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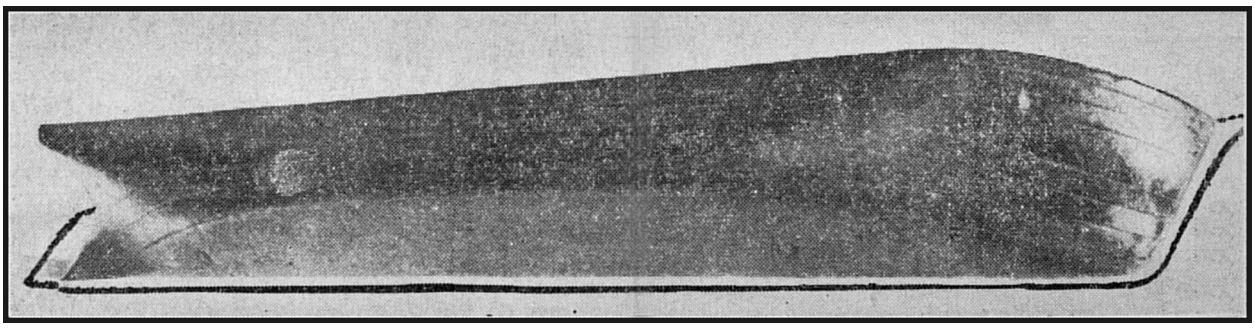
By C.H.J. Snider

Standing Keels and British Queens



Builder's model of the Brigantine "British Queen" of Port Credt.

Builder's model of Port Credit's largest sailing craft, a square rigger, recalls pre-centreboard days in the lake fleets.

STANDING-KEELERS passed out of the lake picture as unprofitable, in the middle of the nineteenth century. They were succeeded by the centreboarders, which were angels at home but devils abroad, as men who took them across the ocean could testify.

The standing keel, as old as the ark, is in use the world over where there is sufficient depth of water to employ it. The keel or backbone of the vessel, is so constructed that a part of it, known as the shoe, projects below the bottom of the hull for a considerable part of the total length, in order to prevent leeway or sidewise drift. For the same purpose the vessel is also modelled of a certain proportion of depth and sharpness.

The centreboard is a short plate of similar area to the long shoe of the standing keel, and used for the same object, but being moveable, and working through a slot in the vessel's bottom, it can be hoisted up out of the way, and so permits her to traverse shallower water.

Centreboards had become characteristic of Great Lakes sailing craft by 1850. The "boards" were big squares of thick oak plank, edge bolted together with dowels, housed in a box or trunk between the deck and the keelson, and lowered through a slot in the keel.

The earlier ones had to be hauled up at both ends, with much labor. They were nicknamed barn doors. Such a board, floating up in the box when the vessel lost way, was the undoing of the scow *Pinta*, wrecked off Marigolds Point. Later ones pivoted on a king bolt in the lower forward comer, and hoisted by a pennant of chain or wire, attached to the upper after corner.

Shallow harbors, rivers and canals limited the draft of water our vessels could carry. Need for cargo space made them almost flat bottomed and often box like – terrible models to work to windward, especially in rough water. Centreboards are as old as the 19th century, but it

was 1840 before they began to come into general use for the larger lake carriers as"slip keels," "sliding keels", "centreplates" and so on, they had hitherto been considered suitable only for small boats, such as use lee-boards.

Thomas' Register of 1864 lists the brigantine *Geneva* as one vessel of that rig then on the lakes with a standing keel. She had been built in 1842.

The brigantine *British Queen*, built in Port Credit, was still afloat at this time, and Abram Block, J. P., who furled her royal as a boy, says she had a standing keel. For many years he has had the builder's model of her. It was given to Mr. James Robinson Shaw of Port Credit, who kept a general store and owned a farm close to the port. On the farm he had a blacksmith shop, and here were made the hand-wrought spikes which fastened the *British Queen*, which was built in the old Port Credit shipyard on the east side of the river near the bridge and below the old timbered blockhouse which used to stand on the side of the present hotel.

Seventy years ago, when Abram Block was a lad of eleven or twelve, he used to play among the baulks of timber which still remained in the shipyard after the building of the *British Queen.* His impression is that she was launched the year Queen Victoria ascended the throne, which would be 1837. Thomas' Register of 1864 and a list of vessels published in the Globe of 1856 both give the date of her building as 1847. This may be correct, but it is a fact that vessels frequently came on to the register in the early days years and years after their actual construction, and their date of registration was given as their date of building.

There were at least one and possibly two other *British Queens* on Lake Ontario, one hailing from St. Catharines and one from South Bay. These were both schooners.

The South Bay *British Queen* was built there in 1863, and was owned by John Palen & Son, of Picton. She was 90 feet 3 inches on deck, 23 feet 9 inches beam, and 7 feet 9 inches deep in the hold, and registered 117 tons. The present generation of Torontonians may remember her when she was carrying stone for the cribs for the new Eastern Gap in 1891 and 1892. She was notable for having no jibboom at that time. One of her earlier skippers was very proud of her, and used to be quoted in the South Bay dialect as saying: "Her's got a boo'ful bottom, her has, and if her was coppered her could go to the Old Country, her could."

