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MYSTERY SHOW TURNS TO MOUNT A FOR ANSWERS



'My day job is teaching, marking exams and papers,' says Colin Laroque, a professor at Mount Allison University in Sackville. "But it is kind of like my Saturday afternoon projects are history or mystery detectives." Laroque recently helped the PBS program, 'History Detectives', determine if a picture frame was made with wood recovered from the Titanic. PHOTO: GREG AGNEW/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Professor aids PBS show in solving Titanic mystery

ADAM HURAS
LEGISLATURE BUREAU

An expert at Mount Allison University will star in an upcoming American public broadcasting program after helping to determine if an old picture frame was made from the grand staircase banister of the Titanic.

The PBS program *History*

Detectives turned to the Sackville university for help in determining whether the wooden frame was in fact from the famous passenger liner that sank in the North Atlantic.

The frame belongs to an American family whose great grandfather rode cable ships from Nova Scotia across the Atlantic Ocean. His ship was also the first on the

scene after the 1912 sinking of the Titanic and the 1915 sinking of the British passenger ship the Lusitania after it was torpedoed by a German U-boat.

Mount Allison professor Colin Laroque, who previously dated what may well be the world's oldest hockey stick, was called by the

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Answer to Titanic mystery to be revealed when show airs Aug. 7

TITANIC ← A1

show to determine whether the frame was indeed made from wood plucked from the debris of one of those famous wrecks.

"There are very few pieces that are known to be authentic from the day the Titanic sank," Laroque said. "So if this was an original piece then I knew it would be very neat to see."

"When they brought it, it was fantastic." The PBS program's trip to Atlantic Canada marks the first time in the show's 10 seasons that it has gone outside the U.S. to find its experts.

When the Titanic went down, its survivors were transported to New York, while the ship's debris and recovered bodies were transported to St. John's or Halifax, prompting the show to make the trek to speak with area experts.

Laroque, with the help of his students, used the tree rings on the wooden frame to pinpoint where in the world the oak trees used on the passenger ships originally grew.

The Lusitania was built using wood from Scotland, while the Titanic was built with wood from Ireland.

The Titanic was one of three luxury ocean liners, known as the Olympic-class, built in the early 20th century. The Mount Allison lab also compared the wood from the frame with other wood from the sister ships.

They also went farther afield, analyzing wood from other ships built around that time.



Elyse Luray PBS's 'History Detectives', brought this picture frame, believed to be made from the stair rail of a famous sunken ship, to Dr. Colin Laroque, head of the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Lab, to see if he could determine if the wood came from the Titanic or the Lusitania. PHOTO: TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

The show then corroborated Laroque's findings with documents from the Dartmouth Heritage Museum and experts at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax.

History Detectives also shot a re-enactment of the sinking in Halifax and other shots in Sackville using a remake of the handrail picture frame fashioned by woodworkers in Amherst.

"The lab was extremely helpful," said *History Detectives* host Elyse Luray, speaking by phone from New York on Monday.

"Without them we really wouldn't have been able to narrow this down."

"From the get-go we were able to locate where the wood came from and that helped narrow down the search."

She added: "It would have been so much more work if we would not have been able to figure out where the lumber actually physically came from."

Luray was tight lipped on the show's outcome, although she said the result is "definitive."

The episode of *History Detectives* airs

Aug. 7 on PBS.

Laroque said he enjoys the role his lab has played in uncovering historical marvels.

"My day job is teaching, marking exams and papers, but it is kind of like my Saturday afternoon projects are history or mystery detectives," he said.

"For us in our lab we usually work away in a dark room with no windows and not much happens, so when a New York television crew comes into your lab it's suddenly interesting."