

The *Manitoulin* Fire

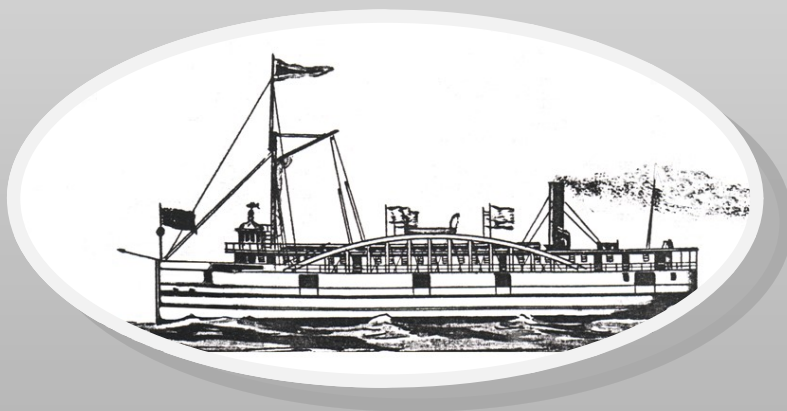
“A Terrible Lake Disaster”



May 18, 1882

STEAMBOAT STORIES

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



THE PHOENIX RISES ONLY ONCE

The Fire Aboard the Manitoulin

THE GRAND EVENT

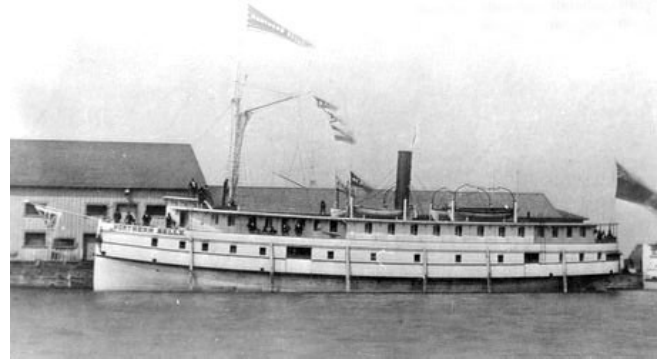
The launch of the steamer *Manitoulin* on Thursday April 22, 1880 was a cause for celebration in Owen Sound. The mayor, Dr. C.E. Barnard declared a half day holiday, so that business owners and merchants could see the spectacle. Schools discharged their students early to witness the grand event. As was always the case when a new vessel slid down the ways in Owen Sound, everyone came to town to watch. There were farmers and their families, bankers in their best tucker, dignitaries from near and far, military officials, and all the retail merchants from town.

Front and centre were the owners of the Great Northern Transportation Company, affectionately known as “The People’s Line”. The company evolved from the old Georgian Bay Navigation Company that began business in 1876 and was absorbed by The Great Northern Transportation Company lock stock and barrel in 1880 following the tragic loss of the *Waubuno* in November 1879. With that absorption the Great Northern Transportation Company acquired the old *Simcoe* and the *Northern Belle*. The *Manitoulin* was the spanking new addition to their fleet.



Mayor Barnard of Owen Sound

The launch was an opportunity for the mayor and members of parliament to make public speeches, laud the accomplishments of the community, and demonstrate their leadership in the dreamed of prosperity for Owen Sound and its hinterland. Already the city had a railway, blossoming industry, and significant shipping capability to serve the opening of new lands to the west and north.



The Great Northern Transportation Company acquired the *Northern Belle* after the loss of the *Waubuno* in 1879

All afternoon the shipyard workmen pounded away that the chocks to release the *Manitoulin*, perched high and dry on the shore. Just past 4 p.m. the 152 foot ship shuddered. Mrs. Keough, the wife of the company Vice President, broke a bottle of champagne over the bow, and the *Manitoulin* started gliding down the greased slides.

There was a crowd on the upper decks. A band. Ladies in bustled frocks. Men in high hats. All those of any account in Owen Sound were there. Flags and banners floated above them, the largest of which was one with the letters MANITOULIN. It was a splendid affair.

Cheering dignitaries on the upper decks held on as the ship slid into the water on the west side of the harbour sending a surge from the side-launched vessel to the east shore, tossing and bobbing the many small craft anchored nearby filled with spectators wanting a closer look, . On shore there were loud huzzas and heartfelt clapping. This flawless launch seemed to cement Owen Sound as a major ship building centre solidifying economic prosperity for the future.

In Collingwood 50 miles to the east they could not help but mock Owen Sound, their competitor for Georgian Bay boat building supremacy. The honourable citizens there were preparing for a launch of their own, the rebuilt steamer *Simcoe*. A dueling verbal battle between the Collingwood Messenger and the Collingwood Enterprise vs. the Owen Sound Times and Owen Advertiser erupted from a long standing war of words going on for more than a decade.

The Collingwood Messenger reported in their coverage of the event:

"We notice by the 'Times' that the people of Owen Sound took a temporary fit of lunacy over the launching of the steamer MANITOULIN last week. The day was proclaimed a holiday, business men wended their way towards the Dry Dock turning hand springs, and hundreds of country people came in to see the "fun". It don't take much to excite those Owen Sound people. Here in Collingwood, the Georgian Bay Transportation Company have about completed a large steamer for the Chicago trade and we say very little about it, but then, they are not used to these things in Owen Sound."

