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Schooner Days CCX (210)
By C.H.J. Snider

OLIVIA'S LUCK

THIS *OLIVIA* of Toronto, whose fortunes we began to recall last week, following the uncovering of her remains in Picton harbor, was a nursery for many valiant mariners of the old school.

The late "Bungy" or "Black Jack" Thomas of Toronto, master of many small schooners in his manhood, sailed in her as cook when he was a boy. The renowned McCraney brethren of Oakville, "Fod" and "Bose," who later had a long partnership in the *Defiance*, were graduates of the *Olivia*. They may have been in her when she was owned at this end of the lake, and the Belyeas of Bronte sailed her. That was eighty years ago – later on her habitat was the Bay of Quinte, where, after thirty years' activity, she has lain at rest half a century.

She wasn't an unlucky vessel in the way of parting gear or getting ashore. She may have had her accidents in the thirty or forty years she was afloat counting the time she was the *Emblem of Bronte* – but she had no major mishaps. In fact, the worst I have ever heard befalling her was the time the tug *Mocking Bird* was taking her up the St. Clair River, in one of her ventures into the Upper Lakes. She took a sheer – they blamed it on the tug for steering wildly – and her jibboom went into a lighter, and took the pilothouse of the latter off. The towline was good, and the *Olivia* went on, with the pilot-house hanging on her jibboom-end like a birdcage, and the lighter's happy helmsman heaving hard up and hard down on his wheel, which had dissociated itself from the parent vessel in the struggle. Eventually the news was broken to him that he was no longer aboard the lugger; whereat he was much relieved, and, deciding it was his watch below, rolled into a spare bunk aboard the schooner, and slept the sleep of the just.

But the "Oh leave you," as sailors called her, had the reputation of being a lifesaver and money loser. They went together, according to lake superstition, the basis of the belief being that an adverse fate made vessels, like human beings "pay up" for any outstanding achievement. The Greeks had a word for this, too. In the case of the *Olivia*, having, when known as the *Emblem*, saved nineteen lives in the *Ocean Wave* disaster, the wiseacres said that even though she had been renamed and rebuilt, "something" was likely to happen to her. It did.

One of her early skippers was the best expert on weather Lake Ontario's shores produced. He could smell a storm coming a day ahead, and predict the winds for a week. Sixty or seventy years ago, when he walked the *Olivia's* quarterdeck, barometers were unknown in the schooner trade and weather bureau forecasts were about as reliable as the late Dr. Ayer's Almanac, which then hung in every farm kitchen.

Like other supermen this skipper had the defects of his qualities. As he aged he trusted his weather wisdom and everybody else. And he had a harum-scarum crew who rejoiced in the collective name of the "South Bay savages," and did not scruple at putting one, or several, over

on the "Old Man." They would slyly leave his "night glasses" lying in the sun until the lenses burned. When he took a look at the moon he would see an iridescent circle around Lady Luna and muttering "Far off circle, nearby storm," he would order the *Olivia's* helm up and seek a sheltered anchorage.

This was just what those young villains wanted, for their wages went on at anchor just the same as at sea, and they had the night in the straw. After lying to anchor all night and next day, waiting for the nearby storm that never came, they would, at the selected moment, empty the teakettle on the rail and then call the Old Man to see how everything was steaming.

"Never knew it to fail," he would rumble, "mist at night, wind by morning. Give her another fifteen fathoms of chain and get your port anchor ready to drop underfoot."

Or, on a passage, they would carefully slop the wheel-stand, where the Old Man used to sit for an after-supper smoke, so that when he came out from the cabin he would say, between whiffs: "Look at that now! Heaviest dew since that big blow that took the spars out of the *Tuscarora*. We'll have the wind heavy from the sou' west before morning. Keep her away for South Bay Point!"

Another trick those heathens had was to conceal a bucket of Stockholm tar and balm-of-Gilead – those sovereign remedies for cuts and sores, and fragrant preservatives of lanyards – somewhere to windward of the Old Man when he was walking his quarterdeck in the cool of the evening. The *Olivia* would be would be ghosting along quietly in the lee of Timber Island or some of the hundred wooded headlands which were familiar landmarks to the old mariner who had used them for half a century.

"There now!" he would exclaim, stopping in his walk and sniffing the air. "Smell the pines on the point? Never knew it to fail. In light weather like this, if the scent of the trees starts to rise from the land you'll get a squall shortly. Clew up that fore gafftopsail and run the jibtopsail down! And when you get 'em tied up clew up the main gafftopsail, too. Better safe than sorry."

So the *Olivia* would crawl along under lower sails all night, or even stand still; and the crew would have another day's wages for a voyage already unprofitably long. There is such a thing as being too weather-wise.

In this way the poor thing spent so much time at anchor, with the crew picking beech nuts, or seeking shelter from prospective gales, that her voyages became longer and longer and her freights shorter and shorter. And then she struck the hard times of the late '70's, and even a change of skippers could not make her a dividend payer, as the shipping bills cited by Mr. T. W. Bose, whose father sailed her, and sailed her faithfully and well, in 1878, abundantly prove.

There is one more story connected with *Olivia*; we had better save it for next week.

(Caption) *SHIPMATES FORTY YEARS AGO*

This group had nothing to do with the schooner Olivia, but it illustrates the vicissitudes

of lakemen's lives. It was taken in 1895, and the members were then in the crew of the steamer William Ewart Gladstone of Cleveland.

James McCannel, on the left, was the wheelsman in the Gladstone. He is now master of the C.P.R. steamer Assiniboia, and has been many years.

Beside him stood Jack Montgomery, then lookout in the Gladstone, and later second mate of the steam barge Kalyuga, which towed the Fontana. He went down with the Kalyuga when she was lost with all hands in Lake Huron, Oct. 19th, 1905.

Seated in the centre was Wm. Radford, wheelsman of the Gladstone. Like Capt. McCannel, he became a master, and commanded the 215-foot wooden barge Tasmania, which foundered in Lake Erie with all hands.

Wearing the hat was Wm. Sturtevant, of Bad Axe, Mich., the Gladstone's second mate. He became first mate of the steamer Harold B. Nye, and was washed from her bridge by a sea on Nov. 28th, 1905, in a great gale off the Apostle Islands.