

The mysterious mythical Marysburgh Vortex

Part 2 by Kenn M. Feigelman

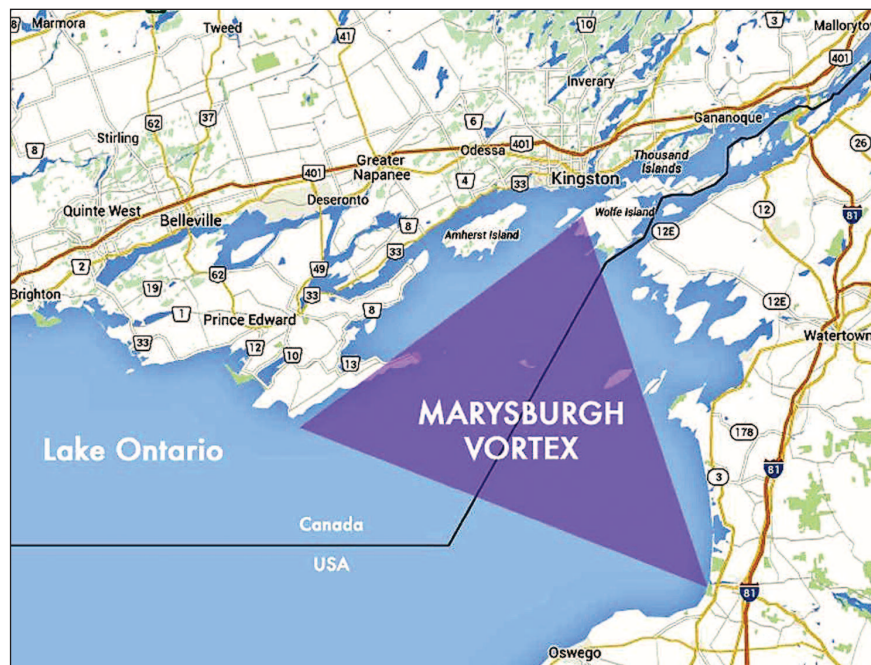
In the Spring issue of *County Magazine*, we attempted to define THE MARYSBURGH VORTEX of eastern Lake Ontario. We also attempted to rationalize the multiple causes for the demise of 450+ long-lost ships, now slumbering beneath these cold, treacherous waters. Narratives of the tragic loss of two steam-powered vessels, the *T.J.Waffle* & the *Ocean Wave*, were presented. In this, issue, we continue our narrative of shipwrecks on/beneath local waters, by concentrating on two two-masted and one three-masted wooden sailing schooners*, wrecked off Prince Edward County. [*In Schooner Days, sailing ships were classified colloquially as ‘Fore & Afters’, if they possessed two-masts and ‘Three & Afters’, if they had three-masts. It’s Lake Slang.]

Definition of Shipwreck:

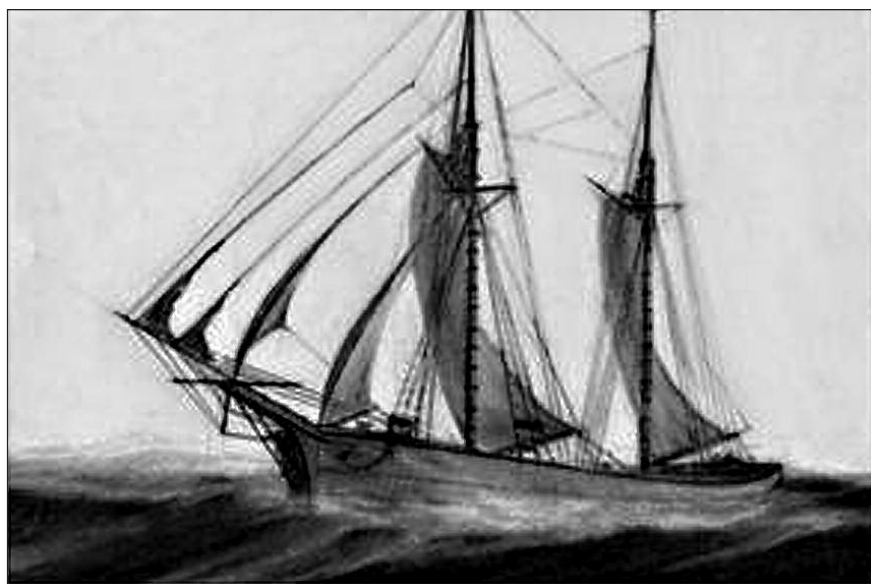
A shipwreck is the wreckage of a ship that is located either beached on land or sunken to the bottom of a body of water. Shipwrecking may be intentional or unintentional. As recently as 1999, there were reported to be about three million shipwrecks worldwide. [\[Wikipedia\]](#)

