

# REPORT MADE ON WRECK OF COAST STEAMER

"Princess Sophia" was Lost through Peril of the Sea, and Master is Exonerated by the Commissioners.

## FULL TEXT OF REPORT

The report of Hon. Mr. Justice Morrison, of the Supreme Court of British Columbia, who was appointed a commissioner to inquire into the loss of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company's coastwise steamship "Princess Sophia" in Alaskan waters on October 24, 1918, when all on board, including 289 passengers and the ship's crew of 61, perished, has been submitted to the Honourable the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, and is printed herewith. It will be seen from the report, which is signed by Hon. Mr. Justice Morrison, and Captain E. Martin, C.M.G., R.N., and Captain John D. Macpherson, Wreck Commissioner of British Columbia, as assessors, that the conclusion from the evidence was that the ship was lost through peril of the sea and the master of the vessel, Captain Locke, is exonerated from blame. No blame is attached to the owners or agents of the steamer, and it was shown that she was seaworthy and well equipped in every way. The following is the report in full:—

"VICTORIA, B.C.,  
"March 27, 1919.

"The Honourable the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, Ottawa.

"I beg to submit the following report, with all exhibits attached, pursuant to the scope of the Commission issued to me as Commissioner, and Captain E. Martin, C.M.G., R.N., and Captain John D. MacPherson, Wreck Commissioner of British Columbia, as Assessors, dated the 3rd day of January, 1919, to inquire into the loss of the British steamship *Princess Sophia* on the 24th of October, 1918.

"Owing to the fact that the ship was lost in Alaskan waters, outside the Canadian jurisdiction, and that the witnesses who were in a position to describe the conditions existing in the vicinity of the wreck at the times material to the inquiry were residents of Alaska, we had difficulty in making much progress at the several sittings held at Victoria and Vancouver, at which we exhausted all the evidence of the few witnesses who voluntarily came within the jurisdiction. After that it was deemed advisable to proceed to Juneau, Alaska, at which point, we were advised by the American authorities there, the remaining witnesses would be available.

"Sittings were therefore held at Victoria on the following dates: January 10th, February 10th and 11th, March 10th, 13th and 20th, and at Vancouver on January 31st, and at Juneau 26th and 27th of February.

(Sgd.) AULAY MORRISON, J.

"The *Princess Sophia*, whose official number is 130620, was one of the coasting fleet of steamboats owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, and plied between Victoria, Vancouver, and Skagway, Alaska, and intermediate ports, carrying passengers and mails.

"She was built at Paisley, Scotland, by Bow, McLachlan & Co. in the year 1912, and was a single-screw, triple-expansion, oil-burning steel steamer, registered at Victoria, B.C. She was

## COAL RESOURCES OF BRITISH EMPIRE ARE SHOWN.

In a report issued by the Department of the Interior the coal reserves of the various countries of the British Empire are given in the following table:—

	Anthr. Coals.	Bit. Coals.	Sub-Bit. and Lignite.	Totals.
	Million tons.	Million tons.	Million tons.	Million tons.
Canada .....	2,158	283,661	948,450	1,234,269
Great Britain and Ireland .....	11,359	178,176	.....	189,533
Australia .....	659	132,250	32,663	165,572
India .....	.....	76,399	2,602	79,001
South Africa .....	11,660	44,540	.....	56,200
New Zealand .....	.....	911	2,475	3,386
Rhodesia .....	2	493	74	569
Newfoundland .....	.....	500	.....	500
South Nigeria .....	.....	.....	80	80
Br. N. Borneo .....	.....	75	.....	75
	25,838	717,005	986,344	1,729,185

366 nominal horse-power, 245 ft. 2 in. long, 44 ft. 1 in. beam, and 24 ft. deep. Gross tonnage, 2,320 tons; and registered, 1,446 tons.

### HAD 289 PASSENGERS.

"She arrived in due course of her schedule time at Skagway, Alaska, on the morning of the 23rd of October, 1918, and left on her return voyage about 10 p.m. (Alaska time) of that day, also in due course of her schedule time, carrying very little cargo, 289 passengers, and 61 of a crew. She had her full complement of officers and crew. She was in charge of Captain Locke, an experienced officer; and the other officers were properly certificated, efficient, and experienced in those waters.

