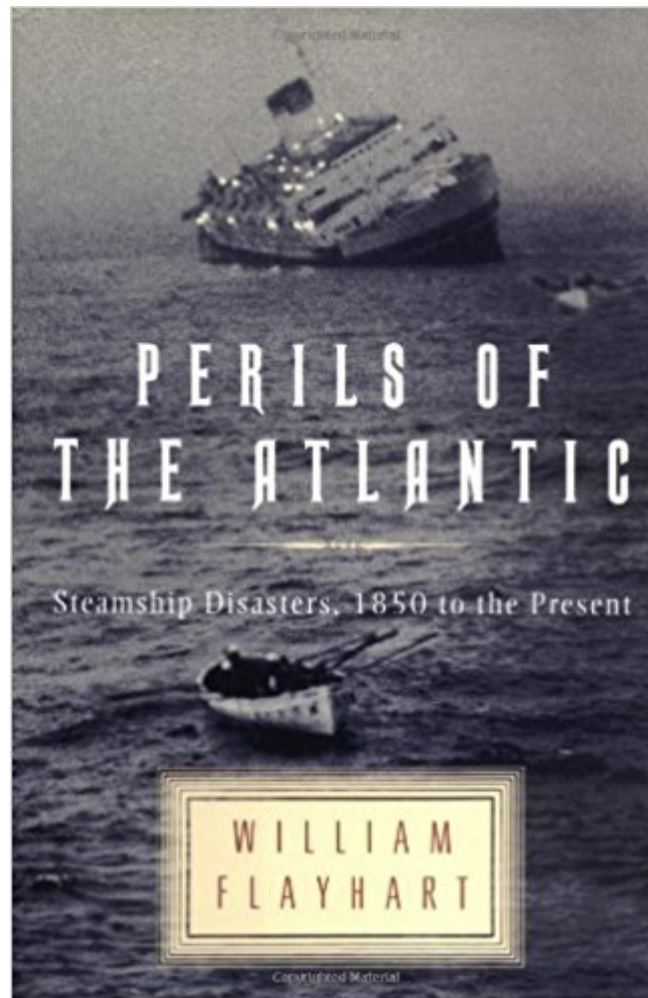




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Perils Of The Atlantic: Steamship Disasters, 1850 To The Present



Synopsis

"Flayhart delivers a gripping chronicle of mishap and mayhem . . . filled with danger and heroism and rich with detail." —Sea Power A colorful and deadly history of ocean liner disasters from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, *Perils of the Atlantic* is a chronicle of the most frightening episodes in the maritime history of the North Atlantic. From 1850 to the present day, the Atlantic has been home to hundreds of ocean liners and cruise ships, each more lavish than the last...all of them symbols of wealth and luxury. Perhaps this is why readers have always been fascinated by the lives of these ships and their deaths. Many of us know the stories of the Titanic and the Lusitania. Both tragedies caused tremendous loss of life, even as they made the ships immortal. But there are many little-known accounts of extraordinary survivals at sea, such as the Inman and International liner City of Chicago that jammed her bow into an Irish peninsula in 1892 but stayed afloat long enough for all to be rescued, or the City of Richmond that survived a dangerous fire in 1891, and a year earlier the City of Paris, whose starboard engine exploded at full speed in the mid-Atlantic and yet miraculously still made port. Often such tales are forgotten even if the ship sank: In 1898 the Holland-America liner Veendam hit a submerged wreck and sank at sea, but all lives were saved—so this vessel's dramatic story seemed less important in maritime history than incidents involving human loss. As recently as 2000, the Sea Breeze I sank off the East Coast of the United States while on a positioning voyage, but all her crew members were rescued in a heroic effort by U.S. Coast Guard helicopters. These stories and many others are dramatic, and acclaimed maritime scholar William Flayhart has spent much of the last forty years in search of material from which to create colorful narratives. 26 illustrations

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Customer Reviews

A distinguished maritime historian offers readers a carefully researched sampling of notable steamship "challenges and disasters" in the North Atlantic. Flayhart (The American Line) begins with the loss of the Collins Line's Arctic in 1854 and ends in 2000 with the loss of the Seabreeze, an obsolete cruise liner on her way to be scrapped. In between, he offers clearly written accounts of some of most famous disasters-Titanic, Lusitania and Andrea Doria-and some of the lesser known ones, such as the Atlantic (grounded off Nova Scotia, with a loss of 585 lives) and the Empress of Ireland (sunk in a collision in the mouth of the St. Lawrence). Flayhart also describes less grisly episodes, such as the rescue of the liner City of Paris after an engine-room explosion; his consideration thereof provides a capsule history of 19th-century steam-engine technology. The grounding of the St. Paul was almost ludicrous (she was racing a rival in fog), while the tale of the sinking liner Veendam marks one of the book's most moving episodes-thanks to superb seamanship, not a soul perished. Flayhart also offers background on the business and financial dealings that created certain ships (such as the burned Morro Castle), as well as salvaged cargo lists ("1,720 boxes of bacon, 595 pails of lard") that show the less glamorous side of the liner business. Written in a matter of fact, respectful tone with balanced judgments on controversial questions, this volume is an absolute feast for lovers of maritime history. 48 illustrations. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Every possible way a ship can sink is represented in this catalog of marine casualty. Collision, fire, engine explosion, grounding, storm, and a torpedo caused the 20 or so disasters the author explores. A ship must be (with a couple of exceptions) a North Atlantic ocean liner to qualify for Flayhart's attention. He covers the vessel's construction and ownership; its size, speed, and cargo manifest at the time of sinking; the death toll; and any legal fallout. Facts consequently dominate the drama that inheres in shipwreck stories, and Flayhart's tales unfold like encyclopedia articles. However, this compendium may find use as a gateway to such library staples as disaster classics (A Night to Remember by Walter Lord, 1955) or photograph albums (e.g., submariner Robert Ballard's collected works). The author mixes catastrophes both famous (Morro Castle; Andrea Doria) and obscure, giving maritime mavens something new to discover. Gilbert TaylorCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

