

Boat Goes Down; 12 Are Drowned

SCHOONER "GEORGE A. MARSH" FOUNDERS IN LAKE ONTARIO AND TWELVE LIVES ARE LOST

Eleven of Those Drowned Are From Belleville--Neil MacLellan and William Smith Sole Survivors of Most Deplorable Tragedy in Our History--Survivors Arrived in City at Noon Today--Schooner, Heavily Laden With Coal, Sprang a Leak in 35 Mile Gale and Sank at 5 o'Clock Yesterday Morning.

DROWNED

John W. Smith, (Captain)
Mrs. John W. Smith
Greta Smith, (daughter)
Eva Smith, (daughter)
Jack Smith, (son)
Clarence Smith, (son)
Lorraine Smith, (daughter)
George Cousins, (Sailor)
Mrs. Neil MacLellan
Douglas MacLellan (son)
George Graves, Toronto, (nephew)
Wm. J. Watkins, (Mate)

SURVIVORS

Neil MacLellan
William Smith

The Place—Lake Ontario, about two miles off Pigeon Island, and nine miles from Kingston.

The Boat—The "George A. Marsh," the property of Mr. John J. B. Flint and Capt. Smith.

The Cause—Sprang a leak and foundered in a gale

(From Thursday's Daily)

One of the most deplorable tragedies in the history of navigation on Lake Ontario occurred about five o'clock yesterday morning off Pigeon Island, about nine miles from Kingston harbor. The coal schooner, "George A. Marsh," foundered in a severe gale and of fourteen souls on board twelve found watery graves. Eleven of those drowned are from the City of Belleville.

The "George A. Marsh," left Belleville just two weeks ago today to secure a cargo of coal at Oswego for the Downey Company of this city. As the cargo was not yet ready the boat was used in the interval to carry coal to Kingston. A full load of 450 tons was secured at Sodus, a port near Oswego, and was to be forwarded to Rockwood Asylum for the Soward Company, of Kingston.

The schooner was in charge of Captain John Wesley Smith, South George Street, of this city, one of the most careful and competent sailors on the Lower Lakes. He was joint owner of the boat along with Mr. Jno. J. B. Flint, of this city.

The crew consisted of Wm. J. Watkins, mate, landlord of the Ferry Hotel, and an experienced sailor, and sailors and deck hands, George Cousins, Neil MacLellan and William Smith, the latter a brother of Capt. Smith.

Accompanying Captain Smith were his wife and five children, the eldest Greta, about 12 years of age and Eva, Jack and Clarence 8 years, 6 years, and 4 years respectively, and an infant daughter, Lorraine, about a year old.

Mr. MacLellan was accompanied by his wife and infant son, Douglas, and a nephew Master George Graves, the four-year-old son of Mr. George Graves, 51 Rosevear Ave., Toronto.

The "George A. Marsh" was a staunch schooner, the best that runs in local waters. She was purchased four seasons ago by Mr. Flint in Chicago and has since been in charge of Captain Smith in the cross-the-lake coal-carrying trade. Before being put into commission this year she was thoroughly overhauled, was freshly painted, caulked and equipped with new sails and lines.

Story of One of the Survivors

Neil MacLellan, one of the two survivors of yesterday morning's disaster, was seen by The Ontario immediately after his arrival in the city at noon today. He was looking remarkably well, notwithstanding his horrifying experience of the preceding 36 hours. His great physical strength had stood him in good stead.

By his side was Capt. Smith's little black dog, "Reine," that had also been through the wreck and had safely made its way to shore on the bottom of the up-turned yawl.

Mr. MacLellan was able to give to our representative a very lucid report of a night of anxiety, ending in tragedy.

Shortly after they cleared from Sodus, said Mr. MacLellan, on Tuesday, a brisk wind arose from the south and in the night freshened to a gale.

Sprang a Leak

About midnight it was discovered that the boat had sprung a serious leak and was rapidly taking water. The steam pump and siphons were immediately requisitioned and all those on board were aroused and brought out on deck. The wind was blowing from 35 to 40 miles an hour. A rain was beating down and the night was intensely dark. They were then not far from the Main Ducks group of islets and about 25 miles from Kingston.

