

# *“Lost Without Trace”: Canadian Archival Clues to Marine Disasters*

by BRIAN HALLETT

Canadian affinity with the sea is shaped by an extensive coastline rivalled by few countries. This affinity is tempered by the natural elements of storm, tide, and ice that have destroyed our ships and challenged our mariners. Ice has prevented navigation on its northern coast or restricted it to a very short season, but it is on the southern coasts, where shipping has concentrated, that the extreme hazards should be emphasized. The ice and tides of the St. Lawrence River and Atlantic Coast, the storms of the Great Lakes, the currents of Juan de Fuca Strait provide the recipe for disaster. The other ingredient in this recipe for disaster is navigational aids. The Canadian system of lights, buoys and charts has been gradually built to a level of service and efficiency (reflected in its archival scope too), but while the system was being built scores of vessels have met disaster in navigable waters lacking effective aids. Yet, irrespective of the system's quality and the technological advances in ship construction, ships will continue to founder and sink due both to the elements and human error.

Increasingly, the search for these ill-fated vessels goes on, whether it be to fulfil the need to find what is lost, for personal gain, or just to embark on a nostalgia trip to relive a romantic period in the past. Increasingly, there is a turn towards the archival record for clues in this search. The archival record can intimidate and frustrate the novice researcher because of its complexity and because the finding aids do not always directly provide answers to a researcher's questions. For example, the question "What do you have on wrecks in Lake Ontario?" cannot be answered directly, as finding aids are invariably arranged alphabetically by ship's names or chronologically. The best advice to the novice researcher, interested in shipping on the Great Lakes, Atlantic Coast, Pacific Coast, inland waters, or Canada generally, is to become as aware as possible of the growing library of books and journals or of a more specialized printed item, like the wreck chart. *Wreck charts* for such diverse parts of our country as Vancouver Island, the Great Lakes, Anticosti Island, the Magdalen Islands, Grand Manan Island, Sable Island, and the Avalon Peninsula, although an archival record, are often available commercially. This awareness, gained through the published sources, is useful, perhaps essential, before researching either newspaper or archival sources.<sup>1</sup>

1 Research sources for Great Lakes shipping should also involve American archives. A useful British research aid is the National Maritime Museum's report (No. 48), *Modern British Shipbuilding. A Guide to Historical Records* (1980).

Logically, the *registration record* should be first approached as it helps to eliminate any confusion over name changes for a particular vessel or over the multiple use of a particular name. The key to overcoming this confusion is the unique registration number, but the registration records also provide basic information on vital statistics such as dimensions and tonnage and a complete record of ownership and financial transactions, such as mortgages, taken out on a vessel. Every country has a system of ship registration; the British system (which has served Canada) evolved from the eighteenth century through a series of Mercantile Shipping Acts. As the key to the system is the unique registration number, then the Mercantile Shipping Act for 1854<sup>2</sup> is the key act since it incorporates the number into the system. In Canada, confusingly, two systems operated until 1874; inland vessels received certification by the Provincial Act of 1843<sup>3</sup> and the coasting and seagoing vessels were registered under the Mercantile Shipping Act. The Department of Marine and Fisheries, formed in 1868<sup>4</sup>, immediately recognized the folly of the two systems and by 1874<sup>5</sup> they were combined under the Imperial Mercantile Shipping Act of 1854. Successive Mercantile Shipping Acts and the Canada Shipping Act of 1934 have produced little change in the system. A *register book* is maintained in the Customs House at the designated Ports of Registry. Duplicate records of registry entries are maintained in the central office in Ottawa. In Great Britain the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen served as the central office. Now, the administration of Part I of the Canada Shipping Act is the responsibility of the Ship Registration Division, Transport Canada.<sup>6</sup> Transport Canada is planning to streamline ship registration and to reduce the number of ports of registry — a process which is expected to be completed under the Maritime Code Act (proposed replacement to the Canada Shipping Act). The ultimate goal is to automate the entire system. In the interim, reality dictates that the Ship Registration Division automate the compilation function to produce the annual *List of Shipping*, and the switch from manual production is just underway.<sup>7</sup> The *List of Shipping* is an alphabetical list of every vessel on Canadian registry for that year, giving the registration number, port of registry, owner, and vital statistics. Publication was begun by the Department of Marine and Fisheries in 1873,<sup>8</sup> and predating this solely Canadian official list was the *Mercantile Navy List and Maritime Directory* compiled and published by the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen from 1850.<sup>9</sup> These annual lists are so useful for, knowing the Port(s) of Registry, research on a vessel can be conducted from the *register books*, which round out the information found in the annual lists. The register books are held in the Custom Port until all entries are cancelled,

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2 British Statutes, 18 Victoria, cap. 104.

