



## Unknown Targets: Avocational Societies and Deepwater Surveying

By: Warren Bush

The offshore vessel rolled over the choppy waters of the North Atlantic Ocean's Flemish Pass Basin as the starless night passed from dull grey to the light grey of dawn. As the oncoming watch groggily made their way onto the bridge and the control room, faint light beamed through the portholes casting greyscale shadows around them. The ship quietly steamed through the ever-present fog while the bridge watch monitored the radar and chart plotter, eagerly anticipating the welcome warmth of the sun and the increased visibility that it would bring.

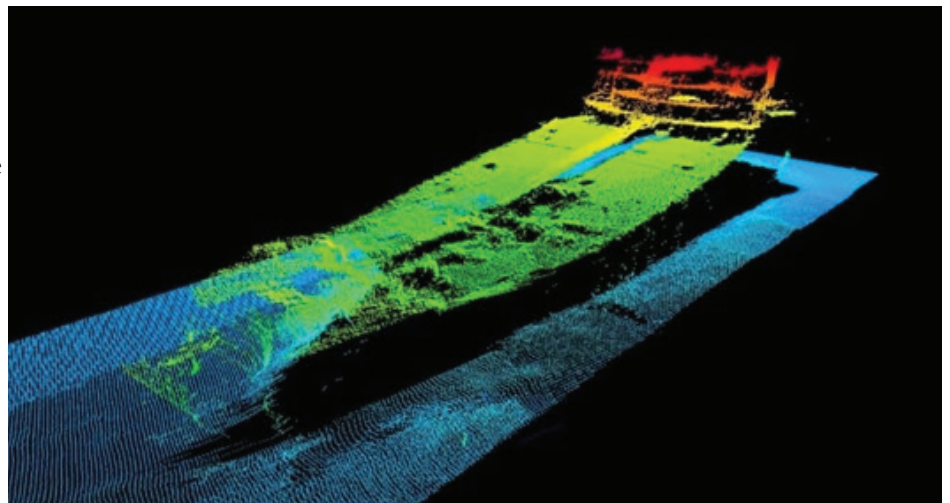
Several thousand feet underwater, the Echo Surveyor VIII, an Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV), moved in pre-programmed geometric patterns underwater, mapping the seabed. The expedition originated with Norwegian oil giant Equinor, which contracted the geotechnical surveying company Fugro to continue mapping the Flemish Basin on their behalf after making significant oil discoveries in the area.

Back up on deck, one can imagine the excitement that must have run through the crew as the multi beam sonar randomly provided the first glimpse of a large shipwreck since it first sank an undetermined number of years ago. Of course, the equipment operators weren't looking for wrecked vessels, but the world's seabeds are littered with sunken ships that met their demise through storm, war, collision or some mysterious disaster that befell an unfortunate crew. In this case,

the surveying crew chanced upon an 80 meter long by 20 meter wide target in around 1200 meters of water, as yet unidentified.

As word of the discovery passed from crewman to crewman, they probably ended up discussing the mystery-wreck in the mess over cups of coffee. Was it a Liberty Ship sunk by a Nazi U-Boat during World War Two? Or a freighter that left a European port during the late Victoria era? Or an American freighter steaming into the St. Lawrence for the up-and-coming ports of Quebec or Montreal, in the early twentieth century?

