

The Toronto Telegram, July 2, 1955.
Schooner Days No. MCCXXVII (1227)
By C.H.J. Snider

Dominion Day in Belleville.

Poor Jack Sidley of Belleville. He it was who lost the *Picton* with all hands. Including his own son, though he gave his life to save him. A good-hearted, brave, and enterprising sailor, without an enemy in the world, over-daring, under-cautious. We always think of him when Dominion Day draws near (if it has not yet been rechristened Government Day.) He lost her on the first of July, 1900. He was a big-vessel man, and was used to the hard driving stormalonging of the Upper Lakes. Two or three years before he had been in command of the big ocean-crossing schooner *Edward Blake*, and lost her, upon Lake Huron. A man must live. He came back to Lake Ontario to look for something more within his means. The *Picton* had been built by Hugh Gaw in Picton in 1868, a grand barley carrier, 98 feet long, 22 ft 6 beam, 9 feet in the hold, and 180 tons register. She was the pride of Prince Edward while she hailed from Picton, her name port, but she was sold to Port Hope for the lumber trade and hailed from Port Hope then for the rest of her days. Tremendous deckloads of lumber put aboard her straightened her out, and, by the time she was thirty, careful sailors looked askance at her. She had been strongly built, her keelson was two feet through each way, and she was a fast sailor. Won the schooner regatta at Cobourg a couple of seasons in succession. But Cobourg purchasers of her from Port Hope owners let her lie idle for two years, because they did not consider it profitable to rebuild her. Then along came Capt. Jack Sidley, looking for a ship cheap. He knew what he was getting, but he could not know how far gone she was. No one did. He spent a lot of time and money overhauling her and her outfit in Cobourg, and took her away happily for the short-run coal trade to Belleville, only sixty miles of it in open water.

All went fairly well for two or three months. He got freights both ways at times, and the *Picton* was repaying what he had laid out on her. When they were unloading coal in Belleville late in June, Nolton Sandford, equally good on deck and in the galley, braced Capt. Sidley for leave, for just one trip. Nolton, a very popular Belleville baseball player, explained: There were four teams in the Belleville Baseball League, the Rolling Mills, the Grand Trunk, the City, and the Printers. The Printers had a chance for the Championship in the coming Dominion Day match, and they needed Nolton for a pitcher. He certainly could pitch – but not from the galley of the *Picton*. Sidley was reluctant to replace him for even one trip, for he relied on him, and besides Clark Taylor, the mate, had gone to go master of the *Eliza Fisher*. Mrs. Sidley, who lived in Belleville, was sent to get Mrs. Sanford to persuade Nolton to change his mind. But Nolton felt he could not let his Printer friends down. So Capt. Sidley shipped Walter Dunn of Belleville, to take Nolton's place on deck. Barney Ayres went as cook. Frank Smith of Belleville, a young man of an old sailing family, was shipped as mate, in Capt. Taylor's place. This left the *Picton* with three new hands – and even so, shorthanded, for she required two sailors, as well as captain, mate and cook. But schooners of her size often went shorthanded in the summer time. Vessy,

Capt. Sidley's 12-year old son, was just finishing school for the term, so he was allowed to begin his holidays with this trip. Capt. Sidley had once lost a passenger by the man slipping off the deckload. That was years before. Never afterwards would Jack Sidley accept a passenger. Vessey was signed on as a "hand". While he would do his best, his 70 odd pounds could not be every effective anywhere but in the galley. Mrs. Sidley wanted to come, to look after him and take the cook's place, releasing him for the deck. But Capt. Jack Sidley would have none of that. Something told him to keep her at home. It should have kept Vessey at home, too. But – well, Jack Sidley did what he thought was for the best. The Printers won the championship, that cold Dominion Day, with Nolton Sanford pitching. Belleville, widely enthusiastic, chipped in 98 dimes as a present for the victorious pitcher. As a married man with a family, who was losing a week's pay in the *Picton* by staying ashore for the ball game, Nolton felt, justly, that his amateur standing was not imperilled by acceptance of this douceur. When he learned of what had happened he pressed a \$10 bill into Mrs. Sidley's hand. Without a word. He could not speak. His face was wet. So was the bill.

[Transcribed G.B.M. Aug. 19, 1976.]