

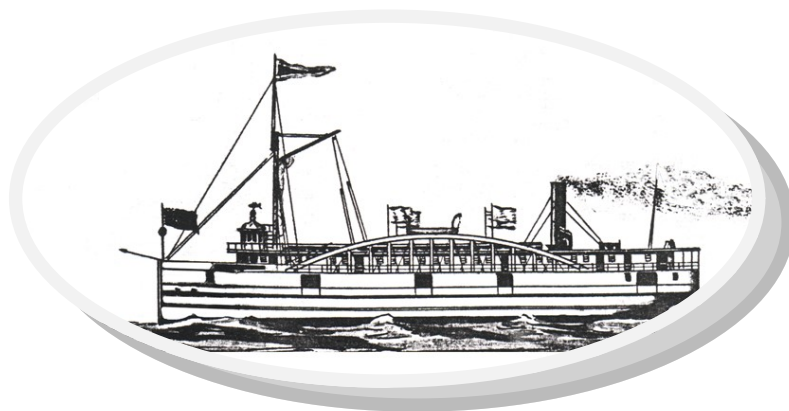
# “Brutal Outrage on the *Baltic*”



August 26  
1889

# STEAMBOAT STORIES

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



# BRUTAL OUTRAGE ON THE *BALTIC*

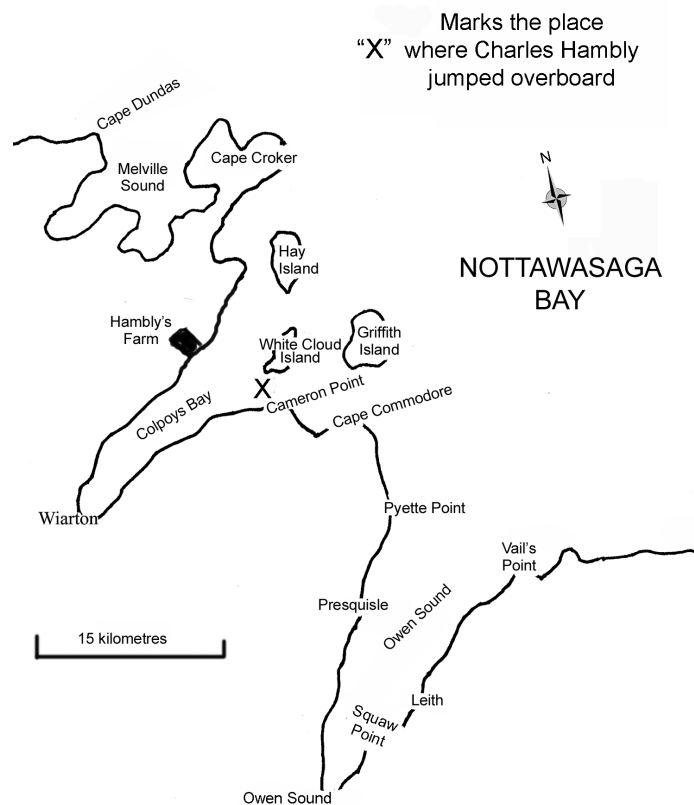
## The Sad Story of Charles Hambly

Charles Hambly died in the evening of Friday, August 26, 1889. It was suicide.

He jumped overboard from the paddlewheel steamer *Baltic* as the ship under the command of Captain William Tate Robertson sailed from Owen Sound to Wiarton on a routine trip to Killarney.

Hambly was a “shy”, “quiet”, and “sober” young man his friends said. His family had suffered from the recent death of their mother in 1888. Charles stayed on the farm with his dad along with eight brothers and a sister until the spring of the next year when he set out on his own. It was difficult farming on top of the Niagara Escarpment overlooking Colpoys Bay. To make ends meet and get some needed family cash, Charles started working on the boats

THE SUICIDE OF CHARLES HAMBLY  
August 26, 1889



when he was 16, the same year he died.

