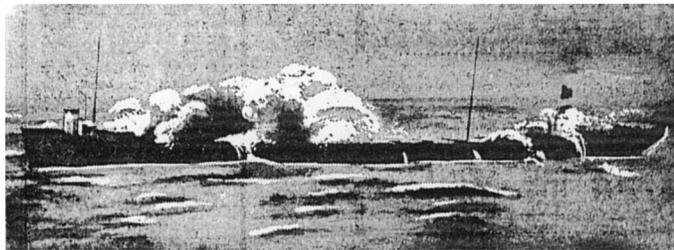


**Toronto Telegram, Nov. 11, 1933**  
**Schooner Days CXIII (113)**  
**By C.H.J. Snider**

### **Gale of Nov. 9th, 1913 Great Lakes Greatest?**

*This week marks the twentieth anniversary of the Great Gale of November 9th 1913, when so many steamers were lost. Urged thereto by Mr. Ivan S Brooke, of Burlington, who follows such things and sends The Telegram a pen drawing of the Carruthers' launch in Collingwood, "Schooner Days" attempts to record of this tragic even, with profound apologies in advance for any inaccuracies which may have been committed.*

Laugh if you like at the idea, but the wild things of the forest and some tame folk of the cities knew of the great gale of the 9th of November 1913 before it came.



*One of the victims pounding on the beach*

It broke on a Saturday at midnight. The day had been preternaturally still. But all through the silent woods in the Sudbury district loggers and slashers and huntsmen noticed that the tenants of the trees were moving out.

Timber wolves howled dismally as they padded down the forest paths from the tall timber to the swamps. They paid no attention to the graceful fawns and does piloted away from the big trees by uneasy bucks; nor were the deer leaving their runways for fear of dog and gun. Something else drove them from the woods.

Bull moose tossed their mighty hat-racks and went crashing through the underbrush toward the swamps regardless of human beings.

Bears fattened on blueberries and partridge until they were ready to den up for the winter, left their coverts and grunted their way towards the small cedar, tamarack and hemlock of the muskeg hollows where the close-packed ranks of the little trees defied the barrage about to be let loose when the brooding weather broke at midnight in a witches' Sabbath.

As Saturday changed to Sunday all the angels in the legion of the Prince of the Power of the Air loosed their black wings and whirled screaming down Lake Superior. The Sault was no obstacle. The falls of St. Mary were but fuel to their flame, spurs to their flanks. Across Georgian Bay and down Lake Huron they raced raving. They swept Erie as with besoms. Ontario they scourged in passing but their wrath was spent and their work was done.

And what a work! Behind them they left seventy-five per cent of the standing pine of Georgian Bay and Lake Superior uprooted. Great areas were bedded deep in falling limbs, upturned trunks. That was why the wild life left the woods for the safety of the thick-packed swamps.

And on the lake shores, east and south from Superior to the sea, piled wreck after wreck. Twenty steamers, worth \$3,330,000, went down, many with all hands. In Lake Huron and Lake Superior two hundred and seventy-four corpses, most of them oil skinned, sea booted, mittened and life-belted, washed in the undertow for weeks, and wearily made final landings, sometime under the rays of lamps that burned in vain to welcome them home.

A dozen steamers more, worth with their cargoes, another million dollars, were stranded on reefs and bars and ledges all the way down the chain of lakes.

And while the bear and the deer and the partridge and the moose and the wildcat and the wolf foregathered in fear, ere yet the storm blast was loosed on the night, people had dreams. People do have sleep-forewarning of ill to come; it was a frequent experience before the Sarajevo murders. People dreamed then of musterings and battles. People who knew even less about the war that was coming than Norman Angell.

One Toronto lady, still living dreamed that Saturday night November 8th 1913, of a great boat, a boat upside down, a boat with people in it. She knew nothing of the gale. It hadn't begun to blow yet. And Monday's paper were the first to give the news of twenty steamers completely wrecked and a score more pounding in the surf – among them, a big black boat 250 feet long, floating bottom up, stern submerged, thirteen miles north of Fort Gratiot, in Lake Huron. For days the capsized hull could not be identified, for all freighters look alike when you turn them over; but this was picked out later as the *Charles S. Price*, missing with twenty-eight men.

