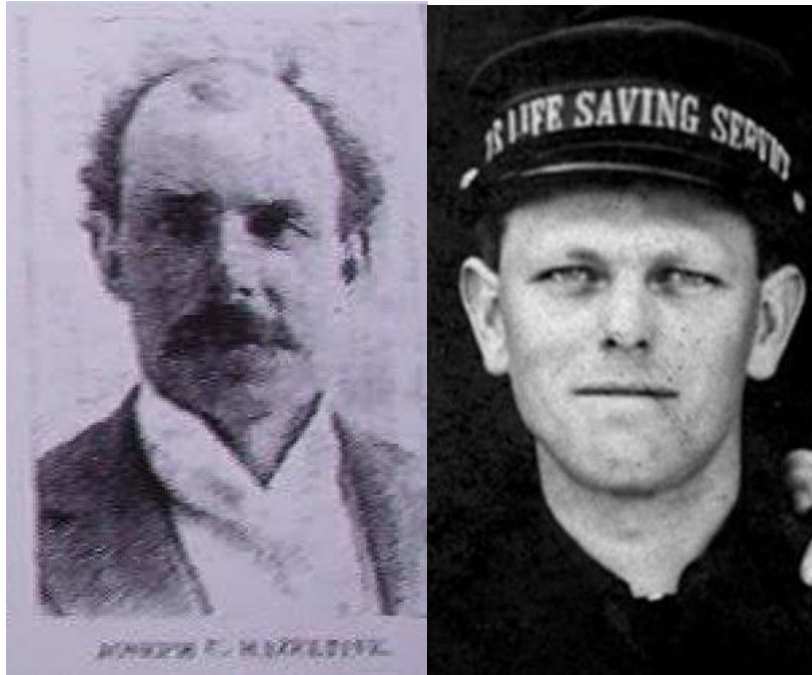


Mysterious Death on White Lake

By Barbara Bedau Brow
White Lake Area Historical Society



Josiah C. Hazeltine and Julius A. Salomonson

A deep and unfathomable mystery hung over the tragic death of three of Whitehall's prominent citizens, Josiah C. Hazeltine, and brothers Julius and Martin Salomonson, who lost their lives in White Lake on Saturday, November 14, 1908, while scouting on the lake in a rowboat in search of fishermen who were netting for fish illegally. The bodies of the three drowned men were found by members of the lifesaving crew in about 7 1/2 feet of water 600 feet out from the shore of Indian Bay. Coroner Moog took charge of the bodies after they were recovered and took them to his undertaking rooms.

Owing to the suspicious circumstances surrounding the drowning of these men, who were all good swimmers and accustomed to the water, Coroner Moog adjourned an inquest until a later date to allow time to make a thorough examination of the case.

Game Warden Julius Salomonson and his brother, Martin Salmonson, started out Saturday afternoon in search of illegal nets. During the afternoon the men succeeded in lifting one net which contained a large quantity of fish and cut loose four more from their moorings which they discovered.

The colony of fishermen who lived near the mouth of White Lake were considered dangerous and were known to have threatened police officers who questioned their netting methods.

Apparently expecting trouble, the brothers returned to Whitehall and secured the assistance of Deputy Sheriff J. C. Hazeltine, and the trio returned to Paul Long's farm on the Whitehall side of the lake, about four miles below the village. Here they secured a flat-bottomed boat and, leaving their horses and lantern near the lake, started for the north shore somewhere near midnight.

In the morning the horses and lantern still remained where they had been left and Mr. Long, unaware of anything being wrong, cared for the horses.

Salomonson had agreed to telephone his wife at 8:00 Sunday morning and let her know how matters were progressing. About two o'clock Sunday afternoon, when no word had yet been received from him, his family grew alarmed and the life saving station was notified.

Captain Henry Curran and three of his men immediately started out in their surf boat and another member was dispatched up the shore on foot in search of the missing men. The man on shore discovered two hats and a pipe on the beach near San Juan dock which were identified as belonging to the illfated men, and soon after an oar and the false bottom of a boat were picked up. This discovery was conclusive evidence that the missing men were in the lake and the crew dragged the lake for several hours until it became too dark to see.

Others continued the search for the boat and at 11 o'clock Sunday night were rewarded for their diligent search by finding the boat in the bulrushes bottom side up and only a short distance from where the bodies were afterwards found. The life saving crew came out again at midnight but their search was fruitless until daylight when all three of the drowned men were recovered.

Hazeltine had his overcoat and gloves on and Julius Salomonson had on his fur lined outer coat and mittens. Martin did not have an overcoat with him. The most mysterious part of it all is that they did not remove their overcoats and attempt to swim ashore when they were so close. A logical explanation of the accident seems to be that the men became numbed by the cold and perished while clinging to the overtruned boat. The wind on Saturday night was blowing from the southwest and bitterly cold.

The boat in which the illfated men set out from the sheltered east shore at 11 o'clock on Saturday night was a poor excuse for a boat, and those who saw it did not wonder that it did not stand up under a heavy sea. It was a scow-shaped row boat, 12 feet long, 3 ½ feet wide with sides only 12 inches high. With three men in it there would be only 6 inches above water. The force of the seas evidently did not strike them until they were in the middle of the lake opposite the channel where the wind had a clear sweep from the big lake. Here no doubt is where the seas broke over the sides of the frail craft in greater quantities than it was possible to bail it out and finally it water logged and capsized, with the men too exhausted and stiff with cold to swim ashore in the icy water.

No one will ever know, however, what took place out there on the lake that cold, bleak night, nor what these heroic men suffered while battling with the elements. They died in the performance of their duty as officials, and their brave act in trying to run down those who were guilty of violating the fish laws, was one that few would undertake on such a night. But they went where duty called them regardless of consequences.

Deputy Sheriff Hazeltine was one of the best known men in the north end of the county. He was a former village president of Whitehall and was prominent in fraternal circles. He was a member and

past master of Whitehall lodge No.310, F. & A.M, a member of the White Lake lodge of Odd Fellows and of the Rebekah lodge. Born in Salem, Massachusetts on 22 September 1858, he made his way to the White Lake area sometime after 1875 where he married Francis "Fanny" Betts in Whitehall on 13 September 1881. They had a daughter Nellie (1882-1911).

The funeral service for Hazelton was held on Wednesday, November 18. It was the largest ever held in Whitehall at that point. The Tannery and other businesses closed in the afternoon. After the service at the M. E. Church, a long procession of Masons, Odd Fellows and Tannery employees, numbering about 200, followed the remains to Oakhurst Cemetery for burial.

Julius Andreas Salomonson was born on 23 January 1877 in Whitehall. He married Nina C. Ericksen on 10 October 1902 in Muskegon. His occupation at the time was surfman at the local life saving station. They had a daughter Jeannette (1903-1972). Julius was recommended for appointment as one of the two deputy game wardens of this county recently. He had previously head the office for a year as a part-time deputy. Julius had also served two season in the life saving station.

Julius's brother, Martin Bernard Salomonson was born 23 June 1882 in Whitehall. He married Karine Olsen on 3 April 1906, in Muskegon. They had a daughter Marvel (1907-1958) and a son Herman L (1909-1977) was born in April 1909 after his father's death.

A joint funeral for the Salomonson brothers was held from the Norwegian church in Whitehall on Thursday, November 19. The attendance was so great that only a small portion of the mourners could get into the church. At Oakhurst Cemetery, the Odd Fellows performed their ritual burial services before the two caskets were lowered into one grave.

All three victims of the accident or tragedy were employees of the Eagle Tanning company.