At the time, he was about five feet six inches tall and a bit stout, his father, Thomas Hambly, said. He had curly brown hair, gray/blue eyes, and was strong for his age. As a farm boy he had done strenuous work and was used to long hours. Like many lads his age he was injured working on the farm. One of his fingers had caught

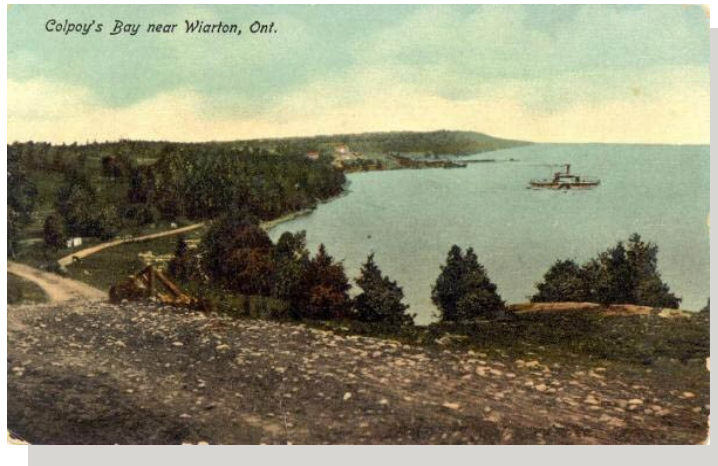
in an auger and, when it healed, it remained crooked.

From the back acres of the family farm overlooking Colpoy's Bay, Charles watched both side wheel steamers and propeller driven steamers as well as schooners moving in and out of the small port of Warton at the head of the bay. The community grew after the arrival of the Grand Trunk railway in 1882. Sawn lumber and fish processing kept a steady stream of ships moving in and out of Colpoy's Bay. A job on one of the ships was always an opportunity for a youngster looking for work.

The Sons of Temperance was a fraternal society created to combat the evils of booze in Ireland. It spread to Bruce and Grey counties in the 1880s

The Hambly family belonged to the Sons of Temperance, a fraternal society, professing prohibition. Prohibition was a hot topic back in 1889. The prohibition movement in Grey and Bruce counties was alive and well with several chapters in the small towns that dotted the region. As a member of the Sons of Temperance, Charles had taken "The Pledge" just like his father, vowing never to let liquor pass his lips.

"Charlie's" first job in the spring of 1889 was on the steam barge *Kincardine*. Later that year in June, he worked on the newly launched package freighter *Favourite* out of Meaford. He left the last job when he became ill and moved to Mrs.



Colpoy's Bay 1890. The Hambly farm overlooked the bay



The steam barge Kincardine

Kelso's boarding house on the west side of Owen Sound. When he recuperated he heard about work as a deckhand aboard the *Baltic* (earlier known as the *Frances Smith*) that at the time was docked in Collingwood. He managed to somehow get from Owen Sound to

Collingwood on Sunday, August 25.

While there he met up with William Smalley, a mess boy on the *Baltic* and they went swimming. Hambly was not much of a swimmer observed Smalley.

(Smalley said he swam like a pig).

Early Monday morning the *Baltic* left for Owen Sound to pick up freight and Hambly was aboard. The ship's captain, Captain William Tate

Robertson planned to pick up additional cargo, passengers, and

freight in Wiarton before heading out for the final destination, Killarney.

Robertson cast off from the dock at Owen Sound and passed the outer

harbour buoy at 8:20 p.m. As they proceeded, a low lying fog shrouded Georgian Bay. This kind of weather was common when the day was hot and the water was cold. From the pilot house Robertson and his Second Mate John Montgomery could just barely see over the wispy white layer while the invisible hull pierced the cloud below them.

The watchman John Currie was at the wheel following the captain's orders on the prescribed course toward Cape Commodore. He was relieved by Montgomery after the first leg and made his routine watchman's rounds of the vessel. The Chief Engineer, John Doran noted that the paddle wheel was turning at nineteen rotations per minute, a speed that would propel the ship at about twelve miles per hour in a gentle sea. Robertson, noted that all was under control so he left the pilothouse and went below to talk with the purser, A.G.

Campbell. The deck crew were now finished their duties and went off watch.



The *Baltic* was originally built as the *Frances Smith* in Owen Sound in 1867 and launched a month before Canadian Confederation. It was later renamed the *Baltic* in 1888 and ran a regular route from Collingwood to Manitoulin Island with many stops along the way.

