

THE WRECK OF THE MARY WARD

NOVEMBER 24, 1872

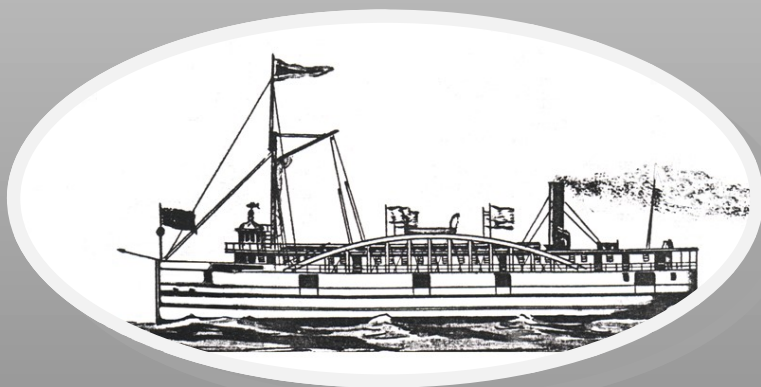


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WHY DID SHE HIT MULLIGAN'S
REEF?

STEAMBOAT STORIES

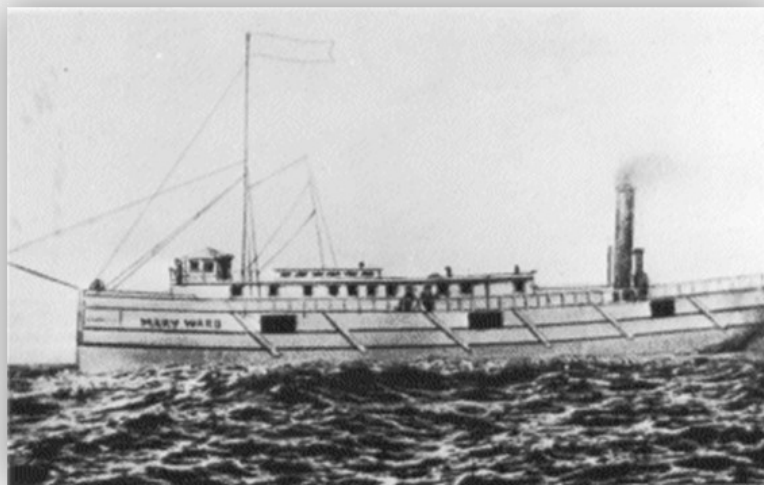
A collection of stories featuring vessels and events on the Upper Great Lakes in the 19th and early 20th centuries



The Wreck of the *Mary Ward*

In the Beginning

The official version of the wreck of the *Mary Ward* on the night of November 24, 1872, claimed that it was caused by a “navigational error”. Later the error was variously attributed to a faulty compass, a suspected malfunctioning distance measuring device (a ship log), and confusion by the person in the wheelhouse about the location of the Collingwood light. Some said the lights of a tavern on shore were mistakenly used as a reference point for the navigator. Whatever the cause, the ship ran aground on a clear night on Mulligan’s Reef, (now called the Mary Ward Ledges) about two kilometers off shore from Craigeleith.



The *Mary Ward* sank near Craigeleith Ontario.

It is located about 2 km off shore.

Parts are still visible in shallow water near the shoal

The 139 foot propeller was built as the *Simcoe* in Montreal in 1864. Her initial owners were Glassford Jones & Company. The same year it was renamed *North*. The *North* burned and sank in 1867 near Port Lambton, on the Saint Clair River. The ship remained on the bottom until the fall of 1868 when it was raised, taken to Wallaceburg, rebuilt, and renamed the *Mary Ward* in 1870.

In 1872 the ship was purchased for about \$18,000 by five Owen Sound investors; Captain William Johnson, Purser George