A nice book for any sea-faring stories buff to own and essential to a library like mine. Not quite so 'up-to-date' as the author might have imagined, but then no imagination could come up with our latest disaster, in the "Med" in 2012 with the so-called liner's 'Captain' refusing to re-board his own distressed vessel to assist the passengers and resisting all Coast Guard orders to do so! (He was, he claimed, 'thrown off' his ship into one of the lifeboats!) Essentially the book offers a straightforward chronological narrative, in well researched and clear prose, of over 21 shipping disasters in the Atlantic. Each event is very fully detailed, from the first (usually) navigational error to resulting Board of Inquiry conclusions. Obviously Professor Flayhart has deep understanding on nautical affairs and terms, but does not "show off" his knowledge by any unnecessary descent into the lingo or "Esperanto" of the seaman's language. It is this core skill ... seamanship... that shines through many of his accounts of these shipwrecks. Marconi Radio Operators showing initiative and staying at their posts long past good sense should have let them. Captains being always the last to leave the ships - if at all. Or, conversely, the mad, expedient and very prompt evacuation of the crew first, long before that traditional "Women and Children First" rule. After many years at sea, through a few 'near misses' of my own, these stories thrill. Nowadays my seafaring is restricted to "Cruising" in vast, top-heavy ships designed to ensure that most passage-makers are totally isolated (protected?) from the experience and realization of their actually being at sea. With ingrained distrust of such un-seaworthy designs and mistrust of crews whose only experience seems to be in the hotel and resort trade, I always ensure my wife and I know the most direct route to our designated lifeboat and its location on the true boat deck. I am pessimistic in my expectations that in the event of yet another "Steamship Disaster" the crew will be away in the boats whilst most of the passengers are still compliantly assembling - below decks - in the dining room as they have been trained to do in the theatre of the usual Cruising Ships "Boat Drill". Only my wife's complaints stop me from boarding with our own self-inflating life-vests, complete with snap-shackles and safety tethers! Only one thing grated throughout this enjoyable and gripping read - in my near-seventy years of boating, sailing and Maritime Service boats, ships and vessels have always been called such, never, as they are consistently and persistently in this work called, were they ever referred to as "units". But that is the only gripe about this work from this very satisfied reader.

This is an excellent book for those who want to go beyond the well known ship disasters. Flayhart deserves praise for combining technical details with a colorful narrative. He is a terrific spinner of nautical yarns capturing those small details that capture and inspire. Each tale is told in a manner

suggesting the author has covered all bases unlike similar books that seem to have left out important details. Though I love history I refuse to read dry books, this book is saturated with the sea spray of the Atlantic Ocean, a truly satisfying read/

This book consists of a series of essays covering various perilous happenstances on the Atlantic. It covers a broad period of time, and the writer is well informed and concise, although his grammar isn't perfect. He's a professor of nautical history, and his outlook is quite interesting. He has good feel for the subject, and even the well-known wrecks, such as "Titanic" or "Andrea Doria", are without the usual overblown histrionics or phony sense of inevitability, and offer some new insights.

William Flayhart's "Perils of the Atlantic: Steamship Disasters, 1850 to the Present" is a well researched and well written book. The reasonable cost is absolutely worth the price to have this little jewel on the bookshelf. Each chapter describes one ship's life and loss. Some sort of illustration of each ship is provided, though with the early ships, a photo of a model might be the only representation, as is the case with the Collins Line's "Arctic" lost in 1852. Of the 22 chapters, 2 are dedicated to well known stories: the White Star Line's "Titanic" and the Italian Line's "Andrea Doria." Other chapters relate the stories of ships which the names may be familiar, but the stories less so: "Empress of Ireland," "Lusitania," "Morro Castle" and "Seabreeze I" - the raw video footage of the latter in her last hours a favorite on [...]. The gripping stories of the long forgotten 19th century ships, make for excellent reading, no less dramatic, or tragic, than the more recent examples. It would seem that telling the story of a ship far from land, slowly sinking, the desperate struggle to save the women and children, the valiant self sacrifice of the crew, the priceless cargo disappearing into the depths, would make for easy story telling. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Too many authors are able to drown the reader in tedious technical minutiae and endless back-story. Mr. Flayhart skillfully avoids those traps, balancing ample detail with genuine humanity to make the stories interesting, exciting and poignant. Mr. Flayhart's writing is smooth and seamless. Since each chapter is a complete and independent story (ranging from 8 to 32 pages), this is a good book for short reads. Highly recommended.

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