



Rather dramatic lithograph of the collision between *Loch Earn* and *Ville du Havre* on 22 November 1873.

AN UNFORTUNATE MEETING

TAKING PLACE IN THE MID-ATLANTIC, THIS 1873 COLLISION DID LITTLE TO IMPROVE PASSENGER SAFETY
BY DAVID HARKNESS

The 22nd of November 1873 was not a particularly pleasant day in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Seas were heavy, the sky broken but visibility was relatively clear. Aboard the British three-masted full-rigged schooner *Loch Earn*, Capt. William Robertson was transporting 85 passengers and crew along with a load of cargo and was pleased with the time his ship was making. Built by Lawrie J. G. & Company shipyard in Glasgow, the 226-foot vessel had been finished in 1869 and

hence was a relatively new ship.

Around 2 am, Capt. Robertson suddenly spotted the lights of another ship. The approaching vessel was *Ville du Havre*, out-bound from New York and heading for La Havre, France. At the time, the law of the sea stated that steam-powered vessels would give way to those under sail. However, the law of the sea was not going to be obeyed and this would lead to a particularly nasty tragedy in mid-Atlantic.

The *Ville du Havre* did not always

carry that name. She was completed during 1865 as a paddle steamer at the Thames Ironworks in London with the original name of *Napoleon III*. The vessel had been built for the *Compagnie Generale Transatlantique* (otherwise known as the French Line) and she grossed 3950 tons with a length of 365.9-ft, beam of 45.9-ft, straight stern, two funnels, two masts, was of iron construction, and had paddle wheel propulsion that would give a cruising speed of about 11.5 knots.