

Explosion In Halifax Harbour

December 6, 1917



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INTRODUCTION:

The morning of Tuesday, December 6, 1917 dawned clear and unseasonably warm in Halifax. The harbour was busier than usual, teeming with ships whose schedules were dictated by the commerce of World War I. Halifax Harbour served as a gathering point for ships being escorted by convoy to Europe, and it was bustling with activity.

Shortly before nine a.m., two ships began their opposing journeys in the harbour's confines. The *Mont-Blanc*, a munitions ship loaded with close to three thousand tons of explosive material, was steaming into the harbour while the Belgian relief ship, *Imo*, was approaching the Narrows on its way out of Halifax. For reasons unknown, both ships headed for the same point in the crowded harbour and were unable to correct their positions in time to avert disaster. The *Imo* collided with the *Mont-Blanc*. The collision spilled a number of barrels of benzol, and the leaking fuel caught fire. As the fire intensified, black smoke billowed skyward.

Unable to control the blaze, and fully aware of the dangerous cargo, the *Mont-Blanc* crew abandoned ship, and the vessel drifted toward the Richmond Pier on the Halifax side. Shortly after nine a.m., as hundreds watched from the shoreline and from windows, the *Mont-Blanc* exploded in a ball of fury, laying waste two and a half square miles of the city, killing close to 2,000, wounding 6,000, and leaving 25,000 homeless. Dartmouth's north end, including the Mi'kmaq community of Turtle Grove, was also devastated.

Much has been written about the Explosion, examining the circumstances before and after the collision. What follows is an extensive list of related materials currently in the collection of Halifax Public Libraries. A brief description of other sources in the community is also included. Also, an annotated list of websites is available at www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca.

NON-FICTION:

Amazing Medical Stories, by George Burden & Dorothy Grant, 79-84. Fredericton, N.B.: Goose Lane Editions, 2003.

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Behind the Headlines! From Moose River to Shangri-la, by Ralph Kelly Morton, 15-17. Halifax: Nimbus, 1986.

The Bicentennial of the Halifax Fire Department: 1768-1968: 200 Years of Firefighting, prepared by Pearl Connelly, 22-26. Halifax: McCurdy Print, 1968.

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Christ Church, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia: 1817 to 1959, by Charles Walter Bayer, 58-67. n.p.: 1960.

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Crime Wave: Con Men, Rogues and Scoundrels from Nova Scotia's Past, by Dean Jobb, 57-66. Porter's Lake: Pottersfield, 1991.

Darkest Hours: The Great Book of Worldwide Disasters From Ancient Times to the Present, by Jay Robert Nash, 227-228. New York: Pocket/Simon & Schuster, 1977.

Dartmouth's Day of Anguish: The Explosion, December 6, 1917, by Harry Chapman. Dartmouth: Dartmouth Museum Society, 1992.

"The Day Halifax Blew Up", by Kenneth MacGillivray in the **In the Face of Disaster: True Stories of Canadian Heroes from the Archives of Macleans**, ed. by Michael Benedict, 242-253. Toronto: Penguin Books, 2000.

"Death in Halifax," by Edmund Gilligan. (An excerpt from **Reader's Digest**, condensed from **The American Mercury**, February 1938).

December 6/The Halifax Solution: An Alternative to Nuclear War, by Leslie Choyce. Porter's Lake: Pottersfield, 1988.

Devastated Halifax: Views of the Greatest Disaster in the History of the American Continent, Caused by the Explosion that Followed the Collision of the French Munition Ship "Mont-Blanc" and the Belgian Relief Ship "Imo" in Halifax Harbour, December 6th, 1917. Halifax: G.E. Weir, 1917.

Disaster Canada, by Janet Looker, 232-240. Toronto: Lynx Images, 2000.

Disasters that Made History, by Webb Garrison, 76-80. Nashville: Abingdon, 1973.

Edwardian Halifax: Postcard Glimpses of an Era, 1900-1920, by Dan Soucoup, 78-81. Halifax: Nimbus, 1998.

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Explosion in Halifax Harbour, December 6, 1917: The Salvation Army's Relief Operations, by Ralph Pilgrim. Halifax: n.p., 1994.

Final Report of the Massachusetts-Halifax Health Commission with Appendices: October 1919 to October 1929. Halifax: The Commission, 1932.

Four Years Work of the Massachusetts - Halifax Health Commission: A Progress Report, by B. Franklin Royer. Halifax: The Commission, 1923.