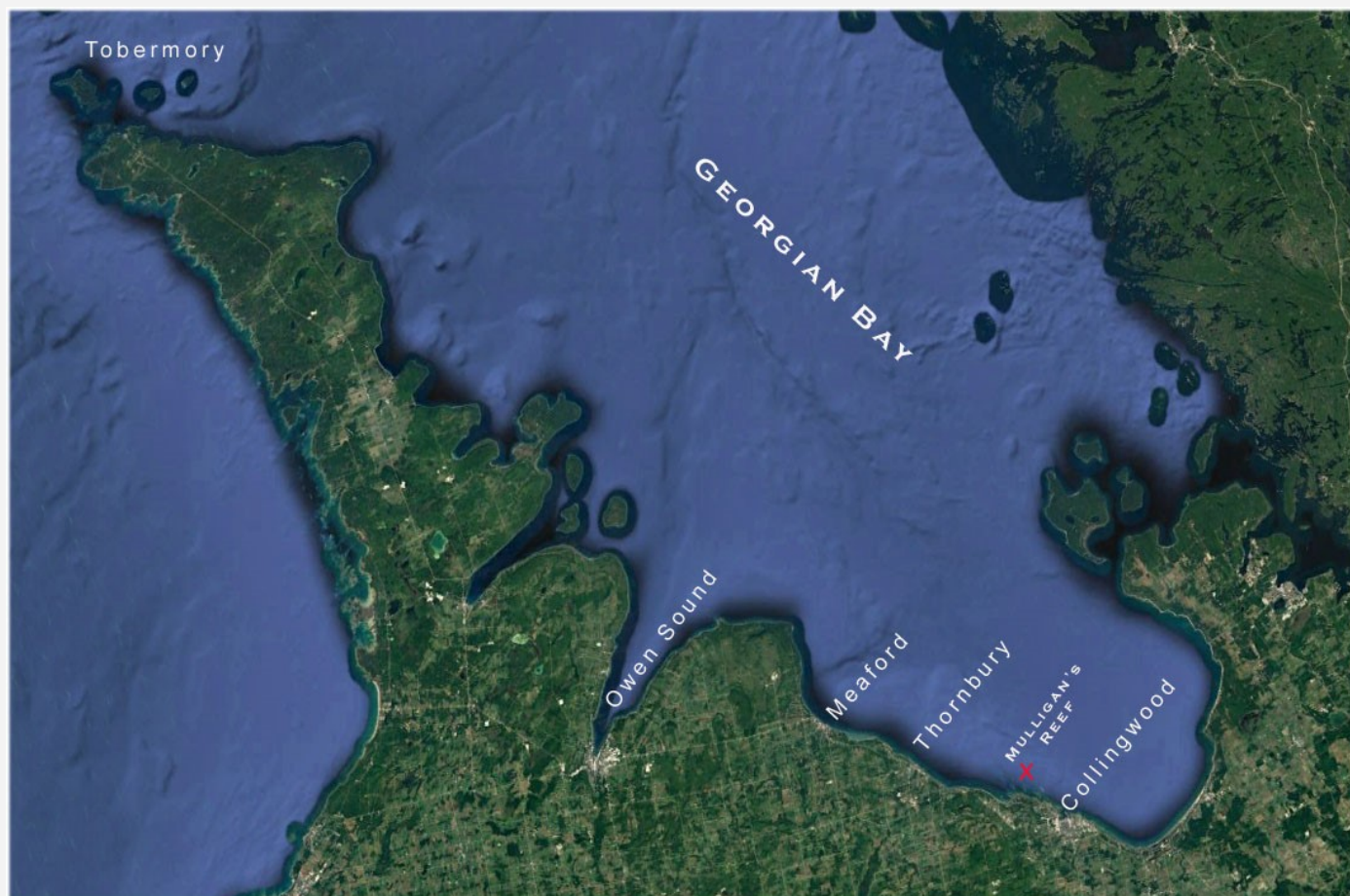
The Canadian stm. NORTH which was destroyed by last year by fire on the River St. Clair, at Baby Pt., and at present lies sunk in about 20 ft. of water, is about to be got up and probably reconstructed into a barge. A considerable portion of her hulk is said to be in a good state of preservation, and more or less of her machinery could be brought into further service. The steamer cost \$28,000 in gold. She was running between Montreal and Chicago.

Buffalo Commercial Advertiser

June 1, 1868 3-4

Corbett, John S. Stephens, Thomas Miller, and a silent partner, Michael Forhan. They ran the ship on a “wildcat schedule” hauling general freight and passengers around Lake Huron and the southern shores of Georgian Bay. On her last trip of the season from Sarnia to Owen Sound she was supposed to proceed to Meaford before being laid up in Collingwood for the winter. She carried 300 barrels of salt for Chisholm & Co. of Meaford and coal oil for a company in Collingwood.