The Advertiser retaliated calling Collingwood a

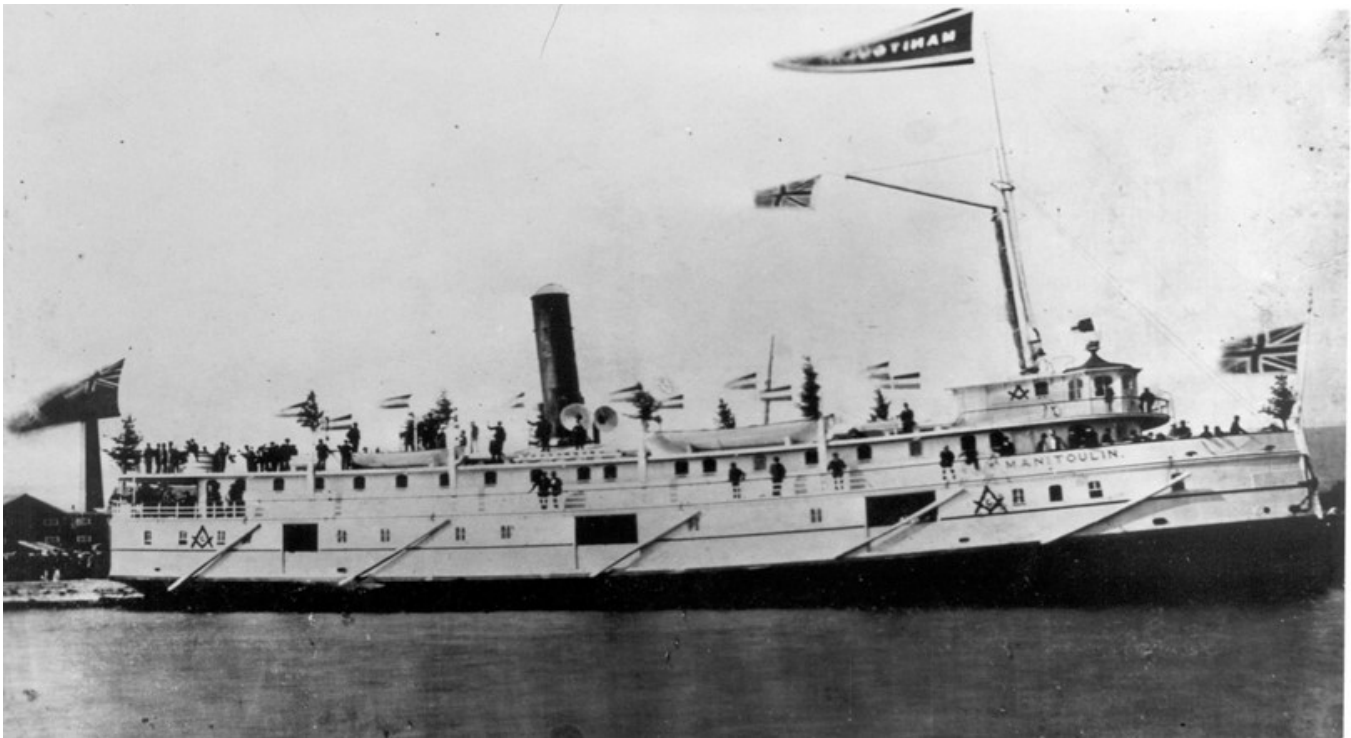
“Forlorn and poverty stricken hole, and nothing but a fishing village.”

Whatever the different perspectives, the launch in Owen Sound was a big event not to be clouded by a petty rivalry between newspapers

THE DESIGN OF THE *MANITOULIN*

T

he *Manitoulin* was well built under the specifications of Captain John Simpson. Simpson belonged to a highly regarded family of shipbuilders. John Simpson had



The *Manitoulin* was built under the specifications of Captain John Simpson and launched in 1880 at Owen Sound

