

## An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

John William Holmes was born 10 Oct 1828 at Hantsport and died 4 Aug 1918 at Wallasey, Cheshire, England, the first born of Peleg Holmes 3<sup>rd</sup> and his second wife Mary Lockhart.

### MY CHILDHOOD REMEMBRANCES

When I was a wee little kid my Mother used to take our horse and wagon and drive about seven miles to visit my grandparents Lockhart.

I can remember how pleased I was and how pleased they were, I remember the house and the grand old couple, the fuss my Grandmother made over me, her first grandson. I remember the hilly road as if it was yesterday. One very steep hill used to frighten me; it was very steep and rough.

I remember my Father went to sea for a short while. I used to be awfully shy of him when he came home. I remember there were two girls, friends of the family, remember their sweethearts coming a-courting; how I used to tease them.

I remember the little old schooner my Father had there, called the *Rainbow*. I used to go on board sometimes, sleep all night with the crew.

I remember when my two half-sisters married; they were married in the house by the Baptist Minister on circuit. No church, no school-house then. I remember the old Ministers, can see their good old faces now. I can pretty well remember the whole district that now comprises what is called Hantsport.

The beach where the little schooner laid up for the winter, the brooks, the roads, the woods - and there was a good deal of woods those days; they used to tap them, get the sap and make Maple Sugar and Maple Syrup - I remember the wild strawberries and the caraway seed that grew all about the house, the hill I used to roll down, etc. etc.

I will now try to give an account of the schools of my boyhood.

There was no schoolhouse in my early youth. When there was a school it was in a private house. The first school I remember was kept by a nice little woman called Nioma. I learnt my Aa and Bb's from her several months.

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

The next was a man's school. I could spell words of four letters then. I remember that school by getting to the head of the class by spelling the word 'knife'.

The next one was three miles away, where there was an old little schoolhouse and a rough, cruel teacher. I remember that school by the slaps I got on the hand for not doing my sums, kept in the noon hour for the same reason. I think my Mother took pity on me and kept me home. I could learn nothing for fear.

The next was in our new schoolhouse, which was schoolhouse, church and general meeting. A teacher was engaged for a year; he was cruel and given to drink, thrash us most unmercifully if we had blots on our copybooks, back-hand slaps if we missed a word in reading. I have seen him knock a scholar over by his back-handed slaps. He used to make my ears tingle, my hands burn, with the slaps of a big, hard wood fiasse. I could stand it no longer and ran away and would not go back again.

I thought that was my last school, but since thinking it over I went part of the winter to two other teachers. One a little Welshman, good little fellow. I remember him because he taught Geography as well as Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.

The next was an old uncle by marriage, a good scholar for those days, good old chap. I could only go part of the winter as I had hard work out in the woods, but I remember it for I went through the Arithmetic and could solve every sum in it. I think it was called Dilworth Arithmetic. I went through two others by my own studies: Hulons, the most extensive published those days.

I was never taught anything but Reading, Spelling, Writing and Arithmetic, except a little Geography by the little Welshman. Good deal of the time there was no school. So you can see my school education was spasmodic and not of a high character. No grammar, no dictation, no punctuation, etc. etc. I had to work before school hours and after school hours.

## OUR SPORTS AND AMUSEMENTS OF OUR YOUTH

When the old folk went there and about, the few boys and girls used to come to the House. The big kitchen was cleared of its wooden chairs, table etc. We would make up a good wood fire, have candles here and there: no oil or gas then, not even matches.

We would have Blind Man's Buff, Hide and Seek, Ring o' Roses etc. Games to the ponds so we could kiss the girls and they could kiss us. There was but few boy or girl in my youth, but we had plenty of Fun.

But day sports as kids in the winter, we would make trenches in the great snow drifts, put straw in them to lie on and light up with candles. It was fine sport. When there came a fall of damp snow, we would roll up great balls of snow, build forts, make snowballs for ammunition and let the snow freeze hard balls too. Then parts of us man the fort and put storm them. Sometimes the fort was taken and demolished: if frozen hard we could hold them and drive the enemy off. This sport was mostly by kids and young boys.

Our greatest winter sports for bigger boys up to young men was coasting down hill with sleds. There was a hill fully a mile long, not too steep. When this hill was in good condition it was smooth and hard. The sleds were made of ash, different sizes, shod with steel, made at home except the steel shoes. There was various sizes: the racers was about four feet long. The mode of racing was to hold the sled up, run a few paces, throw it down, fall flat on it and steer by the toes. There was great competition - quite exciting. Another was to put two or three sleds in line, lie flat on them, hook your toes over the forward bracer. In this way they were steered. The hinder sled acted as a rudder, similar to a ship's rudder. Then there were larger sleds three or four could sit on and steer with their heels. It was a sport greatly enjoyed, especially fine moonlight evenings, often kept up until midnight.

There was good skating by going some three miles: those fond of skating used to go on fine nights. I never used to go, so I never learnt to skate.

We had no such games as football, lawn tennis, croquet, and I do not remember of hearing the name in my youth.

## An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

We had several kinds of Ball. What we called baseball was the most popular, a very interesting game played by the schools of that time. The bats were processed ash or spruce, about four feet long, two to three inches in diameter, slightly tapered, smooth, hard and springy. Made by the players. The balls were made from woollen yarn, generally old woollen socks unravelled, wound very hard, neatly covered with leather, if could get a bit of Indian rubber wound over that. They (were) about the size of a large orange, hard and springy.

There was the old game of Leap Frog, foot racing, Hop Skip and Jump, jumping fences etc. etc.

### MY FATHER'S MISFORTUNES AND LOSSES WHEN I WAS ABOUT 10 OR 11 (NOT MORE THAN 12)

I write this here because it had a very great deal to do with my future life, probably the reason I went to sea as a calling or a business. I assure you I did not take up a sea life because I liked it.

The land he bought was about 100 acres: some had been cleared and tilled, some was woods, some a stone quarry. A brook ran from one end to the other: when I was a youth there was plenty of trout in this brook. When he bought it, he only had what is called a quit-claim deed. There were several tracts of land in that country the same. Heirs from England sprung up and sent their lawyers out claiming it. I can remember when they came to our House, because they brought out their flasks of brandy and my Mother gave them water. I had never seen anyone have a drink of any kind of spirits before: I suppose it made an impression on my mind, hence remembering so well.

The landholder refused to give up possession. The heirs went to law with them. As far as I knew the case was in the courts for two or three years or more and it took a lot of money to defend the case, each landholder paying his proportion. Finally the High Court gave it in favour of the heirs. As far as I could understand, the proprietors could buy it in at the original cost: even so, and the expenses, meant a considerable sum of money. They had their houses, barns re-built for recompense, so they were obliged to be purchased.

