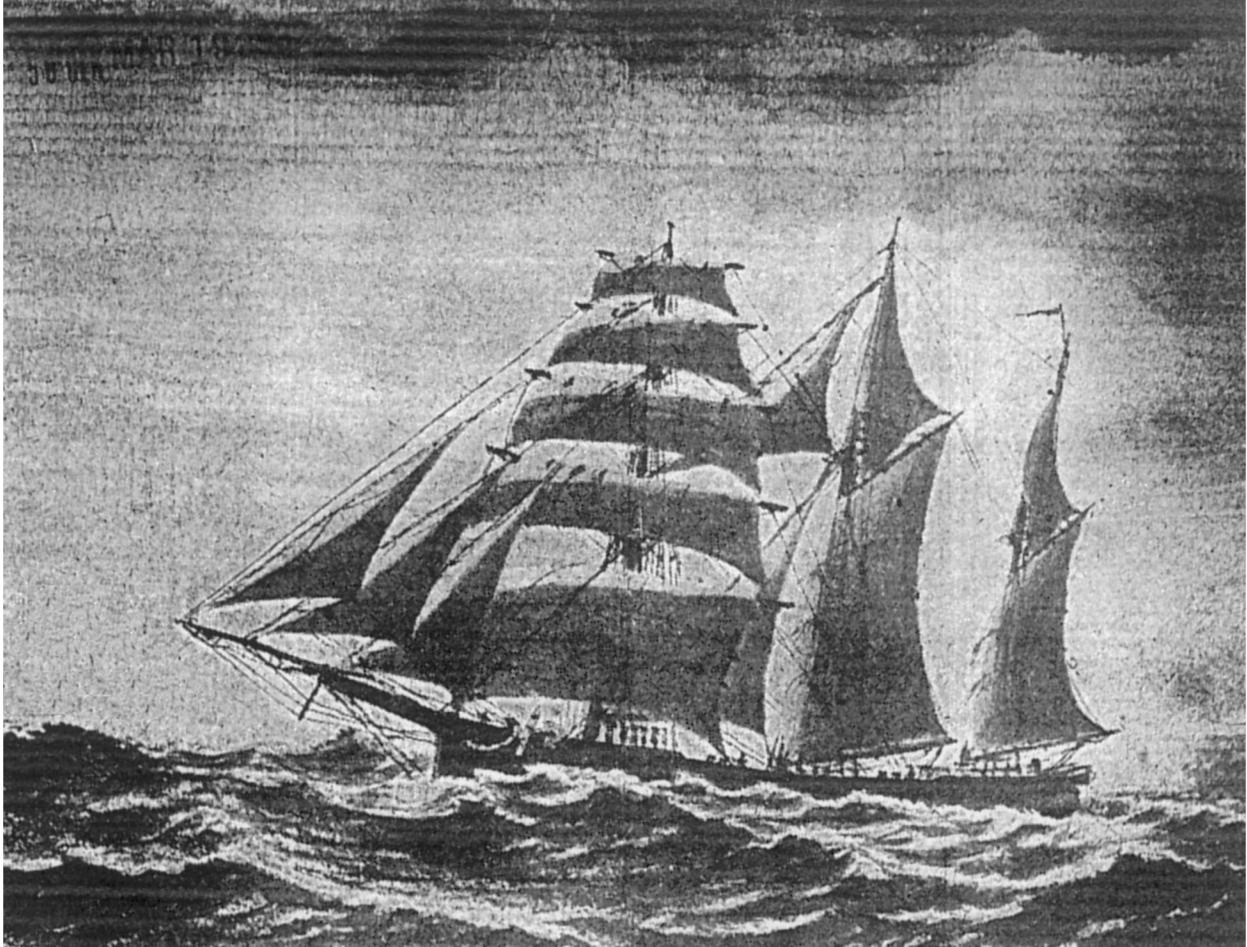


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Schooner Days, XXXIX (39)
By C.H.J. Snider

More About the ELLA MURTON



Newspaper despatches this week described the struggle of the steamship Fellowcraft with Lake Erie ice, with all the assistance modern science could render by means of the radio and visiting airplanes. The Fellowcraft is a modern steel freighter, formerly the Brignogan, and the writer has a friendly feeling towards her, for in the summer of 1923 she towed us up into Lake Ontario, when Aemilius Jarvis was bringing home his schooner, Venture, from Bristol, Rhode Island, by way of the Gulf. Our first glimpse of Ontario, as blue water to the westward, beyond the bows of the Brignogan, as she seemed to part the leafy curtains of the Thousand Islands. Next moment the level beams of an August sunrise lighted up the blue ensign at her taffrail, where our towline was made fast. Her Old Man was a Royal Navy reservist, so she has as good a right to fly the blue ensign as we.

Recently renamed the Fellowcraft the ex-Brignogan thus commemorates a more picturesque Fellowcraft, an old lake barquentine of that name built in Port Burwell on Lake Erie in 1873. The picture of her here reproduced was drawn by Joseph F. McGinnis, an old lakesman who sailed in her in 1881. She was built for David M. Foster, Port Burwell merchant and ship owner, and measured 116 feet on deck, 23 feet 6 inches beam, and 9 feet 8 inches depth of hold. She was of 227 tons register, a mere postscript compared with the present Fellowcraft, but a good sized vessel for her time.

Has anyone a picture of the Ella Murton, the schooner which was the heroine of the January Passage yarn in last month's "Schooner Days"? Loan of it for copying purposes would be appreciated.

