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Schooner Days DCVII (607)
By C. H. J. SNIDER

Gone Port Chronicles of WRECK and RESCUE: Grafton Harbor Had Its Share, and Schooners, Tugs and Steamers Were Both Victims and Victors in the Perils of the Coasting Trade

NOT every vessel caught on the shelterless shore of Northumberland got off as lightly as did the black brigantine *Baltimore*, mentioned last week. Grafton Harbor, long since vanished even from the map, had its share of wreck and rescue, and the bones of one schooner bedded in the lake east of where the pier used to be are mute memorials of tragedy.

Government, ever niggardly in developing lake ports, never got around to giving Grafton Harbor a lighthouse.

The sidewheel passenger liner *Corinthian* got ashore there one night, through, it was supposed, mistaking the fish dresser's flare for the lantern which was usually hung out when a vessel was expected. It has been learned since that this was not the reason.

Tugs and lighters got the passengers off without mishap, and eventually released the *Corinthian*, very much in need of a third epistle from St. Paul.

"I was glad to read in Schooner Days about the steamer *Corinthian* going ashore at Grafton, and as I was aboard of this steamer that night I wish to give you more data," writes that veteran steamboat man, T.M. Kirkwood, 155 Indian grove, Toronto, former head of the Kirkwood Line.

"We were going west, and left Kingston at 5 p.m. When we got abreast of Grafton there was a freight train's head light standing still on the tracks ashore, half a mile inland. The first mate, on watch, turned in to the head light, thinking he was at Cobourg. When the tram started going west, he discovered the mistake and stopped the *Corinthian's* headway, but it was too late. We grounded, but we backed her off, and we got away for several hundred yards when the steampipe burst, and we drifted ashore again, for an all-night bad time.

"The high sea from the south would lift her and drive her ashore, so much so that in the morning we could walk ashore in three feet of water.

"In due time Captain Howard, who was the manager of the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company, sent two powerful steamers, the *Hiram A. Calvin* and the *Chieftain*, with steam pumps, in charge of Captain Donnelly and his son from Garden Island. They pumped her dry, and lightened her more by dismantling the paddle wheels, draining the boilers, and putting the freight and furniture ashore. Then they made a rope fast to a stick of cordwood through a port hole in the forecastle, with the result that both steamers backed up as close as possible and made a run.

“This tore a hole in her iron hull without moving her. Next they made the rope fast to a long elm fender inside of the hull, and both vessels kept jerking her off, little by little.

“When afloat they took her to Cobourg, and a diver went under her and found a large boulder fastened to her bottom, which could not be removed.

“Captain Howard gave orders to tow us to Montreal with a tow boat on each side of the *Corinthian*, but as a storm blew up again the tow boats made matchwood of our guards and he made them let go and tow ahead.

“All hands went aboard of the tow boats with the exception of Captain Howard, Captain Donnelly and his son and myself. At that time I was in my teens and made up my mind that I would rather stay on the *Corinthian* than aboard of the tow boats. As she was lightened she got tossed like a cord until we reached Kingston.

WORSE THAN ATLANTIC TOSSING

“May I say that I crossed the Atlantic forty-four times and did not get tossed as bad as going down the lake on the *Corinthian* that night. Perhaps I am the only man alive to-day, with the exception of Captain Donnelly’s son, that was aboard of the *Corinthian* going down the lake on that stormy night. Andy Tyman, who kept hotel on the esplanade at Church street, was a passenger on the *Corinthian* when we went ashore at Grafton, quite close to the dock.

“Perhaps this letter will have steamboat owners and crews write up their stories about steamer days in Schooner Days, I thank you.”

Towing the *Corinthian* with a boulder in her bottom recalls the feat of sailing H.M.S. *La Pique* home from Newfoundland to England rudderless and with a boulder weighing several tons embedded in her keel. I have seen the stone in Whitehall, opposite the Admiralty, before the Battle of Britain began.

One tug, the *Georgiana*, in which her captain’s life savings were invested, also got ashore at Grafton Harbor, trying to save a raft, and was almost a total loss, but she too was refloated.

IN THE BARLEY RUSH

The schooner *Parthenon*, which became the *Robert McDonald* and later a steamer, and burned, got aground at Grafton in 7 feet of water in the height of the barley export rush when the McKinley tariff was clamping down in 1891. They got her off by jettisoning some of her cargo, and she afterwards made three trips to Oswego, towing all the way behind a tug and getting towed back, to make up for lost time. It paid to do so, for the barley trade was about to vanish.