Annie Falconer

On a particularly stormy night, on November 12, 1904, the two-masted wooden schooner, *Annie Falconer*, foundered and sank in a severe gale off False Duck Island. She was heavily laden with a full-load of soft coal, bound for Picton from Sodus Point, New York. Captained by Murney Ackerman, her crew of six survived the initial sinking and drifted for about 5.5

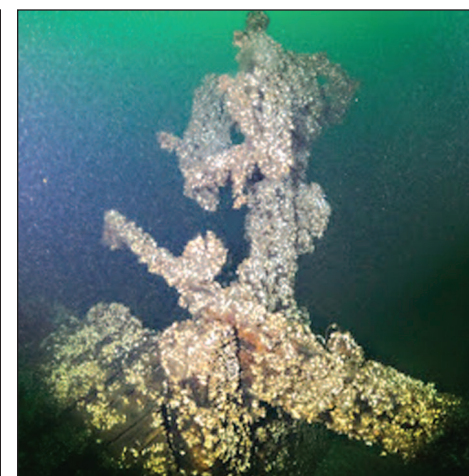
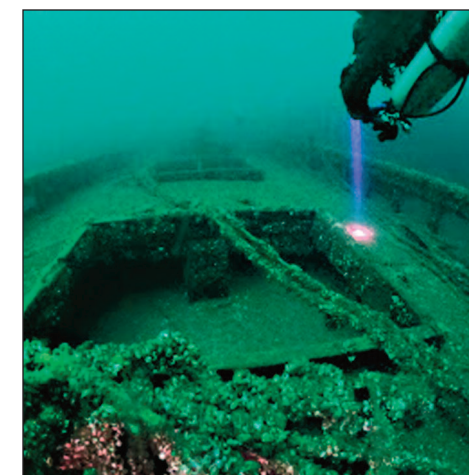


Above: An illustration of the extent of the mysterious area of Lake Ontario.
Below: The *Annie Falconer*.



hours in the open yawl-boat to the shores of Amherst Island. Sadly, however, the First-Mate, James Sullivan, of Picton, became separated from the rest of his crew on the Island and succumbed to exposure, while seeking shelter from the numbing cold.

Built in Kingston in 1867 by George Thurston for her owner, Captain W.R. Taylor, also of Kingston, the *Annie Falconer* was a proverbial workhorse. In her sailing-life she transported a variety of cargoes between Picton, Kingston and upstate New York, including



Annie Falconer photos courtesy Corey Phillips).

Left, top to bottom: The bow of the *Annie Falconer*; The ship’s galley with items still in place; Deadeye on the Starboard Rail; Diver looking into the ship’s hatch.
Above middle: The helm of the *Annie Falconer*; **Right**: The Starboard Anchor.

stone, lumber, shingles, barrel-staves, salt, ice, wheat, barley, corn, chemicals, ore and of course, coal. Apparently, she never returned to port with an empty hold. She was 107-feet in length, with a beam of 24-feet, 9-feet deep in her hold and registered at 201-tons.

Captain John Willard of Kingston, then a small boy, recalled of being on Amherst Island at the time of the loss of the *Annie Falconer*, and of the steamer *Aletha* arriving from Picton to the village of Stella, on the island, to return James

Sullivan’s body back to his native town.

Today, the long-slumbering shipwreck is a popular dive-site for scuba divers, resting up-right in almost 80-feet of water, on a muddy lakebed. She is very well-preserved by the cold, dark waters of Lake Ontario, with the dead-eyes (pulleys), anchors, blocks, chain and the ship’s wheel (helm) all in place; almost as intact as the day she became another tragic victim of the infamous MARYSBURGH VORTEX.

Minerva Cook

THE LITTLE BOAT WHO REFUSED TO FLOAT

Off the south shore of Point Traverse lies Poplar Bar, a small islet which has claimed many unfortunate ships. During a howling gale one night in 1868, the *Minerva Cook*, a two-masted wooden schooner, capsized while sailing for her home-port of Kingston. When daylight finally came, the doomed sailing vessel was discovered lying on its starboard side on Poplar Bar, her masts splintered and sails washed away. Her sole lifeboat was missing from its davits, also.

