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The Dorcas was a 120-ton steamer engaged in the busy coal trade between Sydney, Halifax and the Gulf ports. Built in Sackville, N.B. in 1888, she initially worked the Bay of Fundy. The Etta Stewart was built in Saint John in 1872. This lumbering 787-ton hulk was launched as a barque, but was converted to a barge in 1891 when purchased by George E. Franklyn of the Samuel Cunard Co., also principle owner of the Dorcas. Capt. Angus Ferguson was certainly well known in the city of Halifax, for one who was not of it. A native of Louisbourg, he was a product of the large community of Presbyterian (most North Uist) Highlanders that settled much of the greater Louisbourg area of Cape Breton in the early 1800s. While Gaelic was his first language and that of his home, he was educated in English, an important step for those of ambition in the moral Cape Breton of his day. His desire to be a captain took him to sea at 15 years of age, and he advanced quickly in his chosen vocation. After receiving his master's certificate, he served as mate on the Edgar Stewart, then for years commanded the M.A. Starr out of Liverpool. Then he became skipper of the Dorcas. He was a Mason, and although he and his family lived in Cape Breton he was a member of St. John's Lodge in Halifax. In the prime of his life at the age of 45, he had security and status as a captain with Samuel Cunard and Company, plus a good income to provide for his wife, five children and widowed mother. His friend and Chief Engineer was William Hannah, a native of Greenock, Scotland. He had emigrated first to St. John's, Nfld., and then on to Halifax, serving as 2nd Engineer on the Bermuda S.S. Alpha. He married a local woman, returning to Newfoundland to begin a family but eventually moving back to Halifax in 1887 with his wife, three children and a teenage girl in his charge, a Miss Lucy Baird. Mr. Hannah's first wife died in 1891, and he left his Bermuda-based position shortly thereafter to work closer to home and his family. As a fellow member of St. John's Lodge and a good friend, Captain Ferguson was most certainly delighted to welcome him on board the Dorcas in 1892 as Chief Engineer. The Face of Sydney is Changing... The City of Sydney continues to grow and change with a commitment to the challenges of the future and a recognition of our joint responsibility to the past. From Centre 200 to the 'K' 'Q' 'B' Whitney Pier Historical Society, from excellent shopping to the heritage buildings of the North End and our Waterfront • first-rate restaurants and motels make Sydney your base for all of Cape Breton. Within easy reach of the Miners' Museum, the Fortress of Louisbourg, the Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Museum and the marvellous Cape Breton Highlands • Sydney offers lots of reasons to visit and to relocate here. You are Welcome in Sydney, Mayor Vince MacLean In 1893 Mr. Hannah raised local eyebrows by marrying the same Lucy Baird who had come and lived with the family since their arrival in Halifax. According to the Acadian Recorder of Thursday, August 24, 1893, Miss Baird took charge of the household after the first wife died, and Wm. Hannah married her in February. Their relationship would be described in a cryptic fashion in the early days following the disaster. The Recorder also provided the first eyewitness reports of the



scene on Wednesday, August 23rd. Highlighted by the front page headline: "A Dreadful Shipwreck • Tug Dorcas and coal barge Etta Stewart lost with nearly a score of lives!" it continues with the first eyewitness reports from the scene: The news is unfortunately confirmed. Mr. J.C. Potts, of the Porter Lake Lumber Company, arrived in town from the scene of the disaster with a report to Messrs. Cunard's office. He says the wreckage was discovered yesterday morning on the shores there, but it was not known what it was. The two vessels were lying there breaking-up; one of Mr. Purdy's mill men (John D. McDonald) discovered a broken board with letters on it, "Etta Stewart." Mr. Potts, when told of this remarked, "Poor Capt. Ferguson, the barge must be somewhere." The seas were running mountain high. About a quarter of a mile to the westward, on Half Island Beach, bodies were seen in the water, Mr. Potts and several others went up. One body was pulled ashore by Mr. Acker and his wife. Mr. Potts recognized it at once as that of Capt. Ferguson of the Dorcas; both temples had been smashed in. During this time six or seven bodies were seen floating in the surf at the same place right underneath the bluff • one a female and a little girl of six or seven years. The others were men. The waves were too high to get them until the tide went out at night. The body of Wm. Hannah of 14 Moren St., in this city (Halifax) had not a mark on it. Mrs. Hannah's body was nude. There were large gold rings on her fingers. Hannah's family had been returning from Sydney. The little girl was his. Where the wreck occurred is supposed to have been on the reef between Shut-In Island and Eastern Passage harbour, about 1 & 1/2 hours sail from Halifax, or 20 miles by the shortest land route. The first published list of probable victims came from shipping office of those who boarded in Sydney for Halifax, but whether they were on them at the time they were lost would not be known for a few days. The registered crew of the Dorcas: Angus Ferguson, of C.B., captain. Hector McDonald, 42, of C.B., mate. James McDonald, 23, of C.B., able seaman. William Hannah, 38, of Scotland, chief engineer. Alfred Tonguay, 36, of Quebec, second engineer. James Ronan, 29, of Ireland, fireman. Alex McVicar, 29, of CO., able seaman. Norman McKay, 29, of C.B., cook and steward. On the Etta Stewart: David Baldwin, 44, of C.B., cook and steward. Warren Gordon

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