

Stokes Family History Part 2 – The Lake Disaster

Now that we have discussed Peter Stokes' stepchildren, who were also the children from Mary Ann's first marriage, we will move on to discuss Mary Ann's life with Peter Stokes Sr. The 1861 Census lists Peter with his wife Mary Ann, who is listed as Robinson Stokes (Robinson is Mary Ann's maiden name) and their children: Sarah, Leander, Margaret, Elizabeth, Marchale (Marshall) and William. Just a reminder that Sarah, Leander, Margaret and Elizabeth are Peter Stokes' stepchildren, but they are listed as Stokes not Jones. The next Census from 1871 adds to their list of children with Lucinda, Henry and Mary, while the 1881 Census includes additional children: Peter and Appie (or Abbie). If you continue with the 1891 Census you will see Peter and Mary Ann's oldest child Randolph who is not listed in any of the other Census records as living with his parents. In this Census Randolph is listed as a fireman on a steamboat which would explain his absence. Also listed is Peter's mother-in-law Margaret Fuller. Peter does not show up in the next Census from 1901 because he passed away on July 8, 1899 at the age of 73 years old. His death record also lists him as a farmer. Peter's wife Mary Ann also passed at the age of 73 on February 10, 1902 and her obituary says "There passed away at her home near the quarry, early Monday morning, Mrs. Stokes, relict of the late Peter Stokes, at the age of 74 years. The deceased had been sick over a year from a complication of diseases. The funeral was held Tuesday from her late residence, to Rose Hill cemetery. Rev. D. W. Johnson, officiating. The deceased was born in Virginia. She was first married to Mr. Jones, by whom she had four children. They are Leander, of Anderdon; Mrs. Howard, Detroit; Mrs. Lucas, Ann Arbor. Her second marriage was to Peter Stokes, and they had seven children, four of whom are living, Marshall, at home; Mrs. Kelly, Peter, and Mrs. James Mann, Anderdon."

Other than what is mentioned above, there is no additional information for Peter and Mary Ann's first two children: Randolph and Marshall. Their brother William sadly passed away in his twenties, but an article from the *Amherstburg Echo* recounts the tragic disaster that took William's life in 1885. The article, from November 13, 1885, is titled "TERRIBLE LAKE DISASTER – THE C.P.R. STEAMER ALGOMA WRECKED – OVER FORTY LIVES LOST" and says "Three Anderdon Young Men Among the Missing (Special Dispatch to the Echo) – Echo Office, Amherstburg, November 10th, 9a.m. – A special dispatch this morning from Toronto announces the loss of the Canadian Pacific steamship Algoma on the rocks at Port Arthur. Only 18 of the crew and 2 passengers reached the shore alive. The shores are strewn with the dead. Over 40 lives are estimated to be lost."

The article continues by saying "Toronto, Nov. 10th, 9:30 a.m. – The steel steamer Algoma left Owen Sound on Thursday last for Port Arthur with 530 tons of merchandise, 6 cabins, 6 steerage passengers and a crew of 46 men. On Saturday morning she went ashore on Isle Royale, in Lake Superior, during a blinding snow storm. About 12 passengers and 33 of the crew supposed to be lost ... The first know of the disaster was when the steamer Athabasca of the same line arrived at Port Arthur late last evening with the saved of the Algoma, consisting of 13 men and two passengers, who were the only ones saved."

"The Athabasca which left Owen South two days after the Algoma found the crew and two passengers in a perishing condition on the Island. The wreck had been dashed by the maddened waves against the rocks and finally beaten against the shore of the Island. The crew and two passengers saved took the life boat and battled with the waves until the shore was reached. The men were almost dead from exposure and exhaustion. The storm continued to rage furiously all night. The rescued remained on the beach, watching the wreck beat against the rock-

pound Island, and seeing dead bodies dashed in the surf against the shore. The Athabasca came along about noon yesterday, and as the channel is narrow, could not avoid seeing the wreck and those on the sand. A boat was sent ashore and brought the rescued to the Athabasca. The manager of the C.P.R. lake traffic sent out tugs from Port Arthur with instructions to search Isle Royal for survivors that may have got ashore and to pick up and take care of any bodies found.”

