

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XII

6-26-90

No. 25

It is always a pleasure to have a guest columnist. In particular, over the past several years, Lysbeth Hoffman, Carlton Town Historian has occasionally shared her research, insight and pictures with us in this space. That is the case this week with her recent story about the "Sea Fox" which is pictured above in the spring of 1933. The men in the photo are: Laverne Hey (left) and William Hey (right).

THE WRECK OF THE "SEA FOX"

By Lysabeth A. Hoffman
Carlton Historian



Laverne Hey (left) and William Hey (right)

PROHIBITION: The forbidding by law of the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages. Prohibition, a.k.a. Volstead Act, went into effect in the United States, by the ratification of the 18th Amendment in 1919, and continued for the next 14 years until 1933 when it was repealed by the 21st Constitutional Amendment. During those 14 years the land was dry — or was it —. Onto both coasts, across the Canadian border, and in the bathtubs of American, liquor still flowed. Asked what he thought of Prohibition, veteran drinker and stage star John Barrymore, replied, "Fortunately, I don't think of it." Neither apparently, did many others!

Our story comes by means of the reminiscences of the late Curtis P. Conner, of Lyndonville, who lived at Lakeside in the early 1930's. These are a portion of his interviews done for the Orleans County Historical Association's Oral History Project in 1981.

Conner remembered: "One Friday night, in October of 1932, a boat was coming in, loaded up with beer from Canada, and they got the wrong signals to where they were supposed to land. These so-called 'Rum Runners' from the United States went over to Canada and got the beer from the breweries and brought it to this side. It'd be picked up and distributed from there by either

horse and wagons or automobiles. Well — this boat got the wrong lights and they come in about 200-feet west of the mouth of Johnson's Creek and struck a rock out there in about five foot of water — right near the surface. Stove in the bow; and they had to unload. Threw out all the cases of beer. They'd 500 cases onboard, in quart bottles, to get rid of. Then they beached the boat up on shore. After they'd beached it they got some paint and painted on there the name of SEA FOX. The waves washed up and you could tell it had been freshly painted because it was all runny where the water hit it."

"The boat looked like a reconverted tug. I'd say in the class of about 40-foot long. A pretty good size boat. The Coast Guard heard of it, came up from Rochester, and took a lot of the equipment. They had two reconverted Pierce Arrow marine engines. The wheel and equipment inside, the marine compass, later disappeared. The Coast Guard didn't bother to find out who owned the boat."

Conner then related how "local talent" aided in the recovery: "Those 500 cases of beer was in quart bottles from five different breweries. I can't remember all of them, — outside of one was Black Horse and another was Labatt's. They were packed in cardboard boxes, 12 to a case. Of course when the cases were thrown overboard the cardboard disintegrated. Some of the bottles came to the-top and more stayed down. Art Case, he owned the 'Kit Kat Club' in Lakeside, brought in a couple of divers out of Rochester. Some of us, we put on woolen pants and shirts. We found a lot of those bottles was all right. We found about 15L bottles in five or six foot of water; and it got us through the winter. The divers went down in 10 foot depths. But, they didn't have very good luck, they hunted all one day, and found one case of 12. They'd been down four or five hours. They went over to the 'Kit Kat Club' and drank them."

"Later on — the diver's helper wanted to try diving. He'd never been down before. The head diver explained what he should do and he went down to try to find more bottles. So down he went, and the regular diver manned the pumps for him and the telephone. He found some and he says: 'I see some!' Then he went to reach for the beer, and the air bubble that was around his head went to his feet and he was upside down and couldn't right himself, it was all we could do to drag him in with a rope and the air hose and get his helmet off. It scared the hell out of him!"

The hull of the SEA FOX remained on the beach, a deteriorating curiosity for a few seasons; then the waves eliminated the remaining debris.