

## Mill Haven and the *Oliver Mowat*

C.J.H. Snider

One of the pleasantest sails I have ever had was in the ketch yacht *Kingarvie* last Labor Day, when we were edging back for moorings in Collins Bay. The *Kingarvie* is in the "preferred class" but not in the sense that Collins Bay suggests. Her owner, Mr. G. Herrick Duggan of Montreal, keeps her there during the summer, between cruises, and lays her up in Toronto in the fall.

On this occasion we had spent the night in Prinyer's Cove, on the south side of the Bay of Quinte, above the Upper Gap from Lake Ontario and in the morning we weighed and stood across the bay on a faint trickle of air. Usually one has to give the Quinte shores a good berth, unless you can float in a dew-fall, but on this occasion we fairly scraped the bank. The wind was light and hauled enough to the southward to just allow us to edge along the starboard tack. The water was smooth, and at this part of the north shore it was deep enough to allow us to sail within the proverbial biscuit toss of the limestone edge of the bay.

Thus it came that we almost sailed down the main street of Mill Haven. The walls of the old limestone building which gave the place its name were still there, and so was the little mill stream, gurgling over its limestone bed into a basin just right size for sailing toy boats. But silence had long settled over the old mill wheel. Among the acacia trees we could see two houses, and the outline of a service station on the old Bath road, where had probably been the village blacksmith shop.

And this, lying very still in the September sunshine, was the whole of a lake port which saw Lake Ontario's first steamed launched and had built its own sailing ships, filled them with grain, and flour and sent them across to the United States or down the river, Europewards.

I do not know of any schooner ever sailing directly for England from this two-house town. Our overseas cargoes, in the schooner days, were seldom all loaded in one port. Grain and lumber were picked up sometimes in a dozen places before the hatches were finally battened down in Montreal for the sea voyage. But I do know that thousands of bushels were shipped out of Mill Haven, and at least one three-master schooner was built. And while we floated past we could almost read, through the glasses, the inscription on the obelisk marking the spot on the shore whence was launched one hundred and twenty-nine years ago, Upper Canada's first steam ship, the *Frontenac*. There is nothing else now to mark that a shipyard had ever been there, but a spit of limestone intimates where the ways probably reached deep water.

The large schooner mentioned was built in Mill Haven by master carpenter E. Beaupre in 1873. His grand-daughter, a Mrs. O'Brien living in Highland Park, Mich., has a half model, made in lifts of light and dark wood, of this vessel and of two others built by her grandfather. Presumably at the same place. Beaupre built other lake schooners at Napanee and Belleville. This Mill Haven vessel of his was the first "three-n'-after" I sailed in, the *Oliver Mowat* of Port Hope. She got her name before Sir

Oliver Mowat got his title, and she hailed for Port Hope when I was in her because she was registered there after being rebuilt in 1892.

Her forecastle, airy, bright, clean and well-painted, received me in 1896. Capt. Jim Peacock of Port Hope was sailing her then – still going strong, though now eighty-two. “ Young Bill” Peacock was then mate; long since risen to master’s papers, and portliness. In fact he was the commander of the last three-master on Lake Ontario, the *Julia B. Merrill*, burned at Sunnyside to make a hot-dog harvest. Tom Padginton of Port Hope was in the forecastle with me, and a redheaded high school boy whose name I have forgotten, and Tommy Slight and Johnny Bowerman, two grizzled old chums who always sailed together, and who drowned together in the *Emerald* seven years later. Mrs. Padginton was cook, and I can still smack my lips over the buttered biscuits and spice apple sauce she used to set out for the lunch when that watch was changed at midnight.

This *Oliver Mowat* that was built in Mill Haven, was no pigmy. She registered 295 tons and could carry 700 tons of coal or 21,000 bushels of grain. She was 131 feet long, 26 feet beam and 9 feet 8 inches deep in the hold, very good proportions for a Bay of Quinte grain carrier, where you have to watch your water all the time. She was fast, too, especially in light airs, in comparison with other schooners. She had a squaresail yard and raffle, and was always painted white above, with a particularly pleasing blue shade of lead-color below. Sailors never willingly paint a real blue, because the color is unlucky. The only real blue you see is in yachts and yachtsmen, of course don’t know any better.

This *Oliver Mowat* was always white and blue grey, with pretty combinations of buff and chocolate for her gaffs and booms and white mastheads- always but once. That was the one year Capt. Dolph Corson had her, and he painted her black. The Corsons seemingly always went for black, in the *W. J. Suffel* and the *Straubensee*, and the *Starling*, and the *Erie Belle*, but while it may have suited these vessels it made the *Mowat* look like a hearse. McClelland and Galbraith of Darlington, who for many many years owned shares in the schooner in partnership with her captains, put her back in white the next year and white she remained for the rest of her life.

Capt. Peacock sailed the *Mowat* for seventeen years, and was succeeded by his son. My own next close association with this schooner was on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1905, when she was in the breakers off Bluff Point east of Oshawa, with her yawlboat gone and the crew sending messages ashore in bottles. Major Douglas Hallam and I started down the lake in the tug *Skylark* to rescue them, but off the Highlands the tug skipper got cold feet and turned back. His pedal temperature was affected by the fact that the seas were filling us from rail to rail and lifting his engine house off the deck.

