

From the September 2013 Beacon Marine mishaps part of life on the St. Clair River

Life on the St. Clair River runs smoothly most of the time thanks to modern day navigational devices, dependable water craft and constant vigilance on the part of Coast Guard units from both sides of the river.

But at the turn of the century, river mariners had their share of trials and tribulations to endure. Take this example submitted by history buff, Mr. A. Ander.

He writes this account of an incident that illustrates how dicey things could get. "100 years ago, Aug. 17, 1913, the steamer Atikokan, a whale-back freighter down bound in the St. Clair River, suddenly lost steering control."

"With a whistle blowing danger, the freighter was headed for Marine City, Michigan, directly opposite Sombra. With a crash, bang, and boom, the freighter ran right out of the water, wiping out several waterfront buildings. Fortunately, no one was hurt or killed, but the Atikokan was high and dry, and in need of help."

"The Sombra shore proved a great viewing ground for this spectacle. Three tugs arrived later in the day to provide assistance in towing her (the Atikokan) from her dry land perch. Members of the Sarnia Yacht Club made a trip downriver to view this spectacle. When they arrived in Sombra, they docked at the Whitely ferry dock opposite the Grand Union Hotel and had a front row seat to the action."

Mr. Ander says the Atikokan was freed later in the afternoon and was deemed safe enough to continue on its way, and with the drama resolved, the Sarnia yachtsmen headed back upriver to the club.

The Beacon thanks Mr. Anderson for contributing this great snippet of historic St. Clair River lore.