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

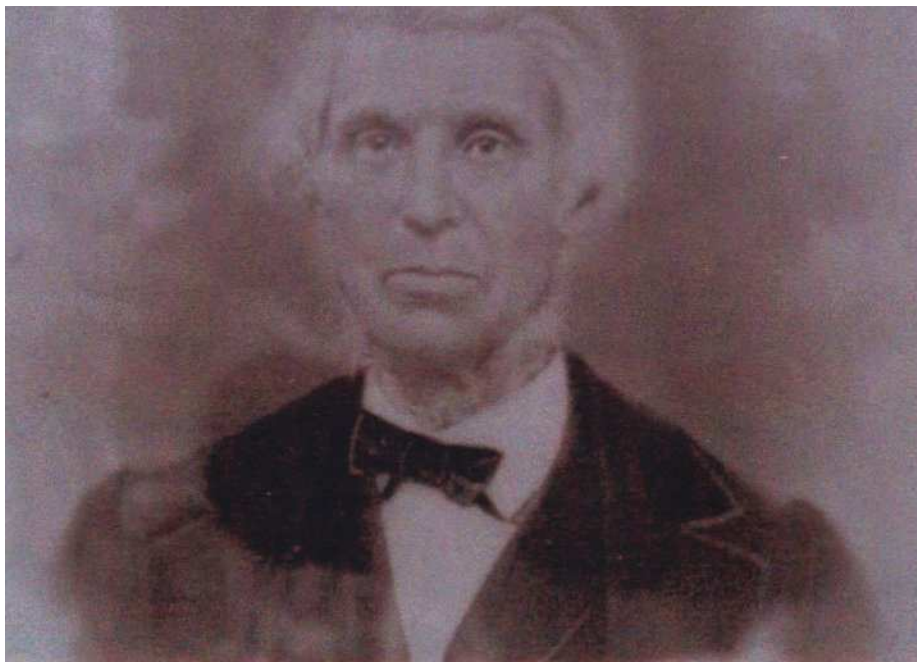
At the same time, my Father's little schooner in charge of my youngest half-brother was a total wreck, and no insurance.

You can readily see my Father was in a very trying position, and an old man then. He sold the poorest and largest part of the farm to enable him to buy it in. There was plenty left for he and I to work.

Being a man much respected, and good credit, he got a much larger schooner built, big enough to run to New York, one of my half-brothers in command. My Father was heavily in debt for this schooner. She was called the *Sterling* and played a great part in the future. In time, he got her paid for and in a fairly comfortable position. Strange to say, this schooner was the first of my going to sea. I had not decided on a sea life, but went two services in her, to New York and back. Still more strange that she was the first craft that I had command of.

When very old, he sold her. He had always, from my earliest remembrance, had a schooner of some sort. In fact he came from Yarmouth in one of his own.

This schooner *Sterling* was the salvation of us and gave me the first start in command. She well deserved the name of *Sterling*.



Captain Peleg Holmes  
1785-1856

CONCERNING AN OCCUPATION FOR MY FUTURE

I had now come to the age of fourteen (14) and began to think seriously of an (occupation) I should follow. My Father's misfortunes spoiled all my and their hopes of giving me an education, as they intended to do. So I had to choose for myself. I knew I would never make a mechanic: there was no chances for clerkships those days. I started to learn to be a caulker, started as Caulker's Devil at twelve dollars a month and found. The work proved too hard, so after about a year I gave it up.

My Father had now got his new schooner commanded by my half-brother serving to New York, trips of four or five weeks. I joined her for the summer months, at home for the winter months. I was now seventeen.

When a brig belonging to Hantsport came to Halifax and was chartered to go to New Orleans and back, the Captain took a crew from home. I shipped as ordinary seaman, at twelve dollars a month.

I had now decided to follow the sea as my future occupation.

Vessel had begun to be built at Hantsport and all around the shores of the Bay of Fundy, and at Windsor, Yarmouth, Maitland etc. There was plenty of berth for young men and good prospects of getting on in that line. I saw a ladder to climb and went to climb it. I did not like the sea, but there seemed no other opening.

I NOW GIVE THE TALE OF WHAT I CALLED MY FIRST VOYAGE AT SEA

I was seventeen that winter. There was a brig owned in Hantsport in Halifax, chartered to go to New Orleans and back. A Captain from home was to take command and take a crew with him. He engaged three young fellows, older than me, as able seamen and me as an ordinary seaman at twelve dollars a month.

When I packed my sea chest, I put in a pocket dictionary, arithmetic, grammar book and book on education. I had no chance to study them, only the dictionary. We all took the old stage coach and four - no rail-roads in Nova Scotia then.

## An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

When I got (to) Halifax, I bought Norie's work on navigation, an old secondhand quadrant, log book, log slate, pens, pencils, ink etc. I said I would learn how to navigate a ship and every spare time I had I studied it. I got the Meridian Altitude with my old quadrant, looked up my latitude, got my longitude by bead reckoning, entered it up in my log book. I then got the altitudes and chronometer time and worked up my longitude by chronometer and entered it in my log book, the same as if I was an officer.

When the voyage was over, I was quite a navigator. The other chaps laughed at me. I did not mind, but persevered. Our voyage was about three months. I forgot to state I bought a book on seamanship and learnt to splice the knots etc.

The vessel was brought to Hantsport in the spring to ply between there and New York, the former Captain to take command. He had no knowledge of navigation and asked if any of us could act as navigator, as he would be some days out of sight of land. The other chaps, they had no knowledge of navigation. I said I thought I could do all the navigation he required. He said he would give me the berth of second mate and navigator, pay me eighteen dollars a month. That was rising from ordinary seaman to second mate in three months, from twelve dollars to eighteen. He took one of the other chaps as first mate.

I kept the log and, when out of sight of land, gave him the latitude and longitude of the vessel. Ran all summer to New York, then laid her up for the winter.

This ends my first start. Not a bad ending.

### MY WINTER'S SCHOOL TEACHING

The winter I was eighteen, the vessel I had been in for nearly a year was laid up on Hantsport beach for the winter and there was no chance to ship again until spring. I had no employment that would bring in any money. I began to think what to do.

A few days after I got home, I was going along the road past the schoolhouse and noticed it was closed. There was no teacher engaged for the winter. I asked if I could have the use of the schoolhouse and open

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

a school for the winter, was told I could and got the key. I then wrote on a piece of paper in big letters that I would open a school on a certain date. Branch taught reading, spelling, writing and arithmetic, charging so much per scholar per week - I cannot remember the sum.

I got my Father to give me a load of wood, took the horse and sled, hauled to the schoolhouse, cut it up for the great big stove. I tidied up nice and clean. It was schoolhouse, church and general use.

When the day came to open, I went early, made a good fire and took my seat on the platform by the desk to see if anyone would come. They soon commenced to drop in. Had quite a number the first day, before the week was out had over forty scholars, some girls as well as boys.

I do not know how I had the confidence to attempt it: only eighteen that winter. |

I had prepared myself with copy book with copies set and sold them to those who wish to write. I could write a fair hand then, but the copies were better, so I was all right for writing. I formed different classes for spelling, gave each class their spelling lessons, the same for reading from their A B C upward, so managed that all right. I fortunately was well up in arithmetic. I could teach that from simple addition right through the arithmetic of that date and time. So I had no trouble to teach what I agreed to do. And I had as many scholars as I could attend to, right through the winter. I went early, made the fire, had everything comfortable when they came in.

