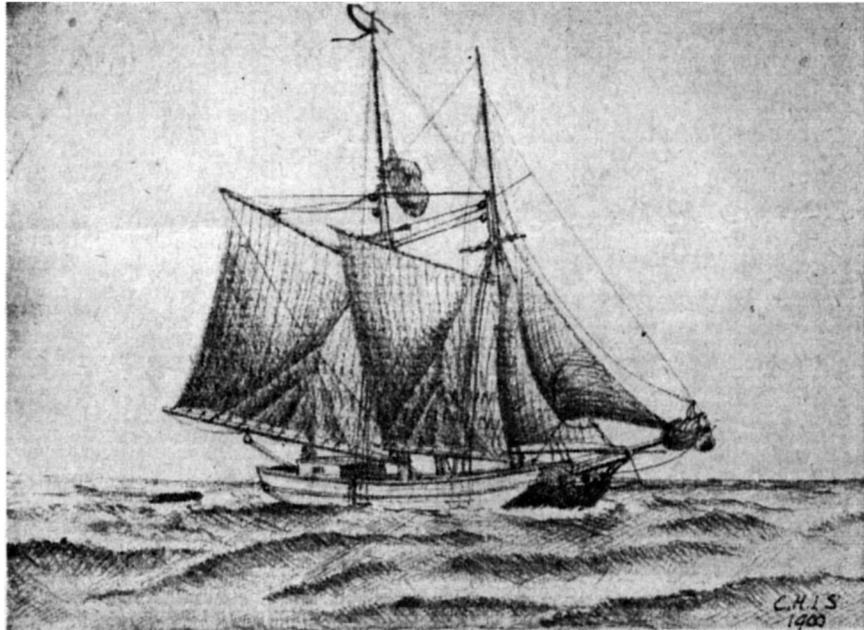


Toronto Telegram, January 8, 1944
Schooner Days, DCXXIII (623)
By C. H. J. SNIDER

BAY OF QUINTE BECKONS ALWAYS

Some fine vessels were built in the Bay of Quinte. The first Canadian steamer on the Great Lakes, the *Frontenac*, was built at Finkle's Point, above Bath, in 1816, and she was a big one. The three-masted schooner *Pacific* was built at Roblin's Cove, and sailed first to Chicago, then across the ocean to England, then down to South America and up to Boston. Bay of Quinte barley carriers like the *Colin Gearing* made



"The short chop of Big Bay can be uncomfortable" – The little schooner-scow does not mind it.

three trips a week between Picton and Oswego, and at the end of the season turned out pickle bottles filled with silver dollars and gold half eagles, eagles, and double eagles, their freights for months, paid in hard money because U.S. bills were at a discount, and kept in the cabin because the captain would not miss a fair wind waiting for the bank to open.

Others were not so good. There were scows built like butter bowls, with barn door rudders, or square at both ends, or sharp at one end and square at the other, like a flatiron, or even just plain packing box model, and no better than rafts.

Some had no decks, or one big hatch without covers, and they piled their cargoes of hay or slabs or bunchwood so high above the rail the helmsman could not see over the top of them, nor more than a few feet in front of him. In the confined waters, and with their buoyant or imperishable cargoes it did not matter how much they leaked. They would be run on a flat, pumped dry, or nearly so, and pushed off to float a few more miles. In between these disreputables and the staunch steamers and the schooners fit to go to sea were dozens, perhaps hundreds, of hardy little packets of humble pretensions but prospering in what was called the Bay Trade.

F B. Meyers of 428 Bloor street west, an old Belleville boy, and a descendant of the

Meyers who first settled there in the 18th century and gave his name to Meyers Creek, wreathe this vignette of some of the Quinte sailing in his boyhood around the little scow *Twilight*. She navigated inside the Bay with small cargoes of brick, lumber and building materials, loading much of her freight at Nelson Lingham's wharf, to which it was teamed from the Lingham brickyard.

