



## *The Sinking of the Breconshire*

By Mary Beth Herzog

In a two-part series, the July & August *Scene* discussed the wreck and subsequent salvaging of a Spanish treasure ship which was broken apart during a hurricane and scattered throughout the waters of the coast of Sebastian in 1715.

In this month's issue, *Scene* will take a look at another shipwreck. This ship was not a valuable treasure vessel, nor was it lost as the result of a violent storm - quite the contrary, in fact. Yet it is important in that residents and visitors of Vero Beach for close to 100 years have seen its remains, resting approximately a half mile east of Sexton Plaza.

The history of this shipwreck remained a mystery to most curious observers of this century until several years ago when Bill Turner, of Vero Beach, delved into the background of the ship and her crew, which was found in the records of the British Maritime Courts in London, England. It is through his efforts that we have the following story of the British Steamship *Breconshire*.

An iron-screw steamer, built in 1884, the *Breconshire* was a schooner-rigged ship with compound engines of 350 horsepower complementing her sail power. She was 300 feet in length and 37 feet in breadth.

A man by the name of Robert Taylor, who possessed a master's certificate, commanded the ship's crew of 24 men. Edwin H. Curling was the second officer.

During her last voyage, the *Breconshire* sailed from England to various Mediterranean ports and then on to New York. In the spring of 1894, she was ordered to proceed to Tampa to pickup an unknown cargo.

Taylor, unfamiliar with Florida's waters, ordered charts of the coast of the state. The package of charts, however failed to include the Florida coast for about 20 miles South of Cape Canaveral. This information was unbeknownst to Taylor when they set out because he did not bother to open the package until three days after they were at sea.



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The *Breconshire* left New York on April 25, 1894; less than five days later she was lost.

The night of April 29 was calm and clear when Taylor set his course and ordered, "I am to be called at 1:00AM." He then went below.

At midnight the second officer, Curling, took charge. He instructed his early morning crew to keep a sharp lookout for and on the starboard. Land was seen as a "dark streak" on the water, but each man on lookout attributed it to a morning breeze until it mistakenly developed into land.

At 1:45 AM, Curling sighted land on the starboard beam and estimated that the distance was four to five miles. Unaware of his danger, he continued his course.

A few minutes later, the *Breconshire* hit a reef and headed for the bottom.

The entire crew managed to escape from the sinking vessel in the ship's boats and after being sheltered in a nearby Coast Guard station for three days, they returned to London.

The ordeal was not ended for the master and his second officer, however. Back in London they faced Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace who determined that the casualty was primarily negligence on the part of the master Taylor and second officer Curling. The courts suspended their certificates for six months.

The value of the *Breconshire* was listed at \$75,000.

There are stories about salvage attempts by Vero Beach residents immediately after the wreck. Although the ship contained nothing of great value, these salvagers took the teak off the wreck and made furniture from it.

Much later, in the summer of 1920, Bob Rice, of Vero Beach, brought up the *Breconshire*'s stern, anchor and a hunk of steel cable.

Rice, who is a draftsman at Piper Aircraft Corporation and owner of the 1110 Royal Palm Blvd. apartment building, displays the anchor on the lawn in front of the building. "That's my trophy of the *Breconshire*." Rice said.

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