

## S. S. "CITY OF BOSTON"

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IT would seem an almost impossible thing, in these days of rapid and comparatively safe water transportation, that an ocean going steamship could be lost—entirely disappear—at sea, leaving no trace, no indication of what fate had befallen it. Even without our present marvellous wireless system of communication, modern safety appliances, with which every sea-going steamship is equipped, the shortness of time between sailing port and destination, and the frequency with which one such vessel establishes contact with another, render it almost impossible that any dire calamity can befall any ocean going passenger vessel without the fact being made known before long to the civilized world. However, in the early days of steam navigation a sea voyage was often fraught with great danger, and many voyages terminated in mystery.

On the 25th of January, in the year 1870, the steamship *City of Boston*, of the Inman line, left Boston for Liverpool with a heavy cargo of freight, and a large number of passengers. Two days later the vessel docked at Halifax, where more freight and passengers were taken aboard. Many of these passengers were prominent merchants of Halifax and Saint John, making the trip for the purpose of buying their spring goods. It was a beautiful clear, cold day when the heavily built and supposedly seaworthy *City of Boston* sailed out of Halifax harbour. The vessel was expected to arrive in Liverpool about the fifteenth to the twentieth of February; perhaps, sooner. It was a stormy time on the Atlantic, and by the end of February no word had been received of the arrival of the steamship. With the passing of time a feeling of tense anxiety took possession of the people on both sides of the ocean, especially those whose friends or relatives had sailed on the missing steamer. And now wherever people met, the main topic of conversation was the possible fate of the *City of Boston*. Every person had his own opinion on the subject, his own theory of what had probably been the fate of the unfortunate vessel. The optimistic person felt that, although the vessel might be lost, the passengers would surely be safe. But it was hard to keep optimistic as the days passed, and no word was received concerning the steamship. At length

optimism gave way to pessimism, and deep gloom settled over Halifax, St. John and the eastern provinces as well as over Boston and Liverpool. The excitement was intense. People recalled the tragic fate of other steamships, the *Hibernia* and the *United Kingdom*, and dejection followed gloom, hopelessness and despair. However, the agents of the Inman line refused to give up hope. "It is our opinion," they said, "that the ship, in all likelihood, sustained some damage shortly after she left Halifax; that not being able to use her propeller, she had to trust to her sails with which she was not too well provided; that she is now taking refuge among the Western Islands; and that with the first opportunity she will steer out and find her way into the Mersey." Other vessels that had sailed from American ports for Great Britain at the same date as the *City of Boston* had been very late in arriving at their destination on account of the stormy weather. Still the fact remained that no vessel had seen at any time the missing steamer since she had sailed out of Halifax harbour.

But on the 16th and 17th of March joyful tidings came to the anxious multitude on both sides of the Atlantic. Telegrams were received at leading papers stating that the *City of Boston* had safely arrived at Queenstown after a somewhat tempestuous crossing. She had been out of sight of land for forty-five days. Great was the rejoicing at Halifax, Saint John, and other parts of the Maritimes. But all too soon the news was contradicted. Telegrams had indeed been received, but the news could not be confirmed. No one appeared to know from what source they had originated. Who had perpetrated the cruel hoax on an already agonized public? The Associated Press of New York offered a reward of five hundred dollars for the detection and punishment of the author of the hoax which reported the arrival of the *City of Boston* at Queenstown on the 16th inst.

Hope dies hard, and there were yet those, haggard and wan from anxiety and dread, who hoped against hope that all might be well. There was still a possibility that their loved ones might have escaped a watery grave—they might yet arrive in safety.

In a copy of the *Island Argus* (Prince Edward Island) dated March 31st, 1870, under the headline, "Very Latest Telegrams", one reads—"London March 18th. The Inman line authorities are still confident that the missing steamer will come into port safely. Vessels from the Atlantic to-day still report a dense fog off the coast of Ireland, with the wind from the north-west."

"London, March 23rd. The *Warrior* has arrived from Madeira. She brings no tidings of the *City of Boston*. Underwriters now decline all risks on the *City of Boston*."

