



AT EXACTLY SEVEN O'CLOCK ON the night of Saturday, November 26, 1898, a deep-throated whistle split the chill night air of Atlantic Avenue on Boston's waterfront.

It was the steamer *Portland* announcing her departure on schedule from famed India Wharf for her regular down-east run from Boston to Portland, Maine. Also, although none could possibly realize it, that whistle was the last Captain Blanchard of the *Portland* ever sounded at India Wharf. Eternity was waiting for every person aboard the vessel, an eternity which would catch up with all hands on the doomed side-wheeler twenty-six hours later.

Although fifty-eight years have elapsed since that beautiful side-wheeler sailed out to meet the hurricane which still bears her name, the average New Englander has a false impression of what actually happened.

It is erroneously believed in many Yankee circles that the *Portland* not only disappeared completely after leaving Boston Harbor, but that no wreckage from her ever came ashore anywhere. Both

beliefs are entirely wrong.

That Saturday night when the *Portland* sailed came two days after Thanksgiving, and because of those returning from the holiday there were more passengers than usual anxious to make the trip on the *Portland* to the city of the same name.

There has developed considerable discussion through the years as to what went on between the *Portland's* captain, Hollis H. Blanchard, and the company officials of the line up to the moment of departure. Captain Blanchard's son who went aboard the *Portland* just before she left the pier later stated that his father had been ordered to sail, and sail he did. Thus he followed orders and did not sail on his own responsibility.

The *Portland*, contrary to the usual belief, was sighted again, again, and again as she proceeded on her way down Boston Harbor, out into Massachusetts Bay, and still later when she was in serious trouble.

Captain Charles T. Martell of Medford was but one of a dozen sailing masters out in the storm which soon hit the area, and his statement follows:

by EDWARD ROWE SNOW

## THE TRUTH ABOUT The "Portland"

"I was steering the tugboat *Channing* in a southeasterly direction, and the weather began to spit snow about eight o'clock. We were off Nahant. The weather was not bad at the time, but I knew a serious storm was coming.

"There were ten or twelve young men gathered on the topside of the *Portland* just forward and aft of the paddle wheel box. When one of the young bloods on the *Portland* shouted across to me to get my old scow out of the way I shouted back at him, 'You'd better stop that hollering, because I don't think you'll be this smart tomorrow morning.'

"By this time I was less than twenty feet from the *Portland*, and could easily make out the features of the young men sailing to their death. I gave three blasts of the *Channing's* whistle, and Captain Blanchard, whom I could easily recognize in the wheel house, answered them promptly.

"Thus I was the last person to speak to anyone aboard the *Portland*, and even after fifty years it makes me feel queer whenever I think of it."

The great side-wheeler had proceeded

down Boston Harbor on schedule. She met spitting snow off Deer Island Light, and without anything unusual taking place, had proceeded across from Boston Harbor to a point near Thacher's Island.

By nine-thirty, however, when the steamer was still off Thacher's the storm smashed into the area with great fury. Captain Frank Scripture, ashore at Cape Ann, later stated that the advance fingers of the storm which became a terrible hurricane struck with such force that long rows of trees were knocked down by the miniature tornadoes. For years afterwards the evidence was still present in the Cape Ann forests.

Conjecture is aided by facts concerning the storm fingers. It was about eleven that night when the *Portland* was sighted off Thacher's Island by Captain Reuben Cameron aboard his schooner *Grayling*, only this time she appeared battered and bruised from her encounter with the gale. The side-wheeler was then rolling and pitching badly, but was evidently trying to keep headed toward the open sea.

Fifteen minutes after Cameron sighted the *Portland*

TURN  
OVER