## The Assault

**W**hile Currie was on his rounds on the ship he overheard some passengers in the saloon talking in low tones about some apparent incident on the main deck. Currie went below to investigate. Just forward of the gangway he saw four crewmen teasing young Hambly. They were being egged on by a few passengers. The watchman told them to lay off the lad and when they did not he went back to First Mate Odum Hill's cabin to report the incident. Hill put the watchman off saying that it was normal to haze a rookie deck mate, and besides he was off duty. "Go and talk to the Second Mate," Odum said. Currie then went up to the pilothouse and told Second Mate Montgomery what he had seen. Montgomery's answer was a dismissive too. "They won't kill him," he said.

Currie returned to his watch duties on the promenade deck far away from the assault going on the main deck. He had done his duty.

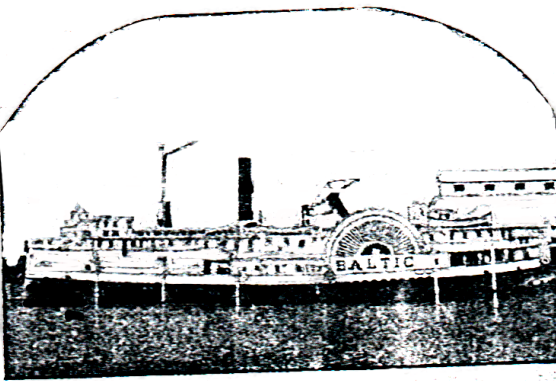
~1893~

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## The Outrage

It was rumoured that Hambly was offered a drink of whisky. He refused. That is when the abuse apparently began. He was accused of being “too close to the horses” ( a rather cryptic comment with sexual overtones). The hazing spun out of control as mob mentality took over from initiation into a violent induction into *Baltic*’s crew. Swearing, teasing, meanness, cruelty, and brutality poisoned what was an introduction to the ship. Men on board many of these 19th century ships were rough and tumble characters and the crew on the *Baltic* was no exception. Their tenure was often short and the Captain often did not personally know his crew. There was often whiskey in the cargo hold and it was not difficult to siphon some off, replacing it with a little lake water, without the purser or mates knowing about it.

The abuse escalated when the second cook, George Dagget, porter, Ken McFadzen, deckhand, and Thomas Russell, the second engineer pushed Hambly back and forth amid the coils of rope and bales of hay stacked in the forecabin. Additional members of the crew joined in the fun, slapping the young man around. These additional crew members included three deckhands, Walter Jennings, Charles Bachaus and James Pleitch.

“Damn it, Leave me alone!,” Hambly cried. It was no use.

Hambly was shoved back and forth around the circle of his tormentors.

By this time there was such a ruckus that several more male passengers from the promenade deck came down to the main deck to see what was going on. They stood watching without saying much although some protested the abuse.

As the bullying continued Russell led the verbal assault. He cursed Hambly in typical sailor’s vernacular.

One of the assailants said, “Lets tar an feather this kid.”

A deckhand, Andrew Tyman, who had joined in the violence went to fetch a pail of tar used to caulk the gangway doors when the ship went to sea. Russell pinned Hambly down in the hay while one of the thugs unbuttoned his shirt and trousers while another yanked off his clothes. At first Hambly resisted but as he fatigued he simply submitted.

The struggle was over. Hambly ceased the fight. He was physically and emotionally exhausted. He gave up lay still on the deck.

Russell seized him by the hair to “straighten him up”.

Tyman by this time returned with the pail of tar.

Russell pushed Hambly to the deck again and grabbed the pail. He poured the oozing mess over Hambly’s now naked body covering him from head to toe.



A model of the *Baltic* (aka *Frances Smith*) at the Collingwood Museum. Charles Hambly jumped from the rail directly before the paddle wheel.

Aaron Tripp, the chief cook arrived on the scene with a pillow under his arm. He slit it open with his knife and poured it over Hambly’s body completely coating him.

Two of the on looking passengers standing nearby realized the situation was out of control. Passenger, Joseph Cherry, shouted, “Leave him alone!” “You have done enough already!”

Tyman the fireman responded "If you don't shut your damned traps we have more tar and we can give you a dose of the same medicine too."

In the ladies saloon above, women screamed and cried out for help. In response two male passengers went looking for the captain. The captain had heard about the goings on previously and did nothing. Now he had to respond when confronted by the passengers.



Captain Robertson headed for the stairway and proceeded down to the main deck where he observed twenty or more people standing around watching while members of his crew still provoked the sobbing young man. The captain exclaimed, "There will be no nonsense on this ship!" His unruly crew stopped what they were doing and backed away from the crying, naked, and feathered boy.