I had made up my mind that a school could be conducted without corporal punishment and I proved (it). I never gave a child as much as a slap on the hand. My first unruly scholar was the eldest scholar. I dismissed him from the school, with a note to his mother to keep him at home. The next unruly one I separated from the others, made him sit close by me where he could speak to none of the others. He went home, told his father I had thrashed him. His father very indignant to think I thrashed him asked for his bill. I said I did not thrash him. When I called with the bill the next morning, his father apologised, said Michael had told him a lie and he thrashed and would send him back to school again.



An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

I had no further trouble with any scholar in the school, old or young. Although I say it myself, there never was a more quiet, attentive, well-ordered school in that old schoolhouse. I never spent a happier time in my life.

The winter soon passed away. I gave notice the school would be closed. To my great surprise, the parents had a meeting and requested me not to close the school. Said they would give me a twelve months' engagement at a good fair salary, saying their children never improved as much in the time before. Even the children did not wish to give up the school. I told the parents I did not feel competent to be their teacher and would be like imposing on them. They said at the end of the year I could go to the Academy for six months and take it up again. I have often thought I should have accepted their offer and become a school teacher. It was not a lucrative business to be a country school teacher, besides I had chose the sea as a business. I did not accept their offer, closed the school and went to sea again as able seaman. |

I never enjoy any occupation or felt more at home than I did that winter. Since in business in Liverpool several of those scholars have patronised me and several have been shipmates with me, even the one I dismissed. Such is life, with its many changes. It's wonderful when you look back on your past life. I wish I was capable of writing it.

FROM THE WINTER I WAS 18 UNTIL I WAS 21

After closing my school, I shipped in the brig *America*, commanded by Captain Nicolas Beckwith as able seaman. I was there only a short time before I was promoted to second mate.

I then went to St John, Nova Scotia, shipped as able seaman. I cannot remember the name or captain's name. I was only there a short time when he promoted me to second mate. After a time he fitted his vessel out for San Francisco and wanted me to go mate with him. It was when the Gold Fever was at its height in Frisco. I did not take the berth. He went out and I have never heard of him since.

I continued in our own ship from Hantsport, steady at sea in the Atlantic trade summer and winter, acting as second mate, until I was one and twenty when I came home intending to spend the winter home. I had now got a pretty good experience of sea life. Our crews were mostly old country sailors. I never had any difficulty with them. My life was as happy as sea life could be. You will remember in those days there was no Board of Trade examinations. If the Captain saw fit he could demote you. I do not know why I always got promoted. Four different times I shipped as seaman, each time promoted to second mate.

MY FIRST VOYAGE AS CHIEF MATE

The winter I was one and twenty I had got home and intended to stop for the winter. When the brig *Walton* put into Halifax from Liverpool bound to Willingsburg, the captain and mate wanted to come home. Captain Nedy Davison was asked to take charge. He asked me to go mate with him. The chance was too good to refuse, so off we went in the old stage coach and four for Halifax (no rail-roads in Nova Scotia then).

There was an old country man second mate, also all the crew. When I got on board I could see they looked upon me as a mere boy, which no doubt I looked as such, However I had not been on board but two or three little circumstances turned up that caused them to think I was not so green as I looked, so we got along nicely. The second mate told me afterwards they all took me to

## An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

be some favourite of the Captain's, only mate in name. They were a decent lot and all went back to Cork in the brig. Some of them shipped again.

We took a cargo of Indian corn to Cork, had a rough passage but arrived without accident. She was then chartered to take passengers to New York, scrap iron for ballast. Was fitted, provisioned for 121 passengers. This was in March. It was the time of the Famine in Ireland. We had a passage of 33 to New York, landed our passengers in good health, no accident or trouble of any kind. The passengers had a little meeting and invited me to it, said they wanted to thank me for the kind care I took for their comfort on the passage. Naturally I felt pleased and flattered. I thanked (them) for their kind consideration.

So ended that voyage, quite a happy one. Captain Davison was a nice jolly skipper and treated everybody well, a terror to carry sail. He took the vessel to Hantsport and resigned command.

### MY SECOND VOYAGE AS CHIEF MATE

This is a very different tale to tell. The vessel was chartered to load deal for Liverpool U.K. Captain Samuel Masters was given command, an ignorant, conceited, unhappy kind of man who always signed his name 'Captn. Samuel Masters'. I soon found he had no confidence in me or anyone else.

In due course we arrived in Liverpool. All hands were pleased to take their discharge. I wanted to take mine but he would not pay me off so I had (to) stick it and go back in the vessel. It was chartered to take a cargo of salt to a fishing port called Castien near Portland Main. On the passage out Captain Masters was taken ill of some kind of rheumatism which laid him up. We happened to have a Captain Foster on board as a passenger, who acted for Captain Masters for the remaining part of the voyage. In due course we arrived in Castien. Captain Masters gave Captain Foster command and left to go home via Portland. As soon as Captain Foster got charge and some money he commenced to drink heavily. We had to discharge the cargo to fishermen in the harbour. One night Captain Foster came on board mad drunk and had the D T. He took a cabin stool up, threatened to brain me. There was a clinch.

## An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

I got the better of him and got him in his room and locked him up. When he got sober and quiet I let him out. He was so ashamed of himself and, knowing his chance to keep command was all up, he left for Yarmouth via Portland.

I had now to take command. Finished discharging, collected the freight, took in ballast and sailed for Hantsport. Arrived all right on Hantsport Beach. The owner, Mr Churchill, chartered her to load plaster from Windsor to New York. I took her up to Windsor, got loaded and brought her down to Hantsport Beach. I thought as young as I was I would be sent away in command. I was disappointed. Captain Masters had got better. When his things came on board, mine went ashore. He says, you ain't going to leave, are you ? I said, Captain Masters, you know from the past you and I can never sail together again. Nothing would induce me to go another voyage with you. He says, what am I to do for ea mate ? I told him I had engaged one in case I took command, probably he will go with you. He took him on and I went ashore. I never saw much of him after. He died a comparatively young man.

So ended my second voyage in the good brig *Waldren*.

### MY THIRD AND LAST VOYAGE AS MATE

The fine new fulbrig *America* was built and ready for sea, commanded by Captain Nicolas Beckwith, as good and competent man as ever stood on a ship's quarter deck. I had sailed with him as seaman and second mate.

We went to Liverpool with a load of deal, discharged the cargo in Birkenhead dock. It was the first vessel that passed through the gates, so had the honour of opening the dock. We took salt back to Halifax. So ended a pleasant voyage. I was then about 23.

My father then wished me to take charge of his schooner, *Sterling*: my half-brother wanted to stop on shore. I said I would go and do the best I could for him.

### MY FIRST COMMAND

I took command of the good old schooner *Sterling*, 90 tons register, 125 tons dead weight when loaded scuppers to the water. No Plimsoll marks those days.

