INDUSTRIAL DISASTERS AT SEA AROUND NEWFOUNDLAND & HISTORICIZING MARITIME PERIL: 1914-1918

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Industrial Disasters at Sea Around Newfoundland & Historicizing Maritime Peril: 1914-1918

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Abstract

Developments in seafaring labour coincided with changes in other industrial sectors, notably coal mining and railroads. A global evolution from merchant to industrial capital connected the three industries, and they shared a broad range of similarities. As the workplace became increasingly organized and concentrated, workers became subject to new occupational hazards, including industrial disasters. Such disasters have been a common theme in Atlantic Canadian history, and have exacted a particularly heavy toll on Newfoundland, as demonstrated by the SS *Newfoundland* disaster of 31 March 1914, when 132 crewmen found themselves stranded 'on the ice' in a blizzard (this disaster provides insight into the gendered dimensions of facing risk at sea). During the same storm the SS *Southern Cross* disappeared without a trace carrying 174 sealers. Four years later, the SS *Florizel* ran aground at Cappahayden killing 94 people, many of who belonged to Newfoundland's commercial and social elite. Exploring each disaster and comparing the respective social impacts and ensuing processes provides insight into class relations in Newfoundland.

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Chapter One – Introduction

"Sailors, there is reason to believe, were simply working men who got wet," argued David Alexander while investigating the social composition of nineteenth century seafarers.[1] Developments in seafaring labour coincided with changes in other industrial sectors, notably coal mining and railroads. A global evolution from merchant to industrial capital connected the three industries, and they shared a broad range of similarities. As the workplace became increasingly organized and concentrated, workers became subject to new occupational hazards, including industrial disasters. Such events did not have comparable equivalents in either their destructive power or visibility.[2] Maritime disasters have been important in Atlantic Canadian history, and have exacted a particularly heavy toll on Newfoundland, as demonstrated through the SS Newfoundland disaster of 31 March 1914, when 132 crewmen found themselves stranded 'on the ice' in a blizzard. During the same storm the SS *Southern Cross* disappeared without a trace carrying 174 sealers. Four years later, the SS *Florizel* ran aground at Cappahayden killing 94 people, many of who belonged to Newfoundland's commercial and social elite. Exploring each disaster and comparing the respective social impacts provides insight into class relations in Newfoundland.

'Men who go down to the sea in ships' largely conducted trade in Newfoundland during the nineteenth and early twentieth, and the inherent dangers of seafaring are reflected through the island's track record for nautical disasters. As the pre-industrial nautical workplace transformed into its more industrial

counterpart, disasters at sea evolved accordingly. The writing of Newfoundland author Cassie Brown has memorialized many of the island's well-known shipwrecks and maritime tragedies, and her book about the *Newfoundland* disaster *Death on the Ice* is important. However, while Brown's investigations are as renowned as they are prolific, her work is not consistent with scholarly standards. Brown's research aside, disasters at sea are the subject of intense popular attention, an extension of which is a very large historiography of almost exclusively limited value. Similarly, despite the importance of processes following such events, industrial disasters at sea have not received significant scholarly attention in a historical capacity. The unfortunate events associated with the *Newfoundland*, *Southern Cross* and *Florizel* offer the object of a structurally promising examination.

All three ships belonged to Newfoundland's sealing fleet, and very different types of disasters befell each vessel in a remarkably short period of time. The *Newfoundland* disaster caused an environmentally specific type of suffering which, combined with the political economy in St. John's, resulted in the colony's most notorious disaster at sea. Unlike previous sealing tragedies, the disaster's aftermath strained class relations because much of the island's seafaring contingent could voice their discontent about social inequality through the Fishermen's Protective Union and its fiery president, William Ford Coaker. The event also provides insight into the gendered dimension of risk at sea. The *Southern Cross* sank in unusual circumstances carrying a similar labour force to that of the *Newfoundland*, and the vessel's commemoration is effectively absent from the historical record and

collective memory. The *Florizel* wrecked under horrific circumstances and represents an industrial disaster in which civilians died as opposed to a strictly working-class labour force – the event's reception dramatically differed than the *Newfoundland* or *Southern Cross* disasters due to the social status of the victims, and to a lesser degree because of wartime social relations.

Largely relying on Newfoundland's newspapers, this investigation will trace the aftermath of each disaster to assess their respective social impacts.[3] The colony's citizenry reacted diversely to the varying nature of the tragedies, and class dimensions and the evolution of World War One heavily influenced them. By exploring the environment and individuals the *Newfoundland*, *Southern Cross* and *Florizel* interacted with, it is possible to open a window into the colony between 1914 and 1918 to historicize nautical peril for a concise period in the island's history. The three incidents provide a singular opportunity to navigate the commemorational unfolding of different sorts of disasters at sea – the events cannot be replicated, and represent very distinct circumstances. While the disasters which befell the *Newfoundland* and *Florizel* offer insight into class relations in Newfoundland, the dimension added by the *Southern Cross* stands alone. The nautical workplace is subject to a type of hazard without a terrestrial counterpart – disappearing without a trace, and the loss of the *Southern Cross* provides a deeply chilling instance of 'out of sight, out of mind.' The trio of diverse disasters and the varying social status of their victims present a tantalizing opportunity to investigate

both the essence of an industrial disaster at sea and a plethora of classist and socioeconomic processes that are unique in Newfoundland's tragedy-ridden history.

An exploration of the *Newfoundland* disaster confirms that a mainspring of the tragic event can be connected to the gendered dimension of risk, or the need to 'take it,' largely owing to a blend of paternalism and masculinity. Further, a comparison of the *Newfoundland*, *Southern Cross*, and *Florizel* disasters proves beyond a reasonable doubt that social inequality and class-relations strongly influenced the commemorational unfolding of industrial disasters at sea around Newfoundland.

Endnotes – Chapter One

[1] David Alexander, "Literacy Among Canadian and Foreign Seamen: 1863 – 1899" in Rosemary Ommer and Gerald Panting, eds., *Working Men Who Got Wet* (St. John's, 1980), 3.

[2] The exception to this would be events related to warfare and other large-scale hostilities, as well as natural disasters. This paper is focusing on disasters of industrial origin, and regrettably natural disasters fall outside the subject area. However, the historiography of natural disasters is surprisingly underdeveloped. For an introduction to the historiography of natural disasters, see, John Burnham, "A Neglected Field: The History of Natural Disasters," *American Historical Association Perspectives* (April, 1988). For scholarship on natural disasters in Newfoundland, see David Liverman et al., "Geological Hazards and Disasters in St. John's," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*. Vol. 21 No. 1 (2006): 71-96 See also, Alan Ruffman and Violet Hann, "The Newfoundland Tsunami of November 18, 1929: An Examination of the Twenty Eight Deaths of the 'South Coast Disasters,'" *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*. Vol. 21, No. 1 (2006): 97-148, See also, Alan Ruffman, "The Multidisciplinary Rediscovery and Tracking of the 'Great Newfoundland and St. Pierre Miquelon Hurricane of September 1775," *The Northern Mariner /Le Marin du Nord*. Vol. 6, No. 1 (September, 1996): 11-23.

[3] At various points throughout this thesis, newspapers are used to assess public opinion. Clearly, newspapers do not perfectly mirror the views of a generalized public. However for the purposes of this thesis such generalizations will be made, as insofar as the historian can assess, newspapers generally reflect a wider opinion. Background research has also been conducted on every newspaper quoted, and has been taken into consideration.

Chapter Two – Historiography

The Industrial Revolution fundamentally changed the workplaces in the shipping, coal mining, and railway industries. The three industries are classifiable as means of production, and played an integral role in the global shift from merchant to industrial capital. Coal needed to be mined to power ships and railways, which integrated markets into the network of capitalism on a global scale. As comparatively inexpensive and efficient means of transporting large volumes of goods, shipping and railways revolutionized global trade and altered previously existing market systems. Excluding textile manufacturing, no other commercial activities have made as large a contribution to the spread of industrial capitalist relations of production over space and time as the coal-dependent shipping and railway industries.

As these three industries helped bring about modern capitalism, the labour forces maintaining them also evolved. Large-scale industrial enterprises required significantly larger volumes of labour than previous forms of productive activity, resulting in widespread collectivity among workers. Developments in the workforce required changes in management: over time, strictly capitalist relations replaced paternalistic ties between employer and employee.[1] Likewise, historically paternalistic disciplinary measures shifted towards options consistent with modern forms of scientific management. The shipping, railway, and coal mining industries all underwent similar socioeconomic changes during roughly the same time period, and they shared another similarity – a universally unsafe workplace for labourers.

It is well known that toilers engaged in early industrial labour worked in extremely dangerous conditions, although to summarize the hazards they faced falls outside the scope of this paper. A common theme of disastrously high death and injury rates unites the historiography of early industrial labour. Shipping, mining, and railway work shared notoriety for being the most dangerous occupational sectors, followed by textile manufacturing and logging.[2] Further, the isolated and gendered nature of labour at sea, underground, or on a railway bred an ethos of masculinity, a theme reflected through the historiography of each subject. Each occupational group faced different environmentally specific hazards, but all found themselves embroiled in an ever-present struggle against nature whilst exhibiting a collective reliance on technology. The technological and environmental hazards associated with shipping, railways, and coal mining further bind each industry together when the potential for 'disaster' is addressed.

Unlike the logging or textile industries, the coal mining and transport industries had immense potential for disasters of an industrial scale. Ships frequently sank or burned with enormous loss of life, trains could easily derail or collide creating impressive scenes of destruction, and mines collapsed and exploded. These events simply did not have equivalents before the industrial era, and marked the beginning of the historiography of industrial disasters.[3] The scale of industrial disasters within these sectors is the final cog in the wheel connecting the three industries.

For the purposes of this thesis, shipping, railways and coal mining are classifiable as an industrial trinity. Industrial capitalism and technology inextricable connected the industries. They also shared similar gendered and class-based labour forces operating in typically perilous conditions or environments – a dynamic that frequently led to industrial disasters. Finally, investigating the historiography of each subject for insight into disasters reveals remarkable similarities, some notable differences, and an interesting avenue of research for scholarship into industrial disasters.

The historiography of industrial safety in the workplace begins with the construction of railroads. Historians have tended to focus on the completed railways and their cultural meaning as opposed to the men employed in building them and their work, thus making the railway labourer a frustratingly obscure entity to research – some scholars even question if rail construction workers belong in the field's historiography.[4] While there is debate on where workers belong historiographically, scholars agree on the exceptional dangers associated with rail construction, as the process required considerable manual labour and often entailed working with primitive tools in inhospitable environments.[5] Indeed, contemporary newspapers and recent scholarship both agree on the high frequency of rail construction accidents.[6] Additionally, rail employees rarely left records or memoirs, unlike those engaged in other occupations.[7]

The historiography of rail transport is extensive, but suffers from a strongly national perspective: the majority of sources either deal with British railways

during the Victorian Era or with the rail boom in the United States, but never an amalgam of the two. The British possessed a thorough geographic knowledge of their environs, allowing rail companies to lay down an astonishing 7,000 miles of track between 1830 and 1850. Rail construction progressed more slowly in United States, although Americans could boast of twenty-three miles of track by 1830, growing to over 1,000 miles of track by 1835.[8] After the Civil War concluded a railway fever gripped the country, resulting in massive construction projects. This historical foray is necessary because it shaped how the historiography of rail transport has been influenced – each country underwent the railway experience in fundamentally different ways.

Due to the regional differences between Britain and the United States, the early historiography of rail transport is chronologically difficult to synthesize, but generally concerns track construction and engineering achievements across isolated terrain. Titles including *A Short History of American Railways: Covering Ten Decades with 400 Illustrations* by Slason Thompson, *Railroads: Their Origins and Problems* by Charles Adams, and *Highways of Progress* by James Hill, are all examples of rail travel's early historiography. However, the authors of many early works did not concern themselves with rail safety or the abundant disasters of the period, and typically dismissed them as "sensational reports of accidents."[9] Whereas early works associated with other industries – notably seafaring – romanticized the danger of everyday life and portrayed disaster as a heroic struggle against the

elements, the early historiography of railways differs (some authors go as far as dedicating their works to the safety of rail transport).[10]

Early authors exclude disasters and seem principally concerned with the development and expansion of national railway apparatuses (including associated politics) and subsequent socioeconomic 'progress.'[11] A paycheck from railway companies likely influenced them to take such an approach: the Bureau of Railway News & Statistics and promoters frequently published titles that fall within the early American historiography of rail travel, while the British literature concerning disasters is sparse, with a notable exception.[12] Additionally, the commonplace nature of rail disasters cannot be accepted as a rationale for their historiographic exclusion – plenty of rail disasters occurred in the United States and Britain, many of which the press covered exhaustively.

Primary source cross referencing confirms that overwhelming public fascination surrounded rail disasters, and as many as 5,000 people sometimes traveled to disaster zones to gawk at scenes of destruction during the time period encompassing rail historiography's early works.[13] Likewise, railway promoter William Crush conceived a publicity stunt in 1896 in which he planned and facilitated a head-on rail collision. The stunt brought 40,000 spectators, circus tents from Ringling Brothers, and made the town of Crush, Texas, the state's second largest city for one day (the stunt backfired and killed three people).[14] The early historiographic exclusion of rail disasters is frustrating – such events could have been interpreted as humanity's struggle to dominate nature, forcing natural terrain

to conform to technology as rail travel shrunk the natural world. When viewed within this ethos of expansion and mastery, rail disasters would emphasize technological hubris while providing a stark contrast to the omnipotence of nature. In any event, the scholarly historiography of rail transport is more reliable.

The scholarly historiography for rail transport begins with Peter Kingsford's *Victorian Railwaymen: The Emergence and Growth of Railroad Labour, 1830 – 1870*, published in 1970.[15] Kingsford's work has spawned a modest but respectable volume of literature on railways, the vast majority of which is classifiable as economic or business history. For the purposes of this paper, two important American monographs require attention, both because of their contribution to the field's overall historiography, and for insight into contemporary conceptualizations of disaster among the rail labour force. Conveniently, one focuses on the east while the other concerns itself with the west. Each work represents a seminal investigation into labour on American railways.

Walter Licht's *Working for the Railroad: The Organization of Work in the Nineteenth Century* is an excellent starting point for the scholarly historiography of American railways (it won the Phillip Taft Labour History Book Award for 1983). Licht is the Walter H. Annenberg Professor of History at Princeton University, and he specializes in labour history with strong interests in labour markets and labour economics.[16] His work sought to build on Kingsford's Victorian study by examining the organization of labour on railways in the eastern United States.[17] After reading Kingsford's work, Licht made the "discovery of an almost complete vacuum of

scholarly literature" on American railways, which greatly influenced his desire to contribute to the field's scholarly historiography.[18] Although he knew very little about railways, Licht began studying the American rail industry between 1830 and 1877 – a forty-seven year window into a pre-union labour market. By studying rail workers and their relationship with the first industry representing 'big business' in America, Licht opened a unique window into the historical record to explore the rise of rail unionism.

Licht's work is a far-reaching investigation of the American rail industry, and his research into varying aspects of rail labour and occupational hazards remains unsurpassed. He bases his work on "railroad corporation papers, government reports, trade journals, union newspapers, and published reminiscences."[19] Chronologically organized, the exploration begins with the birth of American rail travel in Baltimore on 12 February 1830 and ends in 1877, when major strikes and union agitation altered the industry's structure.[20] Licht establishes turning points in American rail history in an extremely detailed fashion, covering areas ranging from labour recruitment and retention, age requirements, disciplinary measures, and changes in the synchronization of labour with America's shift to industrial capitalism. However, perhaps most important are Licht's conclusions on occupational safety, which illuminate shocking insight into the dangers of rail culture. Risky working conditions constantly endangered railmen – they faced exceptionally dangerous hazardous, evident through appallingly high death and injury rates.[21] Unfortunately, Licht does not explore the abundant rail disasters of

the period, as they killed a small number of railmen compared to everyday accidents. While Licht's research leaves little doubt about the dangers associated with railway employment in the eastern United States, the western contingent of the country faced its own perils, demonstrated through James Ducker's scholarly work, *Men of the Steel Rails: Workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, 1869 – 1900.*

Ducker's work can be seen as the western counterpart of Licht's, although with a stronger focus on community-centered labour history as opposed to the organization and industrial composition of America's railway workforce. His research represents a historiographic shift away from labour economics toward a more holistic approach to the historical record in an attempt to better understand the railway labour force in the American west. An institutional labour historian and official with Alaska's Bureau of Land Management, Ducker turned his PhD thesis from the University of Nebraska into a comprehensive study of railways in the American west. He explores the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe railway (ATSF), historically one of the largest and most important railroads in America, through a chronological exploration of working peoples' everyday lives. He also gives significant attention to the formation of unions and how they affected relationships between workers and employers. Ducker argues that 'old labour history' largely viewed unions from the top down, thus taking an institutional stance and dedicating disproportionate agency to union leaders who may not have represented any given union's various objectives or membership.[22] Ducker chooses to contextualize

railway employees as a group ripe for study that "exemplified the growing size and complexity of business operations," especially in contrast to other working-class occupations.[23]

By completing an in-depth study of the ATSF 'from the bottom up' (largely relying on newspaper accounts) Ducker establishes a framework through which he can advance the argument that the specifics of the ATSF made it distinctly different from other railways and industries. A cornerstone of Ducker's thesis is spatial isolation. He states that because isolation placed railmen very far from their employers, the latter party could not typically undertake disciplinary action. Ducker argues that the isolation associated with the ATSF spawned a unique form of informal paternalism compared with railways in the east, which in turn fostered a less hostile relationship between employee and employer.[24] Thus, the ATSF represented the creation of a unique – albeit dangerous – workplace in which employers understood and respected working people. According to Ducker, the widespread implementation of scientific management shattered this dynamic, significantly increasing tension between unions and employers. Parenthetically, legislative interference and the increasing availability of automobiles subjected the economic climate for railroading to massive fluctuations.[25] Ducker concludes by arguing that the collision of scientific management and unfavourable economics dealt this unique workplace its deathblow.

Ducker's work suffers from a major downfall: aside from briefly describing the dangerous nature of rail labour and that unions frequently petitioned for better

working conditions, he effectively disregards hazards and disasters. Considering his background, the exclusion of this aspect of the workplace is unusual – he merely takes the industry's dangers for granted. However, the exclusion of rail disasters is understandable: no rail disasters occurred on the ATSF, and rail disasters did not frequently happen in the American west (with a notable exception).[26] Where Licht succeeds in informing the reader about the collective dangers faced by railmen, the main strength of Ducker's research is his ability to bring the everyday lives of workers to the fore, ultimately making his work a commendable contribution to the historiography of rail travel. His findings reveal a more thorough historiographic window into railmen, their worldview, and their similarities with other occupational sectors than other sources. Ducker's scholarship into railmen also suggests that they sometimes ignored occupational risks.

A unique esprit de corps with origins in the collective and dangerous nature of railway labour bound the workers of the ATSF together, and they bear remarkable similarity to miners and seafarers.[27] The men often told tall tales, or terrestrial versions of sailors 'yarns,' thought up creative nicknames, and worked in extreme weather.[28] Extreme transiency defined railmen, who frequently left one rail job and travelled to another (many of them changed names constantly), they enjoyed indulging in the liberal use of alcohol despite the best efforts of temperance unions, and exhibited arcane superstitions.[29] Engineers became known as a breed apart from other trainmen, the rails spawned a form of argot, off-coloured jokes abounded and the men enjoyed workplace-themed music as a collective pastime.[30]

Nevertheless, perhaps no aspect of railway labour had as much bearing on the workers as did the isolated and gendered nature the workplace, which facilitated a distinct sense of masculinity from the executive level to the lower ranks.[31] Various scholarly approaches have applied historical rigor to a class-based approach to rail history, while unfortunately neglecting the gendered dimensions of labour. This interpretation is limited for assessing rail disasters, as gender – in this case, masculinity – influenced how labourers conceptualized the notions of risk and disaster.

The historiography of rail history can be seen as a continuum beginning with early literature shaded in antiquarianism and notions of progress and civilization. Rail disasters are not included in this early historiography. Largely excluded from this paper, the historiography evolves into a popular approach of limited use (even where it concerns disasters). Interestingly, academic study is a comparatively recent trend. The scholarly approach to railways originated with a widespread interest in the organization of labour and a large, understudied, and important occupational sector.[32] Scholarly interest shifts from organization to working-class agency, which is understood within the context of capitalistic paternalism and worker-employer relations. Hand in hand with this approach is a focus on collectivism and unionism and how workers fit into the capitalist structure of the rail industry. Due to an emphasis on a class-based interpretation, the gendered nature of rail labour has been overlooked, including the impact of gender on risk and disasters. A promising method to employ for following up this unsatisfactory dynamic is to study the

intersection of class and gender within the industrial workplace, and then assess how such an intersection relates to industrial disasters. However, despite being structurally viable this approach is difficult to adopt from a historiographic standpoint, as the secondary literature largely ignores rail disasters.

The exclusion of rail disasters from the scholarly and popular historiography of railways is difficult to assess. A reasonable argument could be that popular approaches are concerned with locomotives themselves and the romanticism associated with rail travel, while recent scholarship is concerned with how rail workers fit into a capitalist framework and their everyday lives – not necessarily how they died (especially considering that general workplace hazards killed far more trainmen than disasters). Another possibility could be that the rail industry and its socioeconomic ramifications simply warrant more attention than the comparatively few times a horrific disaster interrupted the hubbub of everyday life. However, scholarship on such events would almost certainly reveal tantalizing insight into contemporary conceptualizations of technological integrity and the value of property in contrast to human life. A cursory primary source investigation into two rail crashes in Atlantic City, one in 1896 and another in 1906, reveals a remarkable shift in reactions over a mere ten year period.[33] The psychological fascination with rail disasters is one dimension, but equally as fascinating is why rail workers willingly faced potential disasters.

Given the working conditions emphasized by Licht and the collective bravado and masculinity discussed by Ducker, a tentative explanation lies in the desire to 'be

a man' and face whatever risks might be encountered. Is it not unreasonable to propose that railmen probably saw their technological conquest of the natural world as a masculine and dangerous 'taming' of nature? The collective, gendered, and isolated workplace bred a resilience and sense of technological superiority over Mother Nature – now physically altered by dynamite and iron, the natural landscape no longer held railmen to its mercy. The men instead acted as the vanguard of progress labouring in an unsafe working environment in which 'backing down' from danger and disaster would have been to admit defeat in the very struggle against nature represented by the railway and its masculine workforce. In sum, the continuum of rail historiography has not focused on a scholarly understanding of industrial disasters, and has dedicated minimal attention to risk – even in light of the scholarship on unionism and working conditions. This continuum follows a similar historiographic trajectory as that of other industrial sectors, notably coal mining.

Coal mining has been integral to the Industrial Revolution and has, therefore, been an important area of study in modern labour history. Universally regarded as a dangerous occupation, coal mining boasts a large historiography typically divided into British, American, and to a lesser degree Canadian realms. The industry has been synonymous with the working class since it became 'big business.' Coal mining's historiography has gone through several evolutions, with labour history and unionism being recent trends.

The occupational hazards and disasters associated with coal mining are relatively well known and require little elaboration. Labourers worked in primitive conditions with heavy machinery in an unstable environment, and the constant use of explosives ensured an exceptionally dangerous workspace. Roof collapses and accidents relating to the deployment of heavy machinery in a spatially limited workplace claimed many victims. Flooding, falling down mine shafts, and explosions of varying intensity also plagued miners. Although falls, roof collapses, and 'choke damp' killed the vast majority of miners, mining explosions captured a significant level of public attention.[34] Impressive affairs with devastating potential for smaller mining communities, mine explosions became characteristic of early industrial disasters. Such explosions typically resulted in large loss of life, significant damage to property, impressive scenes of destruction not usually associated with the workplace, and the public misunderstood them in terms of causation (even in the early 1900s people remained unaware of the explosive properties of coal dust).[35] Indeed, there can be no question that coal mines represented a dangerous workplace. However, a foray into the subject's historiography provides further insight into differing conceptualizations of industrial disasters.

Unlike the early historiography of rail disasters, works published during the same period on coal mining are candid on the occupational dangers and potential for disaster. Further, they have a tendency to be progressively labour focused for their time, as opposed to the literature on other industries which is mainly "interested in perpetuating the present system of exploitation and in piling up more

profits for powerful corporations."[36] Sources on mining sometimes come "from the workers viewpoint."[37] Such is the case in Anna Rochester's *Coal and Labor*. Rochester's influence for penning her seminal title on American coal mining is a gross sense of injustice at the exploitation of miners on behalf of grasping corporations. Her strong opinion provides a remarkable contrast to views of other industries, especially when explaining the anatomy of mining disasters:

> Operators driving for output and profits criminally endanger workers lives. Safety has become a trade slogan, but actually day-by-day the underground hazards continue. Real safety in a mine with power lines, motor haulage, and machinery is expensive. It is technically difficult. It checks the speed-up. And most operators think it is cheaper to pay the meager compensation required if a worker is killed or injured than to make the mine safe and prevent accidents before they happen. In a capitalist economy costs and profits for the employing class are more important than the lives and well being of the working class.[38]

Clearly, this approach to the historical record is more useful for historians than that found in much of the early literature on railways. Historians of coal mining often place a strong emphasis on working-class agency and establishing a record of one of the most important workplaces in the industrial age, its labour force, and associated oppression. However, the historiography of coal mining is similar to that of rail travel when it comes to disasters: despite their being heavily publicized events, scholarship into the actual disasters is minimal.

The reason that the historiography of coal mining does not address the "massively publicized underground explosions" is because such explosions killed a very small percentage of miners, which became evident in industry's early days.[39] John Benson's excellent contribution to the historiography of coal mining, *British*

Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History, proposes a new path for historians to follow when studying industrial disasters. Benson is influenced by his desire to strip away the barbarism and stereotyping which typically paints coal miners in an unfavourable light. His fundamental argument is that miners should not be seen as backward, primitive entities relegated to a subterranean world, but rather as a generally misunderstood group that had much in common with other contingents of society – principally working hard to increase their standard of living through a variety of means. Through the 'new social history' that sparked a torrent of research into mining and represented a shift from antiquarian interest to sociocultural scholarly study, Benson tells the story of British coal miners 'from the bottom up,' by investigating the everyday lives of miners and their families. Benson's work succeeds in revealing insight into miners themselves – a category of worker frequently subjected to industrial disasters and previously not well known. Historians can use such information to deepen their understanding of labour forces in similar occupational sectors prone to disaster.

Various sources in the historiography of coal mining employ the same approach as Benson in an attempt to study the everyday lives of workers.[40] Miners worked in a unique and unstable environment where constant exposure to potentially lethal conditions combined with collective labour to form a distinct sense of community.[41] The men inhabited a spatially limited workplace, worked specific hours, and the public associated them with the working-class. The public often misunderstood miners because of their sooty appearance, making them

occupationally visible.[42] Miners did not have close contact with their employers, which induced an ethos of independence, and they dealt with disagreeable working conditions through strikes, work stoppages, and violence. Finally – social isolation and a completely gendered workplace spawned a distinct form of masculinity among miners.[43] While miners faced differing types of disaster than other occupational sectors, the subject's historiography has not yet addressed the gendered dimensions of risk or disasters.

On the topic of safety and mining disasters, Benson specifically argues that historians should conceptualize industrial safety outside the context of disasters, as the events are engrained in popular memory but are not representational of mining labour or industrial accidents.[44] He argues that instead of industrial disasters being cornerstones in mining historiography, it is better to conceptualize workplace accidents as "colliery disaster in installments," as a miner was 460 times more likely to be injured at work than be killed in a mine explosion.[45] Thus, while mining explosions captured a significant level of public attention – similar to rail disasters – for historians to stress their importance when compared to overall mine safety would not be representational of the industry, or of disasters within the industry.

Despite Benson's reasonable interpretation of mining disasters (shared by many historians), the publicity such events received is indicative of historical relevancy.[46] A coal mine represents a manufactured void in the natural world – a void responsible for the driving force behind industrial capitalism. Without coal mines, railways and steamships, the harbingers of the industrial age, would be

rendered inoperative. The coal mine can be seen as a starting point for industry and expansion, and is a visceral form of struggle between humanity's commercial momentum and nature. Miners literally eviscerate Mother Nature to power technologies that represent emancipation from the natural world and conquest over it. Further, unlike railroads or steamships, mines do not travel anywhere but further underground, or to a realm where they are even more removed from society. This netherworldly isolation and unfamiliarity to non-miners likely meant that when disaster did strike in the form of an explosion, it must have been difficult not to draw the comparison between the subterranean fires of hell and the more natural world outside the mine.