"Garden City Blossoms," by Mark Campbell. **East Coast Living**. 4.2. Halifax: Metro Guide Publishing, 1997.

Great Canadian Disasters, by Frank Rasky, 143-165. Toronto: Longmans Green & Co., 1961.

Great Halifax Explosion, December 6, 1917, by Joan Horwood. St. John's: Avalon, 1976.

The Great International Disaster Book, by James Cornell, 229-231. New York: Scribners, 1976.

Grim Visions: Arthur Lismer and the Halifax Explosion, by Alan Ruffman. Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 1990.

Ground Zero: A Reassessment of the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbour, by Alan Ruffman and Colin D. Howell. Halifax: Nimbus, 1994.

Halifax and Its People 1749-1999, 54-45. Halifax: Nimbus, 1999, 54-56.

The Halifax Catastrophe: Forty views showing extent of damage in Canada' historic city as the result of a terrific explosion on Thursday, December 6, 1917, which killed 1,500 men, women, and children, injured 3,000 and rendered 6,000 homeless, causing property damage of nearly \$50,000,000. Halifax: Royal Print and Litho, 1917.

Halifax, Cornerstone of Canada, by Joan M. Payzant, 136-138. Burlington, Ont.: Windsor Publications, 1985.

Halifax, December 6, 1917: A Photo-Documentation of the Halifax Explosion, researched by Graham Metson. West House Museum: Halifax, 1977.

The Halifax Disaster, by Ernest Fraser Robinson. St. Catherine's, Ont.: Vanwell, 1987.

The Halifax Explosion, by Kate Carmen. Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1981.

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"Halifax Explosion," by Thomas H. Raddall. In **Atlantic Anthology**, ed. Will R. Bird. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1959.

"The Halifax Explosion," by Evelyn Richardson. **Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly**, 1977, 305.

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"The Halifax Explosion and Going to Siberia." **Cape Breton's Magazine**, Issue 34, 7-12.

The Halifax Explosion and the Royal Canadian Navy: Inquiry and Intrigue, by John Griffith Armstrong. Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2002.

The Halifax Explosion: December 6, 1917, compiled and edited by Graham Metson. Toronto: McGraw-Hill, Ryerson, 1978.

The Halifax Explosion: Surviving the Blast that Shook a Nation, by Joyce Glasner. Canmore, AB: Altitude Publishing, 2003

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Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Great Harbour, 14. Halifax: John Quinpool, 1941.

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Historic Halifax in Tales Told Under the Old Town Clock, by William Coates, 186-192. Borrett. Toronto: Ryerson, 1948.

History of Canadian Architecture, by Harold Kalman, 660. Vol. 2. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford, 1994.

Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life, by Elspeth Cameron. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. (Reminiscences though out.)

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Like a Weaver's Shuttle: A History of the Halifax-Dartmouth Ferries, by Joan M. Payzant and Lewis J. Payzant, 144-147. Halifax: Nimbus, 1979.

The Little Dutch Village: Historic Halifax West, Armdale, Fairview, by Devonna and Don Edwards, 43, 44, 81. Halifax: Nimbus, 2003.

"The Halifax Explosion" (ballad) in **Maritime Folk Songs**, compiled by Helen Creighton, 208-209. Toronto: Ryerson, 1962.

The Medical Services, by Andrew MacPhail, 327-329. Ottawa: The Department, 1925.

"Memories from the Bells," by Alice Bardsley, in the **Atlantic Advocate**. December 1984, 41-43.

"Memories of a Day of Horrors," by Harry Chapman. **The Beaver**. Aug./Sept., 1993, 35-39.

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More History with a Twist, by Bruce Nunn, 116-119. Halifax: Nimbus, 2001.
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A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall, by Joyce Barkhouse, 1-7. Toronto: Irwin, 1986.

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Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History. Vol. 1: Origins and Early Years, by Gilbert Norman Tucker, 229-233. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1952.

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Pride of Home: The Working Class Housing Tradition in Nova Scotia 1749-1949, by Joann Latremouille, 67-74. Hantsport: Lancelot, 1986.

Purcell’s Cove: The Little Place That Helped Build Halifax City, by Elsie Purcell Millington, 23-25. Victoria, B.C.: S. Millington, 2000.

Report, by Halifax Relief Expedition, December 6-15, 1917. Wright and Potter, 1918.

St. Paul’s in the Grand Parade: 1749-1999, by Sarah Baxter Emsley. Halifax: Formac, 1999. p. 12-13, 56-57.