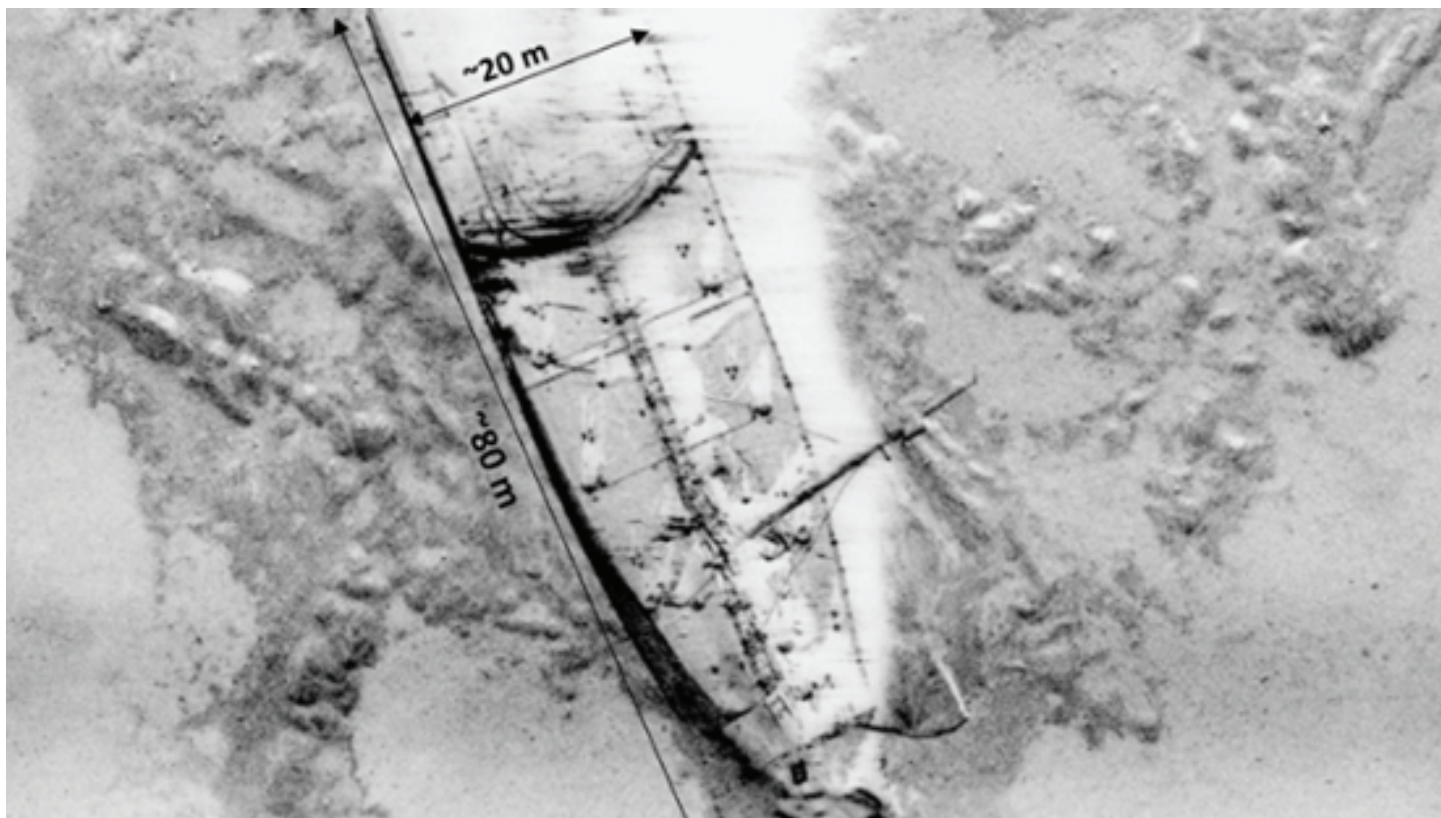
The surveyors from Fugro reported the find to Equinor's St. John's office. The latter shared the discovery with the Canadian Coast Guard, and people began speculating about the vessel's identity and the circumstances surrounding its loss.



The Unknown Wreck in Flemish Pass Basin (Courtesy of Equinor)

When Equinor and the Coast Guard were unable to satisfy their curiosity, they likely Googled ‘Newfoundland Shipwreck Research’ and came across the website for the Shipwreck Preservation Society of Newfoundland and Labrador (SPSNL). SPSNL is an avocational society dedicated to “promoting the study, documentation and appreciation of Newfoundland and Labrador shipwrecks” – a very similar mission to the UASBC – and Equinor ended up sharing the sonar scans with that organization’s President, Neil Burgess, who in turn shared the scans more broadly.

