

Two Accounts of One Wreck

GRADES 9-12 · HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE, ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, NEWS AND MEDIA LITERACY ·
MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA, ROCKPORT

When the records of a death at sea disagree, what can a careful researcher honestly say happened, and how should we name and remember the person who died?

Two 55-minute class periods

On Jan. 6, 1892, a federal ship called the Gallatin hit a hidden ledge off Manchester in a snowstorm. One man aboard died. Every account agrees on that much. But the accounts do not agree on who he was or exactly how he died. In this lesson you will work like a fact checker. You will read the records, line them up against each other and decide what can be verified and what cannot. Then you will test your method on a second Cape Ann wreck, the Liberty ship Charles S. Haight, which went aground off Rockport in 1946. At the end you will write a short note the way a careful newsroom would, and think about how a community should remember someone when the record is incomplete.

Primary source

R1. Source 1: Manchester's town history, 1895

About this source: The Rev. D. F. Lamson wrote this history for the town of Manchester three years after the wreck. He does not say where he got his information.

"On Jan. 6, 1892, the U. S. Revenue Cutter, "Gallatin," was wrecked in a thick snow-storm on "Boo-hoo Ledge," about two miles from "Eagle Head." One seaman, a Dane, was struck by the falling smoke-stack, knocked into the water and drowned; the rest of the crew, with the officers, all landed safely on the beach near the summer residence of Mrs. Bullard, and after being cared for by the town authorities were forwarded by the late afternoon train to Boston."

Source: D. F. Lamson, History of the Town of Manchester, Essex County, Massachusetts, 1645-1895 (Town of Manchester, 1895), p. 358. Transcribed from a scan; spelling as printed. <https://archive.org/details/historyoftownofm00lams>. Rights: Public domain (published 1895)

Primary source

R2. Source 2: The ship's muster roll, January 1892

About this source: A muster roll is the official list of everyone assigned to a ship. Congress printed this one as evidence when it considered paying the crew for belongings lost in the wreck. The full list has 38 names. Three rows are shown here, exactly as printed.

Name as printed	Rank or rate as printed
Eric Gabrielson	Captain.
H. E. Wooster	Pilot.
J. Jacobson	Carpenter.

Source: Exhibit A, 'Muster roll of officers and crew attached to the revenue steamer Gallatin when wrecked, January 6, 1892,' printed in U.S. House of Representatives, Report No. 1830, 56th Congress, 1st Session, 'Sufferers by Wreck of United States Revenue Cutter Gallatin' (May 29, 1900), p. 2. Transcribed from a scan; spelling as printed. https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/SERIALSET-04027_00_00-075-1830-0000. Rights: Public domain (U.S. federal government work)

Primary source

R3. Source 3: A Treasury Department letter and a committee report, 1892

About this source: The Revenue Cutter Service was part of the Treasury Department, so the Treasury was the Gallatin's owner. Twenty days after the wreck, the acting secretary of the Treasury answered a Senate committee's question about a bill to repay the crew.

Treasury letter, Jan. 26, 1892:

"In reply, I have to state that at the time the Gallatin was wrecked there were on board 6 officers, the pilot, and a crew of 29 men and boys. The carpenter was killed by the falling of the smokestack. The 28 surviving members of crew have submitted to the Department certified statements of the losses sustained by each on account of the wreck, ranging from \$44.85 to \$206.54, the total amount being \$3,105.99."

House Committee on Claims, 1892:

"At the time of the wreck the crew consisted of 7 officers, 1 pilot, and 30 men and boys, as appears by list hereto annexed and marked Exhibit A."

Source: Exhibit B, letter of O. L. Spaulding, Acting Secretary of the Treasury, to Sen. William P. Frye, Jan. 26, 1892; and the report of the House Committee on Claims, House Report No. 1479, 52nd Congress (1892); both printed in U.S. House of Representatives, Report No. 1830, 56th Congress (May 29, 1900), p. 2. Transcribed from a scan; spelling as printed. https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/SERIALSET-04027_00_00-075-1830-0000. Rights: Public domain (U.S. federal government work)

Primary source

R4. Sources 4A to 4D: Newspaper reports printed the next day, Jan. 7, 1892

About these sources: In 1892, news of a wreck traveled by telegraph. A paper far from Manchester usually printed a report sent by a news service or a correspondent, not its own reporter's eyewitness account. Look for clues about where each report came from.

