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Schooner Days CCCLVIII (358)
By C.H.J. Snider

Gulls and the Galloo

Late in the month of November, continued Capt. Wm. Stitt, in his story of the *Alberta* the barrel-bowed schooner that had been converted into a steam barge, we found ourselves in Oswego loading hard coal for Kingston. Weather had been fine since we came back to the lake trade and we had two nice runs from Charlotte to Bay of Quinte ports and it was fine and calm and everything pointed to another fine run that night to Kingston. After trimming the hold full and battening the hatches down we ran 75 tons of grate coal on deck which left us with about a foot of free board.

While the mate and crew were making the boat ready for sailing about 4 p.m. I went to the Custom House to get my clearance, and on the way ran into a Mr. Clarke, who was shed foreman at the Coteau Terminal when we traded there. He had returned home to Kingston the week before, and with his wife and baby had come over to Oswego to visit some relatives. When I told him we were loaded for Kingston he wanted to know if they could ride with us. The weather seemed perfect so I consented and told him to get his wife and baby and join the boat at the O. & W. trestle.

When I returned from uptown, friend Clarke and family were on board, so I gave them my room for the trip over.

It was just 6 p.m. when we were passing out the piers and the cook ringing the supper bell when we saw one of the men from the life-saving station raising the storm signal for a strong nor-easter. The lake was as calm as a pane of glass, but the sea gulls were all in on the breakwater, a sure sign of dirty weather, and our ship's barometer also going down. But it's only 28 miles to Stony Point and 30 miles to the Galloo Islands, the Big Galloo and the Little Galloo, about four hours run and we could find shelter if necessary.



The Gulls were all coming in to the breakwater, a sure sign of dirty weather.

We didn't want to go back and get caught in Oswego for two days and sometimes a week at this time of year. I have seen over 60 vessels stormbound there for over a week, it's a nasty place to get out of when the wind blows off the lake, so we stood on.

At 8 p. m., when on our course for the Galloo's and Kingston and about 16 miles out of Oswego, it became intensely dark and some light snow began falling. We had lost sight of all lights for the past hour, and there was considerable of a dead roll from the north which always precedes a storm on the lake. At 8:30 a terrific gale from the northeast hit us, accompanied by hail and snow, and it was impossible to look into it, it fairly lifted the water off the lake and in less than ten minutes heavy seas were washing right over the vessel and tossing us about like a chip and throwing everything that was movable all over the ship.

One big sea came over the bow, carrying both our lifeboats away from their davits just aft of the turtle deck forward and smashed them to pieces against the after bulwarks, the bulwarks amidship began to wash out by the constant pounding of the heavy seas and our deck load of egg coal began to wash overboard, which was a god-send for us, for this gave the *Alberta* more buoyancy.

It was impossible to keep the boat anywhere near her course and also to know if we were making any headway, the only guide I had was to keep the ship heading into the wind as nearly as possible, as I knew this course would bring us straight onto the sand beach of Galloo Island, south of the lighthouse provided she would weather the gale to reach there.

All our 75 tons on deck went overboard before midnight, all these steam barges at that time were fitted with a heavy mast forward, used for hoisting the cargoes from the hold and also for the foresail, and when not in use these were furled up and lashed to the booms and lowered down to within five or six feet of the deck, in bad weather a life line was run from the mast to the railing forward of the pilot house which was always aft, on these small steam barges, this was the way the crew got forward and kept out of the heavy seas washing over the deck and got protection behind the turtle deck forward where the sounding pipe ran down to the keelson, even at that it was a dangerous job in heavy weather.

Now, while the storm is at it's worst outside, let us look inside of the cabins and in the fire-hold and engine room, all the crew, except the chief engineer, Jack Barber, myself and my passenger, Mr Clarke had gone down with seasickness early in the storm, they were laid out everywhere and dead to the world and, I guess didn't care if the ship did go down. Mr. Clarke was deathly sick, but the baby slept through it all, the cabin furniture was strewn all over and many pieces broken, and it kept Mr. Clarke busy keeping his wife and baby from rolling out of the berth.

The Irish cook was mixed up with the pots and pans behind the stove which remained solid, being bolted to the floor, but everything else in the kitchen and dining room was torn down and in most cases broken. The cook resembled Dinah, of Pancake flour fame, for the soot from the stove and pipes had given her a fine coat of ebony.

But the big fight was being waged down in the engine room and firehold. Chief Barber was up to his knees in water in the firehold, and fighting away to make enough steam to keep the water down and prevent it putting the fires out, which would mean Davy Jones locker for all of

us. It was impossible to keep over 60 lbs. of steam, and with our decks awash things looked pretty black.

I was about as busy as the Chief trying to hold the ship head-on and holding myself when she took those awful rolls and lunges in the extra big whitecap seas that every once in a while lifted the ship almost on end. Minutes were like hours during the height of the gale, and the night seemed endless.

I had seen thousands of lights in my imagination during the night, for I know we were pointing towards the grand old Galloo Light that has guided so many mariners across in some pretty tough weather – and many lost too – but while there's a life there's hope.

I was in constant touch with the Chief Engineer by speaking tube, at 4.15 in the morning it was blowing just as hard and snowing, and black as ink, but the sea was going down and I knew we were coming under the island and called to the engineer and told him to keep up the good work and we would soon get shelter.

He said the water was almost in the furnaces.

I turned back to the wheel again and to my joy there was the grand old Galloo light – and the fog-whistle – and in less than two minutes we grounded in the south-west side of Galloo Island on a sand beach.

It's surprising how quickly the crew came too when they saw terra firma, and got busy on the pumps, and at 9 a.m. we floated off the bottom and repaired our storm-battered hulk as best we could, and as the snow and wind died away in the afternoon we ran down through the Stoney Island channel and out by way of Grenadier and across the head of Wolfe Island to the Batteau Channel and arrived in Kingston early the following morning.

We saved all the cargo below decks, but lost 75 tons on deck and both our life-boats, all the crew soon came to, but Mrs Clarke, who was a blonde when she came aboard at Oswego left the boat at Kingston with many "silver threads among the gold." I parted company with the *Alberta* that same fall, but I heard after that she burned and was beached at almost the same spot on Galloo Island that we landed on that stormy trip."