A survey crew from the CPR boarded the *Mary Ward* at Owen Sound heading for Collingwood at the end of their season's work. Given the *Mary Ward*'s late departure from Owen Sound at 3 p.m. and the crew's anticipation of a forthcoming winter holiday, Captain Johnson decided to skip Meaford and press on directly to Collingwood. It was Sunday, and besides, he knew that Chisholm's salt could be shipped back to Meaford on the new railway line which had opened between Collingwood and Meaford, November 14, 1872. Spirits were high on board the *Mary Ward* as she steamed towards Collingwood on a sea that was relatively flat and quiet. Crew and passengers held a singsong in the saloon and celebrated the final voyage with a libation or two.



Disaster

At 9 p.m. the on board party stopped. The *Mary Ward* struck Mulligan's reef. Despite attempts to back off, the ship remained stuck. There was no panic. There was no general



This limestone rock formation is typical of the Craigleith underwater shoreline and underwater geology

alarm. In fact there was no fear, as the night was clear, the sea was calm, and they were close enough to shore that they could see lights. So, the party resumed in earnest. Later a passenger described the situation in the Collingwood Enterprise Bulletin.

“I can remember standing out on the stern after she had struck, looking up at the stars and feeling on my face the

gentle warm south-west breeze. . . I could hear them singing in the cabin.”

Meanwhile, Frank Moberly, a well established surveyor and member of the returning survey crew, met with Captain Johnson and told him that his brother in Collingwood owned a tug, the *MaryAnn*. He offered to row to shore, walk to Collingwood, fetch the tug, and be back early next morning. George Corbett the purser/part owner agreed to go along to make any



Remains of the *Mary Ward* still rest on the bottom of the bay

financial arrangements for the rescue. A lifeboat was launched that night and the men approached the shore near Craighleigh within an hour. On reaching the land they beached their boat and headed out on foot to Collingwood just 10 kilometers away to the east. While they were hiking along, a furious November storm suddenly rolled in off Georgian Bay, soaking the walkers and raising the seas out on the reef.

Those left on the *Mary Ward* spent a frightful night as the wind whipped up huge waves which crashed into the wreck, washing spray over the stern. The bottom of the ship ground along the limestone ridge that held them fast just beyond safety ashore.

Moberly and Corbett arrived in Collingwood at 7 a.m. and to their shock they discovered that the tug *Mary Ann* had already been laid up for the winter and could not be made ready for a rescue attempt for several hours. Out in the Nottawasaga Island lighthouse, Captain George Collins, the keeper, did his routine

visual sweep of the Bay at dawn and saw the stranded *Mary Ward* several kilometers to the west. A few hours later he watched the distressed ship launch a second lifeboat into the surf.



Nottawasaga Island lighthouse at the entrance to Collingwood harbour

What had happened was that Captain Johnson, in the morning, realized that his ship was in serious danger from the storm which was now a full blown gale. He could not figure out why the *MaryAnn* had not arrived for the rescue. No one from the Craigleith shore was responding to his incessant distress whistle. Great waves rolled in from the northwest and pounded the groaning ship. There was a strong possibility she might break up, and slide off the ledge and drop to the bottom. Something had to be done quickly, so he made a decision.

He ordered the second lifeboat to be launched with a crew of eight with instructions to pull toward the Craigleith shore. He was sure they could round up help once on land. He personally took command as one of the eight in the lifeboat. The remaining



Wreckage is in shallow water off Craigleith

passengers and crew were directed to sit tight and wait for a rescue from shore.

By Monday afternoon in Collingwood, the *MaryAnn* had put up steam and tried to punch her way out of Collingwood harbour through heavy seas towards the reef.

Aboard the *Mary Ward* Captain Johnson launched lifeboat #2 and with his lifeboat crew rowed with all their strength but were blown off shore to the east and landed at Nottawasaga Light.

Meanwhile the *MaryAnn* was unable to make headway in the teeth of the storm so she turned back, picked up Johnson's

exhausted lifeboat crew at the island and then headed back to the safety of the wharf in Collingwood.

By then the remaining people on the ship grew increasingly worried about their ability to survive the relentless waves breaking against the ship.

In a bold attempt to get help, the third and last lifeboat was prepared around 3 p.m. Monday for a last ditch effort to reach shore before dark. Charles Campbell, a resident of Craigleith knew the shoreline well, so he volunteered to lead an eight member team. They were less than one hundred meters from the ship when the lifeboat caught a huge wave amidships and capsized. Everyone drowned in clear view of those left on the *Mary Ward*. Passengers later reported that they saw three men hanging on to the gunwales for over an hour before they disappeared.

