

The Wreck of the Schooner Spotless

by Susan Moore Eldredge

This November 15, 1889 article from The Boston Globe was given us by Paul and Mavise Crocker of Falmouth. Paul Crocker's maternal great-grandmother, Olive Ann Moore, was the aunt of Susan Moore of Harwich, the subject of this article. Susan was the daughter of Olive Ann's brother Sears L. Moore and his wife Susannah J. Moore. A bride of just under four years at the time of this incident, Susan had married Capt. Stillman Edson Eldredge of Chatham as his second wife on March 25 1886. Capt. Eldredge was born 1853 in Chatham, son of Stillman S. and Susan (Eldredge) Eldredge and died there October 26, 1894 aged 41y 2m 5d.

EAST HARWICH, Mass. Nov. 14. Ten days ago, a cabled dispatch announced the loss at sea of the schooner "Spotless" in a hurricane. "Crew saved by steamer Atalanta and taken to Jamaica."

Capt. Eldredge's wife, who was on board the ill-fated schooner, arrived home, and though undesirous of newspaper notoriety,

she modestly told THE GLOBE reporter the following story of her last voyage:

We loaded a heavy cargo of about 325,000 feet hard pine lumber at Savannah, and sailed for Baltimore October 17; had a very moderate run till within about 30 miles of Cape Henry, when we hauled close in under the land, as there was every indication of a heavy nor'wester coming off the land.

Instead of a nor'wester, however, a heavy sea came heaving in from the south-east. This was late in the afternoon of the 23rd of October, and early in the evening a heavy south-easter burst upon us, and the sea rose fearfully. It caught us right on a lee shore and came upon us with such force that we could not tack ship, so were obliged to wear around; and oh! we were so near that we could hear the roar of the breakers as

I have heard them roar on Chatham Bars during easterly gales all my life; so near that Currituck light shone right down on our decks and we could see the buildings on the land directly under the light.

NIGHT OF TERROR

Scenes on Board the Ill-Fated Spotless

Told by Brave Capt. Eldredge's Wife

Men Worked at Pumps Until They
Became Faint

Heavy Seas Broke Over a Sinking Ship

Agony of Hours Spent Watching for a
Sail Graphically Told

*Headlines from article from The Boston Globe
of November 15, 1889.*

The vessel headed off shore about east-northeast, and we left seven fathoms of water under the stern, gradually deepening it as we slowly forged ahead to sea. The wind soon backed to northeast and made a terrible cross-sea. We carried sail hard, trying to clear the land and work off shore, knowing that a lee drift would take us down on Cape Hatteras unless we could work wide off.

The gale increased to a perfect hurricane, yet we felt obliged to keep all possible sail on the schooner, which worked her so hard that the deck load started her water ways and caused her to spring a leak.

We were carrying forestaysail and small piece of fore, and mainsail and three reefed spankers. The gale backed further to the northward and increased if possible, tore our sails from the booms into ribbons, except part of our mainsail and carried away our foretopmast. It blew so hard as to tear our snugly furled light sails clean off our mainsail. The vessel leaking badly and seas washing over us, nothing could be done except to put her before the gale, and run before it, hoping to clear Hatteras as the wind had worked around nearly to a northerly direction

All hands were obliged to work the pumps, and the water gained so fast that the next morning the vessel was becoming water-logged.

We had cleared Hatteras; the gale and the sea continued with terrible force, and the vessel was brought head to the wind. She settled so much forward that the high cross-seas made a clean breach over her, starting some of the deck load and smashing the galley and making our condition pitiful indeed as daylight came on, showing the foretopmast swinging about above our heads and threatening to come down on us at any moment. Worst of all, there was

that terrible leak making the vessel more and more unmanageable every hour, and the men fast using up their strength at the pumps. They were lashed there by ropes long enough for them to reach the mizzen rigging. One man stood up on the deck load and when a bad sea was seen coming he sung out and all hands jumped into the rigging to save being almost drowned down around the pumps which were on the main deck just between the poop deck and the deck load. I looked aft at our lifeboat many times, thinking that was our only possible means of safety if the vessel capsized, and my heart sank within me when a fearful sea broke aboard and washed away our lifeboat, davits, flyrail, booms, gaffs and other wreckage.

Captain Eldredge and I both knew that our vessel, being keel-built and of sharp model would roll over after filling with water with such a heavy deck load on, and did all in our power to encourage the officers and men to continue the pumping but as night came on again they were all exhausted, and Capt. Eldredge's limbs had become swollen with the continuous hard work. I wanted to take his place at times, but they wouldn't allow it, and I was obliged to remain shut in the cabin most of the time to prevent being washed overboard.

