

Toronto Telegram, March 15, 1941
Schooner Days, CDLXXXVII (487)
By C.H.J. SNIDER

MIMICO TO MIAMI – SCHOONER TRIP, NOW

IT 'S a long time since anything under sail has gone from Toronto to the South Seas like the Oakville-built brigantine *Sea Gull* did in 1865. All examples in this century have been yachts. Aemilius Jarvis took the *Haswell* to Jamaica and back in the winter of 1920-21, and *Haswell* later went to California and twice raced to Honolulu from Santa Barbara. The schooner yacht *Zavorah*, which G. Herrick Duggan built at Hamilton in 1923, went south after he parted with her. Mr. Duggan had a message from Dr. Hubbard from the ocean post office in the Galapagos Islands. Still later the old steel Clyde-built cutter *Vreda*, converted to a schooner after forty years' service on the lakes, started south and got to the West Indies after a series of adventures. And the four-poster *Azara*, which came here from salt water, went back after wearing the name *Oriole III* for a while, and crossed to Spain. She was still going strong Florida-ways as the *Lady Mary* when last heard from.

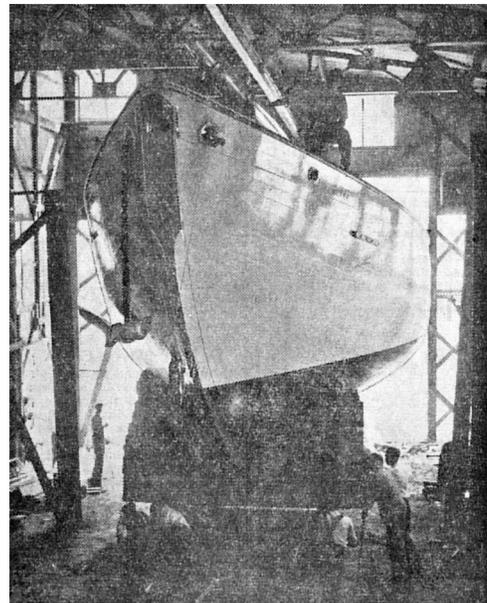
1940 MODEL

So the Shellbacks were not unprepared for B. E. Howard's brilliant series of excerpts from the log of the white two-masted schooner *Alvee*, which was a feature of the waterfront late last fall. She lay near the grain elevators, a brand new vessel, of impressive proportions for a sailing craft. She was 88 feet long, 20 feet beam and 10 feet draught, the largest schooner yacht to be seen there in years. Her masts, 93 feet long, had not yet been stepped. They lay in trestles on her deck. After a week or two she was gone. Shellbacks this week learned whither and how.

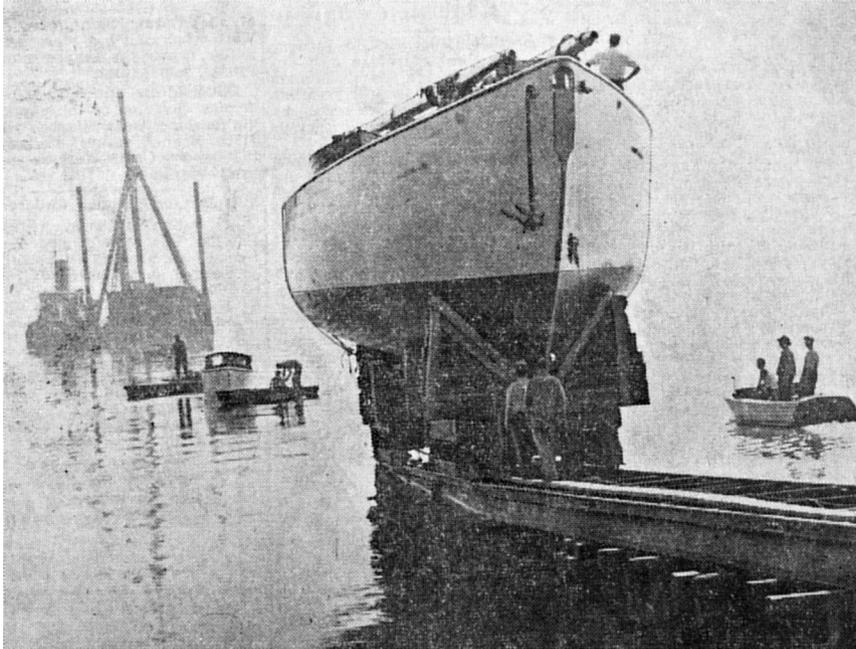
From Mimico to Miami – that was the imaginary trip taken last Wednesday by the Shellback Club members, with Mr. Howard as pilot, and the ship's log used as the background.

