

## The Big Blow - *excerpt from Canadian Yachting Magazine, Summer 2005*

On Friday, November 7, 1913, as hundreds of ships left port on their final trips of the season, a deadly atmospheric disturbance was already churning Lake Superior and spreading east. By Sunday night, Lake Huron was battered by a whiteout blizzard and mountainous 35-foot waves. The "White Hurricane" as it became known, was the worst Great Lakes storm on record, the monstrous product of a meteorological chain of cause and effect that has yet to repeat itself.

The storm ravaged the Great Lakes region for three days, destroying 19 vessels and stranding 19 others, with a loss of 244 lives. The bulk of the wreckage was cast up on the shores of Huron County, where recovery and identification of the crews' bodies was directed by a Lake Carriers' Association committee based at Goderich. Lake Huron north winds exceeded 110 km/h, with gusts in excess of 139 km/h. Lake Erie's west winds caused the lake level to drop to 1.8 m in the western basin, leaving several boats sitting on the bottom of Maumee Bay.

Low visibility due to the heavy snow and freezing spray added to the danger. The steamer J.F. Durston, crossing Lake Huron, arrived at Mackinaw, Michigan covered with 1,000 tons of ice. At Port Huron, Michigan, at the southern end of the lake, trees were uprooted, roofs ripped off buildings and the shoreline severely eroded. Waves swept over a protective breakwater and into the mouth of the Port Huron canal, blocking it with an estimated 18,000 cubic meters of sand.

As the storm, known historically as the "Ultimate Storm" and the "Big Blow," moved across Lake Erie, the barometer dipped to 96.9 kPa in Erie Pennsylvania. Buffalo, New York measured winds of 100 km/h and 56 cm of snow fell on Cleveland Ohio after a day of freezing rain.

The body of Captain Edward McConkey, Master of the ill-fated Regina, a vessel lost in the November storm, washed up on shore nearly a year later. Among his personal effects were a diary and a pocket watch. These items are now part of the Huron County Museum's collection.

Great Lakes mariners fear the gales of November. Six to 10,000 vessels lost in autumn storms litter the lake bottoms. Among the lost ships are LaSalle's Le Griffon (1679), the schooner Black Hawk (1847), the schooner Persia (1869), the ore carriers Charles S Price and the James B. Carruthers (1913), the steel Freighter Novadoc (1940), the limestone carrier Carl D. Bradley (1958), and the ore carrier Edmund Fitzgerald (1975) which was made famous in a song by Gordon Lightfoot.