Source 4A. Morning Journal and Courier (New Haven, Conn.), Jan. 7, 1892, p. 3. The report is datelined "Manchester, Mass., Jan. 6." The same report, word for word, also ran in the Daily Kennebec Journal of Augusta, Maine.

"The smokestack going by the board to starboard and instantly killed J. Jacobson, the carpenter, in the bow of the cutter at the davits and carried the body overboard."

Source 4B. Pawtucket Tribune (Pawtucket, R.I.), Jan. 7, 1892, p. 1.

"While the first boat was being lowered, with the carpenter, Jacob Jacobson, in one end, the Gallatin lurched to port with such violence as to wrench off the smokestack. It fell, striking Jacobson on the head, breaking his neck apparently, and killing him instantly. His body fell overboard and was lost."

Source 4C. Waterbury Evening Democrat (Waterbury, Conn.), Jan. 7, 1892, p. 1.

"Jacob Jacobson, the ill-fated carpenter, had just got into his boat when the cutter was raised by a tremendous [sic] wave and dropped with terrible force upon the ledge. The stack chains snapped and the great funnel went over upon the carpenter and his boat. It is believed that Jacobson was instantly killed."

Source 4D. New-York Tribune, Jan. 7, 1892, p. 1. The report is marked "Special" and its dateline prints the town as "Manchester-by-the-Sea, N. H."

"The United States revenue cutter Gallatin went ashore on a ledge off this port about noon to-day. All hands were saved except J. Jacobson, a carpenter."

Glossary

going by the board: falling over the side of a ship.

starboard and port: the right and left sides of a ship, facing forward.

davits: small cranes on a ship's side that raise and lower its boats.

the cutter (in 4A and 4C): here this most likely means one of the ship's small boats, which were also called cutters, not the Gallatin herself.

funnel, stack: other words for the smokestack.

ill-fated: unlucky; an old newspaper word for someone who died.

Source: Chronicling America, Library of Congress. Each excerpt was transcribed from a scan of the printed page; spelling as printed. Full citations for each paper are listed under the excerpts. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/>. Rights: Public domain (published 1892)

Primary source

R5. Source 5: A federal vessel status card, 1946

About this source: The Charles S. Haight was a Liberty ship, a cargo ship built for the government during World War II. Federal clerks kept a typed index card for each government ship and added a line when something happened to it. These are two lines from the card for the Haight, which went aground off Rockport in the spring of 1946. "C.TL." stands for constructive total loss, meaning the ship was too badly damaged to be worth repairing.

"Grounded 4-1-46 off Rockport,Mass."

"4-2-46 @ 1:30am Vessel became a C.TL..when she grounded off Rockport, Mass."

Source: U.S. Maritime Administration, Vessel Status Card, Charles S. Haight (card 1AE_01), typed entries made after the grounding. Transcribed from a scan of the typed card; spelling and spacing as printed. https://vesselhistory.marad.dot.gov/cards/1AE_01.png. Rights: Public domain (U.S. federal government work)

Summary by Cape Ann Current

R6. Source 6: What other accounts of the Haight say (our summary)

The Maritime Administration's online Ship History Database, kept by the same federal agency that typed the card in Source 5, lists the Haight's sinking date as April 2, 1946. It places the wreck about 1.5 miles east of Rockport.

The Massachusetts Board of Underwater Archaeological Resources, a state agency, publishes an account of the wreck. It says the ship struck the ledges known as Flat Ground at 12:07 a.m. on April 2, 1946, in poor visibility, rough seas and a strong southeast wind. The state account lists its sources, which include the Boston Globe of April 2, 3, 4 and 5, 1946, and The New York Times of April 3, 4 and 9, 1946. The Town of Rockport's web page about the wreck gives the same time and date in nearly the same words.

None of these accounts reports any deaths or injuries. The state account says that by late morning the captain, Joseph A. Mano, had sent 29 of the 49 men aboard into the lifeboats, and that crew members were later taken aboard the Coast Guard cutter Ojibwa.

Source: Summary written by Cape Ann Current from: U.S. Maritime Administration, Ship History Database, 'Charles S. Haight'; Massachusetts Board of Underwater Archaeological Resources, 'Charles S. Haight'; Town of Rockport, 'Charles S. Haight.' <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/charles-s-haight>. Rights: Our summary of facts; the state and town pages are not quoted

A1. Source log

Fill in one row for each source: 1, 2, 3, 4A, 4B, 4C and 4D. Use short phrases. Quote exact words in the last two columns.

