

**Come friends and relations and neighbours I pray**

**You will give your attention to the words I shall say**

**O poor Moses Dulmage I wish to relate**

**How afloat on the waters he met his sad fate...**

**Anna Dulmage, 1878**

There is one thing that a mariner can always predict for certain.

The late fall weather surrounding wide Lake Ontario is certainly unpredictable.

From another era, many narrow, weathered stones lean silently amidst the bushes and trees in the heart of Prince Edward County, Ontario, close by the winding road to Point Traverse. Flanked by taller trees, an almost hidden, well-rusted gate leads into this quiet sanctuary, sheltered on the leeward side of Lake Ontario. This is the sailor's final resting place; the names herein inscribed, those that are readable, link families for many generations to the county. The waters of South Bay have lapped gently at the shore behind these graves for more than a hundred and seventy years.

It is here that the body of Moses Dulmage lies peacefully now - having been buried twice. His aged headstone blends in with the others, quiet and unobtrusive. If it could only talk.



Moses Dulmage headstone in South Bay cemetery.



Marine historian Willis Metcalfe stands on remains of schooner 'Olivia', Young's Cove, Picton harbour, 1965.

They were all sailors who grew up around South Bay. Sailors who worked the farm as children, then rode the wagons to nearby piers watching the schooners load up and then sail out with a brother, uncle, father or even a sister on board.

Later, most of them would sign up for a season, those lucky enough to escape the hot, hard work of the farm, to enjoy the cool breezes of Lake Ontario. But, they were all aware of the lake and its peculiar moods, especially in the late fall.

Sometimes a sailor – a neighbour, father, or even a child went missing. Sometimes the battered body was found and brought home to rest here. Sometimes it wasn't and would lay forever, undisturbed in the deep. Sometimes a hapless sailor's story is so remarkable it becomes a legend; his spirit 'doomed to sail alone and forever', across a wild, unforgiving Lake Ontario every Halloween night until the end of time.

I found his grave partially hidden among the shadows. The lichen covered stone said he was aged 21 years and 7 months. It also said he died November 1, 1878 but no one knows for sure just when young Moses Dulmage closed his eyes for the last time on

that terrible All Hallows Eve.

The image at the top of the stone shows two hands tightly clasped for eternity. The wishful hand of a shipmate stretching out for him that in reality, couldn't quite reach him.

The only thing anyone knew for sure was, in the pitch black of a sudden, wild Halloween night squall, he was all alone in a small yawl boat, screaming for help when the dreaded 'witch of November' came for county sailor Moses Dulmage.

**He shipped in the Julia, on the waters to sail**

**At the end of Point Travers they lay to, in a gale,**

**A number of vessels were anchored quite near,**

**He embarked in the yawl boat, he thought not of fear...**

For most of the afternoon, Captain Timothy Hargrove of the schooner "Julia," paced the quarterdeck watching the sky. There were ten ships now anchored off Timber Island, both in and outward bound, waiting out a southwest gale that had been blowing since early yesterday.

"That wind is gonn'a haul soon," he said to his mate. "I can feel it. There's a low building south of here and that'll put the wind on our back. That should give the seas time to wind down over Travers shoal. We'll sail before daylight."

Part of deckhand Moses Dulmage's duties aboard ship was to check the cable to ensure she wasn't dragging anchor over the bottom. Standing forward, he touched the cable and felt no vibration. At the same time he watched two nearby trees on Timber Island judging their bearing.

"Hallo there!" hailed a voice off to starboard.