"The ship was seaworthy and well found in every respect. The weather at the time of her departure from Skagway was fine. It appears, from the information gathered from wireless messages picked up, that she struck Vanderbilt reef about 2 a.m. (Alaska time) on the 24th October, 1918, a distance from Skagway of 54 miles (Parenthetically, it may be here stated that there is an hour's difference between Alaska time and British Columbia time.)

"Vanderbilt reef, which lies in latitude 58:35:20 north, longitude 135:00:30 west, and one mile and a quarter off the line of her course, is a small projecting reef well out in the centre of the southern extremity of Lynn canal, about equi-distant from both shores, some 3½ miles; the nearest lighthouse being that of Sentinel island, 4 miles south; the reef is submerged at high tide, and is marked by a can buoy.

"The various distances along the line of her course from Skagway to Juneau are as follows:—

Skagway to—	Miles.
Eldred Rock lighthouse .....	30
Point Sherman lighthouse .....	38
Vanderbilt reef .....	54
Sentinel Island lighthouse .....	58
Juneau .....	100

"From the lighthouse records it would appear that she must have encountered heavy squalls of snow before she reached Eldred rock, 30 miles from Skagway, with a strong northerly wind, which condition continued until about six o'clock that morning, the 24th, as appears from the following summary, taken from the lighthouse records at these points: Eldred Rock lighthouse—Snowing from 11.10 a.m. 23rd to 6 a.m. the 24th; clear from 6 a.m. the 24th to 1 p.m. the 25th; snowing from 1 p.m. the 25th to 8 a.m. the 27th. Sentinel Island lighthouse—Snowing from 8.15 a.m. 23rd to 6.50 a.m. the 24th; clear from 6.50 a.m. the 24th to 12.10 p.m. the 25th; snowing from 12.10 p.m. the 25th to 3.40 a.m. the 27th.

"From that hour, as appears from the evidence of those standing by, the

weather moderated in the vicinity of the reef, and remained so until early in the afternoon of the same day—the 24th—during which period passengers could have been transhipped to the several craft standing by and landed without very much, if any, risk of life.

"During the late afternoon of the 24th the wind again freshened, and at 4.45 p.m. Captain Locke wired the *Cedar* that it was impossible to get passengers off, owing to the high seas then running, but that probably they could be taken off next morning. From then on, and during the following day, the 25th, it appears that the vessels which had stood by during the 24th were unable to render any assistance. Captain Troup (who is the manager of the British Columbia Coast Steamship Service of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company), at Victoria, in the meantime, was endeavouring to ascertain the exact condition prevailing and on the 24th wired Captain Locke inquiring what assistance he was getting and asking what disposition he had made of the passengers. This wire was not delivered till the morning of the 25th.

"The following craft were standing by at different hours during the 24th:—

1. *SS. Peterson*—Arrival 9 a.m. Oct. 24th; departure, 8 p.m. Oct. 24th; officer in charge, Capt. Stidham.
  - (a) Character, U.S. harbour boat.
  - (b) Motor power, steam.
  - (c) No wireless.
  - (d) Speed, about 10 knots.
  - (e) Capacity, 150-200 passengers.
  - (f) Length, 85 feet.
  - (g) Number in crew, 10 persons.
2. *Estebeth*—Arrival, 10 a.m. Oct. 24th; departure, 5.30 p.m. Oct. 24th; officer in charge, Capt. J. V. Davis.
  - (a) Character, Mail boat for Skagway and Sitka.
  - (b) Motor power, gas.
  - (c) No wireless.
  - (d) Speed, 8½ knots.
  - (e) Capacity, 85-150 passengers.
  - (f) Length, 65 feet.
  - (g) Number in crew, 3 persons.
3. *Amy*—Arrival, 11.20 a.m. Oct. 24th; departure, 6.45 p.m. Oct. 25th; officer in charge, Capt. E. A. McDougal.
  - (a) Character, ferry boat for Alaska Gold Mining Co.
  - (b) Motor power, gas.
  - (c) No wireless.
  - (d) Speed, about 6 or 7 knots.
  - (e) Capacity, approximately 150 passengers.
  - (f) Length, 65 feet.
  - (g) Number in crew, 5 persons.
  - (h) Life-boats, 2 boats.
4. *King and Wing*—Arrival, 6.20 p.m. Oct. 24th; departure, 3 p.m. Oct. 25th; officer in charge, Capt. J. J. Miller.
  - (a) Character, Seattle fishing boat.
  - (b) Motor power, steam.
  - (c) No wireless.

