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Schooner Days, D (500)
By C.H.J. Snider

OLD BLACK SAL

EVER hear of the old *Black Sal*?

Will Wakeley, gone these thirty years, told about her, and she was an old story when he did. His experience of her had been limited. As a young fellow he had shipped in her after she had been rebuilt in Port Hope. That took place in 1870. Apparently they changed her shape and rebuilt her, getting too much deadrise in her, according to Will. They may also have changed her name at the time, for *Black Sal*, which stuck to her all her life, is a nickname for *Eliza*, which was her name after she was rebuilt, nor would it describe the bright young daughter of the mayor of the town, after whom she was named.

Her registered dimensions, 97 feet long, only 18 feet beam, and 9 feet deep in the hold, and 131 tons burthen, carry out the idea that she was too sharp for stability without ballast, and ballast in a carrier is just so much dead horse. Deadrise is the amount of elevation the bottom of a vessel has from the level of the keel to the point where the bottom turns into the side, at the bilge. The sharper the deadrise the faster the ship – but the less stability she has.

Anyway, the old *Black Sal* had too much of one and not enough of the other when she emerged from the carpenters' hands and the painters' brushes, with her rebuilt sides clothed in white and the name *Eliza Quinlon* on either bow and either quarter and on the sternboard as well, with "OF PORT HOPE" following. This was a particularly effective touch, for *Eliza Quinlon* was the daughter of the mayor of the thriving port, the county town of Durham and great rival of Cobourg, seven miles east.

Perhaps *Black Sal* had been a standing-keeler like the *Acorn* or the *Ann Jane Brown* or some other early Port Hope vessels. She had a square foretopsail – which carried bat wings above it. At two o'clock in the morning she caught a sharp squall off Presqu'isle Bluff, and it knocked her down till the water boiled into her lee scuppers, though she was light and riding high. Will Wakeley was shot out of his berth in the forecastle. He was sleeping in the top bunk on the port side and was shot across into the starboard chain locker. Both he and the locker were somewhat damaged, but he scrambled up the forecastle ladder to hear the mate yelling to the man at the wheel, "Luff her! Luff her! Or by – she's a goner!" and the captain assuring the helmsman "If you luff her I'll brain ye! You can't luff a square rigger like you would a fishboat. Leggo the foresheet and get that tops'l off her!"

Will was hanging on to where the topsail halliard was belayed, for lack of a better hold, and he threw the turns off before the mate had time to echo the command. He felt he was saving the ship, but nothing happened except that she bowed down heavier and the water poured over the lee rail. Instead of coming down the topsail stayed aloft, as full of wind as a pipe organ. He had forgotten the bat wings above it, which were sheeted to each yardarm. The mate let the

foresheet run, and threw everything off the pinrack – batwing halliards, tacks and sheets, topsail sheets and jib halliards, and there was enough flogging of loosened sails to drown the drums of the Manvers Blades and Cavan Blazers on a Twelfth of July. In downhauling and clewing up half the sails went to ribbons, and *Black Sal* staggered back to her feet as the squall blew itself out.

But the captain – W. H. Braund, I think he was – insisted that she was a good stiff little vessel, especially now that she had been rebuilt, and declared that the whole trouble was that they had left too much chain cable overhauled on deck, ready for anchoring. He made them overhaul all sixty fathoms of both chains, and stow it down in the chain lockers. So you may believe that young Will had a wakeful watch below instead of a beauty sleep when he turned in again for the remainder of his four hours, as all this row was roaring past his ear.

Sal may have been a sort of Cinderella without the glass slipper, for while she must have earned some money to keep going for a lifetime, all that survives of her record is grief.

On the 30th of March, 1882, Capt. Wm. E. Van Vlack, master, and Levi Collier, mate, of the *Eliza Quinlon*, appeared before Edward Merrill, notary public by royal authority duly appointed, in Picton, to enter a “protest” over what had happened to the ex-*Black Sal* in the preceding November. This looks like an insurance case, and the *Eliza Quinlon* certainly needed insurance.

