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Wreck of the Dorcas & the Etta Stewart A work-in-progress collected & presented by Michael MacDonald of Louisbourg "Captain Ferguson (of Louisbourg, Cape Breton) was one of Nova Scotia's most heroic sons, who undoubtedly sacrificed his own life and those of his crew in his desperate attempt to save the lives of the utterly helpless men on the barge which he was towing." • Halifax Herald, 1883

The evening of Monday, August 21-22, 1993, marked the 100th anniversary of the Great Gale of 1893, one of the most notorious marine storms in the history of Nova Scotia. Often referred to as "Second August Gale" (in deference to the Great Gale of August 23-24, 1873), the storm of 1893 was both sudden and of enormous force, resulting in substantial damage along the Atlantic seaboard. Over twenty steamers and sailing vessels (and as many large pleasure craft) were sunk or badly damaged between Newfoundland and the New England coastline. The great storm was front page news in North American newspapers on Tuesday, and the Halifax papers gave it prominent attention in light of the furious intensity of the hurricane along the Nova Scotia coastline. The grave of Capt. Ferguson, who died in the Dorcas disaster; also buried here, at Loch End Cemetery, Catalone, are his wife and three children.

The inquiry • then a rarely held procedure. Late Tuesday evening rumours in (Halifax) began circulating that a terrible wreck had been discovered on Shut-in Island reef near the entrance to the Three Fathom Harbour. By the time the Wednesday evening papers went to press, it had been confirmed that the steamer Dorcas and her tow, the coal barge Etta Stewart, had been wrecked during the great gale late Monday night with the apparent loss of all twenty-four crew and passengers. Although obscured by time and overlooked by history, the loss of the Dorcas and the Etta Stewart was a great sea tragedy in its time. It left an impact on the province as a whole and on two communities in particular • Halifax and Louisbourg. The pain was assuredly most felt in Louisbourg, then a sleepy pre-industrial village with a population of about 900. Sixteen of the victims were from the port of Louisbourg including the skipper of the Dorcas, Capt. Angus Ferguson. In Louisbourg seven women were widowed, and thirty children were left without a father. One woman lost a husband and a brother. Another family lost two sons. Captain Ferguson was a well-known, highly regarded man around Halifax and the many harbours along the coastal trading route. The inquiry would focus primarily on his probable course of action during this terrible calamity. Yet the drama would unfold primarily in Halifax. The Chief Engineer of the Dorcas, William Hannah was a resident (as were the 2nd Engineer and fireman). Chief Hannah was bringing home from a visit to Sydney his pregnant second wife, three children from his first marriage and a 14 year old girl in his care. His entire family was wiped out. Front page news across Canada, the fatal voyage would be the subject of an official government in-

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 1893: IS THE STEAMER DORCAS WRECKED? The following letter was delivered to the Halifax Police Station addressed to Chief of Police O'Sullivan • 'Three Fathom Harbour, August 22nd. After the gale, please report that there are two or three vessels' lost this morning the



west point of Shut-In Island. I 'presume' it is the steamer Dorcas. She lies bottom up. The barge Etta Stewart is being broken up. One body has been picked up. Come immediately and take charge." • (Signed) Geo. H. Graham Whether the above was correct or not was impossible to verify last night. The driver of the coach which came up from the Eastern Shore last night, heard nothing of the wreck. By Wednesday afternoon however, the contents of the letter had proven to be sadly true. The Daily Echo confirmed the reported loss of the vessels and wrote that: The Dorcas, Capt. Angus Ferguson, left Sydney, C.B., on Saturday last with the barge Etta Stewart in tow, both coal laden, and had the weather remained fine would have been due here Monday.... The chief engineer of the Dorcas is William Hannah, of 14 Moren Street (Halifax). He had on board with him his bride of a few weeks (second wife) and four children. LeBlanc Siding Ltd.' Island Vinyl Siding Ltd. g' Professional installation Authorized Dealer for fC' YCA N of Aluminum & Vinyl Siding Aluminum & Vinyl Siding In Cape Breton for over 18 years. Aluminum Windows & Doors free estimates, and any siding inquiries, Shutters / Softfit / Fascia / Awnings call Collect: Heavy Duty Vinyl Replacement Windows BRUCE or SONNY MacPHERSON 109 Reservoir Road SYDNEY 539-3665 & 539-4626