- (d) Speed, about 6 or 7 knots.
  - (e) Capacity, 100 passengers.
  - (f) Length, about 50 feet.
  - (g) Number in crew, 22 persons.
5. *SS. Cedar*—Arrivals, 8 p.m. Oct. 24th and 4.55 a.m. Oct. 25th; departures, 9 p.m. Oct. 24th and 1.40 p.m. Oct. 25th; officer in charge, Capt. John W. Leadbetter.
    - (a) Character, U.S. lighthouse tender.
    - (b) Motor power, steam.
    - (c) Equipped with wireless.
    - (d) Speed, 11½ knots.
    - (e) Capacity, 400 passengers.
    - (f) Length, 200 feet.
    - (g) Number in crew, about 40 persons.
    - (h) Tonnage, 1,341 gross tons.
    - (i) Power, 1,300 horse-power.
    - (j) Life-boats, 4 boats.
  6. *Lone Fisherman*—Arrival, 3.30 p.m. Oct. 24th (Sentinel island only); officer in charge, Capt. C. R. Duffy.
    - (a) Character, Juneau ferry-boat.
    - (b) Motor power, gas.
    - (c) No wireless.
    - (d) Speed, 9 knots.
    - (e) Capacity, 200 passengers.
    - (f) Length, 62 feet.
    - (g) Number in crew, 2 persons.
  7. *Sitka*—Arrival, 4 p.m.; left Friday; officer in charge, Capt. Momiss.
    - (a) Character, gas boat.
    - (b) Motor power.
    - (c) No wireless.
    - (d) Speed.
    - (e) Capacity, 100 passengers.
  8. *Elsinore*—Arrival, 7 p.m. Oct. 24th; departure, 10 p.m. Oct. 24th; officer in charge, Capt. Abrahamson.
    - (a) Character, gas boat.
    - (b) Motor power.
    - (c) No wireless.
    - (d) Speed, 6 or 7 knots.
    - (e) Capacity.
    - (f) Length.
    - (g) Number in crew, 2 persons.
  9. *Atlas*—Arrival, 12.15 Oct. 26th; officer in charge, Capt. Thomson.
    - (a) Character, gas boat.

"The *Princess Sophia*, during the time that she was visible, appeared to be resting firmly on an even keel. As near as can be estimated, taking the wireless messages as a guide, the ship must have been forced off the reef about 5.15 p.m. of the 25th, it being then dark, and the snowstorm at its height, when she apparently foundered immediately, leaving no survivors.

### WERE NO SURVIVORS.

"Next morning, the 26th, her position was indicated by a few feet of her foremast projecting above the surface of the water a short distance from the south end of the reef. There being no survivors, it is entirely a matter of conjecture as to how she came to leave the reef after being apparently firmly held thereon for 38 hours, during which there were two periods of high water, and each succeeding day the tides were getting appreciably lower. However, this much seems to be reasonably ascertainable, from a study of the meteorological and tidal conditions prevailing at the time in the North Pacific and in the vicinity of Vanderbilt reef, that there was an abnormally high tide arising from various causes. There had been a recent succession of south-east gales in the North Pacific ocean, causing an influx of water into all the narrower waters of this locality. The northeasterly gale blowing at the time down the Lynn canal when she struck would have a tendency to raise the level of the water at the Vanderbilt reef, in seeking an outlet through the narrow and intricate channels there. There was a low pressure of air (the barometer reading 29.42), which, according to one school of theorists, causes a higher level of water. Another factor that would contribute to the ship being lightened is that her bottom, when she struck, may have been so damaged where she carried her oil fuel as to cause the oil to leak out. When she struck it was almost the top of high water with a rising barometer, the reef being submerged at that period of the tide. The margin of water required for absolute buoyancy, the ship being light, would not be very great. It seems, therefore, having regard to

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