“On land,” wrote “Cap.” W. L. Smith in the Weekly Sun, at this time, “the first blast of winter, with lowering clouds shedding fleecy whiteness over trees and roadways is to the young, but an enlivening break in the monotony of a summer prolonged into fall. Even to the aged and infirm it means a little more than added appreciation of the warmth and cheer of cozy firesides.

“On the wide stretches of Lake Superior, where the smoke clouds of grain-laden monsters pierce the sky line, the gathering storm wears a different guise. Far as the eye can reach billows of angry blackness are rolling and tossing in their mighty tumult. A wind, ever rising, stings like a whip, and the spray, cold even in mid-summer, turns to ice as it strikes deck or rigging. Steadily the clouds close in; the wind demon gathers strength; blackness settles upon the face of the deep; driving snow coating the face as with a mask, would make it impossible to see beyond foam dashed from the bows even if the moon were not hidden by the storm. The roar of the tempest drowns the warning surfboat on shore. The most powerful light is lost amid the gloom. The gale and varying currents make uncertain a course and position based on compass and revolutions of the propeller. A slight error in judgment, a trifling miscalculation, a turn of fate, and ribs of steel and blots of iron are crumpled, twisted and riven by the fangs of a sunken reef, and a score of gallant lives are swallowed up in the icy embrace of the Father of Waters. Meantime, the sleepless mothers, and trembling wives await in vain the familiar sound of a siren that never again shall wake the echoes amid the hills of the harbor's mouth.”

Here are the vessels whose sirens never more wake the harbor echoes after the great gale of 1913:

	With a crew of	Vessel's value
H.B. Smith	26	\$325,000
C.S. Price	28	\$325,000
James Carruthers	25	\$385,000
J.A. McGean	23	\$250,000
Regina	20	\$100
Wexford	20	\$90,000
Leafield	15	\$75,000
Argus	24	\$200,000
Hydrus	23	\$200,000
I.M. Scott	28	\$325,000
Matoa		\$50,000
Turret Chief	crew saved	\$75,000
L.C. Waldo	crew saved	\$200,000
H.M.Hanna	crew saved	\$325,000
Louisiana	crew saved	\$20,000
Barge Plymouth	7	\$5,000
Barge Halstead	6	\$5,000
Light ship No. 82	6	
Butters	20	\$20,000
Nottingham	3 (salvaged)	\$175,000
	Total drowned 274	Total loss \$3,330,000

There have been other “outstanding disastrous disasters” spread over the lakes in the earlier days, when the waters were crowded with small sailing craft. Yet none of these matched the black-and-white swath of destruction that travelled down the lakes that November week-end twenty years ago. We had entered the era of big ships, and this gale took the big ones.

The little fellows, the few remaining sail craft and the small old wooden barges, had crept into ports with the threat of the storm. As far as is remembered only one schooner was out in it. This was the *Sephie* of Sarnia sailed by “Squealing Hughie” McKinnon. Hughie was an A-1 sailor-man, despite his high-pitched voice, and the *Sephie* was the newest, or last-built Canadian schooner, on the lakes. She was a fine three-master, good enough to have insurance of \$12,000 on her cargo of 300,000 feet white pine. Hughie, bless his heart, had a fine farm near Kincardine, in Bruce County, and only stuck to the sailing, while he was an old man, because he loved it. More power to him and his kind! The *Sephie* waterlogged near Cape Smith, on Manitoulin Island, and Hughie had to leave her, with his crew of six and woman cook. They all got ashore safely, and the *Sephie* herself was picked up afterwards near Cove Island and towed in. She was put on the dock and repaired and wound up gloriously by selling at a good figure to an Englishman, when the war created such a demand for tonnage. She was re rigged as a barquentine and taken overseas and may be sailing yet.

The lakes were full of traffic that fall, for there was lots of grain to be moved and general freights were good. A big grain fleet was bound down from Fort William and Lake Superior ports. They caught the worst of it when they began to narrow up the water for the river at the foot of Lake Huron.

Some tried to turn back and ride the gale out head to wind, but they hadn't the power. Some broke their backs in the trough of the sea; some tried to anchor; others rolled over just like a dinghy, though they ran two, three, four, yes, five hundred feet in length, and were ballasted with cargo up to ten thousand tons. But Lake Huron's seas were as tidal waves that night, watery mountains travelling with a hurricane behind them.