3 Consolidated Statutes of Canada, 4 George IV, cap. 41.

4 Statutes of Canada, 31 Victoria, cap. 51.

5 Statutes of Canada, 36 Victoria, cap. 128.

6 The Department of Transport was established in 1936 and assumed the functions of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, now Transport Canada.

7 Interview with officers of the Ship Registration Division, Transport Canada.

8 Published in 1873, 1874, 1877, 1880, 1883, 1886, 1889, 1892, 1895, 1898, 1901, and hence annually.

9 Canadian library holdings of the *Mercantile Navy List and Maritime Directory* are rare. PAC Library holdings begin in 1867. Scattered earlier editions are available in the Dalhousie University Library.

in effect until the owner notifies the Registrar that the vessel no longer exists. This register book is then transferred to the Public Archives of Canada (PAC), where the series now includes 490 volumes and is fully indexed alphabetically. It is noteworthy that the Custom Ports rarely have transferred recent register books, that books for Atlantic Coast ports often date back to the beginning of the nineteenth century (pre-1854 entries have no registration number), and that there are few register books for Great Lakes ports prior to 1874, or during the period of provincial certification. The disappearance of these early register books from the Great Lakes ports has wrought a major gap in the Canadian archival record, for there was no central registry to duplicate the information. The PAC has relied upon the central source in Great Britain to fill gaps, in microform copies, where registry books in Canadian Custom Ports have disappeared. The researcher can see or obtain a copy of the registry entries from the PAC or through another repository that has a microfilm copy. Should the registry entry not be held by the PAC, the researcher can obtain a copy from the Port of Registry; the Ship Registration Division (at Transport Canada) has the names and addresses of Registrars at the Ports.

The *ownership* details found in the registration record are especially valuable. To uncover a cache of photographs, newspaper clippings, plans, specifications or contracts in the possession of the owner is a most welcome reward for the detective work done by the researcher, no matter how infrequently it happens. However, research on the history of shipping remains handicapped because of the prevalent attitude of shipping companies and ship-owners that any records having outlived their administrative value can be destroyed.

Having positively identified the vessel and its vital statistics and ownership determined through the registration record, the researcher can then turn to the sources of information on casualty. Files on *investigations* by the Department of Marine and Fisheries and Transport Canada, dating back to 1904, have been transferred to the PAC. The files may include a preliminary inquiry, a formal investigation report and the correspondence between the federal government and parties concerned with the investigation. The Marine Casualty Investigations Office of Transport Canada is very sensitive to the confidentiality of the preliminary inquiry records. The formal investigation report is a product of a public hearing, so access to the report has always been open, but the preliminary inquiry is a closed hearing and the evidence given under duress and without the opportunity of defense or cross examination is considered confidential. The preliminary inquiry reports and the related correspondence had remained closed, subject to the control of the Marine Casualty Investigations Office, until recent negotiations brought files older than thirty years under the control of the PAC. Staff of the Federal Archives Division (PAC) scrutinize each file over thirty years old to ensure that use of information therein concerning individuals or the evidence they presented at the inquiry would not be an invasion of their privacy or lead to repercussions from these individuals or their descendants. The Federal Archives Division reviews each application for access and refers requests for files in their custody that are less than thirty years to the Marine Casualty Investigations Office.

