

Toronto Telegram, July 14, 1934
Schooner Days, CXLVII (147)
By C.H.J. Snider

REGATTA OF 'SIXTY FIVE

"THE HOOKER MEN were great for racing," said Abram Block, J.P., the patriarch of Port Credit, one afternoon last year before he passed on to exceeding great reward, "but of all the races I sailed myself or heard of none could beat the one between the little *Catharine Hayes*, the *Hunter*, and Bob Collin's scow, *Samson*.

"My own part in it was of the tiniest, but it gives me a thrill yet to know of how I woke early one sunny Sunday morning, while all was still in the creek, and looked out of our window and saw, among the crowded hookers, the winner of the great race with the Union Jack flying from her masthead. She had come in during the night, while everyone was in bed, and the proud victors had left their colors flying for all to see and turned in for a sleep. No, the Union Jack is only properly flown by a King's ship on certain occasions, but that's what they had at the masthead. I dare say they felt like kings.

"The *Catharine Hayes* was a little old centreboard sloop, one of the first centreboarders on the lakes; she was 41 feet long, 12 feet beam, and only 3 feet 9 inches deep in the hold. She had been built at Toronto when Toronto was still York, in 1833; just a little thing, so small her rudder was hung outside of her stern, like a skiff's, and she had only two sails, jib and mainsail. Uncle Tom Blowers, ancestor of the Blowers' clan, owned her here in the Credit at this time.

"The *Hunter* was a two-masted schooner, like the *Defiance*, full in the bows, deep in the keel, and fast. She had a square topsail on the foremast. Charles Hall of Toronto owned her at this time, which was 1865. but she was sailed by Capt. Charlie Hare and Louie Evans of Port Credit. Later on Uncle Tom Blowers bought her and rebuilt her for his sons, James and George. Charlie Hare often sailed her singlehanded, though she was a good chunk of a schooner, and could carry five or six toise of stone easily, or sixty tons deadweight; twice the load of the *Catharine Hayes*. From this single-handing she was often nicknamed the Loner, or Lone Star, and that is what she was christened when Uncle Tom rebuilt her.

"Bob Collins' scow, *Samson*, was bigger even than the *Hunter*, and, like the strong man for whom she was named, she could carry the biggest load of all – eighty tons. She was a fore-and-aft schooner, with seven sails. Caleb Giles built her. She swamped, ten years after this, coming around Toronto Point the night the *Ann Bellchambers* was lost, and that was the 25th of November, 1875. The *Samson* drowned William Hutchinson, who was then her skipper, and the man who was with him, and washed across Humber Bay and up on the low cliffs at Hooten's Point, or Northcote's, and broke up. But this was ten years after my story.

"The hooker fleet were lying in Toronto on a Saturday, after unloading their cargoes of cordwood as customary at the foot of Yonge street. Somehow a race was got up for a cash prize of \$5 and a supper at a place kept by George Somebody-or-other on the north side of Front street,

just east of Church; a famous hostelry in the days when farmer's wagons filled Front street for blocks around the market and the masts of hookers looked like a forest in Yonge street slip. A five dollar prize in those days was enough to make men walk up hill on their hands.

"Uncle Tom Blowers sailed the *Catharine Hayes* with Uncle Dan Sharpe. They borrowed a balloon jib from the yacht *Prima Donna*, a 10-tonner then owned by J. Hamilton, wharfinger, of Toronto. She had sailed in the very first Prince of Wales Cup race in 1860, when King Edward was in Canada, five years before this. I don't know whether Uncle Tom and Uncle Dan had any Toronto men to help them; perhaps they had. Charlie Hare and Louie Evans had Toronto helpers in the *Hunter*, and the helpers brought along a plentiful supply of ballast in stone jars.

"The course was up the bay from the foot of Yonge street, where the hookers did a great trade in cordwood fuel for the steamers; out through the Western Gap, around the Island and in through the Eastern Gap, which was then just a channel recently broken through the sandbar; and then back to Yonge street. The wind was strong from the northwest.