Four steamers went ashore in Lake Superior. The south-east shore of Lake Huron from Goderich to Sarnia was strewn thick with wreckage – rails, woodwork, cabin fittings, boat covers, lifebelts, cargo and corpses. The tug *Logie* steamed through miles of flotsam as she ploughed up the lakes. The Bad Lands of Bosanquet swarmed with wagons drawing away canned goods, blankets, flour barrels, anything that would float or move. One wrecker was stopped with a crate containing thousands of lead pencils.

A money belt with \$800 was seen. It disappeared. W. A. Wiggins of Sarnia Receiver of Wrecks for the Crown, had to appoint magistrates deputy receivers and swear in special constables and call in the provincial police. The Thetford paper ran advertisements pointing out the penalty of three years in penitentiary for retaining wreck goods, and calling all who had picked up property to turn it in to the receiver.

Of course there was something to be said for the shore salvagers, too. If they hadn't picked up what they could it would have been wasted by the wave and the ice; and the stories of the dead being robbed were denied. Perhaps they were not true.

The body of Capt. McArthur, of the *Isaac M. Scott* came ashore eleven miles north of Southampton, thickly clad and lifebelted, with his watch and a lot of money in his pockets. Every article found on him was turned in.

Few if any sailors reached land alive from the vessels that went down in deep water. The rage of the lake was too great and the wind was too cold. The shores were masked in snow and ice. Those who escaped from wrecks were in vessels that stranded, but held together.

The *James Carruthers*, which went down off Goderich, was the pride of the Great Lakes grain fleet. She was the largest bulk freighter attempted up to her time, and she was only five months old when she was lost. Such craft as the *Lemoine* have since eclipsed her in size, but at the time she established a record with her 550 ft length, 58 ft. beam, 31 ft depth and 19 ft. draught. She carried 370,000 bushels of wheat, and was worth, with her cargo \$700,000.

Capt W.H. Wright of 92 Delaware avenue, Toronto, was her master. Mrs. Wright was to have gone over to Port Colborne to meet him when the *Carruthers* got that far down the lakes on her voyage. She and her three orphaned children waited in Toronto for her husband's body to be brought home.

Twenty-five went down with the *James Carruthers*. Three of the crew unidentified, lie buried under the red granite obelisk in Maitland Cemetery, with which the town of Goderich, with fine simplicity, commemorated the unknown dead of the great gale, washed up near its harbor. Lifebelts with the steamer's name were the only means of identification in some instances. In others it was the name of the steamers boat. Men of the *Kintail* and of the *John A.*

*McGean* sleep beside the nameless boys of the *Carruthers* in Goderich's kindly care; nameless, but known to God and their mothers.

Walter McInnes, a fair-haired wheelsman on the lost *Regina*, had a diary in his breast pocket when his body was found. The sodden pages were quite decipherable. They showed that the boy had sent \$400 out of his seasons' wages home to his mother in Owen Sound.

The *Regina* had several Toronto men in her crew of twenty, all lost. W.F. Lenenhan, of Toronto, 2nd engineer, Arthur F. Walford and Dave Lawson, oilers, and George Gosby, sailor, all came from this port.

The flags flew at half-mast in Collingwood for a week. Collingwood was hard hit. The *Carruthers* had been built there. Some of her crew were Collingwood men. Collingwood had seven men and one woman drowned in the *Wexford* with Capt. Bruce Cameron, and nine in the *Leafield* wrecked off Angus Island. Her captain was Charles Baker.

The *Wexford* went down off Goderich. They heard her horn blowing signals of distress, and saw her lights flashing for assistance, at two o'clock in the morning. But before anything could be done her lights disappeared and the whistle ceased. It was thought she had anchored and foundered at the bitter end of her cable. She was a fine ocean going steamer, owned by the Western Steamship Co., in Toronto, and brought out from England, but she was by no means new.

The *Turret Cape* has also crossed the Atlantic.