Owing to the direction of the wind the boat was headed for Pigeon Island. The sea caused her to toss about and the straining to which she was subjected appeared to increase the trouble. The watchers spent nearly five hours of the utmost anxiety. About five o'clock she suddenly went down. She was then about two miles off Pigeon Island. In another twenty minutes or so, said Mr. MacLellan, she would have made shore as she was making fine progress before the wind. It was still raining at the time the boat sank but daylight was breaking and it was possible to see about. The boat sank in about 25 feet of water. The spars are still visible.

When the schooner went down Mr. MacLellan dived in an endeavor to rescue his wife but she was swept over the side and disappeared from view.

He saw George Cousins and one of the little boys clinging to the provision-box. He also saw Captain Smith come to the surface.

The yawl was bottom side up and floated near. This Mr. MacLellan, Mr. William Smith and Greta Smith, daughter of Capt. Smith were enabled to grasp.

They drifted about eight miles before the gale towards Amherst Island and were finally rescued by Hugh McCartney and Benjamin Wemp, two Amherst Island fishermen who were out placing their nets. The rescue took place about 11.30 yesterday morning. About an hour earlier Greta Smith succumbed to the long exposure. Mr. MacLellan said that he did not believe that he and his companion could have endured the strain more than ten minutes longer.

The Drowned

Captain John Wesley Smith was 49 years of age and has resided in Belleville all his life. He was twice married. His second wife, who was drowned with him was formerly Miss Gertrude Manning, of Demorestville. Four of the children drowned were those of his first wife. The two eldest children survive, a son Horace and a daughter, Margaret. They fortunately remained at home but are inconsolable over the loss that has come upon them with such stunning force.

William J. Watkins, was for the past 17 years the genial proprietor and landlord of the Ferry Hotel. Previous to that he was a sailor and therefore was in his natural element on this trip. He was 66 years of age and was born in Kingston. He was twice married. His second wife survives, but there are no surviving children.

George Cousins was a sailor by occupation and was 59 years of age. He was a native of England but had resided in Belleville since his 16th year. He is survived by his wife, who is almost heart-broken by this tragic separation, and he is also survived by one son and two daughters, Arthur George of Sarnia, Mrs. J. A. Vanderwater of Napanee and Mrs. Frank Keegan, of Belleville.

Story of the Tragedy

(From Friday's Daily.)

A Blakeley, cattle buyer, of this city was on Amherst Island on Wednesday and with Benjamin Wemp, a representative of the Standard, the rescue of the two survivors of the ill-starred schooner, the "George Marsh" lost off Pigeon Island on Wednesday morning.

Mr. Blakeley was on the island to buy a certain lot of sheep from Mr. Wemp and went to the lake shore pasturage to see them. While there

he happened to remark to resident that he intended to ship the sheep to city by boat which brought the reply, "Nothing could live in that sea." With those few words both unconsciously happened to look out in the water and there probably two miles out was the drifting yawl. It had four specks on it which later proved to be the two survivors, Mr. Smith and Mr. MacLellan, the captain's little daughter and a dog. While they were watching the dog dropped off.

Realizing the hopelessness of the situation Mr. Wemp ran over a mile and a half to the shore near the "Brothers" and returned only after he had been the means of sending a gasoline boat to the rescue. The two men were found clinging to the keel-piece of the overturned yawl and each had the skin on their legs badly torn. The constant washing of the boat in the waves made their hold very insecure and to save their lives they had withstood the pain from their wounds for five hours and a half.

Mr. Blakeley, in an interview on Thursday morning said that he was completely surprised that the two could hang on to such an insecure place for such a long time. Mr. MacLellan after a talk with Mr. Blakeley left for his home at Belleville.

Who the People Were

The late Capt. W. J. Smith was born on South George Street, Belleville about forty-two years ago. While yet a young boy the call of the lake came to him and he went on the boats plying around Belleville as a deck hand. For many years he sailed with his uncle, Capt. Henry Smith, who is now in port at Crawford's wharf with the steamer City of Dresden of which he is first mate. About four or five years ago he received his captain's papers on the recommendation of Capt. Henry Smith and since that time he sailed on Lake Erie as master of a large steel boat. He later bought the schooner Dundee of Belleville, but unfortunately that boat was burned last winter. Last year this time he has been master of the ill-fated schooner George A. Marsh on which he went down to a watery grave. In many respects he was well known and greatly respected. He was an industrious man and was especially anxious to have the young children well educated.

