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The *Baltic*

Capt. David Reynolds, long senior master in the Royal Canadian Yacht Club fleet of launches, had many good stories of his experiences boy and man in the lake carriers. His narrative of the Great Gale of 1880 was given not so long ago. Here are some more recollections of an early ship of his.

I was five seasons in the *Baltic* – not the stormy water between Russia and Scandinavia, but the schooner of that name, hailing from Wellington Square.

Wellington Square was that forgotten port near Hamilton now known as Burlington. I don't know if there was an intention of naming all Wellington Square vessels after the seven seas, but another Wellington Square schooner was christened the *Azov*, and the *Baltic* often sailed in her company.

The *Baltic* was a real old-timer, built at Wellington Square in 1851; she was 106 feet 4 inches on deck, 21 feet 7 inches beam and 9 feet 9 inches deep in the hold, and could carry 300 tons of coal or 100,000 feet of lumber. Johnnie McGavlin was master of her in 1855, trading between Port Whitby and Oswego, with lumber for Smith and Post.

When I was in her twenty years later, J. D. Neile owned her, and she was sailed by Capt. John Andrew, of Oakville, a brother of the better known Captain Jim, who designed and built yachts as well as lake schooners. The famous prize winner *Aggie of Oakville* was one of his many yachts, and the *Merrythought* was another.

Capt. John Andrew was nicknamed Three-Finger Jack, from having lost a little finger in a ship-yard mishap. That finger, and a pet mallet, was all he ever lost, for the Andrews were canny Scotchmen. He got the pet mallet back in a curious way, but the finger never grew on.

He always contended that this favorite mallet of his had been swallowed up by the yacht *Merrythought*, when he was working with his brother at her building, one winter, and many's the argument they had over its disappearance.

Fifteen years after her launching, the *Merrythought* came back to Jim Andrew's Oakville yard for replanking. and Three-Finger Jack was one of the few carpenters Captain Jim would trust to do the job. They stripped her to her garboard strake, and so laid bare the cement with which her bottom had been filled to make a smooth clean bilge. Taking away the planking cracked the cement, and they decided to clean it all out.

"There's my mallet!" yelled Three-Finger Jack as they did so.

He was right. It had been cemented into her bottom, under the cabin flooring, for fifteen years, and came out none the worse for wear.

This was thirty or forty years, though, after I was shipmates with Jack Andrew in the *Baltic*.

She was, as I said, an old-timer, with a spoon bow, something like the old Paddy Young's, a centreboard box on one side of the keelson and a square topsail, to keep her from coming into the wind on you. She was a hard-steering heifer when I first knew her, in 1875, and took the whole of the road.

One day it was blowing hard from the nor'-west, and we had to beat up around the Island point to come in through the old Western Channel. In a heavy puff the chain sheets of the square topsail carried away, and as it was blowing very hard Three-Finger Jack told us to clew the sail up and furl it, instead of trying to reeve new sheets.

By the time we had this done we had worked as far north as the old line of stake buoys that used to mark the channel, and Andrew squared her away for the entrance.

A hundred yards from the lighthouse on the corner of the old Queen's Wharf a vicious puff hit her and she started to come up against her wheel.

"Hard up, hard up with that helm!" sang out Andrew.

"Hard a-weather she is, sir!" chorussed the two men straining on the spokes.

Still the yawing schooner tried to turn around and talk back at the smiting wind. Without the fore topsail on her there was no holding her.

"Leggo your main peak halliards!" roared Andrew, but before the gaff could settle down and relieve the push on the mainsail the *Baltic's* spoon bow had hit the Queen's Wharf a wallop that spilled the oil in the lighthouse lamps.

She bounced off, all a wreck forward, with the bay water floating up the straw mattresses out of the forecabin bunks. Before we could get sail off her she filled on us and went down under our feet at the inner end of the Queen's Wharf channel. But she didn't go far. When she settled on the bottom the water just came to her hatch coamings.

It wasn't much of a job to re-float the *Baltic* and get her to the drydock. During the winter she was rebuilt thoroughly. A plumb stem, with a little knee or cutwater at the head of it, replaced her battered spoon bow, and gave her greater carrying capacity. It helped make her a better steering vessel, for she was re-rigged forward, and the topsail yard was taken off her, and only the lower yard left, for a squaresail.

I was with her four seasons after that, part of the time as mate. I was out in her in the big gale of November 7th, 1880, in company with the *Azov*, when the *T. C. Street* and *Wood Duck* and *Belle Sheridan* and *Norway* and *Zealand* were lost, and we came through all right. Though we lost mainboom, gaff and mainsail we counted ourselves lucky.

The *Baltic* at last was bought by a Capt. Beard, a Deseronto or Bay or Quinte man, who wouldn't sail on Sunday. Of course, if he was under way on a Sunday he would keep her going,

but he was a genuinely pious man, and many a profitable freight he lost through refusing to set sail on the Lord's Day.

He took good care of the *Baltic*, and had her in fine shape for grain carrying as late as 1894. His whole family worked with him, his son as mate, his wife and daughter doing the cooking. Late in November that year he loaded grain for Oswego in Kingston, and made a quick run across, but missed the piers going in, in a gale of wind. The seas shoved the *Baltic* broadside on under Port Ontario, on the east bank of Oswego harbor.

The lifesavers took off the Beard family and the crew, and it was thought that the schooner herself might be lightered off, with smooth weather. Next night it came on to blow harder than ever, and the Oswego schooner *Daniel G. Fort* missed the pier and landed in on the beach right across the *Baltic's* stern.

That finished her. Next morning the barley was washing up the beach, and one side of the *Baltic* was in staves. Yet the skeleton of the old Wellington Square wood wagon lay on the boulders for two years before the beachcombers had it all burned.