

by Ray L. Bellande

The Emma Harvey: A tale of the July Storm 1916

The recent near miss of Tropical Storm Alberto on July 3, 1994 reminded me of an incident that happened on the Mississippi Coast 78 years ago almost to the day.

Its a true story well documented in the journals and lives of the people of that time.

On the humid morning of July 6, 1916, railroad agent, John Drysdale (1869-1934), walked slowly across the L&N Railroad bridge from Ocean Springs towards Biloxi. Soon he would announce to the world the fate of his little town on the eastern shore of the Bay of Biloxi. During the early morning hours a hurricane struck the Mississippi Coast roaring through Ocean Springs with wind gusts up to 125 mph.

Destruction wrought by the tempest was manifested in roof, fence, chimney, tree and shed damage.

No one was seriously injured, but plumber George Dale (1872-1953) got a good scare when the Knights of Pythias Hall which he was occupying during the storm got blown off its foundation. The colored Baptist Church was heavily hit by the strong wind force and had to be torn down in the days following the storm.

In the country, the Rose Farm north of Fort Bayou reported severe damage. At the C.E. Pabst (1851-1920) pecan orchards some of the older trees were damaged. More fortunate was Theo Bechtel (1863-1931) reporting only slight ruin to his potential crop.

At Biloxi, L&N agent Drysdale found that city in great suffering. The hurricane had struck there also with unrelenting fury. The Back Bay and Point Cadet areas were especially hit hard. It would be days and even weeks before all the news of the great natural disaster

would be known.

At the time many ships were operating in the Mississippi Sound. These vessels weren't outfitted with the communication and weather reporting devices we have today.

Consequently, most of the sailors and their vessels were caught unprepared. Many of the Biloxi schooners were fortunate in that they were working near the partially sheltered Louisiana marshes. Other mariners sought haven in the lee of the offshore barrier islands. Those not so fortunate rode the storm out at sea. Most seaman made it home to their port. One small Biloxi schooner wasn't so fortunate.

It was the *Emma Harvey* and her story follows.

The *Emma Harvey* was a Biloxi schooner utilized in the shrimp and oyster industry of the Mississippi and Louisiana coasts in the early years of this century. She was built by Casimir J. Harvey (1845-1904) at his Back Bay (D'Iberville) shipyard probably in the 1890's and was named for his youngest daughter, Emma Agnes Harvey (1889-1968). Although the physical dimensions of the *Emma Harvey* are not known, it is documented in Chattel Book 2, p. 232 of the Chancery Clerk's Office of Harrison County that Casimir Harvey conveyed a schooner on May 25, 1889, to H.T. Howard. The boat was called the *H.T. Howard*, and was 36 feet in length, 14 $\frac{3}{16}$ feet in breadth, three feet deep, and weighed 8 $\frac{13}{100}$ tons.

The *Emma Harvey* participated in some of the early Biloxi schooner races. In the 1901 Biloxi Regatta, she withdrew before finishing the first round because of heavy seas. After the days of the White Winged Queens had passed,

the *Emma Harvey* was converted to a charter boat and trawler.

She was last seen about 1978 in a canal at Cedar Point, Ala., north of Dauphin Island. Every ship has a tale to tell. The *Emma Harvey* has many and is an unusual craft as will be demonstrated.

On Tuesday morning, July 4, 1916, the *Emma Harvey*, owned by Ulysses (Lel) Desporte, a Biloxi oyster dealer, departed Back Bay on a shrimping trip to Chandeleur Island. Unknown to Capt. George Duggan and his crew, who consisted of Arthur Duggan, Lawrence Bennett, John Helm, John McDuffy and Jack Atkinson, an Englishman, a category three hurricane was poised to strike the Mississippi Gulf Coast the following afternoon (July 5).

The July Storm, as it is known in the annals of Gulf Coast meteorology, came ashore between Ocean Springs and Pascagoula. During this cyclone, several barometers in Biloxi registered 28.08 inches of mercury. Although this was the lowest barometric pressure ever recorded to this date, it was relatively high when compared to the mighty Camille of August 1969 which had a record low pressure for any storm to that time of 26.06 inches of mercury.

