



# Watercraft Philately



Journal of the ships on Stamps Unit, American Topical Association

## Canada remembers: 100 years ago



### HALIFAX EXPLOSION

Canada # (2017)

Halifax was devastated on December 6, 1917 when two ships collided in the city's harbour, one of them a munitions ship loaded with explosives bound for the battlefields of the First World War. The result was the largest human-made explosion prior to the detonation of the first atomic bombs in 1945. The north end of Halifax was wiped out by the blast and subsequent tsunami. Nearly 2,000 people died, another 9,000 were maimed or blinded, and more than 25,000 were left without adequate shelter.

Halifax was a busy, wartime port city in 1917, its harbour crowded with merchant vessels and warships from Canada and Britain. The city's population of nearly 50,000 was swollen by the constant coming and going of naval officials, sailors, and troops bound for service in Europe. With one of the finest ice-free harbours in North America, Halifax was an important staging area for trans-Atlantic convoys, which collected in the protected inner expanse of Bedford Basin before ferrying supplies and soldiers to the war effort.

Two of those merchant ships were the Norwegian vessel **IMO**, on-route to New York to pick up relief supplies for the beleaguered population of war-torn Belgium, and the French munitions ship **MONT-BLANC** — filled with tons of benzol, picric acid, TNT and gun cotton — arriving to join a convoy across the Atlantic.

The **IMO** was departing the harbour on the morning of Dec. 6, 1917. It was travelling south through the Narrows, the harbour's tightest navigation section, moving faster than it should and passing to the left (port side) of oncoming ships, rather than to the right (starboard), which was customary. The **MONT-BLANC** was entering the harbour bound for Bedford Basin when it encountered the **IMO** in the Narrows sailing toward it. Not only did incoming ships (in this case **MONT-BLANC**) have right-of-way over outgoing vessels, but the **IMO** was also sailing too far to the left, in what should have been **MONT-BLANC**'s path.

After a series of whistles and miscommunications between the officers and pilots on the two ships, the **IMO** struck the starboard bow of the **MONT-BLANC**, generating sparks that ignited benzol stored on **MONT-BLANC**'s deck; the burning liquid then seeped into the holds.

For nearly 20 minutes the **MONT-BLANC** burned, sending a huge plume of black smoke into the sky, attracting the attention of people on shore, including children on their way to school. The spectacle drew many residents to their windows and others towards the ship itself, including teams of firefight-

### Inside this issue:

Halifax explosion	17
New Listings	21
Australian shipwrecks	26
Wreck of the Westerbeek	30