

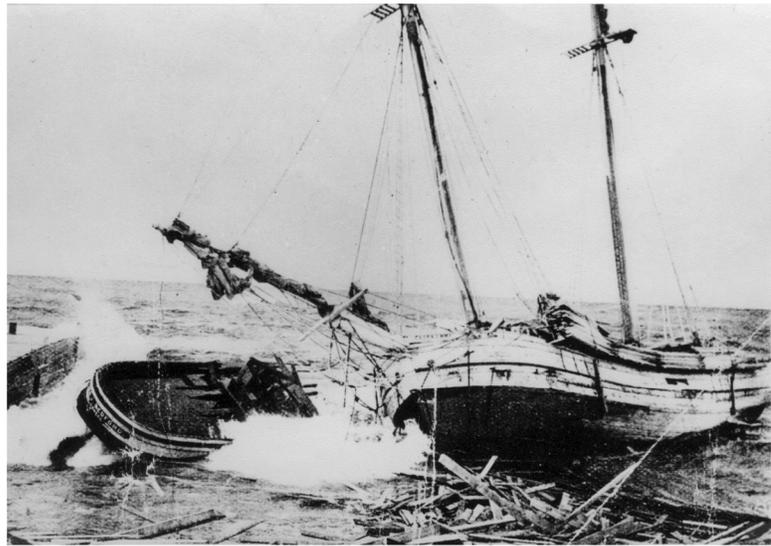
Toronto Telegram, 28 Aug 1937
Schooner Days CCCVII (307)
By C.H.J Snider

Died in Death Grapple - Schooner and Tug

WHAT an odd thing coincidence is!

The compiler of Schooner Days had just sat down before the typewriter to tick out the last chapter in the life of the *Flora Emma* when the telephone rang, and a total stranger, who had been a witness of her demise forty-five years ago, began to talk.

It is not so surprising that anyone should call Schooner Days up after another instalment has appeared. That happens a dozen times a week, and shows the interest Telegram readers take. But it was a bit strange that, at the very moment that the writer was sorting out the strands of a yarn about the *Flora Emma*, and the peculiar thread of coincidence which marked her taking off, someone hitherto unknown should dial in and continue the story-just where it broke last week.



Morning after the gale. The end of the Flora Emma and E. J. Redford at Oswego, 1892, a photograph in Mr. John S. Parsons' collection.

The newcomer was Mr. Wm. Harrigan, in charge of the Junction warehouse of the C. A. Ward Storage Company, and this was his word:

"In November, '92, I was in the *Garibaldi*, then sailed by Capt. Jack Breen, of Port Hope. They said the old *Garry* had been built for a tug, and changed to a schooner afterwards. If so, she had been meant for a pretty big tug, for she could carry over three hundred tons of coal. Her quarters drooped, and she loaded her transom in, but she sailed like a scalded cat and was so quick in stays she would throw you off your feet as she came about. She steered like a yacht.

"This fall we loaded lumber in Port Hope for the Standard Box factory in Oswego. Mike O'Malley, who was in the *Flora Emma* the time she lost her foremast as you told us last week, was mate in the *Garry* this trip. Capt. Tom Fox had the *Flora Emma* at this time, and his married daughter was cook in her. His sons Bob and Joe and Tom were with him, and so was Dyke Mercer, who died not long ago. Dyke was the last of the old lake sailors to go in yachts. For years he was Commodore Wade's paid hand in the *Patricia*. Bill Turnbull of Port Hope, Capt. Fox's son-in-law, was mate in the *Flora Emma*, I think.

"She got away from Port Hope with a load of lumber ahead of us, and was in Oswego when we got there, lying at the box shop slip to the west of the trestle. We couldn't get in there, so we lay at the breakwater outside. The harbor was full of vessels loading coal or unloading lumber.

"A lot of the boys went uptown to get oysters, for an oyster stew, a favorite treat in the schooners in the fall of the year. Perhaps if we had been moored inside our crew would have been with them, but where we lay it was only possible to go on shore by using the yawlboat.

"Before they got back it came on to blow from the westward, driving a great sea down the lake. You know how it blows up at Oswego. We commenced to heave and toss at the breakwater, and tried to get more lines out to hold her. While at this I was nearly drowned where I hung on to the niggerhead with the seas sweeping over the cribwork.

"Someone hollered 'Look at the *Flora Emma*!' and she came driving past under bare poles, the lumber still piled high on her deck. She had parted her lines, as we were parting ours. Young Dyke seemed the only man aboard with Capt. Fox and the cook, though there may have been others. They gave her the anchors, and she fetched up and held for a few minutes. But the bottom there is limestone, and the anchors could not bite. It blew harder and harder, and she dragged past us, so close we could hear them calling for the help of tugs.

"We were in a bad way ourselves, for our forward lines parted and we were only hanging on by some big lines which we had run around our mainmast.