The wind direction in the early hours of the storm was northeast, but shifted to the west where it remained until it abated in the early hours of the morning of July 6. A wind velocity of 90 miles per hour was recorded at Biloxi.

The *Emma Harvey* reached Chandeleur Island and was at anchor in Schooner Harbor on the west side of the island.

This fact was corroborated by Capt. Robert Williams of the schooner, *Lagoda*, also a victim of

the furious storm. Other ships in the immediate area were the schooners: *Laguna* (Lagonia), and the *Beulah D*. The crews of these vessels were rescued in the days immediately following the hurricane by boats from Biloxi.

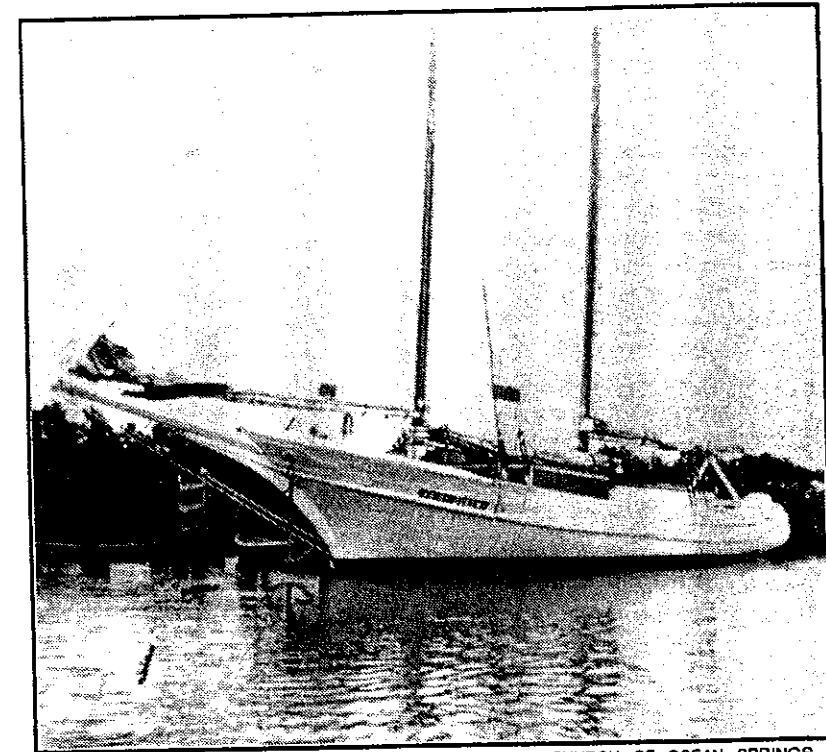
A vivid description of the harrowing experience in the Chandeleurs aboard the *Beulah D* is given by Louis Largilliere in the July 10, 1916, *Daily Herald* (pp. 1 and 3).

He stated: he never wanted to go through such an experience again and he is grateful that he reached the mainland again.

The *Beulah D* was caught in the storm while at anchor in Chandeleur Sound near North Keys. After the blow had overtaken them they put out two anchors but they were of no avail and the schooner was carried about the Gulf for a distance of 35 miles after the masts had both blown out by the gale. During the drifting of the boat the members aboard were compelled to remain below most of the time as the wind was so strong that had they attempted to walk on deck they would have been blown overboard and lost forever. The hatches of the boat were blown away and canvas had to be tacked down to keep out the torrents of rain.

In the days and weeks following the great blow, Lel Desporte sent out motor vessels, primarily the *Ursula C*, captained by Johnny Duggan or Boy Bennett. With other relatives of the missing crew, they made a complete search of Cat Island, the Chandeleurs, Cryhoe Bay, Point Comfort, Earl Island, Bird island, Breton Island, Taylor's Pass, North Keys, Battle Door, Southwest keys and Neptune, La.