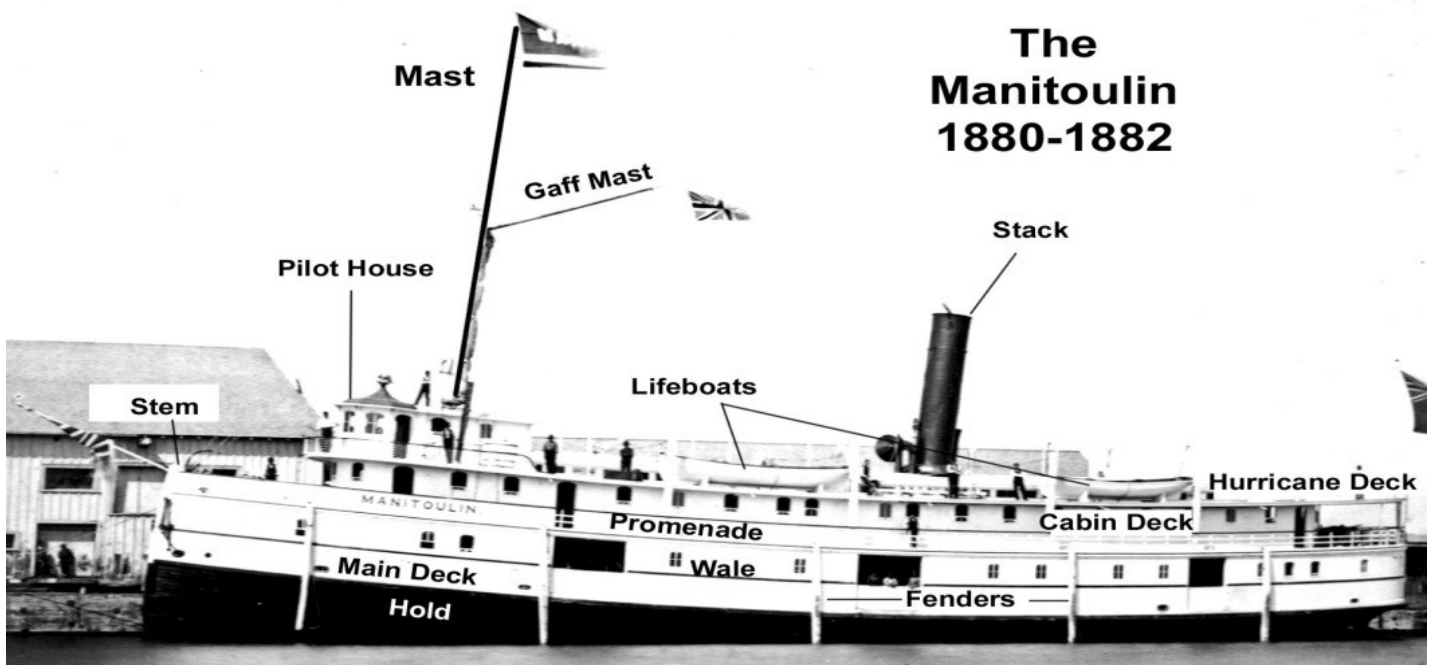
built the Schooner *Azov* (1866) and the propeller steamer *City of Owen Sound* (1875) before building the *Manitoulin*.¹ His brother Melancthon had more than a dozen ships to his credit including the *Cumberland*, the *Frances Smith*, and the *Waubuno*.

At a cost of over \$84,000, the *Manitoulin* was designed to carry passengers and freight around the North Channel as far as Sault Ste. Marie. The planking on her hold was eight and a half inch thick rock elm, one of the toughest materials available to ship builders of the time. Rock elm was remarkably straight and free from knots, but it was difficult to work because of its hardness. Above the waterline, planking was made from full eight inch American oak.

Both materials were used for ships of the line in the British navy in the mid 1800's.

With a beam of thirty feet four inches, there was ample room for staterooms on the cabin deck. There were twenty-six cabins in all, thirteen on each side, separated by a wide common lounge. Some cabins had sliding doors between them so that larger groups could be accommodated. On each side of the smoke stack that passed through the centre of the ship, were large elaborately framed mirrors to give a greater sense of space. Just aft of the stack was a wide staircase to the main deck below. Aft of the stairwell was a large ladies parlour complete with a piano where groups sang everything from the popular "Polly Waddle Doodle" to Auld Lang Syne".

The one hundred and twenty foot cabin area was heated with steam radiators, a relatively



Steamer diagram to show the design of the *Manitoulin*

modern convenience aboard late 19th century ships. Temperature control was a major breakthrough on passenger ships of the lakes. On the upper deck were the captain's quarters and a gentlemen's smoking room complete with a washroom.

The *Manitoulin* carried a crew of 24-28 including officers. On the main deck were quarters for the engineer, the purser, cook, steward and other officers. Below were quarters for firemen

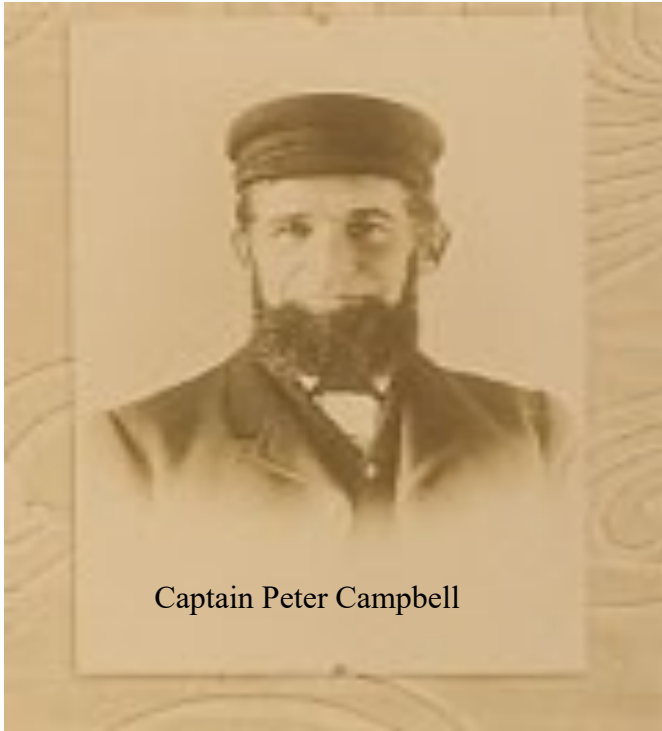
and deckhands. Kitchen staff and waiters were housed at the bow of the ship.