The captain ordered Russell and Arran Tripp, who were standing closest to Hambly, to assist the weeping boy getting some of his clothes back on. Without sympathy he instructed Hambly to go directly to the Purser's office and to collect his pay and get off the ship when they arrived at Wiarton in a half hour's time. The sobbing Hambly just stood there dazed, picking feathers from his hair and body. Eventually he made his way back to his quarters, gathered his clean belongings and stuffed everything into his duffel bag.

Watchman Currie offered to take him to the purser's office located on the starboard side of the main deck. He led Hambly, clutching his duffel bag, to the office and rapped on purser Campbell's window. When it opened he explained the captain's orders. Campbell went to his strong box, fished out a few dollars, and handed it over.

The confused Hambly turned, paused, then stepped onto the railing just forward on the revolving paddle wheel. John McMillan, a waiter was standing directly beside him. For a few moments Hambly gazed down into the now black water still shrouded in low fog. The paddle wheel behind him on his right continued to churn at nineteen rpm. He could hear the hiss of expelled water as it evacuated the holes in the paddle wheel cover. The steady thump thump of the rotating wheel was background noise. The splash of water falling from the paddles sloshed into the lake below. There were no other sounds.

Then he jumped.

As Hambly dropped into Georgian Bay McMillan tried to grab him but he was unable to hang on. He too heard a splash and steady drumbeat of the starboard paddles and the expelled air pushed out of the vents of the paddle box. There was no scream or sound. Hambly simply disappeared in the ship's wake. Hector Lamont, a passenger standing nearby shouted, "There's that man overboard!" "Stop the boat!"

Currie called down to the chief engineer to stop, then ran up the stairs to the promenade deck

where there was a life ring. As he tossed it over the stern the short rope made the possible rescue impossible. It splashed into the water and floated away. Meanwhile Doran, the engineer threw the paddle wheel control into reverse for three revolutions, not quite enough to stop the forward momentum of the ship.

Captain Robertson up in the pilot house did not know Hambly had jumped. Nor did he know why the ship had stopped. He went aft to the hurricane deck where he met passenger Hector Lamont. When told that Hambly had jumped overboard, Captain Robertson said " He needn't have taken a blackening of his hands and face so hard."

Lamont said "Captain, this man was stripped stark naked and tarred and feathered" Robertson responded angrily, "Nonsense!" to which Lamont retorted, "Not nonsense, I saw him so myself." Captain Robertson replied, "Well he is gone: there's no use in stopping here."

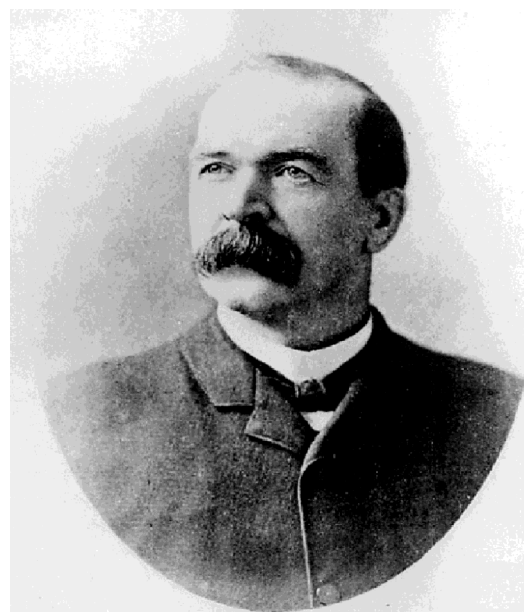
At this point the *Baltic* was now sitting dead in the water, about eight hundred metres south of White Cloud Island. Only the dark outline of the island was visible above the haze. Robertson realized there was no chance of rescue because of the mist over the water. After four to six minutes, Robertson ordered "Full speed Ahead."

Forty-five minutes later the *Baltic* arrived at Warton.

The crew, on Robertson's orders, said nothing.

Robertson wrote a note of condolence to Hambly's father to be delivered after he continued on his journey to Killarney, Manitouwaning and Little Current.

Unfortunately he did not have young Hambly's name. He referred to him as Charles Owen.