Capt. Smith was married twice. By his first wife he had six children and by his last a little baby girl aged eighteen months. The four children of his first wife which were drowned were Greta, aged thirteen, John, aged four, and two other little boys Harry and Clarence. A most remarkable fact about the affair was that the last trip of the captain was the first that his eldest son, Horace, aged seventeen years, had missed this year. He had stayed behind in Belleville with his sister, Margaret, aged about sixteen to get a job in the mill of the Steel Company of Canada. If he had gone on the trip it is altogether likely that like the rest he would have drowned. These two children are now in Belleville, heart-broken at the sad news that their father and mother and their five brothers and sisters had perished in the storm.

William Watkins who was mate of the vessel was a well known mariner of Belleville. He was about sixty-five years of age and was proprietor of the Ferry House, a hotel, in Belleville. Capt. George Cousins was a relative of the dead captain and the owner of a schooner in Belleville. Instead of sailing his own boat, however, he sailed with Capt. W. J. Smith this year for the mate. He was about 59 years of age. William Smith, one of the deck hands was a brother of Capt. Smith and was about 50 years of age. He lived with the captain and for a great many years had sailed with Capt. Smith. He was one of the men saved from drowning. Mr. MacLellan also saved, was about forty-two years of age and went before the mast. He came from Toronto. His wife and two children were among those lost.

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About four or five years ago he received his captain's papers on the recommendation of Capt. Henry Smith and since that time he sailed on Lake Erie as master of a large steel boat.

"We passed Oswego," he began, "about one o'clock in the morning and had a straight run over, for the wind was due south, almost directly behind us. There was a very heavy gale blowing but the vessel had weathered many another such gale and we never thought anything about it. Sometime in the early morning, however, before daybreak, we discovered that the boat was leaking badly, evidently having strained herself in the heavy sea, and was laboring hard. We tried to work the pumps but they could not check the flow of water, and we soon realized that unless something providential happened the vessel was certainly doomed. Accordingly all of us and our families were assembled on deck, ready for any emergency, but hoping always that we would reach shelter or a safe harbor before the boat went to her fate."

The Fatal Plunge

"Suddenly, about five o'clock in the morning when we were just one mile from Pigeon Island and in a about twenty feet of water a wave much larger than usual caught us, the vessel gave a sudden lurch on its side and then took a plunge downward, washing every soul overboard and sending us all into the cruel, pitiless, hungry water."

Young Smith and I had, earlier made ready to launch the yawl boat and in fact we were launching it when the fatal plunge came. The boat, of course capsized, but we managed to cling to it, as did some of the others to the wreckage here and there, but in the end their strength gave out and Smith and I were ourselves fast giving out when we were rescued.

Headed for Pigeon Island

"When it was seen that the vessel could not weather the gale Captain Smith determined to make for Pigeon Island and beach the vessel. The water had meanwhile reached the fore-castle floor, and was rapidly gaining, but we did not think the end was so near and were totally unprepared for the worst when suddenly a huge wave struck us and the vessel heeled over. The next wave caught the quarter and in a moment we were all in the water. The main boom struck and captured the yawl as the boat went over and a few moments later I grabbed it and clung to it. This was about five-thirty o'clock."

Victims Were Near Shore

"Mate William Smith seized it too, and it was then I caught Greta Smith and threw her across the boat. We also clung to the dog. I did not see either my wife, Captain Smith, or his wife or the children then, but shortly afterwards I saw my little nephew George, 'Buster,' clinging to a plank. Sometime later I saw George Cousins floating on some of the wreckage. They were nearer shore than we were, and I watched them in their grim fight against the sea which seemed to be increasing in violence every moment as the day advanced."

Cousins Clung on Till Nearly Shore

"Cousins managed to cling to the wreckage until he reached about a mile from shore when I missed him and I knew that he had gone under. 'Buster' was nearer in shore, about a half mile out it seemed to me, and I was hoping he would be able to hang on, but another huge sea struck him and he disappeared. And here the disconsolate survivor broke down. He already knew that there was no hope for either his wife or his seven-months-old son, Douglas, and the reporter could understand his agony at thus attempting to describe the death of his nephew."

