

Citizens – Captain Thomas Flagstad

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Schooner Ella Ellinwood – 1869-1901

“Miraculous Escape from Death” was the headline that appeared in an article from Thursday, 28 August 1890.

Mrs. Thomas Flagstad arrived home last Sunday from a two months’ trip with her husband on the schooner Ella Ellinwood. She reported that on the 8th day of August at about seven o’clock in the evening a heavy squall came up from the Northwest just as they were entering the doors from Lake Michigan to Green Bay. It was accompanied by heavy thunder and lightning. The lightning struck the schooner, splitting both her fore and main mast all to splinters and going down on the port side striking the big anchor, the fire flying all over.

The mate, William Flagstad, was standing within six inches of the anchor when it struck. He was stunned for a few minutes, so he didn’t know where he was, but otherwise was unhurt. The rest of

the crew, consisting of the captain, the man at the wheel, and four sailors, being busy with the sails when the lightning struck were on the quarter deck, fire flying all around them also.

The ball of the main mast, a large piece of wood with an iron rod two feet long and one inch through, came down striking the wheel and certainly would have killed the man at the wheel had it struck him.

Mrs. Flagstad, being in the cabin alone at the time, was much frightened, as the schooner was trembling like a leaf.

Thomas Flagstad was born in Grimstad, Norway on 19 July 1828. At the age of 14 he left school and took up Navigation in the Nautical School at Christiania, Norway, until he reached the age of 18. After which he went to sea, sailing on every sea and ocean on the globe. He sailed for a number of years out of the City of New York on ships of all nations.

In 1862 he went to Milwaukee and began sailing on the Great Lakes. In 1863 he made his first trip to White Lake on the Schooner Hensdale which carried cord wood from White Lake to Milwaukee.

Captain Flagstad married Anna Elizabeth Rummel in Milwaukee on 24 August 1864. To this marriage nine children were born: Henry Minard (1865-1873); William Conklin (1866-1946); Edward John (1867-1873); Thomas A. (1869-1962); Henry L. (1871-1873); Emily (1874-1960); Ira Joseph (1874-1950); Madelina "Lena" (1876-1957); Unk Flagstad (?)

In November 1864 he removed to White River and a year later moved to Stony Creek and engaged in the fish business until 1878, when he moved back to White Lake where he resided until the time of his death on 30 January 1913.

In the Spring of 1878, he went sailing again with his brother, Captain Andrew Flagstad on the Schooner Ella Ellinwood, becoming owner and master of the vessel two years later. He sailed the Ellinwood until the Fall of 1902 when she was lost on Fox Point near Milwaukee in a dense fog.

From that time until his death he was engaged in the boat livery business at Maple Grove.

In March 1906, Captain Thomas Flagstad nearly met his death by drowning in White Lake one morning. Luckily, he was rescued from the icy waters after being in the water for over twenty minutes. The water at this spot was twenty feet in depth.

He had left his house with his sled and fish basket with the intention of catching some perch, but when he was quite a distance from shore and about midway between Heald's dock and Ben Mac Dhui the ice gave away under him and he found himself in the icy waters. He managed to retain his hold on the sled and it was by means of this that he was able to keep afloat until help arrived.

As soon as the ice broke with him, the old captain made use of a stentorian voice and his cries were heard by Harry and Joe O'Connell and Charles Johnson at their homes near the lake shore. They at once ran to his rescue and started to carry a plank to the old man when the ice broke again and Harry O'Connell was in the water. He pulled himself out without much trouble and the other boys managed to get a plank within reach of Captain Flagstad who was then readily taken from the water, very badly chilled and worn out, and carried to his home. He had broken the ice for quite a distance

in his efforts to save himself from drowning. It was indicated that the captain doesn't care for perch now a days.

By 1920 Mrs. Flagstad was living with her married daughter Emily Haehnel in Muskegon Heights. It is there that she died on 12 August 1928. She was buried along with her husband in Oak Grove Cemetery in Montague.