This schooner played a remarkable part in our family. She put my father in a comfortable position financially, enabled him to build a nice, well-finished house, which my brother George lives in now. My first going to sea was in her: my first command was that schooner. She would now be about eight years old, a good strong old craft or she could not do the work it had to do. I took charge of her in the spring of my twenty-fourth year. Just to buy a cargo of white plasterrock, take it to New York and sell it to the Calcined Plaster Mills, trips from three to five weeks. If I could get a general cargo for St John, Nova Scotia, I took (it), but generally had to come back in ballast. We used to load up the River St Croix, a branch of the River Avon. It was no child's play to use this schooner.

We were five all told, two in each watch and a cook. I had to take my buck at the wheel, same as a seaman, turn about, besides navigating it. Used to go round the South Shoals, in by Sandy Hook, go in to New York with a pilot. Was not compelled to take a pilot those days via Sandy Hook. Through Hells Gate and down Long Island we had to have a pilot.

When the potato crop was got in we used charter to carry a load of potatoes in bulk for some port in the United States. My first cargo of potatoes was for Baltimore: one man bought the whole cargo, we got good despatch and I got home about three days before the River Avon froze up. As soon as the ice was clear in the spring - about 1st of April - we started again to carry plaster to New York, that freight load potatoes for New York. They were peddled out to Huxters. We could not get back before the Avon froze up.

I left the mate in charge and took command of a brig belonging to Halifax, walled the *Ostler* and went out to Cuba and back to New York, then took a cargo for Halifax. As she was no great ketch and no further prospects, I resigned and went home. The owner wished me to continue in her except I was a bit homesick.

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

That brought me home in the spring of the year, just as the vessels laid up for the winter were starting for their summer's work. The mate was doing all right with the *Sterling*, so he kept charge of her until my Father sold her.

To my surprise I was asked to take command of a clipper brig called the *Alma*. They said she had been running two years, two captains had tried her and they never received a penny. There was several owners, mostly farmers. I said I would take her if they would not interfere with her business and if I did not give them satisfaction would resign. They agreed to that and left the matter of wages to myself.

I started in the plaster trade to New York. As luck would have it, I was most fortunate to get cargoes back to St John, Nova Scotia, or Halifax or Newfoundland. If I got cargo for St John, Nova Scotia, I loaded plaster, if for Halifax or Newfoundland I took coal from Sydney to New York, Fortunately I always got a cargo back and doing very well. When I got home I paid myself and everyone off, all bills paid and what was left I gave each owner in proportion to what he owned. I always paid them with silver, as it looked a lot of money. Each had their *bag of silver*. They were highly pleased with what I had done. I charged fifty dollars a month: they made no complaint and asked for no vouchers or act.

I got quite a name for the two years I sailed her. Luck Seemed to favour me. I was the white-headed boy and must have a larger vessel. This craft will come under the heading of The Unlucky Ship.

THE UNLUCKY SHIP: D R DEWOLF

(built at Hantsport 1853)

I will give as correct account of this unlucky ship as possible. It will (be) a long tale to tell.

Ship-building had now become the leading industry of Hantsport, of the Province generally. I had been fortunate in the vessels I commanded and was supposed to be a promising young shipmaster. A number of my friends wanted to give me a new ship, thinking I would make money with her. We were all doomed to disappoint through this unlucky ship or my mismanagement. She was a very fine-looking clipper barque, probably too much of the clipper for profit. My brother Kendal engaged a Mr John Helsea as master builder. My brother superintended the building, rigging of her and managing owner. When afloat I was to take command. She was built and ready for launching in the fall of the year I was 28.

The launching day come, she was all rigged (ataunto) and expected to slide smoothly in to the River Avon. But alas, the first bad luck happened, she broke down on the way and fell over on her broad side.

The master builder went off his dot and cleared out. She had to (be) relaunched before a south gale came or probably she would become a wreck, for it hove a rather heavy sea on. No one seemed to know what to do. I went to my brother, asked him what means he purposed to take to launch her. He said the master builder had cleared out. I said there is a man who has been working on her who is capable to relaunch her. He wanted to know who it was. I said it was J B North. So Mr North was asked if he would undertake the job. He agreed to do so and felt quite sure he could put her afloat the next spring tides if there was no south east gale. He went to work and put her afloat the next spring tides, just in time to save a S E gale. I then took command.

I might say here that was the first that was known of J B North as a ship-builder, anyway in Hantsport. He then built a fine brig for my brother in the same yard, then bought a yard of his own and built vessels up to 1200 tons. I might also say I made a lasting friend of Mr North and he done all he could for me up to his death. When

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

everybody else through this unlucky ship put me down he stuck up for me.

This was the first bad luck for the barque, *D R Dewolf*.

I took command and loaded plaster for New York and started on the voyage. I had not got out of the River Avon before she fetched up on the eastern bar at the mouth of the river and was left high and dry with a very heavy cargo on board. I expected she would strain and when the tide came in would fill with water. Fortunately, She took no apparent harm; when she floated tried the pumps and to my surprise and joy found she was making no water. A fine east wind sprung up and we made sail for New York, the fair wind all the way. On the fourth day anchored in New York Harbour - a record passage via the South Channel and Highlands. Just escaped bad luck in that case, but there was more to follow.

There was nothing offering from New York to Cuba, then trade I intended to put her in. My broker, who owned shares in her, said he could fix her for a lump sum to Naples, out thence, home from Sicily with blemiton and fruit. It looked like a fair business, would have paid had it been done in any reasonable time. I loaded and started for Naples first of January, hoping to make the passage in about 30 or 35 days. Went on all right until we passed the Sable islands. We had rather strong wind and heavy sea for about 24 hours when it made sated, sprung up fair. Got all plain sail on and was going along about eight knots when she struck a head sea and away went the foremast just above the foreyard and everything above went by the board. Got the wreck cleared away and kind of jury topmast up so as to carry a little head sail. The question now: what was we to do ?

Halifax was the nearest port but it was the dead of winter and we was a cripple. There was Bermuda, West Indy Islands and possibly reach the Western Islands, but there was no mast to be had at either. No sense us coming to those ports then. It would take months before could get a mast or she might be condemned on the plea no mast could be had. Finally decided for Halifax and shaped our course accordingly. When we got near the Nova Scotia coast it came bitterly cold and we iced badly. However it softened and we got a south wind and cleared the ice off and made for Sambro, the entrance to Halifax Harbour, and made Sambro in the



An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

morning but just a little to leeward so we had to brace sharp up to fetch clear of Pennent Point. We could not tack off here, so had to take our chance of clearing the rocks. We cleared by two or three ships' lengths and went up the harbour all light-anchored opposite the city. It was a big risk, the condition we were in, but all is well that ends well. Now we could get a mast and do whatever was required. The underwriters were so pleased that they paid all expenses and made me a present of one hundred dollars. Well they might.

Were now ready to sail again for Naples some time in February; we should have arrived at Naples before this had we not met with this accident. I might say the cause of the foremast breaking was that it was made of a dead old pine - looked all right but had no substance. It might have gone before.

