

Shipwreck off Cape Ann, August 14 1635 - letter from Antony Thatcher to his brother Peter a few days after the occurrence.

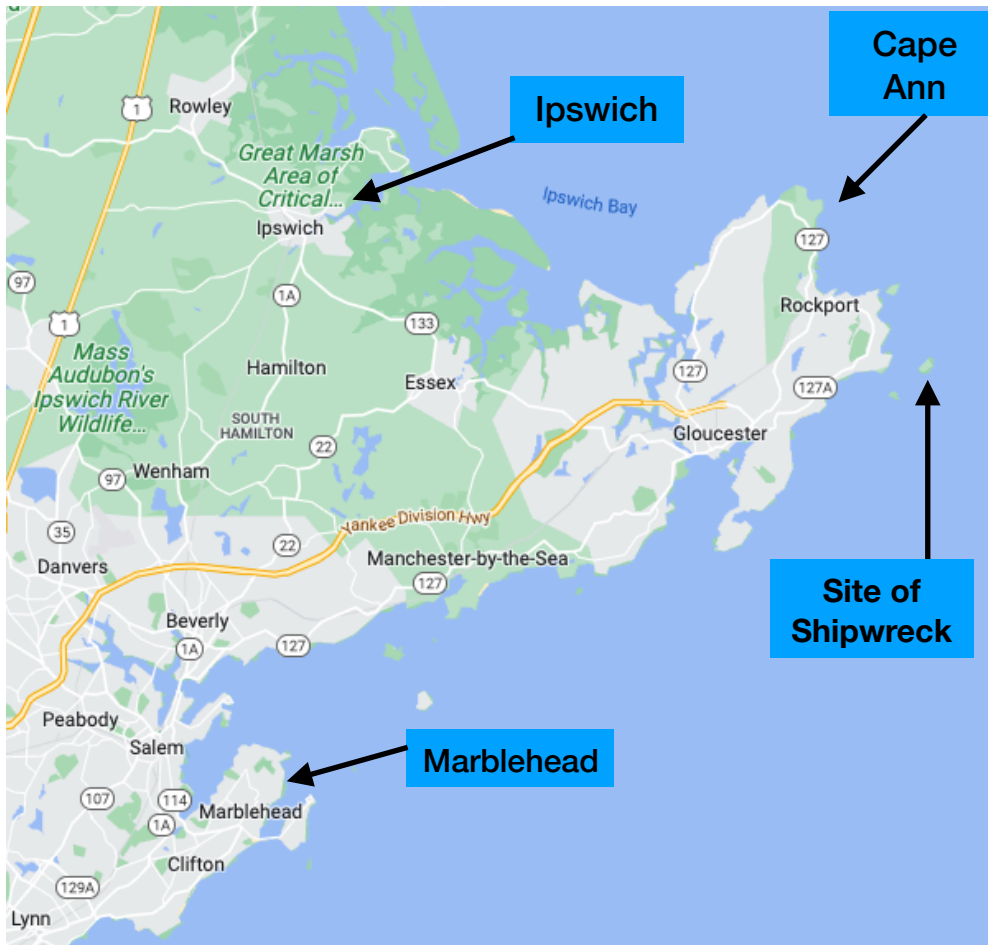
“I must turn my drowned pen and shaking hand to indite the story of such sad news as never before this happened in New England. There was a league of perpetual friendship between my cousin Avery and myself, never to forsake each other to the Death, but to be partakers of each other's misery or welfare as also of habitation in the same place. Now upon our arrival at New England there was an offer made to us. My cousin Avery was invited to Marblehead to be their pastor in due time: there being no church planted there as yet, but a town appointed to set up the trade of fishing. Because many there (the most being fishermen) were something loose and remiss in their behavior my cousin Avery was unwilling to go thither, and so refusing, we went to Newberry intending there to sit down. But being solicited so often, both by the men of the place and by the magistrates, also by Mr. Cotton, and most of the ministers, who alleged what a benefit we might be to the people there, and also to the country and the Commonwealth, at length we embraced it and that thither consented to go. They of Marblehead forth-with sent a pinnace (jb - small ship) for us and our goods.

