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By C.H.J. Snider

The Round-Sterned *Delaware*

The late Capt. W. R. Wakely sailed many vessels from the Friday he went with his father, Capt. Charles Wakely, of Port Hope, in the Enterprise, in 1864, to the Friday, when an apoplectic stroke terminated his fitting out of the steam barge Congercoal for the season of 1913. He was born on a Friday, considered Friday his lucky day, sailed on a Friday, and died on a Friday. Forty years a master of vessels, he never lost a ship or a man. Here follows his own story of one of his first commands; period, the early 1870's, before he was twenty-one.

He came down the wharf at Deseronto with a frown on his face and a big cigar in his teeth.

“Want a vessel, captain?” he asked. I was young, faced with unemployment, and far from my native Port Hope.

“What vessel?” I asked.

“The round-sterned *Delaware*,” said he promptly. “I own her. If you don't know her, you may know the *David Andrews*? Well, that's the *Delaware* now. I rebuilt her, renamed her and rigged her.”

“Of course, I know her,” I said. “Who doesn't know the chanty –

You may paint my sides black,
That were once painted white,
You may alter my name if you will,
But when at my wheel,
Of a dark, stormy night,
You'll find I'm the *Dave Andrews* still.

“You know her, all right,” he grinned. “I want a master for her. Last fellow in her ran me into a bill of expense and quit. I'll pay you \$60 a month, or rather you'll pay yourself \$60 a month. I want you to run the whole works – collect the freights, pay the bills, and not let me hear 'Boo' out of you till the end of the season. She's lying across there in the slip now, loaded with lumber for Oswego. Take her out, and don't come home till the snow flies. Pick up what freights you can, for what you can, when you can and where you can. Don't bother writing or wiring me, for I won't answer. What do you say?”

“I'll take her,” I said, “as soon as you give me a line of writing to say I'm master and manager for the season at \$60 a month.”

“Done,” said he, and we walked uptown to his office and signed.

I had no difficulty in picking up a crew – a mate, three men, and a cook – from among my old shipmates. Like me they were being paid off from the schooner I had come in as mate. They were all eager for a “site,” if it was only the run to Oswego. I told them that was all I could

sign 'em for, but that we would take the same chance; if I could keep the round-sterned Delaware going, they would have jobs. Before noon we got the foresail on her and stood down the Picton Reach from Deseronto outward bound with a light west wind.

The *David Andrews* was a 300-ton tow-barge, built for the St. Lawrence River trade, and like all those barges she had a plump round tug-boat stern. She was so full that she steered wildly. It was always a competition between her and the *Speedwell* which could turn round oftenest and meet the man at the wheel coming the other way. She wore out so many towlines, rudderstocks and helmsmen's mitts that her owner couldn't get a tug or steam barge to take the risk of towing her. So he hauled her out, spiked some more cleats on the cheeks of her rudder, gave her a half-clipper bow and other hoped for improvements, including a coat of black paint above and red paint below, and rigged her as a fore-and-aft schooner.

The rebuild was sufficient to justify a new name, and he had tagged her the *Delaware*, hoping it would change her luck. It hadn't. She went on taking wild sheers into pierheads and turning around and making faces at the man at the wheel just as she had before. It was long before the phrase "in the red" was invented, but she was in it, far past the top strake of her bottom planking, right up to the covering board, at the end of every season.

I had had some "mean, ornery, downright Jezebels" to steer since I started with my father in the old *Enterprise*, at the age of nine, and the round-sterned *Delaware* really wasn't the worst. Long before I got her to Oswego and the lumber-shovers tackled the high-piled pine that covered her decks as high as the upper deadeyes of the rigging I worked out some cures for her tricks. It lay mostly in sail trimming and giving her the right amount of centreboard. It took all the rest of the season to get on to all of her whimsies, for she had a new one with every plank of trim. Before I left her she would eat out of my hand – but I always had to watch that she didn't take a bite of my leg while doing it.

I paid the crew with the freight on the lumber cargo for this first trip. By sheer luck I got a cargo of coal in Oswego for Hamilton, and a load of left-over grain back down the lake from Wellington Square, and then some coal charters for Kingston, and an odd load of cribstone for the new harbor work at Toronto. Some times I had to wait for charters, for freights were slack for everybody, but the *Delaware* was kept moving. I never had to pay the crew off.

It was a good summer for weather, too. While we blew out sails and parted gear now and then it was never bad enough to leave me "in the hole" through ship chandlers' bills. I repainted her in the fall, while flying wind-bound, and gave her a white stripe of covering board in the middle of the black, which smartened her appearance.

The first of December I picked up a cargo of coal in Oswego for the Deseronto iron works. Now, thought I, is about time for me to say "Boo" to Mr. Owner; if I stay away from him much longer I'll be frozen in for Christmas in a foreign port.

So I let her go for home with a strong breeze from the eastward. Of course it was risky. A dozen schooners bound for the head of the lake were lying loaded in Oswego harbor. Their

masters were older than I, and smelled the snow that was sure to come. I looked for snow, too; but I hoped to catch the shelter of the north shore, and get into the Bay of Quinte before things got bad. Once within the bay I could anchor and wait for it to clear.

It is only a short run across from Oswego; forty miles of open water, six or seven hours' sailing with a good breeze, brings you in with the Canada shore. I let her go north for three hours, and began to raise the land, after passing between the Main Ducks and the False. Then the snow shut in thick, thick, thick, so that you could not see the fly at the masthead. I clewed up the gaff-topsails so as to keep the snow out of them, let her go a while, and shook her up to get a cast with the lead.