More details are shared with “CAPT. MOORE’S SWORN STATEMENT – Port Arthur, Nov. 10th – The fullest details have been received, but the following sworn account by Capt. Moore, taken before a notary public, may be relied on as the most authentic: The steel steamer Algoma cleared from Owen Sound at 1:20 p.m. Thursday, the 5th inst., bound for Port Arthur, having on board a general cargo of merchandise of about 400 tons. We had a good run to Sault Ste. Marie which port we cleared a 1 o’clock on the afternoon of Friday, November 6th, and passed Whitefish Point at 3:50 the same day. It was blowing a strong breeze from the east and northeast. The wind was increasing. We made sail at Whitefish Point at 7p.m. The weather was the same, but the wind was slightly increased, with occasional squalls, attended with rain. At midnight the wind had increased to a moderate gale with frequent squalls, accompanied with rain and sleet, a sea getting up. At 4a.m. on on [sic] November 7th the wind shifted northeast with violent snow squalls and a heavy sea running. At five minutes after 4 a.m. we checked down and commenced taking in sail. At 4:30 a.m. all sail was in except the fore tri-sail, which was partly in, and we put the wheel hard a starboard, and the ship was coming around to head out on the lake again on account of the snow. After leaving Whitefish Point, our proper course being northwest by west, but the wind being from the northwest, we steered north west by west quarter west until 10 p.m. to allow for leeway, when the course was changed to northwest, until 4 a.m. We then steered west by south for the purpose of taking sail in. While the ship was coming

around as mentioned above she struck aft about 4:20 and continued to forge ahead driven in by the heavy sea. About 4:40 she settled the seas making a clean breach over her all the time and smashing the ship up. A blinding snow storm still continued. On account of the seas that were running and the surf it was impossible to make any effort to save the ship or cargo and about 6 a.m. she parted at the foreside of the boiler and the freight got washed out and some of it was driven ashore. The survivors clung to the after part of the wreck until Sunday morning, when the gale having abated and the sea gone down, we made a raft and went ashore and found we were on Green Stone Island at the northeast end of Isle Royale. On Monday morning at 9 o'clock we sighted the Athabasca, on which ship the surviving passengers and crew embarked for Pt. Arthur, at which port we arrived at 6:45 p.m. Monday night."

It continues with "Most of the passengers and a number of the crew were in bed at the time the boat struck, but were rudely awakened by the shock and the scene that followed is beyond description. Water poured in through the broken vessel and over the bulwarks, putting out the fires in the furnaces and extinguishing the electric lights. The screams of woman and children were heard above the fury of the storm. The crew hurried hither and thither, doing what they could in the darkness to render assistance but their efforts were of little avail, for in less than twenty minutes after the vessel struck the entire forward part of the boat was carried away, together with the cargo and human freight. Several clung to the rigging and life line the captain had stretched along the boat, but were soon swept away by the sea and swallowed up by the angry waves. The stern of the boat was steadily pushed upon the rock and those who were not too much exhausted with fatigue and benumbed by cold crept to the after steerage and sought its welcome shelter. In less than an hour after striking all was over and but fifteen out of over fifty were saved. Some of the survivors remained from the time of the disaster (4 o'clock on Saturday

morning) until Monday morning at 10 o'clock exposed to the weather with but little food and clothing, nearly everything having been washed away when they were sighted by some fishermen, who came to their rescue. After taking the survivors from the doomed vessel and placing them on Isle Royale, where a fire was kindled for their comfort, the fishermen went out and intercepted the Athabasca, which was coming in about ten miles away. Capt. Foote, of that vessel, immediately put about and took the sufferers on board when they were subsequently brought here."

The end of the article finally lists the three men lost from Anderdon, including William Stokes and says "Three Anderdon colored young men were on board the ill-fated craft as cooks – John Lott, Fred Brooks and Wm. Stokes. John Lott, the head cook of the Algoma was the second son of the late Silas Lott, of Anderdon, but both his parents died when he was young and he was brought up by John Brown, of Anderdon. He has sailed about five years, and was on the Alberta last season, and the Algoma, all this season. His sister, Mrs. Pryor Wilson, of Amherstburg, an unmarried sister and a brother in Michigan survive him. His age is about 25."

"Fred Brooks was the eldest son of John Brooks, who formerly lived in Anderdon, but moved to Sandwich last fall. Fred was about 24 years of age and had sailed about 5 years. He was cook last season on the Alberta and all this season was on the Algoma, as second cook. His father is a confirmed invalid, while his mother and two younger brothers are living."

"William Stokes was the second son of Peter Stokes of the 1st concession of Anderdon, and was about 22 years of age. He has sailed over four years as cook, having been two years on the Alaska. He started this season on the steamer Continental, but went on as third cook on the Algoma over three months ago. His father, mother, brother Randolph and two unmarried sisters are living."

What we publish is not a complete history of any family and is based on the documents that are available. We welcome photos and information to fill in the gaps. See you next week for part 3.