched from its base. The cable was then fastened to the foremast at 9:00 P.M., a particularly strong surge broke the cable and brought down the foremast. Captain Vibert then made sail enough to clear the point of New Linné and the "BELLEROPHEN" was swept out into Bay Chaleur in driving snow and mountainous seas.

WRECK

On Wednesday, November 3rd, in high winds and driving seas, the "BELLEROPHEN" struck a reef of rocks near Green Island. The shock unshipped the rudder and damaged the stem of the vessel. The masts and rigging were cut and set to - then the bark lifted the wreck over the first reef and it extended nearer shore. Soaked and stiffened with cold the crew succeeded in reaching the mainland. The "BELLEROPHEN" and its valuable cargo were a total loss.

CONCLUSION