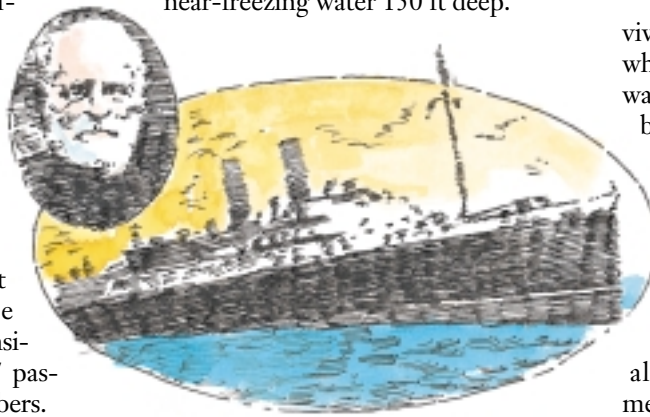# The case of the duplicate diploma

In 1914 a special ceremony was held at the McGill medical school when a recent graduate, Dr. James Grant, became the first alumnus ever to receive a duplicate diploma. He had lost his first one in exceptional circumstances and the faculty bent its own rules to provide him with another.

James Grant was originally from Vancouver Island. He headed east to take up medicine and after graduation in 1913, while interning at the Montreal General, his already unsteady health worsened. Sea air was recommended, and Grant went to work for Canadian Pacific as a ship's surgeon. On May 28, 1914, he sailed out of Quebec on the *Empress of Ireland*, his second west-east Atlantic crossing with the 550-ft liner; he was responsible for the health of 1057 passengers and 420 crew members.

By 2 am the *Empress* had dropped her St. Lawrence River pilot off at Rimouski and Grant was fast asleep in his quarters. At 2:09 he awakened on the floor of his cabin — he had rolled there because of the ship's suddenly extreme list. There were no lights, and he could hear screams. When he found the door and opened it, he was looking *up* the passageway. It was rising slowly, like a drawbridge.

On hands and knees, Grant ascended the passageway and got his head through a porthole, which was now a skylight. A passenger standing on the level side of the ship "decorked" him. As he stood on the ship's flank with hundreds of other passengers and crew members, the ship slipped away beneath him and he stumbled into near-freezing water 150 ft deep.

As he treaded water, the fog that had enveloped the ship dispersed and Grant saw the nearby lights of another vessel. He began to swim toward it, and was quickly picked up by a boat crowded with shocked, shivering people. The boat returned to its mother ship and unloaded the rescued. Grant, who was still in his nightclothes, borrowed an outsized pair of trousers, used a piece of string for a belt, and got on with the business of healing.

The boat Grant was now on was the Norwegian collier *Storstad* — the very one that had cut into the side of the *Empress* in the fog. In a mere 14 minutes, the *Empress* was on the bottom of the St. Lawrence, 4 miles from shore. The final death toll was 1012 people.

Throughout the night, until the survivors had been transferred to shore, where every available regional doctor was heading, Grant battled shock and broken limbs. His efforts were reported in the newspapers, which recorded him as one of the heroes of the worst maritime passenger sinking in Canadian history.

A few weeks later, he was given the duplicate diploma from McGill to replace the one that had, along with his luggage and instruments, gone to the bottom of the St. Lawrence River.

Grant returned to Vancouver Island after the disaster and continued to work for CPR — on land — as chief medical officer until 1938. He raised a family of 4, and he was 59 when he died of an ulcer in Victoria. — © *Phil Jenkins*, Chelsea, Que.

Hugh Malcolm

Cool sites

www.netmedicine.com/cyberpt/cyber.htm
Computer technology is revolutionizing medical training. For instance, surgical training is no longer limited by the number of cadavers available, since computers now provide virtual patients for trainees to cut and paste. Now the same technology is available to the general practitioner. The CyberPatient Simulator presents the clinician with a series of interactive patient simulations. Choose from 5 sample cases in 3 categories: acute care simulator, ACLS megacode simulator or pediatric advanced life support simulator. The clinician is presented with a patient and her complaint, and then proceeds to "save the patient." GPs can choose to get more history, perform a physical, order specific tests or try different treatment options. The system presents a "drug cabinet" and a picture of the patient, as well as text-based information. The site is really a sales pitch to convince doctors to purchase more interactive programs, but the ones available online are fully functional and worth a visit. — © *Michael OReilly*, moreilly@cancom.net