

The Wreck of the *Lizzie E*

Like any small coastal community, the residents of Stanwood's Beach at the Yarmouth Bar had their share of tragic tales of relatives and friends lost to the sea. In one account a community member was lost virtually right on the doorstep of Stanwood's Beach. Joseph C (Joe) Watkins and his twin brother Howard Lockland (Locke) Watkins were born in Villagedale, Shelburne County March 21, 1883. When the boys were just 6 years old, they had their first experience with the unforgiving nature of the sea. Their older brother John Alfred, a crew member of the schooner *Emma W. Dyer* fishing the Grand Banks, drowned when his dory capsized on October 7, 1889. John Watkins was just 20 years old.

In 1900 the brother's parents John and Mary moved with the family to Stanwood's Beach at the Yarmouth Bar. Friends said Joe and Locke Watkins were inseparable and rarely was one seen without the other. The boys had been born by the sea, they grew up living next to it and earned their livelihood by going to sea in vessels owned by others or in fishing ventures of their own. Both brothers had their share of close calls by going down to the sea, especially Joe. During WWI a vessel he was in was torpedoed by a German U-boat and the crew barely escaped in time before she sank. Both twins always looked at the humorous side of these grim circumstances. Joe often recounted this event telling off one crew member who forgot to pack anything but his razor he was so terrified; whereas Joe jokingly said he had all his belongings plus some left behind by the others.

On another occasion while he was a crew member of the 271-ton schooner *Isadah K Stetson*, the vessel struck a ledge off the Massachusetts shore during a winter storm. The ship began to list and the captain, William Reiker of Saint John NB, ordered the crew onto the masts and into the rigging for safety. Four of the crew were eventually swept overboard and drowned. Three days later, Captain Reiker and Joe Watkins both suffering badly from exposure, were barely alive when they were rescued by the American coastguard cutter *Acushnet*. One of the men lost was the mate Nelson McKay who left behind his widow residing at Stanwood's beach. Another crew member, Manford Nickerson age 23, left behind his widow and one child living in Yarmouth South.

In 1924 the Watkins twins acquired the use of one of the last old pinkys¹ the *Lizzie E*, an 18-ton vessel, built in Port Maitland in 1897. Owned by Herbert Sollows of Yarmouth South, the pinky had not been used for some time due to Mr. Sollows failing eyesight. Together with Everett O Connell they got the *Lizzie E* outfitted for fishing and on August 24, 1924 they went out on their first trip with Locke Watkins as skipper.

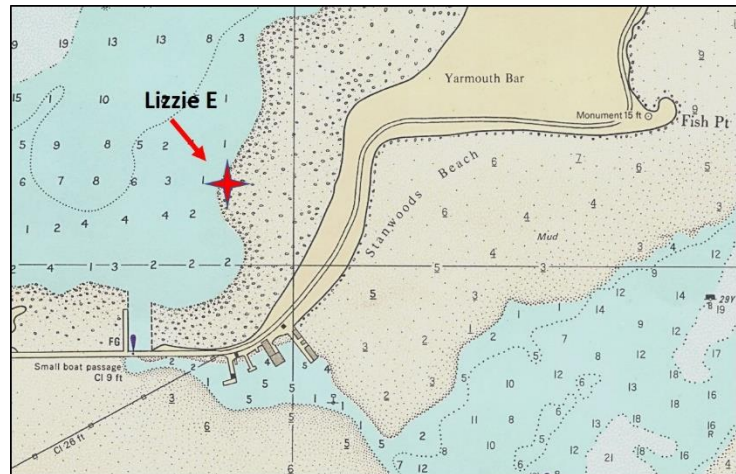
They were several miles off Cape Forchu when a strong easterly gale stuck. Locke and his crew tried to get her into Yarmouth harbour, but the old sails of the



¹ An old type of New England fishing boat. Typically configured as a two masted fore and aft schooner with a short bowsprit it first appeared in Essex, Mass around 1820. They averaged 45 feet in length, were only about 14 feet wide and 7 feet in depth, with a gross weight under 30 tons. The aft bulwarks extended past the stern post and formed the peculiar "pinky stern. There was a cuddy in the bow and occasionally a fish well near the middle of the hull.

Lizzie E couldn't handle the strain and the sails were torn to shreds. Northwest of the Cape, behind Yarmouth Bar they set their anchors and hoped to ride out the storm.

The vessel in distress was spotted and the word went out to the residents of Cape Forchu, Stanwood's Beach and Overton that the *Lizzie E* was in a great deal of trouble. Before long the beach was crowded with friends and relatives including the wives and children of the men aboard. The image of the brave little pinky battling the rolling waves of the storm was one they would never forget.



Just when it seemed the anchors of the *Lizzie E* were holding, the wind suddenly veered and increased in force. As the onlookers watched anxiously, they could see one anchor cable had parted and the *Lizzie E* was dragging her one remaining anchor, slowly getting closer to the rocky shore. The men standing by along the beach were ready with lines to throw to the crew with the hopes they could help them get to shore safely.

The wind suddenly veered and came out of the northwest at a greater strength than before. In a few minutes a terrible sea began running. Perhaps due to his previous experience on that last terrible shipwreck and due to the terrible seas battering the *Lizzie E*, Joe Watkins evidently became panic stricken. Despite the protests of his brother Locke and Everett O Connell, Joe attempted to board a dory tied to the stern of the pinky. Just as he jumped aboard, the *Lizzie E* swung around, tipping the dory on her side and Joe Watkins disappeared into the sea between the two. There was nothing his twin brother Locke, O Connell or those on the shore could do after that to save Joseph from drowning.

After many failed attempts the men on the beach, risking the breakers coming ashore, managed to get a line to the *Lizzie E*. With one end tied to the pinky and the other to an anchor on the shore, Locke Watkins and Everett O Connell, hanging on to the line with everything they had, made it safely through the treacherous waters into the arms of their rescuers.

Joe Watkins was forty years old when he died and he was survived by his widow Abigail Rose and two children, Ruby age 9 and little Nettie Violet just 8 months, living on the nearby Stanwood's Beach. For many days, Joes friends and relatives searched the shores and in the rocks for his body, but to no avail. With the widow, her children and other Watkins relatives living at Stanwood's Beach, it seemed everyone in the area shared the dreadful, ongoing grieving process. Finally, on September fifth, Joseph's badly decomposed body was found near the location the *Lizzie E* went ashore. Joseph Watkins was laid to rest in Yarmouth's Mountain Cemetery.

References used were Yarmouth Herald newspaper articles.