John Wilson Murray was Ontario's answer to Sherlock Holmes. He became the hero template for a CBC series called the Murdoch Mysteries.

## The Investigation

When the *Baltic* returned to Wiarton from the trip north, Captain Robertson was met at the dock by his father-in-law, John Creasor, a prominent lawyer from Owen Sound. Creasor advised the captain to say nothing. Shortly thereafter the captain set sail for Owen Sound with Creasor on board. The *Baltic* then left for Collingwood the same day. Meanwhile one of the passengers who had witnessed the outrage gave a statement in Owen Sound about what he saw to the Crown Attorney, John Frost and the Provincial Constable C. Pearse. An arrest warrant was issued for:

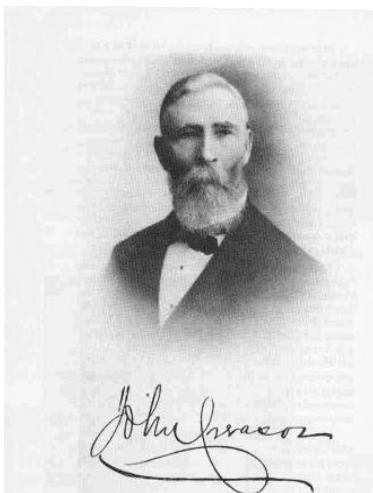
|                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| Thomas Russel    | 2nd Engineer |
| Aaron Tripp      | 1st Cook     |
| George Dagget    | 2nd cook     |
| Kenneth McFadzen | 2nd porter   |

On arrival at Collingwood the four men were identified and taken into custody and subsequently taken back to Owen Sound. They appeared before a judge who remanded the case for a week, pending further investigation. When questioned by the police, Captain Robertson was uncooperative and indifferent. He refused to answer questions. He told his crew not to answer questions either. Indeed he talked to the passenger Mr. Joseph Cherry who had identified the four and told him to go and see his lawyer, John Creasor.

Robertson told the passenger, Mr. Cherry, he would be “well paid” if he changed his story.

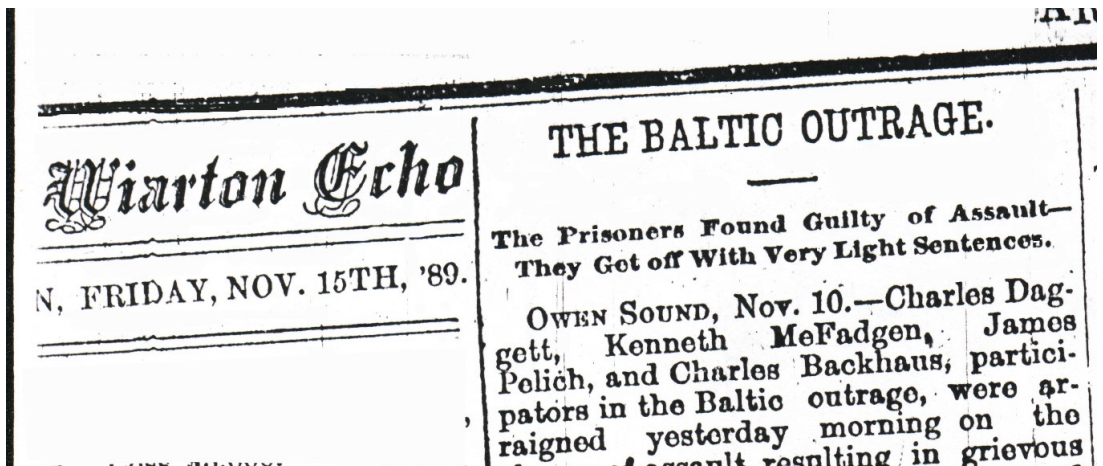
Cherry replied, “I am not for sale.”

Robertson continued to reason with Cherry and when he realized that he was getting nowhere, he threatened to ruin him saying, “Even if it cost thousands of dollars and took ten years.”



John Creasor Q.C. from Owen Sound defended the actions of Captain William Tate Robertson. Robertson had married Creasor's daughter in 1888.

Meanwhile, to add to the confusion and tight-lipped uncooperativeness of the crew involved in the events, Hambly was still being referred to mistakenly as Charles Owen in the press.