This valiant search of the western sector discovered the aban-



GEORGE H. GRANITZ COLLECTION-FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OCEAN SPRINGS-HONORABLE RUSSELL D. THOMPSON, CUSTODIAN

The Fairy Queen

The *Fairy Queen* was built by Casimir Jacob Harvey (1845-1904) at his Back Bay (D'Iberville shipyard) probably in the 1890s or early 1900s. The *Fairy Queen* was owned by W.W. Branigar and others in the late 1920s. She was used to entertain guests at their Gulf Hills Resort. The *Emma Harvey* which was lost in the July Storm of 1916 was a sister ship to the *Fairy Queen*.

doned schooner, *Segura*, and the schooner barge, *Hussler*, both from Biloxi at Cryhoe Bay in the Louisiana marshes. At Taylor's Pass, they located a drowned fisherman.

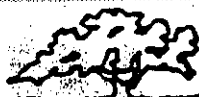
The only physical sign of the *Emma Harvey* after the great storm in the Chandeleurs was reported by Capt. G.L. Fields of the schooner, *Beulah D*, who stated that when his crew went ashore on the island to

search for signs of the *Emma Harvey*, they found nothing but a small meat board and small pieces of rope that had drifted ashore from some boat during the gale. They could see in the sand where the *Emma Harvey* was believed to have dragged her two anchors in her journey across the island to the east during the blow.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



by Ray L. Bellande



Sous les chenes

The Emma Harvey: A tale of the July storm 1916 (Part I)

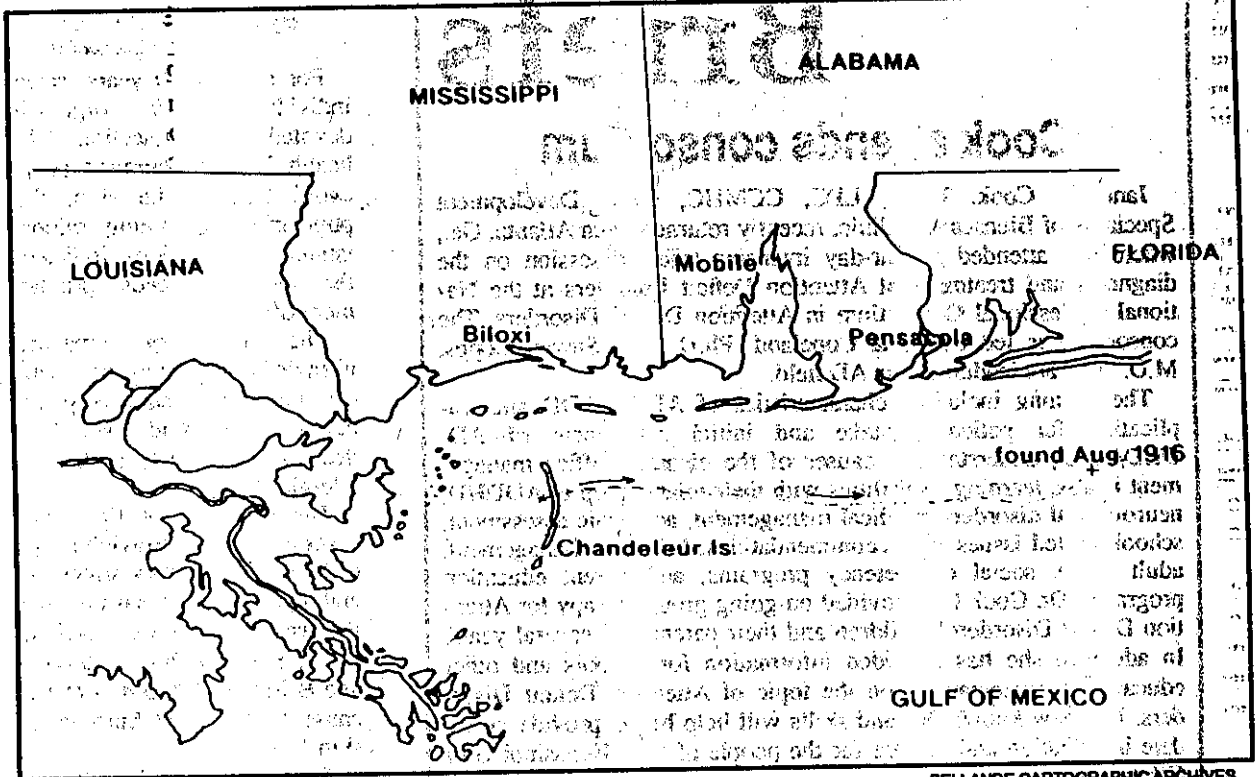
By late July, the hunt for the missing schooner continued aboard the *Ursula C* now captained by Flood Lanius. Henry and Fred Duggan, son of Capt. George Duggan, were also aboard. The search party now concentrated its relentless efforts to the east combing Horn, Petit Bois, Dauphin and lesser islands in that area. They also went to Pascagoula, Mobile and the west Florida coast seeking information and leads.