The *Alvee* was built on the shores of the Humber Bay at Sachau's Marine Yard, of all Canadian materials, and by Canadian labor – the first vessel ever hailing from Mimico, and perhaps the last wooden craft of her tonnage – 60, the same as LaSalle's *Griffon* – to be built on Lake Ontario. The *Griffon*, built 261 years before, was the first to ply the Upper Lakes.

It took 15 months to build the *Alvee*, and for construction new buildings were erected so that the work would not be hampered during the winter of 1939-1940.



In the shop before launching - special buildings had to be put up to house her during two years' construction



Launching on the lake shore was a problem, requiring a specially built railway, dredger and tug to get her afloat.

And when she slid down the 600-foot runway, especially built for her launching, a world-going ocean cruiser hit the waters of Lake Ontario, a Canadian thoroughbred.

Here is Mr. Howard's picture [below]:

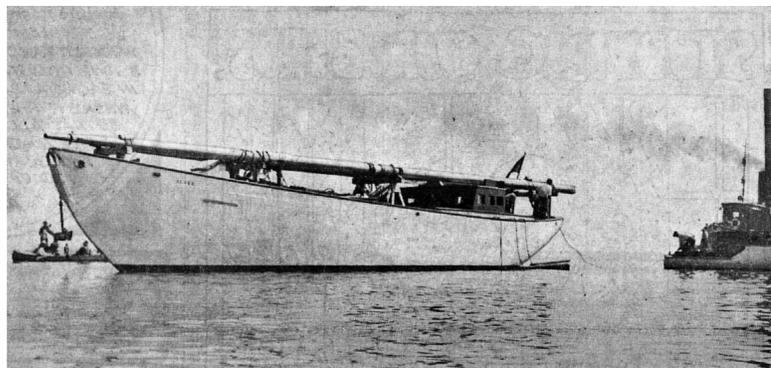
SCHOONER RIGGED

The hollow masts are of British Columbia fir; her decks of three-inch B.C. selected fir, and her frames of Canadian white pine with three-inch B.C. fir planking. The frames,

60 in all, are fitted 18 inches apart, and are double, making them six by three inches in cross section.

She is schooner rigged for offshore cruising, with a marconi mainsail and gaff foresail. The galley is the type that sailors often dream about, but seldom see. It runs across the whole breadth of the ship, complete with electric refrigerator. "The crew," said the speaker, "is going to be delighted with the galley. It has, too, a stove which will burn continuously for 100 hours and keep the same temperature and boil a kettle of water in two minutes."

She has very good accommodation – a cabin to berth two persons, and two others to berth three each, as well as a modern bathroom, tiled just like those in city homes. A saloon runs across the breadth of the ship, and for the benefit of the Shellback's oilskin choir, is equipped with a piano. Even the deckhouse has most up-to-date equipment. In the centre stands the chart table, a good substantial affair, which can be folded up to the sides of the room when not in use.



The Alvee as she started on her 2,000-mile voyage from Mimico for Miami

In fact, *Alvee's* entire equipment is fairly elaborate. She carries an auxiliary diesel engine of 165 horsepower and an eight-horsepower diesel for the ship's dynamo. There are 50 electric lights

aboard this world cruiser.