The exclusion of mining disasters from the overall historiography in anything more than a passing mention is frustrating (regardless of their distinction as comparatively minor killers).[47] An examination of such events could provide insight into differing conceptualizations of humanity's industrial struggle against nature, and early insight into the inherently unnatural and gendered forced entry into Mother Nature. Is it not unreasonable to advance the argument that the collective, isolated, and masculine nature of coal mining bred an ethos of resilience against nature, thus being an integral dimension of mining disasters? Scholarship into such events would reveal contemporary thoughts on early industrial disasters, but also how miners measured their own lives against the industry and capitalist nexus they laboured within. In any event, as carts laden with coal emerged from mines and

found their way onto trains bound for the coastal locations (known as 'tidals'), the final aspect of the disaster prone industrial trinity falls into place: seafaring.

Unlike rail labour and mining, the historiography of seafaring has long been romanticized – although the industrial trinity is united through many similar historigraphic themes, seafaring is the most exploited. Early fictional works including *Moby Dick*, *Lord Jim*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, Edgar Allan Poe's only complete novel, all harnessed public fascination with the nautical realm. They do not have equivalents within the historiography of the mining or rail industries.

The early historiography of seafaring has roots in antiquarian fascination with the sea, and typically begins with Frederick William Wallace's *Wooden Ships and Iron Men*, published in 1937. Wallace employed a shamelessly romantic approach to seafaring, and he steeped the proud British North American legacies of shipbuilding and seafaring in a fierce nationalism. He nostalgically recounted the trials and tribulations of various ships in an encyclopedic fashion, and clearly did not feel that steamers could compete with the sporting nature of 'wooden ships and iron men.' Wallace noted as his major influence a desire to "save from oblivion the facts regarding an era of maritime effort and industry," but he also represented the pioneering endeavours of early North American seafarers as a heroic struggle against "stormy seas...hostile Indians and primeval forests."[48]

Wallace sensationalized disasters at sea to the fullest extent, evident through his recounting of the *Caleb Grimshaw*, a Black Star Line Packet that caught fire on 11

November 1849 carrying 429 passengers. His melodramatic recounting of the event – complete with heroes and villains – emphasizes the romanticism associated with the early works on seafaring, and the imposed lionhearted relationship between iron men and their imperiled wooden ships.[49] Unlike disasters within the rail or mining industries, nautical disasters within the early historiography of seafaring are consistently portrayed as courageous fights between Mother Nature and sailors. Wallace's legacy of maritime antiquarianism remains well known in Canada, and his works, albeit of limited use, are cultural touchstones in the early historiography of disasters at sea. Thankfully, seafaring's historiography has improved.

The historiography of seafaring has transitioned from authors driven by nationalistic antiquarian hobbies to those with more academic interests. An evolution from 'the romance of the sea' to a focus on the economic importance of shipping and the industry's transition from merchant to industrial capital took place in the mid 1970s. The Atlantic Canada Shipping Project (ACSP) at Memorial University of Newfoundland, which took place between 1976 and 1981, is perhaps the most distinct episode in this economic phase. Scholars designed the ACSP as an economic investigation of the rise and decline of merchant shipping and shipbuilding in Atlantic Canada during the nineteenth century.

The ACSP generated six conference volumes encompassing a wide variety of content, and remain seminal works in Atlantic maritime research.[50] Eric Sager acted as one of the driving forces behind the Project, and he wrote *Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820 – 1914*. The study begins with a brief

exploration of pre-industrial ships and the paternal system of relations surrounding them, but quickly transitions to larger vessels. As the industries of shipbuilding, shipping, and ship owning intensified in Atlantic Canada, the composition of British North America's merchant marine evolved considerably. Deep-sea tonnage represented the bulk of ships being built, and the increasing need for specialization in such vessels began a trend through which a smaller number of crewmen completed a larger number of tasks. Formally paternalistic ties became increasingly professionalized through regulation and educational requirements, which introduced modern seafaring labour. However, Sager's work does not dedicate significant attention to maritime risk or industrial disasters. Shortly afterwards, the same author produced a work typically associated with a socioeconomic approach to maritime history.

Along with Gerald Panting, Eric Sager wrote *Maritime Capital: The Shipping Industry in Atlantic Canada: 1820 – 1914*. The work is partly a summary of the ACSP but also an extension shifting away from a strictly economic approach in an attempt to draw farther-reaching conclusions. The authors argue that no technological advances or simple economic study can succeed in explaining the industry's collapse. Instead the decline occurred quickly within the context of the slow transition from merchant to industrial capital, an evolution retarded by economic conditions and relations of production on the colonial frontier.[51] *Maritime Capital* is characteristic of the literature focusing on the economic importance of shipping (although it went to the press in 1990, well after the ACSP).[52] While the ACSP

sparked a torrent of maritime-economic research, during the same period scholars began to approach seafaring from a more social standpoint.

Social aspects of seafaring can be seen through Judith Fingard's *Jack in Port*, a "largely descriptive" as opposed to argumentative exploration of the ports of Quebec, Saint John and Halifax published in 1982.[53] The work primarily relies on newspapers, and is almost exclusively dependent on primary sources.[54] Fingard desired to study the previously unknown sailors who frequented the three ports in order to investigate how terrestrial social relations affected seafaring, which in turn shaped the experience of sailors in port.[55] Her work provides a critical window into the everyday lives of sailors, and emphasizes how the collective, class-based and gendered nature of seafaring influenced the activities of sailors in port.

While scholarly research into differing aspects of maritime history flourished in the mid 1980s and early 1990s, seafaring's historiography took a cultural turn, notably through Marcus Rediker's 1987 work *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (which begins with the crew of the early modern sailing ship *Dove* battling a raging storm and narrowly averting disaster).[56] Rediker's argument is that sailors in the early modern period represented a seaborne proletariat who represented the social, technological, and economic forbearers of labourers in other industrial sectors, with notable exception.[57] Interestingly, Rediker ties supernatural beliefs into maritime peril – he argues that sailors employed arcane superstitions (and some genuinely scientific observations) as methods of understanding Mother Nature, thus making the oceans' omnipotence less imposing.[58] Sailors sought to

make sense of their situation through their own "amalgam of religion and irreligion, magic and materialism, superstition and self help" – they knew that disaster could strike at any moment, and sought to have some level of influence over the ocean's unpredictability.[59] Rediker's work remains a touchstone within seafaring's scholarly historiography, but is limited to the early modern period and does not address maritime disasters in a significant way.

Similar to so many of their railroading and mining brethren who died while working in unsafe environments under primitive conditions, industrial disasters claimed the seafaring labourers who lost their lives in Newfoundland's maritime catastrophes of 1914 and 1918. The literature on the industrial trinity supports that research into disasters within each sector has been minimal, and no specific work on any of the industries provides an adequate assessment of associated disasters. Further, the historiography of industrial disasters is surprisingly neglected – such an amalgamated historiography is waiting to be written. While it does need to be acknowledged that everyday workplace occupational hazards caused the majority of deaths, disasters can hardly be written off as negligible. Studying them can reveal insight that cannot be obtained through more typical workplace dangers. Based on the historiographies of railways, mining, and seafaring covered throughout this chapter, focusing on the intersection of gender and class is a compelling approach to employ for investigating industrial disasters.

Little scholarship has assessed the intersection of gender and class within the context of occupational safety or disaster. A notable contribution to this

historiographic sub-category is Adele Perry's work *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849 – 1871.*[60] The monograph addresses the evolution of British Columbia's social composition, and focuses on government implemented development schemes. Perry's fundamental argument is that various unsuccessful governmental projects sought to civilize the rough-and-tumble homosocial frontier culture associated with the overwhelmingly masculine demographic nature of British Columbia. Her work does not address disasters in any way (she does not even mention the logging industry), but as an examination in an isolated and dangerous masculine enclave it stands alone, and does address the intersection of class and gender with an emphasis on masculinity.[61] Her findings reveal the exceptionally dangerous nature of British Columbia, and that both class and gender had major bearings on conceptualizations of masculinity and violence. In sum, Perry notes that danger "could solidify the male community," which is paralleled throughout the industries examined in this investigation.[62]

Another work that explores the intersection of class and gender with an emphasis on seafaring and risk is "Shipwrecked: or Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representation of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia," by Toby Ditz. The article examines correspondence between merchants in Philadelphia and assesses the language employed to argue that a gendered discourse accompanied instances of mercantile failure. Ditz's work focuses on financial failure amongst elites (all are in the most successful 15% of the Philadelphia's wholesalers), but does look at two instances of shipwreck.[63] She

records the fate of the schooner *Snow Chance*, which lost an arduous 48-hour struggle after being crushed by ice that encompassed the vessel within sight of the city's harbour. The ship's owner Henry Drinker recorded the vessel's misadventure as a valiant struggle against the elements. Throughout a remarkably gendered prose, he repeatedly portrayed Mother Nature as an aggressor to the feminine ship, and a voyeuristic dimension is added by the presence of people on shore unable to render assistance (similar to the SS *Florizel* disaster). Ditz then examines the salvage of another ship owned by Drinker (this one unnamed), which is represented in similar gendered terms, although the actual act of salvage is interpreted as a paternalistic crusade against Mother Nature to rescue the cargo, seen as the 'child' of the 'motherly' ship. Ditz's work strays from the theme of industrial disasters, but does address the intersection of class and gender with an emphasis on maritime risk. Indeed, gendered dialogue is only one of the many recurring themes throughout the historiography on the industrial trinity, which transitions into a fundamental aspect of industrial disasters: a unique occupational ethos of masculinity.

Both Lisa Norling and Margaret Creighton have conducted excellent research on the gendered dimensions of seafaring. Despite the profoundly important socioeconomic roles that women played in assorted maritime sectors and the varying feminine connections exhibited by sailors at sea and on land, men conducted the vast majority of seafaring labour. Collective labour and dangerous working conditions bound seafarers into tightly knit, spatially limited, and isolated

communities. This resulted in a very masculine working culture – similar to rail labour and mining – that spawned a unique esprit de corps amongst sailors.

Creighton is a professor of American and women's history at Bates College. In her article "American Mariners and the Rites of Manhood: 1830 – 1870," she argues that social and labour historians have relied too heavily on a class-based approach to seafaring, and that scholars should now approach the "maleness of the sailing ship" as a social construction.[64] Creighton investigates masculinity in the nautical workplace through different approaches, and her study is predominantly based on extant diaries. One method she employs for interpreting gender is analyzing the usually unsupportive reaction sailors exhibited toward women on the vessels. This aversion could be attributed to a number of reasons, but Creighton emphasizes that the addition of a woman to a typically all-male workplace interrupted the way men could interact with each other "*as men*."[65] She notes that sailors saw going to sea as a rite of passage and a method to "enhance a mature masculinity," which conflicted with effectively anything feminine.[66]

Creighton advances that many sailors saw seafaring labour as a 'test' of manhood and as a way to engage in an exclusively masculine undertaking which valued tasks of physical daring in a dangerous working environment. Sailors would "survive" or fail the test, either leading to their assertion of dominance over Mother Nature or their emasculation.[67] Throughout this nautical conquest, 'old salts' exposed younger hands to the crass activities usually associated with sailors

(drinking, gambling, profanity, sexual promiscuity, etc.), which exacerbated conceptions of masculinity in an already testosterone laden workplace.

Bound through danger, isolation, and collectivity, seasoned sailors strongly encouraged less experienced crewmen to sever ties with their families, and specially ostracized and emasculated them for expressing emotional ties with females.[68] These seasoned sailors employed gendered indoctrination to influence their unversed counterparts to exchange terrestrial residence in favour of the nautical realm, represented as a place of true 'independence,' which formed an informal "deepwater brotherhood." The importance of such a brotherhood can be seen through occupational rituals, including a sailor's first equatorial crossing. To celebrate such an event, the most experienced mariner would be appointed 'King Neptune,' and the ensuing paternalistic exchange would involve shaving, symbolic baptism, and various evaluations of character. Such a ritual emphasizes the extent to which seafarers considered themselves a family of men, "complete with procreative powers" evident through the fatherlike King Neptune ritual.[69] This interpretation of masculinity is an interesting contrast to how sailors conceptualized femininity.

A leading scholar of women's maritime history is Lisa Norling, a professor at the University of Minnesota and recipient the 2001 Frederick Jackson Turner Book Award. She also received the North American Society for Oceanic History's John Lyman Book Award in 2000 for her work *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women and the Whalefishery, 1720-1870.* In her article "The Sentimentalization of American Seafaring: The Case of the New England Whale Fishery, 1790 – 1870,"

Norling argues that evolving gender roles diminished women's involvement with the whale fishery, ultimately giving them less agency and spawning a trend of emotional deprivation.[70] The article is based on a plethora of primary sources, including correspondence, magazines, and diaries. Norling advances that seafaring husbands increasingly relegated women to their homes to raise families and provide emotional support, completely removing them from the fishery in which they had historically been active at the community level. This dynamic led to sailors conceptualizing 'land' as the apex of feminine delicacy, which made residence at sea the pinnacle of 'independence' – and thus manliness. When this mindset is connected to the potential for disaster, it emphasizes the gendered aspect of risk at sea.

Similar to other industrial pursuits, seafaring labour can be interpreted as an exclusively masculine campaign against Mother Nature, with men determined to 'take it' or fight the elements, often in the face of extreme danger. Sailors interpreted a successful weathering of environmental fury as asserting authority over the natural world. The gendered dimension of this struggle with Mother Nature cannot be played down. The paternalistic practices within seafaring culture and the ethos of occupational masculinity adopted by sailors through gendered indoctrination from the forecastle to the captains cabin spawned an atmosphere of inflated masculinity. Benjamin Franklin offered insight into seafarers reception to danger by writing, "our seafaring people are brave, being cowards in only one sense, that of fearing to be thought afraid."[71] Likewise, sailor Charles Nordhoff, who, while riding out a

storm, wrote in his diary "the poor devils on shore, who cannot muster courage enough to leave their Mammas for a week have all my pity."[72] Finally, a rare analysis of shipboard masculinity from the 1830s stated:

> An overstrained sense of manliness is the characteristic of seafaring men. Or rather, of life on board ship. This often gives an appearance of want of feeling, and even of cruelty. From this, if a man comes within an ace of breaking his neck and escapes it, it is made a joke of, and no notice must be taken of a bruise or cut; and any expression of pity, or any show of attention, would look sisterly, and unbecoming of a man who has to face the rough and tumble of such a life.[73]

Seafarers saw incurring danger as the essence of masculinity – thus just hours before the sealing disaster of 1914, when 34 sealers returned to the SS *Newfoundland* after predicting treacherous weather instead of 'taking' the elements, popular literature claims that they faced the question, "what are you, a crowd of grandmothers?"[74]

The various themes emerging throughout the historiography of railways, mining, and seafaring revolve around the isolated and dangerous nature of the workplace, and the ethos of masculinity associated with each occupational sector. A major subject throughout the various historiographies is resilience against effectively anything that can be seen as an obstacle. This is influenced by environmentally isolated labouring conditions. The notion of resilience is similar to the theme of a masculine struggle against Mother Nature, which usually portrays disaster as a heroic undertaking in an oscillating power dynamic (although more so within seafaring than railways or mining). When the dangers associated with industrial labour are added to the theme of isolation, collectivism and masculinity

also become prominent. Each industry spawned an occupational ethos amongst its labour force, defined by gendered, spatially limited, dangerous, and financially unstable working conditions. Such conditions, combined with a masculine conception of self-identity and the paternalistic practices of employers, often equated to disaster. These themes provide convincing touchstones for studying the gendered dimensions of risk, and can be elaborated upon to further understand the anatomy and implications of industrial disasters.

While the continuum of seafaring's scholarly historiography has undergone a number of evolutions as historians approach varying subjects from different vantage points, one topic remains essentially uncharted: a critical understanding of risk and disasters at sea. Interestingly, unlike rail and mining disasters, public fascination with shipwrecks and 'peril on the high seas' has spawned a massive popular historiography. Popular works on disasters at sea are typically concerned with the more sensational maritime tragedies, and are almost always limited in time and space. The *Titanic* and *Lusitania* disasters have historiographies to themselves, and books on nautical mysteries and ghost ships are as numerous as they are fanciful.[75] However, such works are usually encyclopedic or anecdotal in nature and seek to entertain instead of educate or argue. Moreover, popular authors rarely approach the historical record with the necessary neutrality of scholarly study and do not place disasters at sea against a broad social background to draw any type of meaningful conclusion. The result is an almost complete vacuum of scholarly literature on disasters at sea. However, as this investigation will argue, the events

associated with the *Newfoundland* and SS *Southern Cross* during the Newfoundland sealing disaster of 1914, along with the wreck of the *Florizel* in 1918, present an ideal framework to study disasters at sea in a scholarly capacity

The literature on the industrial trinity of railways, mining, and seafaring provides a window into industrial labour forces bound by remarkable similarities. Isolation, masculinity, and collectivism are recurring themes, and industrial disasters consistently occurred in each sector. Such themes support a framework for understanding the effects of a gendered workplace on a labour force, and can contextualize industrial disasters. Further, approaching industrial disasters in the historical record with a focus on the gendered dimensions of risk is an avenue of research that has not received scholarly attention. This approach presents tantalizing possibilities for studying disasters at sea. However, what makes the disasters of 1914 and 1918 distinctly different from other industrial disasters is the loss of the *Southern Cross*. In no other industrial sector is a labour force and its workplace capable of literally disappearing. Indeed, such an event is effectively impossible to replicate, and combined with the differences and similarities between the victims' of the *Newfoundland* and *Florizel* disasters, the trio of tragedies remain an unparalleled historiographic phenomenon with singularly promising potential for research into both industrial disasters, and working men who got wet.

Endnotes – Chapter Two

[1] Eric Tucker, *Administering Danger in the Workplace: The Law and Politics of Occupational health and Safety Regulation in Ontario, 1850 – 1914* (Toronto, 1990), 10.

[2] See Peter Scholliers, "Work Floors Under Tension: Working Conditions and International Competition in Textiles" in *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650 – 2000*, Lex Heerma Van Voss, ed. (Surrey, 2010), see also, Andrew Prouty, *More Deadly than War: Pacific Coast Logging, 1827 – 1981* (New York, 1985).

[3] Scholarship into industrial disasters began with: Samuel Prince, "*Catastrophe and Social Change, Based Upon a Sociological Study of the Halifax Disaster.*" Ph.D. thesis. New York: Columbia University Department of Political Science, 1920. Leading disaster scholar E.L. Quarantelli identifies this thesis as the birth of the field, see L.E. Quarantelli, ed., *Disasters: Theory and Research* (Beverly Hills, 1978), 2.

[4] Walter Licht, *Working for the Railroad: The Organization of Work in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1983), xvii. Light records that his study "would not deal with the construction crews who built the railroads, but rather focus on the men who ran them...Railroad companies rarely employed construction workers directly. Since they were hired, managed, and paid by local, small scale builders who contracted with the companies to build portions of the line, construction labourers technically do not belong in the study of employees of large sale organizations. For the same reasons, Pullman porters are excluded as well Both deserve full-length treatment in their own right." While Licht's reasoning is straightforward, examining rail labour outside of a corporate context should include rail construction crews.

[5] Albro Martin, *Railroads Triumphant: The Growth, Rejection, and Rebirth of a Vital American Force* (New York, 1992), 88, see also, Licht, 164, see also, Tucker, 10, see also, James Ducker, *Men of the Steel Rails: Workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, 1869 – 1900* (America, 1983), 6.

[6] James Bronstein, *Caught in the Machinery: Workplace Accidents and Injured Workers in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Stanford, 2008), 8-9.

[7] F. R. Conder, *The Men Who Built Railways*, ed. Jack Simmons (London, 1983), i. More informatively, Simmons writes, "In spite of biographers, we know little that is truly personal about the engineers who built and equipped British railways. Most of them had a hard life - above all those who were at work during the principle age of construction. They were men of action, and when action was past their work was over. They did not feel the need to justify themselves by setting down their recollections." Simmons's recording is romantic, but historically accurate despite the existence of works penned by figures less prominent than Conder. An occupational group known for leaving voluminous memoirs is sailors.

[8] James Arnold and Roberta Wiener, *The American West, Living the Frontier Dream* (London, 1966), 131.

[9] Slason Thompson, *A Short History of American Railways: Covering Ten Decades with 400 Illustrations* (Chicago, 1925), 212.
[10] Thompson dedicates his work to "our continental transportation service with promptness, speed and safety unparalleled in the history of the world."
[11] See James Hill, *Highways of Progress* (New York, 1910), 1-4. Hill writes, "The savage is content with wresting from nature the basic necessities of life...Let us try and cast our minds twenty or twenty five years ahead and see what will then be our condition. The main elements of this problem, which above all other should command our attention, are three: possibilities of population, actual and possible natural resources, and possibilities of productive application to one another." See also, Charles Adams, *Railroads: Their Origins and Problems* (New York, 1878), 80. Throughout his frequently cited work on railways, Adams's was principally concerned with "the railway problem," which was largely how the American government would regulate freight rates, monopolies on rail travel, and legal quandaries of the day. He never mentions safety or disasters.
[12] A significant volume of scholarly literature on British rail disasters concerns the Staplehurst Rail Crash of 9 June 1865, because Charles Dickens was in the fist class carriage and based his popular short story 'The Signalman' on the Event. For scholarly investigation on the Staplehurst Rail Disaster see Norris Pope, "'The Signalman' and Information Problems in the Railway Age," *Technology and Culture*. Vol. 42, No. 3 (July, 2001): 436-461, see also, Peter Sinnema. "Representing the Railway: Train Accidents and Trauma in the Illustrated London News," *Victorian Periodical Review*. Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer, 1998): 142-168, see also, Jill Matus. "Trauma, Memory, and Railway Disaster: The Dickensian Connection." *Victorian Studies*. Vol. 43, No. 3 (Spring, 2001): 413-436. Promotional literature praising the railways includes Robert Strahorn, *To The Rockies and Beyond, A Summer on The Union Pacific Railroad* (Omaha, 1879), see also, Thompson.
[13] *The New York Times*, Vol. LVI, No. 17,810, 29 October 1906. This was the day after the 1906 Atlantic City Train Wreck, arbitrarily selected by the author for primary source investigation to provide a reliable and representational contrast to secondary literature that excludes such disasters.
[14] Vincent Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier* (Missouri, 1988), 264-67.
[15] Peter Kingsford, *Victorian Railwaymen: The Emergence and Growth of Railroad Labour, 1830 – 1870* (London, 1970), xi, see also, Licht, xvi.
[16] Pinning Licht's exact area of specialty beyond that of a labour economist is not easy – his monographs cover a diverse range of subjects, although there is an institutional undertone to much of his research.
[17] Licht qualifies anything west of the Mississippi River 'not east.'
[18] Licht, xiv. Licht's work is actually a pioneering undertaking within the American historiography – scholarship into American rail history is a comparatively recent

phenomena, despite the legacy of rail travel and its relevance to the geographic, demographic and cultural development of the United States.

[19] Ibid., xvii.

[20] Ibid., 5.

[21] Ibid., 191-95. While drawing conclusions on railway occupational safety needs to be treated critically because state by state data prior to 1889 is limited, to state that workplace dangers intensified is supportable. When the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) initiated its occupational safety and accidents database in 1889, the organization found that in its first year 20,028 railmen had been injured on the job while 1,972 were killed. Considering that 704,443 individuals were employed in the rail industry, the 1889 figures indicate that "one out of every 357 employees was killed in service and one out of every thirty five was injured." Such appalling statistics were hugely troubling to American officials, especially in contrast to the available data for British rail occupational safety. Such data illuminates the degree of risk faced by working people in America's rail industry during the late nineteenth century, and Licht's research produces a plethora of comparable statistics.

[22] Ducker, 167.

[23] Ibid., xi. Ducker is certainly correct in this regard – in 1880 the United States had 400,000 railway employees compared to 300,000 workers engaged in textile manufacturing and 230,000 miners.

[24] Ibid., 169.

[25] Ibid., 170.

[26] This was the Eden Train Wreck of 1904 in Colorado. Rail disasters were far more common in the eastern United States.

[27] Ibid., 52-68.

[28] Ibid., 54-5.

[29] Ibid., 56, 60-2.

[30] Ibid., 60-4.

[31] Ibid., 62.

[32] Notable popular works on rail history are Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinental's and the Making of Modern America* (New York, 2011), see also, John White Jr., *The American Railroad Freight Car: From the Wood-car Era to the Coming of Steel* (Baltimore, 1993), see also, Martin, see also, Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway* (Yugoslavia, 1991), see also, Charles Ames, *Pioneering the Union Pacific* (New York, 1969), see also, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century* (New York, 1977). For popular works specific to rail disasters see L.T.C. Rolt, *Red for Danger: A History of Railway Accidents and Railway Safety* (Devon, 1982), see also Adrian Vaughan, *Obstruction Danger: Significant British Railway Accidents, 1890–1986* (London, 1989), see also Gordon Routledge, *The Sorrows of Quintinshill. The Harrowing Account of Britain's Worst Rail Disaster* (Arthuret Publishing, 2002), see also, J.A.B. Hamilton, *Britain's Greatest Rail Disaster* (London, 1969).

[33] Similar to endnote 13, the author arbitrarily selected two rail disasters in Atlantic City ten years apart – one on 30 July 1896, the other on 28 October 1906. A cursory foray into the archival record revealed that the 1906 disaster was handled in a significantly more thorough fashion that the one ten years prior. Outrage is expressed in 1906, but not in 1896. See *The New York Times*, Vol. XLV, No. 14,024, 31 July 1896, see also, *The New York Times*, Vol. LVI, No. 17,810, 29 October 1906.
[34] Bronstien, 11. Between 1850 and 1852 in Britain, 2,143 miners were killed, however "only 645 had died in explosions compared with 744 in roof falls, 547 in shaft accidents, and 297 from other causes." Choke Damp refers to poisonous gases created via a chemical reaction between newly exposed coal and oxygen.
[35] Mark Aldrich, "Preventing 'The Needless Peril of the Coal Mine': The Bureau of Mines and the Campaign Against Coal Mine Explosions, 1910 – 1940," *Technology and Culture*. Vol. 36, No. 3 (July, 1995), 8. See also, Bronstien, 11. The public was also fascinated by the notion of a mine explosion killing certain men but sparing others – it didn't seem to make sense.
[36] Anna Rochester, *Labor and Coal* (New York, 1931), 7.
[37] Ibid., 7.
[38] Ibid., 147 – 8.
[39] John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History* (London, 1980), 30.
[40] See Dennis Brestensky, et al., *Patchwork Voices: The Culture and Lore of a Mining People* (Uniontown, 1977), see also, Anthony Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth Century Coal Town's Experience with a Disaster Prone Industry (*New York, 1987), see also, Aldrich, see also, Bronstein.
[41] Benson, 36 – 7.
[42] Ibid., 1.
[43] Ibid., 36.
[44] Ibid., 41.
[45] Ibid., 39., 41.
[46] Bronstein, 11, see also, Aldrich, 37.
[47] An example of this can be found in Roy Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume Three, 1830 – 1913* (Oxford, 1986), 582. Church mentions the "Lundhill disaster in Yorkshire in 1857, the New Hartley in Northumberland in 1862, the Oaks in Yorkshire in 1866, Blantyre in Lanarkshire in 1877, and Abercarn the following year in Monmouthshire, Albion Cilfyndd in Glamorgan in 1894, and the biggest disasters of all – at Hulton in Lancashire in 1910 when 344 men died, and the Universal, Senghenydd, Glamorgan, in 1913, when 439 lives were lost," but elaborates on none.
[48] Frederick William Wallace, Wooden Ships and Iron Men (Boston, 1937), xv, 7.
[49] Frederick William Wallace, *In the Wake of the Windships* (Toronto, 1927), 200-209.

