

**Toronto Telegram, 1957**  
**Schooner Days MCCCIII (1,303)**  
**By C.H.J. Snider**

## **Sunrise on Schooner Days**

Once upon a time a junior at Toronto Collegiate Institute (ex-Old Grammar School) descended the lower reaches of Jarvis St. till stopped by the stench of the open sewer mouth at the bottom of that stately thoroughfare.

Stonehookers then lay in the scummy slip there to caulk their leaky seams with the grease congealed by the cooler water of the harbour coming in contact with the steaming raw sewage. Whenever the angel troubled this pool of healing bubbles of gas tar and sewer gas rose and burst with fetid fragrance. Indigents eked out of the price of a beer by skimming it near St. Lawrence Market for soap-making.

Lying head to wind at the mouth of the slip with sails hoisted, a gaunt square-ended scow schooner showed a curious legend across her stern – faded gilt on a black ground: “BARQUE SWALLOW of Port Credit.”

The skipper, Capt. Steve Peer, paced her cabin top, casting a searching eye townward at every turn. His “pummy” or mate-cook-crew was long overdue from the old City Arms, and a fair wind home was wasting itself while the Barque waited.

“Are you going to Port Credit, sir?” asked the knee-panted junior. “Hope so,” answered Capt. Peer. “If that danged fellow shows up. Been gone an hour now, to sell his can of sewer grease. Kin you steer?” “Yes.” said junior proudly. He had never handled a tiller but knew the tricks of a big vessel’s wheel.

“If I take ye to the Credit how ye git back?”

“Shanks mare and the radial,” answered the boy.

“Cheaper than the train,” said Steve approvingly.

They were singling up the lines and breasting her off from the dock when the pummy zig-zagged aboard. Kneepants feared he might be displaced, but Steve said: “You show me how good you can steer” – and he knew he was “in.”

But not for what or for how much. As you are to learn.

The voyage to Credit in the creaking rheumatic, blunt-ended scow steered by a groaning wooden tiller, was packed with prospect. It was not only the hooker in the tossing sea, with the good easterly breeze filling her torn and oft-patched sails. Steve Peer, who had sailed his own craft when he was a 13-year-old orphan, declared that stonehooking was slavery, but he wouldn’t give it up for anything on earth or water while he had his strength. He had sailed in big vessels – but the stonehooker was his own boss.

Liverpool Andy, the pummy was a Barnardo boy who had stowed away in a banana boat out of Liverpool and lived on green bananas in the hold until the pangs of indigestion drove him out in the Azores. His poor face was all scarred with malnutrition ulcers. Apart from beer, he was a likable innocent. Steve was a T.T. He had experienced liquor and the Grace of God, and was a worthy pillar in the Port Credit Methodist Church.

The junior learned why the puzzling “Barque Swallow” crossed the hooker’s stern. She wasn’t a barque at all – barques are square-rigged and three-masted and she was a fore-and-aft schooner, and anyway, vessels did not paint “schooner” or “steamer” before their names.

It appeared that she was very ancient. So much so that her bilges were pioneer pine trees, barked and hewn to make rounded corners joining sides and bottom. She had been an open sand scow, used to fill in the site for the second jail in Toronto at the foot of Berkeley St. Here, in her youth, she had seen men hanging on gibbets from the old jail walls, in the time of public executions.

But Capt. John Sponton an old square-rigged saltwater tar settled at Port Credit, had bought her before such styles in public neckties had gone out, and transformed her. He had decked her over, masted her, painted her up to the nines, and above all, given her two yards and a square top-sail on her foremast – and a name. The yards were his pretext for registering her as the “Barque Swallow” Barques are square rigged and he was proud to assert this characteristic in common in his transferred sand scow. Her square-rigged feature had disappeared years ago, but the name remained as enrolled. That’s the law.

Before the junior got his senior matric, he had sold to John Ross Robertson, MP, founder of *The Telegram*, an illustrated article on the ancient landmark of the stonehooker fleet. And so began his yet unfinished voyage through the broad ocean of newspaper life, with its rich rewards in human contacts, and incidental satisfactions of publishing three thin books and five fat ones, and 1,300 instalments (copyrighted) of Schooner Days. Thirteen hundred? Time for a breather.

New Year’s Resolve No. 1957 – To get Schooner Days into a presentable book this year if we do nothing else.

Be seeing you. — Schooner days

*[Note: Our cutting is undated; based on the author’s “New Year’s Resolve”, we have assumed it was published very early in 1957. The editor, Naval Marine Archive.]*