The boiler was eight feet in diameter and twenty-two feet long. The cylinder used to drive the engine was a full thirty inches in diameter. The drive shaft from the engine was twenty-two feet long, ending in a propeller nine feet across. This was a major accomplishment for the Owen Sound Dry Dock and Shipping Company despite the fact that Collingwood folks belittled the company's success.



The *Manitoulin* circa 1881. The 1880 and 1881 seasons were successful and expectations of then company were high that 1882 would be a banner year

The *Manitoulin* started her 1880 service visiting the ports of Manitowaning, Little Current, Mudge Bay, Kagawong, Meldrum Bay, Spanish Mills, Blind River, Thessalon, Bruce Mines, Hilton Beach, Garden River, and Sault Ste. Marie. During 1881 excursions were made to Mackinac Island after visiting the Sault. Mackinac Island was an increasingly popular destination, appealing to both Canadian and American tourists. Because the excursions to Mackinac took place over Sunday there were hymn sings, and a sermon in the lounge. There



Captain Peter Campbell

was even a baptism on board during a trip that August. The seasons of 1880 and 1881 were successful and raised expectations for the owners. The ship sailed late in the season and initiated runs as early as possible in the spring. On November 27, 1881 the *Manitoulin* was the last ship to leave Manitowaning before being tied to the wharf at Owen Sound for the winter.

She opened her 1882 season sailing from Owen Sound to Collingwood with Captain “Black Pete” Campbell at the helm. From

there on the on the night of May 17, 1882 she sailed back to Meaford and then set out for Owen Sound arriving at 8:45 a.m. Captain Campbell left the wharf at Owen Sound at 11:15 p.m. heading for Killarney in fair weather at full throttle. The *Manitoulin* arrived the following morning at 9:30 a.m. It was a busy start for what was anticipated was to be a busy season.

Killarney sits at the entrance to the North Channel, surrounded by the pink and white granite La Cloche Mountains. Its small harbour is one of the most protected on the entire Great Lakes. The water access only village was initially settled by Augustin Delamorandiere and his native wife Josephte Sai-sai-go-no-kwe in 1820 at what was then called by the Ojibwa name Shebahonaning (canoe passage). Today it is accessible by road but remains a popular stop for sailing enthusiasts around Georgian Bay.

Within the hour, after discharging freight and picking up a few passengers, the *Manitoulin* sailed beyond George Island and headed for Manitowaning, a small First Nation village on the east side of Manitoulin Island. The little village was the site of an early Anglican mission that failed and was replaced by a Roman Catholic mission and residential school in the 1840’s. In 1882, Manitowaning was the largest community on Manitoulin Island.

FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!

By noon on Thursday, May 18, the ship was steaming in fine weather, two miles off shore near the dock at Manitowaning. On the starboard beam sat Shoal Point, low in the water, dark with cedars and pine. Captain Campbell was in the dining saloon having his lunch at 1 o'clock p.m., talking with some passengers. Chief Engineer Lockerbie was in his



The *Manitoulin* inflames heads for shore at full speed

cabin, putting on his coat in order to join Captain Campbell in the dining room. At that moment, below, in the engine room in the after section of the ship, an oil lamp apparently exploded, engulfing the room in fire.² A deckhand opened the door to the dining area and smoke drifted in. From below, the crew could be heard shouting “Fire! Fire! Fire!” Campbell jumped to his feet and shouted orders to steer “Hard a Starboard” to point his vessel toward the not too distant shore, hoping to run her aground. He then ran aft and gave orders to Chief Engineer Lockerbie to activate a donkey engine to put pressure in the fire hoses. Moments later he saw that the fire was out of control so he ordered the steward’s crew to get life preservers on everyone.

Meanwhile Lockerbie crawled along the deck to the end of the hose in order to spray water

into the engine room, but discovered that the nozzles were not attached to the hose, so he could not direct water at the fire. As Captain Campbell assessed the situation, and realized his ship was doomed he sprinted back to the wheelhouse to take control personally.

Many passengers froze in terror and were unable to get into their life vests. They simply ran to the rail, preparing to either jump or get into one of the lifeboats. There was pandemonium on the decks with people pushing, yelling and calling for loved ones.

Because the wind was from the west, the bow of the ship was not immediately engulfed as the *Manitoulin* sped to Shoal Point. The stern was ablaze in minutes. Lockerbie, anticipating Campbell's bold plan to run the ship aground on the distant shore, fought his way through the fire to the engine room and pulled the throttle full open before the searing heat forced him out. Running to the shore at full speed against a moderate west winds swept the flames toward the stern sending curling black smoke behind.

Several persons including ladies and children trapped at the stern leapt overboard to escape



Engineer Lockerbie climbs along the wale to the fender to reach the bow in order to escape the flames at the stern. Passengers crowd forward as the *Manitoulin* steams toward land.

the scorching flames when they realized they could not make it to the bow. Panic stricken passengers still forward of the fire were ordered to the bow of the ship as she steamed full speed toward the rocks, flames and smoke billowing from the engine room. Amid the yelling and shouting, the steward's crew attempted, with only partial success, to get the remaining passengers outfitted with life preservers. Fumbling fingers were unsuccessful in tying the cords tightly around each body so that even if forced to abandon ship, the preserver would snap up hitting the wearer in the face.

Engineer Lockerbie said,

“(I) was putting on my coat to go to dinner when the second engineer came running in and told me the boat was on fire.... At that time the mate and the second engineer were endeavoring to get the hose down. I was four feet lower than them and not so much exposed to the flame...”