"Between the push of the wind and the current of the Oswego River the *Flora Emma* was driven out past the breakwater end, into the open lake, rearing and plunging.

"By this time it was eleven o'clock at night, pitch black and the lake roaring like a cage of lions at feeding time. The tug *E. J. Redford* took a chance and went after the runaway. Her captain was a fair complexioned chap with a dark mustache and a saucy style. He would go through anything. He got alongside the *Flora Emma*, on the inside, and gave the tug every inch of steam the fires could raise. She needed it, for the schooner was blowing into the breakers that were shooting white snowstorms against the black night, under the frown of Fort Ontario, east of the harbor.

"We had our own hands full, for the *Garibaldi* had been thrown against the breakwater and stove a hole in her port quarters, and was leaking. The tug, sailed by Capt. Charley Ferris and bearing his name, came around for us at last, and were we glad to see her! Charley Ferris was everybody's friend, and he told our Old Man off properly for lying out at the breakwater with a gale of wind coming. There was no time for argument, and as soon as the tug had her hawser on us we cut the lines holding our stern to the breakwater and scooted for the harbor. We came back to gather up the pieces of our lines when the gale blew itself out.

"Meanwhile the *Flora Emma* had been wrecked. The tug *Redford* burst a steampipe trying to get her back to the harbor entrance. Capt. Henry Featherstonehaugh was scalded to death. Tug and schooner drove in side by side, heading different ways, the tug outwards, game

to the last. They came in near a little dock east of the river mouth. The lifesaving crew shot a line over them and got everybody off, but that was the end of both of them. Their planking littered the beach, mixed with the *Flora Emma's* lumber cargo."

Here coincidence again asserts itself, the coincidence which was getting under weigh on the typewriter when the telephone rang.

Twenty years before the *Flora Emma's* wreck the tug *Eliza J. Redford* was built at Oswego. In the same yard, at the same time, was built the tug *M. J. Cummings*, for Michael J. Cummings, who owned a schooner of the same name, and a dozen more schooners, forming the Star Line, out of Oswego. The other schooners were named *Rising Star*, *White Star*, *Mystic Star*, *Blazing Star*, *Guiding Star*, and so on.

The *Redford* and the *Cummings* were completed at the same time and launched on the same day. The night the *E. J. Redford* gave up the ghost on Oswego beach, trying to save the *Flora Emma*, the *M. J. Cummings* was burned to the water's edge at Cape Vincent, on the St. Lawrence River.

John S. Parsons, still Oswego's foremost ship-chandler, as he was in 1892, passed the hat for Capt. Tom Fox among the schooner men and handed him \$300 consolation cash for the loss of the vessel which was his home and which he had spent the best years of his life buying.

But hear the last of Mr. Harrigan's recollection, and of coincidences: "When we got the *Garibaldi* unloaded we nailed a patch of canvas over the corner of her transom where the hole had been stove in, and hauled her over to the trestle and loaded three hundred tons of soft coal for Paddy Burns' dock at the foot of Scott Street, Toronto. We made a good run, and then brought the *Garibaldi* back to Port Hope to lay up. It was a bitter cold day in December, bright and keen, with the wind north-north-west, blowing hard off the land and the water smooth. We sailed out from Toronto at eight o'clock that morning, and at noon we shot into Port Hope piers. We carried everything but the fore gafftopsail, and expected the rig to go out of her at any moment, for the *Garry's* outfit was not good."

Can you tie that, Mr. Vanderbilt? Scott Street to Port Hope piers is sixty miles, so the *Garibaldi*, forty-year-old lake schooner, averaged fifteen miles an hour for four hours, something no America's Cup yacht has ever done. She was sunk in Port Hope in 1897.

I remember very well the *Garibaldi* in Scott Street that day she arrived up from Oswego with her load. What with the water in her from the leak, and her drooping stern, and the cargo she carried, she swam so deep that not only was the corner of her transom submerged, but the water was above the name board across her stern. She was a black and green clipper-bowed schooner, so sharp in the hold it was hard to stand up to shovel out the last of the coal. Her figurehead was a cannon barrel, reminder of Italy's warlike days in the middle of the nineteenth century, when she was launched at Sarnia or thereabouts; perhaps Port Huron. An old Bible in her cabin said that her first voyage was from Sarnia to Montreal. She must have been beloved by

her original owners; they had taken the trouble to have her name cast in iron frames and set in the topgallant rail on either quarter.

I remember the day because I had slipped down to the docks at noon-hour, as was my custom, when going to Jarvis Street Collegiate. The three-master, *James G. Worts*, was drying sails preparatory to laying up, and despite the bright sunshine it was bitterly cold. Someone remarked on that, and someone else said, "Why shouldn't it be? It's the first day of December."

The *Worts* was lost next year about this time, with a cargo of grain, near Tobermory. The telephone rings again. It is my old friend Capt. John Williams, of the Kew Beach clan. His call is a further coincidence. We shall have it next week.