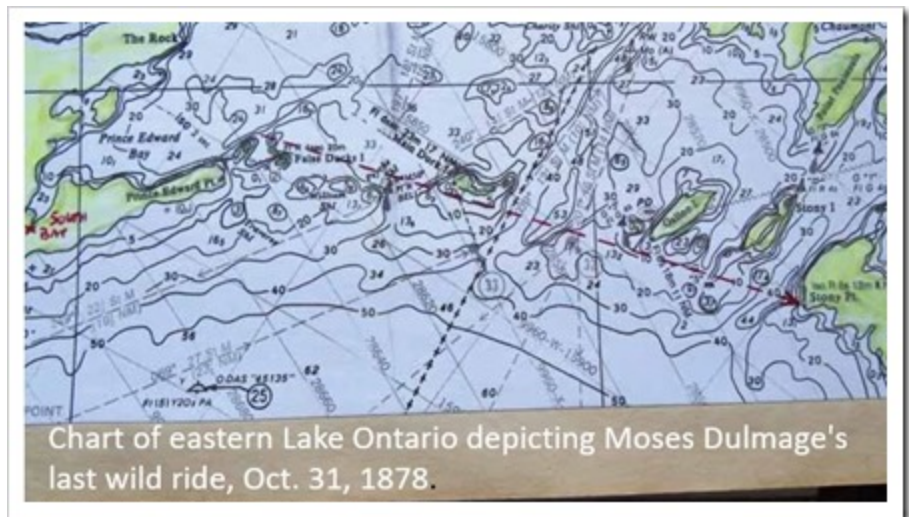
"Hallo back!" Moses called, waving to his friend aboard the schooner Olivia. She was anchored closer to the western edge of Timber Island, about a cable's length away. His duties almost complete, Moses went aft to ask permission to use the yawl boat to visit his friends in the Olivia. It would be late in the season before they would see each other again.

"Alright," Captain Hartgrove said, "but be back early, for I am going to get out of here before daylight."

Tethered astern of the Julia, the small yawl with her mast already stepped swayed restlessly but gently to the swell coming in off the lake. Pulling her in, Moses climbed aboard and, placing both oars between the thole pins, pulled hard for the Olivia.

**He reached the Olivia for an hour or two**

**He remained in friendly discourse with the crew,**



**At eleven that night he thought to return;**

**The danger before him he could not discern...**

The familiar tapping of the overhead rigging was quiet when the boys came out of the after house near the Olivia's stern. Even the yawl was lying dormant alongside the ship rather than at the end of her bow line, where Moses had left her a few hours ago.

"That sky is really dark," one of the boys said. "Will you need a lamp?"

"No," Moses replied, looking up at the sky but feeling uneasy. The wind seemed to have died right out, but they could still hear the heavy breakers out beyond Timber Island.

"The Julia has her stern lamp lit. I'll steer for it."

Climbing down, Moses felt the stern of the yawl swing away as he stepped into the bow. Pulling one of the oars into place, he held himself off the Olivia while reaching for the other. "Throw the painter," he called to the ship.

"Pull hard Moses," yelled one of the boys. "I think there's a squall coming!"

"I'll be alright. I can see the Julia." Facing the stern of the yawl and the Olivia, Moses turned his head to line up for the light on the Julia. It wasn't there.

Turning his head back quickly, he saw the Olivia start to swing around on her cable as the violent squall suddenly hit.

**At home on those waters, no comrade had he**

**The wind became louder, and high ran the sea,**

**To his friends on the vessel this appeal he did make,**

**"Oh, save me! I'm going out into the lake."**

Pulling hard on his right oar, Moses brought her head into the wind. He could hear the voices right beside him to his right on the Olivia and reached for the painter to throw at them. Then he heard the voices to his left and heaved the line blindly into a black void. Realizing she had probably come around on him he fought his senses and relied on his sailor's instinct.

Jumping forward toward the bow he began to scull with the right oar. When the rain hit, it slammed him down into the boat with a vengeance. The voices, shouting at him were everywhere. Or was it the screaming wind?

Yelling back, Moses knew they would stream a line down to him, if they knew where he was. The sea was a confused, boiling cauldron now, with no reference to wind or wave direction. The spindrift, blowing hard off the top, seemed to leap skyward in the tumult. Hauling quickly, hand over hand, Moses raised the small sail and decided to let her run onto Timber Island.

**But the efforts were fruitless, of such as did try**

**It seems as if Heaven had willed he should die;**

**All night and next day in the small open boat,**

**No doubt he toiled bravely to keep her afloat**

Sail full out and seated just before the tiller, Moses braced himself for the impact of the rocky shore of Timber Island. Straining his ears and eyes he couldn't hear or see the breakers which should be just ahead of him. Too much time had passed.

Hauling in his sail, he dangerously brought her about on a starboard tack, terrified that should he miss the island he'd drown for sure somewhere beyond. "I must be sailing back into the bay," he thought, but a further gust of wind heeled her over so far she nearly capsized.

