

**Toronto Telegram, September 3, 1955**  
**Schooner Days MCCXXXVI (1236)**  
**By C. H. J. Snider**

## **SOMETHING SAID NOT TO GO**

SOMETHING told me not to go in that schooner. When I saw her in Baltimore I wanted to. She had just been overhauled and reconditioned for Florida cruising. She was named the *Marvel* and a trip, south by the inland waterway along the Atlantic coast, in good company and solid comfort in a big three-master was marvelously appealing.

She was almost as long as the old Canaller *Albacore*, in which I had sailed years before, but lighter, rather like the American Upper Lakers designed to carry such big deckloads – half their cargo – in the lumber trade.

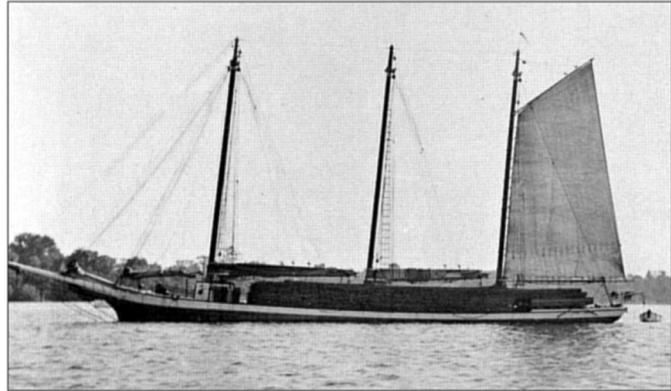
Keelson and stanchions and all her holds showed evidence of years of hard lumber-shoving. But all had been done over, and was spotlessly white with ground cork paint which prevents sweating and dampness inboard. She had 15 brass rimmed swing ports a side, lighting in the many staterooms. Her common rooms and saloon were well fitted for comfort, chintz cushions, books, pictures, radio, and, for all I knew or cared, television. I hate that. The staterooms were furnished simply but attractively.

## **ALL INDUCEMENTS**

She had a stretch of deck 128 feet long, the old hatches replaced by skylights, with a trunk cabin aft like a laker's, and a deck forecastle forward, like tropic traders. She had a charming hostess and a confidence-inspiring crew of real sailors.

She had been built in 1891 - my own first sailing year - and like our vanished lakers, she looked her age, a little flattened out and angular, even slightly bogged, after decades in the lumber trade. Her first venture into passenger cruising had taken her from Baltimore to Miami, 1,271 miles by the inland waterways, in 33 days. One could think of less pleasant ways of holidaying than going in her, and the price was very reasonable.

What lured me strongest was her three freshly scraped masts, each 100 feet from cap-band to keel, bald-headed, no topmasts, with three big square-headed gaff-and-boom sails of



*Schooner Levin J. Marvel shown in 1938 while in service as a lumber carrier. Photo Frank A. Moorshead Jr., Maritime Archaeological and Historical Society collection*

about equal area, and three jibs, or a jumbo staysail and two jibs, on the 30-foot spike bowsprit spearing ahead above her gracefully curved Chesapeake cutwater.

Five or six thousand square feet of wistful cotton duck, in foresail, mainsail, spanker, jumbo, standing jib and flying jib, would tempt any shellback starving on nylon tablecloths of no breadth and all “aspect ratio.” Here was something one could put one’s back into, on halliard and on sheet, bunts that asked for sea-boots and handspikes when it came to stowing. And besides, she looked to be almost the last example of her worthy race, the wooden commercial schooner of this continent.

## **WHAT WAS IT?**

But something told me not to go in her. It was not common sense. Common sense didn’t keep me from crossing Lake Ontario single handed in the pancake *Chicago Girl* with six inches freeboard – or sailing successfully the sharp-ended skiff *Little World*, with five fatalities to her discredit – or taking the decrepit *White Wings* up to Port Credit on the edge of the hurricane that destroyed Galveston – or going in tarry currachs and in stone ballasted half-decked Irish hookers in the Aran Islands and the chops of Galway Bay – or crossing the ocean in R-100.

But something told me not to go in the *Marvel*.

On Monday Aug. 8 Schooner Days was in the Atlantic aboard the good ship *Roonagh Head*, wearing winter overcoat, for the ship was light and lively, and a dozen icebergs were between us and the Straits of Belle Isle far ahead. On Friday the 12th we were steaming up the noble St. Lawrence, Quebec beautiful as a golden dream in the morning light, the whole day a poem of green shores, dimpling waters and sun- drenched air.

## **FATAL FRIDAY**

That very same Friday the 12th, ten corpses in lifebelts over beach clothes lay in the fire hall at North Beach, Maryland, 30 miles from Washington, awaiting identification and two other bodies so garbed had been removed and taken to Annapolis, Md., for burial preparations. All were cruise passengers of the three-masted schooner *Marvel*, that something had me not to go in.

Four more passengers were missing. Six more, four men, a woman and a boy, had been plucked from a duck-blind in Chesapeake Bay by two heroes in a rescue launch. They had clung to the wave-washed blind, not knowing where they were, in a night that matched Hurricane Hazel in the Humber Valley last October. The captain of the *Levin J. Marvel*, and a few of his 23 passengers, had been rescued by the National Guard.

That same Monday when we were wondering about ice in the North Atlantic (we sighted it Tuesday), the *Marvel* had left Annapolis with twenty-three cruising passengers eager to escape the continental heat. She had been cruising for ten years then, and had a crew of four seamen – enough to handle her in the enclosed waters of Chesapeake Bay, anyone would agree. Lake Ontario offers more perils. It was delightful in the Bay. But a hurricane, as merciless as her sister Hazel of a year ago, caught the *Marvel* and smashed and mangled her on North Reach till

no fragment left was larger than a cabin door. A dripping young woman in canvas shoes and torn beach clothes, hurled up the shore by a giant wave, and collapsing as the wave receded, was the harbinger of the tragedy.

Something told me not to go in that schooner.

Like Mr. Gus Ryder, Marilyn Bell's mentor, I believe in divine guidance. Goodness and mercy have indeed followed me all the days of my life. If divine guidance leads to the valley of the shadow of death by hurricane, it will still be goodness and mercy.

God have mercy upon us all.