SAILED IN OCTOBER

But, as the speaker said: “Horror of horrors, she is equipped with an electric bilge pump.” You can imagine the shock to shellbacks accustomed to putting yachts through Lake Ontario and pumping by hand.

It was about the first day of October last when the *Alvee* headed east towards Oswego, then through the New York State Barge Canal. The masts were still lashed to their trestles on deck, for many bridges had to be passed before they would be stepped at City Island.

Through the 360 miles of scenic beauty of the barge canal the *Alvee* sailed with little happening until the Hudson River was reached when she went aground one night as the tide went out. She was, the speaker said, at a very nasty angle next morning. Up the Harlem River to Long Island Sound and City Island.

City Island, the speaker said, was a collection of marine yards, one touching the other so closely that a pilot had to come out and tow the *Alvee* into Nevin’s famous yard, where she was to be rigged. Here, twelve men came aboard and quickly took the *Alvee*’s masts from the deck, where they had rested on cradles, to the marine shops.

The next day two Swedes worked on the ship, two very efficient men, and soon had her ready for sailing.

It was getting late in October as the *Alvee* sailed down past the Statue of Liberty and around the coast, keeping close to shore, and the going was getting rather heavy. Around the New Jersey coast to Chesapeake Bay she proceeded, then to Norfolk, Virginia, where the Canadian yacht was sailing in the same waters as large United States Navy cruisers. Norfolk is “very naval,” the narrator said. The U.S. naval officers insisted on entertaining any Canadian guests who arrived in the harbor.

WEATHER GETS TOUGH

From here the yacht moved on, with the weather getting tougher. The cook was indisposed by this time, and the yacht went back to put off the owner.

From then on it was a hard job for the remaining four members of the crew to take the ship through heavy weather. Her forestaysail weighed as much as the old *Gardenia*’s mainsail. Each time the mainsail was raised, 160 feet of quarter-inch wire halyard was wound around a Merriman winch. “What this ship needs is an electric winch,” opined the speaker’s correspondent.

As the ship drew near Cape Fear, the Gulf Stream was close and an ill-natured battle between wind and current started. The *Alvee* can sail about 5 1/2 points off wind, with her modest sails spread of 3,100 feet in her four lowers, and at this spot the schooner was practically hove to for 18 hours fighting wind and wave, cold and current.

“The crew had not washed for three days; they had not eaten for three days; the cook was still indisposed through that common ailment which often catches up with landlubbers who go to sea . . .

sea sickness; they had no sleep for three days, but the log showed no sign of despair in the entry which said 'We realize now you have to be tough in this game'. Then a shade of hope was shown as the entry continued: 'But if we had two or three more days we could have got organized'."

ENGINES USED

As she sailed further south, better winds and warmer weather prevailed. She had no light canvas at all except a fisherman staysail and none of her sails would fill in a wind of less than 15 miles an hour. However, her auxiliary engines saw her move along at about seven knots.

Arriving at Miami, the *Alvee* tied up between the two well-known yachts, *Good News* and *Stormy Weather*. *Stormy Weather* is said to have cost her owner \$200,000. It was here that the *Alvee*'s crew saw all kinds of ocean-going yachts. At Miami the owners of yachts keep their Jenny flying in a breeze up to 60 miles.

Here, 50-foot yachts are handled by one man, and chartered to visitors for as much as \$700 a month.

"So," concluded the speaker, "we made the trip with very little difficulty. A few of the members with weak stomachs felt the effects a little after the first night out, and the rig was a little heavy for the crew. When they went to set the fisherman staysail it was always a question whether the sail would hoist the men up or the men would get the sail up."

Yachts smaller than the *Alvee* carry crews of ten or twelve for ocean racing. *Alvee* is still in Florida, and although she was primarily intended for a world cruise, she may be there for the duration of the submarine blitz.