

Skipper Ireson's Ride

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North American

Intermediate
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Flood, Fluid, or Floyd Ireson (in some chronicles his name is Benjamin) was making for Marblehead in a furious gale, in the autumn of 1808, in the schooner Betsy. Off Cape Cod he fell in with the schooner Active, of Beverly, in distress, for she had been disabled in the heavy sea and was on her beam ends, at the mercy of the tempest. The master of the Active hailed Ireson and asked to be taken off, for his vessel could not last much longer, but the Betsy, after a parley, laid her course again homeward, leaving the exhausted and despairing crew of the sinking vessel to shift as best they might. The Betsy had not been many hours in port before it was known that men were in peril in the bay, and two crews of volunteers set off instantly to the rescue. But it was too late. The Active was at the bottom of the sea. The captain and three of his men were saved, however, and their grave accusation against the Betsy's skipper was common talk in Marblehead ere many days.

On a moonlight night Flood Ireson was roused by knocking at his door. On opening it he was seized by a band of his townsmen, silently hustled to a deserted spot, stripped, bound, and coated with tar and feathers. At break of day he was pitched into an old dory and dragged along the roads until the bottom of the boat dropped out, when he was mounted in a cart and the procession continued until Salem was reached. The selectmen of that town turned back the company, and for a part of the way home the cart was drawn by a jeering crowd of fishwives. Ireson was released only when nature had been taxed to the limit of endurance. As his bonds were cut he said, quietly, "I thank you for my ride, gentlemen, but you will live to regret it."

Some of the cooler heads among his fellows have believed the skipper innocent and throw the blame for the

abandonment of the sinking vessel on Ireson's mutinous crew. There are others, the universal deniers, who believe that the whole thing is fiction. Those people refuse to believe in their own grandfathers. Ireson became moody and reckless after this adventure. He did not seem to think it worth the attempt to clear himself. At times he seemed trying, by his aggressive acts and bitter speeches, to tempt some hot-tempered townsman to kill him. He died after a severe freezing, having been blown to sea—as some think by his own will—in a smack.

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