

# THE TENSAS GAZETTE

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## HISTORIC CRIMES and MYSTERIES



THE BLOOD OF THE BOATSWAIN.

The story of John Thomas has been a favorite in the forecastles of British ships for a hundred and fifty years, so it naturally has developed numerous versions, and no man can say which is the correct one. A few facts touching the strange adventures of John are of official record, showing that the story has a foundation of truth; but most of the details are tradition. One weak point is common to all the versions. The hero of the story was hanged for murdering the boatswain, although the body of the boatswain was not found, which is in conflict with British law; yet this weak point is the one part of the story that has the strongest backing of official record.

It was the day before Christmas, in one of the latter years of the eighteenth century, when John Thomas, a sailmaker, set forth to visit his mother, who lived near Deal. Reaching that town in the evening, he was too tired to finish his journey that night, so he put up at an inn presided over by a businesslike landlady, who informed him that the house was crowded by reason of the Yuletide festivities, and he couldn't be accommodated unless he was willing to share room and bed with her uncle, who was the

the bedroom down to the beach, and it seemed certain that the murderer had carried or dragged the body of his victim there, and thrown it into the water. In those days men were hanged for stealing spoons, and the only thing to do was to hang John Thomas, even if his victim could not be found.

It happened that a new executioner had just been inaugurated in that district, and John was his first patient. He probably was overcome by stage fright, for he bungled the job. He gave John too much rope, so that his toes rested on the ground, and when he was cut down it was found that he still lived. Friends and sympathizers smuggled the body away and revived him. Kept in close concealment, he soon recovered from the shock, and was as good a man as ever.

Then, under an assumed name, he went down to Portsmouth, where he secured a job on a warship that was about to sail for the West Indies. There he remained for three years, and distinguished himself for diligence, valor and sundry other admirable qualities, so that he was promoted to the position of master's mate, and was generally liked and respected aboard ship as well as on land.

At the end of the three years he returned home and drew his pay. Then, after visiting his aged mother, and leaving her a little roll of real money, he at once embarked upon another ship that was about to sail for foreign parts. As he lounged about the deck, waiting for the vessel to get a move on her, he saw an old mariner whose face was strangely familiar. He knew he had seen that ancient, wind-bitten countenance somewhere, but where?

He puzzled over it a long time, and suddenly illumination came. Laying an agitated hand on the ancient mariner's shoulder, he cried:

"Didn't you sleep at the Bear's Head Inn at Deal on the night before Christmas, four years ago?"

"Ay, marry," quoth the ancient mariner. "Shiver my timbers and bust my binnacle topkights, or words to that effect, if I ever forget that night."

The ancient mariner was glad to tell his story. He had been trying to tell it for years, and nobody would listen to him, and here was a young man who really seemed impatient to hear the facts.

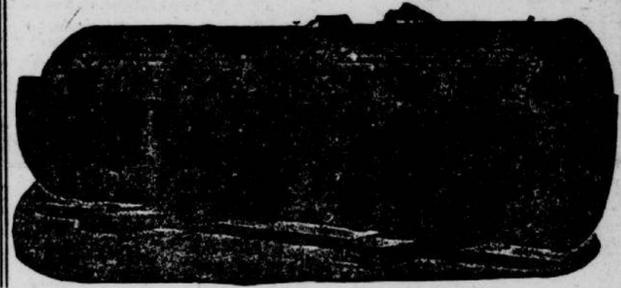
Before going to the inn that evening the boatswain had been to a surgeon, who extracted a quantity of blood from him. He was weak and sick when he went to bed, and fell into a troubled

Nell Callahan

William McLean

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(Signed) THOS. H. HOLT, Agt.

St. Joseph, La., May 13, 1915.

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"He Found to His Astonishment That the Boatswain Was Not There. But the Bed Clothing Was Stained With His Blood and There Was Blood on the Floor."

boatswain of a large ship just arrived from India.

John agreed to this arrangement without hesitation, and, after stowing away a good supper and quaffing a few flagons of brown October ale, he was shown to the room, where he found the elderly boatswain already in bed. The sailmaker disrobed, blew out the candle, and climbed into the downy couch. He found the boatswain a wretched bedfellow. The old man groaned and ground his teeth as though troubled with an ingrowing conscience, and the way he kicked with his feet and clawed with his hands was a sin and a shame.

After standing it for a while, the sailmaker concluded to take a walk, thinking that the old man might be quieted down by the time he returned. It was late at night, and the inmates of the tavern were in bed, so John tiptoed quietly to the back door, only to find that he couldn't open it with his fingers. He remembered that he had seen the boatswain's knife on the window ledge in the room, so he stole back and secured it. With this he was able to lift the latch of the door. He stepped forth into the cool, refreshing night and enjoyed a good walk.

Returning quietly to his room, he found to his astonishment that the boatswain was not there. But the bed clothing was stained with his blood, and there was blood on the floor, on the door, almost everywhere. He was scared stiff, and followed his first impulse, which was to fly. Securing his bundle, he left the inn, and walked to his mother's home.

There he was arrested the day after Christmas. The boatswain's knife was in his pocket, and his story sounded improbable. Save for the absence of the victim's body, there never was a stronger case of circumstantial evidence against a man. It was so strong that John was promptly tried and convicted of murder. It was shown that the bloodstains had been traced from

sleep, which accounted for his thrash around so much. He had a faint recollection of a stranger climbing into bed with him, and also vaguely remembered the departure of the stranger during the night. Then he awoke to find that the wound made by the surgeon had broken open, and he was bleeding profusely. Fearing that he would bleed to death, he hastily donned his clothes, and set forth from the inn, hoping to find the surgeon, but no sooner had he set foot in the street than he was seized by a press gang and carried away to the beach, where a man-of-war's boat was waiting. In this he was conveyed to the ship, and sailed away to the East Indies, where he had been ever since, little dreaming that his abrupt departure had imperiled a human life.

Here the chronicle ends. The sailmaker and the boatswain step out of history as abruptly as they stepped in, and even the fate of the buxom landlady is shrouded in mystery.

### Orders Reversed.

The English soldier on furlough from the front was pressed for reminiscences of France.

"Well, sir, the biggest shock I got over there was going to the firing line first time. Who should I see but Rooney—d'y mind old dot-an-carry-one, who used to be on this beat? There he was, as large as life, in the military police. 'Jim, me lad,' sez he, 'I've pinched you a few times at home for scrapping, but, Lord save us, I'll have to shoot you here if you don't scrap, so keep up your reputation! It's a rummy world.'"

### Worse Still.

"I saw you stepping around the city last night, Jagaby."  
"Er—yes. I was out a little while. Did my er—feet interfere?"  
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