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Schooner Days, DXCVIII (598)
By C. H. J. Snider

LOADING GRAIN ON OUTSPREAD WINGS

ONE good yarn deserves another, and Capt. Harry Mitchell's adventure with the rudderless *Katie Eccles* on her last voyage of all prompted another friend of Schooner Days, W. D. McGlennon of the British Northwestern Fire Insurance Co., in Colborne, Ont., to write:

"I enjoyed your last two stories about the schooner *Katie Eccles*. She was a frequent caller at Lakeport years ago and was well known here. Capt. James Shaw and Capt. Steven Taylor of Lakeport sailed her for many years when she was in her prime. Capt. James Dougherty of Colborne finally bought her and I think perhaps he sold her to Capt. Mitchell as it was about that time he had her."

It appears that the *Katie Eccles* had many close scrapes in her time. In the spring of 1891 or 92, she fitted out in Brighton, went to Cobourg and loaded grain for Oswego and there loaded coal for Hamilton. They ran into a terrific storm and finally made the shelter of Toronto Island with most of her canvas blown away. Her owner, Mr. A. Campbell of Lakeport, watched her coming up the lake from the top of some building, I believe it was the old Board of Trade, Toronto's six story skyscraper of the time, which still rears its dome at the northeast corner of Front and Yonge street.

The crew then consisted of Capt. James Shaw, Mate Steven Taylor and Rufus Barrager, Milo Haight and Wesley Lycett, all of Colborne and Lakeport, which is close by. Colborne is on the Kingston road, Lakeport on the lake shore below. She had been overhauled in Port Dalhousie a short time before and was in good condition, otherwise she probably would have gone down with all hands. Miss Shaw, the captain's sister, was battened down in the cabin for many hours not knowing how soon would be the last. Wes Lycett never sailed again, so it will be seen that this jib picnic was no ordinary adventure.

In the fall of 1894, the *Eccles* went to Wellers Bay with the last load of the season, and was going over to Brighton, just six miles or so away, in Presqu'isle Bay, to lay up. Word came from the owner to load part of a cargo of barley and go to Cobourg to finish out for Oswego. When well out in the lake after leaving Weller's Bay the wind died out and in the heavy sea running she drifted toward land. They let the big anchor go off Lakeport but the chain snapped leaving the vessel unmanageable. She went ashore just east of Grafton and the owner and Mr. Campbell after making an inspection decided to abandon her.

The weather turned more favorable and they decided to make an effort to get her off. They stripped the big sails which were spread out on the beach and with small boats and a large gang of men unloaded most of the Weller's Bay grain on the sails, and finally got her off, and she sailed to Port Hope under her own power without the help of a tug. Although she was ashore

nearly a week at the end of November and there was some bad weather she was not badly damaged and was repaired and fitted out again the following spring as good as new.

The *Eccles* was always ready to do a good turn. On Dominion Day, 1896, she finished unloading coal at Brighton and was ready to leave when word came that a steamer loaded with railroad iron was aground at nearby Weller's Bay. The *Eccles* went to her aid and lightened up the steam barge until she floated off.

Late one fall about 1902 she had just about finished unloading coal at Lakeport and would have been away in a couple of hours. Another schooner, the *Volunteer*, called to pick up grain. The *Eccles* was hove out to anchor and the other schooner loaded. She was brought alongside the dock again in the evening and that night was caught in a wild sou'wester and they scuttled her to save her from pounding to pieces. A wrecking outfit from Kingston came and pumped her out and it was a wild stormy night when they left with her in tow for Kingston where she was repaired.

"While she had many a stormy passage when she was owned here she also had many pleasant voyages, a number of which stand out in my memory," says Mr. McGlennon.

"The last time I saw the *Katie Eccles* was in the summer of 1912 in Oswego. We crossed from Kingston in the *Renvoyle* and it blew a gale. Several schooners ran into Oswego in the morning, among them the *Eccles*, and I recall going aboard and meeting Capt. Mitchell. She was showing the wear and tear at that time, but I notice she was still going until 1922."

The last time Schooner Days saw the *Eccles* was 1922, a few months before she was lost. But in 1921 on the morning of July 31st, we saw a little vessel making heavy weather of it, running for Horseshoe Island, south of Kingston, where the St. Lawrence River leaves the lake, and we were told afterwards that this was the *Eccles*, and that she had reached the Horseshoe just in time, "as she was pretty well waterlogged." It was blowing hard all that day, but we were carrying the biggest clubtopsail, in Commodore Jarvis' schooner yacht *Haswell* – principally because we couldn't get it down, but also because the whole Lake Yacht Racing Association fleet was chasing us for the Freeman Cup. This was the first year that trophy was sailed for and we had led them all the way from Hamilton the night before. There were heavy electric squalls after midnight, with balls of fire at the trucks and spreader tips. After the squalls a lull, and then a westerly gale.

We reached Kingston and won the cup in 20 hours and 12 minutes, after leaving Hamilton, an average of 9 miles an hour, even after being becalmed. But to show how smart the *Eccles* was, that little vessel (if it was she), although weaving around horribly in the rough water and reduced to her foresail and with her tophammer streaming aloft, out of control, kept ahead of us until she reached shelter in the Horseshoe.

Our courses were converging slightly, for she was coming over from Oswego. Although the *Haswell* was a smart yacht – an ocean racer, for the latter won the race from California to Hawaii twice – she had only half the waterline length of the *Eccles*. Our relative speeds should,

on that account, have been as 7 to 10. But against that it must be remembered that the *Eccles* was distressed, not carrying full sail, and laden deep with coal – and lake water. That she could keep ahead of any racing yacht in such circumstances speaks well indeed for the design of the cargo carrier and the skill of the man who was sailing her.

(Caption) LAKEPORT PIER WHICH ONCE SHIPPED A LOT OF GRAIN PER THE *KATIE ECCLES* AND OTHER SCHOONERS. It is now forgotten but eighty miles east of Toronto. Here the *ECCLES* had to be scuttled to save her from pounding to pieces. The grain was unloaded on the still visible beach in front of you.