



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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### FREEMASONRY AND THE GREYCLIFFE DISASTER

The worst maritime disaster to occur on Sydney Harbour was the sinking of the ferry, *Greycliffe*, in a collision with the Union Steamship Company's S.S. *Tahiti* on 3 November 1927 with the loss of 40 lives. The collision occurred at about 4.30 pm some 400 metres off Bradley's Head.

A number of those involved were Freemasons and some of the survivors subsequently joined the Craft.



Bro. Kenneth Horler, OAM.

The only remaining living survivor of the tragedy is Bro. Ken Horler, now 90 years of age, and he gave an account of the event when he was interviewed for the *Sydney Morning Herald* of Friday, 3 December 2003.

His account states that he will never forget November 3, 1927. It was a balmy Sydney afternoon with clear visibility. He was a 14 year old schoolboy at the time, catching his normal ferry home from Circular Quay to Watsons Bay. As usual, he and three schoolmates took their favourite positions at the back of the wooden ferry so they could look at the progress being made on the new Sydney Harbour Bridge.

It was a decision that saved their lives.

This service was known as the "School Boat" as it was generally packed with schoolchildren returning home. Fortunately, owing to the late finishing of the Public Schools Amateur Athletics Association Carnival at the Sydney Cricket Ground many children missed the ferry.

As the *Greycliffe* headed for Garden Island to pick up dock workers, Ken Horler got his first glimpse of the Union Steamship Company's mail steamer, *Tahiti*, coming up from behind, heading from Darling Harbour to San Francisco via New Zealand. At 7600 tons, with accomodation for 500 passengers, the *Tahiti* was three times the size of the *Greycliffe*.

"It was just a normal journey", recalls Horler.

