

Toronto Telegram, January 3, 1953
Schooner Days MLXXXVI (1086)
By C.H.J. Snider

City coal late that Christmas

IT was blowing fresh from the westward when the schooner *Garibaldi* of Toronto, Captain McGlenn, cleared from Fair Haven, N.Y., with a cargo of 350 tons of coal for her Canadian hailing port, 135 miles away.

This *Garibaldi*, one of several schooners then bearing the popular name of the Italian sailor patriot, was a sharply built low-rigged two-master, carrying, beside the usual fore-and-aft canvas, a big square-sail with a single raffle above it. She was a staunch vessel, rather mark, and owned by J. and J. T. Matthews, of Toronto, as a big black "M" on her fore gafftopsail attested after that firm got her.

The headwind forced her into the harbor at Presquile, after she had crossed Lake Ontario in a long port tack towards the north shore, and here she lay, eight miles from her destination, until the sea died down. When the sun set in wrath among the clouds that capped the dark surges on Saturday, Nov. 20, 1880, she had worked up the lake again until she was abreast Frenchman's Bay. This was then an active grain shipping port, about eighteen miles east of Toronto.

Beating in vain

With the setting of the sun the wind, still westerly, increased in force. A close-reefed mainsail, reefed foresail and flying jib, was all the vessel could carry. Notwithstanding this press of canvas the little green light marking Frenchman's Bay east pier had not been left astern by 10 o'clock. The *Garibaldi* was diving up and down in onshore and offshore tacks, barely holding her own, so the captain gave orders to put her about and run back down the lake.

Blocks, sheets and halliards had been coated with frozen spray flung high, and it was with great difficulty that the close-reefed mainsail, not needed for the run, was furled and gasketed on the boom. The halliards had to be chopped to get it down. The *Garibaldi* steered wildly with the large proportion of head-canvas left, so all hands save one man who had to keep the wheel, went to close-reef the foresail. While this was being done the foresail jibed, carrying away its gaff and its boom and flying into tatters.

Ere this wreck could be cut adrift the staysail was blown from its bands. Everything was so coated with ice that attempts at rehoisting this necessary sail were useless. The schooner, accordingly, ran on down the lake under her flying jib alone, being only able to drive before the wind.

It was blowing so hard that under this meagre patch of sail and the push of the seas the *Garibaldi* ran at ten knots. Sunday morning, while it was yet dark, she passed Presqu'ile Bluff and the menace of Prince Edward County's hundred-mile lee shore confronted her. The *Belle*

Sheridan, vainly seeking to enter Presqu'ile, had been wrecked at Weller's Bay two weeks before.

By desperate efforts a tackle was rigged on the main gaff in place of the chopped halliards, and the peak of the mainsail was hoisted high enough to give her some counter-balancing after-sail. It was loss of that which had doomed the *Belle Sheridan*. Before eight o'clock in the morning the *Garibaldi* was steered into Presqu'ile harbor. She could not get very far with such small canvas, and anchored below Salt Point in the open roadstead.

Saved?

The frozen sails were furled after a fashion, and the crew, who had had no food for fifteen hours, were all in the cabin in the act of stowing hot breakfast when Ping! the chain cable parted in a gust coming screaming from the land, and the *Garibaldi* headed lake-wards on her own account. The lee shore was only six miles away.

All rushed from breakfast, and pulled up the heads of the two remaining jibs to give her steerage way. Capt. McGlenn took a stern range on Presquile and peered for the squat little lighthouse, far inland, which indicated the difficult entrance to Weller's Bay – a safe harbor, if only he could make it.

She went slowly, for the wind, though wild, was fluky, sucking out of various openings in the land. For some reason they did not reset the peak of the mainsail. She had only her jobs on. It was noon before she was up with the bar which blocks the shifting entrance to the bay. Slowly she cleared the tail of the bar. There was a 2-hour tide of marsh water out of Weller's Bay most days, and she was stemming the ebb. Just as they felt safe the headsails flapped like thunderbirds shaking their wings. An eddy wind, whirling from Bald Head, had caught her aback. Some rushed to trim the headsails over others to get the peak of the mainsail up again, but before either could be done she circled for the bar, struck, and was smothered in the uproar of billows surging in from the angry lake. Their spray shot as high as the cross-trees.

To the rescue!

The Prince Edward schooner *John Walters* was anchored safe inside. Her little yawl boat was not much to face the rage of Ontario's wintry gale in, but Captain Walters – renowned, the vessel named after him – put off with some of his crew. It was all they could do to scull and row from their moorings to the entrance. When they struck the breakers rolling in they were tossed so high that their boat seemed to stand on her own sternpost.

They could see a little schooner coming across under reefed sails from Presqu'ile. She was towing the Presquile lighthouse boat, the strongest and best sabot for miles around. This boat was of Quicks and Covells and Sherwoods - and Dow Claus. It cast off, to windward of the wreck. Just then the *Walter's* yawl boat, still to leeward, capsized. The Presqu'ile schooner raced on to the help of the *Walter's* men.

The lighthouse boat got alongside the *Garibaldi*, and picked off the woman cook and one of the sailors. The Presqu'île fishermen got these two safely ashore, and pulled out again through the surf. This time they got two more sailors, and landed them. Then they made a third try, for the rest.

But the short November day was darkening down to night. They carried away their rowlocks, and their boat got out of control. With difficulty they beached her, built a big fire, and waited for the day. The roused countryside watched all night by the bonfire's gleam to see if one head bobbed in the breakers. Nothing came ashore but bursted bulwarks and deck fittings.

IN A FROZEN PRISON

Capt. McGlenn, Lewis Stonehouse, the mate, and one sailor named John C. Nelson had been left aboard the *Garibaldi*. The seas kept making a clean breach over her, but in the eyes of the ship, under the small deck of the topgallant forecandle, forward of the windlass, was one dry spot. Here the three cuddled together, the mate lying across the captain's legs. He refused to budge. He said he was going to die where he was.

He did. When morning came Lewis Stonehouse was frozen as solid as the ice which cased him in a block. The captain lay under him, living, helplessly fast, both his legs frozen. John Nelson had found a bit of loose board. Painfully began to chip his way out of the crowded icebox. Tons of ice had walled the entrance up, and it was hours before he chipped himself free enough to even change his position.

Seeing no signs of life aboard the ice-masked vessel the shore watch had waited for the sea to run down before attempting to reach her. When the Presqu'île men at length clambered over the ice-mounted rail the *Garibaldi* looked like a great white deserted mausoleum. They heard a scratching and scraping, then Nelson's fist, with its fragment of board, suddenly appeared through the frozen cascade of ice hanging from the forecandle head to the deck. It startled every one. They rushed to free him, and then got axes and chopped Lewis Stonehouse's body from off Captain McGlenn, and freed him from his ice fetters.

Captain McGlenn recovered. So did the *Garibaldi*. She iced up so heavily that the lake waves could do no more damage to her. In the spring, when the drifts melted, her cargo of coal was jettisoned, and she was towed off the bar, leaking like a basket. She was sold "Up Above." She foundered five miles off Port Elgin in Lake Huron, Oct. 3, 1887. Her dimensions were length 107.7 feet, beam 23.7, depth 9.9; 209 tons register. Built at Port Rowan by Woodward and Wolverton, 1863, A.E.D. McKay, Hamilton, had been her registered owner in 1864 before Mathews brothers got her.

[Transcribed R. Palmer, 2020]