Back in Collingwood, it was apparent that it was impossible to fight against the northwest gale, so it was decided to attempt a rescue mission from Thornbury on the windward side of the now battered and sinking steamer. The fishing community of Thornbury was alerted and prepared for the rescue. Three small boats, each with three fishermen were launched into the bay. By evening they reached the doomed vessel and ferried the remaining passengers and crew safely to shore. Shortly after the rescue, waves pounded the *Mary Ward* enough to rip out her bottom and settle her solidly on to the shoal.

The End

By Christmas 1872, the *Mary Ward* had dumped most of her cargo to the bottom. The salt barrels that broke open had their contents dissolved into Georgian Bay. Barrels of oil and pieces of furniture floated away and drifted to the Craigleith shore, where local farmers “salvaged” their windfall.

In late January, men with teams of horses, dragged stone boats over the ice and completed the “salvage” operations. One farmer apparently spent much of the winter looting what was now left above water on the broken *Mary Ward*.

By early springtime most of the superstructure had vanished, carried away by shifting winter ice pressure and waves.

During the late spring and summer of 1873 a series of unsuccessful attempts were made by the wrecking company Colin & Beck Co. to pull the *Mary Ward* off the shoal. In September they abandoned their efforts as the whole bottom of the *Mary Ward* was entirely destroyed from the relentless battering against the limestone rocks below.

Today only the boilers, heavy planking, engine parts and a few metal fragments sit on the bottom. Occasionally adventuresome kayakers paddle out to the shoal to take a look.

Nothing shows above the water now.

Those who perished when the lifeboat capsized

John Stephens

Owen Sound

Robert Blyth

Owen Sound

? Caldwell

Toronto

? Taylor

Simcoe

? Chadwick

Elora

Charles Campbell

Craigleith

Richard Rearden

unknown

William Row

England

Selected Sources

Owen Sound Advertiser

Owen Sound Times

Orillia Times

Orillia Expositor

Kingston British Whig

Meaford Monitor

Collingwood Bulletin

Files from Bill Hestor

Maritime History of the Great Lakes

Files of Scott L. Cameron

Community Waterfront Heritage Centre

Collingwood Museum

Marine Archaeology Addendum

Under the Ontario Heritage Act, a marine archaeological site is an archaeological site that is fully or partially submerged or that lies below or partially below the high-water mark of any body of water. (O. Reg. 170/04, s. 1.)

Ontario's bounty

Many of the cold, fresh waters of Ontario's lakes and rivers have conserved important evidence of Ontario's history of exploration, settlement and commerce. Some of Ontario's waterways have been surveyed for marine archaeological resources - leaving much to be discovered in Ontario's abundance of lake beds, river beds and shorelines.

These waters may:

Possess a record of the earliest First Nations peoples who travelled, traded, and lived along our province's waterways for many millennia;

Hold the remains of former fishing traps or weirs, campsites, settlements, and docks; and,

Contain many well-preserved ships that sank because of battles, accidents or natural disasters. These shipwreck sites are underwater "time capsules," which may contain artifacts that tell the story, and cultural context, of the moment the ship sank.

What we can do to protect these resources?

The protection of our marine heritage resources is a shared responsibility. The Ontario Heritage Act requires a person to hold an archaeological license in order to alter or remove artifacts or any other physical evidence of past human use or activity from a known marine archaeological site. This ministry supports Save Ontario Shipwrecks in the effort to conserve and protect marine archaeological resources through public awareness. Licensees must provide notification and submit a site record form for newly discovered marine archaeological resources to the ministry.

This ministry encourages:

- Archaeological assessment and documentation by a licensed archaeologist of marine archaeological resources prior to development, such as the construction of wharves or piers;
- Special conservation treatment for marine artifacts based on advice from a licensed archaeologist;

Reporting of disturbance or damage to a marine archaeological site to the Ministry or local authorities.

Marine archaeology licenses

The marine licensing program is different from the land-based system. Email the Archaeology Programs Unit for forms.

Contact

For more information contact:

Archaeology Programs Unit

416-212-8886

Email: Archaeology@ontario.ca



Government of Ontario Official Plaque on the shores at Craigeith Ontario

The Mary Ward is in 3-4 meters of water about 2 kilometers off the coast of Craigeith Provincial Park.

Location coordinates are N 44.33.655 W 80.19.711 .

To see a video of the shallow dive on the Mary Ward see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cf2oVLIufM>

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rVGTT7S-V0