No bottom.

I let her go north again half an hour, and then another cast.

Fifteen fathoms.

"Keep her away nor'west!" I called to the two lads grinding at the wheel.

Fifteen minutes by the cabin clock and I took another cast.

Ten fathoms.

Now Amherst Island, on the Canada shore, lay to the north of us and the great peninsula of Prince Edward County to the west. To get into the Bay of Quinte I was trying to thread the Upper Gap, about a mile of good water lying between the two. Easy enough, even with the round-sterned hard-steering Delaware, in daylight, with a good breeze. But in half a gale from the eastward and thick of snow – not so easy.

"Let 'er go west!" I sang out to the wheel.

"West it is!" they chirruped back, none too cheerfully, for they knew what a bump Prince Edward, lying due west, could give us.

"By the mark seven!" yelled the leadsman at the next cast.

"Keep her jogging," I called to the wheel, "and we'll try again!"

"By the deep four!"

"Ten fathom!"

"Twelve!" yelled the leadsman in quick succession, as fast as he could heave and call. They were all bewildered at deepening the water when they were heading for the shore. But I knew where we were. We were crossing the tail of the shoal off Grapey Island, a small outlier of Amherst. Amherst, you know, is big enough for a township, with farms and villages.

"Haul her up to north again!" I called.

"North, sir?" from the mystified wheel.

"Yes, north!"

“North it is, sir” – very dubiously. One more cast gave us fourteen fathoms.

“Coil up your line and salt it well so it won’t freeze,” I told the leadsman, “we’re in the Upper Gap. Aloft with you to the fore cross-trees and keep your eyes peeled for Indian Point!”

Soon afterwards we ran out of the heavy roll and into smooth water. Amherst Island, invisible in the white smother, was sheltering us.

“Let her go off to west-sou’-west,” was my next bark, and sou’-westerly we went up the Adolphus Reach of the Bay of Quinte, wing and wing, with the booms up-ending in the strong breeze, shaking the flakes out of the round-bellies of the sails in great clouds.

We never saw Indian Point, or Point Pleasant, the sandspit that marks the Prince Edward corner of the Upper Gap. We were flying up the Bay of Quinte, pushing the water in front of us like a rolling snowdrift.

At Glenora the narrow bay splits and turns sharply back on itself making the lower angle of a Z. The land, is high there, and steep-to, and I was in hopes of seeing it before we poked the *Delaware’s* jibboom through the western bank. But all we saw was the dim shape of a steam barge, ploughing along ahead of us. Old Capt. Vanalstine had been lying at the Stone Mills of Glenora in the *Saxon*, and he had just let go his lines. We were coming up on him fast when he suddenly crossed our bows and headed north. I knew he was turning the corner to go up the Reach.

“Hard down the helm! Let the foresail come over!” I yelled, and we jibed, just in time to keep her from climbing the hill on the far side of the Reach. I thought the jibe would take the foresail, foregaff, foreboom and the price of her freight out of her, but we parted nothing.

Closehailed going up the reach we about held the *Saxon*. Old Vanalstine was very good, and gave us a long blast from his whistle just before he vanished as suddenly as though his barge had evaporated. I knew what was happening. He had turned the second corner of the Z, and Captain John’s Island, or Foresters’ Island as it is called now, had blotted him out, although it was invisible itself in the white smother. Deseronto lay in the very corner he had turned, to go on up the Bay.

“Run down your jibs! Stand by both anchors! ” I called to the lads. I took the wheel myself, sending the helmsman forward. As the foresail and mainsail flailed about in the snowclouds and the flogging jibs clanked down their stays there was a clearing, and I caught the loom of the snowclad lumber piles of the Gilmore mills in Deseronto.

“She’ll headreach up to the dock, sir! ” was the good news from the mate.

And she did.

We got our lines out and stowed our wet and snow-filled sails in some fashion. As we passed the last gasket the owner came aboard. He was still frowning. Still smoking a black cigar. Looked more worried even than when we parted. It was only when he stepped off the rail that I noticed there was a foot of snow on deck.

We waded through the drifts back to the cabin and went below.

"I never looked to see you again," said he. "And you've got a cargo, too! Will your freight pay your men off? I hope so, captain, for I can tell you I've been touching bottom all year."

I went to my room and opened the little desk.

"Bills; bills; bills; bills!" said he. "I know. But, honest, captain, it's no use showing 'em to me."

"No?" said I. "Well, count 'em, anyway. They're bills, all right. Four hundred dollars, in fives, ten, and twenties."

"What!" said he.

"Yes," said I. "That's what I've managed to clear for you this season, mister, with this schooner, and she don't owe a cent to me or anyone else for wages, tow-bills, groceries, or chandlery. Her freight on this trip will pay off the crew when we get her stripped, though it will take two weeks to get her sails dried for storage."

"Man," said he, pop-eyed, "that's the first real money I've seen since I fitted her out last spring. You're hired here and now for next season."

"Not at a thousand dollars a month," said I. "This round-sterned omadhaun has finished my education in little fore-and-afters. The man who can make a go of the *Delaware* can run a battleship on moonlight excursions or take an ocean liner through the Welland Canal. From now on I'm out for the big time stuff."