

THREE: THE MARINE EXCURSION OF THE KNIGHTS OF PYTHIAS

DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

“THE MARIPOSA BELLE ALWAYS SEEMS TO ME TO HAVE SOME OF THOSE STRANGE PROPERTIES THAT DISTINGUISH MARIPOSA ITSELF”: THE REAL MARIPOSA BELLE

Sunshine Sketches is largely based on things that Leacock saw first-hand or heard about in and around Orillia. The sinking of the Mariposa Belle is one such story. The ship is an anagram of several steamboats that travelled Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching in Leacock’s time. Its sinking is believed to be an exaggerated recounting of at least two—and perhaps more—rather harmless shipwrecks near Orillia. One is the August 1903 sinking of the Enterprise on Lake Simcoe. The 40-year-old Enterprise took a route through shallow water and began to sink near the Mulcaster Street wharf in Barrie, Ontario. All the passengers disembarked before it hit the lake bottom. The Enterprise was soon re-floated, stripped for parts, and its shell was sunk to the bottom of Lake Simcoe. Another is the 1898 sinking of the Islay on Lake Couchiching. However, the 1898 sinking of the Longford may be closest to Leacock’s Mariposa Belle. The Longford, carrying businessmen on an outing, hit a sandbar on Lake Couchiching and became stuck. A lifeboat was sent, and when the passengers disembarked the boat floated free. Once off the sandbar, the passengers got back on and the Longford carried on to Orillia.

1. When you tell stories, do you tend to exaggerate details? How does exaggeration add to a story?
2. When is exaggeration a good strategy for storytelling? When is accuracy more important?