He continued,

“I took hold of the hose and felt along it for the nozzle but found it was not on.... I ran back to the engine, felt for the lever of the throttle and pulled it open. I could not open it all the way.... I ran back to the gangway, pulled off my boots and crawled along the wale until I came to a fender, when I was assisted to the promenade deck by Messers Spencer and Jas. Miller. Then I noticed the first Mate was trying to lower the starboard boat, and as he was unable to swing her clear, I took hold of the after-fall and helped



Women and children leap into the water from the stern to escape

the mate swing the boat clear of the chocks that she sat on. The mate told me not to let the boat strike the water. I followed the boat down the side to keep her off the promenade rail and shoved her off until my end was about four feet from the water. I was standing on the main wale at the time, having my arm around the fender and the line disengaged from my hand. The immense crowd jumping into the boat either carried it away from the forward tackle or the davit, when I immediately let go the after tackle, as the boat turned a complete summersault and the line nearly swept me off....I fell into the water and waded to shore. When I was hanging on I saw people continually passing under me in the water. I especially noticed a man swimming outwards after a woman who had drifted behind. ...I saw a man clinging to the side who had his hand and his arm in the fire.”

As Captain Campbell and his ship raced to the shore, several passengers fainted on the forward deck, overcome by heat and smoke. A recently married couple found the husband in the fore deck, separated from his wife who was trapped in the ladies cabin aft. In a desperate attempt to find her he ran through the flames only to be overcome and engulfed by fire.

The bow sliced through the water, sending a huge wake away from the hull. Approaching shallow water, the wake grew larger. Then in a tremendous collision, the *Manitoulin* hit the rocks, lifting the bow almost out of the water, smashing the hold, and knocking everyone to the decks. The bow now rested in two feet of water, tilted, high, and dry. The stern was still at a depth of twelve feet, just barely off the bottom. Lines were immediately thrown over the bow so the survivors could scramble down. This took courage as the deck was still over twenty feet above the waterline and those crowding the rail had no idea how deep the water was. Some of the women and children, who were frozen in fear at the bow, were thrown overboard by the crew, while flames moved forward rapidly and now licked against the wheelhouse. One of the crew, Firemen Wm. Brownlee, after lowering himself over the side, stood in the water at the bow and helped passengers as they struggled to their feet and waded to the shore. He caught one woman in midair as she jumped. Finally in a last ditch heroic gesture, Captain Campbell swept a child into his arms and finally abandoned his ship by jumping with her from the stem. Campbell handed the little girl off

to an adult, then commandeered one of the lifeboats successfully dropped earlier and headed out to assist pulling those who leapt before impact and those who were still struggling in deep water. Several bodies including children floated face down in the water nearby.

On the shore, several kilometers away, the local druggist, Mr. W. J. Tucker, was watching the *Manitoulin* with his telescope as it steamed toward Manitowaning. He saw the vessel catch fire and become a moving inferno rushing to shore. He was able to pick out individuals as they jumped from the deck before and after the grounding. He reported a tremendous explosion just before the beached ship was totally consumed.

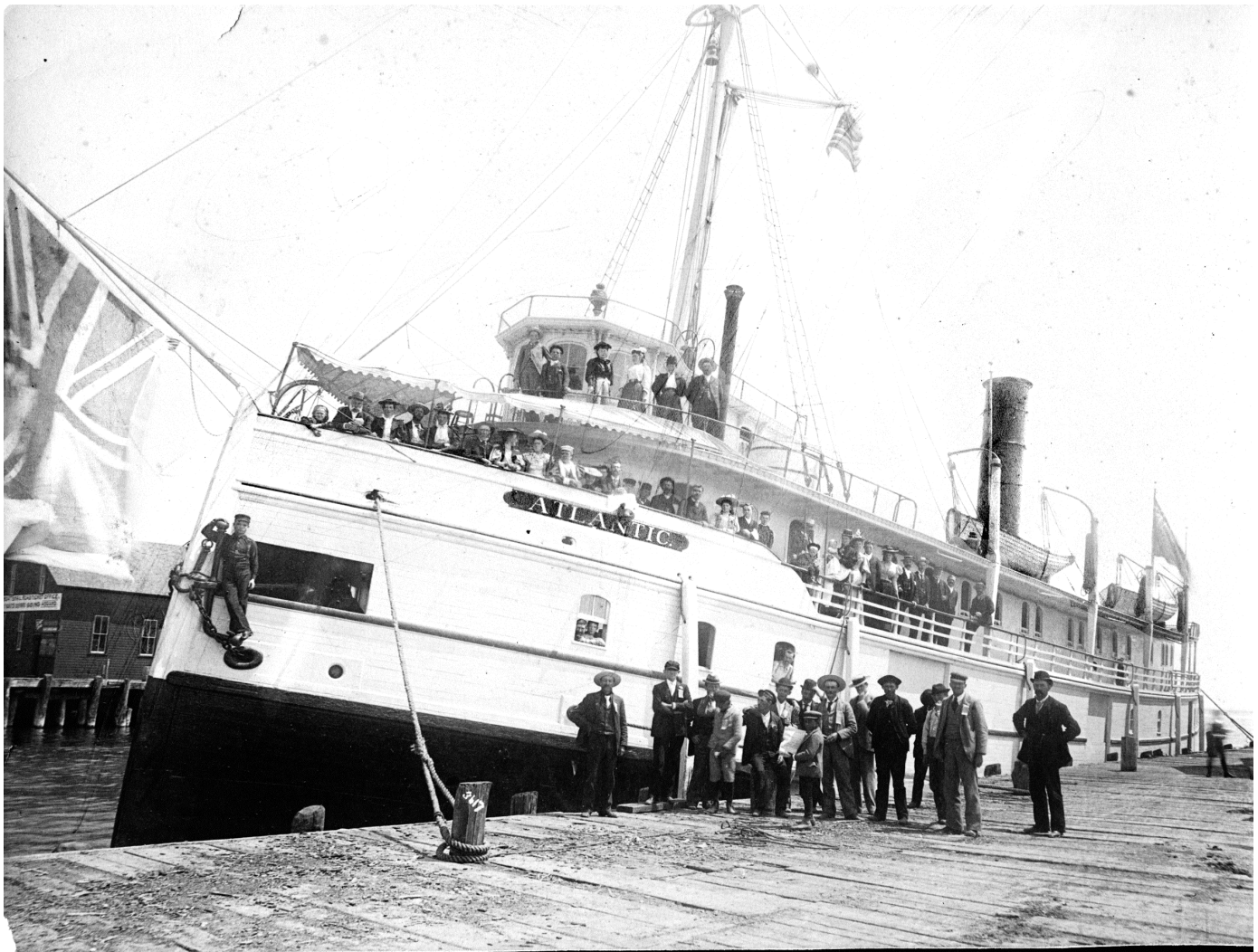
The time from the sounding of the alarm to the grounding was about ten minutes.

