

Chapter 7

1927 drowning of schoolchildren in Chazy Lake

TUES., JUNE 7, 1927

SIX IN ROWBOAT WHEN IT CAPSIZES ON CHAZY LAKE

Miss Emma C. Donk, a Schoolteacher, Rescued After Drifting Three Hours While Clinging to Overturned Boat; Two girl Victims Were to Graduate in Two Weeks. One Was Salutatorian of the Senior Class. Village of Dannemora Stunned by Tragedy, in Deep Mourning Over Tragic Fate of Five Promising Students

Tragedy, lurking near as twenty Dannemora High School students were enjoying their annual picnic at Chazy Lake Saturday, made its presence known in the midst of a terrific wind and rain storm which took a toll of five young lives.

Five students were drowned when a rowboat in which they and a school teacher were occupants capsized, tossing all of them into the rough waters of the lake. The school teacher was rescued after nearly four hours of drifting while she clung to the overturned boat.

The Dead

Miss Bernadette Drollette, a senior, aged seventeen, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Elmore Drollette of Dannemora.

Miss Kathleen Smart, a senior, aged 15, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Smart of Dannemora.

Miss Katherine Canning, a junior, aged 14, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Canning of Dannemora.

Edmond Rowan, a junior, aged 15, son of Mrs. Daisy Rowan of Dannemora.

Thomas Tobin, a junior, aged 18, an orphan.

Miss Drollette and Miss Smart, the two seniors in the party, were to receive their diplomas at graduation exercises which were to be conducted on June 20.

Two Risk Lives To Save Teacher

Miss Emma C. Donk, the teacher who was with the students in the rowboat, was rescued by Philmore King and Sullivan King, residents of Chazy Lake after the boat had drifted to within a few rods from shore.

The two men virtually risked their lives in swimming to her side and bringing the unconscious teacher to shore.

There were about twenty students in the group that left Danemora Saturday morning to spend the day at Chazy Lake. It was the annual interclass picnic.

Accompanying the boys and girls were two teachers, Miss Donk and Miss Florence Kennedy.

The day had been passed in enjoyable pastimes at the lake, but around mid-afternoon a violent storm swept over the little body of water. Just before the storm

before it had been decided to return home. The weather so far had been favorable, and the storm broke out suddenly from a sky that had been clear only a few minutes before.

Out on the lake as the storm broke were Miss Donk and the five students, the boys rowing as fast as possible toward shore. Huge waves lashed at the sides of the small craft, however, and it was difficult to make any progress.

The wind became stronger and the rain came down with greater intensity and the predicament of the party became serious with every wave threatening to overturn the boat. Unable to make progress the boat was swamped and one huge wave took the small craft broadside and it overturned, throwing the occupants into the rough, swirling waters.

Clung to boat With Death-Like Grip

It was about six o'clock when Philmore King and Sullivan King, sons of Xavier King of Chazy Lake, saw the overturned boat drifting toward shore. Further investigation showed that someone was clinging to its side and the two brothers rushed to the west side of the little lake toward which the wind was sending the boat.

The lake was still extremely rough when the King boys threw off some of their heavier clothing and walked out toward the boat. It was still about twenty rods from shore and the two had to swim to reach its side.

With considerable difficulty they unloosed the woman's grip on the side of the boat and took the unconscious form to shore and then to their home. Miss Donk's condition was serious, and after her removal to Dannemora yesterday the physician in charge would not permit her to speak to anyone. She

is suffering from the nervous strain of her experience and also from long exposure to the storm.

Immediately after the rescue of Miss Donk, searching parties were organized and began dragging the lake in an effort to recover the bodies of the five students who were with her.

Throughout the night men in boats continued to search for the bodies without success. More volunteers offered their assistance yesterday and throughout the day a score of boats were dragging the lake. Up to a late hour last night none of the bodies had been recovered.

Eight State Troopers from Malone Barracks were in charge of the search for the bodies yesterday. It is understood they will be assisted by four divers from Ogdensburg today. The divers were expected on the scene last night.

Worst Storm in Memory, He Says

"Saturday's storm was one of the worst I have ever seen on the old lake," said Wilfred King, who as a resident of Chazy Lake for many years has witnessed some terrific storms in that section.

"The storm came up suddenly and within a few minutes waves several feet high swept over the lake," he told a Press reporter last night.

News of the tragedy spread rapidly and yesterday afternoon hundreds of people visited the scene, looking on in silence while searching parties in rowboats and launches dragged the lake for the bodies.

Only one of the six in the boat was able to swim. This was Edmond Rowan. It is likely that the lake was too rough for him to make any headway swimming to shore, or it is possible that he lost his life in an attempt to aid the more unfortunate ones of the group who could not swim. Nothing will be learned relative to the actual scene after the boat capsized until Miss Donk's condition permits her to speak of the tragedy.

Prof. Harold Blair, principal of Dannemora High School, told the Press last night that the graduating exercises of the school were to be held on June 29.

Miss Drollette, one of the two seniors who lost their lives two weeks before they were to receive their diplomas, was salutatorian of the class and an honor student. The deaths of Miss Drollette and Miss Smart will leave only six students in the graduating class.

