Sophia and Sisters

Delving into the records of lake vessels which ventured to cross the Atlantic when wind was the motive power and all work was done by hand, the following "cockleshells" appear among the earliest. None of these vessels was over 130 feet long. Some were less than 100 feet. You could set all four mentioned to-day side by side in Bay street, and the bulwarks of the outside ones would not touch the walls of the buildings. Incidentally you are to hear something of "Hen and Chickens."

IN 1847 the schooner *New Brunswick*, of St. Catharines, left Chicago with 18,000 bushels of wheat for Liverpool, via the Great Lakes, Welland canal, and St. Lawrence canals, river and gulf.

This is said to have been the first clearance of the kind ever made from the Great Lakes for Europe. The *New Brunswick* does not appear in the Dominion registers, which only date back to 1873, but in a list of lake vessels published in the Globe, 1856, she is shown, a three-masted schooner of 201 tons register, built at St.

Capt. Kidd's "Sophia"

Catharines in 1844, owned by W. Jago, of that city, commanded by a Captain Horne, and named the *New Brunswick*.
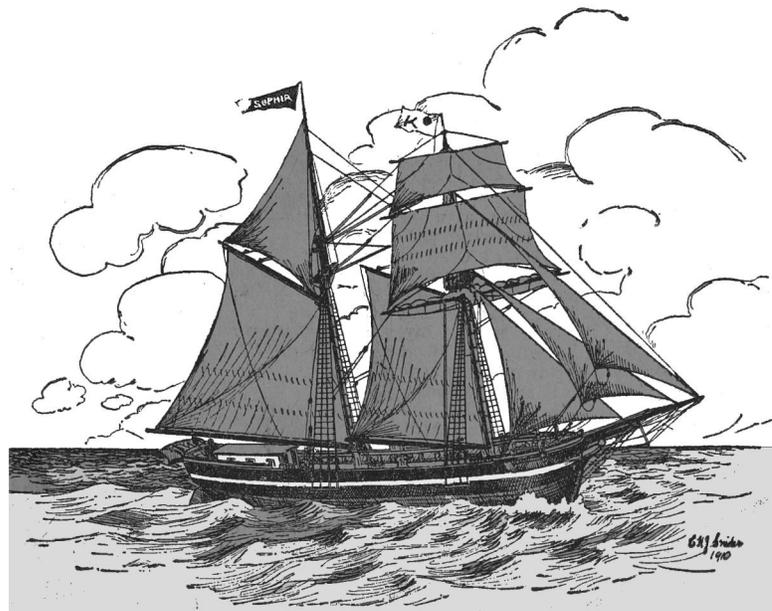
Eighteen thousand bushels of wheat would weigh 540 tons, and a vessel of 200 tons register would be capable of carrying that cargo, as "tons burden" usually ran over double the "tons register." The schooner owned by Mr. Jago was therefore probably the pioneer of trans-Atlantic lake commerce.

The Captain Horne mentioned may have been Capt. Tom Horne, who lost the schooner *Maggie Macrae* in the ice off Thunder Cape in 1888, but more probably he was an ancestor of that mariner.

In 1848 the schooner *Lillie*, Capt. Hunter, went to England from Kingston, Ont. Particulars of this voyage are not known. Perhaps some Kingston follower of "Schooner Days" can oblige.

1850 – Brigantine *Minnesota* stranded in Lachine rapids on the way to Wales with copper cargo from the Georgian Bay. Thomas' Register of 1864 carries a schooner *Minnesota*, built in Oswego by G. S. Weeks in 1847 and owned by H. S. Holstead. This may be the same vessel, for many Chicago craft were built in Oswego.

Schooner *Sophia*, Capt. Gaskin, went from Kingston to England, this same year.

Seventy years ago almost – in 1864, to be exact – the brigantine or top-sail schooner *Sophia* was laid up in Blockhouse Bay at Heber's Wharf Toronto Island, dismantled, and allowed to go to decay after years of service.

Whether she was this ocean voyager of Capt. Gaskin's or another of the same name, is not certain, but it is quite possible that this was the seafarer.

She was very well known to Wm. Armstrong, C. E., early secretary of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, who painted pictures of her and gave the writer a minute description of her. She was black, with a broad white stripe and red underbody. She had a figurehead, a lady in blue and white.

Capt. Tom Kidd, brother of the then governor of Toronto Jail, sailed the *Sophia* in the last ten or twelve years of her life, and was very proud of her. He had a white flag for her foremast head, with his own initial, "K", and a large ball on it, in blue, and at the mainmast head he flew a red burgee with the name "Sophia" in white letters.

The *Sophia*'s yards, topmast heads, mastheads and crosstrees were all painted black. Her masts were scraped bright. Mr. Armstrong estimated her size at about 250 tons burden.

Capt. Kidd – no relation to the pirate of that name – was an early bird, and often had the *Sophia* outfitted and ready for sailing while Toronto harbor was still icebound.

In 1852 and again in 1853 he was the first to sail for the Hen and Chickens, as Collingwood was then called, from Toronto.

Schooners did considerable business in passengers and general freight from the lower lakes to Collingwood, for the place was just "coming on the map" as the upper lakes terminal of the new Northern railway.

In 1853 the *Sophia* was lying all ready to clear from the old jail wharf at the foot of Berkeley street, with passengers and freight for the Hen and Chickens, but the ice in Toronto Bay was thirty-six inches thick and hard as glass, and showed no signs of yielding to the April sun.

Farther up the bay, at the foot of York street, one of the mail steamers – probably the *Chief Justice Robinson*, which had a ploughshare bow and ran all winter to Niagara – lay frozen in, too.

Men set to work to saw a passage for her to the open water at the Queen's wharf. Capt. Kidd, with a fraternal fervor, prevailed on his brother, Governor John Kidd, to set the jail prisoners to work to saw enough ice to connect with this passage.

David Sylvester, later a prosperous ship owner, was at this time a lad, and had shipped in the *Sophia* for the early trip. He told the writer that the prisoners sawed for three days at the ice cutting, but what they took out by day froze by night, and their task seemed endless.

When they knocked off Saturday night the connection with the foot of York street had not been made, and the governor of the jail would not stretch brotherly affection so far as to work his prisoners on Sundays. But a big gale blew up, and by Monday morning the bay was full of tossing ice-cakes, and by Tuesday, with a fair wind and moderating weather, the *Sophia* got away for the Northern's terminal and Georgian Bay ports.

The *Sophia* is advertised in the old Toronto Leader of 1853 as sailing "from Toronto for Owen Sound and Hen and Chickens about the 10th July, calling at Malden, Sarnia, Goderich and St. Vincent." This advertisement is signed by Capt. John McGregor, who may have been the shore agent for Capt. Kidd, or may have sailed the vessel for him at times.

The ledger of Port Whitby harbor shows entries for the *Sophia* as early as 1843.

Some of these ports of call have vanished from the marine registers of to-day. "Malden," for example, is now the port of Amherstburg. That name was used long before 1853, but Malden, the name of the fort guarding the port, persisted. "St. Vincent" was the name for the present town of Meaford, on Georgian Bay, up to some time in the 1860's.

It would be a satisfaction to know that this early pioneer of lake navigation, plying while "Malden" and "St. Vincent" were ports of call and Collingwood had not yet received its name, was also one of the pioneers of navigation overseas. Can anyone add to the record?