The Federal Archives Division has compiled an alphabetical *index to ship casualty files* in its custody, but a more available guide is a *list of all total losses*

reported to the Department of Marine and Fisheries and Transport Canada, but not necessarily investigated. These annually updated lists are available through the Marine Casualty Investigations Office from 1870 for inland waters, 1896 for Atlantic waters<sup>10</sup> and 1897 for Pacific waters. The lists identify the vessel and give the date and general location of the casualty. Associated with these lists is a *register* prepared to 1949 by the Department of Marine and Fisheries and Transport Canada for the same waters.<sup>11</sup> This Register, although essentially the same as the lists, is more detailed and is available on microfilm and interlibrary loan from the PAC. The *Wreck Reports*, British Board of Trade Form W.R. 1, that the Registrar of Shipping prepared for shipping casualties and submitted to the Department of Marine and Fisheries and Transport Canada are, again, more detailed but are closely associated to the lists and the register, in that the Wreck Reports are arranged alphabetically by year for Atlantic, Pacific and inland waters. These Wreck Reports date from 1907 and often provide information on a casualty for which there is no investigation file. To use this source effectively, the researcher should know the name of the vessel and the date and area of the casualty, as the Wreck Reports are not yet indexed.<sup>12</sup>

To answer the inevitable question as to where to turn for information on pre-twentieth century shipping casualties, there are very few answers in federal archival sources. The Department of Marine and Fisheries reported on casualties from 1868, as seen from their remarkably informative *Annual Reports*. They undoubtedly maintained investigative correspondence and reports, but the Department suffered extreme losses to their records in the fire that ravaged Parliament Hill's West Block in 1897.<sup>13</sup> The missing records for the decade or so after the fire was probably due to departmental disposal of records considered routine. Another source of information, the Department of the Naval Service during World War I and the Department of National Defence during World War II did report on casualties to civil shipping as well as to naval shipping. War-time duties inevitably precluded a formal investigation or even a preliminary inquiry, so files consist mainly of telegrams and correspondence on casualties due both to normal marine hazards and to enemy action.

The *crew lists* and the *certification of masters, mates and engineers* are two sources, dealing with individuals who survived or were lost in the casualty, that are now available in archival repositories. The crew lists, housed with the Maritime History Group, Memorial University, St. John's for the period from 1863 to 1913 and at the Registry of Seamen, Transport Canada from 1937,<sup>14</sup> give the officer's and seamen's signature, age, nationality and particulars on engagement and discharge. The maintenance of the crew list, or article of

10 For the purposes of the lists, inland waters extend down the St. Lawrence River to Montreal and Atlantic waters extend upriver to Montreal.

11 PAC, RG 12, Vols. 1007-1010.

12 Supplementing the Wreck Report, completed by the Registrar of Shipping, is another question and answer form completed by the Master. Transport Canada has custody of this form for only the most recent period in time.

13 *Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries*, 1898.

14 The Maritime History Group has recently received crew lists from Great Britain that post date 1913. This large collection has not been indexed and therefore is unavailable, as yet, for research.

agreement, was the responsibility of the British Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen until the Department of Transport took over in 1937. British archival authorities in the early 1960s began to have reservations about the practicality and desirability of storing and maintaining this immense collection of crew lists from across the British commonwealth. They settled on a sampling programme to serve future research needs. The Public Record Office in London took a random sampling of ten percent, plus all crew lists before 1860 and crew lists for a collection comprised of famous ships. The National Maritime Museum in Greenwich took precise years: 1861, 1862, 1865, 1875, 1885, 1895 and 1905. As well, they contacted archival repositories to see if they would be interested in select crew lists. At the time (1971), Memorial University, stimulated by the persuasive powers of Dr. Keith Mathews, offered to take the remaining collection in its entirety. To find a Canadian location willing to house and maintain a collection of some 10,000 linear feet was very fortuitous for shipping research, but note that the reference work of the Maritime History Group is greatly facilitated if the researcher provides the ships' registration number.<sup>15</sup> Canadian crew lists after 1937 are available from the Registry of Seamen, Transport Canada which is presently converting the hard copy to microfilm, and upon completion, has agreed to transfer a copy of the microfilm to the PAC.