Miss Donk is teacher of English and Latin at Dannemora High School. This was her first year at the school. Her home is in Fairport, N. Y., and she is a graduate of Rochester University.

Dannemora was a sad little village yesterday. Scarcely a soul in the town had not known at least by sight one of the victims and the loss of the five young lives left the community in an extremely sad state.

NEW YORK, June 6, (AP) Inspector Connelley at headquarters late for Connelley at headquarters today was notified by Detective Frank Reich that a confession to intoxication in the \$100,000 robbery of Jesse L. Livermore had been made by Arthur Gibson. Gibson was arrested last night with a woman companion on Long Island and part of Livermore's jewels are said by the police to have been recovered.

TUES., JUNE 7, 1927.

CHAZY LAKE FAILS TO GIVE UP CLAIM TO FIVE BODIES

Force of Searchers Augmented by Three Divers; Miss Donk Recovers And Tells Coherent Story of the Tragedy; Relatives of Victims Watch Anxiously the Process of Dragging the Lake; Hundreds Visit Scene

Hours of work yesterday at Chazy Lake failed to bring to the surface any of the bodies of the five Dannemora High School students who were drowned Saturday when their boat capsized during a violent storm.

The force of men engaged in dragging the bottom of the lake for a stretch of half a mile or more was augmented yesterday by the arrival of three divers from Ogdensburg who joined in the search for the bodies.

Miss Emma C. Donk, the school-teacher who was saved by clinging to the side of the rowboat while it drifted toward shore, was much improved in condition yesterday and was possible for the first time since the tragedy occurred to give a coherent story of her experience.

Dr. H. R. Marvin, who has been attending Miss Donk at the residence of Xavier King at Chazy Lake ever since the tragedy, said yesterday that she was completely out of danger and had gained considerably since Sunday. Mrs. Marvin, wife of the Lyon Mountain doctor, has been at her side continuously since Saturday night.

Miss Donk was able to tell about her experience yesterday, and this story disclosed the fact that she did not lose her head when she found herself in such a serious predicament, but cleverly kept her wits in an effort to save the party from the danger that they faced. But it was all to no avail.

It was around mid afternoon she said, when she and the students returned to the north west shore of the lake after a long and tiresome climb to view the forest fire observatory on Lyon Mountain. The rest of the students had remained at the Signor and Cummings camps on the opposite side of the lake. Thomas Tobin was at one of the cottages when he saw the school teacher and the students on the other shore, and he rowed across the slightly rough lake to take them across.

As the wind became more violent, Miss Donk had her misgivings about attempting to cross, but upon thinking the matter over she thought there would be no danger since the Tobin boy had crossed in safety. So the six in the group got into the boat and set out.

They made fair progress until they were half way across, then the full fury of the storm made itself felt, she said. Huge waves lashed against the boat.

"Suddenly", she said, "it seemed as though two giant waves coming from opposite directions crashed together over the boat, filling the craft with water. The boat began to sink then."

Young Tobin, apparently with the intention of trying to swim to shore to get assistance when he saw the predicament they were in leaped overboard and disappeared, said the school teacher.

Miss Donk, as the boat slowly settled into the water, briefly shouted directions above the roar of the storm. She told the rest of the students to cling to the side after it was overturned, and hang on for their lives until someone could reach them from shore. The words were scarcely out of her mouth when they found themselves struggling in the water. The students obeyed Miss Donk's directions and grasped the side of the boat after it was overturned.

A few minutes elapsed as they were tossed about in the turbulent waters, then Miss Kathleen Smart, who had only recently recovered from an attack of pneumonia, lost her grip and disappeared.

Half an hour more went by, Miss Dank believes, with the other students silently, grimly, holding on. She felt her grip on the side of the boat weakening, she said. Then she lost her senses. The last she remembered the other three students were still gripping onto the upturned craft.

It was about 6:30 when she was rescued. She had a death grip on the side of the boat, and her fingernails had bitten deep into the wood. It was with considerable difficulty that the rescue party managed to loosen her hold and carry her to shore, where Dr. Marvin and Mrs. Marvin were waiting for them, having rushed to the scene

as soon as notified.

For four continuous hours Dr. and Mrs. Marin attended Miss Donk until they were certain she was out of danger.

It was learned yesterday that Miss Bernadette Drollette, one of the students who lost their lives, was considered an expert swimmer, having won medals for life saving last summer, and it was only because of **this** fact that her step-mother had permitted her to join the party.

A score of rowboats, manned by state troopers and volunteers from Dannemora and Lyon Mountain, continued to drag the lake yesterday in an effort to locate the bodies while hundreds of onlookers stood on the shore.

Twelve state troopers from Malone barracks are quartered at the residence of Xavier King, near the scene of the tragedy.

Several trustees from Dannemora prison volunteered their services and were assisting in the search yesterday.

Among those grappling for the bodies was Francis Pender who has been attending Mount Assumption Institute here this year, and who was an intimate friend of the students who were drowned. He and other youths from Dannemora have had little sleep since the tragedy occurred, having been on the scene almost continuously since Saturday night.