one’s mind is the highway of shipping that traveled east and west across that desolate stretch of ocean in support of the Allied war effort during World War Two. Or could it be from before World War Two? Can anyone find any reference of a freighter suffering a catastrophic hull failure somewhere in the area? Or some sort of explosion? Why is there only half the vessel – and how can the stern be far enough away that the AUV didn’t inadvertently locate it, as well? Was it because the propellers continued providing propulsion after the



The unknown wreck in Flemish Pass Basin, likely the forward section of a tanker. (Image Courtesy of Equinor)

Burgess posted the scans on SPSNL’s Facebook page, which has people talking – what ship do the scans depict? At first glance the vessel appears to be a steel freighter or cargo ship, and the first thing that enters

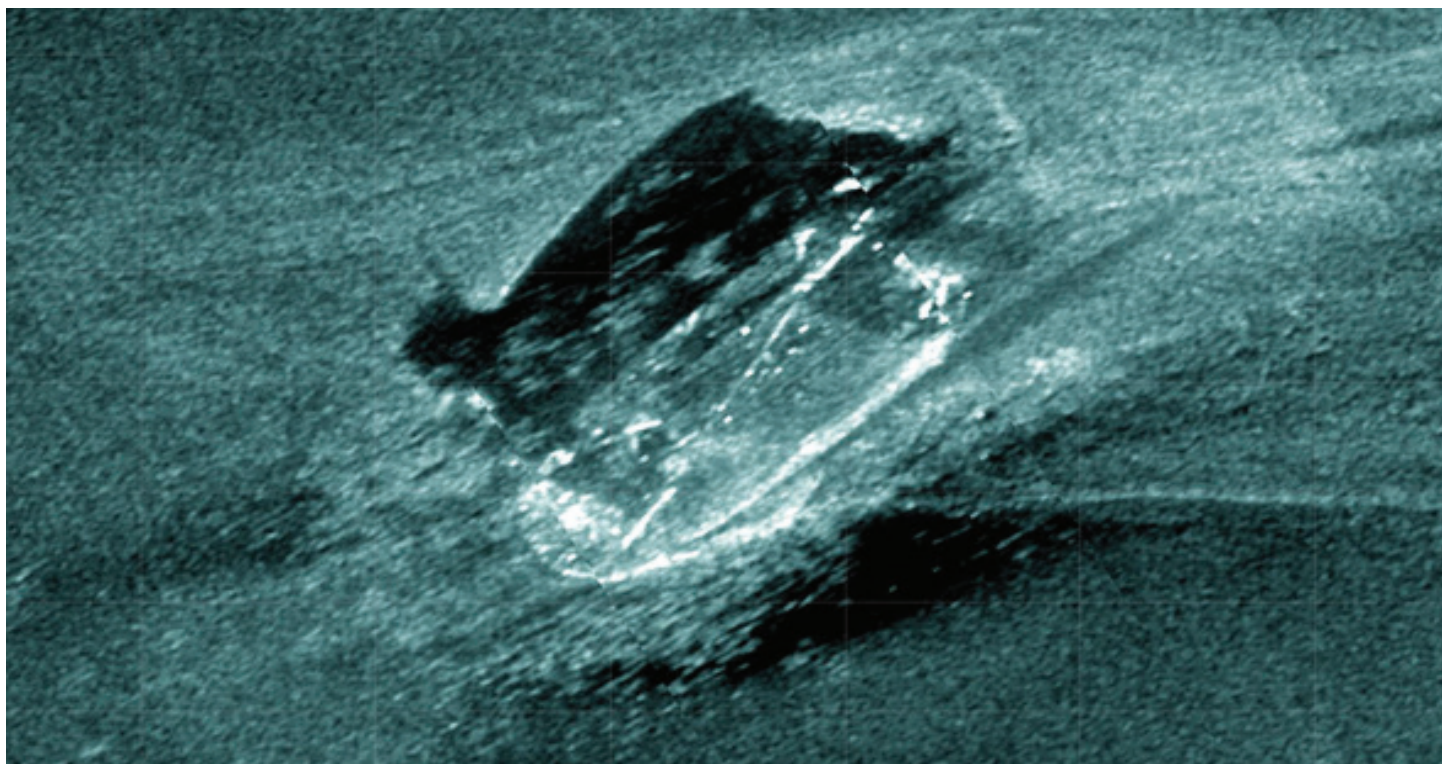
forward part separated, so that the ghostly aft portion of the ship continued making way, slowly flooding before slipping underwater and finally sinking far from the forward portion? There’s just enough information to