The Wiaraton Echo was one of a dozen newspapers to pick up the story of the outrage. The case came to the attention of politicians and the police departments around Georgian Bay

The Globe ran a full column front-page story about the "Outrage on the *Baltic*" on September 2 and September 3 reporting on the death of "Charles Owen".

Captain Robertson quickly mounted his defense, knowing that there would be trouble for him, the crew, and the company. He sent a terse rebuttal to the Globe's story in a letter to the editor. He also sent telegraphs to all the municipal telegraph offices around southern Georgian Bay on September 2.

*EDITOR - The Globe - The sensational article in the Globe today is simply paragraph by paragraph untrue with the exception of an unknown man jumping overboard.*

*W. Tate Robertson*

*Capt. Baltic*

His brusque and uncommitted statement to the papers was typical of Robertson's tight-lipped responses to the police during the early stages of the investigation.

John Wilson Murray, the Ontario Provincial Detective (the same character now part of a CBC series called Murdoch Mysteries) became interested in the case. Murray had a reputation as a tireless and highly successful investigator whose skills and international fame added drama to the case. Murray interviewed the crew, the passengers, and then went to visit Hambly's home near Wiaraton. His reports and interviews were important in the prosecution's argument, especially when crewmembers "forgot" details or made contradictory statements during the trial.

Mr. J.M. Fyfe, a commercial traveller who often sailed on the *Baltic*, wrote a spirited defense about the officers and crew of the *Baltic* in the *Globe*. He accused their reporter of errors in details about the *Baltic* (he was correct) and attributed the misrepresentation to the rivalry that existed between Collingwood and Owen Sound as well as an attempt to injure the character of the good Captain. He disputed the *Globe* report that claimed the crew was "maddened with liquor". He maintained that there was no bar on the *Baltic* and that the sale of liquor was prohibited on the company's steamship line.

On September 9 the four prisoners (Daggett, Tripp, Russell, and McFadzen) who were now in jail were formally charged with the death of Charles Hambly. They were remanded for another week. An argument then ensued between the defense and the prosecution about who would be a witness at the trial. Constable Pearse reported that some of the crew were foreigners and were under the control of the captain. The captain, he stated, intimidated them to keep quiet and the prisoners should therefore be held in custody until the trial.

Andrew Tyman, the fireman, was arrested on Sept. 10 in Little Current when Constable Pearse went up to Manitoulin Island on the *Carmona* to catch up to the *Baltic* that was by now continuing her regular schedule.

By September 12, nine more members of the crew were arrested as witnesses in the death of Hambly. They included James Currie, Charles Bachaus, James Pelich, John Macmillan, and William Jennings. The preliminary hearing began on September 16 before George Price, Justice of the Peace, George Spencer, Police Magistrate, and John Rutherford, Justice of the Peace. Daggett, Tripp, Russell, and McFadzen were refused bail and held in the Owen Sound jail while arguments about the nature of the charges were debated.

Once the hearing began before the Grand Jury, the defense council, Mr. Creasor, objected to the "bulldozing" of his client James Currie, the night watchman, whose testimony on the stand was vague and did not match the statements he initially made to Provincial Detective James Murray. Currie it seemed was unable to remember details or the sequence of events.

In response to Creasor's objection the judges observed, "It appears that all these boatmen have been either intimidated or bribed. They are most unwilling to give evidence. It seems to us that the bulldozing has been the other way. We think the Crown Counsel should have a good deal of license with adverse witnesses."

The tone for the trial was set.

Over the next week, confusing evidence, contradictory testimony, and forgetful witnesses appeared in the court, but the essential details were tabled. The preliminary court found enough evidence to have them sent for trial. As a result Charles Daggett, Kenneth McFadzen, James Pelich, Russell, Tripp, and Charles Bachaus were charged with manslaughter.

