
Uriah Skinner, The Piratical Smuggler

We are indebted to Mr. John F. Tuck of Knowlton Landing for this bit of historical satire.



Fancy a fellow, brawny and brown,
With very black hair that hangs shaggily down,
With whiskers remarkably bushy and black,
With fists that might give a most terrible
thwack;

With very fierce eyes under dark heavy brows
That flashed like a cat's when it springs on a
mouse,
Or like coals in a cavern that gleam fiery red,
With a great Roman nose, so uncommonly red.

Of all the smugglers who plied on the lake
Uriah Skinner was hardest to take.
The officers hunted him often and yet
Uriah Skinner they never could get!
But alas and alack! that very bold chap
Was caught at last like a rat in a trap!

Night on the lake so clear and calm,
The night breeze sings in the trees its psalm.

Stars shine bright in the dark blue sky
And the crescent moon sails in her glory on
high.

Above and below it is all serene.
Who, as he gazed on the peaceful scene
At the moment, would fancy that nine or ten
Very keen-sighted and well-armed men,
Motionless and all as still as the dead.
Were ambushed under the great Owl's Head?

Look – don't you see!

That's Skinner, must be –
Oh! Skinner, that bold smuggler,
there's peril for thee!
Now the chase grows eager and hot
And Skinner himself thinks so, too, I wot
For his boat speeds over the waters blue,
Swiftly as flieth an Indian canoe
And he has an Indian's craftiness too.
Now they are near him – now they are on
His heels as it were – and now – HE IS GONE!

But where?

How they stare

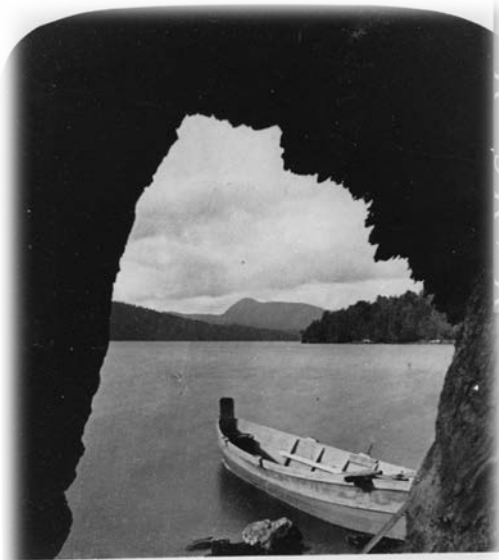
And rave and swear!

But all they find is the empty boat
Which one of the officers pushes afloat;
The fruitless search they at length give o'er
And Uriah Skinner was never seen more!

Nearly six years had passed away
When a fisherman out in a storm one day
In the side of an island a cave he spied
And in less than a minute was safe inside.
He looked above, beneath and around,
And what do you think the fisherman found?
Neither a gold nor a silver prize,
But a skull with sockets where once were
eyes;
Also some bones of arms and thighs
And a vertebral column of giant size.

'Tis needless to say
 In this later day
 'Twas the smuggler's bones in the cave that
 lay.

Copied from *Beautiful Waters*, Volume I, by
 William B. Bullock, Newport, Vermont, 1926



Looking out of Skinner's Cave

Photograph

*Looking out of Skinner's Cave,
 Lake Memphremagog, QC, 1867,*

William Notman (1826-1891), 19th century
 Silver salts mounted on paper

Albumen process 10 x 7 cm

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 I-29066.1

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 photograph (77678), waterscape (2986)

Comment by Sandra Jewett

John F. Tuck – in Harpers

Much as Dr. Kesteman described in his article, publicity about the Townships may be read in the archived copy of the August 1874 of Harpers Magazine, which contains an interesting article by F.G. Mather entitled « On the Boundary Line » in which the author describes a fishing trip through the Eastern Townships of Quebec, including a short stop at « Tuck's Hotel », now called L'Aubergine in Knowlton Landing : « *We had just dined on trout, at Tuck's Hotel, Knowlton's Landing. Tuck is a very useful member of society. He is hotel-keeper, store-keeper, postmaster, and her Majesty's customs preventive officer all in one, and his little corner at the brick hotel is a curiosity shop. Over the small cupboard door which secures the three bottles comprising the bar is a card with this illustrated rebus, « I am as dry as a fish » The stranger who reads this aloud is at once asked by those present, « Then why don't you treat? » At the other end of the shelving a space corresponding to the bar is used for the post-office. There are six pigeon holes, only two of them which are in use. The mail from the interior is brought by « Old Coons » in his buggy, and a boy crosses the lake with the mail from the east. The boy stops to fish, and « Old Coons » stops to talk; they intend an exchange, and sometimes they effect it, but this daily service is not reliable. What are three or four letters daily to the pleasures or profit of the mail carriers? »*

John F. Tuck, also served as a member of the Municipal Council At 93 years of age in 1927, « Uncle John » as he was called, was still looking after the mail.¹ The Tucks bought the brick building we call L'Aubergine in 1862. John F. Tuck died in 1928 and is buried in the George Cemetery, on chemin du Lac, with his wife, Albertine Stone.

It is interesting to note that the Harpers article contains the same photograph, reproduced as an etching, in their article.

¹ *History of Brome County*, Volume II, E. M. Taylor