The Registers of Certificates of Competency and Service for Masters and Mates-Seagoing in Canada begin in 1872. An act<sup>16</sup> was passed in 1870, but the Canadian certification process was not immediately recognized by the British Board of Trade. Certification of Masters and Mates-Seagoing was the first, gradually the other types were transferred to Canadian authority. Prior to 1872, certification of Canadians can be found interfiled in the British records and after 1872, they are filed separately by the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen. The PAC has obtained microfilm copies of the registers for Canada and Newfoundland from 1872 to 1921. Although duplicating the registers maintained by the Department of Marine and Fisheries, the microfilm is very useful as not all of the early Canadian registers have been transferred from Transport Canada, and Newfoundland is represented. Each register is indexed but when the date is not known, it is useful to refer to the complete index at Transport Canada.

Finally, there are many sources on shipping which are not frequently available in Canadian archival repositories including: *cargo manifests*, *customs records*, *ship's plans*, *ship's logs*, and *insurance records*. The cargo manifest, created by customs officials, is a particularly voluminous record that is not considered to be archival and has a short retention period as an administrative record in the Custom Port. In addition to the cargo manifest, a multitude of other records in the Custom Ports have been systematically or haphazardly destroyed. The Public Archives Canada has received only limited records for certain ports. The most comprehensive collection of customs forms, used to prepare the registry entry, is for the ports of Quebec City, Ottawa and Toronto,<sup>17</sup> and the most comprehensive collection of early records, such as the

15 See Keith Mathews, "Crew Lists, Agreements and Official Logs of the British Empire." *Business History* 16 (January 1974): 78-80.

16 Statutes of Canada, 33 Victoria, cap. 17.

17 PAC, RG 42, Marine Branch.

registers of vessels entering and leaving port, is represented by the ports of Liverpool, N.S., and St. Andrew's, N.B.<sup>18</sup> Ship's plans are another source where the researcher will probably experience frustration in the search for information. Few ship's plans are in Canadian repositories and the availability of plans for Canadian vessels in repositories outside Canada is largely unknown. The researcher must usually depend on plans surviving in the hands of owners and builders.<sup>19</sup> Ship's logs are generally unavailable in Canadian archival repositories. The term "log" is often associated with the crew list, which is confusing, but if one has in mind a diary type log of shipboard events, then one must turn to the papers of sea captains and not to official records.<sup>20</sup> Insurance records are rare too in Canada. Early voyages may often have been underwritten locally, but the only notable collection is Lloyds in London. Lloyds maintains a variety of records like the reports on the construction of a vessel prepared by their surveyors for classification purposes. The survey reports are being transferred to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich and the PAC has received microfilm copies of ship's surveys done at the ports of Quebec, P.Q.; Saint John and Miramichi, N.B. and Prince Edward Island from 1852 to 1899. Lloyds, also, compile and publish registers and statistical returns. Their *Registers of Ships*, from 1764, and their *List of Shipowners*, from 1876, rival the official lists because they are so comprehensive and transcend the official lists because they are international in scope.

#### A CASE IN POINT

"Missing Boat Long Overdue" read the Toronto *Globe and Mail* headline of 8 November 1937. In fact, no trace of the missing boat has ever been found, except for some hatch covers that were found washed up at Baleine Cove on Cape Breton Island. The CALGADOC sank with all seventeen hands lost, a short while after leaving Sydney harbour. Where she sank can only be an estimate, but the location was probably twenty or thirty miles north of Scaterie Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The CALGADOC was built in Dumbarton, Scotland by A. McMillan and Son, Ltd. for the Algoma Central and Hudson Bay Railway Company of Sault Ste. Marie in 1910 and was christened the THOMAS J. DRUMMOND. She was 247.8 feet in length by 43.7 feet in breadth, by 22.8 feet in depth, with a registered tonnage of 1664.43, and she carried freight for Algoma Central on the Upper Great Lakes until 1917, when she was part of an exchange transaction with the Great Lakes Transportation Company, whereby Algoma Central received the WILLIAM S. HACK in exchange for the THOMAS J. DRUMMOND. Prior to this transaction, the THOMAS J. DRUMMOND made at least one noteworthy voyage when, in 1915, she carried a shipment of steel billets from the Algoma Steel Company at the 'Soo' to France as part of the war effort.<sup>21</sup> A few months after this first change of ownership, she was sold to the Department of Railways and Canals of Canada. In 1920 she became a private holding company (the Thomas J. Drummond Ltd.), with the Department of