The schooner *Ocean Wave* loaded 5,800 bushels of barley at Grafton Harbor for Oswego in November, 1871. She loaded many cargoes there, but was lost in 1890 with her two owners, Cpts. Tom Brokenshire and Billy Martin, carrying a very heavy load of headings, barrel staves and lumber from Trenton for Oswego. Perhaps the lumber got wet and swelled and burst her, for when the wreck was found south of the False Ducks in Lake Ontario, the stern was out of her and all her crew gone.

They overloaded vessels unmercifully in the lumber trade, probably because they relied upon the cargo to keep them afloat. Capt. Dan Rooney, whose adventure in the *Picton* at Grafton Harbor has been mentioned, shipped as a boy in the schooner *Mary Taylor*, which was later rebuilt in Cobourg by an uncle of his and renamed after a member of the family, who is alive, although the schooner has been gone these forty years.

This time when he shipped in her in Trenton she was loaded so deep with lumber that it was piled above and over her cabin top. When she reached the lake through the Upper Gap the lake seas shoved this huge deckload aft until it put so much weight upon her ancient tail feathers that the transom settled down upon her rudder stock and jammed the rudder. She was leaking like a basket and could not be steered. They kept her before the wind by taking off her after canvas, and sometimes she headed east and sometimes she headed west, and sometimes south and sometimes north. But whether she was going backwards, sideways or ahead she was all the time blowing nearer to Oswego to the accompaniment of much profanity on board, and much jeering from passing vessels.

They had no sympathy for her as long as she was in no danger of sinking. When she sashayed into Oswego, though, the jesters came around and helped her exhausted crew unload her and pump her out. Relieved of her load, her transom released the rudder stock, and her helm could again be turned. So they put 250 tons of coal into her to pay freight for a return passage, and brought her home to Cobourg, where she was rebuilt and emerged as the *Loretta Rooney*. Both as the *Mary Taylor* and as the *Loretta Rooney* the bluff-bowed, straight-stemmed, slab-sided two-master, built on the lines of a half-size Welland Canaller, was a caller at Grafton Harbor up to 1890. She was burned in 1897 and became a barge.

Contemporary callers with her were the *Blanche* of Cramaha, which was lost with all hands in 1888, the *Eliza White* and *Eliza Fisher*, the *Katie Eccles*, the *Picton*, *Queen of the Lakes*, *Fleetwing*, *Snow Bird* and *Two Brothers*, and, if we are not mistaken, the *Oliver Mowat* and *Paragon*, which later became the *Keewatin*. Archibald Campbell, who shipped much grain from neighboring piers at Colborne and Lakeport, also used Grafton Harbor as a shipping point, and his vessels sailed by Cat Hollow captains – Shaws, Keiths, Hendersons, Matthews, Redfearns, McGlennons, Peacock, et al, know the lost port well.

One of the earlier callers on the old harbor books which we missed mentioning was the *Hannah* of Whitby, 120 tons, built in 1844 and going twenty years later but then classed as unseaworthy.

Capt. Dan Rooney, of Cobourg, never lost a ship or a man, nor cost the insurance companies a dollar, but this was due to his own resourcefulness as much as to good luck. He came in in such hot haste with the schooner *Picton*, to load 10,000 bushels of barley at Grafton Harbor that she would not stop for him .and carried part of the wharf with her up the bank, her round bows pushing the gravel ahead of her on top of the limestone. He had tried to check her by dropping her centreboard, but, though he got his lines on the spiles, she kept going and took the spiles with her. Jack Munro, third of the line and name to come from Scotland to rule as

harbormaster, was just as anxious to get the barley out as Capt. Dan was to get it in, so the loading crews and schooner crew got together to save the *Picton* while the weather was fine. They ran her anchors out to deep water astern, and these, going overboard with their chains and lines, lightened her by a couple of tons. Then they hove a strain on windlass and capstan, and swung the schooner's 60-foot mainboom and 40-foot foreboom, first to starboard and then to port, so that she made a trench for herself in the gravel as she listed in the rolling. Meantime, a heavy strain was kept on the anchors all the time, by purchase and capstan bar as she moved a little. When the sea began to slap in from the southward it raised the water temporarily, and every time she rose an inch they hove her back a foot. So off she came, back to the battered wharf, and they slapped the barley into her, trundling it out in trucks, up gangways, over her rail, and she got loaded and away, none the worse for wear.

Missing images:

S.S. CORINTHIAN was an early steel-plated steamer of 350 tons, built at Kingston in 1864. She was commanded by Capt. Crysler and later by Capt. Dunlop, on the "Rochester Route" – Port Hope, Cobourg, Grafton, Colborne and Charlotte – and the Royal Mail Line's Hamilton-Montreal route.

T. M. KIRKWOOD, veteran steamboat man, who as a boy went through the CORINTHIAN'S Grafton adventure.