

Electra

By April Van Wyke

The Electra was described as a "lumber schooner" that was reportedly owned in San Francisco and "lightly insured." She was lost while unloading lumber at Cambria in San Luis Obispo County.

Her cargo of lumber was to be delivered to the firm of March and Co. at this small port. According to newspaper accounts, which consisted of information gathered from local residents, the Electra had come down from Puget Sound more than a week before the accident, carrying 150,000 board feet of lumber. She was discharging her load at a small chute located at Leffingwell's landing and Captain C. Wilson and his crew had almost completed their work when the accident occurred.

The Cambria area had reportedly been free of fog until Monday evening, October 15, 1894, when a thick fog rolled in, reducing visibility to one hundred yards. The sea remained calm and the Electra lay quietly at anchor, until about midnight, when the swells of "one of the heaviest seas ever known at Cambria" began to move into the little port.

The vessel was secure until 12:30 a.m., when a huge swell struck her. By 1:30 the lines to the main anchor had pulled away and the tide began to push the vessel rapidly towards the shore. The crew attempted to throw lines out, but due to the fog and waves, it soon became evident that the vessel could not be secured, and the crew decided to seek safety. To their dismay, their small life boat had been washed away. Soon the schooner's keel was thumping against the rocks about 300 yards from her mooring place. The vessel scraped further along the rocks, and finally came to rest on some "usually-exposed" flat rocks.

The Captain and those crew members on board made it safely off the ship before daylight, and took shelter in the March Bros. Warehouse.

The next morning, October 16, 1894, at daylight, Captain Wilson and his crew returned and found the ship resting firmly on the rocks and "broken badly through the center." They waited for low tide and then unloaded the remaining twenty-five thousand board feet of lumber. The vessel was also stripped of everything but her rigging. The Electra remained firmly rixed in her position and it was predicted that she would be broken up and salvaged by junk dealers. She was reportedly valued at \$500,000.

Sources Consulted

San Luis Obispo Tribune (San Luis Obispo). October 17, 1894, "Under the Waves."