17 Minutes to Live, by Richard A. Boning. Baldwin, N.Y.: Dexter & Westbrook, 1973.

Shattered City: The Halifax Explosion and the Road to Recovery, by Janet Kitz. Halifax: Nimbus, 1989.

Shipwreck Treasures: Disaster and Discovery on Canada’s East Coast, by Roger Marster, Halifax: Formac, 2002. p. 94-99.

The Smoke-Eaters: A History of Firefighting Nova Scotia: 1750-1950, by Mike Parker. Halifax: Nimbus, 2002. p. 170-174.

The Story of Dartmouth, by John Patrick Martin. Dartmouth: the Author, 1957. p. 62-67; 71-72; 515-523; 527.

The Story of Firefighting in Canada, by Donal Baird. Erin, Ont.: Boston Mills Press, 1986. p. 167-171.

Survivors: Children of the Halifax Explosion, by Janet Kitz. Halifax: Nimbus, 1992.

Thunder in the Sky: The 1917 Halifax Explosion Video. [video recording]. Global Video Inc., 1992.

Time In A Bottle: Historic Halifax Harbour from the Bottom Up, by Bob Chaulk, East Lawrencetown, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 2002. p. 127-128.

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The Town that Died: The True Story of the Greatest Man-Made Explosion before Hiroshima, by Michael J. Bird. Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1962.

“Tracing the Halifax Explosion”, by Tom Mason, in **Saltscapes**, November 2001- December 2001. p. 36-40.

Views of the Halifax Disaster, December 6, 1917. Halifax: n.p., 1917.

“A Vision of Regeneration”: Reconstruction after the Halifax Explosion, 1917-1921. Halifax Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1993.

“Visit with Steve Whitty”, by Steve Whitty in **Cape Breton’s Magazine**, Issue 34. p. 64-72.

White Shirts and Blue Collars: Industry in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia 1785-1995, Dartmouth, N.S.: Dartmouth Historical Association, 1997. p. 59-62.

World Disasters: Tragedies in the Modern Age,.. Chicago, Ill: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. p. 62-63.

Worse Than War: The Halifax Explosion, by Mary Pauline Murphy Sutow. Tantallon: Four East, 1992.

ADULT FICTION:

Barometer Rising, by Hugh MacLennan. New York: Doull, Sloan and Pearce, 1941.

Burden of Desire, by Robert MacNeil. New York: Tales/Doubleday, 1992.

A Romance of the Halifax Disaster, by F. McKelvey Bell. Halifax: Royal Print and Litho, 1918.

Sixth of December, by Jim Lotz. Markham, Ont.: PaperJacks, 1981.

“Winter’s Tale,” by Thomas H. Raddall in **Nearly An Island: A Nova Scotian Anthology**, ed. by Alice Hale and Sheila Brooks. St. John’s: Breakwater, 1979.

YOUTH FICTION:

Irish Chain, by Barbara Haworth-Attard. Harper Trophy Canada, 2002.

Love from Katie, by Paddy Muir. Dartmouth: James-Stonehouse, 1991.

Penelope: Terror in the Harbour/Book One, by Sharon E. McKay. Penguin, 2001.

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Who’s a Scaredy-Cat!: A Story of the Halifax Explosion, by Joan M. Payzant. Windmill Press, 1992.

Yesterday’s Children, by Joyce C. Barkhouse. Lancelot Press Ltd., 1992.

IN THE REFERENCE DEPARTMENT:

City Council Minutes:

The “**Minutes of the City Council of the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia**”, from 1917-1976 reported on the efforts to rebuild and rehouse Halifax. Each volume has an index in the front. Look for entries under “Explosion, December 6, 1917” or “Halifax Relief Commission”.

City Directories:

Check the **McAlpine’s Halifax-Dartmouth City Directories** for the year 1915-1925 to locate families or businesses before and after the Explosion. The **1918 City Directory** published an alphabetical list of “Names of the Identified Dead Killed in the Explosion at Halifax, December 6, 1917”, up-to-date at the time of printing. The “Halifax Street Directory”, near the front, notes afflicted regions as “Devastated Area”.

Memorial Book “Halifax Explosion, 1917” (1966):

This memorial book, a calligraphic listing all the known dead, is on display at the Halifax North Branch Reference Department. In 1966 the Halifax Relief Commission donated \$100,000 towards building this branch as a memorial to the Explosion.