Between 20 and 25 persons including the newly married couple died that day. The total number remains unverified. On vessels plying the lakes in the 19th century there was often no manifest for all passengers. There were residents from Ottawa and Toronto as well as local citizens among the dead.³ The *Manitoulin* burned to the waterline. Everything aboard was lost, including registered mail, two pianos, a safe full of money, and all personal belongings. In addition 2 cases of chickens, 2 cows, 2 oxen, 1 pig, 1 wagon, and 2900 cwt household goods were lost.

With a saved skiff from the decks of his ship, Campbell ordered his mate, Andrew Johnstone, to set sail immediately back to Killarney to seek help. When Johnstone was only a short distance out, the steamer, *City of Owen Sound*, happened to be passing by in the narrows between Killarney and Manitowaning on its return to Collingwood. Johnstone was seen



Silver Tray given to Captain Campbell for his bravery and heroic conduct in saving lives



The newly built *Manitoulin* is renamed the *Atlantic* relaunched in 1882

emerging through the fog to the southwest. The *City of Owen Sound* hove to, picked up the mate, and steamed at full speed to Collingwood with the news. Within hours, the *Northern Belle* and the *Frances Smith* were dispatched to pick up survivors and return the bodies of the dead.

A testimonial from the passengers commended Captain Campbell for his presence of mind and heroic conduct. The grateful passengers also praised the remaining crew members for their courageous actions. The townspeople of Collingwood and the company honoured Captain Campbell with an inscribed silver serving tray.⁴ Campbell's reputation was at its apex. Even today his legend lives on in song with lyrics and music

composed by Kevin Moyses of Owen Sound in a CD called "Songs of Georgian Bay."

Although it was assumed the ship was irreparably damaged, a decision was made to make a closer inspection at the dry dock in Owen Sound. By June 5 the charred hull had been raised and pumped out and taken under tow by the tug *George Mathan*. The tow was hindered and slowed as a heavy two day storm delayed sailing. The burned *Manitoulin* was finally maneuvered into the dry dock on June 7 whereupon shipwrights looked her over. On examination it was deemed that the hull below the water line was still in excellent shape and worthy of rebuilding.

Work started immediately. The new ship was to be called the *Atlantic*

Can. Great Northern Transit Co.
Pam.

**Great Northern
TRANSIT CO'S
STEAMBOAT LINE**

RUNNING IN CLOSE CON-
NECTION WITH THE C.T.R.
AND C.P.R. COMPANIES

S.S. PACIFIC
928 TONS

S.S. BALTIC
900 TONS

Collingwood and Sault Ste. Marie

1892.-ROYAL MAIL LINE.-1892.

S.S. ATLANTIC
740 TONS

S.S.
NORTH'N BELLE
900 TONS

Steamers **PACIFIC, BALTIC** and **ATLANTIC** leave Collingwood every **Tuesday, Thursday** and **Saturday**, respectively, after arrival of the G.T.R. morning trains from Toronto and Hamilton, calling at Meaford, and leaving Owen Sound at **10.30 p.m. every Tuesday, Thursday** and **Saturday**, after arrival of the C. P. R. afternoon train from Toronto, for Sault Ste. Marie and intermediate ports. The Saturday steamer will call at Warton both ways.