There were some sightings in the eastern Gulf which gave hope for locating the missing crew and boat. The Coast Guard cutter, *Talapoosa*, reported on July 11 that it had passed a schooner's mast 12 feet out of the water at Latitude 29.18 N and Longitude 86.55 W (approximately 100 miles southeast of Pensacola). About the same time, the private yacht, *Shirin*, of New Orleans passed a vessel within six miles of Grant's Pass (near Dauphin Island) with its right side up.

An unusual event occurred on Aug. 2, when Martin Lomax, a teenage lad from Biloxi, found a bottle with a note in it on the south side of Deer Island. The note read: "Help. Help. On an unknown island." Signed George Duggan and crew. Some thought the note a hoax while others believed John Heim had written it since he always carried an empty flask in his pocket when at sea to be prepared for the emergency of a shipwreck.

The destiny of the vanished *Emma Harvey* was discovered on Aug. 12, when the lost schooner was located by two fishing boats from Pensacola. She was found floating bottom side up about 25 miles from Pensacola (other reports point to a location of 75 miles). No sign of Capt. Duggan or any members of his crew were ever found. The derelict was towed to a mooring point near the Perdido Wharf in Pensacola by the tug, *William Flanders*.

Mr. Bruce S. Weeks, Deputy Collector of Customs at Pensacola, stated in his report of the incident



BELLANDE CARTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES

July Storm 1916

On July 5, 1916, a category three hurricane struck the Mississippi Coast between Ocean Springs and Pascagoula. It played havoc with the local fishing fleet. The *Emma Harvey*, a Biloxi schooner, was caught at Schooner Harbor in the Chandeleur Islands and blown eastward. This map depicts the track of the vessel.

the following:

There are absolutely no indications that the crew of the *Emma Harvey* was saved and he expressed the opinion that the men from Biloxi, who went to the Chandeleur Islands on July 5, were lost in the hurricane which swept over the Gulf on that date.

No indication of crew and there does not seem to be much probability that they ever got away in the boats. The crew evidently cut away the rigging on the starboard side, but failed to cut it on the lee side first, and apparently, the rigging went over the port side, hung and the vessel simply turned over. The anchors appear to have been

out, but only a short length of chain.

The Biloxi schooner, *Emma Harvey*, was deemed worth saving by Capt. Rocheblane of the towing vessel, *William Flanders*, but because of the great salvage and towing expense, Lel Desporte decided to dispose of her in Pensacola.

The precedent information was assimilated from the *Daily Herald* in the issues July 7, 1916, through Aug. 29, 1916. A personal perspective of the incident is given by Frank Duggan (b. 1912) who is the sole surviving son of the skipper of the *Emma Harvey*, George Duggan. Frank Duggan resides at 344 Fayard Street in Biloxi on the site that his family moved to circa 1905. Previously the Duggans lived at 747 Reynoir. As Frank Duggan was only four years of age when his father, George, brother, Arthur, and cousin, Lawrence Bennett, drowned that stormy July 5 evening east of the Chandeleurs, it wasn't until years later at the dinner table or while drinking beer with his older brothers, Charlie and Fred Duggan, that he would hear the familial version of the *Emma Harvey* disaster. The following narrative is a summary of the tale of the *Emma Harvey* as told to me by Frank Duggan on Dec. 17, 1990.