1. Who created this source, and what was their job or role?
2. When was it created? Count how many days or years after Jan. 6, 1892.
3. Was the creator an eyewitness? If not, what can you tell about where the information came from?
4. Why was this source made, and who was meant to read it?
5. What exact words does it use to identify the man who died?
6. What exact words does it use to describe how he died?
7. Source check: Source 4A also appeared word for word in a Maine paper. Should those two printings count as one source or two? Explain.
8. Source check: What does the dateline in Source 4D tell you about how carefully that report was checked?

A2. Corroboration matrix

For each claim, write S if the source supports it, C if the source contradicts it and N if the source does not mention it. Add a few quoted words when you can. Then rate the claim as verified, probable, contested or unknown and give a one-line reason. Note any sources that may not be independent of each other.

1. Claim 1: One man aboard the Gallatin died in the wreck.
2. Claim 2: His name was J. Jacobson.
3. Claim 3: His first name was Jacob.
4. Claim 4: He was the ship's carpenter.
5. Claim 5: He was a seaman.
6. Claim 6: He was Danish.
7. Claim 7: The falling smokestack struck him.
8. Claim 8: The blow from the smokestack killed him.
9. Claim 9: He was knocked into the water and drowned.
10. Claim 10: His body was never recovered.
11. Which single record, if you could find it, would most change your ratings? Where might it be kept?

A3. The Haight date: one night, two dates

Work with a partner. Use Sources 5 and 6.

1. What date does the typed card give for the grounding? What date and time does the state account give?
2. Read the second line of the card carefully. Does the card agree with itself? Explain.

3. The card and the online database come from the same federal agency. What does it tell you that they give different dates?
4. The Town of Rockport page and the state page use nearly the same words. Do they count as one source or two? Why?
5. List two possible reasons a record could be one day off for an event that happened near midnight. Label these as possibilities, not facts.
6. Write one sentence about when the Haight went aground that a careful newspaper could print today without overstating what is known.
7. Name one record that could settle the question, and say where you would look for it.

A4. What we know / What we don't

Write a note of 200 to 300 words about the death aboard the Gallatin, in the style of a newsroom note that is published alongside a story. Use two headings: What we know and What we don't know. Every fact must name its source in the sentence, for example 'according to the Treasury Department's Jan. 26, 1892, letter.' Use your matrix ratings. Do not use the word 'definitely' unless two independent records agree.

1. Open with one sentence that states what all the records agree on.
2. Under What we know, give at least three facts, each with its source.
3. Under What we don't know, give at least two open questions and explain why the records cannot answer them yet.
4. Name the man who died the way you think is most accurate, and explain your choice in one sentence.
5. End with one record or archive that could answer an open question.

A5. Remembering with care

Discuss these questions in your group, then write the exit ticket on your own.

1. The town history calls the man who died 'one seaman, a Dane' and does not give his name. The federal records give a name and a job. Which matters more for remembering a person, and why?
2. Some newspapers say Jacob Jacobson; the muster roll says J. Jacobson. If you were carving a name on a memorial, which would you use, and how would you note the other?
3. Is it fair to write that he 'drowned' or that he was 'killed instantly'? What does each choice claim to know?
4. Nothing we found ties J. Jacobson to Cape Ann except the place he died. Should Manchester remember him? How?
5. The Haight's crew all survived, according to every account we have. Why is it important not to add drama or danger to a story that the records do not support?

6. Exit ticket: Write one line, under 25 words, that a memorial or anniversary story could carry for the man who died aboard the Gallatin. It must be accurate to the records.

Talk about it

- Lamson wrote three years after the wreck, for his own town. The newspapers wrote the next day, for readers far away. How might time and audience change what each one chose to include?
- Several Jan. 7 reports say Jacobson was killed 'instantly,' but one says 'It is believed.' What is the difference between those two ways of writing, and which is more honest?
- Two newspapers that print the same wire report agree word for word. Why does that agreement prove less than it seems to?
- The Treasury letter is an official record. Does official mean correct? What would you want to know about how the Treasury learned what it reported?
- In the Haight case, the same agency gave two dates. What does that suggest about trusting a record just because it came from the government?
- If a reader asked you to 'just say what happened,' how would you answer without hiding what is uncertain?

Show what you learned

Write a 200- to 300-word 'What we know / What we don't' note about the man who died when the revenue cutter Gallatin wrecked off Manchester on Jan. 6, 1892. Attribute every fact to a named source, rate your certainty honestly and name him accurately and respectfully. Your note will be scored on use of evidence, corroboration, handling of uncertainty and respectful remembrance.

Points: 20