[50] The respective titles are: *Ships and Shipbuilding in the North Atlantic Region,* Gerald Panting and Keith Mathews, eds. (St. John's, 1978); *The Enterprising Canadians: Entrepreneurs and Economic Development in Eastern Canada, 1820 – 1914,* Lewis Fischer and Eric Sager, eds. (St. John's, 1979); *Volumes not Values: Canadian Sailing Ships and World Trade,* Rosemary Ommer and David Alexander, eds. (St. John's, 1978); *Working Men Who Got Wet,* Rosemary Ommer and Gerald Panting, eds. (St. John's, 1980); *Merchant Shipping and Economic Development in Atlantic Canada,* Lewis Fischer and Eric Sager, eds. (St. John's, 1981); and *Change and Adaptation in Maritime History: The North Atlantic Fleets in the Nineteenth Century,* Lewis Fischer and Gerald Panting, eds. (St. John's, 1982).
[51] Eric Sager and Gerald Panting, *Maritime Capital: The Shipping Industry in Atlantic Canada: 1820 – 1914* (Kingston, 1990), 201.
[52] See also, Eric Sager and Lewis Fischer, *Shipping and Shipbuilding in Atlantic Canada, 1820 – 1914* (Ottawa, 1986).
[53] Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto, 1982), 3.
[54] Ibid., 282. Fingard was writing in a vacuum of secondary literature.
[55] Ibid., 3.
[56] Markus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700 – 1750* (Cambridge, 1987), 1.
[57] The exception would be piracy, which is difficult to replicate terrestrially on the grounds that the necessary organization makes it distinct from simple theft. See Rediker, 254-87.
[58] Ibid., 179-80.
[59] Ibid., 185.
[60] Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia , 1849 – 1871* (Toronto, 2001)
[61] It should be noted that much of Perry's argument and focus is on race, which falls outside the scope of this paper.
[62] Perry, 44.
[63] Tony Ditz, "*Shipwrecked: or Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representation of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia,*" The Journal of American History. Vol. 81, No. 1 (June, 1994): 2.
[64] Margaret Creighton, "American Mariners and the Rites of Manhood: 1830 -1870" in *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour,* Colin Howell and Richard Twomey, eds. (Fredericton, 1991), 145.
[65] Ibid., 145. Clearly, there were other reasons (typically socioeconomic) that sailors did not enjoy the company of women on their vessels, specifically the wife of their captain.
[66] Ibid., 146.
[67] Ibid., 146.
[68] Ibid., 148.
[69] Ibid., 150.

[70] Lisa Norling, "The Sentimentalization of American Seafaring: The Case of the New England Whale Fishery, 1790 – 1870," in *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour*, Colin Howell and Richard Twomey, eds. (Fredericton, 1991), 165.
[71] Jeffery Bolster, "Every Inch a Man: Gender in the Lives of African American Seamen, 1800 – 1860," in *Iron Men, Wooden Women Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700 – 1920*, Margaret Creighton and Lisa Norling, eds. (Baltimore, 1996), 154.
[72] Norling, 148-49.
[73] Bolster, 154.
[74] Cassie Brown, *Death on the Ice: The Great Newfoundland Sealing Disaster of 1914* (Canada, 1972), 85.
[75] See Stanley Spicer, *The Saga of the Mary Celeste: The Ill Fated Mystery Ship* (Halifax, 2002), see also, Bland Simpson, *Ghost Ship of Diamond Shoals: The Mystery of the Carroll A. Deering* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

Chapter Three – SS *Newfoundland* Disaster of 1914

"Fear great tragedy, *Newfoundland*'s crew caught out in last blizzard," was the first notification that St. John's received indicating trouble during the 1914 sealing season.[1] A widely known vessel throughout the colony, the SS *Newfoundland* mainly operated in the island's sealfishery between 1900 and 1914.[2] Captain Westbury Kean captained the ship to the ice floes in the latter year with a crew of 189, 132 of whom found themselves stranded 'on the ice' as a result of a communication breakdown and subsequent navigational error on behalf of Wes's father, Abram (thirty four of the men returned to the *Newfoundland* after observing signs of inclement weather). A blizzard descended and the men fought the elements for around fifty-three hours in what became the colony's best-known disaster at sea. By the time the crew of the SS *Bellaventure* located the *Newfoundland*'s lost party, seventy-seven had frozen to death while many others sustained serious injuries. The ensuing delivery of frozen bodies to St. John's caused significant commotion around the island, and the event generated a bitter controversy which received intense media attention, especially in light of the local political climate. Also at the ice during the disaster was president of the Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU) William Ford Coaker, who spearheaded a public display of vehemence against Abram and the merchants of Water Street in an attempt to better the working conditions of sealers. The sealers' ordeal has been immortalized in Cassie Brown's book *Death on the Ice*, a classic work of Newfoundland non-fiction still read by many of the island's pupilage.[3] The thirty four returnees not willing to 'take it' reveal undeniable insight

into the gendered dimension of facing risk at sea, and the tragedy's aftermath illuminates underlying social inequality between Newfoundland's 'toilers' and the 'fishocracy.' The *Newfoundland* disaster became the colony's most notorious disaster at sea, and exploring its reception illuminates a unique passage in the island's history because of its class-based dimensions and the contrasting parallel it establishes to other maritime disasters.

A wooden steamer built in Quebec by Peter Baldwin at some point during 1872, the *Newfoundland* had a length of 212 feet, a beam of 29.5 feet, and displaced 576.83 net tons.[4] The vessel's operational history before 1893 is unknown, but in that year Nova Scotia based sealer Captain J. Farquhar purchased it, and he employed it in his respective industry. Interestingly, Newfoundland's residents conceptualized the ship as synonymous with sealing long before the disaster bearing its name – as early as 6 March 1894 the St. John's based *Evening Telegram* noted that it possessed "an advantage hardly fair to Newfoundlanders" based on its ability to clear the island's ports before colonial tonnage, the latter grounded until March 10th.[5]

The *Newfoundland* became a familiar sight in ports around its namesake and in Halifax, and often visited North Sydney, where Newfoundlanders working the coal mines sometimes signed on as crewmen.[6] Perhaps the vessel's most exciting activity occurred during the Spanish American War during 1898, when it acted as a blockade-runner to Cuba, although American authorities apprehended Farquhar, quarantining him in Charleston for six months.[7] Harvey & Company purchased the

Newfoundland in 1904, and it acted as a workhorse and sealer thereafter. Space does not permit a breakdown of the vessel's sealing performance, although Chafe's Sealing Book reveals notable years to be 1900 and 1910, with Captains Farquhar and Jacob Kean respectively harvesting 20,738 and 23,128 pelts.[8] The *Newfoundland*'s captaincy went from Farquhar to Samuel Bradford in 1904, then to J. Knee in 1905, to J. Parsons in 1906, to Jes Windsor in 1909, to Jacob Kean in 1910, and finally Westbury Kean in 1911.[9] Each captain boasted a distinguished sealing record, although industry's heyday had long since past when tragedy befell the *Newfoundland*.

Literature on Newfoundland's annual seal hunt is abundant, and the subject's historiography has transitioned from fanciful antiquated works including *Wooden Walls Between the Ice Floes: Telling the Romance of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery* and *Vikings of the Ice* to more scholarly studies, notably that of Dr. Shannon Ryan. The harvesting of seals around Newfoundland requires little elaboration – the island's aboriginal population hunted seals for subsistence and utilized the remains resourcefully, and by around 1790 early colonists engaged in an annual spring seal hunt, leaving the island during March and April in small ships destined for the ice floes (others hunted seals from shore). Colonial vessels mainly exploited the Gulf of St. Lawrence and 'the front,' or the waters off Newfoundland's northeast coast, where sealers intensively harvested Harp Seals. The island's citizenry prized seals for their skins and oil, the former being used in the creation of everything from cigar

cases to boots, while the latter powered lights in mines, homes, and lighthouses.[10] Sealing quickly became crucial to Newfoundland's economy.

The island's spring seal hunt reached its apex during the 1840s and 50s, and the introduction of steamers in the 1860s reconditioned the industry. Brigs and brigantines of 150 to 200 tons typically prosecuted the sealfishery, but ship owners and merchants quickly realized the advantages of steam power – a steamer doubled the potential productivity of a vessel engaged in the hunt in terms of seals harvested per ton of shipping.[11] Further, steel-hulled ships could act as icebreakers.[12] By the 1870s the division in productivity between sail and steam power grew, by which point the industry in decline. After the 1880s sealing's economic importance rapidly deteriorated, and comprised around five percent of Newfoundland's exports by the twentieth century.[13] The 'romance' of the seal hunt has been capitalized on literarily and in films such as *The Viking*, and modern environmental and ethical objections to sealing have received harsh media attention, notably culminating in the 1983 boycotting of whitecoat and blueback products on behalf of the European Economic Community.[14] In any event, the annual spring seal hunt retains a unique niche in Newfoundland's seafaring heritage, and while captains navigated the floes in search of pelts, they did so at extraordinary risk to life and property.

Contextualizing the dangers of sealing is difficult due to the absence of studies in other maritime industries, but it had a reputation as a particularly perilous undertaking. As early as 1799 Governor William Waldegrave observed that the sealfishery presented "an object that requires much weighty consideration" and

that "the very mode of taking these animals is of a nature to form the hardiest race of men in the universe."[15] Likewise, in 1804 Governor Sir Erasmus Gower noted the "extreme hardships and dangers" associated with the industry.[16] Other early documentation reveals that contemporary opinion considered sealing to be dangerous for both men and their ships. While fundamentally dangerous conditions affected all forms of seafaring labour around Newfoundland's treacherous coastline, sealing presented additional hazards largely related to environmental phenomena. By comparison, British vessels either carried saltfish to markets in southern waters, returned to Britain, or simply found a port to tie down in – their respective captains avoided sailing in Newfoundland's waters at all costs during the winter months.[17]

As the 'wooden walls' sailed out of St. John's through the narrows or past the stalwart customs building at Harbour Grace, the island's attention would be temporarily diverted to vessels hoping to get 'in the fat.' Newfoundland's newspapers regularly updated the fleet's progress and performance with the introduction of wireless telegraphy, and shortly after setting sail the crews would be reminded of the industry's associated risks. Ice floes could push ships onto the rocks far from assistance or crush vessels that became icebound. Further, as the crew of the unfortunate 245-ton SS *Mastiff* experienced firsthand in 1898 while sealing off the Funk Islands, ice floes could literally cut a wooden wall in half.[18] Sails and rigging also constantly froze, and the extreme unpredictability of dangerous winter storms constantly endangered crews, especially when sealers adopted the practice of 'panning.'

Described as "the most important on ice innovation of the steamer operation" in sealing, panning was a process by which sealers deposited pelts at a given location on an ice floe, marked with a kerosene torch.[19] Different watches would be delivered to different areas, thereby increasing productivity by ensuring that a crew would hunt various clusters of seals simultaneously. Ideally, the ship would then pick up the pelts after an area had been exhausted of seals, although crews' not being able to find panned floes constantly plagued sealers (panning also played a large role in overhunting).[20] Panning dramatically increased the sealers' kill ratio – no longer inconvenienced by the historically standard time consuming procedure of towing pelts back to their vessel, the men could focus exclusively on the hunt. Additionally, panning placed the crews far away from their ships, which exposed them to an increased risk of being caught in a storm. In sum, there can be little doubt that sealers toiled in a very dangerous form of seafaring labour. Indeed, crews' finding themselves 'on the ice' was hardly without precedent before the *Newfoundland* disaster.

The SS *Greenland* disaster of 1898 constitutes the first sealing tragedy where a sizable number of men found themselves stranded, and it bears remarkable similarity to the event dubbed 'death on the ice.' A wooden steamer built in Ireland during 1872, the *Greenland* had a length of 151 feet and displaced 259.11 net tons.[21] The St. John's firm Nicholas Stabb & Sons acquired the vessel in Aberdeen in 1872, and used it as a sealer and workhorse around Newfoundland thereafter.[22] The *Greenland* initially belonged to a small sealing fleet based in Harbour Grace and

operated by John Munn & Co., but the bankruptcy of Munn's estate resulted in an ownership transfer to Baine Johnson. The first major accident associated with the ship occurred in September of 1884 when it caught fire and capsized shortly after the crew escaped (good fortune saved the vessel from being a total loss). Five years later, the crew of the *Greenland* would not be as lucky.

Captain George Barbour took the *Greenland* to the ice in 1898 with a crew of 207, many of whom narrowly escaped being stranded in a blizzard while sealing on March 15th around the Funk Islands. On March 20th, Barbour ordered one watch of fifty-four sealers under James Gaulton over the side, and he then steamed around two miles in a different direction, dropping off another three watches under the respective commands of Jesse Knee, Nathaniel House and James Norris. Barbour observed indicators of inclement weather shortly after the last watch left the ship, and retraced his course to retrieve Gaulton's party, but could not steam back to the other watches because an icefloe blocked the *Greenland*'s progress in their direction. A major blizzard descended shortly thereafter, and the three watches on the ice broke into seven or eight groups, some of which unsuccessfully attempted to return to the *Greenland* (which almost foundered).

The weather cleared up enough by four o'clock the following morning to allow Barbour to rescue the majority of the survivors, but yet another squall hampered efforts until the next morning, when he recovered another six survivors.[23] With twenty-five corpses frozen solid and covered in snow on the *Greenland*'s hatch and another twenty-three men missing, Barbour set sail for St.

John's. The unfortunate crew then encountered a storm that forced them into port at Bay De Verde, where Barbour wired news of the disaster to Baine Johnson. After the mooring chain snapped resulting in the grounding and subsequent refloating of the vessel, the *Greenland*'s crew fought out a final blizzard near Cape Francis, and reached St. John's on Sunday March 27th. The ship slowly steamed through heavy fog and finally put in at Baine Johnson's dock, at which point "excitement was greatly intensified."[24]

News of the *Greenland* disaster reached St. John's around eight o'clock on the evening of Saturday the 26th, and "a great wave of sorrow swept over the little city" while people prayed "for God to lighten the blow and avert a general calamity."[25] Once the ship concluded its tragic voyage the survivors and bodies alike immediately embarked for their respective hometowns, "indeed the sealers were removed to their homes away from St. John's as quickly as possible after the *Greenland* docked."[26] The city descended into a general state of mourning as residents began to evaluate the "distressing circumstances" that overtook the sealers, which greatly "agitated the public mind."[27] Further, rumors swiftly began to circulate that the SS *Aurora*'s crew under the command of Abram Kean had stolen panned pelts gathered by the *Greenland*'s men, forcing the latter ship to stay at the ice longer and thus inadvertently causing the tragedy. Newfoundland's citizenry quickly began asking questions and interpreting the questionable circumstances under which men prosecuted the island's sealfishery.

In addition to a public outpouring of sympathy for victims of the *Greenland* disaster and their families, sources identified the loss of the SS *Huntsman* as a similar disaster and used it to contextualize the dangers of sealing. A brig owned by C. and A. Dawe, the *Huntsman* operated in and around Bay Roberts, where it became a familiar sealer between 1862 and 1872. Captain Robert Dawe left for the front on 5 March 1872 with a crew of 62, but disaster struck when a storm blew the vessel onto a reef near Cape St. Charles and destroyed it.[28] Forty-three crewmen drowned while the appropriately named sealing vessel the SS *Rescue*, captained by Robert's brother John Dawe, saved eighteen crewmen (only three men escaped without broken bones).[29] The disaster dealt a severe blow to Bay Roberts as the majority of victims hailed from the surrounding area, and is immortalized by the altar of St. Mark's Anglican Church in Shearstown, which is dedicated to the *Huntsman*'s crew.[30] Sources also singled out the *Trinity* disaster of 1801 and the *Tigress* disaster of 1873, which respectively killed 22 and 25 men.[31] In any event, as disaster specific to the sealfishery captivated the public, the "system of method by which the industry is prosecuted" became the subject of intense scrutiny.[32]

As voiced through *The Evening Telegram*, popular consensus within the colony admitted that prosecuting the sealfishery would always involve an uncomfortable degree of risk, "even under the best circumstances, but the question arises: is it not the duty of all concerned to minimize the danger as much as possible?"[33] The island's citizenry decided that "the dark forces of nature" could not be accepted as the perpetrator instigating the *Greenland* disaster, and attention

focused on the flagrant disregard of safety associated with the hunt.[34] *The Evening Telegram* noted that "the voyage is conducted with a reckless daring that seems to defy the very forces of nature," and the almost complete absence of safety measures, for which the newspaper faulted both sealers and their employers.[35] The press further pointed out that shipowners and captains did not organize evaluations of the sealers' physical and mental conditions, nor did they take any precaution taken against infectious diseases.[36] People also emphasized the danger of sealers traveling far from their ship with no protection from the elements, which Newfoundlanders viewed as a particularly acute issue. The tragic events associated with the *Greenland*, all agreed, "calls loudly for drastic legislation," especially regarding when sealers went "beyond hailing distance of their vessel."[37]

Newfoundland's population concluded that the *Greenland* disaster proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the dangerous nature of the sealfishery warranted legislative intervention. The dominion's residents identified specific issues including the need for inspections of sealing vessels, restrictions on crew sizes, adequate sleeping berths and a minimum cubic footage for humane living conditions, and a lazaretto or "floating hospital."[38] Seafaring professionals and landsmen alike stressed the requirements for some means of shelter for men traveling on the ice, an officer dedicated to watching meteorological conditions when men traversed the ice, and a mandatory insurance scheme, "to embrace all the interests and classes directly affected by the sealfishery, for the benefit of the men."[39] However, despite the initial impact made by the *Greenland* disaster, the government made no

amendments or changes in the sealfishery's framework (the survivors did not even give testimony in the ensuing inquiry).[40] The aftermath is best described by a speculative editorial:

> Nobody knows exactly where or by whom salvation might have come to the lost men, nor at what exact point a timely remedy would have averted the disaster. They're dead. That's all about it. Take up a subscription for the survivors, and let us hope it won't occur again. That, and nothing more, is the sum-up of all the public and private philosophy on the subject, and that is the Amen of all its effects.[41]

The anonymous contributor's hypothesis hit the mark – the colony learned hard lessons, which sadly fell on deaf ears (ice floes crushed the *Greenland* during the hunt in 1907, but the *Newfoundland* rescued the crew). Almost sixteen years to the day after the *Greenland* disaster, the crew of the *Newfoundland* would tragically discover the dangers of such a shortcoming.

In March of 1914 Wes Kean busied himself with preparing the *Newfoundland* for the floes at anchor near Pool's Island (home to five of the *Greenland* disaster's victims). Kean had captained three previous sealing voyages exclusively employing the *Newfoundland* despite not retaining a Masters certificate. Near the beginning of the second week of March he sailed the *Newfoundland* to Wesleyville where the majority of his 189 crewmen climbed aboard, and then set out for the front at 8 o'clock on the morning on March 12th alongside the SS *Eagle*. The ensuing events are well known: the sealing fleet departed for the front as per usual, and thick ice became a problem almost immediately, blocking the *Newfoundland* from putting in at either Fogo Island or Seldom-Come-By where another forty crewmen waited to

be taken on. Kean decided that the ice presented too formidable an obstacle and headed for the front, attempting to locate seals whenever possible. Onboard, men ate hard tack, drank tea, and constantly fought to keep the ice at bay and maintain the desired course.

Well into the front by March 30th, the *Newfoundland*'s crew had harvested a mere 538 seals (the SS *Beothic* had almost 25,000 already stowed).[42] Kean eventually made visual contact with other sealers including his father's ship the SS *Stephano*, and observed various crews enjoying success 'in the fat.' Along with his first mate George Tuff, Kean then devised a plan in which the *Newfoundland*'s crew would walk to the *Stephano* to receive an update on the whereabouts of any seal patches from Abram (the alleged villain culpable for the *Greenland* disaster), and spend the night on the latter vessel before striking out again the following day. Kean ordered the crew onto the ice at seven o'clock on the morning of March 31st, and 34 men turned back after observing indicators of inclement weather while the remaining 132 reached the *Stephano* around eleven thirty. Abram received the sealers from his son's ship, electing to provide them with tea and bread while steaming toward a patch of seals he noted earlier. He apparently misjudged the distance between his own ship and the *Newfoundland*, and thought the latter vessel to be nearer than it actually was, and that the men left it later than they actually did. Kean ordered the visiting sealers onto the ice twenty minutes after their arrival, and the men quickly realized that they would not be spending the night on the *Stephano*

as Wes had planned. The men then decided to head toward the *Newfoundland*, but the storm that caused 34 of their coworkers to turn around quickly overtook them.

Onboard the *Newfoundland*, Wes Kean could not communicate with other vessels because the wireless apparatus had been removed the previous year, as officials of Harvey & Co. deemed it a financial drain. The same officials also removed the thermometer on the same grounds, ensuring that Captain Charles Green could not identify changes in the temperature and thus an approaching storm (maritime law required him to act as a 'navigating officer' because Wes did not possess a Masters certificate). The danger of this limitation would have been reinforced when the same storm that descended on 132 of the ships crewmen slammed the *Newfoundland*. Throughout the ordeal, Kean simply thought that his father had the men safely within the *Stephano*, and the *Newfoundland*'s log reveals no second thoughts or fretting of any sort.[43]

On the ice, the men broke into three groups, two of which succeeded in building commendable structures using ice and snow. Many men died during the first night, principally through hypothermia exacerbated by damp clothing. The blizzard continued into the next day and the men concluded that low visibility eliminated the chance of finding the *Newfoundland*, so they remained stationary under the sad impression that a search party would find them (during the second day on the ice, Tuff also led a small party in an unsuccessful attempt to catch the attention of the *Bellaventure*). The sealers remained undiscovered while the blizzard claimed numerous victims over the second night, by which point the men had fallen

into a general state of enfeeblement. On the third day, Wes Kean spotted a small party led by Arthur Mouland from the crow's nest of the *Newfoundland* (which remained icebound), and he in turn hailed the other ships with makeshift smoke signals. Around the same time, a small group lead by Benjamin Piercey managed to walk close enough to the *Bellaventure* to finally raise awareness of the sealers' peril. The *Bellaventure*'s crew eventually located most of the men lost on the ice while the *Stephano* and *Newfoundland* also aided in the search. After it became clear that the rescue effort had reached a diminishing point of return, the *Bellaventure* steamed for St. John's with its grisly cargo.

News of the disaster reached St. John's at 10:06 on the morning of Thursday April 2nd, around one hour after the rescue effort began. Captain Joe Kean of the *Florizel* sent a general warning that a "terrible disaster" had befallen the *Newfoundland* and advised his employers to "keep land offices open during night" until the search for survivors concluded.[44] He ended the message by stating "this is where wireless would have saved catastrophe if on all ships," although certain papers did not include his final sentence.[45] Word spread quickly, and the disaster became the sole discussion "in every office, store and home in the city" in less than an hour after Joe sent his fateful message.[46] Newfoundland's newspapers reflect a profound sense of confusion after the initial report – Wes Kean could not transmit news from the *Newfoundland*, Abram Kean played a comparatively minor role in the rescue and had little to report, while the vast majority of the victims combined with getting to St. John's expediently occupied Captain Randall of the *Bellaventure*. Not

surprisingly, sources unanimously stated that the public principally desired a list of casualties. *The Daily News* reported that, "in the clubs, at the street corners, at the telegraphs, and in the homes, the tragedy was the chief discussion, and the ever anxious cry was 'is there a list of the dead'?"[47] People thronged telegraph stations and Water Street waiting for news, and many grew despondent. At four o'clock on the afternoon of the 2nd, Randall transmitted a list of casualties to St. John's. When received, "for at least a minute not a word was spoken" among those assembled, the news bringing "very little comfort – in fact but increased the general apprehension that the disaster was even worse than as at first reported by the *Florizel.*"[48]

As "business was practically suspended the city over" while St. John's waited for the arrival of the *Bellaventure*, the government carried out impressive preparations for the disaster's victims.[49] Sources agree that the Morris administration conducted methodical and thorough medical preparations. Officials overhauled the Seamen's Institute into a makeshift hospital/morgue with impressive haste, largely organized by a group of the island's mercantile elite who immediately convened upon hearing of the tragedy (John Munn spearheaded the meeting).[50] The *Bellaventure* finally arrived in St. John's around five thirty on Sunday April 5th, at which point people swarmed Harvey Company's premises, apparently "thousands were there, of all ages, classes and creeds."[51] Indeed, the colony's newspapers estimated that literally thousands of people situated themselves at the waterfront to receive the victims of the *Newfoundland* disaster a full day before they even arrived (many prepared dories to row alongside the

Bellaventure and inquire about specifics, "despite the disagreeable weather conditions").[52]

Police cordoned off an area of the Harvey Company's premises where the survivors and bodies would be transferred from the *Bellaventure*, which successfully facilitated the grim procedure while watching citizens "generally raised their hats in deep respect."[53] Although sources are united that the bodies did not exhibit "many of the gruesome details which formed part of the awfulness of the *Greenland* disaster," there is little doubt that the removal of so many frozen corpses left a lasting impression on St. John's.[54] An excellent state of preservation allowed observers to ascertain that death came peacefully, although *The Daily Mail* noted grisly details.[55] The bodies of Reuben Crewe and his son Albert John, who froze together during their "sorrowful duty on the icefield," became a particular source of morbid curiosity.[56] As medical officials at the Seamen's Institute prepared the bodies for burial, the island went into a general state of mourning while anxiously awaiting the arrival of the *Newfoundland* and *Stephano*.

Anxiousness quickly emerged as a strong theme in the aftermath of the *Newfoundland* disaster, and for good reason: the event evolved into a drawn out and very public affair. Although the *Bellaventure* delivered the vast majority of victims, Newfoundland's newspapers indicate that the island's citizenry could not assess the impact of the tragedy until they could physically account for everyone at the ice – including those on the *Southern Cross* (which had been missing since March 31st). Sources reflect a public unwillingness to fully trust wireless updates in case "a name

had been omitted or placed in the wrong list" (which turned out to be a rational concern).[57] The *Newfoundland*'s return became a source of intense anxiety, apparently "the arrival of no ship was ever more longingly looked for."[58] Unlike the loss of the *Florizel* or the *Greenland* disaster in which "the blow came quickly and heavily, in the present case wireless telegraphy told of the misfortune long before the details were forthcoming."[59] The *Newfoundland* finally steamed through the narrows alongside the *Florizel* at nine thirty on the evening of April 7th, while the *Stephano* arrived at five thirty on the evening of the 8th. With the ships, survivors, and bodies associated with the disaster back at terra firma, the processes at play in the wake of the disaster began to emerge.

In addition to a general expenditure of sorrow for the *Newfoundland*'s crew, the island's newspapers identified the collective nature of the men's ordeal early in the disaster's commemoration (even before the *Bellaventure*'s arrival). Sources are united by the opinion that the mutual nature of the sealers' ordeal had a strong bearing on their tragic experience. An editor for *The Daily News* offered an assessment of their tribulation by writing, "the strong sheltering the weak, inspiring the despairing, whispering words of helpfulness, of home and of consolation...what tales of self sacrifice, of devotion, of human sympathy and sanctified courage could those lips now silent in death have told?"[60] Other sources provided identical interpretations of the collective nature of the disaster. Cassie Brown also heavily exploited the theme of collectivity in *Death on the Ice*, which likely has a bearing on why the work leaves such a greater impression than her book on the *Florizel*

disaster. However, the collectivity identified is fundamentally different than that typically associated with disasters at sea because of the particulars of sealing – sealers are not fishermen – they are 'hunters.' The *Newfoundland*'s crew set sail when Mother Nature could be no colder, they steamed and dynamited their way through the natural world, then left the comforts of their temporary home (however minimal) to kill seals (for hard currency), in itself a viscerally rugged act. The men also had to fight through "furies of the pole" and "ice fields so vast and far extending," or other environmental conditions often absent in seafaring labour.[61] Unlike so many others stranded at sea, the 132 sealers from the *Newfoundland* experienced a socioeconomic and environmentally specific ordeal which transcended the collectivity typically associated with the trying nature of survival in maritime disaster. Newfoundland's newspapers projected this dynamic alongside a popular interpretation of where sealers belong in the island's social and industrial complex.

Sources are unanimous in noting that the men "had found death while striving for their means of livelihood," and consistently emphasized the dangers faced by "men who go down to the sea in ships."[62] A strong keynote in the disaster's aftermath is the 'fight' against a harsh environment, or struggle to dominate Mother Nature. Residents frequently expressed the opinion that "the forces of nature hurled them down," and newspapers made much of the dangers faced on an everyday basis by Newfoundland's seafaring population.[63] Tabloids constantly pointed out that the majority of the island's residents "have to battle with the billows for a livelihood,

they have to win their wage on the bottom of the deep," during which a distressing number of "the colony's sons are overtaken and conquered in the fight."[64] A sermon given by Reverend W.H. Thomas at the Congregational Church in St. John's on April 5th provides insight into the mainstream interpretation of the constant struggle with Mother Nature:

> Man in his splendid, his magnificent conflict with and determination to master the forces of nature has been checked, not by god in judgment, but because he has not yet discovered all the laws of nature, how to observe all those laws, and compel them to his service rather than be overwhelmed by them in destruction.[65]

Similar interpretations identify sealing as a campaign against the elements. An editor for *The Daily Mail* bluntly wrote, "Their warfare is accomplished. Their labour is at an end."[66] Viewing the disaster as part of an ongoing quarrel with the natural world went hand-in-hand with the men's designation as 'toilers of the deep.'