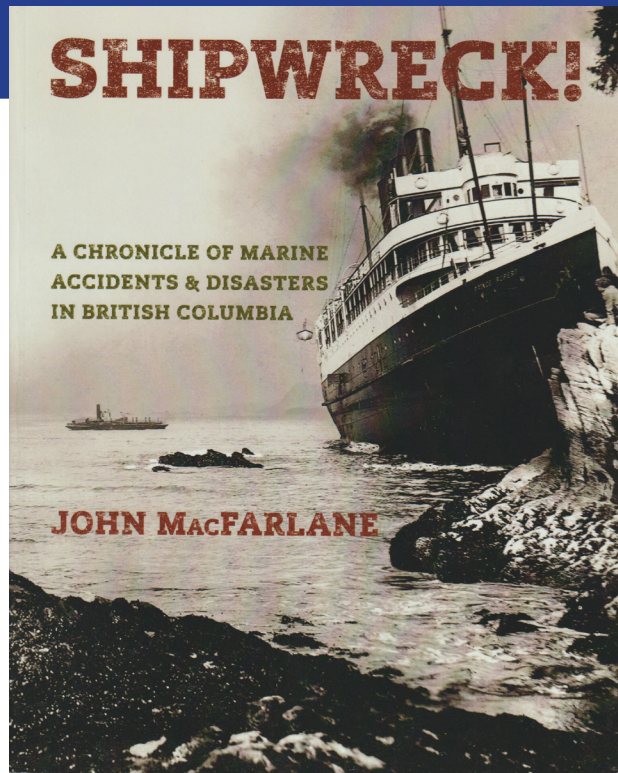
make someone want to ask questions. Of course, it's a bit fanciful to think that a group of laymen will crack the mystery, but that's not the point: by sharing the scan, people became engaged and had fun. Notably, that community engagement wouldn't have happened had the SPSNL not existed.

Closer to home, it is not unusual for surveyors, divers or the Canadian Hydrographic Service to report unknown targets that are found by accident. These targets and their coordinates often make their way to the UASBC's Exploration Director, Jacques Marc, who tries to historically contextualize the target to provide a likely identity. An example is this tantalizing 45 meter long and 18 meter wide target in deep water, but close to land – what is it? Had Jacques not taken the proactive measure of reaching out to the marine-surveying community, and had the UASBC not had the visibility

that it does, these beneficial partnerships wouldn't have emerged. As new technologies like AUV's continue charting different bodies of water and initiatives like the Nippon Foundation-GEBCO Seabed 2030 Project probe uncharted depths, unknown targets will be discovered with increasing regularity. While these targets will clearly not be accessible to divers, the sonar images of them will be, providing ample opportunity for divers and historians alike to participate in research and enjoy the challenges of target interpretation.



A large target of unknown identity in British Columbia waters (Image courtesy of Mosaic Hydro)



# ***Shipwreck!***

## ***A Chronicle of Marine Accidents & Disasters in British Columbia, 2nd edition***

**by  
John MacFarlane**

Review By: Rick James

Perhaps one of the most rewarding relationships I established while researching and writing about West Coast maritime history was with John MacFarlane. When I first got started, I met John back when he was Director of Museum Operations and Curator of the Maritime Museum of B.C. (1988-1994) and he soon proved most supportive and helpful with all of my endeavours. For the past few years, he has been primarily preoccupied with his website creation "Nauticapedia" ([www.nauticapedia.ca](http://www.nauticapedia.ca)) which has proved one of the most exceptional nautical history resources to turn to for both myself and the UASBC.

