

The Barque – *The Orquell*

In the mid to late 1800s, Pictou was a busy seaport and a number of fine quality ships were built in this harbour town. One such boat was *The Orquell*, a full rigged barque that was launched from John & James Yorston shipyard on May 22, 1879 and made from the finest materials that could be found in Pictou County.

Pictonians followed the career of *The Orquell* and its Captain, William Joe Fraser with pride. At one time, it even managed to set a speed record for sailing ships crossing the Atlantic. However, after 8.5 years of hard driving through the major waters of the world, disaster struck *The Orquell* in the middle of the English Channel.

In September 1877, *The Orquell* sailed from England with a heavy cargo of iron ore and ran into a terrible storm. The ship was relentlessly pounded by water and waves and had trouble staying afloat. The situation only got worse. Only the deck was left above water and all of the life boats were smashed, and rescue boats were still hours away.

The Orquell somehow managed to hold together above water until rescue arrived, which was a testament to the skill of Pictou shipbuilding. Just minutes after the last man was evacuated, *The Orquell* sank to the bottom of the English Channel – where it still remains to this day.