The voyage to Chandeleur commenced as a suggestion from Johnny McDuffy when he told George Duggan, "Hey, Cap, they're slaughtering shrimp out there and getting redfish with them in the seine."

but son, Fred had disappeared to parts unknown. When the anchor was weighed, Fred Duggan was replaced by his brother, Arthur, a newlywed. Arthur was eager to earn good wages for his new family situation.

Fred Duggan, who had sailed on the *Emma Harvey* many times with his father, never liked the little vessel, and thought it unsafe in rough weather. He referred to it as a "deathtrap" and admonished Charlie Duggan to never sail on her. Fred preferred the larger schooner, *Cavalier*, and could never understand his dad's love for the smaller boat.

The tragedy of the July Storm of 1916 has remained with the Duggan Family through the years as one would expect from such a sudden loss of loved ones.

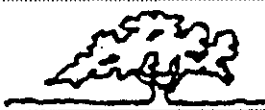
After the *Emma Harvey* was towed into Pensacola and salvaged, a Miami man bought it from salvagers. He had it towed to southern Florida, and refurbished it with a new cabin, engine and trawls. The U.S. Coast Guard became suspicious of the vessel since it never seemed to utilize its fishing gear. When they boarded the craft, a cargo of illicit Cuban spirits was discovered in the hold. The rum runner was confiscated and sold at a sealed bid auction in Miami as a victim of the Prohibition enforcement years (1919-1933). The purchaser, an Alabama man, returned the *Emma Harvey* to the Gulf Coast, probably to Bon Secour, Ala.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Capt. Duggan mustered his crew,



by Ray L. Bellande



Sous les chenes

The *Emma Harvey*: A tale of the July Storm 1916 (Part III)

A trip to Cedar Point and Dauphin Island, Ala., on Dec. 31, 1990, resulted in telephone conversations with Sadie Mae Collier Serra and John Henry Lamey. Sadie Serra is the daughter of Frank Collier. According to her, Frank Collier obtained the *Emma Harvey* from a Bon Secour man in a trade. The man may have been John Steiner or Budgey Plash.

Collier gave \$800 worth of fine oysters for the vessel.

Mrs. Serra, the 10th of 11 Collier children, told of her father's success as a business man in Mobile County.

Frank Collier and two associates owned 25 boats, a canning factory and grocery store on Dauphin Island, and an ice plant in Mobile. A disastrous fire at the ice plant and the Great Depression combined to bring the Colliers to financial chaos. They moved to Cedar Point circa 1933 with only 75 cents in the family treasury. Frank Collier began life anew by oystering in the bay. His wife opened the mollusks and sold them. This "mom and pop" operation slowly grew, and the Collier children were integrated into the operation as their age allowed. Sadie Mae Serra said that the Collier fortunes improved rapidly after the *Emma Harvey* acquisition.

Initially, the old Biloxi schooner was put to work as a ferry boat transporting people, mail, automobiles and cattle from Cedar Point to the island. The Colliers ran a herd on the west end of Dauphin Island.

Prior to World War II, the *Emma Harvey* would take day charters to the snapper banks. During the war years, fear of German submarines caused Capt. Collier to ply the coastal and bay waters for trout. He would take as many as 20 people out for \$30 per day and give them a delicious fish fry after the trip.

During the September 1947 Hurricane, the *Emma Harvey* was trapped by low tide at her mooring in the Cedar Point canal. The Collier family left for higher ground. When they returned the next morning, they found the valiant little lady on high ground adjacent to their store. During the night of fierce winds and violent seas, the vessel had stood as a barrier to protect the Colliers' building from storm tossed flotsam and other debris.