THOS. LONG, Secretary. **CHAS. CAMERON, Manager.**

MAIL JOB PRINT TORONTO

Left

An advertisement for the new *Atlantic* as a member of the Great Northern Transit Company

THE PHOENIX ATLANTIC

The Northern Navigation Company hired John Simpson's brother Melancthon to oversee the rebuild at Owen Sound. The work was completed by mid-November of the same year and at a second launching the *Manitoulin* was renamed the



The *Atlantic* had 34 staterooms with radiators, an innovation in 1882

Atlantic. On November 30, 1882 she took her first trip as the *Atlantic* to Collingwood carrying a handful of passengers and 1700 barrels of flour. Travelling at over 12 miles per hour the handsome ship generated high praise even in the Collingwood newspapers.

Newly outfitted, the *Atlantic* now had 34 staterooms, an additional eight feet in length, and more modern facilities. The saloons were fitted out in carved walnut and ruby coloured plush chairs. Sunlight diffused through coloured glass transoms above the long saloon giving the travellers a sense of luxury and spaciousness. There was a piano back in place for “sing alongs” and for Sunday Service.



For safety reasons the boiler and engine were encased in iron as fire protection. Additional metal was installed around the stack.

New white paint, fresh rigging, and redesigned upper cabins made the vessel look and feel like a first build original. She was pressed into full

Pacific at Sault Locks. The ship sailed from Collingwood every Wednesday after the arrival on the noon trains from Toronto and Hamilton

service in 1883 and was a regular visitor to Georgian Bay ports working along with the other company ship, the *Northern Belle*, originally named the *Gladys* when launched in the USA in 1875. By the spring of 1885 the Great Northern Transit Co. placed their spanking new steamer under the command of Captain Robert Foote. That year the *Atlantic* was described by the Manitoulin Expositor as being as “clean and neat as a new pin.” And so it was.

Immediately the *Atlantic's* owners found themselves in serious competition for postal contracts to deliver mail around the upper lakes. The mail was in fact gravy for the steamship lines because they were visiting most all the ports between Collingwood and the Lakehead anyway. Companies like the Collingwood Lake Superior Line and the Great Northern Line (and its predecessor) had been battling it out for mail delivery supremacy for over a decade. With contracts of \$12,000 per year to deliver mail, a contract from the Government of Canada was not to be sneezed at. The Post Master General's inspector, Matthew Sweeham realized that by 1883 the new



Sons of Scotland excursion on the Frances Smith
intending from Sault Ste. Marie - about 1890-91. from Collingwood

The *Frances Smith* was renamed the *Baltic* in 1887 and became part of the Great Northern Transit Company Fleet

transcontinental being built by the CPR Railway would be a much more efficient way to deliver mail from Toronto and Southern Ontario points to Fort William and beyond. A system of bidding among steamer companies was instituted. Gradually the gravy train began to dry up. The post office even diverted some mail through the USA in the mid 1880's thereby further weakening the negotiating hand of the companies owning steamers. and post office management was forced to deal with the shipping establishment at a time when small communities were demanding more service.

The *Pacific* left Collingwood each Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. and the *Atlantic* left at the same hour on Saturday after the arrival of the noon trains from Toronto and Hamilton. The two ships stopped at a dozen intermediate locations between Collingwood and the Lakehead. Twice per week mail service was important to places like Meldrum Bay, Kagawong and Bruce Mines.

This arrangement was met with hostility by the owners of the *Frances Smith* who felt left out of the lucrative mail business that they had controlled only decade earlier before the *Atlantic* and *Pacific* entered the competition. Protestations at the highest levels of government resulted in proposals of a shared arrangement whereby Captain Tate Robertson of the *Frances Smith* offered the Postmaster General a deal to deliver mail without stopping at intermediate points between Collingwood and Sault Ste. Marie for only \$1000. His plan was to run on Thursday. The Great Northern countered with an offer of \$600. The *Frances Smith* proposal was turned down.



The Graves Lumber Mill at Byng Inlet

The matter was eventually solved when the GNT purchased the *Frances Smith* in 1887, renaming her *Baltic* and adding her to the dwindling post office trade, a small trade to remote communities that continued into the 20th century.

Fire was the enemy for the Great

Northern Transit Company. The *Baltic* burned at the Collingwood dockside in September 1896. The *Pacific* went up in flames on November 3, 1898 at the wharf in Collingwood. The *Northern Belle* burned to a total loss at Byng Inlet three days later on November 6, 1898.

The company added the *Majestic* to its fleet in 1895. She burned in 1915 in Sarnia. The *Germanic* was added in 1899 using the boilers from the *Pacific* only to burn in Collingwood in 1917.

Meanwhile the *Atlantic* plugged along, and was still active at the turn of the century, sailing from her home port of Collingwood to the Sault, visiting dozens of small docks along the eastern shores of the bay. Much of the business was for supplies to lumber camps from Parry Sound to Killarney. Flour, sugar, lard, and iron stoves were for the camp kitchens. Fruit, vegetables, and meat were for the tables of the shanty men. Hay, oats, wagons, and harness were for the hundreds of horses working in the bush. Live animals, rakes, wagons, and farm implements were for the few marginal farms attempting to be established where pockets of fertile soil was scattered amongst the rocky landscape. At times various Sunday Schools chartered the *Atlantic* for summer excursions, thereby earning the *Atlantic* the title of “The Gospel Ship”.

