

Toronto Telegram, May 14, 1932
Schooner Days, XLVII (47)
By C.H.J. Snider

The Pummy

If schooner men scorned stonehookers in our days of the wind ships, stonehooker sailors despised pummies still more.

Stonehookers were those patched and picturesque craft whose resourceful crews of two or three men won a scanty living by gathering cribstone, gravel, building stone, pavers and hardheads along the lake shore, and selling it here in the city.

Pummies were the roustabouts they carried as crude labor – seldom for more than one trip; the unfortunate down-and-outs of the waterfront who could be induced to ship on starvation wages and starvation rations, because they were no good as sailormen, but possessed a pair of blistered hands and an aching back apiece, which might be employed in handling heavy and indestructible freight.

LIVERPOOL ANDY was a pummy. All unlovely was Liverpool.

He never saw thirty, but he might have been any age between eight and eighty from the look of his face. It was seamed with sores that were always healing and never healed. His uncombed hair was scanty and colorless. His eyes were a faded blue. His hands were gnarled like an old man's and his mouth was as slack as a child's.

The dockside loafers called him a Barnardo boy. That was only because he was English and an orphan. Good Dr. Barnardo's institution had never had the care of him. He was a foundling; finally escaped from some parish pariah-pen when he was eleven; after many attempts reached the West Indies and there stowed away in a fruiter bound for New York. In the dark hold without water, he lived on green bananas for ten days, according to his story, and broke out in sores which scarred his face forever afterwards.

He reached Toronto waterfront by the blind baggage route. He stopped off at the old West Market street slip, not from choice but because the train crew discovered him in that longitude. He had a close call from death under a shunting engine's pilot, and from capture under the broad palms of old Bob Williams, the Esplanade constable.

Mr. Williams was usually mentioned in contemporary newspapers in the melancholy paragraph concluding with... "was notified, and dragging operations commenced at once, but so far without result." His heart was as big as both his big hands, and if Liverpool Andy and similar sinners escaped his clutches the Division Inspector up aloft did not give him a bad mark for it.

Andy recognized the smelly vicinity of West Market street dump, and the neighboring sewer mouth in Jarvis street slip – which was really East-market street – as a natural habitat. Had he known the traditional, "Here-I-rest, " meaning of Alabama he would have uttered that sounding phrase as soon as he caught breath after Constable Williams' chase.

Thenceforward the stone wharves across the Esplanade railway tracks behind the old City Hall, became his haunt. Concrete mixers and the sand-pump have long since obliterated his pasture, and the water front has moved a quarter of a mile south from the shoreline of his days.

Andy earned a meagre livelihood in summer by occasional trips as pummy in stonehookers, varied by intermittent dockwalloping and blind-stabbing.

Dockwalloping was an open-shop form of stevedoring or longshoreman's work, remunerated at the rate of fifteen cents an hour or so much a toise – according to the state of the market, the stonehooker skipper's temper, and the state of ebriety of the laborer.

A toise of stone weighed from eight to ten tons. For lifting that much from the stonehooker's deck or hold, carrying it ashore and piling it on the wharf the dockwalloper considered himself well paid if he received seventy cents. He was in great luck if in addition he was able to share the stonehooker men's bread and molasses and bay perch at noon hour, or if the skipper sent him up to the City Arms on Westmarket street, or Tymon's at the corner of Church and Esplanade, for a can of beer.

Blind-stabbing was another form of honorable employment, practised by borrowing first a scow, second a scoop or rake, third tobacco, and fourth a match; and, so equipped, patiently groping in the greasy bay water at the head of wharves and slips.

The purpose was to retrieve therefrom such granite hardheads, or stray flatstone, or gravel, as had slipped between the hookers' sides and the wharf edge in the process of unloading. Sometimes a man made as much as \$2 a day at this.

Good money, that was called. For this was in the 1890's, when everybody was poor. Everybody worked or went hungry. Some worked and went hungry, too. Those of us who endured the nineties with Liverpool Andy found them hard and happy. It was forty years after the water had flowed under the bridge that another generation began to discover that the nineties were either "gay" or "naughty."

Winter was the time of Liverpool Andy's discontent. The doctrine had not yet been enunciated that "you can't let a man starve." We could, in the nineties. And, God forgive us, sometimes we did.

Unemployment relief was an undreamed of term. Charity there was, crude, and not appetizing. At the Don Jail the hungering workless got skilly. Several "missions" stretched their slender resources to the utmost to provide one free breakfast a week – every Sunday morning. When the jobless carried the black flag along Front street the old Evening News hailed a bread wagon, and stuffed its business office windows with loaves, and did not blush to let its left hand know in screaming headlines that its right hand was giving them away.

Casual laborer at best, Liverpool did not fare sumptuously when frost bound the Bay and the hookers ceased from troubling the lake shore farmers until the following spring.

Winter work for Liverpool Andy there was none. With a horror bred of English

workhouses he shunned the expedient of "getting sent down till spring," and the tender mercies of the missions and the House of Industry. He made an odd ten cents or even a quarter (which adjectives are contradictory per se) shovelling snow or holding teams at the Black Horse or the St. Lawrence Market, or at the public weigh scales. But his standby for his daily bread and nightly sleep was the grease he could collect at the mouth of Jarvis street sewer.

Toronto Bay was at this time a cesspool. A dozen sewers spewed their undigested contents into it raw. The one at Jarvis street was the ripest, rankest, foulest of them all. When oakum, tar and tin patches all failed, the sickest stonehookers used to be hauled into Jarvis street to let the sewer coat their gaping seams with scum that would keep the rest of Lake Ontario out. For this reason the slip was nick-named of the hooker men The Hospital. In summer every wash of a steamer's wake, surging into the slip, released great blobs of gas from the foul bottom, which burst with awful stench on reaching the surface.

Factories discharged waste into Jarvis street sewer. Their chemicals, and the sudden chilling of the warm sewage by the Bay ice in zero weather, caused the grease to coagulate in startlingly clean white dapplings on the surface of the little pool of open water at the sewer mouth. Here Liverpool Andy plied his trade in bitterest weather, with skimmer and bucket. The smooth white grease he sold to tallow chandlers and soapmakers; and so, perchance, had his humble share in my lady's toilette.

What happened to Liverpool Andy will be told next week.

Five Jibs

John Redfern Macdonald, Goderich fisherman, writes apropos of the recent picture of the *Erie Belle*:

"About the names of the five jibs on the *Erie Belle*. I was before the mast in the schooner *George Sturges*, out of Chicago, different times. She used to be the schooner *Higgle L. Jones*, and she had five Jibs, and they went this way in her: Outer Jib, jibtopsail, flying jib, standing jib, and fore staysail. The standing jib and foretopmast staysail is the same sail. The *Sturges* was a three-masted topsail schooner, 35,000 bushels. She went to the coast, and I heard she went under with all hands in the Gulf, about twenty years ago."