John Henry Lamey, a neighbor to Sadie Mae Serra at Alabama Port, worked as a deckhand on the *Emma Harvey* in the 1940s and 1950s with Weldon "Doc" Collier, the brother of Sadie Serra. He vividly recalls the search and discovery of the wreckage of a National Airlines

DC-6 airliner which crashed into the Gulf about 12 miles south of Fort Morgan. The accident occurred in February 1953. The commercial aircraft was enroute to Moissant in New Orleans from Tampa when it went down as the result of turbulent weather.

After the Dauphin Island causeway was completed in the 1950s, the *Emma Harvey* plied the bay and Gulf waters as a shrimp trawler. According to the indigenous people of coastal Alabama, the high tides and strong winds of Hurricane Frederick on Sept. 12, 1979, blew the Casmir Harvey built schooner into the wide expanses of the Mon Island marsh or Portersville Bay to the west of Cedar Point. The fate or position of the *Emma Harvey* is presently unknown, but it is generally held that the Biloxi built schooner was destroyed by Frederick.

Epilogue

Ocean Springs, July 7, 1994 — Today I received a telephone call from Bobbie Bond Helm who resides at 309 Live Oak. She tells me that her husband, Joseph O. Helm Jr., is the nephew of John Henry Helm (1893-1916) who was a crew member of the *Emma Harvey*.

Mrs. Helm further details the Helm Family relating that there were four Helm brothers and a sister: Conrad (1890-1914), Martin (1891-1954), John Henry (1893-1916), Joseph O. (1896-1968), and Rita (1898). Their father, John G. Helm (1867-1949), of German ancestry was born at New Orleans while their mother was Josephine Molero (1858-1914) of St. Bernard Parish.

The Moleros were from the Canary Islands. All the Helm men were born in New Orleans and died in Biloxi, except John who was lost at sea east of the Chandeleurs on July 5, 1916.

Frank Duggan (b. 1912), the son of Capt. George Duggan, the skipper of the ill-fated, *Emma Harvey*, who resides at Biloxi is married to Carrie Mae Voivedich (b. 1913). She spent her formative years in Ocean Springs. Mrs. Duggan's father, Nicholas Voivedich, owned a store on Washington Avenue about where Miner's Toys is now located. The Voivedich Brothers' store closed in the mid-1920s.

To my present knowledge, other Ocean Springs residents with familial connections to the *Emma Harvey* through its builder, Casmir J. Harvey (1845-1904), are: former Ward IV alderman Phil Harvey; Carroll Clifford, Jackson County Board of Supervisor from Gautier; and myself. Phil Harvey is as direct



John Henry Helm (1893-1916)

Young Helm was a crewman aboard the ill-fated *Emma Harvey* on that July 5 day of 1916. He was born in New Orleans of German ancestry. John Helm had the reputation of carrying a vial or bottle to sea. In case an emergency arose, a message could be sent ashore with the wind and tides. Although the *Emma Harvey* was located south of Santa Rosa Island in August 1916, Helm's remains and those of his shipmates have never been found.

descendant of Pierre Harvey Jr. (1841-1878) and Victoria Koehl (1850-1904). Clifford descends from the builder, Casmir Harvey and Rosina Husley (1852-1937), and I am a descendant of Marie Harvey (1840-1894), and Antoine Victor Bellande (1829-1918). Marie was the eldest child, of French immigrant, Pierre Harvey (probably Hervais or Herve) (1810-1880+), and Celestine Moran (1811-1883).

Casmir, Pierre, Jr., and Marie Harvey, who were born at Back Bay (present day D'Iberville), were siblings.

For all you loyal readers of "Sous Les Chenes" who have asked about a book concerning the history of Ocean Springs, wait no more. In

its limited edition printing, which should be off the press by Aug. 1, 1994, I will have for sale, *Hotels and Tourist Homes of Ocean Springs*. This book is a treatise on our early tourist industry and gives an insight into the architecture, people and history of 13 structures at Ocean Springs, some of which survive today.

The art work by Ken Matthew is superb and worth the price of the book. If you desire a copy, please call me at 872-3880 or write PO BOX 617, Ocean Springs, Mississippi 39566-0617.

The cost is \$20. All profits will be given to the Depot Restoration fund raising efforts now in progress.