We reached the Straits of Gibraltar in due course after long passage. We were drifting through on a beautiful moonlight night, dead calm. Suddenly a puff of east wind struck us and in less than two hours we were under close reef, topsails blowing: a Seroco gale. Right down the Mediterranean we drifted, through the Straits. Had then to face the Seroco winds and beat all the way to Naples. Which took us weeks to do what could have been done in a few days with a fair wind. Finally we reached Naples, about the time we should have arrived back to New York. Got discharged, sailed for a small port in the west end of Sicily, took in our blemiton and went to Palermo for our fruit. Loaded up and sailed for New York. Bad luck still followed as there was constant head winds for weeks and weeks. We could not beat through the Straits against the current.

Finally had to go into Gibraltar for provisions and water. With ordinary luck we would have arrived in New York in the time we sailed from Palermo. There was no Tug Boats to tow you through the Straits those days. At last there came the east winds and away we went. There would not be less than 300 vessels pass through the Straits of Gibraltar that day: it was difficult to keep clear of each other. Went on all right until we reached the Western Islands when it fell calm and for fifteen days we did not make ten miles. Finally we arrived at New York - 103 days from Palermo, which might easily been done in 30 days. Ate up the last scrap of provisions the day we arrived, after being on an allowance for some time. We

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

should have made the voyage in four months at the longest, instead we were almost ten months. You can easily see it was a ruinous voyage.

After discharging the cargo of rotten fruit I chartered for the north side of Cuba and back to New York. Loaded at Sagua la Grande. I was reckless now and rather she would be lost - knew the hull was insured. I had the freight and disbursements insured in New York. I left Sagua and ran her across the Little Bahama Bank, hoping she would fetch up on one of the shallow spots or the ledges on the east side of the Bank. She would become a total wreck: little danger of life. Night and all as it was, never touched anything and went clear of the Bank into the Florida Stream. In five days I anchored in New York. Quickest passage on record. The consignees of the cargo said I had beaten the Mail Boat. That ship ended all right.

I then took a cargo to St Jago out, chartered a cargo of sugar molasses back to New York. All went well until the day I sailed from St Jago to Cienfuegos, when the Mate and all of the crew except myself, 2nd mate and Cook were taken down with the Yellow Fever. I ran her into Cienfuegos Bay, let go the anchor: sails run down but we could not furl them. The Mate died as I entered the Bay. There was an American barque sent his crew on board to furl the sails. I was allowed to go up to Cienfuegos, load up for New York. Sailed and arrived in due course. The crew all recovered from the fever. I went without a mate. So ended that voyage to Cuba and back to New York.

Now commences my troubles and losses again. I took upon myself a big lawless and illegal venture which if it had succeeded I would (have) been called a smart clever fellow, but as it was a failure I was called a reckless fool. Two others had taken the risk and succeeded: I hoped to do the same but was too late.

It was the time of the Crimean War. A fine legion of recruits was being got up in the United States for the English and French army. I got the barque down to a very secluded place called Harlem in the East River, filled her up to take about 200 of these recruits on board for Brest. Got provisions, water on board, crew shipped everything ready to make a dash as soon as they were on board, seemly never detected.

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

The night came that they were to be marched down and go on board. I had the vessel moored bows out with slip moorings, two tugs with ropes attached to them. The moment they were on board, slip the moorings, tugs to steam ahead and take her to sea. Midnight came: no Foreign Legion came but instead three or four military officers appeared on the wharf and began asking questions.

I knew at once the game was up, passed the word to the tugs to go ahead full speed, slipped our moorings and away we went, leaving the officers on the wharf. I expected to be chased by some kind of cutter - there was no steam cutters those days. The authorities either had nothing to chase me or did not think it worth their while to do so. I got out past the Highlands and to sea, still looking for a cutter after me. I shaped my course to run through a narrow channel between the Old and New South Shoals, thinking they would not venture to do that. Went through all right, breakers on each side of me. I felt safe now. What was I to do now ? I had cleared for Brest in France and was to go from there up to the Crimea. The only thing I could do was to make for home and face the music, which I did and arrived on Hantsport Beach in due course, feeling very cheap. All conceit had gone out of (me). All I could say was I took the risk and failed, but if I had succeeded would have done well. They blamed me for being so reckless, no doubt properly so. All this time and expense was lost. I was blamed and felt done. So ended that unfortunate and unlawful business.

For some reason or other no one would ask me to leave. The barque was chartered to load deal in a little crooked river in Parsboro called Hose River. I took her there and loaded her for Liverpool. I thought they wanted a change of masters and I was sick and disgusted. Crossed over the Bay in the boat and told them to get another master as I would not sail her any longer. Went back in the boat for my luggage. A Captain Dixon Crowel, a share-holder, was appointed and came over to take charge. I offered to take her out of the river, having staked it out and studied the current by drifting in and out with the flow and ebb tides. He said he thought he was quite capable to take her out of the river. I packed up and went on shore. He started and had not got far before he fetched up and side, left her and she broke her back. When the tide came in she filled with water. He abandoned her as a total wreck. The underwriters would not accept the abandonment but said

they would get her off and repair her or the owners could. They would pay their average. So my brother Kendal got her off and repaired her. I do not know how he settled with the underwriters. He took charge and continued in charge until he lost her on the Island of Grandman somehow three years later. He never made her pay. When I settled up, she owed me one hundred and fifty dollars which is still owing me. So ends the story of the unlucky ship.

### STARTING LIFE AGAIN AS A SHIP'S MASTER

I was now stranded, lost my good name as a ship's master. No one offered me a ship of any kind, at home or near home. Mr North would have done so but he was not then in a position to do so. I went to Halifax to see what I could do there. I met a Captain Hendrake whose acquaintance I had made somewhere in the West Indies, told him I was looking for a master's berth. He said he was going to city and he would introduce me to his owners and recommend me. He was part owner himself. He did so and I was engaged at once. Don't think I had been in Halifax three days.

She was a boney little brig, sailed well, carried a good cargo. Was the largest vessel that the firm of Messrs Fierbanks & Elleson owned, rather large for their particular trade which was taking fish to the West Indies, sugar and molasses back. They load her with dry fish for Kingston, Jamaica and a market. I made a good time there, agents sold the cargo well. I was then to proceed to Jacksonville, Florida, and buy a cargo of pitch pine, as specified for Havana, Cuba. Had a bank credit to pay for it. This was before the days of telegraphing. Took it to Havana, consigned to their agents. They did not want the vessel back and I was at liberty to charter. I chartered to go to New Orleans and load a general cargo for Kingston, Jamaica. A yankee schooner were loaded with same kind (of) cargo and a market. If I got there first I was to have a bonus of fifty dollars. I was nearly discharged when the schooner arrived, so got my bonus all right. I came near losing her shining around Cape Antonia, just touch and went clear, that was how I beat the schooner.

I then took a load of logwood from Jamaica to Philadelphia, chartered then to Antigua, West Indies. I was then advised to go to Careso, buy a load of salt for Cienuegos, Cuba. As luck would have it a part of the cargo from Philadelphia

## An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

was to go to Careso end they paid me to take it there so I had plenty of funds to pay for the cargo of salt. I took it to Cientuegos consigned to their agents and then loaded sugar and molasses on owners' act for Halifax.