This was the *Minerva Cook*’s tragic end, after a career of maritime incidents (accidents) & near-misses:

- 1851: Grounded ashore, Long Point Cut, Lake Erie

- 1854: Grounded ashore, 18-Mile Creek, Lake Ontario
- 1854: ‘Re-built’ (170-Tons)
- 1858: Sank off Long Point, Lake Erie, after a collision with the barque, *Clayton*
- 1863 (September): Capsized off South Bay Point, Lake Ontario
- 1865: Ashore off Sodus, New York with a load of lumber
- 1866: Damaged in a collision with the schooner, *E. Masters*, at Mill Point, Lake Ontario
- 1868: Wrecked & a total loss, off Poplar Bar, Prince Edward County

Good Start; Bad End

Built by D.D. Calvin of Garden Island (across from Kingston) in 1841,

the *Minerva Cook* was named after the daughter of Calvin's business partner. At the time of the tragedy in 1868, off Poplar Bar, the ship was owned by John Fraser, a Kingston-based hardware merchant.

Aboard the doomed vessel that tragic night were Captain James Kennedy, his sister Elizabeth Kennedy (the ship's cook), and a crew of five men. The schooner had been specifically designed to carry large loads of timber. On-board also, were two large 'timber-horses', utilized to heft the cumbersome

cargo, as well as Nero, a large black Newfoundland dog.

When the *Minerva Cook* capsized, Elizabeth Kennedy was three times washed off the wreck, and rescued three times by Nero, who dragged her back to the doomed schooner. When the vessel heaved over, both horses had been housed in a horse-box on the foreward circle deck. Sadly, one of the beasts drowned in his halter, while the other horse, Sugar, kicked his way free and began to swim for shore.

Seeing the horse making for the

shore, Captain Kennedy summoned the animal to come back to the capsized vessel, which it obediently did. Kennedy then lashed his sister to Sugar's back and sent him towards shore once again, accompanied by the loyal Newfoundland dog, Nero. The trio soon vanished from sight amid the pounding waves and treacherous undertow.

The Aftermath

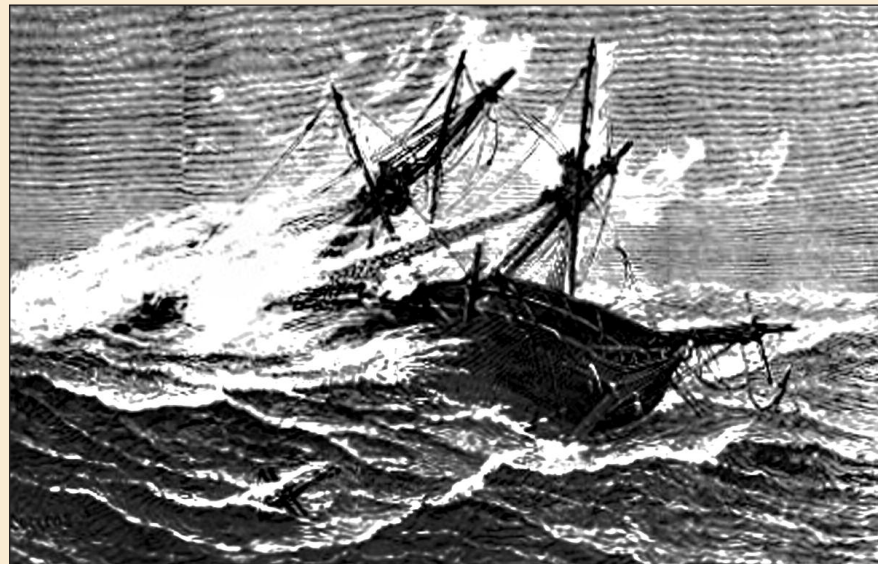
Soon after news of the tragic incident the Point Traverse Life Saving Crew, led by Captain Leroy Spafford, managed to rescue Captain Kennedy and his five remaining crewmembers from the floundering ship, despite the relentless pounding surf. Once on shore, the frigid, shivering survivors were barely coherent – they were promptly massaged and provided with warm blankets and copious amounts of hot whiskey.

Days later, Sugar, the heroic horse, was found alive; however, there was no trace of Elizabeth Kennedy. Soon after, the lifeless body of Nero was discovered washed up on the pebbled beach. It was only weeks later that Elizabeth's body was also found, on the eastern shore of Poplar Bar.

Members of Elizabeth Kennedy's family were summoned to Point Traverse to claim the sad remains. From there, her body was returned to her native Kingston via Samuel Ackerman's scow-sloop.

The doomed *Minerva Cook* would sail no more. Despite a career of rising from the ashes, like the proverbial phoenix, the MARYSBURGH VORTEX had claimed yet another victim. □

Originally from Montreal, Kenn M. Feigelman co-founded Deep/Quest 2 Expeditions in 1973, searching for sunken history. Kenn evolved into a marine scientist, photographer and documentary film producer. He studied at McGill University & Concordia University in Montreal, and received his Doctorate in Marine History from the College of Marine Arts in South Carolina.



Sketches of tragedy on the Lake.