On November 9, 1903 while sailing from Collingwood to Byng Inlet with a full cargo of baled hay, coal oil, and supplies for the Graves Lumber Company, the *Atlantic* was making good headway on a perfectly calm day. As they approached the Western Islands the first mate noted an approaching storm from the west. He remarked that it looked like a serious November blow, as he knew November storms could be on Georgian Bay. The howl of the wind was audible even before the full brunt of the storm struck. When it did hit, the sudden wind whistled through the rigging to a crescendo like the roar of an earthquake. With her port side to the wind the ship took a list to starboard and received a battering from the quickly rising seas sweeping toward her from the open water on the west. After midnight, mounting waves washed across the decks and flooded into the hold. At about 4:30 a.m. November 10, the lights went out. The dynamo was knocked out. In the heavy seas and the broadside winds, the *Atlantic* started to list even more and take on water.

It was more than the old wooden vessel could handle and she sprung a leak. The Atlantic's captain, Captain Foote ordered all pumps to full output but they were not able to keep ahead of the inflow of water. By the minute, the *Atlantic* took more and more of a starboard list. The list was so heavy that the starboard firebox was under water. The crew realized they were in danger of a boiler explosion if the water continued to rise. Yet, the port firebox remained high enough to keep some steam pressure up but it was not enough to maintain speed as they headed to shelter closer to the eastern shore.

The Wreck of the Atlantic is near the Pancake Islands west of Parry Sound



Plaque placed on the remains of the S.S. Atlantic

THE END OF THE *ATLANTIC*

The small lighthouse of Red Rock sits on a tiny pink island to warn captains away from a cluster of submerged stone and unnamed shoals that make up part of the dangerous rocky east coast of the bay. The battered *Atlantic* headed straight for it, searching for an unknown possible channel beyond in order to hide, out of the brunt of the wind. Each roll threatened to capsize the vessel. As they made it past Red Rock waves washed over the small lighthouse every 10-15 seconds obscuring visibility for the officers attempting to thread their way to safety behind the shelter of the islands. They passed Red Rock and were successful in slowly heading toward Parry Sound in the shelter of the many islands that dot this part of Georgian Bay. At one point the water flooded into the pilothouse and the *Atlantic* was so far over it was possible to stand on the wall. Like a piece of cardboard in the wind, deck structures washed overboard.



The Wreck of the *Atlantic* is near the Pancake Islands west of Parry Sound

But it was fire that forced the crew to abandon ship before they reached their destination.

The wheelsman, 17 year old Amos Girdwood, reported:

“In a very short time the skipper shouted down that the ship was on fire and "everyone to the lifeboats", which we had made ready from about dawn. We had difficulty lowering No. 2 boat as 6 men got in it before it left the hurricane deck and by this time the flames and smoke were coming out the fan lights at our feet. We got into the boat by sliding down a davit, then down a fender or any way we could."

"We saw one of our crew come running down the hurricane deck and with an armful of clothing which he was trying to save. He ran to the edge of the deck and made a leap for the lifeboat, even with 15 already in the boat, he landed OK and didn't hurt himself or anyone else. By this time the waves were coming into the boat and in our desperation, all but one took off his cap and started bailing."

”Just then a tug sighted us, headed for us, and picked us up . Then and only then did we know we would reach land safely.

“When we were about to leave the scene, I took one last look back. She was one sheet of flames but we were glad to be alive and able to walk on dry land again."

The entire 16 member crew was saved but all their personal gear was lost. The *Atlantic* was a total loss.

Tom Towson reported in Canadian Diving News in 1972 that the burning *Atlantic* drifted from behind the Pancake Islands and sank in her present position against one of the Spruce Rocks. “Her bones are still there for divers to find. The wreck is a 15-minute boat ride in open water from Parry Sound Harbour towards Spruce Island.⁵

Ian Merringer a reporter - diver wrote in the Globe and Mail in in 2002,

“The rudder appears first, lying on the bottom where it came to rest after being ripped from the Atlantic's stern. It's 10 centimeters thick and as wide as a double bed. Beside it, the propeller juts out from the remains of the stern, three of its four blades having been snapped off a century ago. The drive shaft extends up through the skeleton of the hull and joins with other heavy-duty machinery near the bathroom-sized boiler.”

NOTES

- ¹ John Simpson subsequently built the City of Midland, City of Collingwood, Brockville, City of Toronto, Katadin, Pacific, and P.S.Hiesordt.
- ² There are contradictory reports of the explosion. One suggests that oil had been used to clean the boilers and it ignited causing the fire.
- ³ Those who died were: Fanny Proud (child) Owen Sound, Robert Henry, Toronto; Thomas Hanbury & wife, Owen Sound; James Little; John Hogan, Toronto; Patrick Fitzpatrick, Ottawa; an known deck passenger; George White (deckhand), Muskoka; Joseph Lewis (deckhand), Chatham?; deckhand (unknown).
- ⁴ The tray is at the Collingwood Museum as part of their maritime collection.
- ⁵ The *Pacific* was built under the direction of Captain John Simpson at Owen Sound.
- ⁶ The *Atlantic* is quite easily found if one follows Chart No. 2203 sheet one. Her position is N. 45 degrees 19' 59", W 80 degrees 15' 42.

Selected Sources

Community Waterfront Heritage Centre

Collingwood Museum

Owen Sound Advertiser

Great Lakes Maritime Database

Library and Archives Canada

Maritime History of the Great Lakes

The Frances Smith by Scott L Cameron

The Scanner

Bowling Green University

Owen Sound Sun Times

Toronto Globe

Meaford Monitor