"As everybody expected, the *Hunter* ran away from the other two coming up the bay, and even held her lead on the scow when they wung out and ran dead before the wind down the west shore of the Island. Her square topsail pulled like a horse. When they jibed over and dashed eastward down the Island shore she stretched away and led by a mile when it came time to haul up for the beat through the sandbar cut.

"In spite of the *Prima Donna's* racing jib the poor little *Katie Hayes* was by this time a bad last.

"But a race is never over till the finish gun. Once they came on the wind between the cornjuice auxiliary and the ticklishness of the square topsail sailing close-hauled, the *Hunter* was three sheets in the wind most of the time, sometimes in irons and sometimes out.

"'Keep her full!' Charlie would bawl to Louie.

"'She's as full as a goat now, fuller'n I am,' Louie would answer.

"'And that's no halfway job,'" Charlie would retort.

"While they would be arguing the square topsail would come aback on them and they would have to box her off on the other tack to get her going. Their Toronto helpers only peered despairingly into the empty stone jars.

"The *Samson* waded by the *Hunter* like the son of Manoah carrying off the gates of Gaza, and the *Catharine Hayes* came along like Delilah on his trail.

"Before they got inside the bay the *Samson* took a very heavy puff. She was a stiff vessel as most scows were, and though she heeled some she wrung off her foremast head, and had to come to an anchor, while the little *Catharine* slipped past her.

"Once in the bay, with open water and only two tacks to make to reach the foot of Yonge street, the *Hunter* filled her topsail and came on like a house afire. But the *Catharine Hayes*

outpointed her, and though the Hunter passed her, it was to leeward, and when they both came about on a the last tack for Yonge street slip the little sloop had the shortest road to travel and shot in between the cordwood piles well ahead.

“There was a great to-do as all hands were carried up to Front street for the supper, but as soon as Uncle Tom and Uncle Dan got the five dollar bill their appetites were appeased, and they slipped away and got back on board and made sail for the Credit. That’s how it came that the *Catharine Hayes* lay in the creek that still Sunday morning with colors flying, while Thomas and Daniel slept the sleep of the just. The whole village soon woke them up when they discovered the flag and demanded the news.

“The little *Catharine Hayes* was Emily Blowers’ chief asset when her husband, Uncle Tom, died a few years later, just after getting the *Hunter* rebuilt. Mrs. Blowers was a resourceful woman, and with the advice and assistance of Mr. James Abbs of Toronto, a market gardener in South Parkdale with whom one of her daughters worked, she rebuilt the *Catharine Hayes*. Not before the little sloop needed it, either, for she was 36 years old by this time, and while she could carry cordwood she had got so soft they were afraid to put a load of stone in her. Mrs. Blowers turned her into a schooner, giving her two masts and topmasts, and raised her sides 12 inches, and out of gratitude to the gentleman who had been such a good friend to her and her daughter she re-christened the rebuilt hooker the *James Abbs*.”

Passing hails

THE THREE FRIENDS

Sir,—We noticed an article in your Saturday evening paper called *The Three Friends*, and we would just like to mention to you that we are descendants of the Field whom you mention in your article. Also, we might say we have a halliard block off the vessel you mention.

We thought this information might! be of interest to you.

Yours truly,
GEO. A. FIELD,
R. R. No. 1 Whitby, Ont.

PICKERING REMEMBERS.

“Among the most interesting stories that a person can read are those that refer to the sea or lake. In no other walk of life is a person called upon to endure hardships more than in that of the sea or lake. There is something attractive in the life of a sailor, but there are times when he is called upon to perform acts of real heroism and endure suffering. For many weeks the Toronto Telegram, in its Saturday edition, contained interesting tales of the life of the sailor on Lake Ontario. In last Saturday’s edition there is the story of a sailing vessel, the *Three Friends*, a schooner engaged in the coal and grain trade on Lake Ontario . . . Today George Field is still using some of the tackle taken from the boat on his farm on the lake shore, and has a piece of this boat in his barn. — Pickering News.