Wearing her hard about and feeling the sea rise on her quarter, Moses decided to let her run. No compass, no stars, nothing to guide him. With a few minutes to think, he reached under a thwart to find a small coil of rope. A sailor's greatest fear during the last century was not so much about drowning but of not being found or to die without a Christian burial.

Taking the line in his freezing hands, he lashed first one leg, then the other to the thwart he was sitting on so he wouldn't be swept away. The driving rain had turned to snow, further obscuring any hope of being seen or seeing ahead.

He wanted to believe he was caught in the southwest sea, drifting toward Amherst Island but he knew the cold, north wind was pushing him outward, maybe to end up on Main Duck Island.

Numb with cold, drifting in and out of consciousness, his hair now caked with ice particles, Moses neither cared nor concerned himself with the wave height or direction. The yawl was steering herself and running free. He should be near Main Duck Island but that seemed hours ago. Eyelids heavy with ice crystals, he let them fall shut just one more time.

**Near Stony Point Lighthouse he steered her ashore,**

**His strength had quite failed, and he could not do more,**

**The spot was secluded, and no one passed by**

**Alone he had laboured and alone he must die...**



"Do you have any idea who he is?"

“I’m sure I don’t know,” replied the lighthouse keeper at Stony Point, New York. “I spotted him just this morning at daylight. He wasn’t here Friday, I know that.”

“Look at the ice. It’s got to be an inch thick on him and the boat. Do you think he was shipwrecked?” Both men stared at the ice encrusted form sitting almost upright as both man and boat swayed gently as one in the breaking surf.

“He was caught in that storm Halloween night, I’m bettin’. Look at his hands. It’s as if he was tryin’ to untie himself...”

**A grave they prepared him on that foreign shore**

**And buried him kindly, they could not do more,**

**But his friends could not suffer their loved one to stay**

**In the land of the stranger, from his kindred away...**

The following season a procession of seventy five American and Canadian schooners crossed the lake from Stony Point New York to Prince Edward County, Ontario. The exhumed body of county sailor Moses Dulmage was returning home aboard the schooner Sea Bird after spending the long winter in an unmarked grave.

The tale of his incredible journey swept away by the dreaded witch of November in a gale for more than 30 miles in an open boat on Halloween night, only to die at the end, touched the heart of every mariner who heard it. In a yawl boat marked ‘Julia’, a young man frozen stiff, the unidentified body on the far shore had to be him. Family members confirmed it was. Another grave in the family plot awaited him in South Bay, not far from his boyhood home.



Playwright Suzanne Pasternak unveils a new monument to Moses Dulmage, Oct. 31, 2004. This depicts his epic voyage across wild, Lake Ontario that fateful night of Oct. 31, 1878.



An outdoor abridged version of the play 'Minerva' at South Bay Marine Museum, Sept. 19, 2004. Playwright Suzanne Pasternak on guitar with singer/songwriter Emily Fennell in the lead role. Emily is a relative of both Moses Dulmage and Minerva McCrimmon.

The young sailor became a local legend. Ghostly, superstitious reports of seeing

him on his final voyage on a midnight watch haunted the local ports for many years. Prince Edward County playwright Suzanne Pasternak’s musical ‘Minerva’ which debuted on November 1, 1990, portrays Moses’s final haunting voyage across wild, Lake Ontario to thrilled audiences to this day.

But for many years, especially anchored ships seeking shelter in Prince Edward Bay, sailors on the midnight watch waiting on late fall north-westerly gales, no one speaks of legendary Moses Dulmage and his

wild ride.

Not even today.

By Brian Johnson, Semi-retired Captain, Wolfe Islander III; Anna Dulmage, who composed the poem, was Moses's sister in law.

*Brian & Cathy Johnson were proud to be part of playwright Suzanne Pasternak's unveiling of Moses Dulmage's new monument depicting his ordeal on Oct. 31, 2004 at South Bay Cemetery. Earlier, Sept. 19, 2004 they attended an abridged outdoor showing of 'Minerva' with singer/songwriter Emily Fennell, a distant cousin to Moses, in the lead role at the South Bay Marine Museum.*

*This story first appeared in the Kingston Whig Standard on Oct. 31, 2003, the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his tragedy.*