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Schooner Days CCCCXIX (419)
By C.H.J. Snider

One Garibaldi

IT was blowing fresh from the westward when the schooner *Garibaldi* of Toronto, Capt. Wm. McGlenn, cleared from Fairhaven, N.Y., with a cargo of 350 tons of coal for the vessel's home port. Less than a fortnight before the lake fleet had been scattered and shattered by that great storm, still



The schooner GARIBALDI, the morning after . . .

spoken of, which destroyed the *Belle Sheridan*, *Zealand*, *T. C. Street*, *Bermuda*, and *Wood Duck*, capsized the *Norway*, and damaged many others. Remembering their fate, Capt. McGlenn put into Presqu'isle when the fresh headwind blew the *Garibaldi* across the lake on the port tack. He was then still a hundred miles from home, almost as far off as when he left Fairhaven, but at least on the gaining side of the lake and safe. Weller's Bay, where the *Sheridan* perished, was only six miles to leeward.

Getting a favoring slant, the *Garibaldi* put out again, and when the sun set in wrath among the clouds that capped the dark surges on Saturday, Nov. 20th, 1880, she was abreast of Frenchman's Bay, at that time a busy barley port with a green light and a narrow entrance, eighteen miles east of Toronto. There was only five feet of water in that entrance last summer. Some years there has been less, or even none.

With the setting of the sun the westerly wind increased in force, and a close-reefed mainsail, reefed foresail, and full staysail and jib was all the canvas the vessel would bear. Notwithstanding this press of sail the green light of Pickering Harbor or Frenchman's Bay had not been left astern by ten o'clock at night, the vessel making no headway and being barely able to hold her own, tack for tack across the wind, with the mounting sea. So the captain gave orders to put her about and run back before the gale for their earlier shelter under Presqu'isle Point.

The blocks and halliards were frozen and coated with ice, and when they tried to furl the mainsail they had to chop the halliards above the pinracks before they could get the canvas down, and then they had great trouble stowing it, for the lower part had frozen to the lifts and lazy-jacks and was like so much corrugated iron.

The wind increased, and even with the mainsail stowed the vessel was unmanageable, so they went to close-reef the foresail, which had one reef in already. All hands were needed for this task, but one man had to be left at the wheel. She really required two there, to keep her straight. The one who could be spared let the foresail jibe during the reefing operations, and this broke both the foreboom and the fore gaff, the spars which spread that sail. While they thrashed around they rent the frozen foresail to tatters, and the staysail was torn from the hanks which held it to the forestay. The vessel was so coated with ice forward that it was impossible to re-bend this last sail, and the schooner was accordingly headed down the lake under the flying jib only, as lake sailors always called the first jib set on the jibboom outside the bowsprit end. Generations have passed since these sails were actually "flying" kites, that is, set without being attached to stays, but the old name persists.

From Frenchman's Bay to Presqu'isle Point is between seventy and eighty miles, and from around ten o'clock at night to five o'clock in the morning is between seven and eight hours. But in that wild passage of time the *Garibaldi* had been going at ten miles an hour, under the flying jib alone, and the first gleam of day found her where the *Belle Sheridan* had been two weeks before on a Sunday, with the shelter of Presqu'isle beckoning her to the northward, the treacherous channel and fatal beach of Weller's Bay menacing her to the east, and the raving west wind scourging her on towards both.

The *Belle Sheridan* had failed to get into Presqu'isle because she had already lost every stitch of after canvas she possessed, and some after sail was necessary to luff her up into the lee of the point.

With only the flying jib the *Garibaldi* was in worse case than the *Belle Sheridan*, and with her main halliards cut and her mainsail frozen it was difficult to remedy this. But Capt. McGlenn rigged a purchase on to the main-peak, and by this means raised a small triangle of sail, which helped her head up towards the land; and, rolling as though she would throw the spars out of her, she pointed for the harborage from which the wind blew, keen and hard with November's frosts.

Then as now, the big boulders of the bottom, some of them like housetops, forced her to give Presqu'isle Point a wide berth as she swung around the sheltering corner. But she did "come up," as sailors say, that is, she took a look at the smiting wind with one eye, and she rolled in past the lighthouse to the comparative lee of the shore. With the little effective sail she had left it was impossible to work her in past Salt Point – Presqu'isle Harbor is wide and runs back inland two miles, providing perfect shelter, but up a long narrow channel. As soon as the *Garibaldi* was inside Capt. McGlenn dropped the one available anchor and brought her to, intending to give her the second one if necessary, as soon as its chain was chopped clear and the sails stowed, or else to work her further into the harbor when he got straightened away.

It continued to blow very hard and perishingly cold, and when the sails had been handspiked into the semblance of a reasonable stow the crew of seven all clustered in the cabin for warmth. The woman cook had been able to get the galley fire going, and all had a hot

breakfast, their first food in fourteen hours. While they were eating, a series of strong squalls struck the vessel, and she settled back on her anchor chain, fetching up with a jolt each time.

"Good holding ground, cap, " said Lou Stonehouse, the mate, between bites.

"Better if we had that starboard bower down," said Capt. McGlenn, wiping his moustache after the scalding coffee. "Shake your trotters now and get it clear for dropping before she parts her chain!"

As he spoke there came another gust, and the *Garibaldi* settled back from it with the slack of the cable grinding and groaning. This time when the final jolt announced that she was again at the end of her tether there was a sharp "Ping!"

Out of the cabin tumbled all hands. The *Garibaldi* was lying broadside to the wind, instead of eyeing it defiantly, confident in her anchor's grip on the bottom; from the port hawsepipe hung a few links of broken chain, and she was sidling through the water, out towards the raging lake. The cable had parted.

