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Schooner Days, XXIV (24)
By C.H.J. Snider

The Ship of Stone

Graven in grey granite a ship of stone sails serenely above her master on Lake Huron's shore.

High above the winding Maitland River, high on a hilltop which in life was their landfall, they bury Huron sailors hailing from Goderich.

Maitland cemetery is not exclusive. Here are "beds for all who come." Dark red, a polished obelisk has an anchor carved on the top, before and abaft. Below, on one side, is the inscription:

"A Memorial to the Unidentified Seamen whose lives were lost in the Great Lakes Disaster of Nov. 9th, 1913."

On the other side of the red obelisk is one eloquent word:

"SAILORS."

This was that wild November week end which sent sixteen steamers to the bottom of Lake Huron and drove twelve ashore. Two hundred and twenty-five men were taken off wrecks by the lifesavers. Two hundred more perished in the waves; in many instances whole ship's companies.

Five small headstones mark these graves. The inscriptions read: "Str. Kintail, No. 26"; "Str. Jno. A. McGean"; "Str. Carruthers, No. 6"; "Str. Carruthers, No. 3"; "Str. Carruthers, No. 2." The numbers seem to refer to the lifebelts or lifeboats in which these poor nameless men were washed ashore, dead and drowned, when the gale had done its worst.

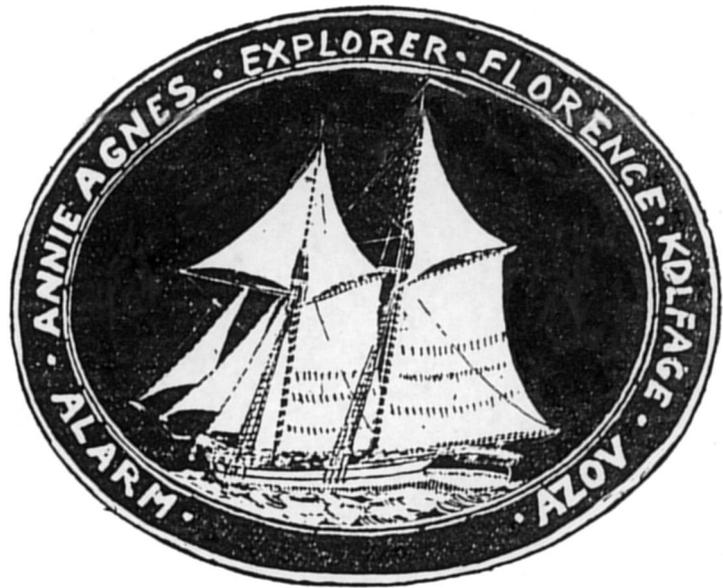
Close by rises a grey granite shaft, family memorial of another mariner, a sailor of the sail.

"In loving memory of
Capt. John Macdonald
Born in Stratford, 1852.
Died in Kincardine, 1930."

"Son Angus, 1881-1902."

Side by side father and son sleep through their "long watch in."

The fretting billows of Lake Huron trouble them no more. But the sure instinct of



another sailor son and brother has given this monument the character the captain it commemorates would love.

In an oval are carved the names of the six ships, large and small, which owned his sway. "Alarm," "Annie Agnes," "Explorer," "Florence," "Kolfage," "Azov. "

Within the oval, chiselled with good bold strokes and patient detail, is the portrait of his last and finest vessel, the one he loved most; the schooner *Azov*.

The last fore-and-after out of Goderich – and, so far as is known, the last fore-and-after on all Lake Huron – was the *Azov*.

"Fore-'n'-after," ye innocents, is lake argot for two-masted schooner. A three-master was called, not a tern, as on salt water, but a "three-n'-after." If she had a square topsail, a "barque." The lake sailor never worried unduly about what to call a four-master, for there were few of these in fresh water history.

Perhaps readers will recall Capt. Dave Reynold's reference to the *Azov* in his account of the Great Gale of 1880, on Lake Ontario; how she was one of sixteen vessels in company on the night of November 6th; lost every stitch in the storm that rose with the changing of the watch at midnight; ran it out under bare poles, and was discovered, when morning broke, laboring through the billows for the shelter of Kingston.

After this experience she rather disappeared from Ontario sailors' ken. She was sold from Lake Ontario years and years ago. Like several other schooners once plying regularly to Toronto – the *Vienna*, *Sweepstakes*, *Singapore*, *Maria Annette*, *White Oak* – she went "up above" and never came back. It was strange to find her where she was – on a Goderich tombstone. For the *Azov* is that ship of stone which will sail the cemetery of Maitland till judgment day.

"Yes," said Redfern Macdonald one of John's boys, "father had the *Azov* eleven years. When he bought her "AZOV of WELLINGTON SQUARE" was on her stern. We knew she was Lake Ontario built, but we had never heard of the place. After a while some man from the Department of Marine and Fisheries came along and said we'd have to change it, that there wasn't any Wellington Square any more, and the nearest thing to it would be Hamilton."

And so this long lost schooner from a long lost port was "run to earth." The *Azov* was built in Wellington Square, at the head of Lake Ontario (the present town of Burlington) in 1866. John Potter, of Oakville, may have been her builder, and may not. That point is uncertain, but she was owned by Wm. Buntin, merchant of Wellington Square, from which port many of the oldtimers hailed, and she was a profitable carrier on Lake Ontario for a quarter of a century. Her adventures "up above," as they used to call the Upper Lakes, will be told later.