Treasury Department,

U. S. LIFE-SAVING SERVICE.

Washington, D. C., January 6, 1880.

Sumner I. Kimball, Esq.,
General Superintendent Life Saving Service.

Sir:

In compliance with your instructions of the 8th. ultimo, directing me to investigate, in accordance with Section 9. of the Act of June 18th 1878, the circumstances attending the disaster to the Schooner "W. and E. Henderson", recently wrecked near Life Saving Station No. 17. 6th. District, involving the loss of four lives, I have the honor to submit the following report.

Some of the witnesses examined in this case, were found at Hatteras'

more than forty miles from the scene of the disaster, and they could not therefore, be confronted with those first examined.

It appears from the evidence that the first intimation of this disaster was received by Keeper George L. Daniels, at about 6 O'clock on the morning of November 30th 1879, from Surfman Leonidas D. Pillett, who had the morning watch on the south beat from Station No. 17. This man returned to the station at 5.20 A.M. made a fire in the stove, and called the cook. Soon after, he went up stairs, and looking from the south window of the station, he discovered, with the glasses, a man whom he supposed, at first, to be a fisherman,

but upon a closer examination, he found the man had on no hat. It then occurred to him that this man was coming from a wreck. Acting upon this idea, Tillett called the keeper and crew, and started out himself to meet the man referred to. This he did, a short distance from the station, found the man much ex= hausted and only able to say: "Captain drowned, masts gone". Tillett assis= ted the survivor, whose name I could not learn, to the station, and leaving him in charge of the colored female cook there, the keeper and crew started for the beach.

The witnesses examined at station No. 17. agree that they began to come up with debres from the wreck

when about one mile and a quarter south of the station, and discovered at the same time, some part of the vessel rising and falling on the sea, about three hundred yards off shore. Thence they followed the shore line to New Inlet, three quarters of a mile further south, walking through fragments of the wreck search=ing for bodies. At New Inlet the Life Saving crew met some fisher=men, who told them that they had found a man floating in the channel, had taken him to their camp on Jack's Island, and had come to see if others could be found. Keeper Daniels and two of his men, went to the camp of the fishermen and found the man referred to, but in

crossing from the beach to said camp, they discovered what appeared to be a man in a sitting posture upon the beach they had left. Kidper Daniels, who remained at the camp, sent his two men back to see what the object re= ferred to was. They found it to be the third sur= vivor, and with the aid of the fishermen they took him to the camp.

The fishermen had ministered to the first man found, by rubbing, giving him warm coffee, and wrapping him in bed clothes, so that when Daniels arrived there the man was so far recovered as to be out of danger. When the two men of the Life Saving Crew returned to the beach to look after what was supposed to be another survivor, the medicine chest had been

sent for, to the station, and arrived at the camp at about the same time with the last man found.

The night from 2. A.M. until broad daylight, Nov. 30th. is shown to have been the clearest and brightest moonlight, two witnesses going so far as to swear that a vessel's spars could have been seen a distance of two miles.

Surfman Tillett, the morning patrolman south from Station 17. swears that he left his station at ten minutes after 2 O'clock; that, as nearly as he can judge, it took him one hour to walk to the end of his beat, about two and a quarter miles; that, arriving at its terminus, the North shore of New Inlet, he remained there from three quarters of an hour

to one hour, to exchange signals with the patrol from No. 18., thus making it 3.10 when he arrived, and 3.55 or 4.10 when he started back, and that it took him about one hour and a quarter to walk back, making the time about 5.20 A.M. when he got to the station. He further swears that the night was clear moonlight and that, when at the end of his beat he could have seen a vessel broadside on, a mile at sea, and head on, a quarter of a mile.

As I conclude that the vessel could not have held together more than an hour, /for reasons given below/ it is believed that she struck the bar between the hours of 4. and 5. O'clock, perhaps at

about 4.30 Assuming this as the hour of her stranding, she must have been very near the point of grounding when Tillett passed it, on his way north from the end of his beat, and that he should not have seen her, if on the port tack (wind N.E.) nearly broadside on, or her running lights if on the other tack, head on shore, seems a singular circumstance and suggests one of two propositions as the reason for his failure to discover the wreck; either that he was not where he swears he was, or that he had grown careless of his lookout, owing to the clear beautiful state of the weather, and intent only upon getting back to the station. Inasmuch as Sudfuman Sparrow Nidgett, the morning patrol

north, from Station No. 18 testifies that he saw Tillett's light on the opposite shore of the inlet, a half mile distant, at about 3.45 or 4. a.m. it must be admitted that Tillett was on his post at the hour sworn to by him. It is plain, consequently, that surfman Tillett should have discovered this wreck if he had kept a bright lookout, if not just when she came on, then very soon thereafter. His failure to do so, is evidence of the neglect of the most important duty of a patrolman.

Having taken all the testimony that was available, or deemed of value at this station and No. 18, and learning that the fishermen above referred to, could be found at Hatteras, the further hearing of the

case was adjourned to that place. Arriving there on the 2. instant, I succeeded in getting such information from the Stowe Brothers, / Ira Stowe, J.B. Stowe and O.A. Stowe / the fishermen alluded to, as they possessed. It was valuable in enabling one to detect false swearing on the part of Keeper Daniels of Station No. 17.-

Keeper Daniels testifies that when he left his station with his crew for the beach, on the morning of the wreck, he took with him the medicine chest among other things; that upon arriving at the camp of the fishermen, he found the survivor saved by them, reviving; that he then gave him some brandy and an opium pill.