Included in the crowd of on-lookers on the shore yesterday were relatives of some of the victims. They stood by, silent, red-eyed, anxiously hoping that the waters would give up the bodies of their beloved kin.

Three divers from Ogdensburg arrived on the scene yesterday and were soon at work aiding in the search for the bodies. They are George Fisher, Edward Boucher and Harold Barr.

Speaking to a Press representative last night, Edward Boucher declared that they had not been able to do much yesterday but expected greater success today.

"The lake was rather rough Monday," he said, and we did not do much aside from getting organized for a more complete search of the bottom of the lake today."

One diver who was under water for a short time yesterday said that the bottom of the lake was very muddy, and walking was difficult. If they are favored with calmer water today the divers expect results.

It was learned last night that another man was with the King brothers when they rescued Miss Donk. Jack Lynch, a school-teacher at Chazy Lake, was also on the scene when the King brothers noticed the boat drifting toward shore and aided them in rescuing Miss Donk.

The story of the finding of a dog that was in the boat with Miss Donk and the students and published in the Press yesterday, was verified at the King residence. The body of the dog was found among some weeds and dead brush near the north shore on Sunday afternoon.

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* **Body of Dog, Pal** *
* **of Students, Found** *
* ----- *
* By a strange irony of fate, *
* the body of a dog which was *
* said to have been in the boat *
* in which the five Dannemora *
* High School students lost their *
* lives Saturday was recovered *
* from Chazy Lake yesterday, *
* according to the story of a *
* Dannemora youth who was at *
* the scene of the tragedy dur- *
* ing the afternoon. *
* *

It was impossible for anyone from shore to have seen the predicament of the party in the boat Saturday afternoon, said one student who was on the picnic in an interview yesterday, because of the fact that a dense fog had settled over the lake and it was impossible to see more than a hundred feet away.

One man who was aiding in the search yesterday said that thirteen years ago this week he had two brothers-in-law drowned in the same body of water and practically in the same place in which the five students lost their lives Saturday.

One of the bodies, he said, was recovered in 18 days and the other was not brought to the surface until 28 days had elapsed.

Permission was obtained from W. H. Miner, owner of Heart's Delight Farm at Chazy, to open the spillway on the east end of Chazy Lake to lower the water so that the search for the bodies might be made easier. This spillway was constructed in 1924.

Yesterday afternoon, as soon as

It was learned that Miss Donk's condition was improved to such an extent as to allow her to receive callers, numerous students of Dan nemora High school called at the King residence and asked to see her. Mrs. Marvin, the nurse in attendance, permitted all of them to see Miss Donk.

It was a particularly pathetic sight as these youngsters went to her bedside. Miss Donk would force a smile to her lips, but her face still showed the ordeal which she has undergone.

One blonde-haired youngster entered the house and asked to see Miss Donk. He was the brother of one of the girls whose body still lies on the bottom of the lake. There were tears in his eyes as he entered the bedroom and silently clasped the hand of the teacher.

The visits were brief as the nurse did not want to tire her out too much, but it was felt that there could be no harm in permitting the children to talk to her and help to cheer her up.

Dr. H. R. Marvin of Lyon Mountain, who attended Miss Donk as soon as she was taken from the water, told the following story last night, giving credit to several whose names were not mentioned previously and who rendered valuable assistance in the rescue of Miss Donk and in organizing the search for the bodies of the five students:

The first to discover the accident was James Brennan, a high school student of Dannemora who came around by shore from Chazy Lake Station. He notified Philamore King who was at home in the high way and John Lynch, who was passing in his car. Calling another brother of the King family, they ran to the lake where they could faintly see the boat through the heavy seas about a half mile from shore. It was drifting in rapidly.

They tried to push out a boat but failed, and then wading into the water up to their necks they set out determined to reach it by swimming. The boat, however, drifted in before they were forced to swim and clinging to it in an unconscious condition was Miss Donk, the only survivor.

In the meantime Mrs. Xavier King called all the doctors on the telephone that she knew.

Dr. Marvin and Mrs. Marvin were the first to arrive, as has been stated, and they assisted the King boys and John Lynch to carry Miss Donk from the shore through the woods to an automobile where she was taken to Xavier King's residence. First aid was given and Dr. Pultz from the Clinton Prison was the next to arrive with the prison pulmotor. This was not used however, as Miss Donk had by this time reacted slightly. Dr. Pultz with Dr. Marvin continued the restoration and shortly Dr. Lavigne of New York City, who has a summer camp at Chazy Lake, arrived and gave assistance. In about two hours Miss Donk recovered consciousness.

Miss Collins, the Chateaugay Ore & Iron Co. nurse, Miss Mina Arpin, a resident nurse, and Mrs. Marvin, also a trained nurse, divided time in giving the patient care for the next two days. The next morning Dr. Sartwell of Peru called and also offered to do what he could. Dr. Hutchins of Saranac was also a caller at the bedside of the survivor. Too much credit cannot be given to Mrs. Xavier King, a middle-aged woman in poor health, who worked with the doctors and nurses far beyond her strength to save the life that was thought to be beyond saving. The entire resources of her home were placed at the disposal of the victim's friends.