Newspapers singled out victims of the *Newfoundland* disaster as masculine providers, and emphasized the breadwinning ethos of the sealers.[67] Sources regularly pointed out that the men followed "one of the ordinary avocations of the country," and that sealers merely supported families through the hunt.[68] The newspapers saw as an especially unfortunate aspect of the disaster that the sealers found "death in its grimmest form awaiting them on the very floes from which they hoped to reap a harvest of profit" (one which quickly evolved).[69] This paradigm likely has origins in a combination of contemporary conceptualizations of masculinity, logic, because the men really did undertake a "search of bread for their loved ones," but also regional economic geography, as "not one district or one town

is affected but practically the entire East Coast."[70] *The Daily News* described fatalities from the *Newfoundland* disaster as "widely spread throughout the country," directly affecting thirty-six outports and dealing a heavy blow to St. John's (not to mention those left permanently handicapped, or the crew of the *Southern Cross*, who hailed from thirty-eight outports).[71] The loss of so many men from such a swath of small communities came with "stunning force," and that their removal would clearly have sweeping financial ramifications, especially in light of residual winter shortages. Indeed, newspapers viewed the sealers' struggle in a socioeconomic context to sensibly identify them as breadwinners engaged in practical labour, and one contributor to *The Daily News* ventured that they "risked and paid the penalty with their lives in order that our industrial one may live."[72] Further, the island's citizenry clearly understood the colony's dependence on seafaring, but sources reflect the widespread opinion that price exacted on the 'colony's most industrious sons' constituted a tribute more than an accident.

'Duty,' 'sacrifice,' and 'tribute' emerged as strong themes in the aftermath of the *Newfoundland* disaster. Unlike the aftermath of other disasters at sea which claim civilian lives, sources did not elaborate on the inherent dangers of seafaring labour. Indeed, sources portrayed sealers as men who "went to wrestle with the forces of nature for the treasures of the deep" in order to provide for loved ones regardless of the dangers involved.[73] Two editorials offer insight into the notion of sacrifice, and warrant quoting at length:

> The hearts of the people throb today, in a common sympathy while Newfoundlanders everywhere pay tribute of sigh to those who have been called upon to pay in their own persons the tolls demanded by the insatiable harvester. Britain has paid the price of her lordship of the seas in the lives of her citizens and almost all of the dominions and colonies of the empire have rendered similar tribute. On Newfoundland the burden has fallen with exceptional severity. The tragedy of Tuesday last is a reminder that the sons of the Empire, wherever they may be, must continue to pay the price of admiralty.[74]

Similarly:

> Soldiers of the industrial army, you who met death on that fateful Tuesday at the hands of Natures forces while in quest of the wealth of the icefields...spirits are drooping as the tale is told of the terrible sacrifices that has been made to provide profits for our captains of industry, a living for yourselfers, your children and your wives. We ask: why did you knowing this hazardous occupation face its perils and its dangers? The answer is one that inspires our faith in man. It was Duty's Call: You obeyed. Duty said you must be an industrious citizen of your country, earn your living by the sweat of your brow, you must struggle with the forces of nature if needs be to make your loved ones respectable members of the community and provide them against the ravages of poverty and starvation. The sealfishery was one of the occupations open to do this. Brave men that you were you gave no thought to its perils and dangers, springing at the call of duty you went forth to suffer and to die.[75]

Other examples are abundant. Many knew that extreme danger would be a constant companion, but newspapers commentators considered it to be merely an extension of the colony's economic condition. Sources openly socialized the excitement that would accompany the following year's seal hunt regardless of the death toll in 1914 (the same dynamic is evident after the *Greenland* disaster). Interpreting the *Newfoundland* disaster as a 'sacrifice' was likely a nationalistic product of its era and a method to brush aside that sealing simply presented a dangerous but traditional employment opportunity for working men. Reverend and possessor of a 'Doctorate

of Divinity' Humphrey Pickard Cowperthwaite went as far as calling the *Newfoundland*'s crew "martyrs to the industrial conditions of the land in which they lived."[76] Such an interpretation is a marked contrast to industrial disasters in which civilians are killed – when the *Florizel* disaster claimed many 'captains of industry' four years later, sources certainly do not classify them as 'industrial martyrs,' nor did they mention 'tribute.' In any event, popular consensus appears to be that as labourers, as *men*, sealers had a 'duty' to assert their dominance over Mother Nature, to reap the ice floes of seal pelts, and, when necessary, die. However, the topic of masculinity as it relates to the *Newfoundland* disaster needs to be assessed, as it provides compelling insight into the gendered dimension of risk at sea.

While environmental variables will always influence the plethora of dangers faced by seafaring labourers, recklessness had a major bearing on the *Newfoundland* disaster to the extent that it represented a failing built into the class relations of an industry in decline. Sean Cadigan notes that a "deadly combination of masculinity and paternalism" bound sealers and their employers, and contemporary newspapers are congruent on the risky nature of the sealfishery.[77] The extremely dangerous nature of sealing and the persistence of events like the *Greenland* disaster did not dissuade would-be sealers from crewing on sealing steamers. Much the same as other forms of seafaring labour, paternalism and masculinity combined to form an ethos of resilience that strayed beyond mere recklessness. In the case of sealing, such a dynamic could not be more overt than the *Newfoundland* disaster. The thirty-four sealers who returned to the *Newfoundland* after Wes Kean ordered

his crew to the *Stephano* indicates that a gendered interpretation of risk strongly influenced the event memorialized as 'death on the ice.'

The disaster's first inquiry – not to be confused with the second inquiry – reveals a remarkably unorganized state of affairs on the *Newfoundland* before Wes sent his men to the ice (the majority of sealers examined insisted that they did not even know their destination). According to Thomas Dawson the only direction the men received after leaving the *Newfoundland* was "sang out" from aloft by Kean, who merely exclaimed, "the second hand will look after you now, boys."[78] Around halfway through the hike, a number of the men became uneasy after observing indicators of inclement weather and halted their progress to discuss the wisest course of action, while others walked past them. The interval of uncertainty lasted for around five minutes, after which the apprehensive crewmen decided that proceeding to the *Stephano* presented too dangerous a prospect.

Thirty-four men turned around and made for the *Newfoundland*, and, according to Stephen Jordan, "the rest of the men went toward the *Stephano*, but before they left a number of them started shouting out after us and calling us 'cowards.'"[79] Because the majority of men pressed on to the *Stephano* most sealers accepted the option as a natural choice, although many admitted entertaining doubts about the weather. Josiah Holloway testified that he voiced his concerns to surrounding coworkers, to which Alfred Maidment of Shambler's Cove replied, "well boys, if the rest can do it we can do it" (Maidment died on the ice).[80] By comparison, when the inquiry's overseer Judge Knight asked sealer Edmund Short why he chose

to make for the *Newfoundland*, Short replied "I turned back because I thought it was going to be stormy and I did not see anything ahead of me but death."[81] The evidence suggests that the 132 sealers who ignored their shipmates concerns hiked toward the *Stephano* while emasculating the returning party in a blatant instance of a gendered disregard for safety (albeit an instance influenced by various societal factors).

The returning party eventually reached the *Newfoundland*, by which point they "could not see 100 yards" because the blizzard they indirectly observed from afar had descended.[82] According to Cassie Brown, Kean confronted the thirty-four returnees and accused them of being "a crowd of grandmothers," but not surprisingly such a statement is not reflected through the inquiry.[83] Kean maintained that he admonished the men for not returning under the direction of a master watch, and sent them below. Three of the four returnees examined insisted that they traveled among the rearmost of the men to return to the *Newfoundland*, and that by the time they returned Kean had gone below, so the exact nature of their reception is difficult to gauge (Brown very well may have based her interpretation on now-lost ethnographic data). [84] In any event, with the ethos of risk taking and masculinity known to influence sealing, it seems perfectly reasonable that Kean may have emasculated the returnees for their decision not to 'take it.'

The matter of the thirty-four returnees did not garner attention until a few days after the victims of the disaster had returned to St. John's. Insofar as the historian can assess, the public reception to the returnees can be seen as an

unspoken admission to the dangers of sealing and the sometimes-imprudent attitude of men on the ice. However, an editorial in *The Daily Mail* (the forerunner of the FPU's *Fishermen's Advocate*) published on April 8th sheds light on conceptualizations of masculinity amongst sealers by extolling the:

> Brave fellows who left on that eventual morning, but who would not court death returned to the *Newfoundland* and escaped with their lives. Some one may have called them cowards, but their conduct does not merit the term. We believe them heroes just as much as the poor fellows who died. They knew they were human, they were men of experience, they knew what it would mean to be out in a blizzard all night. The *Greenland* disaster was fresh in their minds. They knew the viciousness of the storm and rather than take the chances of their lives, they returned. Had the story left no deathly results in its wake, they would have been stigmatized as cowards, but who will call them such now? Life was sweet to them, as it is to most of us. Wives, children and parents depended on them, and rather than jeopardize themselves they returned to their vessel.[85]

The editorial reveals the demonstration of mastery over Mother Nature typically associated with sealers – it bluntly states that if none of the *Newfoundland*'s crew died then the returnees would have been 'stigmatized as cowards.' Instead of heeding the concerns of their shipmates, 132 of the *Newfoundland*'s crew fell victim to a deadly blend of paternalism, masculinity, and the pressure from captains to ignore risk whilst in pursuit of declining profits. Such a dynamic substantiates beyond a reasonable doubt that the gendered dimension of risk played a major role in the causation of the *Newfoundland* disaster. The same cannot necessarily be said for the *Southern Cross* (although Clarke's decision to fight a blizzard while rounding Cape Race is not congruent with feminine delicacy) and a gendered approach to danger did not influence the wreck of the *Florizel*. Unfortunately, an ethos of

masculinity and a careless approach to danger remained commonplace in the sealing industry well after the disasters of 1914, and as one antiquarian author noted in 1933, "there is never any disaster ahead for them till it comes."[86] Nevertheless, the theme of sacrifice reached its apex in the disasters immediate aftermath but quickly evolved into collective financial paternalism, or 'practical sympathy.'

A turning point in public opinion on how to interpret the disaster appears to be Sunday April 5th, during which discussion and sermons among the various churches in St. John's focused solely on the unfortunate event (except Cochrane Street Church, which celebrated an anniversary). Effectively every sermon drew parallels to the *Greenland* disaster with "its many similarities," specifically a 'disaster fund' established to alleviate the financial burden faced by grieving families.[87] Not surprisingly, people interpreted the *Newfoundland* disaster through a heavily religious response and lens – sources identified the victims as "Christian Heroes" who "accepted their doom with patent resignation, and earnest prayer to God for themselves and those who called them husband and son."[88] Newspapers also pointed out the ability of men to pray before death as "they were not called away suddenly."[89] In any event, the *Newfoundland* made port two days after the Sunday sermons, and the financial impact of the disaster became the island's most visible public spectacle during a 'Citizens Meeting' held in the courthouse of St. John's on the same evening.

Citizens "from every profession, business, and trade" descended on the city courthouse on the evening of Tuesday April 7th to show their sympathy and establish a 'disaster fund' through which monetary donations would be accepted and given to stricken families.[90] Sources are congruent that people partook in the meeting "irrespective of class or creed," and that the considerable event generated maximum attendance.[91] Many of the island's commercial and religious elite gave brief speeches, and all agreed that 'practicality' defined the gathering's primary objective. The speeches conveyed reveal a deep sense of collective paternalism, or a responsibility to proactively seek monetary donations because "the widow and orphan must be our care."[92] Clearly, such a dynamic truly meant well, but the notion of 'duty' to provide for families is notable, as it contrasts to the same paternalistic 'duty' that sources claimed the *Newfoundland*'s crew demonstrated on the ice.

The fund rapidly generated promising statistics, with cities and individuals alike making a number of generous donations including $5,000 from New York City's city council, $5,000 from Toronto's city council, and $500.00 from Sir Joseph Outerbridge (then on vacation in Bermuda). Newspapers also drew parallels to the fund established in 1912 to assist victims and families of the *Titanic* disaster, apparently donating to which "was regarded as a privilege."[93] All understood that monetary donations would be extremely beneficial, so contributors to the fund had their names run in various newspapers for months after the disaster. Sources are unanimous that "the most satisfactory aspect of these universal expressions of grief is the majority of them are accompanied by material help."[94] Newfoundlanders

considered no sum too small, and considerable generosity met solicitors who traveled to outports. Pleading for donations understandably emerged as a dynamic after the funds creation at the courthouse on April 7th and remained a constant theme for many months. However, the meeting serves other purposes to historians, as it highlighted the community binding effect of the disaster (initially), but also represented a turning point in public interpretation of the 1914 sealing season – the speeches reveal an introductory acceptance that "the extent of the disaster will be more than trebled," or that the *Southern Cross* was lost at sea beyond a reasonable doubt.[95]

That communities are typically brought together by disaster is well known, and the immediate aftermath of the sealing disasters of 1914 is no exception. Newfoundlanders found themselves "impelled by a common sense of duty, inspired by a common sympathy, united in a common sorrow," according to Edward Patrick Roche's courthouse speech on April 7th (Roche went on to become the archbishop of the island's Roman Catholic church).[96] While working men defined the victims of the disasters of 1914, Roche's statement sums up the general feelings being socialized: the entire island certainly accepted the sealing accidents as tragedies (the absence of Corner Brook's newspaper *The Western Star* for the period is frustrating).[97] Individuals and companies carried out various undertakings at the community level in St. John's – J.P. Kiely, owner of the Nickel Theater donated the proceeds of his establishment on Easter Monday to the disaster fund, the Pope Furniture Factory offered "horses, vans and half a dozen men," the Salvation Army provided as much

support as possible, and the Reid Newfoundland Company provided a "special" dining car and cook to those accompanying the bodies traveling to various outports.[98] *The Daily Mail* also produced a special edition dedicated to the fund exclusively focused on the *Newfoundland* disaster, which sold 8,000 copies.[99] Other examples are abundant, but the opinion that "every Newfoundlander must feel his pulse throb in unison with every heart," captures the general theme of community support and unity in the immediate wake of disaster.[100]

The *Stephano*'s arrival on the evening after the Citizens Meeting fulfilled the second last outstanding particular desired by Newfoundland's citizenry. Once Abram steamed into St. John's and delivered the last of the *Newfoundland*'s frozen bodies, the colony waited in vain for the *Southern Cross*. Although people widely expressed concrete disbelief during the Citizens Meeting, many residents clung to the belief "that there is always hope from the ocean."[101] Sadly, the *Kyle*'s return after its unsuccessful search for the missing sealer finalized the matter – the colony realized its 'worst fears,' and the full weight of the disasters began to sink in.

By the second week of the April the government had shipped many of the bodies home via rail, and the island's newspapers followed the grim gauntlet astutely. Detective Bryne accompanied thirty-one bodies to Conception, Trinity and Bonavista Bays, while Detective Tobin traveled around the eastern contingent of the Avalon Peninsula engaged in the same task. Understandably a major event throughout various outports, the arrival of bodies received significant attention, specifically Bonavista, where *The Daily News* reported "many distressing

incidents."[102] An additional sixteen sealers remained in the Seamen's Institute in St. John's, as their respective outports could not be accessed by rail or because of winter conditions. However, authorities assigned the grim task to Captain W.C. Windsor, whose conduct during the sealing season in the SS *Beothic* the public universally regarded with contempt (he raced ahead of the fleet to be the first in port). Windsor set sail on April 9th, and on the 14th solicitors began canvassing the island for donations to the disaster fund.

During the drawn out ordeal resolutions of sympathy flooded the colony from across the globe, from as far off as Rhodesia to the staff of the Quaker Oats factory in Peterborough, Ontario. The island even received notice that "the Queen and I deeply deplore the great suffering and loss of life" in the disaster from King George V on April 4th.[103] The first official inquiry into the disaster began as early as April 6th, and the sealing fleet slowly returned to their various ports over the ensuing weeks, notably the SS *Nascopie*, which arrived in St. John's carrying Coaker on the evening of April 9th. The survivors among the *Newfoundland*'s crew also publicly exonerated their captain early on, stating that he "did exactly what any other captain would have done under similar circumstances" and that "no blame whatever attaches to Captain Wes. Kean."[104] The same would not be said for Kean's father, Abram. However, before examining the disaster's political dimension, the manner in which Newfoundlanders conceptualized safety requires analysis.

Not surprisingly, sources consistently identified the *Greenland* disaster as a contextualizing parallel to the tragedy which befell the *Newfoundland*'s crew.

Colonial residents agreed that "the lesson of the *Greenland* disaster was not learned," which resulted in the dominion paying a toll in lives.[105] Various sources reflect a popular desire to effect change in the industry, but the majority of suggestions could not be adopted practically. St. John's lawyer and politician Michael Gibbs spearheaded the theme of safety by penning an article in *The Daily News* two days after the *Bellaventure* made port. He suggested that sealers be "provided with camp accommodations" that could be erected as shelters in the event of a blizzard.[106] People widely criticized Gibb's suggestion as "worse than useless in a gale," and a flurry of speculation arose culminating in a submission from J.P Howley that the sealers' salvation would be found in procuring Inuit from Labrador and pressing them onboard (apparently inspired by a long forgotten Arctic misadventure, 'the Polaris disaster'). Howley advanced that the polar natives could "in a very short time build snow houses, make fires with seals fat...as well as to do a little cooking or boil water for a hot drink and thereby probably save the lives of the entire party."[107] People received his suggestion affably, but others mentioned that canines would also provide practical companionship and that matches should be kept in glass bottles to prevent moisture damage. Thankfully, sealers would be benefited far more through public opinion on shipboard safety.

From Joe Kean's first infamous message to St. John's on April 2nd, the fact that wireless telegraphy could have prevented the *Newfoundland* disaster resonated with the colony's citizenry. Wireless communication had historically been employed in the industry as a method of relaying the locations of seal patches, and had nothing

to do with safety. In the words of one newspaper contributor, "to most of us wireless looked an expensive luxury, rather than a necessity," but newspapers demanded that such technology become mandatory.[108] The adoption of technology capable of preventing similar tragedies became a strong theme in the wake of the *Newfoundland* disaster. Sources further socialized the need for rocket apparatuses and thermometers, but mainly focused on wireless telegraphy. Clearly, the possibility existed that the men would not have been found on the ice even if the *Newfoundland* did possess a wireless, but such a possibility hardly negated the preventative potential. As one editorial stated, "it does not seem that in all the brief history of the wireless there has been a clearer case of the salvation which it might have brought."[109]

The removal of the *Newfoundland*'s wireless for exclusively financial reasons caused people to ask questions like, "were we placing too high an estimate upon the value of seals and too low an estimate upon the value of men?"[110] The universal adoption of wireless telegraphy on sealing steamers could not have been a more blatant requirement – the fundamental point is that shipowners knew that wireless telegraphy could contribute to both safety and productivity, but refused to institute it for financial reasons. The *Newfoundland* disaster simply would have been less likely if shipowners installed a wireless device on the vessel. Nevertheless, although the disaster initially strengthened community ties, widespread discontent amongst the 'toilers' with the 'fishocracy' began fermenting. The process took on an

interesting dynamic because of Coaker, the 'fisherman's hero' and President of the (FPU), who traveled with the *Nascopie* during the 1914 sealing season.

Coaker sailed as an observer under Captain George Barbour on the *Nascopie* during the 1914 sealing season to generally get first hand experience with the sealfishery. He kept a journal over the course of his voyage published by *The Daily Mail*, which has since received scholarly study. Barbour picked up Joe Kean's wireless message addressed to St. John's at 10:06 regarding the 'great tragedy,' which "caused tremendous excitement and sympathy on board."[111] Coaker recorded that no man on the *Nascopie* wanted to pursue seals, but instead accompany the *Bellaventure* into port as a sign of respect for "our almost assassinated countrymen," especially considering that the fleet had exceedingly poor luck finding seals at the front.[112] Coaker radioed Job Brothers and relayed his opinion that the fleet should make for St. John's, but company officials told him not to interfere, after which point his log becomes a vehement rant against the "slave owners" of Water Street (it also appears heavily edited and engineered for maximum political impact).[113] Of the merchants, he recorded that "it is not the seventy seven dead bodies of sealers sacrificed for greed they are interested in, but seals, which apparently are of more interest to them."[114] Although Coaker's original journal from the trip does not survive, Brown heavily exploited the newspaper installments in *Death on the Ice*, and they are probably what inspired her to focus on the classist dimension of the disaster. After adding a number of politically charged postscripts written after his return to St. John's, Coaker concluded the journal and then began the next stage in

his battle with the 'fishocracy.' He began in earnest on April 11th through an article published in *The Daily Mail.*

Coaker's article described the *Newfoundland* disaster as "the price of negligence and indifference," and represented a vicious attack on both Water Street and Abram Kean, who he specifically blamed as personally responsible for the tragedy.[115] Coaker also identified the inquiry as a "superficial" and "incomplete" waste of time, accused various government interests including the "so called Minister of Justice" of gross incompetence, unconditionally demanded sweeping legislative reform, and labeled *Newfoundland*, SS *Ranger*, SS *Kite*, SS *Viking*, and *Southern Cross* "floating sealing coffins" that "must never again be allowed to clear the seal fishery."[116] He concluded by summing up the widespread discontent expressed within the sealing fleet regarding the show of neglect associated with the "seventy seven poor Terra Nova's noble sons" on the *Bellaventure* (his journal had not yet been published).[117] Kean immediately charged Coaker with libel, and a bitter argument ensued among Water Street interests, Kean and Coaker over the latter's 'floating sealing coffins' comment.

The Daily News published the first major rebuttal to Coaker's attack (aside from the libel charge) in an editorial on April 13th. The article noted that the inquiry sought to "ascertain facts, to decide whether criminality attaches to any parties, and to report," and insinuated that Coaker's hasty condemnation of the proceeding placed those involved in an awkward position, as the inquiry had only run for five days and many witnesses had yet to recover (both Coaker and Abram had only been

on the island for two days).[118] Regarding Coaker's charges against shipowners and negligence, the article dryly stated that "if one hundredth part of the energy displayed in the discussion of cooks and beans had been devoted to the larger questions surrounding the sealing voyage, practical results might have followed."[119] Ultimately, especially in the wake of the *Greenland* disaster, *The Daily News* declared, "successive governments, owners and shareholders of the sealing fleet, the sealers themselves, the newspapers and the public have all been neglectful."[120] It further scoffed that Coaker demonstrated bad form in a time of universal sorrow through his aggressive accusations based on flimsy evidence.[121] Before long Abram joined the fray, and shortly thereafter Coaker responded "to Captain Kean's vapourings," beginning a very public and drawn out conflict.[122] However, the conflict had as much to do with the *Newfoundland* disaster as it did with the FPU and the political climate in St. John's.

Coaker founded the FPU on 3 November 1908 on Newfoundland's northeast coast. The organization dedicated itself to securing financial safety for fishermen and combating classist mercantile or government economic oppression. On 2 December 1914 at the Mechanics Hall in St. John's during the Fifth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council of the FPU, Coaker made clear his desires by stating "the FPU has come to stay, and will in future be the chief factor dominating the political, social and commercial affairs of the colony."[123] By 1914 the organization had reached the apex of its political influence and subscribership, with about 20,000 members.[124] The FPU frequently tried to increase the integrity of

maritime working conditions in a legislative capacity and generally better the lot of Newfoundland's fishermen. The disasters of 1914 understandably deeply bothered the colony's seafaring population on the grounds of social inequality.

Eventually, the inquiry cleared Abram of any wrongdoing and deemed the *Newfoundland* and *Southern Cross* disasters an 'Act of God,' although the inquiry into the former vessel eventually produced commendable results.[125] Nevertheless, Coaker remained fixated on barring Kean from the sealfishery. As Coaker announced on 16 November 1914 at the Sixth Annual Convention of the FPU at Catalina, he thought that the *Newfoundland* disaster could be attributed to Kean's "lack of good judgment and failure to take ordinary precautions."[126] According to Coaker, that Kean did not search for the *Newfoundland*'s crew after putting them over the side made him guilty of criminal negligence: Coaker believed that Kean killed the men by not being proactive and failing to confirm that the crew had unmistakably reached the *Newfoundland*.[127] While Coaker's commitment to Newfoundland's 'toilers' cannot be questioned, one is left with the impression that Kean's support for the Morris government influenced his actions. Further, the Morris administration did not advocate many of the FPU's initiatives, as did it outrage Coaker by agreeing to surrender Newfoundland's eventual war effort to the Newfoundland Patriotic Association.[128] It also seems that in Coaker's eyes, Kean's alleged culpability in both the *Greenland* and *Newfoundland* disasters turned him into a personification of the sealfishery's perils – preventable perils, according to Coaker and the FPU.

Differing interpretations of the *Newfoundland* disaster and the commission's conclusion further intensified discontent between the 'toilers' and the 'fishocracy,' as the former did not think that 'God' caused the tragedy. The inquiry's conclusion that Mother Nature caused the tragedies of 1914 placed the events within a context that portrayed them as inevitable. Such a dynamic is supported by the overwhelming amount of content focused on 'duty,' 'sacrifice' and 'tribute.' The inquiry and Newfoundland's newspapers combine to reveal that the government officially responded to the disaster with an indifferent attitude to the risks of seafaring labour: essentially that real men demonstrate their "duty" to face "perils and dangers" and proudly 'take it' to be breadwinners.[129] In the war with Mother Nature (specifically sealing), the inquiry concluded that casualties would be a matter of due course similar to any other conflict. Indeed, the quote from a colonial elite regarding the fallen sealers that, "were a monument to be erected to their memory the epitaph could be inscribed 'sacred to the memory of those brave and hardy solders of the industrial army who struggled, suffered and died on the battlefield of the Frozen Regions for their captains of industry'" is a stark contrast to the candid motto of the FPU, 'to each his own.'[130] Not surprisingly, Newfoundland's fishermen demonstrated an unwillingness to be the cannon fodder of an 'Industrial Army.'

The division in interpretation of the *Newfoundland* disaster lies in the 'toilers' not accepting that taking risks at sea needed to be an inevitable aspect of seafaring labour. Coaker and much of the FPU had long believed that Newfoundland's

fisheries required a formalization of social relations between merchants and labourers. Simply put, the reckless approach to danger and paternalism associated with masters like Abram Kean epitomized a needlessly perilous workplace. Coaker and the 'toilers' clearly felt that dying at sea – or, in the case of the *Newfoundland*, literally freezing to death – could hardly be accepted as an inevitable occupational hazard if preventative measures could be adopted. The public reaction to 'death on the ice' markedly differed from the *Greenland* disaster because the FPU provided the political means for fishermen to voice their discontent with social inequality and launch a coordinated effort to effect regulatory and legislative intervention to hold the dangers of the sealfishery in check. The nightmarish nature of the *Newfoundland* disaster combined with the political climate in St. John's to challenge the notion that being a 'working man who got wet' required one to take risks at sea and potentially face the prospect of an industrial disaster. The fundamental implication of Coaker's disagreement with the inquiry's conclusion lay with his belief that only foolhardy logic could deem events like the *Newfoundland* and *Greenland* disasters as inevitable sacrifices – instead, he classified them as unnecessary class-based tragedies.

Coaker continued to call for Kean's arrest, but the outbreak of World War One on 28 July 1914 drew attention away from the feud (although Coaker did voice his desire to apprehend Kean at the FPU's annual meeting in 1915).[131] Residents of St. John's met the initiation of hostilities with a crescendo of nationalistic saber rattling, and the evolution of the Great War shifted attention from the problems plaguing Newfoundland's sealfishery to the battlefields of Europe. Focus shifted

from conflict not between classes, but between countries. While the island's citizenry hardly forgot the disasters of 1914, the dramatic change in political climate between April and July of 1914 and the heavy death toll sustained by the Newfoundland Regiment thereafter all but eclipsed the long-term social impact of the tragedies (so did Coaker's eventual support for conscription).