The owners were hugely pleased with what I had done and trusted me well and wished me to continue in the vessel. Perhaps I was a bit homesick and preferred a home ship.

I met Mr Ezra Churchill in Halifax. He was Member in the House for Hants County and a fast-rising ship builder and owner. He persuaded me to come home and he would give me a master's berth right and long. I resigned and went home. He gave me the worst old brig he had, strange to say the very one I shipped ordinary seamen on, what I called my first going to sea as a calling - new then but old now. I went to New York and back home. She leaked, so I threw her up. I don't think Mr Churchill (sic) was well pleased as he never offered me a berth after and I would not ask for one.

### TRYING MY LUCK KEEPING A GROCER'S STORE

I fitted up a kind of shop in the house, went to Halifax, bought a lot of groceries. But I soon found that game would (not) pay. First, my shop was not suitable. Second, I was not in a central position. Third, there was so much credit. I did not renew my stock, sold what I had and gave it up.

Had to take to the sea again. Captain Alfred had chartered his schooner to take a load of ice from Parsboro to Savanna. Not being a navigator, he asked me to take her for the voyage. I accepted his offer and loaded cargo of ice. Arrived in Savanna in due course, discharged and loaded cotton for St John, Nova Scotia. It was just when the War broke out between the North and South. After being loaded with the cotton, the authorities would not allow me to sail with it, in fear it was for their Enemy. Had to discharge the cargo again. The authorities paid all expenses, paid for the time, so I was not put to any loss. I then load pitch pine for St John. The South were trying to raise a Navy, getting all the sea-faring men they could. They offered me a commission in their navy, if I would leave the vessel. I could not very well accept it, there (was) nothing to induce one to accept it. I took the cargo to St John and

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

took the schooner home. Captain Smith took charge again. So I was stranded again.

An uncle of mine had bought the management of a big lump of a brig, new, called the *Dawn of the Day*. He asked me to take charge of her, which I did. He chartered her deal and cork for orders arrived there. Got my orders for London: arrived there all right. A son of his went with me for the good of his health, a real jolly gentle chap. We were offered a freight away up the River Danube in Bulgaria. The son thought it was good business so we chartered the brig for round voyage out and back. We brought grain back to Bristol Channel. It was not a profitable voyage, a long tedious one, great deal of detension up the River Danube left little or no profit.

I then chartered to load coals at Cardiff for Cuba. Now the law obliged Captains and Mates to have certificates of servitude or pass their examinations and get a certificate of competency. There were no examiners in Cardiff then so I took the train for London on Saturday night and the next Saturday returned with my certificate of competence. Went to Cuba, loaded back with sugar for Glasgow - at £3 per ton made a very good voyage.

I then load in Greenock for Ponce, Puerto Rico, coals, and make a very good freight. I loaded there for New York. Got a good sum of tonnage in Puerto Rico for detention. I came out a very good business. The brig was sold, so I had to leave. My only misfortune was the Danube charter, as far as the business was concerned. I had the misfortune of the Mate, a nephew of mine, being washed overboard and drowned - the only man I ever lost at sea. We were running before a heavy gale and heavy sea under close reefs when a tremendous sea rolled up behind us. The Mate and I were at the wheel. I saw we were going to be pooped by the sea and sung out to everyone to look out for themselves. The sea over the stern swept everything movable before it, took the Mate overboard and we never never seen or heard any more of him. How I escaped I do not know, only I caught hold of a thin railing which was around the poop deck and was able to hold on. My body must have been overboard. We did not receive much damage, only what was loose went overboard.

TAKING A VESSEL TO ENGLAND TO BE SOLD

Mr J B North asked me to take his old brig across and sell her at any price I could get. She was load with deal in Halifax, Cork for orders. She was getting old and leaked badly. I started and in twelve days arrived in Cork. Fine weather and fair wind, all the pumps pretty busy all the way. Got orders for a little port in the west end of Ireland called Kiltrush. I thought it was the last place in the world to sell a vessel. When discharged I chartered to take pit wood to Cardiff, hoping to sell her there. To my great surprise a captain came there: I made his acquaintance. He said he was a coaster and would like a vessel about the size of the Clyde. I did not look up him as a buyer. To my surprise he ask me if I would sell her and made me an offer. Would take her there with her charter. We came to terms, he took her and paid me cash down. I cannot remember the figure. I was glad to make a sale so unexpectedly. Had no commission to pay, settled the little business between ourselves. I think he was pleased with the vessel. I left for Liverpool to take steam for hone. Arrived home in good time.

Mr North highly pleased with the sale. Said he would give me a ship as soon as he could.

I was again without a berth, but not long. There was three brothers in Parsboro on a little river called Fox River had got a vessel built about 200 (tons) register but could not get an outfit of chain rigging and sails. I offered to lend them a few hundred dollars if they would give me command and a free hand to manage her, which they agreed to do. When it was known I was to take command and manage her they had no trouble to get an outfit. I rigged her and she was launched. I took her to Windsor and loaded plaster for New York. The eldest brother wanted to know if I would allow him to go with me as a kind of passenger, said he would not interfere in the business. I said I did not mind, he could come if he liked, so he packed up and went with me. As soon as we got to sea he wanted me to teach him some rudiments of navigation. I was quite willing, although I could see what his little game was. He went to Cuba and back with me. I think he was glad to go home then.

Matters was none too pleasant between us, so he went home. I went to Cuba and back again and loaded for Halifax. The top bills were now about paid off. When

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

I got to Halifax he was there, said he had been learning navigation and thought he could sail the vessel himself. I said all right, I will collect the freight and settle up with you for what you owed me and for wages and if any balance is left hand it over to you. He wanted me to let him have my books, vouchers etc to go through them. I said No, Mr Geame, I will not trust you with my books or vouchers but will put them into the hands of an Account or if you like let Messre Farebanks & Ellison go through them. He would not do either, so I settled with myself, got what I lent them with interest, wages up to date, handed the vessel over to him. She had made good money for the time. I never knew how he got along after, never heard any more from him about a settlement.

So ended my business with the *River Bell* and Geeme brothers. Paid me all right, for I made about \$500 besides my wages smuggling to Cuba. |

I went home, was only 6 few days home when Captain Lockhart wanted me to take his three-masted schooner, *Queen of Clipper*, the smartest craft out of the Bay of Fundy. I went to New York with plaster, then to Newfoundland, back to New York, then down home. He was very pleased with what I had done, said he could not have done so well himself.

Now the best chance turned that I ever had offered me. The barque *Gurino* was in Montreal, chartered to load box shooks at Three Rivers, a place between Montreal and Quebec. Captain Toy wanted to be relieved. Mr J W Barss was the managing owner, J B North the builder and a large owner. He proposed and recommended me. I was appointed to take command and away I went for Montreal, arrived and took charge.



I WILL WRITE THIS UNDER THE HEADING OF THE LUCKY SHIP

I joined her at Three Rivers, loaded under and on deck with box shooks for Havana, Cuba. Dropped down to Quebec, got provisions, water and crew on board ready to sail on the last day of November - a very late sailing for the St Lawrence. Started with a strong fair wind down the river when it commenced to freeze up and navigation was stopped but fair wind took me out past St Pals, so I was all right out in the open sea.