The document they signed tells how on Nov. 9th, 1881, they partially loaded the schooner at Belleville with rye for Oswego, and sailed down to Kingston to complete their load, while a southwest gale which prevented their crossing the lake blew itself out. Anchoring abreast of Powers’ shipyard in Kingston – who remembers where it was? – after midnight, their cable parted and they lost a 700-lb. anchor and 20 fathoms of chain, worth \$60, and were blown back into the schooner *Wave Crest*, doing \$75 damage to her and wrecking their own headgear. The fore staysail and staysail boom were destroyed, the port headrail and cathead carried away, and the remaining anchor thrown inboard on deck so that it could not be lowered. They got a new 4-inch line on to the *Wave Crest*, and tried to hang on to her, but the line parted and 40 fathoms of it were lost.

Black Sal was now in imminent danger of driving ashore in Kingston harbor, but they “got a piece of the foresail on her” and stood across to the foot of Garden Island in the darkness. Here, having contrived to get the spare anchor over the bow, they let go, and hung on until daylight and a tug came to their rescue.

This regrettable incident ran up a bill of \$247.50 against a freight of unspecified amount, but possibly less than \$200.

But poor *Sal* was not yet out of the woods. While her headrail and cathead were replaced and another anchor was being found she completed her cargo of rye at the Kingston elevator, and two days later in November steered out for Oswego. She got within twelve miles of the place, a hundred minutes’ sailing, when the wind increased to a gale again and blew the foresail out of

the boltropes. Having already lost her forestaysail she could not beat into Oswego, and had to run back across the lake for South Bay, under the jibs she had left and a little piece of the mainsail.

South Bay was a lively spot in the 1880's, although it is now only a post office in Prince Edward County and a name on the chart. Perhaps off the chart would be more accurate, for Prince Edward Bay has made its appearance in its place. But in those days Case's Wharf and Cooper's Wharf jutted into South Bay, and Port Milford and Black Creek and Waupoos and Smith's Bay were schooner ports on it, doing a big barley trade and building scows and vessels.

Sometimes as many as seventy schooners lay at anchor under Point Traverse at the entrance to the bay, sheltering, and farmers would drive down sheep and cattle and pigs, and slaughter them on the beach, to provision the windbound fleet. Years after this the schooner *J. B. Kitchen* put in there, leaking and out of provisions. She had a square topsail, too, and wrung the foremast head off carrying it. No meat was to be had on this occasion, but the captain went ashore with a shotgun, and bargained with a farmer for 50 cents a chicken for each bird he could hit. The farmer opened the henhouse door and the captain opened both barrels. He had to pay \$21.50 for the forty-three hens he destroyed by his broadside, and the crew had to live on chicken breakfasts, dinners, suppers and midnight lunches till they crowed in their sleep.

But when the *Eliza Quinlon* went into South Bay in November, 1881, she was not looking for feathers but a foresail. She borrowed one that fitted her from a vessel which had laid up for the winter, and sailed out again to deliver her much travelled barley. This time she got it to Oswego – but the loss of the foresail added \$70 to the \$247.50 already standing against her freight.

From the fact that the protest was not recorded till the end of the following March it is probable that she was frozen in at Oswego or somewhere else for the winter, and could not get back to Prince Edward County till next spring. She did not last long after this unprosperous trip. That year, or soon afterwards, another captain took her out. She reappeared at South Bay, but on the wrong side of the county, the lakeside, a wreck on Poplar Point. She was coal laden at the time, leaking, and struck the bar, trying to make the shelter of the Bay.

Her crew were taken off by Capt. Spafford in the Point Traverse lifeboat, but no one seemed to have the heart to do anything more with her. For weeks she lay, with her masts bolt upright and her sails still on the booms and her cargo in the hold. She broke up in a second gale, and all that was saved of her was a few tons of coal which the farmers scraped up like gravel on the stony beach.