The *Leafield* was another English built ship, brought out by F. M. Clergue of the Sault, along with *Paliki*, *Theano* and *Monkshaven*. The last two were lost with cargoes of steam rails outside of Thunder Cape, long before the *Leafield* went. The Great Lakes are no respecters of ocean-going tonnage, and the Great Gale respected nothing, not even the lightships on Point Alino on the Corsica Shoals and at Point Alino.

The first named dragged and second vanished. This was the U.S. *Light Vessel No. 82* a steel ship built to stand anything. No one ever knew what happened her. She just disappeared. "Goodbye Nellie. Ship is breaking up fast. Williams" was found scribbled on a piece of wood near Buffalo afterwards. It was written by Capt Hugh M. Williams, of Manistee, Mich., the master; his last word to his wife.

The cook of the *Carruthers* was Mrs. M. Henry, and she had with her her niece, Miss Claire Waite. They too, were lost, for the *Carruthers* went with all hands.

Here let us again pay tribute to those fine women, often God's angels afloat, who cook for lake sailors. The stuff of which they are made is shown by this letter from a Wiarion lady, unknown to the writer. She sent it to the *Globe* and signed herself "A Boat Cook," and it was to correct some mistake someone had made between the *Leafield* and the *Wexford*, and not to blow her own horn she wrote:

"It was the *Leafield* that went down on Lake Superior; the *Wexford* went down just outside Goderich, on Lake Huron. I know, for I was cooking on the *S.S. Doric*, sailed by an old

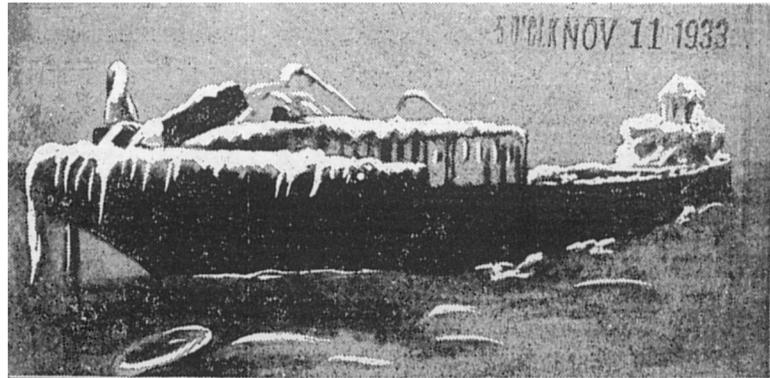
captain named Samuel Hill and an engineer named Cameron. The captain lived in Orillia and the engineer in Collingwood.

“The night the storm struck us the *Leafield* went through the Soo lock just two hours before the *Doric*. Don’t I remember it just as though it had happened yesterday!

“I remember the captain coming down to the galley to get something hot. There was no fire; it all rolled out, and everything that was loose was moved; kettles thrown in all directions. And in the ice-box and storeroom raisins and syrup and flour were all mixed up together halfway up the wall.

“We were two days and a night without a meal, only what the men got themselves. Then thank Providence, came calm and port. We unloaded our cargo, which was barrelled salt, and came back to Owen Sound.

“The first thing the captain did was phone his wife to let her know we were safe. She asked him, he told me, if I was quitting. He said he answered her: “No, she is made up too much of that stuff we call British pluck.”



*The end of the story.*

### **Passing Hails**

Another call from Cat Hollow

Sir- Your stories in *The Telegram* are very interesting.

As a boy in my ‘teens, living in Colborne, Ontario, (a suburb of Lakeport “Cat Hollow”) the home of some of the finest sailors on the Great Lakes, I spent a good deal of time during the summer holidays with my uncles who sailed schooners and your articles often bring back very vividly many memories of “windjammers” that were familiar to me, longer ago than I care to admit here.

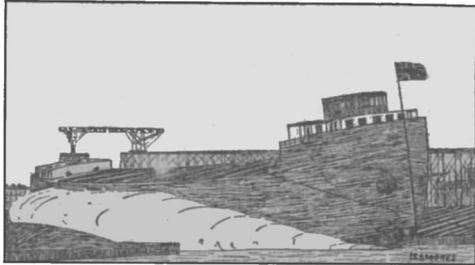
I was especially interested in the “Passing Hail” from Mr. F. H. Batty of Port Hope in last Saturday’s “Telegram.” I had quite forgotten that Capt. George Brown and James Cunningham of Lakeport sailed in the “*Reuben Doud*” but I remember very well that several other Lakeport boys were members of the crew when Capt. Joyce of Bronte had her.

