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Schooner Days MCCXXX (1230).
By C.H.J. Snider

Smith Falls, Schooner Port.

Pioneers planted honey locusts in Upper Canada to the life they had left behind – the laburnums dripping gold cascades in England, the acacias which had adorned estates from which the Loyalists were driven in the American revolution. Sight and scent of the mauve and green tassels beloved of the bees, among the graceful fernlike pinnated leaves of Ontario locust trees, ever recall old missions of mellowed red brick. They are so often found bowered among these crooked limbed rough barked giants waving pale green fronds higher than the wide mouthed chimney tops. Lovely trees they are, murmurous of mellow prosperity, distilled from the hopes and fears and lives and loves of three, four and five generations.

There must have been honey locusts in Smith Falls, Ont., when the schooner *Acacia*, was built there in 1873. Many of us, confound the honey locusts with Acacia. Alfred Ayearst of Kingston, this vessels first owner, may be forgiven if he made an mistake choosing her name. If not a honey locust, and built not of locust wood but of good Ontario white oak, she was certainly a honey of a schooner for forty years. Whoever christened her may have chosen *Acacia* because he shared the common belief that there was nothing luckier than three A's in the name on a vessel's bow and stern.

Smith Falls, in Lanark County, midway between Ottawa and the St. Lawrence River, and 60 miles from the N.E. corner of Lake Ontario, is not the place where one would look for a great lakes schooners ways. But fellow Canadians should not forget the 125 miles of Rideau Canal completed in 1832 by the sweat of Imperial soldiers and the taxpayers of Great Britain for the defence of Canada West. The idea was that if the St. Lawrence was impassable above Montreal, by reason of its rapids and enemy menace, a backdoor route up the Ottawa River and through the Rideau to Kingston. Even in the present century passenger steamers and tows of tugs and barges, navigated the route between Kingston and Ottawa. The Blue Barge Line made two trips a week between Ottawa and Oswego, where it connected with the Erie Canal traffic to New York. Smith Falls was not so far back in the bush as sailors might think. Several steamers were built there, or near there, and more than one tall sparred sailing vessel. There was plenty of tall white oak for timbers, frames and planking, and good white pine for decks, quickwork, and masts. One schooner was the *Dundonald*, 262 tons register, built in the canal in 1859, re-rigged and changed in name 2 years later to the brigantine *City of Toronto* - one of several vessels owned by J.G. Laidlaw of this port. The brigantine *George Laidlaw* made a voyage to the West Indies. This *Dundonald*, before her name was changed, made two round trips between Port Whitby and Oswego in April of 1861, delivering 21,654 bushels of Canadian wheat in eleven days.

[Transcribed G.B.M. Aug. 22 , 1976.]