Halifax Public Libraries
Resource Guide
Introduction

The morning of Tuesday, December 6, 1917 dawned clear and unseasonably warm in Halifax. The harbour was busier than usual, teeming with ships whose schedules were dictated by the commerce of World War One. Halifax served as a gathering point for ships being escorted by convoy to Europe, and it was bustling with activity.

Shortly before nine a.m., two ships began their opposing journeys in the harbour’s confines. The Mont-Blanc, a munitions ship loaded with close to three thousand tons of explosive material, was steaming into the harbour while the Belgian relief ship, Imo, was approaching the Narrows on its way out of Halifax. For reasons unknown, both ships headed for the same point in the crowded harbour and were unable to correct their positions in time to avert disaster. The Imo collided with the Mont-Blanc. The collision spilled a number of barrels of benzol, and the leaking fuel caught fire. As the fire intensified, black smoke billowed skyward.

Unable to control the blaze, and fully aware of the dangerous cargo, the Mont-Blanc crew abandoned ship, and the vessel drifted toward Richmond Pier on the Halifax side. Shortly after nine a.m., as hundreds watched from the shoreline and from windows, the Mont-Blanc exploded in a ball of fury, laying waste two and a half square miles of Halifax city, killing close to 2,000, wounding 6,000, and leaving 25,000 homeless. Dartmouth’s North end, including the Mi’kmaq community of Turtle Grove, was equally devastated.

Much has been written about the Explosion within the last 100 years, examining the circumstances before and after the collision. What follows is a select list of adult and youth materials currently in the collection of Halifax Public Libraries. In 2017, Halifax Regional Municipality will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Halifax Explosion with a series of programs, cultural events and commemorations. For more details visit 100years100stories.ca.
Resources

Adult and Youth Non-Fiction (Y):

- The Halifax Catastrophe: Forty views showing extent of damage in Canada's historic city as the result of a terrific explosion on Thursday, December 6, 1917, which killed 1,500 men, women, and children, injured 3,000 and rendered 6,000 homeless, causing property damage of nearly $50,000,000. Halifax: Royal Print and Litho, 1917.


“The Halifax Explosion and Going to Siberia,” Cape Breton’s Magazine, issue 34, 7-12.


In the Privy Council on Appeal from the Supreme Court of Canada between the ship “Imo” (Southern Pacific Whaling Company, Limited, Owners), (Defendant), Appellant and La Compagnie Generale Trans-Atlantique, (Plaintiff), Respondent: Record of Proceedings: Volume 1. [n.p.], 1919.


The Medical Services, by Andrew MacPhil, 327-329. Ottawa: The Department, 1925.


CITY COUNCIL MINUTES
The “Minutes of the City Council of the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia”, from 1917-1976 reported on the efforts to rebuild Halifax. Each volume has an index in the front. Look for entries under “Explosion, December 6, 1917” or “Halifax Relief Commission”.

CITY DIRECTORIES
Check the McAlpine’s Halifax-Dartmouth City Directories for the year 1915-1925 to locate families or businesses before and after the Explosion. The 1918 City Directory published an alphabetical list of “Names of the Identified Dead Killed in the Explosion at Halifax, December 6, 1917”, up-to-date at the time of printing. The “Halifax Street Directory”, near the front, notes afflicted regions as “Devastated Area”.

VERTICAL FILES
The Local History Room has vertical files on the Halifax Explosion. These files contain newspaper articles, tour guides, brochures, maps, photocopies of primary sources and other interesting items.
For example:
- Halifax, N.S.-Explosion
- Halifax, N.S.-Explosion, 1917-Relief Commission
- Halifax, N.S.-Hydrostone District

NEWSPAPERS ON MICROFILM
Newspapers published hundreds of articles after the explosion. Many survivors placed notices inquiring or identifying the whereabouts of families and friends. Articles on rescue efforts and relief measures can also be found. Look for new research or survivor tales around the December anniversary.
- Halifax Herald/Chronicle Herald: July 1880 to present.
- Evening Mail-Mail Star: 1894-2004

PERIODICAL INDEXES AND DATABASES
- Canadian Periodical Index. (1920-2002). Indexes Canadian magazines.
- Eureka.cc. Features over 4000 full-texted articles from local and world newspapers. (Available only at the Halifax Central Library).
- General Reference Centre. General interest articles, mostly U.S. based.
- ProQuest. 1985-present. Online access to Canadian Newspapers.

Memorial Book “Halifax Explosion, 1917” (1966):
The Halifax Relief Commission donated $100,000 towards building of the Halifax North branch as a memorial to the Explosion. The branch features a calligraphic listing of all the known dead, circa 1966.