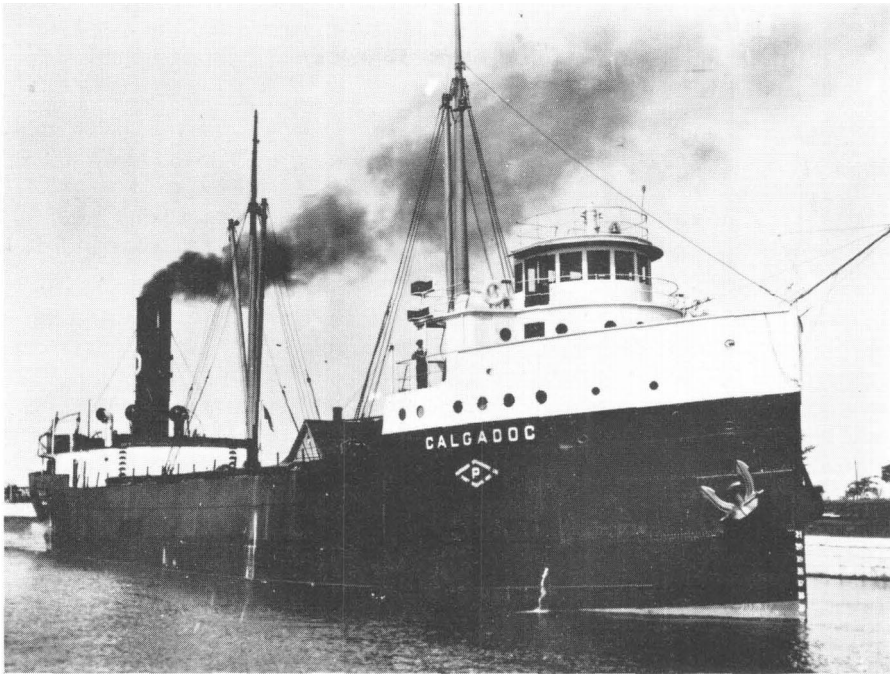
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18 PAC, RG 16, Revenue Canada. Customs and Excise Branch.

19 Transport Canada has a large collection of post World War II ship plans.

20 Official logs at the PAC consist of a limited sampling for mainly federally-owned vessels.

21 O.S. Nock, *Algoma Central Railway*, (London, 1975) p. 87.



*The CALGADOC, proceeding through locks on the St. Lawrence River, c. 1930. From the E.D. Simzer Collection through the auspices of George Ayoub, on loan to the National Photography Collection. (PAC, PA-32957)*

Railways and Canals holding the mortgage, until 1923 when she was purchased by N.M. Paterson and Company Ltd. (Paterson Steamships Ltd.) of Fort William, Ont. Other than a name change to CALGADOC in 1926,<sup>22</sup> nothing particularly eventful happened to the vessel until the shipping season of 1937. That season she left Montreal for Sydney under voyage charter to the Dominion Steel and Coal Company (DOSCO). She was initially employed in carrying coal from Sydney to ports on the St. Lawrence River, but soon after her destination was switched to Maritimes ports and, according to the preliminary enquiry report:

On the last voyage of the ill-fated vessel she arrived at Sydney, N.S. on October 28th at 7-0 A.M., commenced loading a cargo of Nova Scotia Screened Coal on October 29th at 8-30 A.M. Completed loading, October 30th at 9-0 A.M. carrying 3190 tons of

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22 Department of Marine and Fisheries order 61/1926, dated 22 November 1926, recorded in registry entry 6/1925, at Fort William, Ont. The registration record at the Sault Ste. Marie port is 4/1910.

coal, 132 bunkers and 8950 gallons of fresh water, and the usual stores. From this it will be seen that she was loaded approximately as usual.<sup>23</sup>

Captain David Simpson of the British Steamship *DOMBY* was the last to sight the *CALGADOC*, as the *DOMBY* was also on charter to *DOSCO* and had left Sydney, bound for Montreal, one half hour behind her. He returned to Sydney ten days later, just as concern for the missing ship became serious and inquired as to "what lake boat left just ahead of him, as it was taking the worst punishment he ever saw a boat take."<sup>24</sup>