The *Newfoundland* disaster of 1914 remains the colony's most infamous disaster at sea, and it occurred within a specific socioeconomic and political context that made its impact much different than the *Greenland* disaster. The exceptionally visceral nature of frozen bodies being delivered and identified under glaring lights in the Seamen's Institute at St John's shocked Newfoundland's residents to a profound degree. Perhaps more importantly, the political influence of the FPU allowed working people to meaningfully voice their anger (the preventable nature of the disaster exacerbated matters). Sadly, the disaster struck down a working-class labour force engaged in a notoriously dangerous form of seafaring labour, which is reflected through the event's paltry immediate aftermath. The *Newfoundland* disaster also provides telling insight into the gendered nature of facing risk at sea through the thirty-four returnees, and the event's social impact is representative of social inequality between Newfoundland's 'toilers' and the 'fishocracy.' Although Coaker's strategic campaign against Water Street certainly did have sweeping long-term political ramifications, the outbreak of hostilities altered the island's focus to an unprecedented degree. Indeed, the colony's citizenry focused their attention elsewhere hastily, and it seems that popular consensus became "may

many long year elapse before the unenviable record of April, 1914 – Black April – shall be even remotely approached."[132] Nevertheless, while headlines in St. John's sensationalized the *Newfoundland* disaster during April, many anxiously awaited the arrival of the *Southern Cross* and its 174 crewman – the ship had been missing since March 31st.

Endnotes – Chapter Three

[1] *The Daily News*, 3 April 1914.
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[3] Cassie Brown, *Death on the Ice* (St. John's, 1972).
[4] Shannon Ryan and Martha Drake, *Seals and Sealers: A Pictorial History of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery, Based on the Cater Andrews Collection* (St. John's, 1987), 31.
[5] *The Evening Telegram*, 6 March 1894, see also, Ryan, *Seals and Sealers*, 31.
[6] Ryan, *Seals and Sealers*, 31.
[7] Ibid., 31.
[8] Chafe, 170-1.
[9] Ibid., 170-1.
[10] James Candow, *Of Men and Seals: A History of the Newfoundland Seal Hunt* (Ottawa, 1989), 16.
[11] Eric Sager, "The Merchants of Water Street and Capital Investment in Newfoundland's Traditional Economy" in *The Enterprising Canadians*, ed. L.R. Fischer and Eric Sager (St. John's, 1979), 83.
[12] Ibid., 83.
[13] Shannon Ryan, "Newfoundland Spring Sealing Disasters to 1914," *Northern Mariner*. Vol. 3, No. 3 (July 1993), 15.
[14] Candow, 17.
[15] Ryan, 1993, 15.
[16] Ibid., 16.
[17] Ryan, 1993, 17.
[18] See "Mastiff, SS," in *The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 480, see also, Ryan, 1993, 37.
[19] Candow, 69.
[20] Ibid., 69.
[21] See "*Greenland*, SS" in *The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 726, see also, Ryan, 1987, 17.
[22] Ryan, 1987, 17.
[23] Ryan, 1993, 36.
[24] *The Evening Telegram*, 26 March 1898.
[25] Ibid., 26 March 1898.
[26] Ryan, 1993, 36.
[27] *The Evening Telegram*, 26 March 1898.
[28] See, "*Huntress*, SS" in *The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 11, see also, W. Howe Greene, *The Wooden Walls Amongst the Ice Floes: Telling the Romance of the Newfoundland Sealfishery* (London, 1933), 62.
[29] Ryan, 1993, 32, see also, Greene, 62.
[30] See "*Huntress*, SS" in *The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 11.

[31] *The Evening Telegram*, 28 March 1898, see also, Green, 62.
[32] Ibid., 28, 30 March 1898.
[33] Ibid., 28 March 1898.
[34] Ibid., 28 March 1898.
[35] Ibid., 23 March 1898.
[36] Ibid., 23 March 1898.
[37] Ibid., 23 March 1898.
[38] Ibid., 30 March 1898.
[39] Ibid., 30 March 1898.
[40] Ryan, 1993, 36.
[41] *The Evening Telegram*, 30 March 1898.
[42] Melvin Baker, "President Coaker's Log of His Trip to the Ice Floe last Spring in S.S. *Nascopie*," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*. Vol. 25 No. 2 (2010), 234, see also, Chafe, 141.
[43] Magisterial Inquiry into the Newfoundland Disaster, GN 121.51.
[44] *The Evening Telegram* 2 April 1914, *The Daily Mail*, 2 April 1914.
[45] *The Evening Telegram*, 2 April 1914, see also, *The Daily Mail*, 2 April 1914. *The Daily Mail*, a right wing conservative publication, did not publish Kean's final sentence about the wireless apparatus.
[46] *The Daily News*, 3 April 1914, see also, *The Daily Mail*, 3 April 1914.
[47] *The Daily News*, 3 April 1914, see also, *The Evening Telegram*, 3 April 1914, see also, *The Daily Mail*, 3 April 1914.
[48] *The Daily Mail*, 2 April 1914, see also, *The Daily News*, 3 April 1914.
[49] *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1914.
[50] *The Daily News*, 3 April 1914, see also, *The Daily Mail*, 3 April 1914. Also present were J.R. Bennett, J. Harvey, G. Harvey, and many of the directors of the *Bellaventure* Company.
[51] *The Daily News*, 6 April 1914, *The Evening Telegram*, 6 April 1914.
[52] *The Daily News*, 3, 4 April 1914.
[53] Ibid., 6 April 1914, see also, *The Evening Telegram*, 6 April 1914 see also, *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1914.
[54] *The Daily News*, 6 April 1914.
[55] *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1914.
[56] *The Daily News*, 6 April 1914.
[57] Ibid., 6 April 1914.
[58] Ibid., 6 April 1914.
[59] Ibid., 6 April 1914.
[60] Ibid., 3 April 1914.
[61] Greene, 42, 43.
[62] *The Daily News*, 6 April 1914.
[63] *The Daily Mail*, 3 April 1914.
[64] *The Daily News*, 8 April 1914, see also, *The Daily Mail*, 6 April 1914.

[65] *The Daily News*, 7 April 1914.
[66] *The Daily Mail*, 3 April 1914.
[67] *The Daily News*, 6 April 1914.
[68] *The Daily Mail*, 3 April 1914.
[69] Ibid., 3 April 1914.
[70] *The Daily News*, 7 April 1914. See also, Figure 1.1.
[71] *The Daily News*, 7 April 1914.
[72] Ibid., 7 April 1914.
[73] *The Daily Mail*, 3 April 1914.
[74] *The Daily News*, 3 April 1914.
[75] *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1914.
[76] Ibid., 8 April 1914.
[77] Sean Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History* (Toronto, 2009), 184
[78] Magisterial Inquiry into the Newfoundland Disaster, GN 121.4.
[79] Ibid., GN 121.8.
[80] Ibid., GN 121.29.
[81] Ibid., GN 121.18.
[82] Ibid., GN 121.8.
[83] Brown, 1972, 85.
[84] Magisterial Inquiry into the Newfoundland Disaster, GN 121.11.
[85] *The Daily Mail*, 8 April 1914.
[86] Greene, 68.
[87] *The Daily News*, 7 April 1914.
[88] *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1914.
[89] *The Daily News*, 6 April 1914.
[90] *The Daily Mail*, 8 April 1914, see also, *The Daily News*, 8 April 1914.
[91] *The Daily News*, 8 April 1914, see also, *The Daily Mail*, 8 April 1914.
[92] *The Daily Mail*, 3 April 1914.
[93] *The Daily News*, 14 April 1914.
[94] *The Daily Mail*, 7 April 1914.
[95] Ibid., 8 April 1914, see also, *The Daily News*, 8 April 1914. It should be noted that the minutes from the Citizen Meeting are published in tandem with articles expressing extreme anxiety for the *Southern Cross*, but the gathering is the first instance of 'sealing disasters' (plural) being openly socialized.
[96] *The Daily News*, 8 April 1914.
[97] *The Trinity Enterprise*, 4 April 1914, see also, *The Twillingate Sun*, 4 April 1914.
[98] *The Daily News*, 6, 9, April 1914.
[99] *The Daily Mail*, 6 April 1914.
[100] Ibid., 3 April 1914.
[101] *The Daily News*, 8 April 1914.
[102] Ibid., 7 April 1914.
[103] *The Royal Gazette*, 4 April 1914.

[104] *The Daily News*, 6 April 1914.
[105] Ibid., 13 April 1914.
[106] Ibid., 6 April 1914.
[107] Ibid. 9 April 1914.
[108] Ibid., 17 April 1914.
[109] *The Daily Mail*, 6 April 1914.
[110] Ibid., 3 April 1914.
[111] Baker, 236.
[112] Ibid., 240.
[113] Ibid., 240.
[114] Ibid., 239.
[115] *The Daily Mail*, 11 April 1914.
[116] Ibid., 11 April 1914.
[117] Ibid., 11 April 1914.
[118] *The Daily News*, 13 April 1914.
[119] Ibid., 13 April 1914.
[120] Ibid., 13 April 1914.
[121] Ibid., 13 April 1914.
[122] *The Evening Telegram*, 22 April 1914.
[123] William Ford Coaker, ed., *Twenty Years of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland: From 1909 – 1929* (St. John's, 1930), 64-5.
[124] Robert Cuff, "A Brief History of the FPU" in *A Coaker Anthology*, Robert Cuff, ed. (St. John's, 1986), 6.
[125] Shannon Ryan, *The Ice Hunters: A History of Newfoundland Sealing to 1914* (St. John's, 1994), 318-19
[126] Coaker, 81.
[127] Ibid., 81.
[128] Cadigan, 187
[129] *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1914.
[130] Ibid., 4 April 1914.
[131] Coaker, 98.
[132] *The Daily News*, 1 May 1914.

Chapter Four – SS *Southern Cross* Disaster of 1914

"It is hoped that something will soon be heard from the overdue ship, as anxiety for her safety is increasing hourly," reported the St. John's based *Evening Telegram* on 3 April 1914 regarding the fate of the SS *Southern Cross*.[1] Captain George Clarke sailed the *Southern Cross* to the Gulf of St. Lawrence on March 3rd to engage in Newfoundland's annual seal hunt – a voyage from which he and his crew of 174 never returned. On the evening of March 31st, a massive storm slammed into Newfoundland's east coast, prompting a series of events now immortalized as the 'Newfoundland Sealing Disaster of 1914.' The same storm that sunk the *Southern Cross* also descended on the crew of the sealing vessel the SS *Newfoundland*, who found themselves stranded 'on the ice' in a major blizzard between March 31st and April 2nd, resulting in 78 deaths through hypothermia and many other serious injuries. As survivors and casualties from the *Newfoundland* disaster made their way back to St. John's, uncertainty about the whereabouts of the *Southern Cross* intensified. After a systematic inspection Newfoundland's eastern waters, search vessels unsuccessfully returned to port without finding a trace of the *Southern Cross*, and the ship's loss remains one of Newfoundland's most tragic maritime disasters. While the cause of the *Newfoundland* disaster could be promptly investigated, the loss of the *Southern Cross* remains a mystery, its unknown fate leaving a "story without a climax."[2] The *Southern Cross* disaster stands alone in Newfoundland's history as a significant disaster at sea that did not generate historically meaningful processes due to the nature of its loss and labour force. The *Southern Cross*'s

disappearance offers irrefutable evidence into how class-based inequality can repress the commemorational unfolding of a disaster at sea. An assessment of its loss and the event's subsequent reception provides insight into how an industrial disaster can be literally and figuratively erased from the historical record.

The chronicle of the *Southern Cross* begins with master shipwright Colin Archer. Born in Larvik, Norway, in 1832, Archer designed over 200 vessels throughout his career. Norwegian scientist and explorer Fridtjof Nansen led Archer to the apex of his career in 1892 by conscripting him into the budding industry of polar exploration. Nansen's early polar ambitions are vague, but appear to stem from a desire to explore 'more' of the Arctic than his predecessors and investigate ocean currents, a goal only attainable through revisions in naval architecture. Nansen and Archer created the *Fram*, a 127 foot expeditionary ship boasting a hull built "somewhat like a salad bowl, with smooth, sloping sides" that could withstand the extreme pressure of ice in polar regions, allowing it to be pushed through the floes and thus 'float' over conditions that would crush other vessels.[3] The *Fram* subsequently made numerous Arctic and Antarctic voyages (including ferrying Roald Amundsen's successful 1910 expedition to the South Pole), and presently resides in the '*Fram* Museum' in Oslo. However, six years prior to his partnership with Nansen, Archer oversaw the construction of twin ships, the *Pollux* and *Castor*.

Archer initially named the *Southern Cross* the *Pollux*, and built it at his 'Pigs Point Shipyard' in Arendal, Norway, in 1886. Although the original plans for the *Pollux* have not survived, Archer designed the ship as a three-masted barque with

preliminary dimensions of 107.7 feet in length, 28.2 feet in breadth, and 15.2 feet in depth, displacing 310 tons.[4] An architectural predecessor to *Fram* in terms of hull construction, the *Pollux* sported a rounded hull and stern, with one-meter thick oak sides sheathed in Greenheart.[5] Constructed for Axel Herlofsen and owned by H. Svendsen, the *Pollux* partook in the Norwegian whaling industry for eleven years, switching to the ownership of a D. Andreasen in 1894.[6]

The *Pollux* changed hands in 1896, when Norwegian Antarctic explorer Carsten Egeberg Borchgrevink purchased it for his 'British Antarctic Expedition: 1898 – 1900,' for $25,000 (or $80,000 Norwegian Krones).[7] Borchgrevink received $200,000 in funding from media mogul Sir George Newnes, who owned *The Strand Magazine* in which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 'Sherlock Holmes' series had been published in the preceding five years.[8] He renamed the *Pollux* the *Southern Cross* and employed the firm of I. & A. Jensen, based in Fredrickstad, Norway, to install a "360 horsepower triple expansion engine and new boilers," and "a ten foot propeller, which could be raised into a well."[9] The *Southern Cross* could travel at a maximum speed of nine knots and is reported to have reached twelve knots under sail, although its coal capacity of 300 tons limited its speed under steam.[10] In addition to the propulsion upgrades ordered by Borchgrevink, the *Southern Cross* appears to have been lengthened in Fredrickstad, as the Lloyd's Register's change its dimensions to 146.5 feet in length, 30.7 feet in breadth, 17.6 feet in depth and now displacing 325 tons.[11] Borchgrevink harboured ambitious plans for the *Southern*

Cross, and he soon launched the vessel into the celebrated history of Antarctic exploration.

The glory-seeking locus of Borchgrevink's era inspired his Antarctic Expedition, which the public saw as quite the scientific endeavour. London's citizenry gave Borchgrevink and his party a "rousing farewell" from London on 22 August 1898 and arrived in Antarctic waters after a rather lengthy cruise via Hobart on 17 February 1899.[12] The expedition overwintered at Cape Adare, where the men undertook a plethora of scientific experiments using 90 Siberian Huskies, while the *Southern Cross* sailed to Australia to wait out the winter (spending a winter in Antarctica and using dogs on the continent had not been attempted previously). Borchgrevink's party completed their experiments over the winter despite losing zoologist Nicolai Hanson to beri beri, and the *Southern Cross* picked them up in the middle of January 1900.

The expedition members then steamed into the Ross Sea to the Great Ice Barrier, where they traveled via dogsled to 78°50′ S – the southern-most point any human had reached (about forty miles farther than Ross himself traveled on the *Erebus* in 1842).[13] On 19 February 1900, with their exploratory thirst quenched, the expedition members turned the *Southern Cross* for England, where they arrived in June. The United States, Scotland, and Norway celebrated Borchgrevink with awards (Norway made a knight of St. Olaf), but the English scientific establishment did not recognize him because of his disagreeable character and the minimal research produced by the expedition.[14] Nevertheless, the Royal Geographical Society

eventually awarded Borchgrevink with their 'Patron's Medal' in 1930 after the English scientific community accepted him as a precursor to Sir Ernest Shackleton, Roland Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott (Scott left out any mention of Borchgrevink and the *Southern Cross* in his published diary due to jealousy of the ship and man that "got ahead of his own carefully laid plans").[15] Ownership of the *Southern Cross* changed once again shortly after Borchgrevink and his expedition returned to England.

Borchgrevink sold the *Southern Cross* to the frustratingly vague Glasgow based firm of Daniel Murray and Thomas Crawford, which first employed it in the Newfoundland sealing industry in 1901.[16] Initially skippered by Captain Darius Blandford, the *Southern Cross* caught a record 26,500 seals in less than eleven days. It performed unremarkably thereafter:

Figure 1.1 – Table of *Southern Cross*'s Sealing Record[17]

Year	Master	Men	Pelts	Supplier
1901	Blandford, D.	223	26,563	Baine Johnson
1902	Blandford, D.	186	6,563	Baine Johnson
1903	Blandford, D.	175	17,183	Baine Johnson
1904	Blandford, D.	173	6,594	Baine Johnson
1905	Bragg, D.	173	883	Baine Johnson
1906	Bragg, D.	175	10,889	Baine Johnson
1907	Carter, P.	174	3,659	Baine Johnson
1908	Fowlow, R.	173	570	Baine Johnson
1909	Bartlett, M.	173	1,242	Baine Johnson
1910	Clarke, G.	172	23,009	Baine Johnson
1911	Clarke, G.	177	13,531	Baine Johnson
1912	Clarke, G.	121	5,288	Baine Johnson
1913	Clarke, G.	173	16,086	Baine Johnson
1914	Clarke, G.	174	----------	Baine Johnson

The *Southern Cross* enjoyed a degree of fame in Europe, but its life in Newfoundland is difficult to investigate historically – it appears to have been a typical sealing ship and workhorse (correspondence from Baine Johnson reveals trips to Sydney, Battle Harbour, and Labrador).[18] The *Southern Cross*'s Norwegian whaling voyages, Antarctic adventure and North Atlantic service aside, no aspect of its operational history can be compared to the events of 1914s sealing season.

By 1914 the hunt consisted of the ice-breaking steel-hulled fleet and the wooden-hulled fleet, respectively destined for 'the front' and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The wooden walls sailed on March 4th, and the steel-hulled fleet a week later on March 13th.[19] Interestingly, *The Evening Telegram* noted that, "the Gulf fleet is much larger than that of other years, but whether this will make for more or less seals being brought in only the end of the voyage will tell."[20] Further, newspaper accounts suggest simmering tensions and an undercurrent of economic stress in Newfoundland due to recently imposed taxes. An editorial provides insight into this dynamic by stating:

> The reports for the next week will be watched with anxiety in the hope that it will be possible for the sealing steamers to make an average catch. In view of the extra taxation which has been imposed, it will be a bad outlook if the sealing fishery is not an average one. The country will need every cent which can be earned to enable people to live and to respond to the extraordinary demands being made on them under the new tariff.[21]

In any event, the *Southern Cross* sailed into the Gulf under Captain George Clarke on March 4th from Chanel Port-aux-Basques (some sources incorrectly state that George's brother John Clarke commanded the vessel).[22] Approximately 44 years of

age in 1914, Clarke resided in River Head, near his hometown of Brigus. He fathered a daughter and adopted a son with his wife Shirley, and had committed to buy a larger house in Brigus with his earnings from the 1914 season.[23] Sources universally regarded Clarke as a capable sealer, but questioned his abilities as a captain.[24]

Many Newfoundland based newspapers including *The Evening Herald*, *The Bay Roberts Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Trinity Enterprise*, *The Twillingate Sun*, *The Free Press*, *The Western Star*, *The Daily News*, and *The Evening Telegram* published regular accounts of happenings at the ice. The colony kept abreast of the fleet's progress through updates from ships equipped with wireless telegraphy (captains would include updates on other ships should the information be available). For example, on March 20th the SS *Neptune* radioed, "Estimated number of seals taken from patch 500, following ships are in patch but can't say what they are doing: *Terra Nova*, *Viking*, *Erik*, *Southern Cross*."[25] After being intercepted, Newfoundland's newspapers reprinted similar updates verbatim. The press also published updates from shore stations that established visual confirmation of the fleet.

The first notable event in the season occurred on March 22nd, when a major storm blew into the Gulf. Vessels reported heavy snow and driving winds until the 26th, when conditions become slightly more hospitable. Despite the treacherous weather, the crews from the Gulf fleet found themselves, as sealers said, 'in the fat.' *The Evening Telegram* reported on March 24th that the SS *Terra Nova* had amassed an impressive 24,000 pelts, the *Neptune* 12,000 pelts, the SS *Viking* 6,000 pelts, the SS *Erik* 14,000 pelts, the Halifax-based SS *Seal* 5,000, and – ominously – that ships at

the ice could only report the *Southern Cross* as "well fished."[26] In other words, no sealer had spoken to the *Southern Cross*'s crew to obtain an accurate assessment of its progress (sealers used the term 'well fished' as visual designation based on the hulls position in relation to the waterline). The *Seal* updated the situation on the ice later the same day when it radioed Baine Johnston & Co., saying, "*Southern Cross* about 10 miles North West of Byron Island; think fairly fished."[27] The only statistical report on the number of pelts amassed by the crew of the *Southern Cross* is found in *The Evening Telegram* on April 2nd, which vaguely states that Captain D. Martin of the *Erik* could attest to a load of between 17,000 and 20,000 pelts.[28] To trace the progress of every vessel in the sealing fleet during the season is outside the scope of this chapter, but by reading the 'Sealing News' columns it is clear that the *Southern Cross* did not sail in tandem with the rest of the Gulf fleet. *The Evening Herald* noted on March 19th that over 60,000 seals had met their deaths at the hands of sealers on Newfoundland's French Shore, and the possibility exists that Clarke struck out on his own hoping to hit a similar bumper crop.[29]

After the storm subsided on March 26th, the 'Sealing News' columns represented a regular season and the *Southern Cross* remained separated from other sealers. *The Evening Herald* reported the first news of a sealer homeward bound on March 30th, with the shore station at Chanel-Port Aux Basques reporting:

> The first sealer homeward bound off the Gulf passed channel at 6:30 last evening, apparently well fished. Steamer supposed to be *Southern Cross* or *Terra Nova* but too far off to identify. Last evening matters were astir in the sealing circles, when the news was currently reported that a steamer has passed out of the gulf loaded. Just after tea a large concourse

> of people assembled near the general post office, where word was received that a Gulf steamer was homeward bound and deeply laden. Many conflicting messages were posted up as to what steamer was coming...The general opinion is that the reported steamer is the *Southern Cross* while a great many hold that it is the *Terra Nova* on account of the ship being reported to 24,000 five days ago, while the catch of the *Cross* was not reported for the spring, though she was mentioned as doing well.[30]

The radio operator at St. Pierre identified the vessel the following day, messaging St. John's that "it is the *Cross*."[31] The next day *The Evening Telegram* reported that "Bowring Brothers received a message from Captain Connors of the *Portia* today saying that he passed the *Southern Cross* 5 miles WNW of Cape Pine at 11AM yesterday."[32] A plausible scenario one can assemble is that the *Southern Cross* enjoyed a successful voyage in the Gulf or alternatively needed to return to port. Sailing west out of the Gulf and past Chanel-Port-aux-Basques and St. Pierre, it crossed paths with the *Portia* off of Cape Pine shortly before noon on March 31st (just before the deadly storm blew in). Newfoundland's residents never saw any trace of the *Southern Cross* again.

Prior to any mention of anxiety over the whereabouts of the *Southern Cross*, news of the *Newfoundland* disaster "plunged" the colony "into deep sorrow over the loss of so many of her brave sons."[33] Major St. John's based newspapers ran stories about the tragedy on April 2nd, while the outport newspapers reported the story by the 4th, except for *The Free Press* which ran the story on the 7th. The disaster remembered as 'death on the ice' brought Newfoundland to a standstill, and sensational headlines quickly ran rampant. *The Evening Telegram* ran a story on

April 5th titled, "Out of the Jaws of Death: Perils and Tragedies of the Sealing Industry, Thrilling Tales of the Hazard that Attend the Reaping of the Harvest of the Floes," and other newspapers followed suite.[34] Although the coverage of the *Newfoundland* Disaster eclipsed that of the *Southern Cross*, Newfoundland's newspapers began fretting over the latter ship around April 3rd. *The Evening Telegram* reported "No Report of the *Southern Cross*" on the 3rd, "*Southern Cross* Still Missing" on the 6th, "No Tidings of the *Southern Cross*" on the 7th, "The Missing *Southern Cross*" on the 8th and "No News of *Southern Cross*" on the 11th. Likewise, *The Daily Mail* reported "No Tidings Yet of *Southern Cross*" on the 6th, "No News of *Southern Cross* on the 8th, and "Still No Word on *Southern Cross*" on the 9th. Clearly, profound concern surrounded the ship's whereabouts and the well being of its crew.

Generally optimistic, the early reports on the *Southern Cross* assumed that Clarke had hove to in St. Mary's Bay shortly after his chance meeting with the *Portia*. Such a scenario could not be established until the 2nd as the blizzard caused extensive damage to Newfoundland's radio apparatus. Upon reestablishment of communication, it quickly became apparent that the *Southern Cross* did not seek shelter in either St. Mary's Bay or Trepassey.[35] Late on Friday the 3rd or on Saturday the 4th the government decided to dispatch the 220-foot Reid steamship the *SS Kyle* to search for the *Southern Cross*. *The Evening Telegram* reported:

> The SS *Southern Cross*, Capt. J. Clarke, had not been reported anywhere since passing Gallanty Head on Monday afternoon and spoke to the *Portia* off Cape Pine on Tuesday morning. Grave concern is now felt for the steamer though the owners and many nautical men hold the opinion she got driven of to sea on the recent storm but that no grave fears need

> be entertained, as she will turn up all right. A few years ago Captain Clarke met with a similar experience when returning from the Gulf sealfishery. The vessel was caught in a severe storm crossing Placentia Bay, was driven out sea, but survived the elements after losing 14 boats off her decks. At six o'clock this morning the SS *Kyle* went in quest of the missing vessel taking ample provisions and supplies of all kinds. Those who went on the *Kyle* were Captain Snow, Ministries of Marine Piccott and Mr. J Grieve. The *Kyle* will report often by wireless the results of her search.[36]

The American Coast Guard cutter the USS *Seneca* soon joined the *Kyle* in the hunt for the *Southern Cross*, as did a coastal cruiser the SS *Fiona*. Various newspapers printed regular updates under the title 'News from the *Kyle*,' although some articles expressed doubt early in the search (as early as April 4th *The Twillingate Sun* ran an article titled 'Is the Southern Cross Gone to the Bottom')[37] The nature of articles on the *Southern Cross* sadly began to darken as the search vessels failed to find any evidence of disaster.

The fate of the *Southern Cross* remained utterly uncertain until April 13th, when the sealing ship SS *Bloodhound* arrived at St. John's. The *Bloodhound* sailed alongside the *Southern Cross* out of Chanel Port aux Basques on March 4th, and shortly thereafter the crew refused to hunt seals or man the ship because of a squabble over bean rations. During the contentious voyage the *Bloodhound* came across a floating body, thus the city coroner Dr. Campbell immediately went aboard after the ship after it docked at St. John's and overheard the crew speaking about a debris field 90 miles east of Cape Broyle. Campbell subsequently made haste delivering word of the wreckage to the authorities, thereby quickly renewing hope for solving the mysterious fate of the *Southern Cross*.

According to Captain Jessie Windsor and the crew of the *Bloodhound*, they passed through a large debris field consisting of wreckage visibly consistent with sealing, including "deck sheathing, pound boards, flag poles, prizes, pieces of timber, a seaman's chest, a cap, and a bottle tightly corked."[38] Unfortunately, news of the *Southern Cross*'s uncertain status had not reached the *Bloodhound*, so the crew did not investigate. However, the mysterious 'tightly corked' bottle became quite the news item when Windsor reported the wreckage. *The Free Press* speculated on the *Bloodhound*'s alleged find:

> The bottle referred to was seen by practically every member of the crew and was passed on the starboard side of the steamer, it being quite close to the ice. After hearing of the *Southern Cross's* absence many on board the *Bloodhound* concluded that inside the bottle was a note which would tell the tale of what brought the wreckage there.[39]

Likewise, other newspapers latched onto the notion of the corked bottle containing a message, and popular consensus agreed that the bottle contained a narrative that would illuminate the fate of the *Southern Cross* (sources did not elaborate on the 'needle in a haystack' nature of their belief in the bottle). Additionally, the *Kyle* arrived in port alongside the *Bloodhound* on April 13th to replenish its supplies, prompting an intriguing story ran only by *The Evening Herald* under the headline, 'Dreamed of Wreckage'.

