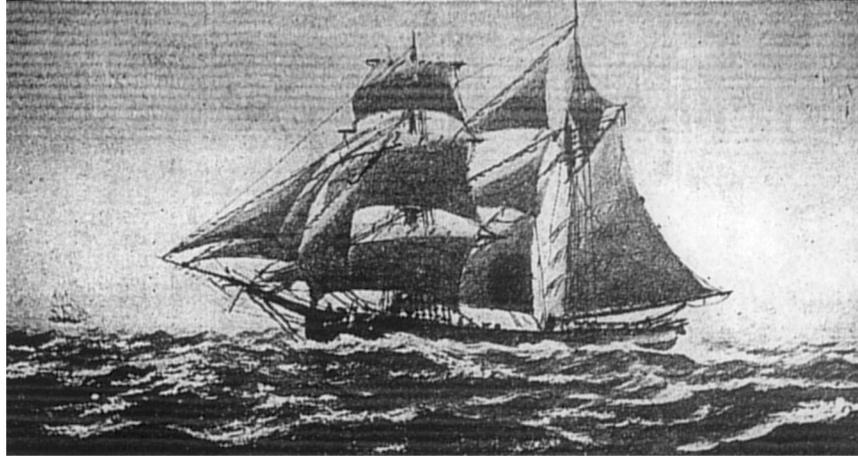


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Schooner Days II (2)  
by C.H.J. Snider

### Wild Man Who Sailed In His Socks



*(As painted by Jos. F. McGinnis, lake sailor of the period.)*

*"Oh, we're bound down from Marquette  
And both my hands are sore,  
I've been pushing a wheelbarrow  
And I'll do it no more.*

*And I'm hump-backed from shovelling.  
So listen to my roar!  
When we fetch up at Cleveland  
I'll shake Red from Ore."*

*The schooner Mary Ann Lydon, central figure in Magistrate J. J. O'Connor's lively description of a white squall last week, went to Lake Erie soon after the remarkable experience off Oswego, told by Mr. O'Connor, who at this time (August, 1875), was one of her crew. Let him tell what happened in Lake Erie.*

"We were light, bound for Cleveland to load coal. We ran into a thunder squall about 3 o'clock in the morning, and it hove us down on our beam ends.

"We got her straightened away without mishap, and double reefed her all around. The wind continued with terrific force out of the northward, and stiff and all as the *Lydon* was we had to keep a man standing by each halliard, to lower away if she failed to come back in the heavy puffs.

"Capt. Tom Price, our Old Man, was a terror to carry on. I can see him now, as I did then by the lightning flashes, squatted on the cabin top in his socking feet, in the most cheerful manner, and mum as an oyster. That was one thing that Tom Price always did – he took to his socks and enjoyed himself when others would be looking for lifeboats. He had a great reputation for coolness in emergencies, because he never said anything. He stuttered terribly, and when he got really interested the words just would not come. I have heard shout and shake his fist at the mate, Jerry London, and suddenly explode: "Dammit, Jerry you know what I mean. Can't say it. Do it!"

"Jerry London was what sailors called a 'card' too. He once stole a schooner off Lake Erie, took her up to Alpena on Lake Michigan, and sold her there, just for a lark.

"We battered away at it all night and all next day, with occasional lulls and then thunder squalls of the most violent kind resuming. By four o'clock that afternoon we were in sight of Cleveland, with the wind now heavy from the southwest.

### **An interlude for hymns**

"Do you know that hymn? –

"Brightly beams Our Father's mercy  
From His light house evermore  
But to us He leaves the keeping,  
Of the lights along the shore.  
Let the lower lights be burning,  
Send a gleam across the wave:  
Some poor fainting struggling seaman  
You may rescue, you may save."

"It was written by P. P. Bliss, a contemporary of Moody and Sankey, and its inspiration was the harbour lights of Cleveland. The first light was built high on Lighthouse Hill, overlooking the waterfront, in 1829, replaced by another tower in 1872, which was only three years old at the time I speak of. It has since been abandoned and torn down, though the keeper's dwelling, a fine three-story house, still stands in the heart of the present downtown Cleveland, at West 9th street and Lakeside avenue.

"This old light was the 'lighthouse evermore' of the hymn, and the "lights along the shore" were the lanterns down on the breakwater and entrance to Cuyahoga Creek, which, when all was said and done, were more important to the man trying to make Cleveland on a dark stormy night than the tall light on the hill. Poor Bliss and his wife lost their lives in a railway wreck at Ashtabula in December, '76.

### **The lower lights were burning**

"By the time we had got abreast of Cleveland the 'lower lights' were burning in the early twilight, and feeble and few they seemed, with this dangerous entrance to thread. We came into the midst of a fleet of Lake Superior vessels, downbound, with the westerly gale, with cargoes of copper and iron ore for the Ohio furnaces. They were all shortening sail and blowing horns and burning flares for the Cleveland tugs, while the thunder cannonaded and the lightning flashed, and fierce squalls lathered the lake. Not a quarter of a mile from us one of the Lake Superior vessels was struck by lightning, and both her topmasts went out of her like matches. I have often wondered if the copper ore in her cargo attracted the flash.

"We had our own fish to fry, however. A Cleveland tug came boiling up to meet us in the twilight. The sea was running so heavily that he dare not come close enough to give us his line, but he very cleverly worked up to windward of us, made a heaving line fast to one of his fenders, and threw that over the side and let it drift down to us. We picked it up with a pike pole and hauled in his heaving line and then the big tow-line and got the end fast around our windlass bits, with the tug racing alongside, in a wild effort to get ahead of us, and get a strain on the line.

## **An airy perch**

"I was out on the jib boom with the others, stowing the jibs which had been run down, shooting up thirty or forty feet in the air when she landed on the seas. The tug's funnel slipped under our feet and she finally leapt ahead of us and tautened the line, and amid the belch of smoke I could see her captain sticking his head out of the wheel house and heard him scream up to us: 'Is that a wild man sailing your vessel?'"

"The *Lydon* was certainly flying, and we went into Cleveland at race horse speed, so fast that the tug could not check us when we came to the first bend of the Cuyahoga Creek on our way to the Irishtown coal docks. We had just come in from the jib boom when she went around the bend, and she poked her long nose piece through the main rigging of a schooner lying on the opposite bank and took the mainmast clean out of her.

"But that was all-right. Everybody carried insurance, and besides, it was the tug's funeral. She should have had power enough to handle us properly, Tom Price declared. I never heard who paid for the damage.

"Such was life in the good old days. I look back to them now with fond remembrance and happy memories of the sailor men with whom I had my most enjoyable experiences of existence, and with whom my sympathies will always be."

The *Mary Ann Lydon*, long a well known visitor here at the foot of West Market street and Church street, went ashore at Charlotte about 1906, carrying away a summer boathouse and wharf as she climbed up the beach. Refloated without damage she became a tow-barge shortly after 1910. In 1912 she was owned by J.F. Sowards of Kingston, the register of that year giving her dimensions was 112 feet length, 23 feet beam, 10.5 feet depth of hold. In her prime she could carry 600 tons of coal. Mr. O'Connor speaks of her as originally "white with green petticoats." The surviving generation of lake sailors remember her as black above and sometimes green below and sometimes red. Has anyone have a good picture of her?