Our cabin stove had become full of water, but I got my oil stove lashed to the legs of the other, and with it I boiled meat and eggs which I found in the cabin store room, and made hot coffee, thus furnishing some food for all hands to keep up their strength. Night came on with everything for the worse, and it was a terrible night for me, for I was shut up in the cabin in the darkness fearing that every sea which broke over the vessel might take my husband with it. Several times during the night he watched his chance and came into the cabin for a moment, and the prospect of the ship's living till morning looked

so doubtful that every time he went back to the pumps he bade me good-bye, not knowing whether he would return from the pump alive. It seemed to me that the seas would take the cabin over the stern, but it was considered the safest place for me, and while straining my eyes for glimpses of somebody out the windows in the darkness I would pray.

No words of mine can describe the feelings of a woman under such circumstances. With the chances a thousand to one against us, thoughts of mother, father and brother at home came over me and left me sick at heart to think that they might never know our fate. How many times that night my husband said as he left me to go back to the pump, "Ah, Suzie, if you were only safe at home!"

The night wore away and toward morning I tried to boil some potatoes for the men and was obliged to lie down on the water-soaked lounge while steady-ing the oil stove and the tin pail I had to cook in. Daylight came at last and I could see the men still pumping, but all worn out, limbs all chafed and badly swollen, and almost unable to work longer. I climbed out to them again at the risk of my life,

with something to eat and drink, and felt that I ought to be allowed to use what strength I had at pump-ing, but was ordered back into the cabin gangway.

The men could not pump much longer and as the vessel did not seem to show signs of capsizing, we prepared to take to the rigging as soon as she settled too low to live aft. Capt. Eldredge rigged a bows-wain's chair aloft and I packed a satchel with a can of wa-

ter, corned beef, knife, spoon, etc. and he took it aloft, but told me it was almost im-possible to cling to the rig-ging as it had become loos-ened and would sway ter-ribly. Suddenly a Morgan Line steamer was sighted, but did not stop for us because appar-ently all she

could do was take care of herself. It was very hard for us, however, to see her steam slowly away, leav-ing us to our fate, which seemed rapidly approach-ing, as the water now gained fast and was getting up over the cabin floor.

Towards noon the gale seemed to moderate and the seas subsided a trifle, but the schooner was making some bad lurches and the seas coming at times over the house, apparently determined to roll the vessel over. "If we only had our boat!"



Capt. Stillman Edson Eldredge and wife, Susan Moore Eldredge
from Boston Globe article of November 15, 1889.

But all exhausted, we could do nothing but await the end; when at 3 p.m. my husband shouted, "A steamer! A steamer!" Our hearts leaped for joy and we did all we could to attract her attention, and soon saw her steaming toward us. She ran up to windward and launched a big boat containing the first and second officers and four men. It was still so rough! We couldn't see the boat again till she arrived nearly alongside.

I had for about 40 hours been dressed with long rubber boots, a pair of my husband's pants over them, and oil jacket and sou'wester on. Seeing the steamer launch a boat, I waited below, changed the sou'wester and oil jacket for a bonnet and jacket, shoved some of my best dresses and a few valuables into a clothes bag, and sent it on deck, hoping I might save some clothes to make myself presentable on board the steamer.

The boat reached us but could not make fast, of course. The only way to get aboard was when our vessel rolled towards the boat for us to jump for her. I made the leap and struck in the arms of the first officer, who kindly allowed them to throw my clothes bag aboard. Capt. Eldredge was the last one to leave the *Spotless*, on board of which we had spent so many happy hours. Soon we were alongside the great steamer and I was the first to jump for the rope ladder and scramble over the side as quickly as possible, soon followed by the others. I was shown to the stateroom and changed my clothes as quickly as possible, for while we were on top of the cabin house on the schooner waiting for the boat, a cross-sea broke over the stern and completely drenched me from head to foot, so that my bonnet and jacket looked like "the last rose of summer" I think.

Within an hour of the time we reached the steamer's deck, another wreck was sighted and her crew saved in the same manner we had been. It was the brig *Bell of the Bay*, lumber-loaded, and her experience had been a good deal like ours. She, however, was a flat-built vessel and was in no danger of rolling over. The crew were in very weak condition and were living on the main boom almost, she was so low in the water.

This brig has been reported as being seen since, drifting about; but the *Spotless* has not been reported, and she no doubt capsized very soon after we left her and we owe our lives to the *Atalanta* and her noble-hearted officers.

Yes, it was a terrible experience, but if Capt. Eldredge buys another vessel and goes to sea again, I shall go with him. If you should get run away with a horse today and escape unharmed, you would ride out again tomorrow with another.

Mrs. Eldredge is only 24 years old and is the daughter of Capt. Sears Moore, post-master at East Harwich, himself a old sailor and a very successful mackerel fisherman, who gave it up a few years ago. Suzie, the daughter, was married to Capt. Eldredge about four years ago and has been with him almost constantly ever since.

They own a beautiful home in South Chatham and will spend the coming winter there and very likely will start out next spring on a new voyage. The *Globe's* reporter hopes they may never be obliged to go through another such experience as this.