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From all indications it is apparent that Captain Ferguson must have held on to his tow until she was swept towards the breakers at the west end of Shut-in Island. No doubt the knowledge of the fact of his approach to the breakers occurred suddenly and but little warning was given, and when all chance of saving the barge and her crew had been abandoned, and he became conscious of the inevitable danger they were in and the hopelessness of any further exertion being made towards the attainment of his purpose of rescuing the other craft, he endeavoured to sever the wire hawser, with the thought that those on board the steamer might escape with their lives. Three strokes of an axe were made upon the wire hawser. Grave of Sadie Musgrave, just north of East Hillcrest Cemetery, South Bar Graham Head, proves conclusively, by the marks upon it, that it must have been struck with an axe, and was actually severed where the cuts were made. The other end, fast to the barge, was probably broken off, as the strands are irregular and appear to have suffered a severe strain. After having accomplished this it is quite possible that a heavy sea swept over the steamer and put the fires out in the stoke hole and carried the master overboard, as his body was the first to be picked up at Half Island Point, near the former entrance to Porter's Lake, and it was not until several hours afterwards, that the bodies of the engineer and his family, with the rest of the crew of the Dorcas were seen floating upon the top of the surf. Probably many minutes did not elapse before the steamer was stranded. It is supposed by the commissioner she struck first upon her keel aft upon the adjacent reef. The sea must instantly have made a complete breach over her, and being followed by the heavy surf the vessel was no doubt thrown upon her beam ends, and after pounding for a time upon her port side on the rocks (as observed by the planking and timbers being most broke there), she turned keel upwards and was swept in towards the beach. From the sworn evidence of the diver, Mr. Gilkie, it does not appear that any part of the rope is around the boss of the propeller..and would indicate that the machinery of the steamer was not in motion when the rope became entangled and that the circumstance did not occur previous to but after the stranding of the vessel. The commissioner is of the opinion that Capt. Angus Ferguson, who lost his life with the others upon this sad occasion, was not to blame for the lamentable result of this disaster. That from his previous conduct and habit it is fair and just to infer that he did not fail to perform the duties imposed upon him in the trying circumstances to avert the calamity. It may be considered by some that it would have been more prudent and wise for the master of the Dorcasto have disconnected his steamer from the barge at some safe time before approaching the breakers, in order to enable his vessel to reach off shore and thus have made an effort to save the larger number of Power of Progress people on board the steamer at the sacrifice of the less number on board the barge. Had Captain Ferguson, however, acted in such a manner and been successful in saving the steamer with those on board, he would have forever been branded as a coward when he reached the land and laid himself open to the serious charge of



deliberately and wilfully sacrificing the lives of many human beings for the sake of saving his own. To a brave man this would have been intolerable and it must be acknowledged that in acting as he did he displayed the genuine characteristics of a noble seaman, when, amidst the dangers of such a hurricane and wild sea, he met death at the post of duty. It is not to be presumed that Captain Ferguson ever gave up all hope of saving the lives of those on board both the vessels up to the very last moment. Had he however severed the wire tow rope at any time before he did and cut himself adrift from the barge, he knew it meant sure and inevitable destruction to every soul on board that vessel. It is most difficult to realise the grave responsibility resting upon the master of the Dorcas at that eventful time, the thoughts impressed upon his mind in such an hour of peril, or the probable influence exercised upon him by the Chief Engineer, whose daughter, with a young girl companion, were on board the barge. Taking into consideration that the master of the Dorcas sacrificed his own life in his endeavour to save those on board the two vessels, due credit must be given to the actions of a courageous seaman, who displayed such heroic fortitude at the time of a most terrible emergency. The vessels were probably wrecked upon the Shut-in Island reef sometime between 11 o'clock P.M. and midnight of the 21st of August. The commissioner is of the opinion that the loss of these vessels was caused by a furious cyclone which swept over the province of Nova Scotia, and was especially disastrous on the Atlantic coast, on the night of the 21st of August and early morning of the 22nd., but it must be mainly attributed to the very sudden shift of wind from S.E. or S. by W., between half past ten and eleven P.M. of the 21st, and the violent squalls which continued until past midnight of that date, and caused a terrific sea, which drifted the vessels towards the Shut-in Island reefs. Newspaper coverage ended with the release of the Dorcas Inquiry decision. Most of the twenty-four dead were disinterred and reburied. Captain Ferguson was disinterred twice • once to be buried in Hardwood Hill Cemetery, and again for his final burial in the old family plot at Loch End Cemetery, Catalone, five miles east of Louisbourg. William Hannah and his family rest under a large granite stone in Camphill Cemetery. The dedication reads: "Erected by the Canadian Marine Engineers Association of Halifax and friends as a token of esteem and regret." Mike MacDonald continues his work on the story of the shipwreck of the Dorcas and the barge Etta Stewart, and welcomes any additional information, printed or oral history, or photographs of any of the people lost. You can contact Mike through Cape Breton's Magazine, Wreck Cove, Nova Scotia BOC IHO. Our thanks to Mike for his work on this article, including his photographs of the graves in various cemeteries. Michael MacDonald 52