The Stowe Brothers all swear that, when

they met Keeper Daniels and his crew on the beach they had no medicine chest with them, but had to send back two miles and a quarter to the station to get it, and that it did not arrive at their camp, until the second man had been taken there. Upon my return to Station No. 17. on the 4th instant, I charged Keeper Daniels with false swearing in this matter. After some hesitation, he admitted that he had testified falsely, and signed an admission to that effect.

Referring to the cases of resuscitation reported by Keeper Daniels, I find:

In the case of the man Samuel, reported by him, he states that artificial respiration was employed for one hour, while in his sworn evidence he states that; that part of the method of resuscitation was not employed on any one.

From the evidence of the Howe Brothers, the efforts to restore the two men taken to their camp, were found to be about as follows;

The first man was taken from the water to their camp, nearly dead, wrapped in bed clothing, given warm coffee and got warm, so that when Keeper Daniels arrived, an hour and a half afterward the man was conscious.

The second man was found insensible, and far gone, but breathing; was removed to their camp with the assistance of the Life Saving Crew, and treated as the first had been. Both of these men were taken to Station 17, in the afternoon.

I conclude that the saving of the life of the first man was due entirely

to the efforts of the Howe Brothers.
In the second case the Life Saving Crew assisted in his restoration.

After a careful review of this case, and of all the evidence I was able to obtain, I respectfully submit the following recommendations;

That Keeper Geo. C. Daniels be removed immediately; cause, false swearing, and his personal acknowledgement of his unfitness for the position.

That Surfman L. R. Tillett be discharged; cause, neglect of patrol.

That Surfman Charles L. Midgett be discharged; cause, not a competent surfman from lack of experience as admitted in his testimony.

For appointment to the keepership of Station No. 17. I recommend Richard

Etheridge, colored, now No. 6. surfman in station No. 16. I examined this man, and found him to be thirty eight years of age, strong robust physique, intelligent, and able to read and write sufficiently well to keep the Journal of a station. He is reputed one of the best surfmen on this part of the coast of North Carolina. I also recommend that his crew be composed of colored men, four to be drawn from the number of colored surfmen now in stations; two from No. 10, two already in No. 17, and that he be directed to select two others to complete his crew.

I am aware that no colored man holds the position of keeper in the Life Saving Service, and yet such as are surfmen, are found to be among

the best on the coast of North Carolina.

I have given this matter as careful consideration as I am capable of, and have tried to weigh every argument, for and against its adoption, and I am fully convinced that the efficiency of the service at this station, will be greatly enhanced by the adoption of my recommendations as above set forth.

The same views with my own, are held by the Asst. Inspector of the 6th District.

The white men to be retained in service from the present crew of No. 17, can be transferred to fill vacancies at Stations 10. and 16. from which colored men are proposed to be drawn to compose the new crew for No. 17.

While at Station No. 17 on the 29th ultimo, I visited the scene of the disaster to the "Henderson", and the wreckage still left there, was carefully examined. Lying about two hundred and fifty yards off shore, was one of the vessel's spars, attached to some sunken portion of the wreck, near where she appears to have struck and went to pieces. Upon the shore opposite, lay parts of her plank-shear, a section of her bow with breast-hooks attached, sections of her deck fast to parts of the beams, and broken masts, where they had been driven in the break up. From this point to New Inlet, three quarters of a mile further south, the beach was strewn with fragments of the wreck. Occasional sound timbers, and a piece

of new deck, were found, but the evidence of her rottenness, was too plain to be mistaken.

From 2 A.M. until daylight on the morning of the wreck the weather was clear, wind fresh N. E., a very heavy surf on the beach, and a strong southerly cut or current along shore.

The fact that the "Henderson", was laden with phosphate rock, that she struck the bar when a very heavy surf was running, that the main portions of the wreck landed on the beach almost opposite to where she appears to have struck, at any rate, to where all that was left of her in the water was found and still remains, added to the rottenness of the vessel, all give evidence of her sudden demolition

She could not have lasted more than one hour, and my judgment is that she did not hold together more than one half or three-quarters of that time.

By reference to the Record of American and Foreign Shipping, published by the American Shipmasters Association of New York 1879, the record of the Schooner "M. E. & Henderson," is found to be as follows:

"Built at Pleasant Mills, N. J.,
"in 1864: 387 Tons, Specially sur-
"veyed in 1878, and rated A. 1 3/4
"for three years."

In view of the clear fine weather for some time before the vessel is supposed to have

struck, which is testified to by all witnesses, are of two conclusions as to the cause of the disaster, viz: unavoidable: either that the vessel was wrecked as the result of the gross carelessness and mismanagement of those in charge, or that she was purposely run ashore. —

The testimony taken in this case is transmitted herewith.

Very respectfully
Your obd. Svt.
Chas. F. Shoemaker
First Lieut. U.S.R.M.
Asst. Inspr. L.S.S.

S #102. Vol. 9. L. S. S.

Wash. D. C.
Jany: 16, 1880.

C. F. Shoemaker
Asst. Insp. L. S. S.

Reporting investigation of the circumstances attending the wreck of the late Sch. "M & E. Henderson"

UNITED STATES
JAN 24 1880
LIFE SAVING SERVICE.

Dis 6 # 38 Vol. 9 L. R.
" " " 44 " " "
N 25 " " "
N 28 " " "
LS Vol 5 p 307 W