

## "JOSEPH MEDILL" LOSS

### Ice "Most Probable" Cause

#### BOARD OF TRADE INQUIRY FINDINGS

From Our Own Correspondent

NEWCASTLE, Wednesday. The findings in connection with the Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the all-welded motorship *Joseph Medill* were given in Newcastle to-day, the Court deciding that most probably the cause of the vessel's loss was ice. The inquiry was held on July 21 and 22, before Judge Richardson, Wreck Commissioner, sitting with Commodore H. Stockwell, Captain Peirs De Legh and Mr. J. L. Scott as assessors.

The *Joseph Medill* (2086 tons gross) was built by Swan, Hunter & Wigam Richardson, Ltd., of Wallsend, for the Quebec & Ontario Transportation Company, Ltd. The vessel was all-welded, and driven by two Diesel engines, and was for service on the Great Lakes. She left the Tyne with a cargo of coal on Aug. 10 and after being reported by a Norwegian steamer on Aug. 17 was never heard of or seen again.

#### WELDING CONSTRUCTION PRUDENT

In answering the Board of Trade questions, the Court found that the construction by welding was prudent and should have resulted in producing a seaworthy ship. The first loaded trial of the vessel was unsatisfactory as to steering, but after alterations were made to her rudder and skeggs a further loaded trial was satisfactory. Her steering gear was in good seaworthy condition when she sailed. The mean draught and freeboard were safe and proper for the voyage, and she was in a seaworthy condition when she sailed. Her manning complied with the Board of Trade regulations, and she had been properly loaded and all three holds had been trimmed.

The vessel would have arrived off Newfoundland on Aug. 24 having regard to her speed at that time. Strong to fresh winds were experienced in the neighbourhood of Belle Isle, and there was a considerable amount of ice in the vicinity. The Board of Trade was justified in granting a wireless installation exemption. The cause of the loss of the vessel must remain problematical, but the most probable cause was ice. All hands on board the vessel, numbering 16, were lost.

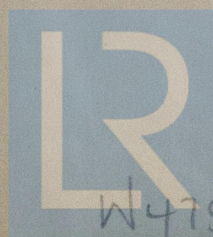
In an annex, the Court stated it had had in mind that the *Joseph Medill* was lost on her maiden voyage in the North Atlantic, for which conditions she had been specially built, and she was the first of the many Lake steamers to have crossed the Atlantic to be lost on the voyage. Since ships of all-welded construction of the size of the *Joseph Medill* were an innovation, there was no information available for the purpose of ascertaining how the strength and behaviour of such structures compared with the riveted type when subject to deep-sea service conditions.

#### EXCELLENT WORKMANSHIP

The Court was of the opinion that every precaution it was possible to foresee was taken in determining the scantlings and structural arrangements of the vessel for the particular service for which she was intended and the freeboard assigned for the voyage was proper. There was no doubt that butt welding of ships required special care and skilful workmanship. Any defective work would lead to serious consequences. It was proved beyond doubt that the workmanship on the vessel was of an excellent standard and the supervision ample. All new problems were tested and worked out in a school for welders and for builders. A vessel of such box-like shape would be difficult to manage in a head wind and manoeuvring in ice might be precarious. In view of the Merchant Shipping Acts of 1919 and 1932, the Board of Trade had no option but to grant an exemption from the obligation to carry a wireless installation. It might be a matter for serious consideration whether ships of an unusual type of construction not intended for ocean service should not be required to carry temporary wireless apparatus for single voyages as a precaution.

The Court ruled out as highly improbable loss by collision, fire, wreck, faulty construction, bad weather combined with shifting of cargo. Impact with ice was considered by the Court as the most likely cause of the disaster in view of the fact that no wreckage or boats were found. It would appear that the disaster must have been a sudden one. Assuming that the *Joseph Medill* was suddenly confronted with an iceberg, a "growler," and used her helm to obviate such collision, it was quite feasible that the side of the ship could be cut open by contact with the ice, causing her to founder in a matter of minutes. That theory, however, did not preclude other possibilities. The Court also considered the possibility that the vessel might be unmanageable if severe weather were encountered and might be thrown bodily by the sea and overwhelmed, but that was not likely.

Judge RICHARDSON expressed sympathy with the relatives of the lost men and thanked the Assessors for their assistance in what he described as "a somewhat technical case."



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