We embarked at Ipswich August 11, 1635 with our families, and substances, bound for Marblehead, we being in all 23 souls, viz. 11 in my cousin's family, seven in mine, and one Mr. William Elliot sometime of New Sarum (jb - old sister city of Salisbury, England) and four mariners.

The next morning, having commended ourselves to God with cheerful hearts we hoisted sails: but the Lord suddenly turned our cheerfulness into mourning and lamentations, for on August 14, 1635 about 10 at night having a fresh gale of wind, our sails being old and done, were split, the mariners, because that it was night, would not put to her new sails, but resolved to cast anchor till the morning. But before daylight it pleased the Lord to send so mighty a storm as the like was never known in New England since the English came, nor in the memory of the Indians. It was so furious that our anchor came home, where upon the mariners let out more cable, which slipped away.



**Pinnace from
colonial society.org**



from Google Maps

Then our sailors knew not what to do: but we were driven before the wind and waves. My cousin and I perceived our danger, and solemnly recommended ourselves to God, the Lord both of earth and seas, expecting with every wave to be swallowed up and drenched in the deep: and as my cousin, his wife and my tender babes sat comforting and cheering one another in the Lord against ghastly death, which every moment stared us in the face, and sat triumphing upon each one's forehead, we were, by the violence of the waves and the fury of the winds (by the Lord's permission) lifted up upon a rock, between two high rocks, yet all was one rock, but it raged with the stroke, which came into the pinnacle, so as we were presently up to our middles in water as we sat. The waves came furiously and violently over us and against us, but by reason of the rocks position could not lift us off but beat her all to pieces.

Now look with me on our distress and consider of my misery, who beheld the ship broken and the water in her, and violently overwhelming us: My goods and provisions swimming in the seas, my friends almost drowned, and mine own poor children so untimely(if I may so term it without offence) before mine eyes, drowned and ready to

be swallowed up and dashed to pieces against the rocks by the mercyleless waves, and myself ready to accompany them. But I must go on to an end of this woeful relation.

In the same room whereat he sat, the master of the pinnace not knowing what to do, our foremast was cut down, our main mast broken in three pieces, the fore part of the pinnace beat away, our goods swimming about the seas, my children bewailing me as not pitying themselves, and myself bemoaning them, poor souls, whom I had occasioned to such an end in their tender years, when as they could scarce be sensible of death. And so likewise my cousin, his wife and his children, and both of us bewailing each other, in our Lord and only Saviour, Jesus Christ, in whom only we had comfort and cheerfulness, in so much that from the greatest to the least of us, there was not one screech or outcry made, but all as silent as sheep, we're contented resolved to die together lovingly, as since our acquaintance we had lived together friendly. Now as I was sitting in the cabin room door, with my body in the room, when lo, one of the sailors by a wave, being washed out of the pinnace was gotten in again, and coming into the cabin room over my back cried out, "we are all cast away, the Lord have mercy upon us. I have been washed overboard into the sea and gotten in again." His speech made me look forth and looking towards the sea, and seeing how we were, I turned myself to my cousin and the rest, and spoke these words "Oh cousin it have pleased God to cast is here between two rocks, the shore not far from us, for I saw the tops of trees when I looked forth."

Whereupon the master of the pinnace, looking up to the scuttle hole of the quarter deck went out at it, but I never saw him afterward. Then he that had been in the sea went out again by me and leapt overboard towards the rocks, whom afterwards also I could not see. Now none were left in the barque that I knew or saw but my cousin, his wife and children, myself and mine and his maid servant. But my cousin thought I would have fled from him and said on to me, "Oh cousin leave me not, let us die together," and reached for his hand to me. Then I letting go my son Peter's hand took him by the hand and said: "Cousin I purpose it not: whither shall I go? I am willing and ready to die with you and my poor children. God be merciful to us and receive us to himself," adding these words, "The Lord is willing and able to deliver us." He replied saying "True cousin, but what His pleasure is, we know not: I fear that we have been to unthankful for former deliverances, but he hath promised to deliver us from sin and condemnation, and bring us safe to heaven, through all sufficient satisfaction of Jesus Christ: this therefore we may challenge of him." To which I replying said "That is all the deliverance I now desire or expect" which words I no sooner said but by a mighty wave I was with a piece of the barque washed out upon part of the rock where the wave left me almost drowned; but recovering my feet I saw above me on the rock, my daughter Mary, to whom I had no sooner gotten, but my cousin Avery and his eldest son came to us being all four of us washed out by one and the same wave. We all went to a small hole on the top of the rock, whence we called to those in the pinnace to come unto us: but presently came another wave, and dashing the pinnace all to pieces, carried my wife away in the scuttle as she was, with the greater part of the quarter deck unto the shore, where she was cast safely but her legs or something bruised, and much timber

