



# MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)



## NEWS RELEASE

TODAY WE REMEMBER  
THE SINKING OF THE RMS EMPRESS OF IRELAND:  
'CANADA'S TITANIC'

MAY 29, 2021

**Ottawa, Today** – Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), remembered the sinking of *The RMS Empress of Ireland*.

It was on that tragic day of May 29, 1914, when the transatlantic liner *Empress of Ireland* was rammed accidentally, under a thickness of fog, by the Norwegian-built collier *SS Storstad* (close to Pointe-au-Père, near Rimouski, Québec, Canada). The oceangoing passenger ship, owned by the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company, sank to the bottom of the St. Lawrence River in only 14 minutes. Of the 1,477 souls on-board, 1,012 died, making it the worst peacetime marine disaster in Canadian history.



(From left) RMS Empress of Ireland and Portrait of Florence Barbour (Canadian Museum of History, IMG2012-0381-0004-Dm)

However, the sinking of *The Empress of Ireland's* greatest loss was the children. Out of the 138 aboard, only five survived this tragic ordeal. Eight-year-old Florence Barbour (above), travelling in second class with her mother and sister, was one of the fortunate to survive. Bodies recovered from the *Empress* were gathered in the village of Sainte-Luce, and buried near Rimouski, where a monument now stands to their memory.

Notwithstanding the significance of the sinking of *The RMS Empress of Ireland* catastrophe, she was always overshadowed by the higher-profile transatlantic sinkings of *The RMS Titanic* and *The RMS Lusitania*. The *Empress of Ireland* also played a critical role in Canada's immigration boom, while she was in service from 1906 to the 1914 sinking. Over 120,000 European immigrants sailed on her seeking new opportunities in Canada. It is estimated that approximately a million Canadians today can trace an ancestor to this ship.



The Revd Canon Dr. Crispin Pailing, Rector of Liverpool, Liverpool Parish Church (left), and Mr. Bill Anderson MNM, Chairman, Merchant Navy Association, Liverpool Branch (right), Commemorating the Sinking of The RMS Empress of Ireland (May 26, 2020). To view the commemorations, please select: [Commemoration of The RMS Empress of Ireland](#).

Sadly, Mr. Anderson passed away from Covid-19 on October 16, 2020. For more information, please select: [Bill Anderson Obituary | Liverpool Mayor Brother Died – Bill Anderson Death](#).

### Quotes

*« Le 29 mai 1914, ma grand-mère naissait sur les hauteurs de ce qui est aujourd'hui la rue du Sanatorium. Mon arrière-grand-mère se plaisait à raconter que, lorsqu'elle tournait la tête vers le fleuve, elle voyait à travers le brouillard que quelque chose n'allait pas : le brouillard n'était pas de la bonne couleur. Ma famille n'est pas la seule à avoir transmis le souvenir de l'Empress of Ireland d'une génération à l'autre; des dizaines de familles, témoins de la tragédie, l'ont fait. De Rimouski à Sainte-Luce, des familles ont recueilli des survivants, le temps qu'ils puissent s'en retourner. D'autres familles ont contribué à la récupération des corps. Cet événement a marqué l'imaginaire de la région et a démontré la solidarité et le respect des gens du Bas-Saint-Laurent pour leurs compatriotes. Aujourd'hui, le Musée de la Mer de Pointe-au-Père commémore la tragédie et il est encore possible d'aller poser quelques fleurs au monument commémoratif pour les victimes, situé au cimetière de l'endroit. »*

– Mme Julie Vignola, Députée, Beauport—Limoilou, Québec

*“When the Empress of Ireland ocean liner sank to the bottom of the St. Lawrence on May 29, 1914, it dragged men, women and children of every age and social class into the river's watery depths. A newspaper reporter described seeing the victims in Rimouski's quayside hangar that served as a makeshift morgue: “The rich sleep beside the poor, the powerful beside the weak. The humble Pole or Russian who was starving in the streets of a Canadian metropolis sleeps beside the golden patrician . . . they are all equal.”*

– Dr. John Willis, PhD, Adjunct Research Professor, Carleton University,  
May 28, 2018

### **Associated Links**

- [The Children: The Greatest Loss of the Empress Tragedy | Canadian War Museum](#)
- [Wreck of RMS Empress of Ireland National Historic Site of Canada | Parks Canada](#)
- [RMS Empress of Ireland Memorial and Mass Grave \(Rimouski, Québec, Canada\)](#)
- [Pointe-au-Père Maritime Historic Site: The Empress of Ireland Museum: Discover Canada's Worst Maritime Disaster](#)
- [On This Day: The Empress of Ireland, 'Canada's Titanic,' sinks in 1914 | Irish Central, May 29, 2019](#)
- [Empress of Ireland, 'Canada's Titanic,' finally getting its due after 100 years | Globe and Mail, May 23, 2014](#)
- [Canada's Titanic: The Sinking of The Empress of Ireland | National Post, May 28, 2014](#)

### **Contact Information**

- Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP)  
Stéphane Ouellette  
President and CEO  
E-mail: [ouellettes@rogers.com](mailto:ouellettes@rogers.com)  
Website: [www.alliedmerchantnavy.com](http://www.alliedmerchantnavy.com)