Made a good run to Havana, discharged and loaded for New York, making a good voyage to start with. Made \$500 for myself as well.

I will not give details of the separate voyages I made during the five years four months I was in command. I was most fortunate in getting freights both ways across the Atlantic at fair paying rates with any lost time only made on longest passage, several quick ones. And as the old sea phrase goes, never lost a rope yarn, that is, never had an accident of any kind. I was taken ill in Savanna, had to advise them to send another captain. When he arrived in Savanna the ship was loaded, being at Tybee ready for sea with a good freight for Montivideo. Captain Dexter, the new captain, had as good luck as I had. His first voyage of ten months was a most successful one. I think he done well until she was sold. I only got home once during all the time I sailed her, then only for a few days. I never had a settlement with the owners until the end of the five years and four months. I took my books and all of my vouchers to Mr Barss expecting (to) have them scrutinised as he was a thorough business man, a bank manager. To my surprise he never opened my books or the pile of vouchers, said the accounts of each voyage was quite sufficient and very business-like. The only question he ask me was how much I owe you and what wages I charged per month. I said \$90. That is all right, although it is more than Captain Toy had. Well, what do I owe you now? Nothing, I owe the ship \$100 and was going to hand it to him when he said, I make you a present of it, you have done remarkably well.

I was now pretty well established as a competent ship master. Mr Barss and Mr North at once proposed to build a ship for me of about 1000 tons, registered and commenced at once to build. I could now afford to take a rest and wait for the new ship. I had only been home for a short

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

time when I received a cable message to come to Liverpool to take command of a ship. My expenses would be paid. Packed up and took the first steamer from Halifax and in ten days was in Liverpool.

Mr James R Dewolf said he wanted me to take the barque *Seagem*, kind of an outside ship of the firm of J S Dewolf and Co. Wages £17 per month and five per cent on the nett earnings. I did not think the commission would amount to much but to my great surprise they amounted to £8.7 per month making my pay £25.7 per month during the time I was in command. The vessel must have cleared about £176 a month. Mr Dewolf was well pleased and coaxed hard to continue in their employ. I could not accept the offer as Mr North had got the new ship well along, so I had (to) go home again to take command of her.

When I got home found masts made for a full rig ship. I said I prefer a barque rig. They agreed to that, though large for barque rig. After they went in for larger vessels to be barque rig, said I was quite right in my ideas of rig. I worked about the ship yard, planned the cabin. Rigged and ready for sea when launched.

I left in ballast for Philadelphia seeking business. Arrived safely in Delaware breakwater in good time. Ran in there in the night without a pilot amongst a lot of vessels, anchored there. It was a risky thing too, but all's well that ends well. Went up to Philadelphia and chartered to load oil for Bremen. Left in latter part of December, made a quick run to the Downs when I learnt the river was frozen up, not to come till advised. My cargo had shifted on the passage. I towed to Sheerness and had the cargo arranged and the vessel righted. She was well over on her broad side when I arrived on the Downs. Made a claim on underwriters which they paid. Discharged up the river in the stream at a place called Brock, got my freight and some demmorage and left in ballast.

This vessel would not sail as fast as the barque *Quiona*. Never got more than ten knots out of her, could get twelve out of the *Quiona*. I struck a shoal of the Tescee going to Bremen.

I wanted her mettled so I put her into Plymouth and dry docked her when I found forty feet of her false keel gone. I mettled her and went to Cardiff to load coals for Martinique, West Indies. From there to Havana

An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

to load cotton for Genoa. From Genoa went to Leghorn to load marble and general cargo for New York. Got out of the Mediterranean with loss of time and arrived in New York in good time.

I then resigned to come to Liverpool to go into the ships' chandlery and ship store business. This ended my sea-faring life with the exception of taking a large ship from Liverpool to Cardiff.

When I look back on my sea-faring life, I wonder how I am here. I (took) many risks, barely escaped being wrecked at least three times, struck the bottom seven times and went clear once ashore for twelve hours, had to jettison some of the cargo to get off. I done one foolish thing in a business point of view: that was the Foreign Legion business. Made one unprofitable voyage and one poor voyage. I think the rest was all fairly good, some very good. Only one long passage, several very quick passages. So ends my sea-faring life.

My business life has been too complicated to undertake to write it. I built up a good business, made a good Canadian connection and a fair Liverpool connection. Established a good credit with wholesale dealers, manufacturers and banks - probably too good, which was the cause of me losing so much by endorsing other people's paper. I made many friends in a business point of view, especially ship masters and a few ship owners and creditors. With all my ups and downs I never lost my credit or good name, never had a creditor to press me for payment of an account. At one time I had shares in as (many as) twelve ships. Some of them made money, some were a dead loss. I had several law suits and two arbitration cases. I won in every case, whether plaintiff or defendant. I made a good deal of money and lost a good deal of money. Had to spend a good deal, having two families to bring up. I do not claim to have been a shrewd or even a clever business man: I put too much confidence in certain business firms. I could never say no or see myself properly secured, hence my heaviest losses which were not less than £1500. Even these I could pay 20s to the £. My creditors were satisfied with 12/6 to the pound as they did not wish to hamper me in my business. Had Canadian ships continued as they once were, I should have had a very profitable business. I have had as many as 30 ships on my books at one time, ranging from £65 to over £1000. I never lost a customer through them

being dissatisfied or displeased. I have the satisfaction to know they were generally satisfied. In many respects I feel proud of my business life. Made many good solid friends and had the confidence of all of them. I have often wondered how or why it was so - there was so many different characters to deal with. I do not know as I ever made an enemy in all of my various business transactions. I had one man that was my first partner, Albert Armstrong, who done all he could to spoil my business and drive me out of Liverpool, but he never succeeded but had to give up business himself. I am now a pensioner in my 91st year.

### MY FIRST AND ONLY SHIPWRECK

It was the last trip of the Season to Quebec and back home. I was twelve years old the next month. My brother could get no one to go (in) the ship, so I had to go. All went well until we got back to the mouth of the River Avon, nearly in sight of home, when it shut in a thick heavy snow storm. Had to bring the schooner to anchor. When a heavy north-west gale sprang up and parted the chains, the schooner then drove on to a rocky part of the shore. The sea was now running pretty high. We were seen by the farmers in that neighbourhood, some seventy or more came down and saw the dangerous state of the schooner. Said we must get ashore. as soon as possible or the tide would cut us off as there was a point each side that we could not get around and could not climb the cliffs. The schooner being light, the surf threw her up so high that when it receded the men could get quite near. We hove them a rope. They strung out with it over their shoulders, keeping it taut, and when the surf receded we shinned ashore on (it), each one watching their chance. I was the first one to take my chance and just reached the men before the sea caught me. The rest followed and all got safely on shore just in time to get round the point of rocks. We had to leave just as we stood, all drenched with salt water and freezing on us. There was only four of us.