Then this past year, John released a new book: *Shipwreck! A Chronicle of Marine Accidents & Disasters in British Columbia* and his write-up of it posted on Nauticapedia provides a good insight on what he was able to achieve with it.

"The waters of British Columbia are dangerous – and have claimed thousands of vessels and thousands of lives over the last 250 years. This is the second edition of a collection of the most significant of those disasters. Each one is documented with detailed accounts in an easy-to-read, easy-to-access book that will please the casual reader as well as the most dedicated nautical historian. In these carefully researched accounts, the author has separated myth from fact to tell true stories of British Columbia marine historical events."

Indeed, John's chronicle will prove a most rewarding resource for all us researchers and historians to turn to what with all its entries being well backed up with facts and figures. The names of vessels lost are all arranged in alphabetical order through the book, much like a dictionary, and many an account of their loss is provided with a good photo. Then there's a number of the wrecks reported on which John worked up a more extensive story on to keep us all well entertained.

The above said, this exceptionally well researched book deserves to be up our bookshelves right next to Fred Roger's books, *Shipwrecks of British Columbia* and *More Shipwrecks of British Columbia*. While Fred wrote up many stories on numerous vessels lost along our west coast, John's book serves as a wonderful complement to all his work since it provides countless more tales on those that went down or ran up on the beach. For his part, Fred Rogers did work up very detailed maps of all the wrecks he came across in his research which will serve as one great reference to turn to when thumbing through John's Shipwrecks tome.

*Shipwreck!* is available from [Amazon](https://www.amazon.ca), the [UASBC Shop](http://www.uasbc.ca) on-line and the Maritime Museum of B.C. in Victoria.

# **UASBC Diver Explorations**

## **Fall Diver Schedule 2021**

### **COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS**

The UASBC will adhere to Dr Bonnie Henry's advice. Given the rising infections from the Delta variant we will proceed with caution. Divers must have at least one shot or are fully vaccinated and are COVID symptom free to participate. Also, we may be required to wear masks again when not diving. On the coast we hope to take 7 divers on each trip but this could be reduced. The Interior trips are much more limited due to boat size.

#### **Saturday August 28th Swordfish & Barnard Castle**

We will try another attempt to dive on the iron bark Swordfish, wrecked on South Bedford Island in 1877. Our second dive will be at the Barnard Castle site. The Barnard Castle was a collier that struck Race Rocks and sank in Pilot Bay in 1886. The Swordfish will be a recce dive. We hope to relocate and GPS several large artifacts. We hope to trim some of the kelp on the Barnard Castle site in preparation for doing some photogrammetry work. There may be some current during the first dive, but we will be using a live boat for pickup. We will depart from Pedder Bay.

**Cost: \$85.00 per person. Limit 7 divers.**

**Call Jacques (250) 474-5797 or email: [jmarc@shaw.ca](mailto:jmarc@shaw.ca)**

#### **Sunday September 26th Nanette & Barnard Castle**

On this trip we will visit the Nanette site on Race Rocks and the Barnard Castle in Pilot Bay. The Nanette was a wooden sailing barque that was wrecked on Race Rocks December 27, 1860. It eventually drifted off leaving much of its cargo on the bottom. The Barnard Castle was a coal collier that struck Race Rocks and sank in Pilot Bay in 1886. The Nanette will be a documentation dive. We hope to conduct some photogrammetry on the Barnard Castle. There may be some current during the first dive, but we will be using a live boat for pickup. We will depart from Pedder Bay

**Cost: \$85.00 per person. Limit 7 divers. Call Jacques (250) 474-5797 or email: [jmarc@shaw.ca](mailto:jmarc@shaw.ca)**

#### **September 20 to 24 (Central Interior) Upper Arrow Lake**

The UASBC will be diving on side scan sonar targets identified south of Arrowhead in upper Arrow Lake.

We will also do some diving in the Beaton Arm of the lake.

**For details contact Bill Meekel : [billmeekel@gmail.com](mailto:billmeekel@gmail.com)**



# **UASBC Diver Explorations**

## **Fall Diver Schedule 2021**

### **October 4th to 8th (Central Interior) Okanagan Lake**

Exploration and diving in the north end of Okanagan Lake.

