

**Toronto Telegram, September 26, 1931**  
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**By C.H.J. Snider**

### **Putting on the Dog**

*There was never any general objection to sailing on a Friday, on the lakes, although many captains piously refrained from beginning a voyage on a Sunday. None was ever the worse for that. But lake sailors were firm believers in Finns being able to control the winds, and when the Finlanders began to flock to Chicago in the '70's and get berths as skippers and mates some sailors refused to sail under them. Others were eager to ship, believing that a Finnish master or messmate would be able to provide "fair winds" as required.*

*Belief in haunted schooners, in port and at sea, was common among lake sailors, and they also believed that certain men were hoodoos, and brought bad luck to every vessel they were in; and conversely, that certain ships were hoodoos and were fated to misfortune, no matter how good the men who sailed them. Such a belief is not peculiar to fresh water. But here is one which is – or was: –*

“May the Black Dog of Lake Erie cross your deck!”

Half drunk, wholly sore, he spat that out, red with rage and reeking with whiskey.

He had been fired by the Old Man as soon as the *Azimuth's* shore lines bighted on the spiles. He had committed many nautical misdemeanours, crowning them by jibing her all standing and springing the main gaff. He had beaten it forthwith to Andy Tymon's, at Church street and the old Esplanade, got his courage reinforced, and come back for his clothes and an argument.

The skipper, big, fat, good-natured, was immediately three hundredweight of fury.

He pounced on his late mate like a rhinoceros on a rat. He dragged him to his knees with a one-hand grip on his throat and swung back the other fist like a piledriver, taut knuckles showing oddly white through the sunburn.

“Take it off!” he snapped. “Take it off, or your own mother'll never know you again by the look of your face!”

The mate-that-was went white with fear and blue with choke. He feebly threw out both, hands and tried to nod his head.

“Sure,” he gasped, “it's off. I couldn't put it on, anyway. You know I'm not a warlocky Finn!”

“All right,” said the master of the *Azimuth*, “but to prove what you say you'll come along with us next trip yourself. Not as mate, but in the fo'c'sle. You're not worth the salt on your porridge, but I reckon you won't go so far as to drown yourself to spite me.”

“I was only foolin', cap'n.”

“By cracky,” rumbled the mountainous skipper, in the tone of a squall fading out to leeward, “if I told the boys you’d threatened the Black Dog they’d tear you limb from tree. To think of the blather of the likes of you scattering the *Azimuth* and her whole crowd along the front of some man’s farm some dirty night! Take shame to yourself for thinking of it.”

“Honest, cap’n, I didn’t mean it,” mourned the sobered one, ruefully feeling his Adam’s apple. “I couldn’t a put the Dog on ye if I tried, and I wouldn’t try if I could.”

That was all. The *Azimuth* went her ways with a fished main gaff and nothing happened until, full of years and patches, she was sold for a decent figure and became a floating coal dock down Kingston way. She may be that yet.

Fifty or sixty years ago it was not healthy even to talk about the Black Dog of Lake Erie along the Waterfront. The hint that the animal had been seen aboard was enough to empty a schooner’s forecabin, even with the towing-out hawser laid along for the tug and the shore-lines cast off. The threat to bring the beast was a threat of death; deserving of death, in the simple logic of the men who drove the lake trade when canvas was king.

Can any reader, like Capt. John Williams or Capt. Frank Jackman of Toronto, or Capt. James McCannel of Port McNicoll, who sailed the lakes in their prime, tell how the Black dog superstition began or ended? The deck is clear for them.

### **The White Man’s Ship**

*(As the Indians call the supposed wreck of La Salle’s Griffin, in Misissagi Straits, Manitoulin);*

*White are your timbers, lying,  
Bleached by the wind and the tide:  
Suns of many a summer  
Have blistered your ruined pride.  
Out on the sunny billows*

*You rode, with your sails unfurled;  
Catching the light lake breezes;  
Around you the waves are curled.  
Gaily your sailors shouted  
Farewell to the men on shore:  
Proudly they took their places,  
Not recking they’d see no more.  
The swift Niagara River  
Or Lake Ontario’s shore,  
Or down the blue St. Lawrence  
Row again, with steady oar.*

*The sun set in a glory  
Of purple and red and gold,  
Black clouds on the horizon,*

*Mariners in dread, behold.  
“Land ho!” called down the look-out,  
The captain raised his hand –  
“I think we are coming near  
The Indians’ haunted land.”  
“Somewhere within these waters  
Is Manitou’s Happy Isle,  
Where the spirits of all lost sailors  
Their blissful leisure beguile.”  
“We will anchor until the morning –  
These waters are new to me.  
We cannot tell where rocks lie  
In this uncharted sea.  
“Manitou, in whose keeping  
The winds and waters lie,  
Is angry because of our daring:  
I know by that livid sky. ’*

*From out the deep cave on the Island  
Where the Four Winds lay asleep,  
Came a mutter, like thunder, growing,  
Till it echoed o’er the deep.  
All the winds of heaven came rushing  
Across that lone darkened waste  
Of waters, wildly tossing  
The ship, as if in great haste  
To tear the sails in sunder –  
The masts and spars to break down –  
The ship rolled over numbly:  
In a trough of the waves – it went down.  
MANITOU, brooding over  
Those storm-tossed, billows, deep,  
Buried the sailors, gently –  
On his Island, they lie asleep.  
If you listen as the sun sets, red,  
On a golden Autumn day,  
The Cave of the Winds will whisper low.  
The Secret of Georgian Bay.  
– OTCHIBWE.*