As regards Madison Cunningham mentioned in Mr. Batty’s letter, I believe the writer is under a misapprehension that the accident occurred on the “*Emerald*” unless Cunningham was involved in another accident of a similar nature of which I am not aware. I recall very distinctly although at the moment I do not remember the exact year in the early 1900’s that Madison, while “scraping down” on the schooner *Maria Annette* of Port Hope at that time commanded by my uncle Capt. James Shaw of Lakeport, fell from the spar and was seriously injured. Another

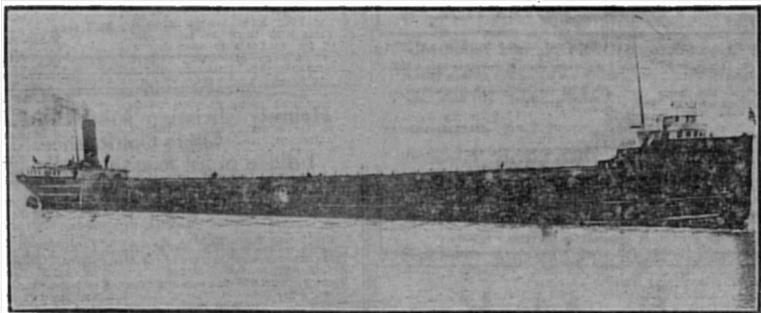
member of the crew McLelland, was killed. There followed a lawsuit against the owners of the vessel which was tried either in Belleville or Coburg.

Incidentally, James Cunningham was mate of the *Marie Annette* at the time.

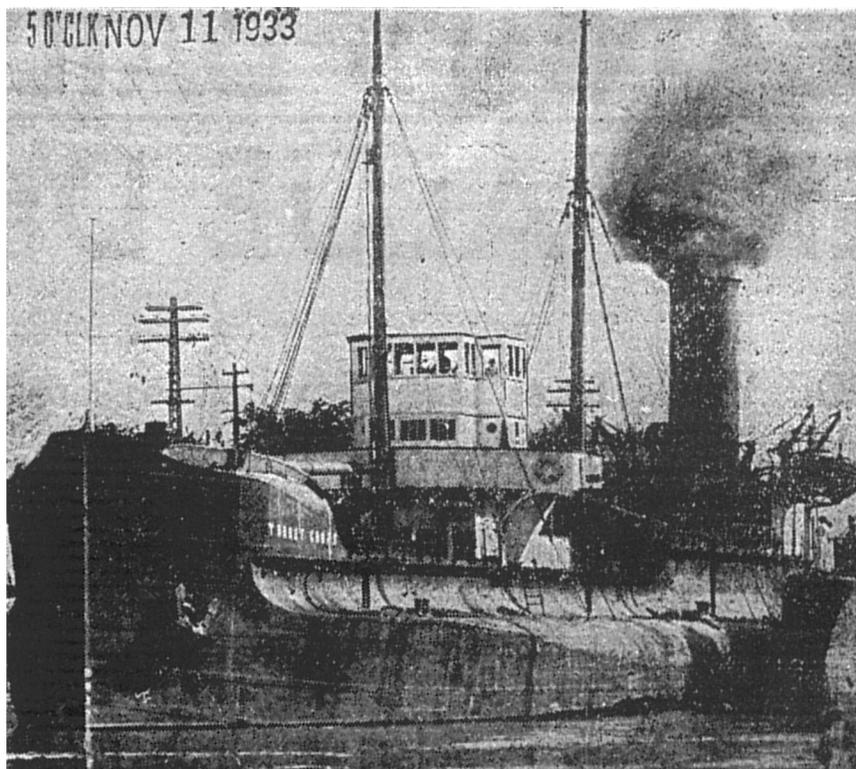
Very truly yours,  
W. W. D. McGlennon  
White Star Line, Canadian Service.



*JAMES CARRUTHERS* launched at Collingwood



*And on her first trip in June, 1913.*



*The Turret Chief—one of several English-built turret ships brought to the lakes early this century.*