The curious article describes (in detail) an instance of morbid telepathy between Minister of Marine and Fisheries Piccott and Captain Parsons. Piccott supposedly fell asleep in the *Kyle*'s smoking room only to wake and explain to the crew a "frightful dream, that he had seen in his sleep a lot of wreckage and also

bodies and that the ship was passing through them" after inquiring if he had been shouting during his slumber.[40] He then went to speak with the napping Captain Parsons. Piccott woke the captain upon entering his cabin, at which point the drowsy Parsons described an identical dream of an odious debris field. The two men then walked to the smoking room "and were engaged in discussing this curious circumstance" when the *Kyle*'s Marconi operator burst in and notified them of the *Bloodhound*'s possible discovery.[41] Similarly, renowned explorer Bob Bartlett wrote on the eve of the *Southern Cross*'s loss that "in at least three homes spirits of the lost mariners were seen that night."[42] In any event, through the tale of the corked bottle containing the fate of the *Southern Cross* and the telepathy between Piccott and Parson's, newspaper accounts suggest that Newfoundlander's harboured discomfort over the vessel's uncertain fate. Far-fetched tales of messages in bottles, ghosts, and mysterious dreams probably would not have circulated if the *Southern Cross* had left vestiges of its quietus.

After Piccott and Parsons allegedly had their ominous dreams, the *Kyle* once again steamed out to sea in search of the *Southern Cross*, to no avail. Accounts regarding what the *Kyle* found are contradictory, with some sources stating that the crew found the debris field sighted by the *Bloodhound* while others claimed that the searchers found nothing more than logs from shore, but all sources agree that the corked bottle remained elusive. *The Evening Herald* stated "the bottle which the *Bloodhound* sighted was not seen," while *The Daily Mail* speculated, "there is much regret that the bottle at least was not secured, as it was seen by most of them men

on board and was near the ice, the general impression that it probably contained a message, and it is feared that it may have been thrown against the ice and smashed since."[43] Most major papers express similar sentiments. The *Kyle* returned to St. John's on April 20th, leaving no room for hope that the *Southern Cross* remained afloat.

An analysis of how Newfoundland's newspapers handled the loss of the *Southern Cross* provides insight into both the nature of sealing in 1914 and how the public related to a maritime disaster in which maritime authorities drew no meaningful conclusion.

Newfoundland's citizenry initially reacted to the disasters of 1914 understandably focused on sorrow, remembrance, and support – a dynamic that remained throughout most newspapers until articles on the disasters disappear. Unfortunately, a major difficulty in assessing the public reaction to the loss of the *Southern Cross* arises from the horrifically visceral and overtly visible nature of the *Newfoundland* disaster. Due to the presence of survivors – and thus someone to blame – the public conceptualized the events differently, although *The Evening Telegram* noted that by April 11th "the one topic of conversation" throughout St. John's focused on the *Southern Cross*.[44] Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of both disasters, residents still expected the *Southern Cross* to return, further intensifying the imbalance in coverage. *The Daily Mail*'s first major opinion piece on the disasters involving both the *Newfoundland* and the *Southern Cross* captures one school of thought:

> There is no one to tell the tale of the *Southern Cross*, but ambition to get in first sent her to her doom with one hundred and seventy valuable lives when she could have taken St. Mary's Bay. There may be some excuse for the *Southern Cross*, but there is no earthly excuse for those were scarified off the *Newfoundland*, because that could have been avoided.[45]

The editorial advanced that Clarke gambled the lives of his crew to be the first in port (considered a prestigious achievement in the hunt), but also that 'there may be some excuse' for the disaster. Alternative editorials took a more proactive stance, particularly around St. George's Day, when religious ideals struck a chord with Newfoundlanders.[46] Others stressed the importance of religion combined with North America's march toward a more civilized understanding of the value of human of life in the wake of the industrial revolution or the 'highway or progress.'

In an article published in *The Free Press* titled "Words of Strength and Comfort," Dr. Reverend Moore compared the sealing disasters to other industrial tragedies, specifically the fire at Iroquois Theatre, the burning of the *General Slocum* and the sinking of the *Titanic* to argue that by 1914 seafaring labour, like "our factories and railroads" began "to transfer value from property to human life" and that those lost in the *Newfoundland* and *Southern Cross* disasters personified "crimson stains which are found along the highway of progress."[47] Other sources focused on the sense of community and compassion fostered by the disasters, although content overwhelmingly focused on the *Newfoundland* and not the *Southern Cross*. The social impact of the *Southern Cross* disaster is extremely difficult to assess historically – for all intents and purposes, after the *Kyle*'s return not a

single newspaper article addressed the ship and its 174 crewmen in anything more than a passing mention.

Despite a few callous inklings typically citing "supply and demand" arguments for the disasters, widespread mourning for the victims of 1914s sealing season united Newfoundlanders.[48] Citizens of renown quickly created an impressive support fund for affected families to "alleviate in a practical way the sufferings of those left destitute through the loss of their breadwinners."[49] Indeed, there is no question that the disasters brought the island together (initially), particularly by the support fund. Newspapers mentioned contributors "from all parts of the world" by name for months, and people deemed donation universally necessary – some contributed as little as one dollar, while "the well to do classes, moreover, are exceedingly generous and appeals for any good object are never made in vain."[50] In the case of the *Southern Cross*, people went as far as trying to track down the families of ten sealers who illicitly purchased berthing tickets from other sealers and thus could not be identified by the name on the ship's manifest.[51] As the colony mournfully reeled at the scope of the disasters, practical methods for avoiding similar tragedies became the subject of public focus.

Assessing contemporary thoughts on preventative issues specific to the *Southern Cross* disaster is difficult because people almost exclusively focused on the *Newfoundland*, but sources identified the absence of wireless telegraphy on sealers as a dangerous limitation.[52] The colony's citizenry consistently pointed out that if the *Southern Cross* sported a wireless apparatus, Clarke could have radioed Cape

Race and been updated that the month of March went "out like a roaring lion" and that he would need to weather "the worst snow storm of the season" to reach St. John's.[53] People generally agreed that if Clarke possessed a wireless device he probably would not have rounded Cape Race, but sought a sheltered inlet instead. Newfoundland's residents also identified the requirement for sealers to have an insurance policy of two hundred dollars as a wise stipulation, although hardly one synonymous with safety. In any event, *The Evening Telegram* noted that "everybody feels that legislative provisions must be made to safeguard sealers from such deaths as some of them met onboard the *Southern Cross* and on the ice when hunting from the *Newfoundland*."[54]

Other editorials called for research and reform, but emphasized the emotional undercurrent in Newfoundland following the disasters and thus the need for time to pass before holding a 'definitive' and 'neutral' inquiry. A contributor to *The Daily News* elaborated by pointing out that "an investigation into all the circumstances surrounding the sealfishery must result in due course, is obvious" but noted "the present time, however, is most inopportune" because the inquiry initiated on April 6th focused on placing "responsibility where it may belong" and suffered from the absence of "calmness and deliberation."[55] Perhaps no summation better captures the totality of the *Southern Cross* disaster than an editorial from *The Evening Telegram* on April 22nd, which warrants quoting at length. The author flatly summed up the uncertainty associated with the early days of the search for

wreckage, the social impact, the contrast to the *Newfoundland* disaster and required governmental response:

> It is thus limited in scope even as an inquest, for the question of those who perished in the *Southern Cross* is not before the Coroner. The reason of this particular limitation is obvious. At the time the inquiry commenced, hope for the arrival of the *Southern Cross* was not abandoned. But that is no reason now why a most searching inquiry, as far as the circumstances allow should not be made. Indeed, it is hugely imperative that the loss of 173 men on one bottom at the seal fishery should be investigated. For this alone would make a disaster unparalleled in our sealing annals. The circumstances however, of the two disasters are quite different as everyone knows, and the inquiry into the *Newfoundland* disaster only touches a few points, mainly weather conditions, where there is a similarity. Each of these disasters is more than sufficient to warrant and to make absolutely essential a searching inquiry into our whole sealing venture, with a view to the dissemination of knowledge amongst those engaged in such ventures and the enactment of such protective measures as may safeguard the lives and limbs of the men from such disasters as have befallen them this spring. Judge Knight has allowed every latitude possible at this inquiry, and full advantage has been taken of it so far as the scope of enquiry would allow. But that is not enough as we believe we have shown, and we have had abundance of opportunity to form an opinion. It is not possible for any Government to withhold such an enquiry. They must grant it for humanity's sake.[56]

By mid-May, articles on the *Southern Cross* no longer appear in Newfoundland's newspapers, and hostilities between Mexico and the United States overtook the sealing disasters as the predominant news item. Compared to disasters at sea like that which befell the crew of the *Newfoundland* or the wreck of the *Florizel*, the disappearance of the *Southern Cross* received remarkably little attention (basically none at all). Such a dynamic is predictable considering the events of the 1914 sealing season, but the *Southern Cross* was hardly a dory fetching cod traps – the vessel's loss remains one of the Newfoundland's *worst* disasters, yet the public

hastily relegated it to a forgotten footnote in the island's tragedy-ridden history. Effectively no meaningful social developments unfolded in the disaster's wake and insightful primary source material on the event is limited to a handful of indirect newspaper articles in April of 1914 (and folk songs). However, before assessing the *Southern Cross*'s removal from the historical record, it is necessary to examine the issues identified as contributing factors to the disaster. Similar to the *Newfoundland* disaster in which popular opinion saw the quest for profit as having agency over human life, public interpretation of the *Southern Cross*'s demise had nothing to do with 'an act of God,' and everything to do with the negligent grasping merchants of Water Street who consistently demonstrated an unquenchable thirst for pelts.

Not surprisingly, one of the earliest and most profound reactions to the sealing disasters of 1914 came from the President of the Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU), William Ford Coaker, on April 11th. In an article published by *The Daily Mail*, Coaker infamously titled the *Newfoundland*, SS *Ranger*, *Kite* and *Viking* as 'floating sealing coffins,' and specifically identified the disasters as the "price of negligence and of indifference," particularly on behalf of Abram Kean regarding the events associated with the *Newfoundland*.[57] He also asked the public, "what about the *Southern Cross*? Was she a fit and proper ship to clear for such a perilous voyage as seal hunting? Who will dare say she was."[58] Coaker's strongly worded objection to the inquiry, government officials, and the merchants of Water Street created considerable controversy and immediately earned him a libel charge from Kean. The ensuing vehement public feud between Coaker and Kean captured headlines, and

Coaker's 'floating sealing coffins' remark represented the opening volley in a drawn out battle between the 'toilers' and the 'fishocracy.' By the time Coaker forcefully vocalized his discontent on the 11th, the inquiry into the *Newfoundland* disaster had materialized into a very public and heavily promoted affair. Nevertheless, always an outspoken advocate for fishermen's rights, Coaker felt that the government owed Newfoundlanders a commission that would prevent similar disasters in the future and consistently voiced his suspicion and discontent with the official response. Coaker chose not to limit himself to the events associated with the *Newfoundland*, but transcended his feud with Kean to address the matter of the *Southern Cross*.

The debate intensified through an article in *The Daily Mail* titled 'President Coaker Replies to Captain Kean's Vapourings' published on April 22nd. Coaker fumed that he wanted to "save our toilers from another such catastrophe as the country has witnessed not only in the *Newfoundland* disaster but also that of the *Southern Cross*."[59] His rallying cry for an inquiry into the *Southern Cross* very well may have been due to rumors over the ship's alleged poor condition, which newspapers commented on by April 6th (although one wonders what Coaker thought such an examination would use as evidence). The particulars of popular opinion remain elusive, but the *Free Press* and *Daily Mail* voiced the opinion on the seaworthiness of the *Southern Cross* on April 7th:

> The ship before sailing for the fishery was in excellent condition, and reports circulated to the contrary yesterday are absolutely without foundation. She was fitted with triple expansion engines and her boilers, according to the inspectors certificate issued just previous to her departure could carry about 120 pounds of steam. The idea of her

> pounds giving out and allowing the cargo of 17,000 seals to make trouble is not agreed with by the owners as the pounds were unusually well constructed, and would hardly give way before her sides.[60]

Interestingly, the themes of neglect and overloading regarding the *Southern Cross* disaster did not fade away, but remain constant touchstones in the vessel's brief historiography. In other words, it is beyond a reasonable doubt that popular interpretation of the *Southern Cross* disaster has been heavily influenced by theories of neglect and overloading from the year it sank until the present.[61] However, accusations that the *Southern Cross* was unfit for the sealfishery and overloaded are questionable.

Rumors that the *Southern Cross* took on a dangerously heavy load of seals evidently began circulating after the storm on March 30th, and Coaker thrust the matter into the public arena by spearheading grave doubts regarding the integrity of its physical condition shortly thereafter. Interestingly, the circumstantial evidence surrounding the ship's final voyage suggests that its loss – albeit of an unusual and deeply distressing nature – probably did not have origins in neglect or overloading. In the ensuing inquiry Walter Baine Greive testified that over $20,000 had been spent on the vessel's maintenance since 1902, and that "Mr. Butler," a competent carpenter, completed all repairs and filed reports.[62] A Lloyd's surveyor also examined the *Southern Cross* both afloat and in dry dock, who gave testimony regarding its "very good condition," which a recent certification to carry passengers to Labrador corroborated.[63] Further, the *Southern Cross* had been active in Newfoundland's waters for thirteen years without gaining a reputation as an

'unlucky' ship, as did a world renowned shipwright design the vessel (who has a peninsula in Nunavut and a prestigious international yachting race named in his honour). In sum, there is no verifiable evidence connecting the *Southern Cross* disaster to nautical deficiencies or mercantile neglect – if anything, it seems to have been a commendable and dependable workhorse for its entire twenty-eight year career. Additionally, the rumored overloading as causation for the tragedy is a similarly suspect theory in light of the often-overlooked testimony given by three crewmembers of the sealer *Erik* under the command of Captain D. Martin.

The *Erik* came alongside the *Southern Cross* around five o'clock on March 26th, and Martin boarded the ill-fated steamer and spoke to Clarke, who voiced no discernable worry of overloading. During the meeting the *Erik*'s chief engineer and bosun also made general observations on the *Southern Cross*, and all three men testified in the ensuing inquiry that they did not think the vessel to be overloaded. Based on the time elapsed between when the *Erik* left the *Southern Cross*, when the radio operator at Chanel Port aux Basques sighted the latter ship, when the radio operator at St. Pierre sighted the ship, and when Captain Connors of the *Portia* made his infamous final sighting (at which point it did not appear overloaded), it is unlikely that Clarke would have been able to stow enough pelts to endanger his ship's stability – he even told Martin he desired to leave the Gulf imminently. His eastward passage also took him through waters devoid of seals. Inconclusive historical foray aside, the *Southern Cross*'s alleged overloading and poor condition

are moot points – the important thing is that the public merely accepted such hypotheses without any proof.

Analogous to popular interpretation of the *Newfoundland* disaster's causation, the colony's citizenry blamed the grasping ethos of Water Street merchants for the loss of the *Southern Cross*. The island's 'toilers' saw the disaster as a tangible testament to social inequality, and the tragedy contributed to widespread discontent with the 'fishocracy.' While Newfoundland's residents mainly concerned themselves with the *Newfoundland* disaster, the matter of the *Southern Cross* certainly added fuel to the fire burning over class divisions on the island. However, the particulars of each disaster quickly began to influence the trajectory of collective memory. The singularly nightmarish nature of the *Newfoundland* disaster, the presence of survivors, and the ability to place blame equated to a much more visible process of memorial and closure – a luxury not afforded to the families of those lost on the *Southern Cross*.

Sadly, the absence of widespread commemoration for the *Southern Cross* is not entirely surprising due to the environment surrounding the nautical workplace. Similar industrial disasters – principally those involving railways and mines – do not have equivalents comparable to that which befell the *Southern Cross*. While a mine can collapse and a locomotive can plunge to the bottom of a gorge, both leave physical evidence of disaster. The same cannot necessarily be said for industrial disasters at sea. Clearly, certain shipwrecks or disasters leave plenty of corroborating indicators in various forms including survivors, flotsam, oil slicks, and

frantic wireless messages. Nevertheless, other disasters at sea remain complete mysteries, including the fate of the *Southern Cross* – the vessel's demise simply does not have a terrestrial or industrial equivalency (outside of seafaring labour). The possibility of vanishing beneath the ocean combined with the social status of the sealers onboard to further obscure the *Southern Cross* disaster's impact and legacy.

Similar to the rest of Newfoundland's seal hunting contingent, the designation of 'working men who got wet' defined the victims of the *Southern Cross* disaster. The colony would hardly have considered the death of a sealer as a notable event unto itself, although tragedies at the ice affecting large numbers of men generated sizable controversy, evident through the *Greenland* and *Newfoundland* disasters. Uniquely, the dual tragedies at the floes during 1914 produced a situation by which industrial disasters affected two working-class labour forces, and one event left evidence whereas the other did not. The result was a temporary outpouring of grief for the *Newfoundland*'s crew but not for that of the *Southern Cross*, and the island's population completely swept both events under the rug remarkably quickly considering their magnitude, even before the outbreak of World War One (indeed, the inquiry into the loss of the *Southern Cross* produced no results at all, although the curious nature of the disaster makes this no surprise). The disregard of commemoration for victims of the sealing disasters is related to the social standing of the victims, a fact made undeniable through the *Florizel* disaster four years later. Likewise, the industrial disposition of the *Southern Cross* and its crew are almost certainly why the ship's unusual loss is comparatively unknown in

contrast to events like the disappearance of the cruise liner SS *Waratah* in July of 1909 or the USS *Cyclops* in March of 1918, or the mysteries surrounding the ghost ships *Mary Celeste* or *Carroll A. Deering*.

The *Southern Cross* disaster's aftermath is fundamentally strange – *one hundred and seventy four men* simply did not return home, yet the event is an obscure annotation in Newfoundland's sealing annals. Without question, the *Southern Cross* disaster is a truly disturbing case of 'out of sight, out of mind,' with roots divided between the victims' social status and the strange nature of the accident. The *Newfoundland* disaster demonstrated that survivors and physical evidence influence the aftermath of a tragedy, but a brief comparison to another disaster at sea in Canadian waters sixty days after the *Southern Cross* disappeared supports the theory that an industrial accident's reception is markedly different depending on who is killed and under what circumstances. The tragic sinking of the *Empress of Ireland* proves as much.

A 570-foot liner owned by the Canada Pacific Line, the *Empress of Ireland* sank after colliding with the Norwegian collier *Storstad* in the St. Lawrence River on 29 May 1914. The sinking of the *Empress of Ireland* is one of Canada's worst maritime disasters, and resulted in the highest loss of life via shipwreck in Canadian waters – 1,012 people. Unlike the *Southern Cross*, many survived the disaster and recounted their harrowing experiences at length. Newfoundland's newspapers ran dozens of articles with headlines like "Appalling Maritime Tragedy, Only 12 Women Taken Alive from the Liner, *Storstad's* Fatal Blunder, Tales of Survivors," and

sensationalized the disaster for a considerable length of time.[64] While the significantly more people died on the *Empress of Ireland* than on the *Southern Cross*, the point is that people possessed the ability to tell their stories thus eliminating any sense of uncertainty (like the *Newfoundland* disaster). The resulting dynamic caused the sinking of the *Empress of Ireland* to receive widespread news coverage, whereas the *Southern Cross* received effectively none considering the immensity of its loss. The difference between the *Empress of Ireland* disaster and the loss of the *Southern Cross* is fairly straightforward: one is perfectly explainable while the other is a complete mystery limited to 'working men who got wet,' which is reflected through each events' reception, social impact, and legacy. Even the non-fatal shipwreck of the SS *City of Sydney* off Sambro Island, Nova Scotia on 17 March 1914 generated a similar level of dialogue within the colony as the *Southern Cross* disaster, particularly because the former carried "twenty three cases of steel filing cabinets and special fitters" designated as "especially needed in business circles."[65]

The loss of the *Southern Cross* remains one of Newfoundland's most tragic disasters at sea. Shrouded in a precarious veil by the storm of 31 March 1914, and subsequently eclipsed by the *Newfoundland* Disaster, research into the vessel is minimal - exactly what happened to the ship and its 174 crewmen remains unknown. An investigation into reactions to the event through Newfoundland's newspapers reveals an inconclusive chasm of sorrow and speculation, undermined by the inability of assigning blame. Without any evidence to support arguments or conclusions, the *Southern Cross* faded into obscurity with startling haste, only

remembered through a minor historiography and a tombstone in the graveyard of All Saint's Parish in Foxtrap, dedicated to the "loving remembrance of six brothers who were lost in the SS *Southern Cross*." As 'death on the ice' captured multinational headlines, the *Southern Cross* disaster's curious nature – its 'disappearance' – caused the event to fade into the island's outports, where class, geography, and the visibility of the *Newfoundland* disaster combined to totally eclipse a labour force that literally disappeared without a trace. Class-based inequality is indisputably the dominating factor in the absence of the disaster's commemoration. This dynamic becomes even more unsettling when the disappearance of the *Southern Cross* is contrasted to other very visible disasters at sea like that which befell the *Empress of Ireland*, or the loss of the *Florizel* a mere four years later. Instead of vanishing into the deep like the *Southern Cross*, the *Florizel* slammed onto a coastal reef carrying a cross section of Newfoundland's elite. The island's citizenry exhibited a significantly different reaction the *Florizel* tragedy (similar to the *Empress of Ireland* disaster), as the very visible event killed civilians of notable social status, and not only 'working men who got wet.'

Endnotes – Chapter Four

[1] *The Evening Telegram*, 3 April 1914.
[2] Tim Rogers, "The Last Voyage of the Southern Cross", *The Newfoundland Quarterly Journal* (12:1989), 21.
[3] Kenney Gerard, *Ships of Wood and Men of Iron: A Norwegian-Canadian Saga of Exploration in the High Arctic* (Toronto, 2005), 5.
[4] *Lloyds Register of British and Foreign Shipping: From the 1st of April 1886, to the 31st of March, 1887* (London, 1886).
[5] Rorke Bryan, *Ordeal by Ice: Ships of the Antarctic* (Ireland, 2011), 138.
[6] *Lloyds Register of British and Foreign Shipping: From the 1st of July 1894, to the 30th of June, 1895* (London, 1894).
[7] L.B Quartermain, *South to the Pole: The Early History of the Ross Sea Sector of Antarctica* (London: 1967), 61.
[8] Bryan, 138.
[9] Frank Galgay and Michael McCarthy, *Shipwrecks of Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's, 1987), 45, see also, Bryan, *Ordeal by Ice*, 138.
[10] Bryan, 138.
[11] *Lloyds Register of British and Foreign Shipping: From the 1st of July 1889, to the 30th of June, 1900* (London, 1899).
[12] Quartermain, 62.
[13] Ibid., 70.
[14] Bryan, *Ordeal by Ice*, 142.
[15] Quartermain, 82, see also, Bryan, 142
[16] Rogers, 22. According to archivists at the Scottish Maritime Museum, no documentation from Daniel Murray and Thomas Crawford survives. The outfit specialized in sealing and was fairly well known.
[17] Levi Chafe, *Chafe's Sealing Book: A Statistical Record of the Newfoundland Steamer Seal Fishery, 1863 – 1941*, Shannon Ryan, ed. (St. John's, 1989), 178.
[18] Maritime History Archive at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Baine Johnson Files: 2.03.
[19] *The Evening Telegram*, 13 March 1914.
[20] Ibid., 13 March 1914.
[21] Ibid., 21 March 1914.
[22] *The Evening Herald*, 3 March, see also, Rogers, *The Last Voyage of the Southern Cross*, 25.
[23] Rogers, 25.
[24] Ibid., 25.
[25] *The Evening Telegram*, 24 March 1914.
[26] Ibid., 24 March 1914.
[27] Ibid., 24 March 1914.
[28] Ibid., 2 April 1914.
[29] *The Evening Herald*, 19 March 1914.

[30] *The Free Press*, 31 March 1914, see also, *The Evening Herald*, 30 March 1914.
[31] *The Evening Telegram*, 31 March 1914.
[32] Ibid., 1 April 1914.
[33] Ibid., 18 April 1914. The exceptions are *The Daily News* and *The Daily Mail*, which ran the headline 'No Word From *Southern Cross*' on the 2nd, or in the morning editions of the papers that were printed shortly before news of the *Newfoundland* disaster reached the island. Such a dynamic insinuates that the public was worried about the ship considering its last known location, likely course, and the incoming storm.
[34] *The Evening Herald*, 5 April 1914.
[35] *The Evening Telegram*, 3 April 1914, see also, Official Logbook for Cape Race Lighthouse, Provincial Archive at The Rooms.
[36] *The Evening Telegram*, 4 April 1914.
[37] *The Twillingate Sun*, 4 April 1914.
[38] *The Evening Telegram*, 13 April.
[39] *The Free Press*, 14 April 1914.
[40] *The Evening Herald*, 13 April 1914.
[41] Ibid., 13 April 1914.
[42] Bob Bartlett, *The Log of Bob Bartlett* (New York: 1928), 334.
[43] *The Evening Telegram*, 16 April 1914, see also, *The Daily Mail*, 13 April 1914.
[44] *The Evening Telegram*, 11 April 1914.
[45] *The Daily Mail*, 15 April 1914.
[46] *The Evening Telegram*, 23 April 1914.
[47] *The Free Press*, 12 May 1914.
[48] *The Twillingate Sun*, 9 May 1914.
[49] *The Evening Telegram*, 16 May 1914.
[50] Ibid., 16 May, 22 April 1914.
[51] *The Evening Herald*, 14 May 1914.
[52] *The Daily News*, 15 April 1914.
[53] *The Daily Mail*, 1 April 1914, see also, *The Daily News*, 31 March 1914.
[54] *The Evening Telegram*, 3 May 1914.
[55] *The Daily News*, 22 April 1914.
[56] *The Evening Telegram*, 22 April 1914.
[57] *The Daily Mail*, 11 April 1914.
[58] Ibid., 11 April 1914.
[59] Ibid., 22 April 1914.
[60] *The Free Press*, 7 April 1914, see also, *The Daily Mail*, 7 April 1914
[61] Aside from inklings throughout the colony's newspapers, the first verifiable instance of attributing the *Southern Cross* disaster to overloading appears in Eugene H. Outerbridge, "The Newfoundland Sealing Disaster," *The American Red Cross Magazine*. Vol. 9, No. 3 (July 1914), 159-62. Outerbridge states that the *Southern Cross* "had a successful voyage, and was fully loaded, no doubt too deeply loaded."

Another useful primary source can be found at Memorial University's Folklore Archive, that being 'MUNFLA Accession #72 - 213, Cassette C1 385,' a circa 1972 assignment of former student Nick Soper's which consists of audio recordings of an interview with a descendent of Bob Bartlett who was 26 years of age when the *Southern Cross* sank (and from Brigus). The Interviewee specifically says, "she was a bad ship, the *Southern Cross*," and is very clear about the vessels poor condition, specifically leaks. Short chapters in recent popular works are congruent about theories of neglect and overloading. See Frank Galgay and Michael McCarthy, 45, see also, John Feltham, *Sealing Steamers* (St. John's: 1995), 126, see also, Vertical Ships File on the SS Southern Cross at the Center for Newfoundland Studies.

[62] Inquiry Into the Loss of the SS *Southern Cross*, Provincial Archives at The Rooms.

[63] Ibid.

[64] *The Free Press*, 2 June 1914.

[65] *The Daily News*, 28 March 1914.

Chapter Five – SS *Florizel* Disaster of 1918

"It behooves all classes and all creeds to make themselves interested in seeing that something be done for the prevention or alleviation of such an awful calamity as that which took place on that fatal Sunday in February," wrote C.T. James, editor of the St. John's based *Evening Telegram* shortly after the SS *Florizel* disaster.[1] A well-known ocean liner and flagship of Bowring Brothers' Red Cross Line, officials with the company divided the *Florizel*'s brief career between Newfoundland's annual seal hunt and ferrying passengers in relative luxury between New York City, Halifax, and St. John's. Water Street merchants liquidated the colony's steel-hulled tonnage near the beginning of World War One, except for the SS *Stephano* and the *Florizel*. The torpedoing of the *Stephano* on 8 October 1916 resulted in the *Florizel* being Newfoundland's only steel-hulled ship, making it an important tangible and symbolic connection to North America and Europe – especially in light of wartime subsistence shortages and restrictions. The *Florizel* departed St. John's at eight o'clock in the evening on Saturday 23 February 1918 under the command of Captain William J. Martin, bound for Halifax and New York City with 78 passengers and 66 crew. Many passengers belonged to Newfoundland's commercial elite or the aristocracy of St. John's. The *Florizel* went aground on a coastal reef near Cappahayden around eight hours after it set sail, and the passengers and crew fought for survival while authorities launched a major rescue effort from St. John's. The ensuing expenditure of grief for the disaster's victims based on their social standing and the public reaction to the tragedy proves that an

industrial disaster which claims civilians has a markedly more intense reception than one only claiming 'working men who got wet.' The loss of the *Florizel* remains an iconic disaster at sea that is significant and unique in Newfoundland's history because of the social status of the victims, the preventable nature of the wreck, and the ensuing response to an industrial disaster that killed civilians as opposed to strictly labourers.