"Get sail on her! Get the flying jib on her again, and the jibtopsail! " shouted Capt. McGlenn. He himself took the wheel.

Out of Presqu'isle and safety drifted the *Garibaldi* before the smiting gale. Capt. McGlenn had two choices; another eighty miles around Prince Edward County – if he could keep the *Garibaldi* clear of Wicked Point and Point Peter with what sail he had left – and then shelter somewhere between South Bay Point and Kingston; or the anchorage six miles away in Weller's Bay, if he could get in. With wind and sea as it was it was unlikely that he could clear Wicked Point. With the difficult, shifting channel it was improbable that he could enter Weller's. But Weller's he decided to try.

She cleared the tail of the bar at the entrance to Weller's Bay early that afternoon, and it looked as though her troubles were over. Inside, in the Bay, they could see the schooner *John Walters*, of Picton, safe at anchor. The *Garibaldi* was really in the channel across the sandbar when her two headsails flogged with a noise like thunder. By a freak of the gale an eddy wind swept out past Baldhead and caught her aback.

Perhaps if they had had the second anchor ready they might have caught a precarious hold in the shifting sand; perhaps if they had the peak of the mainsail set they might have luffed into this channel. They hadn't, and the deep-laden *Garibaldi* fell off and grounded on one of the many bars outside the entrance.

She struck heavily, and pounded hard with the bursting of the lake rollers which had come roaring after her all the way from Hamilton. Her hold was flooded. Her stern settled low, for there the water was deeper, but her sharp clipper bows rose above the spray in mute appeal to heaven. It looked like the wreck of the *Belle Sheridan* over again.

But there was hope yet. A little schooner lying in the Cove at Presqu'isle, probably Capt. Sim Weaver's *Eugenie*, had seen the *Garibaldi* going adrift. She came staggering after her under

reefed sails, towing a volunteer lifeboat from the Cove. She was small and nimble; so, too, was the boat she towed. And from the security of the Weller's Bay anchorage the men of the *John Walters* put off in their small yawl boat. They had a hard struggle to get across the wind-whipped Bay against the gale, and when they tried to enter the lake the big rollers tossed them high in the air and capsized their yawl. They clung to her and were washed ashore, but they could not get her off the beach.

Meanwhile the Presqu'isle schooner had arrived and cast off her lifeboat. She herself had to run into the bay or be tossed on the beach, so she took the first alternative. The lifeboat was only a fisherman's skiff used in service by the Prequ'isle lighthouse keeper. It got alongside the *Garibaldi* and took off the woman cook and one sailor. They were hanging in the rigging. The Presqu'isle men got them ashore and put out again. They pulled through the breakers and took off two more sailors on the next trip. Two passengers was all their boat would carry and keep afloat. They tried again, but this time they broke their rowlocks, and were thrown back on the beach. The short November day waned quickly, and they had to give up for the night.

Capt. McGlenn, Stonehouse the mate, and a sailor named John C. Nelson yet remained aboard. The seas were making clean breaches over the *Garibaldi* and her masts were swaying as if they would fall at any moment. To cling to the rigging meant perishing by frost if the masts stood, and by flood if they fell. There was one spot where the waves did not break, a narrow triangle in the high sharp bows of her, protected by the little platform built over the heel of the bowsprit, known as the topgallant forecastle and extending to the pawlpost of the windlass. Under this the three crawled as black night settled down, the sailor on one side of the bowsprit heel, the captain on the other, the mate lying across the captain's legs for warmth. It was bitterly cold in that cramped prison. Capt. McGlenn begged the mate to move off his legs, which had lost all feeling. Stonehouse said he was going to die where he was, and so he did.

By Monday morning all three were cased in ice. The dead mate lay frozen over the captain, and the captain's legs were shackled in ice to the deck. He was unconscious. Nelson, the sailor, found a loose piece of board and began to chip at the mass of ice which completely covered the windlass and walled up the opening under the topgallant forecastle deck. He was hours at the task before he made room enough for him to change his position. After that the work sped more quickly. At noon he broke through to daylight, to see that the storm had subsided. The schooner's sides and decks were loaded with ice, but she was intact.

As he looked, Presqu'isle men clambered over the ice-laden bulwarks. With the break of day they could see no sign of life aboard the vessel, and concluded that the remainder of the crew had perished. Accordingly they waited for the sea to lull down before attempting to board her. With axes they chopped the body of the dead mate from the captain's legs. He became conscious as they chopped him free in turn. They carried all three men ashore in one trip, the water being calmer, and attempted resuscitation. Capt. McGlenn's legs were terribly frozen and gave him frightful pain; but he recovered their use. He is said to have given up sailing after this experience, and to have kept an inn at Hamilton for a number of years.

The *Garibaldi* herself survived. She was got off the beach by throwing her cargo of coal overboard and pumping her out with steam pumps. It is almost sixty years since this happened, but there are men alive who remember it. Bobby Dale, of Brighton, is one. He made a trip in the *Garibaldi* after she was got off. He went to Black River in her with Capt. Hank Maitland of Presqu'isle the following spring. She leaked badly. He does not remember what became of her, but she probably wore out towing behind the steam barge *Niagara* on the upper lakes. This *Garibaldi* was built at Port Rowan in 1863, measured 209 tons, and was 103 feet 7 inches long on deck, 23 feet 7 inches beam, and 9 feet 10 inches depth of hold, according to her register. A. E. D. McKay of Hamilton was her registered owner before J. & J. T. Mathews got her.

And another man who should remember her is Walter Losee of Consecon, the gallant young school teacher who was one of the volunteer crew that attempted to save the crew of the *Belle Sheridan*. He was near eighty, but hale and strong when the writer last visited Wellers Bay. That was when some wreckage of the long lost *Belle Sheridan* came ashore, fifty-three years after the foundering.