By the time Hallam and I got straightened away again on the rescue job some Whitby boys had pulled out of that harbor, four miles against a big sea, in a laid-up lifeboat of the steamer *City of Owen Sound* and by the time they got there a gallant gang from Port Hope had brought a fishboat up on the old Grand Truck, stooped the train, and dumped her off opposite the wreck, dragged her across Farewell’s frozen marsh, and pulled out and got the crew. All the rest of us got out of it was the exercise and a laugh.

But I got one thing more: the lasting memory of Capt. George Robinson’s wife -- he was sailing the *Mowat* then with a broken ankle, and Mrs. Robinson was cook. She is alive still in Port Hope,

eighty-four, and sometimes need glasses now to read! It was pitiful to see poor George hobbling around on one foot, leaning his weight on the capstan bars when they went to heave the *Mowat* off, after the gale died down. Mrs. Robinson, brown-eyed, bright faced, ordered two hundred tones of coal to be jettisoned, and anchors run out astern, and got the schooner off the boulders without much damage. But she did all the bossing by the mildest suggestions: when I asked her if she despaired before the lifeboat came she said, “Well, no, you see I kept on praying, and I knew the Lord would take care of us.”

The Port Hope lifesavers who did the Lord’s work were Capt. Johnny McMann and his brother, Charlie; Capt. Dick Edmonds; Jack McEvoy, whose brother was aboard the schooner; Tommy Norton: from New Castle or Darlington; Will Harvey and Capt. Clarke, from the Government life boat. They were all sailors and fishermen, and used the fishboat for their job. The Whitby boys who had the long, wet pull were Capt. Dick Goldring, of Maple Leaf, and his brother Capt. Ed. Goldring of the Northwest: Capt. Geo. Atkinson of the Madeline, Dan Cannon and Walter Pearson -- stonehookermen all.

My last sight of the *Mowat* was in the Bay of Quinte one bright morning in 1916, some miles above her birthplace, Mill Haven. She had come through the Upper Gap bound for Picton or Belleville with coal, while I was working down with the *Blue Peter*, bound for Carleton Island in search of an old French man-of-war sunk at the time of the conquest of Canada. (I found her too.) Capt. Wm. Savage, of Picton, was by this time master and owner of the *Mowat*, and gave me a friendly hail. He had bought in 1914, and sailed her for seven years. Then Capt. Thomas Vandusen of Picton, bought her. Soon afterwards – on Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> 1921 – the schooner was run down at night off the Ducks by a steamer, and Capt. Vandusen, his mate Jacob Corley, of Deseronto and his cook, Mrs. McGregory, of Port Hope were drowned. They were all in the after part of the vessel. George Keegan and John Minaker, sailors who were forward, were picked up. Of course, the schooner was not murdered and her afterguard drowned of malice aforethought. But the captain and mate of the steamer were very properly sent to jail for keeping such a poor lookout.

Strongest claim to kinship with Prince Edward County which this picker-up of unconsidered trifles can make is warm personal interest in sails and sailors. Next comes the fact that one of the points up Bald Head way, on the western coast of the county, where Lake Ontario thunders, bears his family name.

On one count or the other, or perhaps because of the pedagogical profession, he likes to offer hard nuts to crack, Dr. C. E. Stothers, inspector of public schools in Picton, has forwarded a list of sailing vessels about which he has no information. Dr. Stothers is making most commendable use of his office as a centre for records of county history, to which the scows and schooners of Prince Edward, in the old sailing days, contributed fascinating chapters. In truth the plough and the centreboard made Prince Edward County: the canning factory came later.

Dr. Stother’s list includes the *Oliver Mowat*, and, as taught today with my entrance examination paper forty-seven years ago, I have given the “answer” in the case of this vessel first, as above, because it was the easiest.

I know a little about all the schooners on which he seeks light, and will tell that little later; but perhaps many others, better informed, will tell what they know about any of these vessels meantime. If they will send it to schooner Days I can promise to look as wise as an owl and pass it on to Picton.

Here is Dr. Stothers' list:

HIBERNIA  
JOHN RAY  
FLYING SCUD  
OCEAN WAVE  
ELIZA QUINLAN  
FALCONER  
FABIOLA  
OLIVER MOWAT  
CONDOR  
JAMIESON

Continued – with letter to Telegram

### **Passing Hails**

Is Dresden's face red?

Dear Sir, - I happened to read your article on Schooner Days in last week's Telegram and noticed what appeared to me to be a couple of errors in respect of the steamer "*United Lumberman*".

You quote that the "*United Lumberman*" was in the ocean service and still going strong and that during the World War it would seem strange to see a vessel coming into port with the "*United Lumberman of Dresden*" across her stern.

For your information according to official records the "*United Lumberman*" foundered at Pier No. 9, Louise Basin, Quebec, Que., on April 28<sup>th</sup> 1928, and was a total loss.

And again, while the "*United Lumberman*" was built at Dresden in 1884, all vessels have to show the port of registry across their stern and not the place where they were built. The "*United Lumberman*" was registered in the Port of Wallaceburg in 1884 and the registry was transferred to the Port of Midland on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1908, and she remained there until registration cancelled. In this case during the war the word "*United Lumberman of Midland*" should have appeared on her stern and no doubt did as these markings have to be certified to by registration officials.

Yours truly  
A.E. MARTIN,  
Midland, Ont.