The Glasgow-based firm of C. O'Connell & Company Limited built the *Florizel* during 1909 at the request of Bowring Brothers to replace the SS *Silva*, lost on 14 March 1908 in Vinyard Sound, Massachusetts. The *Florizel* sported a 305-foot long hull, a 42-foot beam, a depth of 29 feet, and displaced 3,081 tons.[2] A triple-expansion engine powered by three boilers with a bunker capacity of 450 tons propelled the vessel, which could carry 145 first-class passengers and 36 second-class passengers. The *Florizel* also had the unique distinction of being constructed specifically as an icebreaker, and flaunted a $700,000 wireless unit and submarine apparatus designed to alert the crew of dangerously shallow water.[3] Frustratingly, very little is known about the *Florizel*'s commissioning, construction in Glasgow, or its more detailed operational specifications. A fire destroyed Bowring's Water Street location and records repository in 1962, and bombing during World War Two blew up the office in Liverpool – apparently no primary sources relevant to the *Florizel* survive with the company.[4] Similarly, a fire destroyed the ships' plans of C. O'Connell & Company.[5] However, it seems that Bowrings envisioned the ship as a

versatile and dependable workhorse, primarily to be used in ferrying passengers and Newfoundland's annual seal hunt.

The *Florizel* immediately became a vessel of renown in Newfoundland, with Abram Kean bringing in a record setting 49,000 seal pelts on its second trip to the ice in 1910.[6] The ship performed commendably thereafter, principally carrying passengers and cargo between St. John's, Halifax, New York, and occasionally visiting ports in the Caribbean. During the winter months when employed in the sealfishery, wooden planks covered the *Florizel*'s decks and Red Cross employees cordoned off the luxurious quarters (the sealers slept in the hold). Chafe's Sealing Book reveals a brief but respectable sealing career:

Figure 1.2 – Table of the SS *Florizel*'s Sealing Record[7]

Year	Master	Men	Pelts	Supplier
1909	Kean, Abram	203	30,488	Bowring Bros.
1910	Kean, Abram	203	49,069	Bowring Bros.
1911	Kean, Abram	270	28,129	Bowring Bros.
1912	Kean, Joe	270	4,582	Bowring Bros.
1913	Kean, Joe	270	21,878	Bowring Bros.
1914	Kean, Abram	270	17,643	Bowring Bros.
1915	Kean, Abram	269	2,592	Bowring Bros.
1916	Kean, Abram	270	46,481	Bowring Bros.

Aside from the disaster bearing its name, the *Florizel*'s most distinguished moment came when it carried the Blue Puttees, or 'first five hundred' (actually 537 in number) volunteers of the Newfoundland Regiment from St. John's to Britain on 3 October 1914 for wartime service. Subsequent to ferrying the first five hundred, the *Florizel* took part in the 1916 sealing season, and thereafter carried passengers,

military volunteers, and cargo, to various ports. However, the outbreak of the First World War altered the seas the *Florizel* steamed about, and the fleet it sailed with.

Newfoundland's economy relied on tonnage – vessels carried saltfish to Europe, paper to Great Britain, and iron ore to Nova Scotia, the United States and Germany (before the War).[8] Inbound tonnage carried foodstuffs, confectionaries, and machinery vital to Newfoundland's citizenry. The introduction and employment of steamships and their technological advantages rapidly diminished the financial returns typically attributed to sailing vessels, and by 1914 steamers conducted the majority of coastal trade on Newfoundland's east coast, especially during winter. This resulted in a dependence on steel-hulled steamers for basic subsistence around the island. However, despite a thorough understanding of this limitation, Water Street merchants liquidated their steel-hulled fleet over the course of 1915, beginning with the Reid steamers SS *Lintrose* and SS *Bruce*. A. Harvey and Company followed suit by selling the SS *Adventure*, SS *Bellaventure*, and SS *Bonaventure* (Harvey & Company held the majority of shares in all three ships).[9] Shortly thereafter Job Brothers sold the SS *Nascopie* and SS *Beothic*. Merchants also sold the SS *Iceland* before its launch from a shipyard in Scotland. Additionally, the Canadian government commandeered the remaining vessels of the Furness Withy Line, the only other steamship company operating in Newfoundland during 1915 (with three of their original six ships), further reducing imports. By 1916 no steel-hulled steamers serviced Newfoundland's needs except the *Stephano* and *Florizel*.

The liquidation of the steel-hulled fleet has been described as a "short sighted, greedy and potentially suicidal policy" that "seriously threatened both the income and outgoing trades."[10] Newfoundlanders saw the sale of the fleet as the elite of St. John's expressing flagrant disregard towards the well being of the colony. It did not help that the owners of the fleet represented a 'who's who' of the Newfoundland Patriotic Association, and "patriotism that pays" displeased the public.[11] Merchants sold every ship except the *Nascopie* to the Russian government for service on the White Sea, where they proved critical in maintaining supply lines that fed the war effort in northwestern Russia. Merchants completed each transaction on the pretence of patriotic duty, although citizens of St. John's hardly failed to notice the "handsome excess profits...made by the sale of the ice breaking steel steamers."[12] Newfoundland immediately felt the effects of the fleet's liquidation, with intensifying subsistence shortages and a skyrocketing cost of living.

Clearly, wartime shortages and other conditions caused the high cost of living throughout Newfoundland during the war years, and not just the liquidation of the steel-hulled fleet. However, the evolution of shipping rates reveals staggering monetary ramifications. The rate for shipping a 4 quintal cask of fish from St. John's to Naples provides insight into the effects of wartime conditions on the industry: in 1913 the rate was $1.80, increasing to $3.50 in 1914, to $5.50 in September of 1915, to $6.00 in December of 1915, and up to $9.00 by February of 1916.[13] Likewise, the cost of goods imported into Newfoundland increased to distressing levels, which the

tonnage shortage exacerbated. On 21 February 1917, the *Evening Telegram* reported that "the *Daily News* strikes the right note this morning in its warning of a coming shortage of salt," identifying the next commodity to be included in a growing list of rationed goods.[14] The first commodity to be affected was coal, but salt, flour, and other commodities swiftly became subjected to the particulars of a wartime economy. The situation deteriorated when merchants began importing and stocking fewer goods in reaction to wartime uncertainty and confederation rumors.[15] Newfoundland's residents did not lose sight of fact that the steel-hulled fleet could have ameliorated the serious shortages and inflated prices.

The liquidation of the steel-hulled fleet became the source of intense interest, specifically in St. John's. The public interpreted the fortune made by Water Street merchants on the transactions an unfair impediment to the working class and those more severely affected by the inconveniences of wartime conditions. The elite in St. John's defended themselves by explaining that the recently imposed sealing regulations due to the disasters of 1914 made the vessels financially unrewarding, although this logic did not provide a passable answer for the ultimate decision to liquidate the fleet – the steamers could have capitalized on skyrocketing shipping prices and hauled freight . Indeed, the public advocated a war tax on the fleet's sale:

> The substantial taxation of the great profit made by the sale of these icebreakers over the investments made in them, would form a fund out of which might be paid the charges for such a war measure or such charges as we have indicated...The revenue from the taxation of the profits on the sale of these steamers would not be an annual tax, as the transactions are all single ones and are all closed, and will not be repeated. But it might form a fund which would meet the annual war

> charges during the period of the war, and for a year or two afterwards, and thus ease the strain on the general public.[16]

The war tax never materialized, and the merchants of Water Streets continued to make exceptionally high profits off wartime conditions. Newfoundlanders quickly began questioning the fine line between mercantile success and war profiteering.

By December of 1915 St. John's faced a serious coal shortage, which required government intervention and created considerable tension. Simply put, the tonnage shortage dramatically raised the price of coal, and collusion between various merchants ensured that they retailed the commodity for maximum profit. A.J. Harvey, who led the monopoly, bluntly stated that, "importers were not in the business for philanthropic reasons and were following the laws of supply and demand."[17] The public pressed the government to intervene and restore coal stocks to a reasonable fixed price, but the Morris administration merely took over Newfoundland's coal stocks and handed them over to four companies (Harvey owned two of them), neglecting all other coal merchants and "creating a government sponsored monopoly."[18] Because coal could be imported for less money than the government paid to import it, the government's intervention actually increased the price of coal.

The situation understandably incensed the public, who balked at coal being "priced for the benefit of the merchant," and moreover that in response to demands to lower coal prices the merchants simply appealed to the government for the very tonnage they had sold at a massive profit. Similar scandals involving other

commodities followed. However, the Red Cross Line managed to escape unscathed because they did not dramatically alter their prices. W.A. Munn even showered officials from the company with praise at a Tonnage Committee on 17 February 1916 for "endeavouring to keep conditions as normal as possible."[19] However, the actions of the U-*53* under the command of Captain Hans Rose changed the patriotic tune of the Red Cross Line.

Rose sailed the U-*53* into neutral American waters and docked at Newport, Rhode Island on 7 October 1916, where he invited ranking naval officers and their families onboard for a tour of his submarine.[20] He then left Newport and sunk eight British vessels while surrounded by American warships, and headed back to Germany.[21] The *Stephano* fell victim to Rose's rash of sinkings, torpedoed near Nantucket on 8 October 1916 under the command of Abram Kean. The Red Cross Line immediately raised their insurance and freight rates to suspicious levels, leaving Newfoundland with a single steel-hulled steamer to service its needs. The *Florizel* became a symbolic connection with the outside world in a time of serious militaristic and financial tension. Acutely aware of the precariousness of this position, on 21 February 1917 an editor for *The Evening Telegram* foreshadowed future events by writing:

> Almost all our daily bread is brought to us in a single steamer or over a singe line of railway. The later source may at any moment be cut off for days or even weeks at this time of year; what if some cause removed the *Florizel* from her regular schedule?[22]

The question would be answered almost exactly one year later, setting the stage for the final voyage of the *Florizel*.

Toward the end of February 1918, Captain Martin prepared the *Florizel* to take a cross-section of the St. John's elite, military recruits, and other passengers to either Halifax or New York – a journey he and the ship had made many times. The *Florizel* also carried 5,000 barrels of herring, 600 casks of codliver oil, 800 casks of codfish and lobster, and another cargo of 1,300 casks of codfish.[23] Amid squabbling related to a mandatory smallpox inoculation requirement and a meteorological warning from Ottawa, the *Florizel* steamed through the narrows around eight o'clock on February 23rd. The events which transpired thereafter require little elaboration: the ship made exceptionally slow progress, passengers either drank heavily, gambled, or experienced seasickness, the crew did not complete adequate soundings, and Martin dramatically misjudged his position, opting to chart a course west around what he mistakenly interpreted as open water south of Cape Race. The *Florizel* then slammed directly onto a coastal reef at Cappahayden around four o'clock in the morning of the 24th. The ship's grounding initially disoriented many passengers, most of whom had succumbed to slumber or seasickness. Marconi officer Cecil Sidney Carter quickly sent out an SOS notoriously declaring "*Florizel*. Ashore near Cape Race. Fast going to pieces," which the present day Admiralty House Museum in Mount Pearl received (then the home of a Marconi wireless station). Preparations for a major rescue effort from St. John's began immediately, although the late hour presented an obstacle.

Onboard the *Florizel*, conditions rapidly deteriorated. The aft section of the ship broke off and presumably sank shortly thereafter, and the forward section began to disintegrate as seawater flooded the staterooms and corridors. Many passengers and crew drowned under hypothermic conditions in the ship's interior, while others succeeded in getting on deck only to be washed overboard by heavy seas. The majority of passengers and crew who perished died shortly after the impact, and hypothermia presented a major problem as most passengers and crew attempted to find shelter wearing whatever they slept in, not dressing fully before leaving their berths. Passengers and crew identified the Marconi shack as a place of relative safety, and most of the survivors quickly filled the already small space where they remained until rescuers succeeded in bringing them to safety.

By the evening of the 24th, the SS *Hawke*, SS *Home*, SS *Prospero*, and the SS *Gordon C* had arrived at the scene of the wreck, captained by Captain Simonsen, Parsons, MacDermott, and Perry respectively. The rescue crews could not initially confirm the presence of survivors, leading to unfortunate reports to St. John's that "position of ship hopeless," and that the lifesaving mission had failed.[24] However, the survivors in the Marconi shack succeeded in signaling rescue crews with a flashlight, although heavy seas thwarted subsequent efforts to board the wreck (one rescuer almost drowned after being launched into the ocean). Around 27 hours after the *Florizel* went aground, the seas calmed and the rescuers finally rowed the survivors to the waiting vessels in dories, and then headed for St. John's. A considerable salvage effort followed the rescue, with bodies, mail, and wreckage being retrieved

for weeks afterwards. The pubic reaction to the *Florizel* disaster is a unique passage in Newfoundland's history, and provides insight into the social dimensions of the aftermath of an industrial disaster at sea that claimed victims other than 'working men who got wet.'

Newfoundland's newspapers recorded the loss of the *Florizel* overtly and in a straightforward fashion because the disaster occurred in the early hours of a Sunday morning. On Saturday February 23rd newspapers merely advertised that the *Florizel* would depart St. John's as usual, and the following editions printed on Monday the 25th dramatically announced the disaster with remarkably little discrepancy – clearly everyone managed to get their facts straight over February 24th. Outside of the rescue parties, those who attended seven, eight, and nine o'clock morning masses first heard of the wreck, and effectively everyone in St. John's conferred over the matter by the 11 o'clock on the 24th.[25] Large crowds assembled at the telegraph offices of Harvey & Co., Bowring's, and the Reid Newfoundland Company at regular intervals to receive any updates, and the search party first transmitted reliable reports that the ship remained intact on Sunday evening.[26] Similarly, citizens "thronged" government and railway locations equipped with telegraph stations in Corner Brook and various outports.[27] By the time newspapers rolled off the press on the 25th people had become distressed to the extent that they accosted newspaper delivery boys, "forcibly" taking papers and leaving money on the street – apparently "the people wanted the news to learn the latest reports from the ill fated *Florizel* and were not standing on ceremony."[28] The disaster quickly eclipsed wartime hostilities

to become the most discussed subject in Newfoundland (*The Daily News* alone printed 15,000 newspapers on the 25th).[29]

The rescue steamers returned the survivors to St. John's around midday on the 25th and docked at the Red Cross Pier, where the government ensured that a detachment of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment would be "drawn up under arms for the purpose of checking any rush to the wharf."[30] As some families reunited and many others went into mourning, the disaster positively blindsided residents of St. John's "because of its dreadful suddenness, because it was so utterly unexpected."[31] The unpredicted and unanticipated nature of the *Florizel* disaster became the most consistently cited aspect of the event, and sources unanimously noted that "the terrible unexpectedness is the feature that causes keenest pain."[32] Clearly, the glacial progress of the ship between St. John's and Cappahayden that caused the disaster surprised people, but the social aspect of the event's initial reception requires elaboration. The utter amazement expressed at news of the disaster likely has roots in wartime social relations, the symbolic connections represented by the ship, and the unspoken difference between an 'unexpected' maritime accident compared to more dangerous industrial seafaring labour.

The loss of the *Florizel* differs from many of Newfoundland's maritime disasters because it took place during a conflict in which the colony was heavily invested in, socially, politically and militarily. The First World War fundamentally altered everyday life and strained tensions markedly, which heavy losses on the battlefields of Europe exacerbated. The unfortunate casualties sustained by the St.

John's dominated Newfoundland Regiment at battles like Beaumont Hamel affected the colony considerably – tragedy steeped Newfoundland by 1918. This dynamic is relevant to the *Florizel* because it influenced how Newfoundlanders conceptualized death (particularly in St. John's). Sources are unanimous that hostilities tried the colony like never before, and that Newfoundlanders became 'hardened' and united through the intense war effort undertaken by the colony. Despite this resolve, the loss of the *Florizel* appears to have been a type of disaster that Newfoundland's citizenry evidently had not steeled itself for, unlike military casualties. The *Daily News* offered an assessment of the *Florizel* disaster and its reception within the context of wartime Newfoundland:

> Despite the fact that thousands of human beings are passing out of existence daily during the past three years or more, a catastrophe like the present shocks us much more than the report of the many thousands who fall in one day, or even one hour, on the battle field. The reason of this is that the one is near and the other remote...The soldier goes from us with the thought of death uppermost in our minds, and he with the full knowledge that he was facing in the direction where death holds away all around him...The *Florizel* calamity shocks the sentiment and excites the sympathy of the community more than the report of an equal number of death in battle, because the latter is remote and therefore less vivid, and because we can discern in it human motives and purposes as the causes...The other is nearer and more intimately associated with us, and consequently vivid and nerve shocking.[33]

Other sources provide similar opinions. Newfoundlanders spent four years weathering intense emotional hardship related to hostilities, and did not expect tragedy on their own shores – especially not in connection with the symbolic *Florizel*.

The tangible aspect of the *Florizel*'s symbolism has been examined, but the utter disbelief that disaster could befall the ship needs to be emphasized. Newspaper accounts written on the vessel's activity reflect the degree to which St. John's considered it a mainstay – for example on 25 February 1916 *The Evening Telegram* ran a glowing article on how Martin fought his way through ice for three days to bring in a shipment of coal, and of the craft's admirable service to the colony.[34] The *Florizel* provided an integral service to Newfoundland's isolated local economy, and attended to its dependency on imports and the means of production required to transport them during a tumultuous period in world history. The ship continually provided for citizens in a variety of different ways to become a familiar and indispensible aspect of everyday life, especially amid the tonnage shortage. Additionally, sources conveyed the opinion of the *Florizel* being "the finest of locally owned steamers" and that "no stronger or more seaworthy ship ever left the harbour of St. John's."[35] Such an outlook suggests that people thought the vessel's engineering and technological capacities placed it 'above' a tragic loss, and at a minimum cast doubt on Mother Nature's ability to act as a perpetrator in the *Florizel*'s premature destruction.[36] *The Daily News* went as far as quipping that "we could scarcely believe it possible that she should meet with disaster" because of its "strength and splendid stanchness" that had tamed Mother Nature in years past.[37] In any event, the *Florizel*'s 'mainstay' position and importance to everyday life clearly influenced the disbelief expressed subsequent to the disaster (the ship also partook in seafaring labour not typically considered dangerous).

Although sources are not explicit about what type of maritime activity people conceptualized as dangerous versus the opposite, the surprise surrounding the loss of the *Florizel* provides insight into contemporary notions of accident-prone seafaring labour. While Newfoundland's citizenry would have been well aware of the U-boat peril in the Atlantic (chiefly through the loss of the *Stephano* and a rash of sinkings in 1917), German naval activity did not present a significant enough threat to prevent the *Florizel* from putting to sea with prominent passengers. Interestingly, the ship's completely unassuming departure from St. John's provides quite the contrast that of the sealing fleet, as the colony celebrated the latter's egress in a spectacle second to none. Although partly attributable to the annual nature of the fleet's departure compared to the constant presence of the *Florizel*, Newfoundland's newspapers reflected an unspoken admission that the 'unexpected' nature of the *Florizel* disaster lay with popular interpretation of more industrial seafaring labour like sealing, in which the frequency of accidents deemed them as 'expected.' Investigating the manner in which sources contextualize the loss of the *Florizel* supports this division.

Newspapers mostly reacted to the *Florizel*'s loss by comparing it to other disasters at sea. *The Evening Telegram* initially likened it to the sinking of the SS *Southern Cross*, and by the 28th to the "great tragedy of the ice floes," which the *Evening Herald* seconded.[38] *The Twillingate Sun* instead cited the slaughter at Beaumont Hamel on 2 July 1916 as an equivalent, and the *Western Star* recorded a 'western Newfoundland' *Florizel* disaster, the loss of the SS *John Knox*, which went

aground in Chanel Harbour on 1 May 1887, killing all 27 crewmen despite rescue attempts by Burgeo's citizenry.[39] *The Sydney Post* compared the loss of the *Florizel* to the New Waterford and Stellarton mine collapses, and the *Daily News* and *St. John's Daily Star* classified the disaster as a "grief that has had no parallel in this generation at any rate," or the colony's greatest tragedy.[40] However, while different sources attempted to identify contextualizing parallels, they remain united by the unanticipated nature of the *Florizel* disaster. It would not be fitting to accuse Newfoundland's citizenry of 'expecting' the various catastrophes which befell the island between 1914 and 1918, especially the loss of the *Florizel* – but it is difficult to ignore that the island's residents did not meet the events identified as corresponding tragedies with the same wave of incredulity.

In St. John's, surprise evolved into a general state of mourning that "hung almost like a visible pall above its businesses and its homes."[41] A major salvage effort continued at the wreck of the *Florizel*, and local fishermen eventually raised dozens of bodies from Cappahayden's waters while a diver surveyed the submerged areas of the hull. Salvagers collected large quantities of mail and goods, and Detective Bryne of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary brought the galley's valuable silverware back to St. John's. By this time citizens could purchase photos depicting "25 fascinating views" of the wreck from the office of Douglas A. Cox, including "exclusive photos in and outside Marconi House (dimensions about 7x8 feet) where 34 lives were preserved," and the importance of the disaster began to descend.[42] After the colony recovered from the initial shock of losing the *Florizel*, the

island's residents dedicated significant attention to another major aspect of the disaster's commemoration – class.

Reverend Monsignor McDermott emphasized the social importance of those lost on March 7th in a spirited sermon at the R.C. Cathedral by preaching that, "it would be difficult to get together a more representative group of men and women from this city than the group that sailed to their deaths on the *Florizel*."[43] A disproportionately high number of the St. John's elite sailed on the *Florizel*'s last voyage and almost all died, the exceptions being Major Michael Sullivan of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and J.P. Kiely, owner of the Nickel Theater. Space does not permit biographies of the sixty passengers killed in the wreck, but notable losses include John Shannon Munn, who sailed with his four-year-old daughter Betty, Thomas McNeil, W.F. Butler, James Baggs, Captain Joseph Kean, Patrick Laracy, W. Moore and Newman Sellars. The more prominent fatalities represent a cross-section of Newfoundland's social and commercial elite, and the social standing of each victim strongly influenced public grieving for specific deaths within St. John's. The death of John Munn corroborates this dynamic.

The Munns belonged to the gentility of Harbour Grace, where John was born on 6 July 1880. The family fell on hard times with the death of John's father William in 1882 and the bankruptcy of his estate in 1884, however his mother Flora Clift quickly remarried Edgar Bowring, and upon her death in 1888 John became Edgar's ward.[44] John received his education at Oxford and became very successful in Newfoundland's business community, including being elected the president of the

St. John's Board of Trade. By 1918 he filled the position of the managing director of both Bowring's entire commercial operation and their Red Cross Line, and intended to take *Florizel* to Halifax to meet his wife Alice May Munn.[45] Newspapers publicized Munn's death significantly more than that of any other victim of the disaster, and unanimously praised him for doing "great things in the peaceful arts of Empire building" and noted that "none is more deeply mourned."[46]

Thomas McNeil trailed Munn in prestige. The grandson of the founder of McMurdo's Drug Store and leading member of St. John's commercial elite, McNeil heavily involved himself in city affairs and the Presbyterian Church, and his widow's father held superintendence in the Anglo-American Telegraph Company.[47] Similarly, renowned Captain Joe Kean lost his life in the wreck greatly distressing the sealing community, and James Baggs, one of the most prosperous merchants in western Newfoundland met the same fate. Newman Sellars and W. Moore also died, the former being a well-known insurance agent who "travelled frequently for business," while the latter enjoyed an "eminently successful" business career, worked with James Baird Limited and also ran his own commercial establishment.[48] St. John's further mourned the loss of Patrick Laracy, "connected with the business of the colony for nearly 50 years" through a successful dry goods business and later as owner of the "highly popular" Crescent Theatre, and architect W.F. Butler, responsible for the "bulk of the city's architectural work on many of the larger buildings and residences."[49] Numerous other notable residents perished in the disaster, but Munn, McNeil, Baggs, Sellars, Moore, Laracy and Butler offer

representative examples of many victims of the wreck – the *Florizel* essentially carried a 'who's who' of Newfoundland's social and commercial elite.

The class-based distinction of the *Florizel* disaster is unique in Newfoundland's history, as is the social impact made by the event. Never before had so many leading citizens been killed at one time, and that the tragedy played out "so close to our doors" added a measure of anger over its preventable nature.[50] An editorial from *The Evening Telegram* provides insight into the conceptualization of the deaths on the *Florizel*:

> Practically all sections of business and industrial life is hit and hit hard. There was hardly an old person among them. All were men and women in the strength of youth and in the vigor of manhood. Not one of them could be spared. They were of our very best, our most useful and most needed, aye and our most esteemed and respected and loved. A friend well acquainted with this city from his childhood wrote me yesterday, that the loss of a hundred thousand men in an engagement with the enemy would not be such a blow to England or Scotland as the loss of these ninety four people to St. John's and to Newfoundland. And that is doubtless true.[51]

While dramatic, such content hits home the extent to which the social composition of the *Florizel*'s passengers influenced the process of mourning in St. John's. Additionally, the speculation that industrial life would be "hit hard" proved to be correct – by March 9th a group of men found their way to Twillingate, displaced from their temporary lodging and employment at the Grand Falls paper mill because the *Florizel* provided the means by which paper traveled to New York.[52] In the immediate wake of the disaster Newfoundland's newspapers reflect the initial shock expressed at the grounding of the ship and the loss of leading citizens, which quickly

manifested into tangible evidence of class relations with the recovery of bodies from the wreck site.

A breakthrough in the salvage effort occurred on March 11th, when Cappahayden's fishermen discovered a coastal gulch containing a large number of bodies. Between then and the 20th, salvagers recovered forty-three bodies from the gulch and sent them by train to Petty Harbour. Upon arrival the undertaker, Andrew Carnell, the owner of Carnell's Funeral Home on Freshwater Road, prepared them for burial (he had already processed over thirty bodies recovered earlier). As survivors slowly recuperated in St. John's and salvagers recovered bodies which medical authorities attended to, many victims' families began making funeral plans. The first major funerals occured on Monday March 11th for John and Betty Munn, Betty's nurse Evelyn Trenchard, and Joe Kean. The four had been found early in the salvage effort, along with Charles Snow, W. Butler, and second steward Edward Berteau, arriving in St. John's on March 9th. Although *The Daily News* classified many of the funerals as public spectacles for "the merchant princes of the world," none compared to the Munn's, Trenchard, and Kean's.[53]

The Munns decided to include Evelyn in the funeral for John and Betty, and the procession passed through St. John's destined for the Anglican cemetery near Quidi Vidi Lake. All offices and businesses along Water Street closed their doors between two and four o'clock, and "hundreds of citizens and sealers...of all classes of the community" attended the event.[54] Sources reported that essentially the entire business community of St. John's paid their respects, and "the working man, to who

Mr. Munn was a true friend, was largely represented" – editors could not remember a more sorrowful funeral in the city's history.[55] Similarly, sources classified Kean's funeral on the same day as one of the "largest and most impressing" seen in St. John's, which is not surprising considering the social standing of his father, Abram.[56] Many sealers attended the funeral and several hundred Orangemen walked in front of the casket, "including the principal officer of city lodges."[57] Further, Newfoundland's mercantile community delayed the departure of the sealing fleet "as a show of respect," and basically every member of outport lodges in St. John's at the time attended Kean's funeral.[58] While Kean's popularity did not rival Munn's, people clearly placed high agency on his funeral, and sources unanimously noted that he "was the ideal husband and dutiful son – and a man."[59] Curiously, Abram opted not to attend, instead sailing the SS *Terra Nova* to the front and striking the hoods three days later (the fleet's postponement ended before Kean's funeral).[60]

Other funerals followed the spectacles of March 11th, including that of George Massey and his eleven-year-old daughter Catharine (the first female to be buried in the Masonic Temple in St. John's), but without the early exhibitionism associated with Munn and Kean. While it is not surprising that Newfoundland's residents received tragic deaths within the colony's elite with an intensified level of commemoration, the unspoken but candid admission that they assigned higher value to human life based on class and occupation is unsettling. The social impact made by Munn's death alone yields more content for historians than the loss of the

Southern Cross and its crew of 174 – a dynamic explained in part through an editorial in *The Evening Telegram*:

> Though the *Florizel* disaster does not approach that of the *Southern Cross* in magnitude, it nevertheless strikes a harder blow at this city, as among those who went down in the latter ill fated ship were many from the different outports, whereas on the *Florizel* the majority, if not all, are of St. John's.[61]

Such an opinion advances geography in addition to class as a factor in the social impact made by the *Florizel* disaster, but only further obscures that of the *Southern Cross*. Social stratification playing a hand in the commemoration of a disaster at sea is commonplace – the key aspect here is the differing criteria on which Newfoundland's residents evaluated victims of the *Florizel* disaster against compared to sailors engaged in dangerous seafaring labour. While the colony's citizenry did commemorate the *Newfoundland* disaster, their activities hardly compared to the loss of the *Florizel*, and comparing the latter to the commemoration of the *Southern Cross* emphasizes the degree to which class can influence both people's reaction to death and collective memory. A priest at the Cochrane Street Parish went as far as declaring that, "A greater blow has been struck at St. John's by the loss of the *Florizel* than if the empire has lost 10,000 in battle" – a far cry from the reception to the disasters of 1914 – especially the *Southern Cross*.[62] In any event, after bodies recovered from Cappahayden began being buried, the preventable nature of the *Florizel*'s destruction captured the attention of Newfoundland's citizenry.