Old-timers will remember the *Ella Murton* on the Toronto waterfront. In the 1890's she often brought in a cargo for Rogers, Congers or Dickson and Eddy, when the foot of Church street was the great centre of the coal trade, and grain was still shipped from Adamson's elevator at West Market street or Sylvester's storehouse on Church street wharf.

The writer has two very definite memory pictures of her. One, in the year 1892, of her lying at anchor close in to the mouth of the Church street slip, to the great inconvenience of the *Truant* and *Kathleen* and *Jessie L. McEdwards* and other Island ferries which then patronized Church st. Her crew were busy with the yawlboat alongside, scrubbing her bulwarks in preparation for a fresh coat of paint. She was a white schooner, with lead-colored bottom, white topsides, black covering board, and a red beading under the rail. She had red hawsepipes, too, in the bows, and, which was rare, in the stern as well.

These little details are as vivid as though they were noted yesterday. What was most striking at the time was the prevalence of patches of orange or yellow rust all along her whitework. She had evidently been a well built vessel, well fastened and well salted. It was the preservative salt which spotted her sides so; marks of careful ship husbandry, although until the new paint would obliterate them, they gave her the rough and battered appearance of an old tin can.

The *Ella Murton* had been well built, for a fact. She was launched at Mill Point in the Bay of Quinte, in the year 1875, which came close to marking the acme of wooden schooner building on the lakes. She measured 118 feet 3 inches on deck; 26 feet, 2 inches beam, and 10 feet, 1 inch depth in the hold, and registered 229 tons. She had 500 tons of anthracite under the hatches at the moment she was getting this scrub, for, like all lake carriers, her burden greatly exceeded her registered tonnage.

She was classed at Inland Lloyds, and registered at Napanee. J. W. Murton of Hamilton, coal merchant and wharf proprietor, was her first owner and he named her after his daughter, then a little girl with a great big pigtail, going to school in Hamilton. The schooner was later

sold to Kingston and again sold back to Hamilton.

This deponent's next and last glimpse of her was one dirty morning off the Devil's Nose. We were beating down for Charlotte in the Loretta Rooney, with the gafftopsails and jib topsail furled, the pump going for an hour every watch. Our Old Man, Capt. Frank Barnhart, was as mad as a wet hen because he had had her on the dock only the trip before and here she was leaking as badly as ever.

At the end of the middle watch – 4 a. m. that morning – Lake Ontario was as gaunt and desolate a place as could be found outside the Sahara. The only sign of human life in the whole leaden waste of lake and sky was one sharp spire of topsail poking up to the eastward. It grew amazingly, for it was coming towards us at twelve miles an hour and we punching towards it at eight.

While daylight still lingered as though afraid to get her feet wet the spire resolved itself into the grey and straining sails of a white-hulled schooner, mainsail off to the rigging, main gafftopsail stowed, foresail stretched out under the driving urge of the fore gafftopsail, jibs arching ahead like swallows' wings.

The outer fifteen feet of her jibboom looked as bare as a toothpick, for the jibtopsail had gone to Kingdom-Come. She was loaded deep, with soft slack heaped on deck, and every time she settled in a sea a ton or so of it washed out through her freeing-ports.

“No wonder the companies won't insure deck cargoes,” commented Capt. Barnhart, grinding at the *Rooney's* wheel. (She was a little thing, and her master stood trick and watch with the men). The newcomer rushed by in a great wash of suds and coal dust.

“That's,” said he, “the *Ella Murton*, with a fair wind of it for Hamilton.”

She was owned in Hamilton then, for the second time in her career. Some years later she was sold to someone up Kincardine way on Lake Huron, and vanished.

To go “up above,” as moving to the Upper Lakes was called, was as complete a translation as Elijah's when he went up on high. Yet mundane affairs obtruded at the time to this extent that the comment was made that the *Ella Murton*, which had been just sold for \$1,800, had cost \$18,000, or exactly ten times as much, to build.

It is a tradition yet in Port Credit, where the *Ella Murton* used to trade, in the best days of the barley business, that her skipper displayed marvellous seamanship once when a flock of stonehookers lying at the piers so cluttered the entrance that he could not round up in time to catch the rickety piling where the grain warehouse stood.

The alternative was to let her go aground on the opposite shore; and so smartly did Miss Ella light up everything, running off her sheets and spilling the wind out of all canvas, that when she touched “It wouldn't-a cracked a aig, ” as Capt. Dally Peer put it. The yawlboat ran a line across the creek and as soon as the end of it was taken to the capstan the schooner was hove off and berthed where the farmers waited to back up their grain wagons.

Many Port Credit, Oakville and Bronte men sailed in the *Ella Murton* while she was owned at this end of the lake. One was Charlie Giles, who went mate in her. They left the Queen's Wharf one day with a fresh northwester, got sail on her, jibed over, and shaped a course for Oswego. About this time the cook rang the bell, and, as custom was, all hands went to dinner in the cabin – all, that is, except the man whose trick it was at the wheel. And he happened to be the said Giles.

They had set up the lanyards of all the rigging while waiting to unload a cargo of coal for P. Burns and Co., and now, with the schooner flying light, the whole weight of her sides was on her chainplates, and the rigging was bar-hard.

A puff came. She was a good stiff vessel, and stood up to it. There was no give or play in the tense shrouds and lanyards.

“Bang!” went either a mast or a swifter with a report like a cannon. “Crack! Crack! Whoo-s-sh! Wham!” went foremast, mainmast, and the whole rig overside.

Charlie Giles pushed back the cabin slide and joined the startled group at the table.

“My trick's up, Old Man,” said he to the skipper, “there'll be no more steering of this packet this day.”

Charles, however, was wrong. A tug picked the *Ella Murton* up before she drifted across the lake, and she was in port by nightfall.