of the vessel being there also cast, she was sometime before she could get away, being washed by the waves.

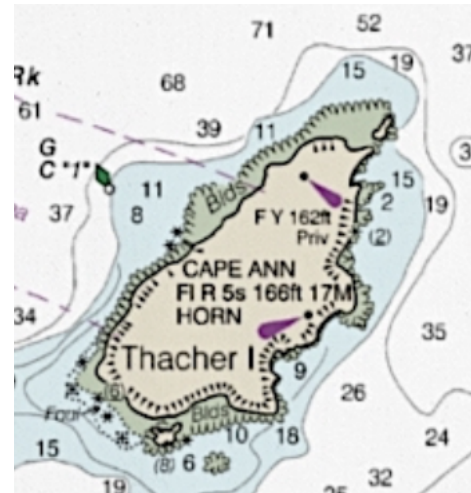
All the rest that were in the barque were drowned in the merciless seas. We four by that wave were clean swept from off the rock also, into the sea, the Lord in one instance of time disposing of 15 souls of us according to his good pleasure and will. His pleasure and wonderful great mercy to me was thus: standing up on the rock as before you heard, with my oldest daughter, my cousin and his oldest son, looking upon and talking to them in the barque whenas we were by that merciless wave, washed off the rock, as before you heard, God in all his mercy, caused me to fall by the stroke of the wave, flat on my face, for my face was towards the sea, in so much that I was sliding off the rock, into the sea, the Lord directed my toes into a joint of the rock's sides, as also some of the tops of my fingers, with my right hand, by means where of, the wave leaving me. I remained so, having in the rock only my head above the water, when on the left hand I espied a board or plank of the pinnace. And as I was reaching out my left hand to lay hold of it, by another coming over the top of the rock, I was washed away from the rock, and by the violence of the waves was driven hither and thither in the sea is a great while, and had many dashes against the rocks.

At length, past hopes of life, and weary in body and spirit, I even gave over to nature, and being ready to receive in the waters of death, I lifted up both my heart and hand, to the God in Heaven (for note) I had my senses remaining perfect with me all the time that I was under and in the water, who at that instant lifted my head above the top of the water, that I might breathe, without any hindrance by the waters. I stood bold upright as if I had stood up on my feet but I felt no bottom nor had any footing to stand on, but the waters. While I was thus above the water, I saw by me a piece of the mast, as I suppose, about 3 feet long, which I labored to catch into my arms. But suddenly I was overwhelmed with water and driven to and fro again, and at last I felt the ground with my right foot, when immediately, whilst I was thus groveling on my face, I presently, recovering my feet was in the water up to my breast, and through God's great mercy, had my face unto the shore, and not to the sea.

I made haste to get out but was thrown down on my hands by the waves, and so with safety crept to the dry shore, where, blessing God, I turned about to look for my children and friends, but saw neither nor any part of the pinnace where I left them as I suppose. But I saw my wife about a butt length from me, getting herself forth, from amidst the timber of the broken barque. But before I could get to her she was gotten to the shore. I was in the water, after I was washed from the rock before I came to the shore, a quarter of an hour at least. When we were coming each to the other we went and sat down on the bank. But fear of the seas' rolling and our coldness, would not suffer us there to remain.