W. Smith's Story

"Wm. Smith, brother of the dead captain, referred to briefly to his terrible experiences. 'I have been sailing for many years,' he said, 'but this experience was my worst. The seas dashed us about like chips and it was all we could do to hold on. Poor little Greta put up a brave fight but it was too much for her. No one will know how it fared with the others, but I guess they were sucked down with the ship, which seemed to melt into the waves.'

"My brother was always classed as a first-class navigator but the leak was too big for us to beat and the water-logged ship was unequal to the fight."

The Hell and Horror of It All

"You can imagine the hell and the horror of it all—to see your loved ones go down before your very eyes and not be able to tend them a helping hand or do anything

to save them from the doom that engulfed them. And then you can imagine the further hell when for six long hours we struggled in the water, clinging to the overturned yawl boat—for you must remember it was but till 11.00 o'clock that we were rescued, while the vessel had gone down about five."

"What made the situation worse—if indeed it could be worse—was to see that dear girl, Greta Smith, the eldest daughter of the Captain, who had clung to the boat with us for some hours, finally give up the fight and with a smile on her face go down to join her parents and her brothers and sisters at the bottom of the cruel lake. When the vessel lurched and finally took her last plunge, Greta Smith was thrown into the water alongside of me. When I came up she was still near my side and I grabbed her and helped her to the yawl boat, which was floating some distance away, bottom up. How William Smith reached the yawl boat I do not know, but he was there when we two reached there. This was about 5 o'clock or thereabouts."

Terrific Struggle for Life

"Imagine, then, our struggle for life to cling to this boat in a driving, terrible sea, with the wind rising higher and higher and dashing us about almost as corks. And, imagine, then the awful pathos and ferribleness of it to see the strength slipping away from plucky, dear little Greta—the strength ebbing and ebbing and we trying to cheer her up, while, God knows, we knew not the minute we would drop off ourselves. Finally, the end came. As near as I can judge it was about 10 o'clock, after having clung to the boat for nearly five hours, that she smiled her last good-bye at us and without an outcry or a word of complaint she relinquished her hold upon the boat, and sank never to appear again to our eyes. Oh the tragedy of it, the tragedy of it!"

Were Finally Rescued

"It was about an hour or so later that help came to us from the two Amherst Island residents who came to our rescue, and not a moment too soon, for we were, thoroughly exhausted and I do not believe we could have held on many minutes longer. I tell you it seemed good to us to reach land again and touch old Mother Earth once more."

"It is a terrible, terrible tragedy and it seems more like a nightmare to me—a bad dream—than a reality. I cannot realize it now, and I suppose I will not till I go to my empty home and find the dear ones there no longer."

Survivors Badly Used Up

"Both the survivors were badly used up in their battle with the waves, their limbs being badly bruised and scraped by striking the yawl boat. Both were lame and stiff this morning after their trying experiences."

They Paid a Warm Tribute to the Treatment Given them by the Residents of Amherst Island and to the Splendid Rescue Effected by Hugh McCartney and Benjamin Wemp.

"Their strength was about gone when the rescuers reached them and they could not have held on much longer."

Only Trip the Wives Took This Year

"Perhaps the most distressing feature of the whole terrible affair is that this was supposed to be a pleasure trip for all on board; for it was the first time this year that the Captain's wife and family or Mr. MacLellan's wife and family had been with them. The weather, however, had been so delightful for the past three weeks that, somewhat against their will—for Mrs. Smith was very much interested in furnishing the new home they had built—they were all prevailed upon to go; and those who saw them set out from Belleville say they were the jolliest, happiest party imaginable and were looking forward to a glorious time. That the disaster should have occurred on this, the one and only trip which the wives and children took, seems indeed a remarkable fatality."

A Pathetic Incident

"A pathetic incident in connection with the tragedy is that Capt. Smith had just built a new home in Belleville and only last week, just previous to their departure for Oswego, his wife had ordered the new shades and curtains for the house. This information the Standard learned last night from one of Belleville's leading merchants from whom the goods were purchased, and who happened to be in Kingston and reading the Standard bulletin at the time the news of the terrible accident was received."

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