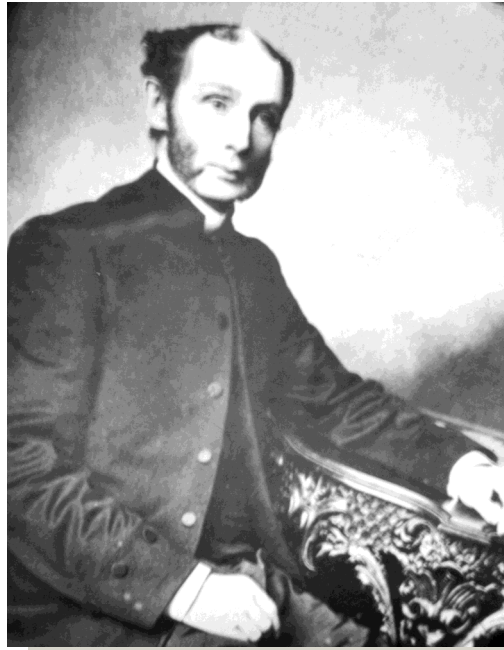
They appeared before the provincial court of Judge John Douglas Armour (Appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada in 1902). Each pleaded not guilty. The defense argued that, although Hambly had been tarred and feathered, there was no case that his drowning was a direct result of the outrage. Defense lawyers argued that the defendants be found not guilty of manslaughter.

Mr. Frost argued for the Crown, that if the outrage had caused the boy to become insane, then the outrage was the cause of the drowning. He argued that the accused be found guilty. The Judge agreed there was no evidence that Tripp and Russell had followed Hambly to the location on the ship where he jumped overboard. On a point of law, he found that they did not directly cause Hambly's suicide and he advised the jury to find them not guilty. For the same reason, the other four (Daggett, McFadzen, Pelich and Bachaus) were also found not guilty.

The six were then arraigned on an indictment of aggravated assault. Daggett, McFadzen, Pelich and Bachaus again pleaded not guilty. Russell and Tripp entered a plea of guilty.

In the end, all were found guilty of the lesser charge.

Tripp and Russell were sent to hard labour in Central Prison in Toronto for one year each. The other four, Daggett, McFadzen, Pelich, and Bachaus were sentenced to six months hard labour in the same prison. The court dismissed charges against others of the crew, although it noted that Jennings had taken part in stripping Hambly. The judge in the trial also rebuked Captain Robertson for obviously intimidating his crew to keep quiet



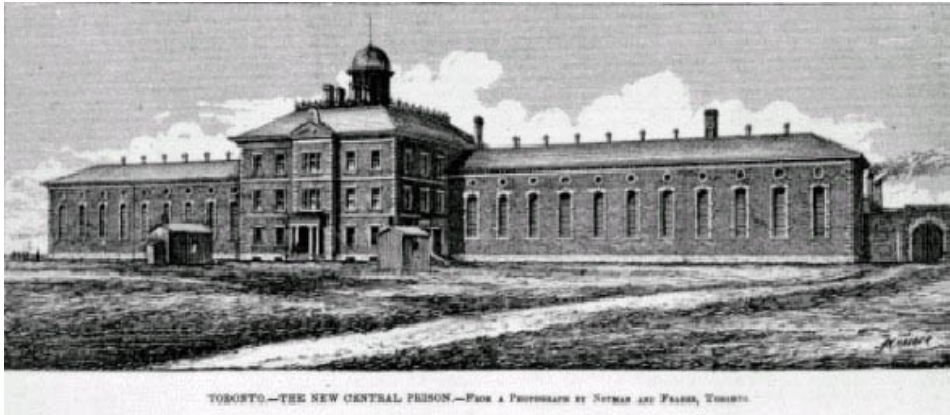
Archdeacon of the County of Grey, Robert Mulholland of the Church of England in Owen Sound wrote to John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister of Canada, pointing out the political implications of taking Robertson's license as captain away. Robertson was a solid Conservative and held a lot of political clout in Owen Sound as did his father-in-law John Creasor.

His decision made its way to Ottawa and a formal investigation was launched by the Minister of Marine, Charles Tupper in January of 1890. As a result William Tate Robertson lost his captain's papers for a year. Robertson was found to be remiss in his duty to stop the outrage and to even make an attempt to save the young man.

At this point the political war began and the issue of Robertson's rebuke got as far as Prime Minister John A. Macdonald's desk, as well as at the attention of the Free Mason's Lodge, and the Anglican Archdeacon. A massive letter writing campaign was initiated in Robertson's defense. It was to no avail.

The suspension remained.

However, Captain Robertson sailed aboard the *Baltic* the next season and there is evidence to suspect that he remained at the helm.



TORONTO.—THE NEW CENTRAL PRISON.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY NORMAN AND FRASER, TORONTO.

The Central Prison in Toronto was notorious as a rough place to be with hardened criminals.



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