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Schooner Days MCVII (1107)
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Happier Bride's Diary - Old time Terrors of Wood Creek

When taking Commodore Jarvis' racing schooner *Haswell* from Lake Ontario to salt water some time ago (she eventually reached Honolulu) we went by the shortest water route to New York-about 450 miles. The airline is 100 miles shorter and the road line 100 longer.

At Oswego we lifted out her masts and laid them on trestles on deck for the schooner would have to go under fixed bridges. Then, towed by the R.C.Y.C. work-boat *Opeonga*, we entered the Oswego canal, which has paralleled the river of the Onondagas for a century. So we came to the Erie or Thousand Ton Barge Canal, and went through the Oneida river and Lake Oneida and the former Wood Creek, to Rome, N. Y. and Utica. Then by the canalized river and former swamps to Schenectady, Albany and the Hudson. Here we upended our mast again, beside a friendly oil barge with good derricks, and went on down the long river, past Manhattan through Hell's Gate to the great yacht yard at City Island.

These long three pleasant spring days of towing and sailing, with every night 'in the straw' as sailors say. The only excitement was nearly going over the power dam at picturesque Little Falls, a junior Niagara, one morning in the mist.

It was the same route that Mrs Anne MacDonell, bride of the High Sheriff of the old Home District of Upper Canada, had to travel 148 years ago, but so much improved that the recollection of it heightens one 's admiration for that young lady's courage and endurance.

Wood Creek was the dread of early navigators of the Ontario-New York waterways. This essential link in the water chain was choked with dead trees, uprooted and drowned in each year's spring floods, stranded in each summers' evaporation, so that the serpentine creek was usually a long, stagnant swamp through the forest filled with creeping things living and dead.

Snapping turtles abound and the tannic acid in the stagnant waters blisters the skin and raises sores on arms and legs, hands and feet. Drinking water had to be brought along in barrels as on the Atlantic or Dead Sea.

The difficulties Wood Creek presented in getting powder provisions, ship's stores and seamen up from New York, were a factor in the British loss of Oswego to the French in 1756. Its obstruction has been obliterated by modern canalling, but when Anne MacDonell and her companions had to navigate it on their way towards New York in 1805, in a four man rowing boat with sails, it was little improved over its conditions fifty years ago.

Leaving Oswego June 10th Anne's party had slept three nights later at a wretched house four miles along the creek. Her well-kept diary recorded:

Though there was only one room with half a floor for a dozen people, the sail made our bedroom. We were thickly stowed and plenty of snoring. I was too ill to sleep, and spent a

wretched night.

Basket Breakfast.

June 13th Rose early and off before six o'clock. Stopped at Smith's Tavern, but breakfast from our own baskets, as we could get nothing fit to eat on this road. The inhabitants seem as poor as their huts are miserable, tho there there is a house every four or five miles, and it matters not, if a Tavern or no Tavern, you pay the same.

"Stopped at Oak Orchard, 12 miles from the Lake Oneida, a good looking house but ill-natured people. We therefore dined under an oak tree very comfortably, a fine spring at its foot a boon to us, as on those rivers and lakes we had no water but what we carried in jugs, the river water being the color of cherry brandy.

This creek is more cooked than the Lake Oneida River, so much so that we went 9 miles to gain three. After passing Oak Orchard six miles is cleared out, and I doubt not in time will be a pretty river, though so narrow in many places as scarcely to admit two boats to pass. The land is very low, rarely a bank to be seen, and must of course be over-flowed in the spring, though the houses are close to the creek, and the people subject to fevers, owing to the water they say."