

ORINOCO

Wreck of the steamer Orinoco on Seal Island, about ~~1885~~ <sup>1907</sup>. Captain Walter Manning was a sailor in her at the time, making his first voyage. Jerry and Hubert Nickerson were fishermen on the island at the time.

Orinoco had come up from the West Indies with a cargo of rum and molasses. The rum mostly in 5-gallon kegs, the molasses in puncheons. She had called at St. John and picked up there a consignment of pine coffins for Halifax. The coffins were of all sizes from a large man's to a child's, and they were stowed nested one within another.

Orinoco struck on the west side of the island near Scratch-All shoal. Terrific sea running. Crew got ashore. Cargo drifted ashore on west side Seal Island, mostly about Green Head. Fishermen watched eagerly for the rum and molasses, but the kegs and puncheons were shattered on the rocks in the surf. At times in the midst of the storm the inshore air reeked with rum-fumes. The molasses puncheons had been stowed with bungs out, to give vent to the sugar gasses, and of course the stuff came out as soon as the puncheons rolled free.

The coffins drifted ashore, many of them still nested together. The big sea and a high tide threw them up on the grass at the top of the bank. They were of little value, not worth boating off to Clark's Harbor anyway, and for a long time they lay scattered along the bank. One of the fishermen, a man who had lost his only child not long before, couldn't stand the sight of the smallest coffins lying about. One day in a fit of melancholia, and without saying a word to anybody, he took an axe and went along the shore, smashing every one of them to splinters.

Some of the Seal Island fishermen used the longer pine boards in the coffins for ~~various~~ repairs about their shacks and boats. One man used some of the coffin boards to make a wooden hand-pump for his boat. Some time later he disappeared while visiting his lobster traps far off the island. Some parts of a boat drifted ashore on Seal Island, and the fishermen identified <sup>them</sup> as the missing man's by the coffin-wood of the pump. The name of the consignee had been stencilled on the side of each coffin at the time of loading, and one of the pump-pieces bore the name. All the fishermen shook their heads and said that was what came of using coffin-wood in a boat.