But we went up into the land, and sat us down under a cedar tree, which the wind had thrown down, where we sat about an hour almost dead with cold. But now the storm was broken up and the wind was calm, but the sea remained rough and fearful to us. My legs were much bruised, and so my head was: other hurt I had none, neither had I

taken in much quantity of water, but my heart would not let me sit still any longer, but I would go to see if any more were gotten to the land with safety, especially hoping to have met with some of my poor children: but I could find none, neither dead nor yet living. You condole with me my miseries – who now begin to consider of my losses. Now came to my remembrance the time and manner, how and when, I last saw and left my children and friends. One was severed from me sitting on the rock at my feet, and other three in the pinnacle. My little babe (ah poor Peter) sitting in his sister Edith's arms, who to the utmost of her power sheltered him from the waters. My poor William, standing close onto them, all three of them looking ruefully on me, on the rock, their very countenance calling onto me to help them, whom I could not go unto, neither could they come to me, neither would the merciless waves afford me space of time to use any means at all, either to help them or myself.



Oh, yet I see you their cheeks, poor silent lambs, plead pity and help at my hands. Then on the other side to consider the loss of my dear friends, with the spoiling and loss of all our goods and provisions: myself cast upon an unknown land in a wilderness, I knew not where nor how to get thence. Then it came to my mind how I had occasioned the death of my children, who caused them to leave their native land, who might have left them there, yea, and might have have some back again and cost me nothing: these and such like thoughts to press down my heavy heart very much.

But I must let this pass, and will proceed on the relation of God's goodness unto me, in that desolate island on which I was cast. I and my wife were almost naked both of us, and wet and cold even unto death. I found a knapsack cast on the shore, in which I had a steel and flint and powder-horn. Going further I found a drowned goat : then I found a hat and my son William's coat, both of which I put on. My wife found one of her petticoats which she put on. I found also two cheeses and some butter driven



Thacher Island off Cape Ann, Rockport, MA - from marinas.com

ashore. Thus the Lord sent us some clothes to put on and food to sustain our new lives, which we had lately given unto us, and means also to make fire for in an hour I had some gunpowder, which to mine own (and since to other men's) admiration was dry. So taking a piece of my wife's neck cloth, which I had dried in the sun, I struck a fire, and so dried and warmed our wet bodies, and then skinned the goat, and having found a small brass pot we boiled some of her.

Our drink was brackish water. Bread we had none. There we remained till Monday following when about three of the clock in the afternoon, in a boat that came that way, we went off that desolate island, which I named after my name, "Thatchers Woe" and the rock "Avery's Fall", to the end that their fall and loss and mine own, might be had in perpetual remembrance. In the isle lieth buried the body of my cousin's eldest daughter, who I found dead on the shore. On the Tuesday following in the afternoon we arrived at Marblehead."

A cradle coverlet, of scarlet broadcloth, originally trimmed with gold lace, said to have been shipwrecked, is still in the possession of his descendants and is held in great veneration.

In the Massachusetts Colonial records, we find under date of September 3, 1635, the following: "it is ordered that there shall be 40 marks given to Mr. Thatcher out of the treasury towards his great losses: And under date of March 9, 1636 - 1637 the following: "Mr. Anthony had granted to him the small i[s]land at the head of Cape Ann (upon which he was preserved from shipwreck) as his PP inheritance

In Governor Winthrop's Journal we find: "the General Court gave Mr. Thatcher 26 135 4D towards his losses, and divers[e] good people gave him besides."

JB Notes:

About the Great 1635 Colonial Hurricane from newenglandhistoricalsociety.com

On land, the damage was staggering. The tides at Narragansett Bay were reported at 20 feet higher than normal. Unknown numbers of Native Americans caught in the surge drowned. Buildings in Plymouth and Bourne blew down and flooded. The storm damaged Boston less than Providence, but downed trees throughout the colony.

William Bradford, in "Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647", called it "a mighty storm of wind and rain." None living in these parts, either English or Indians, ever saw anything worse", he wrote. "Indians climbed into trees for their safety. It blew down many hundred thousands of trees, turning up the stronger by the roots and breaking the higher pine trees off in the middle," he wrote. "And the tall young oaks and walnut trees of good bigness were wound like a withe, very strange and fearful to behold."