**For details contact Bill Meekel : [billmeekel@gmail.com](mailto:billmeekel@gmail.com)**

### **Sunday October 17th San Pedro & S.F. Tolmie**

On this trip we will visit the San Pedro a large steel coal freighter that struck Brochie Ledge and sank on November 22, 1891. Our second dive will be on the wooden four masted auxiliary schooner S.F. Tolmie.

The Tolmie broke free from Ogden Point wharf during a storm and was wrecked on Harrison Island on December 27, 1944. These will be recce dives in preparation for doing future survey work. Both dives are suitable for all open water divers. We will depart from West Bay.

**Charter \$85 per person. Limit 7 divers. Call Jacques (250) 474-5797 or email: [jmarc@shaw.ca](mailto:jmarc@shaw.ca)**

### **Saturday November 20th HMCS MacKenzie and Trebla**

Dive 1 will occur on the SS Trebla a steam tug that burned and sank in Saanichton Bay in 1923. We started a survey on this site in about 2003. We will measure the few remaining pieces to complete the site plan and do some photogrammetry work as well. The HMCS MacKenzie was sunk as an artificial reef in 1996. We haven't visited it in a while so will check it out on dive 2. We may experience a bit of current, but both dives are suitable for all open water divers. We will depart from Sidney for this trip.

**Charter \$85 per person. Limit 7 divers. Contact Jacques (250) 474-5797 or email: [jmarc@shaw.ca](mailto:jmarc@shaw.ca)**

### **Fall 2021 Central Interior**

Some preliminary side scan work was completed in 2020 around Okanagan Landing.

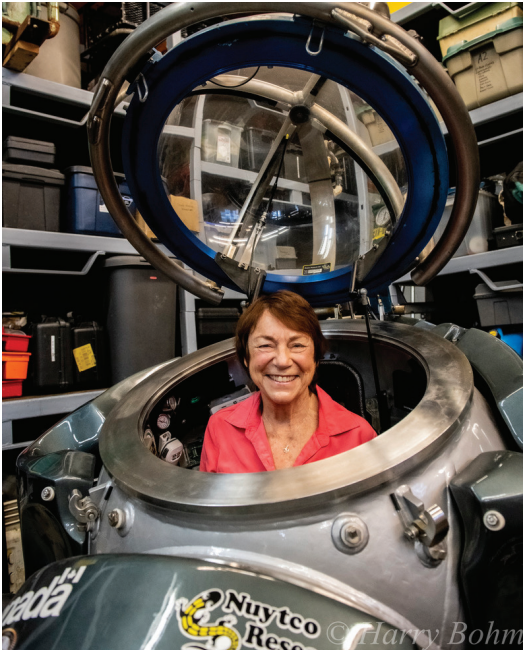
The plan is to continue to search the eastern shoreline around Okanagan Landing using sidescan looking for artifacts and the hull of the SS Aberdeen which was reported beached south of OK Landing.

The project is expected to occur in April 2022.