On the same date—the *Argus* also published the following article copied from the *Halifax Chronicle*:

"The *City of Boston*.—It is impossible to exaggerate the painful anxiety which prevails in Halifax—and indeed throughout the lower provinces—respecting the steamer *City of Boston*, which left this port on the 28th of January for Queenstown, and up to yesterday had not arrived. At any time the safety of a vessel sailing from Halifax would be a matter of interest, but in the present case the very large number of passengers on board, including many of our leading business men, has made the safety of the steamer the object of anxiety in every man's mind. All day long at the clubs, the reading rooms, on the streets, and in every place the question is heard: 'Any news of the *City of Boston*?' And the unwelcome answer 'None', gives rise to the most gloomy forebodings. The following is a list of the passengers from Halifax:

"Cabin—Mr. W. E. Potter, Captain William Forbes, (Surveyor to French Lloyds), Mr. Leconte, Master F. R. Robinson, Master Thomas H. Robinson, Captain Hamilton, 65th. Regt., Mr. James Allin, (of J. Allin and Co.), Mr. A. K. Doull, (of Doull & Miller), Mr. Edward Billings, (of Anderson, Billings & Co.), Mrs. Kiedhal, child and infant, Mr. John B. Young, C. E., Mr. Baker, lady, two children and nurse, Mrs. Orange and child, Mr. John Barron (of P. Power & Co.), Mr. Walter Barron, Mr. Patrick Power, Jr., Captain Sterling, lady, infant and nurse, Mr. James N. Paint, Miss F. Paint, Mr. G. A. Knox (of Knox & Jordon), Mr. William Murray (of Burns & Murray), Mr. C. S. Silver, Mr. E. J. Kenny (of T. & E. Kenny), Mr. John Thompson (of Thompson & Co.), Mr. Henry C. Morey, Orange, and female servant, Lieut. Kidahl and female servant, Lieut. Mr. John D. Purdy, Mr. Charles Fisher, Mr. T. R. Montgomery, Mr. W. Parks (of St. John). Steerage.—Joseph Holland, James Graves, Mary E. Erskine, Patrick Cassidy, George Bowline; James McCain and wife, servant of Lieut. Orange, servant of Lieut. Kidahl. Total 51."

As weeks passed into months, the public was forced to realize that it must accept what was all too evident—the *City of Boston* had disappeared—was forever lost. No one knew how nor when, or might ever know. A cruel sea had engulfed the vessel.

Public opinion felt no censure was due to the owners and management of the missing steamer. If any vessel was safe on the Atlantic, that vessel was the *City of Boston*. So far as man's knowledge could judge, so far as man's invention could devise, the *City of Boston* was entirely seaworthy. However, public opinion knew all too well that so long as wind and tide are beyond the control of man and man's invention, so long will such disasters be possible.

But, although the sea did not give up its dead, and withheld its grim secret of what had befallen the passengers and crew of the missing steamer, a little faded slip of paper which was found enclosed with the newspaper clippings from which the writer has learned the major part of her story—a little faded "scrap of paper"—may perchance lay bare some small portion of the ocean's secret. This slip of paper bears an inscription, which apparently is a copy of a message which had been enclosed in a bottle and cast overboard from the sinking vessel. It reads:—

March 21st. 1870. *City of Boston*. Ship sinking; over half full now, good-bye all. Look after my boy. Thompson. Be gone in two hours.

We can scarcely believe,—we almost refuse to believe, that this message was also a hoax. My mother, in whose cherished work-box the envelope containing the newspaper clippings and slip of paper was found, was possibly intimately acquainted with someone of the missing passengers. Why should she have carefully preserved the slip of paper along with the clippings during the course of her lifetime, had she not had reason to believe that the message had been authentic! Alas! 'Tis too late to enquire whence this message came. This knowledge has been lost—lost in what Bacon has called "the deluge of time".

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!  
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;  
 Man marks the earth with ruin—his control  
 Stops with the shore:—upon the watery plain  
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain  
 A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,  
 When for a moment, like a drop of rain,  
 He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,  
 Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd and unknown.

—BYRON.

In the preparation of this article the writer has derived a portion of her information from the *Island Argus*, the *Scottish-American Journal* and the Saint John newspapers on file in the Saint John Public Library.