N. and D. J. Phillips appear on the Dominion register as owners of the schooner *British Queen* of St. Catharines in 1874. Capt. John Williams, of Toronto, once sailed in her. This was either another Queen than the South Bay beauty, or the latter with different port of hail and ownership.

For forty years Abram Block and Mr. Shaw were associated in spiritual as well as nautical affairs, both being pillars of the then struggling Methodist Church in Port Credit. Mr. Shaw's grandson, the Rev. Garnet Lynd, of Aurora, has now three United Church pastorates. Another grandson, Mr. Lloyd Lynd, is a Toronto business man, with a residence on the old Shaw lot on Port street, Port Credit. Mr. Shaw gave Mr. Block the model of the *British Queen* of Port Credit, and Mr. Block, in turn, has given it to Mr. Lloyd Lynd for his brother, who has a special

interest.

The relic handed down by Grandfather Shaw is a beautiful example of the practical builder's half-breadth working model, from which the moulds of the actual vessel were taken off, and from which she was built.

As was the custom, it is finished only up to the height of the deck, the details of bulwarks, deck structures, spars, rigging and rudder being sufficiently standardized not to require preliminary miniatures.

Following practice, the model was not whittled from one block, but built of alternate strips of dark and light wood, walnut and a softer wood, pine or spruce, first shaped, then screwed together and finished. As the four lower layers, or lands, as they were called, were of the same thickness throughout, they gave accurately the waterlines of the vessel, up to above where she floated when cargo-free. The next layer was curved to give her the required amount of sheer. Succeeding layers, screwed on top of this, had parallel surfaces, and so carried the sheer up to the deck.

Applying the scale of 1/4 inch to the foot to this model, we get the following dimensions for the British Queen:

Length on deck, 135 feet.
Length of keel. 130 feet.
Beam, 24 feet 6 inches.
Sternpost, 9 feet.
Depth from top of deck plank to bottom of garboard, 11 ft. 3 in.
Depth of hold inside, 9 feet, 3 in.

Adding fifteen inches for the projection of the shoe usually employed by standing-keelers to prevent leeway, we get a probable draft for the British Queen when fully loaded of 10 feet 3 inches. She must have been a hard vessel to work to windward, unless a centreboard was added. This was frequently done by the builders of the nineteenth century, the centreboard box being built, on one side of the keelson and keel.

If these dimensions are correct, the *British Queen* was the largest vessel ever built in Port Credit. She could carry, as Abram Block recalls, 14,000 bushels. Later centreboard schooners of the same overall length, beam, and depth, would carry more than that, because they were made very flat in the bottom, with hard bilges, only slightly rounded.

When the straight-edge is put on the model of the *British Queen* it shows that she had considerable deadrise, as sailors call the V shape of a sharp bottom. She had 18 inches of deadrise before coming to the turn of the bilge. This sharpness of bottom would enable her to hold on, going to windward, in place of a centreboard, but it manifestly reduced her carrying capacity in comparison with the flat-bottomed ones. Mr. Block says she was a handsome vessel, with a half-clipper bow or knee at the stem head. She was painted black above and red below. So, too, was the much smaller *British Queen* of South Bay. The Port Credit *British Queen* had

the old style square single foretopsail. She is mentioned in Port Whitby's earliest harbor records as paying import tolls, at 3 shillings and 4 pence per ton, on 227 tons of railway iron brought in for the new Grand Trunk railway in 1855.

Abram Block well remembers the last time the *British Queen* came into Port Credit. It was one fall early in the sixties, and he was playing on the bridge with other boys as she nosed up the creek. They knew the captain and crew. As a favor they were allowed to scramble up the fore topgallant mast and stow the royal, the highest sail above the deck, one hundred feet up in the air.

The *British Queen* lay in the Credit that winter. Next spring after the freshet had cleared the river of ice it came on to blow from the north at night, and new ice formed. Ranging around on her mooring lines the *British Queen*'s waterline seams were opened by the cutting edges of the fresh skim ice, and she filled and settled on the bottom, with her deck above water.

A Toronto man named Wardle took the contract of raising the *British Queen*, and floated her without difficulty. After that she was towed away from the Credit, and never came back.

Who was the master builder of the *British Queen* Mr. Block does not recall, but James Harris, better known as "Boss" Harris, who built the *Defiance*, *Mary Ann* and *Mary E. Ferguson* and *Resolute* was one of her ship carpenters. In the register of 1864 her owner is given as H. Wade of Port Credit, and her builder as H. Chisholm. Her registered tonnage, 350, is consistent with the model's scaled dimensions.

There were still a few standing keel schooners in the 1864 register. So far as is known the schooner *Annexation*, built in Goderich in 1849, was the last standing-keeler of considerable size built for lake traffic. She could carry about 300 tons. She required fifteen feet of water when loaded to full capacity; so much depth that she seldom got a full load, and her freights were unprofitable in competition with the new models.

A centreboard schooner of similar burden would not draw more than nine feet; a centreboarder could carry 700 tons on 11 feet draught, which was long the limit of the Welland Canal. The standing-keelers passed out because they did not pay.