**For details contact Bill Meekel : [billmeekel@gmail.com](mailto:billmeekel@gmail.com)**

# FALL 2021 ZOOM SPEAKER SERIES

## Fall 2021 Zoom Speaker Series

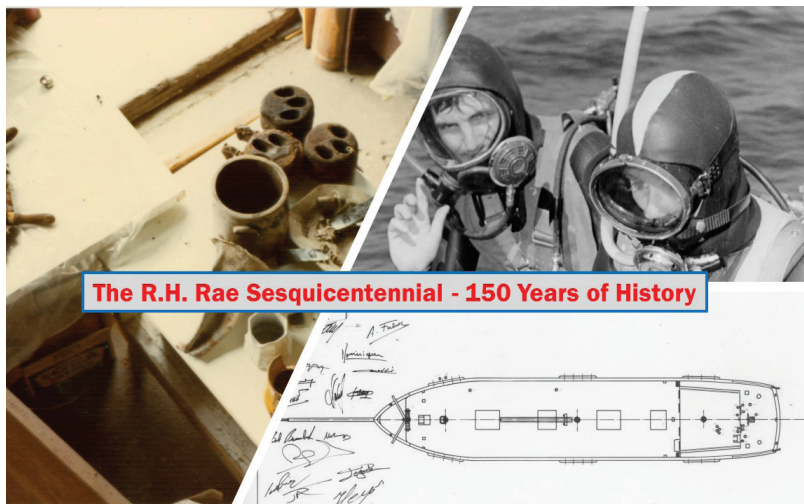


### Wednesday September 8th 7:00 PM. **DEEP, DARK & DANGEROUS - The unknown legacy** **Speaker: Vickie Jensen**

Join Vickie Jensen for a look at B.C.'s watery work world, a deep, dark & dangerous environment that divers know first-hand. What you may not know are the stories of the pioneers—people like Al Trice, Phil Nuytten, Jim McFarlane Sr., Al Robinson, Helmut Lanziner and Willy Wilhelmsen, among many others. Their inventions and exploits have achieved global acclaim. Ironically, this legacy is all but unknown in Canada. Vickie's newest book, *DEEP, DARK & DANGEROUS: The Story of British Columbia's World-class Undersea Tech Industry* aims to change that fact!

Join Vickie for an illustrated Zoom talk about the tales and tribulations of underwater work—definitely not your ordinary desk job. She'll also share the insights she learned in four years of interviews with underwater trailblazers as well as young people new to the subsea tech business.

Harbour Publishing's *DEEP, DARK & DANGEROUS* will be available in mid October.



**The R.H. Rae Sesquicentennial - 150 Years of History**

### Wednesday October 13th 7:00 PM **The R.H. Rae Sesquicentennial -** **150 years of History** **Speakers: David Mekker & Durrell Martin**

The R.H. Rae holds many secrets, having been lost only a year after her launch even though she was outfitted with some of the newest technology of the time. Descend with us, and travel back in time and tell the story of her history, from her launch in 1857 to being discovered by Barbara Carson to being visited by Jacques-Yves Cousteau. Come explore the mysteries of the R.H. Rae, one of Kingston, Ontario's true marine treasures.

To join a Zoom Call please contact Keith Bossons ( [keithsharon@bossons.ca](mailto:keithsharon@bossons.ca)) and he will provide you with an invite to join the session.

# FALL 2021 ZOOM SPEAKER SERIES



**Wednesday November 10th 7:00 PM**  
**The Empress of Ireland: Canada's Titanic**  
**Speaker: Rob Rondeau, Archaeologist**

The Empress of Ireland was built by the Canadian Pacific Railway to compete with the other great ocean liners of her day, like the White Star Line's *Titanic* or Cunard's *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*. But on May 29th, 1914, after departing Quebec City for Europe, she collided with the Norwegian collier *Storstad* in the Saint Lawrence Seaway north of Rimouski and sank in less than 14 minutes. More than 1,000 people died. In fact, more paying passengers died aboard the *Empress of Ireland* than did on *Titanic*!

It is Canada's greatest maritime disaster during peacetime.

To join a Zoom Call please contact Keith Bossons ( [keithsharon@bossons.ca](mailto:keithsharon@bossons.ca) )and he will provide you with an invite to join the session.

## **UASBC Presidents' message** **September 2021**

*by: Keith Bossons*

*Hi Everyone,*

I hope everyone has had an opportunity to get out and enjoy some of the nice summer weather we have been having. As fall is fast approaching the UASBC will be starting up our fall activities in the near future. We are hoping to get back to in person meetings this fall, but will still continue with the on-line Zoom presentations as they have been very popular. We still need to work out some of the details over the next few weeks so more information will be sent out in the near future. If you have any ideas or suggestions about future meetings or Zoom presentations, please let us know.

*All the best*  
*Keith Bossons*

**Please refer to**  
**[WWW.UASBC.COM](http://WWW.UASBC.COM) for latest Updates!**



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