Predictably, people quickly identified the absence of life saving stations, lighthouses, lightships, and rescue tugs as major threats to shipping and impediments to navigation. Sources are unanimous in their condemnation of neglect regarding coastal safety, although vary somewhat in attributing responsibility – some demand action be taken by the government, while others claim that "the government is no worse than the people who permit it to remain in office" thus warranting communal action. Both editorials and printed sermons encouraged Newfoundlanders to insist on better safeguards on the grounds that apathy equated to criminal negligence, a claim all too easy to back up given the island's treacherous coastline and a plethora of related disasters at sea. Similarly, newspapers based on the Avalon Peninsula consistently drew comparisons to the wreck of the SS *Regulus*, an unfortunate cargo carrier involved in six serious maritime accidents between 1907 and 1910 which ultimately ran aground in October of 1910 between Bull Head and Petty Harbour Motion, killing all 20 crewmen.[63] The inquiry into the loss called for navigational aides and a rescue apparatus, which fell on deaf ears. The public swiftly picked up on the themes of neglect and apathy in relation to maritime disasters, and identified them as variables in the loss of the *Florizel*.

The unexpected and class-based nature of *Florizel* disaster intensified public desire for safety measures, and many of Newfoundland's residents criticized the lackadaisical and apathetic approach to the perils of everyday life in a maritime country. Although newspapers agreed that Newfoundlanders live "and they have to, and will always have to by the very nature of the country's staple business," by

taking chances at sea, the popular opinion concluded that people treated coastal safety with flagrant disregard.[64] For example, a contributor to *The Evening Telegram* pointed out that the government pledged to erect a lighthouse at Cape Race following the grounding of the SS *Acadian Recorder* as early as 1848. Numerous other vessels ran aground subsequently, including the notorious groundings of the SS *Britannia*, the SS *Florence*, and the SS *Anglo Saxon* – all at or near Cape Race – yet the government did nothing.[65] Overt contributions from many others published in Newfoundland's newspapers condemned the indifferent attitude typically surrounding coastal and maritime safety. They often cited the island having "not a single life boat station, not even a rocket apparatus for service," and blamed a reckless approach to danger as an aspect of everyday life.[66] Corner Brook's *Western Star* elaborated upon this dynamic by challenging its readers to justify the absence of safety measures around the Cabot Strait given the region's heavy volume of traffic and logistical importance to the dominion.[67] *The Western Star* also emphasized that "the cost need not be a deterrent" in instituting aids to coastal safety compared to the value of human life, a theme expanded upon by other sources.[68]

Newfoundland's citizenry widely discussed the topics of general safety and vigilance in maritime affairs in the wake of the *Florizel* disaster. The St. John's based *Evening Herald* pointed to the "the undesirability of steamers leaving here on westbound voyages after nightfall, especially when weather conditions are threatening," which Ottawa seconded through a reprimand that the *Florizel* went to sea in the face of a meteorological warning.[69] Other sources criticized the laissez-

fare ethos surrounding shipping and expressed alarm at the unknown whereabouts of a number of Newfoundland-based vessels, as some had been overdue for over 100 days on voyages previously undertaken in less than a month.[70] The flurry of legislative activity in the wake of the 1914 sealing tragedies also influenced the aftermath of the *Florizel* disaster – the public deemed the government protecting sealers with legislation while not addressing merchant sailors as unfair.[71] The theme of an administrative apparatus regarding merchant-marine safety received significant attention, and is linked to a popular desire to modernize shipping and adjust the ratio between tonnage and human life in favour of the latter. Sadly, it took the deaths of notables on the *Florizel* and the staggering nature of the disaster for such ideas to be widely and openly discussed.

Newfoundland's citizenry quickly began to analyze the outcry for stricter management of merchant shipping around the colony in the aftermath of the *Florizel* disaster. Sources initially reflected the event's unanticipated nature, quickly giving way to issues of class and mourning, after which maritime affairs become prominent – the broad topic of an administrative and legislative framework pertaining to colonial shipping grew out of the widespread discussion on coastal safety. One editorial pointed out that "there are suspicions abroad that greed of gain has counted more than the lives of men" and that international and ubiquitous cost cutting measures endangered the lives of seamen.[72] A contributor to *The Daily News* also expressed concern for insurance requirements, vessel assessments, vessel-construction parameters, and a general overhauling in the administration of colonial

shipping. Notably, people also identified the high wages paid to sailors in light of wartime hostilities as having the potential to "tempt men to incur risks they should not be asked to incur."[73] While many of the opinions expressed focused on speculation of a tentative nature, the loss of the *Florizel* caused people to ask farther-reaching and fundamental questions noticeably absent from the wake of 1914's sealing disasters. Unlike the sealers lost on the SS *Newfoundland* and *Southern Cross*, the deaths of those on the *Florizel* made a social impact that called for a disproportionately greater focus on maritime affairs and safety. After the *Florizel* disaster, the public professed to place higher agency the preservation of human life and reaching an equilibrium between maritime safety and the management of commerce. Until the colony received and observed such measures, popular consensus concluded that "disasters will come, Newfoundland will pay the price."[74]

Between 1914 and 1918 Newfoundland had 'paid the price,' both in terms of citizens killed at sea and through another dominating factor in the commemoration of *Florizel* disaster: World War One. Although the loss of the *Florizel* initially surpassed war news, tidings on hostilities quickly returned to being the most abundant news items. The Bolshevik Revolution and the ensuing political instability's effect on Russia's military effort caused great concern, and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk confirmed the Allies' worst fears. Russia and the Central Powers signed the treaty eight days after the *Florizel* went aground, and newspapers understandably reported extensively the Soviet Federative withdrawal from

hostilities. However, the treaty allowed Germany to act on intelligence from the eastern front regarding the disorderly nature of Russia's military affairs, and transferred almost fifty divisions from the Baltics to Western Europe in preparation for their spring offensive, dubbed Operation Michael. The Germans designed their campaign as a last ditch effort to push British forces out of northern France, and the impressive scale of preparations reflected what was at stake – the outcome of the War. The Germans went as far as inviting media officials to freely saunter around the area from which the offensive would be launched, and the menacing reports received subsequently caused considerable tension.[75]

The Germans launched Operation Michael on 20 March 1914, and missives on the *Florizel* outside of published trial minutes rarely made headlines thereafter. Instead of shocking articles about peril on the high seas, news flashes typically took advantage of hostilities through articles with titles such as "Armies Locked in Death Struggle: Mightiest Conflict Ever" or "The Great Battle Has United All Classes in England."[76] Newfoundland's press even printed newspapers on Good Friday, "in view of the crucial war situation."[77] It is hardly surprising that the scale of Germany's spring offensive relegated the *Florizel* to 'yesterdays news,' but the situation staunched the rate at which newspapers produced content on the disaster, and thus the historian's ability to further assess its social impact. The importance, scale, and rigour of Operation Michael created a proliferation of articles focused on conscription fears, German spies, Russia's capitulation and Bolshevik conspiracy theories that almost totally eclipsed the *Florizel* disaster. Sizable content on the

Florizel only appears on the rare slow news day, including April 9th when rough weather knocked out telegraph service and thus news from abroad. The attention of Newfoundland's citizenry essentially shifted from a coastal reef at Cappahayden to the battlefields of France, and the *Florizel* became another unfortunate footnote in the colony's checkered history of disasters at sea. The forlorn hulk simply became a familiar sight to Cappahayden's fishermen, and the colony trudged on. However, with the chronological framework of the events associated with the *Florizel* established, one process stands out and requires inspection: the gendered interpretation of the disaster's reception.

Newfoundland's citizenry reacted to the loss of the *Florizel* in remarkably gendered fashion – sources placed the disaster and its victims in an exclusively masculine context. People swiftly identified the impressive rescue effort after the disaster, and sources congruently praised those who "demonstrated their British pluck and spirit by facing almost certain death to render help to those whose lives were in jeopardy."[78] Without question, the crews of the *Hawke*, *Home*, *Prospero* and *Gordon C* all displayed exemplary seamanship, and sources universally praised Captain Perry of the latter vessel for making six trips to the wreck in a small dory and personally overseeing the rescue of around twenty passengers. Newfoundland's newspapers portrayed the "magnificent courage and absolute self forgetfulness" with which the rescuers acted as they rowed "frail dories over the hundreds of yards of raging seas" to the stranded liner.[79]

Tabloids maintained a discourse of masculinity, of "hardihood, skill, and bravery" throughout the narrative on the rescue, and the actions of the various crews received heavy coverage.[80] Indeed, the Prince of Wales awarded six men from the *Hawke* and *Gordon C* with the Royal Humane Society Medal for Bravery in 1919, and another six rescuers received the Board of Trade Medal for Gallantry in Saving Life at Sea. The island's citizenry strongly voiced their opinion that the rescuers should be decorated for their service, a belief likely influenced in part by the sensational retrieval of five crewmen from the Norwegian vessel *Snorre* that went aground at Bonavista on 18 September 1907 (the Carnegie Foundation later honoured local fishermen who saved the crew as heroes).[81] The ethos of masculinity surrounding the rescue extended to the interpretation of the victims.

Despite the fact that adult males defined the vast majority of the *Florizel* disaster's victims, the public left the loss of women and children largely untouched. Clearly, numbers are at work – 11 females died, 2 of whom where children, as well as three male children, compared to eighty adults (fifty-four of them passengers) – but the gendered social response is notable. The monument dedicated to Betty Munn in Bowring Park of St. John's can lead the historian to believe that the loss of women and children had a major bearing on the disaster's commemoration, which is certainly not the case. With the exception of a few headlines like "Children Cried for their Mother Mid Din of Wreck," the press effectively excluded femininity and youth when reporting on survivors, instead focusing on the notions of perseverance, skill, and success as they related to the men killed. The unusually high numbers of elites

on the *Florizel* makes its loss difficult to compare with other maritime catastrophes in Newfoundland's waters, but a brief comparison to the infamous sinking of the SS *Arctic* off Cape Race in 1854 suggests that the deaths of women and children via shipwreck did not have a significant bearing on the immediate social impact of a disaster at sea.[82]

The reason the gendered dimension of the *Florizel* disaster excludes women and children is difficult to establish with certainty, but likely has classist and social origins. The socioeconomic status of many of the male victims disproportionately outweighed that of the women, which would be reflected through their removal from everyday colonial life. Grieving over the deaths of women and children evidently presented little benefit in comparison to a strictly masculine interpretation of the disaster. The ethos of masculinity associated with the war effort also may have influenced how the public interpreted the disaster, as women did not serve overseas, nor did they die overseas. The social 'spotlight' definitely focused on Newfoundland's male citizenry – especially in St. John's, hometown to most of the *Florizel*'s victims. In any event, the gendered dimension of the disaster is interesting. If one simply read the sources associated with the *Florizel* disaster and possessed no prior knowledge of the event, it would be relatively simple to miss that any women or children died.

The *Florizel* disaster's reception also has a classist dimension that reaches beyond the social status of many of the victims. As Peter McInnis points out, the *Florizel*'s final voyage coincided with a tumultuous period for labour relations in St.

John's.[83] As discussed earlier, the city's elite undertook various commercial schemes that undeniably generated monetary profit from wartime conditions and had a disproportionately severe effect on those least able to bear it. However, not surprisingly, sources do not reflect overt class conflict in the wake of the disaster. Presuming that newspapers reported happenings accurately, it seems that the loss of the *Florizel* transcended class conflict – the tragedy strongly affected all for Newfoundlanders, and the event's commemoration bears absolutely no evidence of the spite or ill-will extant in labour relations at the time. Sources are unanimous that colonial residents shed tears "from the homes of rich and poor alike," and that the disaster "affected all classes of the community."[84] Even when those in a strong financial position had the gall to import ten automobiles while "we have been scouring the world for a steamer to carry the necessaries of life for man and beast" after losing the *Florizel*, residents did not complain significantly.[85] This respectful dynamic is predictable, but the total absence of any content relating to class conflict in the disaster's social impact is notable.

The *Florizel* disaster rapidly faded from Newfoundland's press given the importance of the event, and hostilities in Europe eclipsed the processes evolving in its wake. Newspapers published trial minutes from the inquiry sporadically, mostly as filler. Subsequent to Martin's conviction for failing to take adequate soundings, news on the *Florizel* died out completely. The press ran a modest few articles in August of 1925, when Sir Edgar Bowring selected the site he wished to erect the Peter Pan statue currently in Bowring Park. After torrential rains halted the first

unveiling on Friday August 28th, Mayor Cook presented a crowd of 3,000 people with the statue the following day, including many of the elite of St. John's. He announced that the statue commemorated "a dear little girl who loved this park very much," and the "spirit of eternal youth" represented by children's character Peter Pan.[86] However, unlike the bronze memorial to Betty Munn, the postscript of the *Florizel* disaster is rather unsound.

The official inquiry into the disaster found Martin to be at fault for not taking adequate soundings. The court made clear that his Masters license would normally have been suspended, but did not enforce the penalty in lieu of his stellar safety record. The perceived environmental factors influencing the *Florizel* on its final voyage also worked in Martin's favour. Those involved in the inquiry believed that strange tidal currents caused what they refer to as the Polar Current, today known as the Labrador Current, to reverse – to travel from south to north as opposed to north to south.[87] Those involved with the inquiry agreed that before a gale, "it was not unusual" for the Labrador Current to reverse, which dramatically impeded the progress of the *Florizel* and played a major role in its destruction (Martin's lawyer identified it as the only factor responsible for the disaster).[88] While the scientific limitations of the day obviously inhibited the abilities of those conducting the inquiry, modern oceanography provides ample evidence that the Labrador Current certainly does not reverse. Similarly, probing the story almost 60 years later, well known Newfoundland author Cassie Brown recorded her theory that engineer Phillip Jackman purposely 'throttled,' or 'shut in' the engines to impede the ship's

progress so that it would arrive in Halifax later than intended. Brown wrote that he acted on the desire to spend the ensuing evening with his family; although she does not provide rationale for why the *Florizel* would not simply set sail once it had discharged its passengers and cargo (the theory is probably a selling point for her book). Jackman clearly would have known the dangers of throttling the engine, especially in a storm while passing Cape Race – the theory is unverifiable and extremely unlikely (Jackman also testified that the *Florizel*'s propeller remained submerged, likely ruling out cavitation). Neither the Labrador Current or Jackman had any bearing on the *Florizel*'s progress, and it seems improbable that the storm alone caused the vessel to travel only forty-five miles in eight hours. The source of the *Florizel*'s glacial headway resulting in its loss remains unknown.

As the only vessel plying Newfoundland's waters by 1915 because of the shortsightedness of Water Street merchants, the *Florizel* became an important tangible and symbolic connection to the outside world for the island's citizenry at the time of its loss. Although the colony acquainted itself with tragedy by 1918, the *Florizel* disaster positively blindsided Newfoundlanders, and the event's commemorational unfolding dramatically differed from that of the sealing disasters of 1914 because civilians lost their lives, not just 'working men who got wet.' The social standing of the victims also strongly influenced the disaster's reception, and there is no question that many Newfoundlanders valued the lives of colonial elites at a higher premium than that of the island's seafaring population (specifically in St. John's). The event remains an iconic disaster at sea in Newfoundland's history, and

even ninety-four years later, families still drive to Cappahayden to gaze at the coastline where the vessel ran aground. Indeed, the *Florizel* disaster touched a different nerve than the sealing disasters of 1914 because prominent civilians died on a neglected coastline in a particularly horrific and completely 'unexpected' industrial disaster – a disaster that proves beyond a reasonable doubt that social inequality played a large role in the commemoration of maritime tragedies in Newfoundland between 1914 and 1918.

Endnotes – Chapter Five

[1] *The Evening Telegram*, 8 April 1918.
[2] Cassie Brown, *A Winters Tale: The Wreck of the Florizel* (St. John's, 1976), 4
[3] See, "Florizel, S.S." in *The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 228.
[4] Cassie Brown Papers, 10.01.012. When approached by author Cassie Brown for background specifications on the *Florizel*, a Bowring's employee merely stated, "all our old records are lost."
[5] Cassie Brown Papers, 10.01.06.
[6] Levi Chafe, *Chafe's Sealing Book: A Statistical Record of the Newfoundland Steamer Seal Fishery, 1863 – 1941*, Shannon Ryan, ed. (St. John's, 1989), 161.
[7] Ibid., 161.
[8] Patricia O'Brien, *The Newfoundland Patriotic Association: The Administration of the War Effort, 1914 – 1918.* Masters Thesis for Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981, 239.
[9] O'Brien, 239.
[10] Ibid., 239.
[11] Ibid., 239, . This included A.J. Harvey, The Honourable M.J. Winter, the Honourable George Knowling, the Honourable James Angel, the Honourable R.J. Bishop, John Harris, John Harvey, G.W.B. Ayre, David Baird, W.J. Ellis, Norman and Herbert Outerbridge, and C.M. Harvey.
[12] *The Evening Telegram*, 25 February 1916.
[13] Ibid., 18 February 1916. A quintal is a measure of weight equal to 100 kilograms.
[14] Ibid., 21 February 1917.
[15] O'Brien, 237.
[16] *The Evening Telegram*, 25 February 1916.
[17] O'Brien, 242.
[18] Ibid., 242.
[19] *The Evening Telegram*, 18 February 1916.
[20] Paul Halpern, *A Naval History of World War One* (London, 1994), 336.
[21] Ibid., 336.
[22] *The Evening Telegram*, 21 February 1917.
[23] *The Daily News*, 25 February 1918.
[24] Ibid., 25 February 1918.
[25] *The St. John's Daily Star*, 25 February 1918.
[26] Ibid., 23 February 1918.
[27] *The Western Star*, 27 February 1918.
[28] *The Daily News*, 26 February 1918.
[29] Ibid., 26 February 1918.
[30] *The Evening Telegram*, 25 February 1918.
[31] Ibid., 25 February 1918.
[32] *The Evening Herald*, 26 February 1918.
[33] *The Daily News*, 26 February 1918.

[34] *The Evening Telegram*, 25 February 1916.
[35] *The Twillingate Sun*, 2 March 1919, see also, *The Daily News*, 26 February 1918.
[36] *The Twillingate Sun*, 2 March 1919, see also, *The Daily News*, 26 February 1918.
[37] *The Daily News*, 5 March 1918.
[38] *The Evening Telegram*, 26, 27, 28 February 1918, see also, *The Evening Herald*, 25 February 1918.
[39] *The Twillingate Sun*, 2 March 1918, see also, *The Western Star*, 20 March 1918.
[40] *The Daily News*, 25, 26 February 1918, see also, *The St. John's Daily Star*, 6 March 1918.
[41] *The Evening Telegram*, 8 March 1918.
[42] *The St. John's Daily Star*, 5 March 1918.
[43] *The Evening Telegram*, 8 March 1918.
[44] See "Munn, John Shannon" in *The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 650.
[45] Ibid., see also, *The Daily News*, 25 February 1918.
[46] *The Daily News*, 26 February 1918, see also, The *St. John's Daily Star*, 26 February 1918.
[47] *The Daily News*, 25 February 1918.
[48] Ibid, 26 February 1918.
[49] Ibid., 26 February 1918.
[50] *The Evening Telegram*, 8 April 1918.
[51] Ibid., 8 March 1918.
[52] *The Twillingate Sun*, 9 March 1918.
[53] *The Daily News*, 26 February 1918.
[54] Ibid., 12 March 1918.
[55] Ibid., 12 March 1918.
[56] *The St. John's Daily Star*, 15 March 1918.
[57] Ibid., 15 March 1918.
[58] *The Daily News*, 11 March 1918, see also, *The St. John's Daily Star*, 15 March 1918.
[59] *The Daily News*, 26 February 1918.
[60] *St. Johns Daily Star*, 15 March 1918.
[61] *The Evening Telegram*, 25 February 1918.
[62] Ibid., 2 March 1918.
[63] Ibid., 4 March 1918, See also, "SS Regulus" in the *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 561.
[64] *The Evening Telegram*, 28 February 1919, see also, Ibid., 8 March 1918.
[65] Ibid., 8 April 1918.
[66] *The Twillingate Sun*, 2 March 1918, see also, *The Daily News*, 4 March 1918, see also, *The St. John's Daily Star*, 16 April 1918, see also, *The Evening Telegram*, 6 March 1918.
[67] *The Western Star*, 13 March 1918.

[68] Ibid., 20 March 1918, see also, *The Daily News*, 5 March. Newspapers were overt about the need for human to be held in higher regard than the value of property.
[69] *The Evening Herald*, 26 February 1918, see also, *The Evening Telegram*, 2 March 1918.
[70] *The Daily News*, 5 March 1918, see also, Ibid., 20 March 1918.
[71] *The Evening Telegram*, 6 March 1918.
[72] *The Daily News*, 5 March 1918.
[73] Ibid., 5 March 1918.
[74] Ibid., 5 March 1918.
[75] *The Evening Herald*, 19 March 1918.
[76] *The Evening Telegram*, 23, 28 March 1918.
[77] *The Daily News*, 28 March 1918.
[78] Ibid., 26 February 1918.
[79] *The St. John's Daily Star*, 27 February 1918.
[80] Ibid., 27 February 1918.
[81] *The Daily News*, 28 February 1918, see also, David Molloy, *The First Landfall: Historic Lighthouses of Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's, 1994), 73.
[82] The social impact created by the sinking of the SS *Arctic* emphasizes the extent to which the gendered dimension *Florizel* disaster is to be expected. The *Arctic* was a 280-foot steamer belonging to the Collins Line designed to transport passengers and goods in relative luxury around the North American seaboard and across the Atlantic, services it performed between 1852 and its loss two years later. On its final voyage, a number of prominent passengers sailed with the ship, including the wife, only daughter, and son of Edward Knight Collins, owner of the Collins Line, and Frederick Catherwood, an English artist and architect. On 27 September 1854, the *Arctic* collided with the French ship SS *Vesta* causing considerable damage to both parties. Captain James Luce, the *Arctic*'s master, decided that steaming toward Newfoundland (and away from the *Vesta*) presented the most promising possibility for survival. Unfortunately, the ship never made land, sinking somewhere off Cape Race, killing 321 passengers and 92 crewmen. No women or children survived, which was not reported on in any capacity in Newfoundland's press, unlike the "revolting scandal" and "eternal shame" that ensued when it was discovered that the colonial government did not undertake a sufficient rescue effort. Admittedly, a comparison between the social impacts of the gendered dimensions of the *Arctic* and *Florizel* disasters is not perfect – loss of life was significantly more severe on the former ship, it was not carrying members of Newfoundland's elite, and they a time span of sixty years separates the two events. However, the point is that gender was not identified as a commemorative matter in the wake of either disaster. See *Newfoundlander*, 5, 9, 26, October, 1854, see also, *Newfoundlander*, 9 November 1854, see also, Alexander Brown, *Women and Children Last: The Loss of the Steamship Arctic* (New York, 1961), see also, David Shaw, The *Sea Shall Embrace Them: The Tragic Story of the Steamship Arctic* (New York, 2002).

[83] Peter McInnis, *Newfoundland Labour and World War I: The Emergence of the Newfoundland Industrial Association*. Masters Thesis for Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1987.
[84] *The Evening Telegram*, 25 February 1918, see also, *The Daily News*, 12 March 1918.
[85] *The Evening Telegram*, 10 April 1918.
[86] Ibid., 31 August 1918, see also, *The Daily News*, 31 August 1918.
[87] Cassie Brown Papers, 10.01.010. Brown received a full copy of the inquiry into the loss, accessible in the Archive of the Center for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland.
[88] Ibid. The court concluded, "unusual and extraordinary tidal conditions sometimes occur along the coast."

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The twentieth century contains no shortage of disasters throughout the industrial trinity of railways, mining, and seafaring, the academic historiography of which remains underdeveloped. Similarly, despite the popular focus on general maritime topics, academic research into disasters at sea is minimal, and the gendered dimension of facing risk is a promising avenue of research for interpreting such events. As proved by the SS *Newfoundland* disaster of 1914, the masculine ethos of seafarers and the gendered workplace they laboured within had a major bearing on conceptualizations of danger (similar to other industrial sectors). Indeed, it is beyond a reasonable doubt the need to demonstrate mastery over Mother Nature and the elements, or to 'take it,' was a major factor in the causation of industrial disasters at sea.

The disasters that befell the *Newfoundland*, the SS *Southern Cross*, and the SS *Florizel* represent a trio of events that offer telling insight into class relations in Newfoundland. While the colony had long been acquainted with maritime peril, the blizzard which descended on the *Newfoundland*'s crew and the ensuing horrific ordeal endured by the men jolted the dominion as never before. Unlike the *Greenland* disaster of 1898 that colonial residents hastily disregarded, the aftermath of the sealing tragedies in 1914 differed markedly. The creation of the Fishermen's Protective Union in 1908 and the nature of its volatile president William Ford Coaker allowed the island's fishermen to voice their discontent about social inequalities in the wake of the sealing disasters. The callous and impolitic decision

on behalf of Water Street merchants to have their ships continue the hunt and not accompany the SS *Bellaventure* to port understandably angered the colony's seafaring population (made perfectly clear by Coaker).

Once the totality of the 1914 sealing season began to sink in, the colony came together in a show of sympathy and support, particularly through the disaster fund, but before long simmering over underlying social inequalities contributed to a division between the 'toilers' and the 'fishocracy.' The preventable nature of the *Newfoundland* disaster – that the absence of a wireless device undeniably made the event more likely – exacerbated tensions. Although the ensuing conflict between Coaker and Abram Kean became an extremely public affair (partly because of Coaker's aversion to a captain allegedly culpable in two paternalistic and preventable disasters), remarkably limited aftermaths succeeded both the *Newfoundland* and *Southern Cross* disasters considering their magnitude. Sadly, it took the dual tragedies of 1914 for the government to entertain the implication of what fishermen had long been calling for – regulations and legislative intervention capable of keeping the dangers of the sealfishery in check thus eliminating unnecessary accidents. While the inquiry into the *Newfoundland* disaster produced commendable (if not long needed) results, the same cannot be said for inquiry into the loss of the *Southern Cross*. Further, the outbreak of World War One shortly after the disasters strongly influenced their immediate aftermath. Hostilities rapidly drew Newfoundland into a global conflict which exerted unprecedented pressure on the

island and seriously altered socioeconomic relations. The First World War also overshadowed the commemorational unfolding of the *Florizel* disaster.

The *Florizel* plied Newfoundland's waters during the latter phase of hostilities, by which point the colony had suffered considerably, and the ship had become an important symbolic connection to the outside world. The vessel's grounding at Cappahayden and the ensuing disaster brought the dominion to a standstill because of the social status of those killed and the ramifications of their removal from everyday colonial life. However, the 'unexpected' nature of the *Florizel* disaster and the exhibitionism associated with the tragedy's victims provides undeniable evidence of class-based social inequalities in Newfoundland when compared to the disasters of 1914 – colonial residents expected 'working men who got wet' to 'sacrifice' themselves in a noble war against Mother Nature, while not expecting the same for those of a higher social standing. The trio of disasters and the respective social impacts proves beyond that the colony's citizenry placed higher value on the lives of elites.

While the *Newfoundland*, *Southern Cross* and *Florizel* disasters greatly differed in nature, they represent a series of events with singular importance to class relations in Newfoundland, and the tragedy involving the former vessel provides insight into the gendered dimensions of facing risk at sea. Despite the magnitude of each disaster, the dominion had little time for deliberation – the outbreak of the First World War fundamentally eclipsed all aspects of commemoration. Nowhere is such a dynamic clearer than in the case of the *Southern*

Cross's crew, whose disappearance remains an example of a cancer eating at the vitals of class relations and inequality in the twentieth century.

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