They took us to their homes, got our clothes dried, gave us plenty of warm food and took care of us overnight. The next day drove us up the shore opposite Hantsport and across the river in a boat and landed us on Hantsport Beach and went to our homes.

The poor little schooner, *Freedom*, was smashed all to pieces on the rocks. It was a serious loss to our family as we

## An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

depended on it to bring us in a little ready cash to buy necessities needed for the family. We got pretty nearly all the food we wanted off the farm. So ended the good little schooner, *Freedom*, that we had for ten or twelve years.

### NARROW ESCAPE FROM BEING DROWNED

It were discharging a cargo of railroad iron at a wharf in a place called Williamsburg on the Napehanor River in the Chesapeake Bay near Washington. Some parts of the wharf was very rotten. I was coming down it when all of a sudden a plank broke and down I went some twelve or fifteen feet, foot foremost in the water. I could not swim. I came up and got my arms around one of the spiles and held myself up until they got a rope down and pulled me up through the wharf. I shall never forget one thought came to me when under the water: an I to end my life in this simple way ?

### NEAR FOUNDERING, HOVE TO IN A GALE

We were on a voyage from the Chesapeake to Cork with a load of Indian corn. A severe gale obliged us to heave to under a close reef topsail. The cargo began to shift. Lee rail under the water, she (fell) over until the lee hatch connings was under the tarpaulins, were washing off. We managed to get a small piece of the trysail set, which brought her a little more to the head of the wind. How the vessel ever lived through the night I could never understand. I do not think there was a man on board thought she would. I moderated a bit and she lived through. We got her righted up a bit and arrived safe in Cork.

### TWICE JUST ESCAPED A WEST INDIAN HURRICANE

The first was at Turks Island. We had just got all the ballast out ready to take in salt the next day when the report of a hurricane came. We could do nothing but lie anchored as we had no ballast in to put to sea. All we could do was to wait and see whether it would sweep down over the Turks Island or pass by further south.

We watched all night and the people watched all night to see if it struck us. If it did, we should be driven on the shore and they might render us some assistance. Providentially, it passed to the leeward of where we were. We were saved from total shipwreck, the probability we

should all (have) perished had it struck us.

The second time we were going down the south side of Cuba when a violent hurricane was raging on the north side of the island and drove all the ships ashore. All the effects we felt was a heavy sea. Had this hurricane taken place a few days later we should have been on the north side of Cuba and caught in it. It was a providential circumstance that we escaped in each case.

#### JUST ESCAPED BEING WRECKED GOING INTO NEW LONDON

We were running in a gale of wind for the harbour of New London, shut in a heavy rain squall. We lost our bearings and the vessel struck a rocky ledge. Strange to say, only struck once and very slightly then and we went safely in and came to anchor.

It was a providential circumstance that we were saved from a total wreck and loss of our lives. Nothing could have saved us if the vessel had stopped on the ledge and a heavy sea running.

My next narrow escape from shipwreck was on a passage from New York to St John, Nova Scotia. We left New York in January in company of another vessel called the *Quickstep*, both bound to St John, both belonging to Hantsport. We had a fine run down the Long Island sound, through the Vineyard sound and across the shoals up as far as Mount Desert Rock when it shut in a thick snow storm, wind south-westerly, plain gale breeze. I kept running for the Bay of Fundy, hoping it would clear up. I hauled in shore in fact, heading nearly head-on to the shore, keeping a good look out, thinking we would see the land in time to hawl off and shape a course for the Bay of Fundy. I knew the next change of wind would be from the north, probably very cold. All of a sudden I saw the white fowm through the snow on the rock nearly mast high. I jumped to the wheel and sung out to the mate to brace the yards up and trim in the sheets, which they quickly did. I kept the wheel so as to keep a good full on. The wind allowed us to head a point or two off shore with a good full on. Fortunately the tide was on our weather bow and we soon shot off the shore. I knew pretty nearly where we were and shaped my course for the entrance of the Bay of Fundy via Quida Head and on in the snow storm. When we got in the bay it cleared up and I run the vessel into St John and got her in slip

of the South Wharf before the wind change. I run a great risk: thought it necessary to do so.

That night the wind shifted to the north, most bitterly cold. It was so intensely cold you could not go outdoors with being frost-bitten. No shops in the city was opened, no work attempted to be done on the wharfs. It was called the Cold Friday and has been as such ever since. In all probability the coldest day ever in the Province of New Brunswick. I was thankful we had got in. I do not know what our fate would have been if we had not got in. The *Quickstep* that left with us never arrived. Some weeks after she was found bottom up and taken ashore. All the crew was found drowned in the cabin. She had iced up and went over through being top heavy. Probably that would have been our fate the rest paid.

#### A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE OF BEING WASHED OVERBOARD

We were crossing the Atlantic bound to the UK, running under close reefs in a westerly gale, very heavy sea. I looked astern, saw a tremendous (wave) coming close on to us. I saw we would (be) pooped by it and sang out for everyone to take care for themselves. The mate and I were at the (wheel ?). The sea came rolling over our stern several feet deep and filled full from stern to stem. When the vessel shook the sea off I mustered all hands to see if we were all there. To my great sorrow the mate was missing, washed overboard on the poop deck I suppose, for we were both at the wheel when the sea broke over us. No one knew what had happened until the water had cleared enough to get our feet again.

Why or how I escaped I never knew. When sea rolled off the poop deck I was holding on a twine rope that wind round the poop deck. Instinct must have told me to catch it or may have caught by meer chance. All I knew when the water went off I was holding on this twine rope and safe.

The mate was a fine young fellow, about twenty-two, a nephew of mine. We did not know he was gone until found him missing. Even if we had we could do nothing in such a sea and gale of wind. We ran it out and arrived safely. This is the only man I ever lost during my command - over twenty-five years.

## An Account of My Life by Capt. John William Holmes 1828-1918

Another very (lucky) escape of being shipwreck was in the unlucky ship, D R Dewolf when I was making for Halifax, partly dismasted. In this case probably there was not much risk of life, for it was a fine clear day, not a very heavy sea and near a lifeboat station. In making for the entrance to Halifax Harbour, I was a little to the leeward of the entrance and had hawl close on the wind to fetch past Pendent Point. Disabled as we were, we could neither move or stay. All we could do was to go on and to take our chance of clearing the rocks on Pendent Point. If we cleared, we had the harbour open and a fair wind in. Fortunately we cleared by about two ships' lengths and away we went up the harbour and anchored off the city. It was a very risky thing to attempt to reach Halifax in January. All is well that ends well.

### MY LAST NARROW ESCAPE OF BEING DROWNED

After lying at Sheerness waiting the River Elbe to be clear of ice, I started across the North Sea for the River Elbe. I was shaping to make the Texel. The weather was rather hazy. I decided to haul her off until clearer. Had just got her heading off and braced up with a full when to my surprise she gave one hard bump on the edge of a shoal or bank of the Texel. She did not stop but ranged off into deep water.

Had I continued ten or fifteen minutes longer she would have been hard and fast on a dangerous shoal, out of sight of any land and in all probability been a total wreck. Only saved by hauling off when I did.