Newspapers on Microfilm:

Newspapers published hundreds of articles after the explosion. Many survivors placed notices inquiring or identifying the whereabouts of families and friends. Articles on rescue efforts and relief measures can also be found. Look for new research or survivor tales around the December anniversary. In 1992, The Herald produced a searchable database of their Explosion articles, available in the Spring Garden Road Reference Department.

Halifax Herald/Chronicle Herald: July 1880 to present.

Evening Mail/Mail Star: 1894 - present.

Daily News: 1981-present

Periodical Indexes and Databases:

Use a periodical or newspaper index to locate other articles on the Explosion:

Canadian Index. (1993-1999). Indexes Canadian magazines and newspapers.

Canadian Periodical Index. (1920-2002). Indexes Canadian magazines.

Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature. 1919-present. Indexes American and some Canadian magazines.

Infotrac Online. Provides access to the General Magazine Index (1980-present), primarily American in content, and CPI-Q (1988-present), the online version of the Canadian Periodical Index.

Available via
www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca

ProQuest. 1985-present. Online access to Canadian newspapers.

Available via
www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca

Vertical Files:

Some branches of Halifax Public Libraries have vertical files on the Explosion. These files contain newspaper articles, tour guides, brochures, maps, photocopies of primary sources and other interesting items. For example:

Halifax, N.S.-Explosion

**Halifax, N.S.-Explosion
Memorial**

**Halifax, N.S.-Explosion, 1917-
Relief Commission**

Halifax, N.S.-Hydrostone District

IN THE COMMUNITY:

Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management

6016 University Ave
Halifax, N.S. B3H 1W4
902-424-6060
nsarm@gov.ns.ca

The Archives has produced a number of finding aids to assist in searching Halifax Explosion material. MG27 has various records, such as telegrams, letters and reconstruction files. MG36 has the Halifax Relief Commission records from the real

estate appraisal board, financial statements, committee minutes, property files, and a Canadian Pension Commission Claims Index. These records are worth checking for the lists of victims who used relief services or filed claims for compensation.

Check the card catalogue, under the subject heading **Halifax Explosion, 1917**, for library books, magazine articles, pamphlets, reminiscences, poetry and newspaper accounts.

The archives also carries newspapers on microfilm such as the **Daily Acadian Recorder**, the **Daily Echo**, the **Morning Chronicle** and the **Nova Scotian**. Maps and photographs are available for consultation.

Maritime Museum of the Atlantic:

1675 Lower Water Street
Halifax, N.S. B3J 1S3
424-7490
mmalibry@gov.ns.ca

The Maritime Museum of the Atlantic maintains a permanent exhibit about the Explosion called "Halifax Wrecked." It features touching personal artifacts from the Explosion, fragments of the SS Mont-Blanc itself and the Halifax Explosion Remembrance Book. In addition, several hundred explosion artifacts are in storage but available for study by appointment. Permanently berthed at the Museum's wharf is the 1913

steamship CSS Acadia, the only ship still afloat that took part in the Explosion. The Museum's Collection includes over 330 photographs of the Explosion's destruction and maintains research files on a variety of explosion topics such as ships involved, the railways, and the poetry & music inspired by the Explosion. Call 424-7890 for a research appointment.

Fairview Cemetery:

Many of the victims were buried in this non-denominational cemetery. A monument was erected near Chisholm Ave to commemorate the unidentified dead buried there on December 17, 1917. Another monument, which once be-longed to the cemetery, can be seen on Bayer's road. Fairview Cemeteries staff have access to a database to locate burials. 902-490-4883.

Mount Olivet Cemetery:

Both identified and unidentified Roman Catholic victims were buried in this cemetery and a monument was erected near Olivet Street. To search for burials, call 902-865-6663.

Halifax Explosion Memorial Bell Tower:

Located at Needham Park, in Halifax's North End, the Memorial Bell Tower consists of

fourteen bronze bells, which ring every year on the anniversary of the Explosion. They were donated by the United Methodist Church and survivor Barbara Orr Thompson, along with the financial assistance of the Halifax Relief Commission, Halifax Memorial Bells Committee, and the federal and provincial governments.

Hydrostone District:

Stroll the Hydrostone District, rebuilt in Halifax's North End, the area hardest hit by the explosion. The area is named after the unique concrete blocks used to rebuild businesses and residential homes. Completed in 1921, this area is a fine example of early Canadian urban planning. The Hydrostone district is roughly from Young Street to Duffus Streets, bordered by Novalea and Isleville Streets.

Websites:

For a list of websites, visit www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca . Click on the Resource Lists link.