Below: *To the Rescue*, courtesy of Archives Canada.



Bavaria

Each shipwreck tells its own story – no two are quite alike.

Consider the timber schooner [drogher], the *Bavaria*. On May 29, 1889, after a two-day gale, several sailing schooners departed Kingston Harbour to search for the missing vessel. Last spotted between Main Duck Island and Great Galloo Island, the *Bavaria*, heavily-laden with a cargo of white pine timber and part of an armada of three schooners, had disappeared from sight while being towed by the steam-barge, the *D.D. Calvin*, of Garden Island, whose tow-lines had parted in mountainous seas.

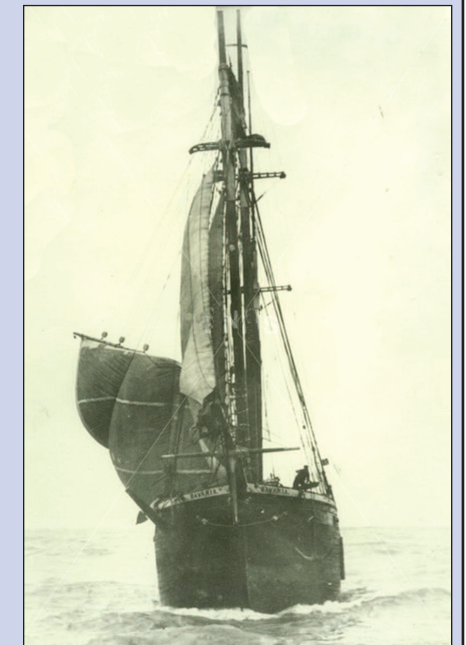
The three timber schooners under tow were the *Valentia* in the lead position, the *Bavaria* in the middle and the *Norway*, bringing up the rear. When the tow-lines broke, the *Bavaria* drifted off and rammed the *Norway*; no apparent hull damage to either vessel was apparent. While the *Norway* made sail and made to the lee of one of the nearby islands, the *Bavaria* apparently breached and fell into the trough of the high seas. She took on some water but remained afloat and drifting with no sails raised. The steamer *D.D. Calvin* swung around and drew abreast of the *Bavaria*. Her captain attempted to hail the crew of the still drifting schooner, but to no avail – no re-

sponse whatsoever – the ship appeared to be totally deserted. The *Bavaria* soon drifted too close to Galloo Island and became grounded.

On May 29th, members of one of the search party, the steam barge *Armenia*, sighted the missing ship resting upright on Galoo Island Shoal. No one responded when hailed, and so the *Armenia*'s crew boarded the *Bavaria*, only to find the vessel totally deserted, its 'eight' crewmembers nowhere to be seen.

The sails were still stowed, however, and the ropes still in place. Indeed, nothing at all appeared amiss, except for the missing crew, who appeared to have fled the ship in the now-missing lifeboat. The only sign of life onboard the *Bavaria* was a canary, chirping away in its cage in the captain's cabin. There was even a batch of freshly-baked bread in the galley oven. The captain's papers and freight-money were still in his desk.

The *Bavaria* was still seaworthy when found, so the rescuers pumped-out her bilge of lakewater and proceeded to tow the schooner back to her home port on Garden Island, just across from Kingston, where it had been built by the Calvin Company.



No bodies of the missing crewmembers were ever found. Why the captain and crew abandoned the *Bavaria* so suddenly, in the yawl-boat in the middle of Lake Ontario, never to be seen again, is – and likely will always be – yet another deep, dark mystery shrouded by *The Marysburgh Vortex*. □

The Bavaria's lost crewmembers:

John Marshall - Captain
Felix Campeau - First Mate
John Snell - Second Mate
William Owens - Seaman
Arthur Boileau - Seaman
Alexander Berry - Seaman
Elias King - Seaman
Miss Bella Hartman - Ship's Cook

I wish to thank profusely, all those whose invaluable & generous assistance helped make this feature possible:

- Tom Rutledge, for his archival prowess and (deep) knowledge of "all things shipwrecked".
- Corey Phillips, for his great underwater photos of the Annie Falconer.
- Dr. Paul Adamthwaite, Executive Director, Naval Marine Archive, Picton, for his profound knowledge of local maritime history & for his phenomenal archival resources.
- Steve Campbell, Editor/Publisher, *County Magazine*, who has been gracious enough to invite me to compose a series of 3-features on THE MARYSBURGH VORTEX, in the Spring, Summer & Fall 2022 issues of his prestigious publication.



Archival images of the 'mystery ship' *Bavaria*. Both images provided are courtesy of the archives of The Maritime History of the Great Lakes collection. Fascinating story/mystery, yet to be solved.