

Skinner's Cave

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North American

Advanced
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The abhorrence to paying taxes and duties—or any other levy from which an immediate and personal good is not promised—is too deeply rooted in human nature to be affected by statutes, and whenever it is possible to buy commodities that have escaped the observation of the revenue officers many are tempted to do so for the mere pleasure of defying the law. In the early part of this century the northern farmers and their wives were, in a way, providing themselves with laces, silver-ware, brandy, and other protected and dreadful articles, on which it was evident that somebody had forgotten to pay duty. The customs authorities on the American side of the border were long puzzled by the irruption of these forbidden things, but suspicion ultimately fell on a fellow of gigantic size, named Skinner.

It was believed that this outlaw carried on the crime of free trade after sunset, hiding his merchandise by day on the islands of Lake Memphremagog. This delightful sheet of water lies half in Canada and half in Vermont—agreeably to the purpose of such as he. Province Island is still believed to contain buried treasure, but the rock that contains Skinner's Cave was the smuggler's usual haunt, and when pursued he rowed to this spot and effected a disappearance, because he entered the cave on the northwest side, where it was masked by shrubbery. One night the officers landed on this island after he had gone into hiding, and after diligent search discovered his boat drawn up in a covert. They pushed it into the lake, where the winds sent it adrift, and, his communication with the shore thus cut off, the outlaw perished miserably of hunger. His skeleton was found in the cavern some years later.

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