The length of time which elapsed before the investigation into the disappearance of the *CALGADOC* was begun is remarkable when judged by current practice, but the *CALGADOC* had no ship-to-shore communication. The investigation file does not begin until 6 November when newspaper reports urged a sharp lookout for the *CALGADOC*, as she might be in trouble resulting from the heavy southwest gale that had swept Cabot Strait. It was not until 8 November that her owner, N.M. Paterson, wired C.D. Howe, the Minister of Transport, to request an air search. Hope was still very much alive on 9 November, as the schooner *GOVIN* finally reached St. John's after having left her port, Harbour Grace, the same day as the *CALGADOC* left Sydney. If the *GOVIN*, having encountered the same storm, could arrive safely in port after nine days without word on a 38 mile voyage, then the *CALGADOC* might be riding out the storm in an isolated cove on the south coast of Newfoundland. On 10 November, the Toronto *Evening Telegram* editorialized:

She's all right they (lake captains) said and feeling that these men knew of what they spoke, we refrained from reporting. Now hope is waning. . . A ship should never be allowed to sail around the coast (east) without some means of communication to shore and it's suicide to send a ship of canal size down there at this time of year without some means of communication to shore, and the sooner Canada's shipping laws are amended the better for all of us.

On 22 November, it was reported that a meat block and three hatch covers were picked up at Baleine Cove, presumably belonging to the *CALGADOC*. The Department of Transport was uncertain about conducting an inquiry, as there was so little information and the *CALGADOC* supposedly met all regulations; coasting vessels were not required to carry wireless if they travelled not more than 150 miles from shore. However on 12 January, Captain Charles L. Waterhouse, Supervising Examiner of Masters and Mates at Halifax, was appointed to conduct the preliminary inquiry, which was held at Sydney on 25/26 January 1938. No formal investigation was required. In his report, Capt. Waterhouse, through *DOSCO* officials, dealt with questions of: How competently was the *CALGADOC* loaded? Were her hatches properly battened down? What was her draft? Everything appeared in order. He then dealt

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23 Preliminary inquiry into the loss at sea of the SS *CALGADOC*. PAC, RG 12, Vol. 1263, file 9704-128, p. 32.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 30.



with the questions of how well the CALGADOC'S Capt. LeMay followed regulations. He had never taken a Pilot, either entering or leaving Sydney harbour, so there was nobody to verify that she had left in seaworthy condition on 30 October. Capt. LeMay contacted the Port Warden just before departure to obtain a Port Warden's Certificate but Kennedy, the Port Warden, felt that due to the time of year, class of ships and weather conditions he could not take the responsibility without first contacting Ottawa. As Capt. LeMay was then ready to leave and the certificate was not mandatory, he left without it. The regulations may have been loosely adhered to but there was no negligence involved. The weather also had to be reckoned with — the report at Sydney on 30 October read: "Light fog off shore from early morning until 9:30 A.M. then set in rain showers for the rest of the day. Wind S.W., maximum velocity 20 m.p.h., average 15 m.p.h. 8:00 P.M. thunder and lightning for 15 minutes. Sky overcast and showers all day. Temperature Max. 56°, Min. 50°".<sup>25</sup>

The unusual and critical feature of the weather was the very heavy south east gale blowing just outside the harbour, contrary to the weather report of average south west winds blowing inside the harbour. There is evidence of another unusual happening contained in a copy of the crew list, enclosed with Capt. Waterhouse's reports — the quirk of fate that invariably seems to attend disasters. On 29 October, Gertrude and George Bastedo, the steward and second cook on the CALGODOC that season, signed off in protest to be replaced by Frederick Lynk and Fred Wilcox of Louisbourg, N.S. Any evidence of the circumstances surrounding this crew replacement on the eve of the tragic voyage is yet unknown.<sup>26</sup>

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25 Ibid., p. 31.

26 From correspondence with the Bastedo's daughter-in-law.

## Résumé

L'auteur montre comment les archives du gouvernement fédéral peuvent être utilisées pour obtenir des renseignements sur le sort des bateaux échoués le long des côtes canadiennes. Le cas d'un navire de fret est étudié à titre d'exemple.