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The Drowning of Murdoch MacDonald A Family History from Ranald Thurgood

INTRODUCTION: This story is yet another kind of what we call Family History • that is, a rare opportunity to overhear while people share stories they usually tell only to family and close friends. Ranald Thurgood: Murdoch MacDonald of Malquish (Malkish, Malkush, Muilcuish), near Gabarus Lake, was born in Uist, Scotland, in 1848 and emigrated to Cape Breton as a baby. He married Effie Ferguson and had nine children • seven daughters, a son, and an infant who died at birth. According to family records, Murdoch drowned on Sept. 7, 1897. His fourteen-year-old daughter, Kitty Ann, had died of TB on June 30, 1897. Two more daughters died of TB within the next couple of years. Their mother, Effie, died of illness soon after. Another daughter, Kate, died of TB in 1919 at the age of forty-five. Murdoch's youngest daughter and second youngest child, Dolena, was my grandmother. These five accounts of Murdoch MacDonald's drowning provide different perspectives on the same event. The first two • from residents of Fourchu • focus on the boat's owner, John Severance, and both lead into stories of a second fishing accident involving Severance. The other three come from members of Murdoch MacDonald's family and " emphasize the devastating effect of this series of tragedies on the MacDonald family. Arthur Severance Recorded July 24, 1992, in Arthur Severance's kitchen in Fourchu. Also present: Annie Shepherd, Art Severance's niece from Toronto. (Ranald Thurgood: Okay, you were going to tell me about when my great-grandfather and your....) Art Severance: Now that was my--he was fishing with my Uncle John. (This is Murdoch MacDonald. Okay?) Yeah. John Severance. And there was another man with them, he was from Grand Mira. But Murdoch MacDonald lived down there, it's about four miles from here. There's a fellow has that property now--he comes down in the summer from the States and puts a trailer on it. (Roy MacLeod.) Yeah, that's the property. Well, they were codfishing, and they were what they called "makin' a drift." They weren't anchored--(I often did fish that ' I ii/iiTE=n 110 Reeves St. ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS "Serving Cape Breton Over 35 Years" SPECIALIZING IN: • INDUSTRIAL • COMMERCIAL • INSTITUTIONAL • RESIDENTIAL ?? WIRING CONTRACTORS ?? MAINTENANCE SERVICE] ?? ELECTRIC HEATING SYSTEMS ?? FREE ESTIMATE nuHeevestji. ceo "oo SYDNEY, N. S. ODZ-I 1 'Z FAX 526-1699 way, too. If you got conditions just right for it. You'd have a mainsail up, and that was just to hold the head of the boat in the wind there. It wouldn't be really windy, just a very light breeze, when you'd make a drift, eh. And the mainsail was up. And of course, the sheet would be fastened, eh. Well, it happened that this squall--an offshore squall--struck. It came so quick that she hove down and, of course, ballast--she was ballasted, ballast boat. But she'd be open, she wasn't decked. She hove down, and she sank. Well, the three men.... Fellow from Mira could swim. Well, they had no engines Real Estate & Insurance "If you're thinking of selling your home, give us a call." Serving Industrial Cape Breton and North Victoria R. Hickey & Co. p. O. Box 96, North Sydney B2A 3M1 Gerald Brennan, Mgr. "And remember: No sale, no charge."



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