

Detroit Free Press – August 18, 1897

Article discusses Captain Robert Rhynas.

Captain Rhynas died on August 16, 1897

He was secretary of Detroit Lodge No. 7 at the time of his death.

ST. CLAIR DISASTER.

THE LATE CAPT. RHYNAS COMMAND- ED HER WHEN SHE BURNED.

The late Capt. Robert Rhynas was master of the Ward line steamer St. Clair when she burned and sank in Lake Superior, all on board being lost except himself and two others. She had been nicknamed the "contraband boat," as she was the only one in the line that carried oil. The terrible mishap came in the spring of one of the latter '70's. The woodwork near her engine room became ignited and the flames quickly spread through the oil-soaked hull. After a brief but unsuccessful fight the two boats were lowered and some of the passengers and crew let into them, the others not waiting, but jumping overboard. One of the boats, poorly handled, went down in the suction of the sinking vessel and every man in it was lost. The other was overturned by the struggles of those who had jumped overboard, and the occupants thrown into the icy lake. It was impossible to keep the boat right side up, so fierce were the struggles of those who tried to reach it. Capt. Rhynas and the mate and one other hung to the ends, and when all the rest had become so chilled that they sunk the three clambered in and floated about until picked up by a passing steamer. The loss of life was about twenty-five. It was one of the most thrilling disasters of that time.

Capt. Rhynas began his sailing as deckhand on the old sidewheel steamer Keweenaw, which up to a few years ago was carrying passengers out of this port, and was eventually transformed into a lumber carrier. In four years he had been promoted to first mate. This position he also held on the St. Paul and St. Louis, from which he went into the St. Clair. Afterward he commanded the Atlantic, Nyack and Moran in the Lake Superior trade. It is noteworthy that he made a specialty of his knowledge of Lake Superior and its south shore harbors for business and shelter and the north shore harbors for shelter. Every vessel that carried him ran to Lake Superior, and it was rarely that he went around to Chicago. This makes his clean record for disasters all the more creditable, for Lake Superior is probably the most dangerous of all the lakes in the fall and early spring.