"From our shore just east of Belleville, Ont., one could see ten sawmills, but in 1885 not half were in operation and very shortly afterwards the lumbering was carried on by Gilmour, of Trenton, and Rathbun, of Deseronto. A small mill operated at Belleville also.

"Clem Bell was born near Norwich, in Norfolk County in England. He came to Canada about 1865 with his wife. In England he had sailed the North Sea and learned to make brick ashore. One of his earliest jobs in this country was to start a brickyard for the widow of Tobias Bleecker, eventually carried on by Nelson Lingham, with Clem acting as yard boss.

"About the start of the Northwest Rebellion, 1885, Clem Bell became owner and master of the *Twilight* and Mr. Lingham may have had an interest for he had the dock at Bucks Mill (then not operating) repaired to be used as a shipping and loading wharf.

"Here the scow came for her load and here the teams came, and drivers and yardmen put on their D shaped leather hand protectors and tossed brick from man to man into the hold, and as the front wagons were emptied they returned and the waiting drivers took their places until the hold was filled. Then away went the *Twilight*, up or down the bay. She could lay into shore in very shallow water and unload, if no docking facilities were handy.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bell were people the whole world would love. She was sweet and pretty and he used to tease the neighbors by appearing to deprecate her. My mother asked him about Mrs. Bell, and mentioned she had not seen her and he replied: "Oh you'd know her anywhere, she's a hickory faced old thing." For him to refer to her as a Mrs. Shagbark was another sample of his wit, perhaps understandable by the fact that she was very pretty and he was no beauty himself.

"They loved when the day's work was done to sit out by their flower garden, and sing the songs of Old England and her sailing days and victories. One does not hear them any more, like one did even up to the Great War of 1914-18 – Black Eyed Susan, the Royal Rainbow, and hosts of others – but one that stood out when they sang it was "Fear Not But Trust in Providence." When they came to "Go down, go down, the sailor cried," one felt that he himself was on the deck and looked for the hatchway to get below at once.

"Clemmy had only one eye and was humorously referred to as 'Old Twink,' and one of his thumbs was cut off at the first joint and the brown bone protruded. The best that could be learned when I was five concerning the thumb was that the rats had gnawed it off when he was asleep! As this was debated in negative form by the listener and Clemmy would be cornered, he would brighten up and change the subject by enquiring, 'Freddy, why can I see more with my one eye than you can with your two?' and of course I would say 'You can't, for I can see

everything,' and he would reply 'Yes I can, I can see twice as much as you.' I would call for proof and he would say 'I can see your two eyes and you can only see my one.'"

The Bells built their new house during the winter of 1885-6, located about one quarter-mile northwest of the Bucks dock and with a good view of the narrows at Ox Point and Mississaga Point.

Mrs. Bell, during her housework, always watched the two points, and when a boat came through she would get the glass, and if it was the *Twilight* she would say "There is my Clemmy, and I must put the dinner on."

"I recall a regatta in Big Bay, off Mississaga Point, in July, 1885-6 or 7, and some of the yachts were Mr. Gooderham's second *Oriole*, *Atalanta*, that challenged for the America's Cup, *Norah*, that raced for the Fisher Cup, *White Wings*, *Iolanthe* and many others, including the *Kitten*. My father had a green ducking skiff that he called the "*Kitten*" and no doubt he got the name from the yacht you mention in Schooner Days."

"The *Atalanta* was later burned and her hull sold to a Chicago syndicate for \$800. She was rebuilt and renamed I think and sailed on Lake Michigan for many years. The *Norah* was owned by John Bell, of Belleville, lawyer for the old Grand Trunk Railway and no relation to Clem Bell of the *Twilight*.

Hon. Robert Reid's distillery burned about this time and as this occurred at midnight it was a weird sight to see the alcohol – which ran down a creek and out on the bay – blazing merrily on the water and producing that weird blue ghost-light over the countryside, as the ships cast off their moorings and were towed out to prevent any possibility of fire, their bare spars shining like spears in the picture. I do not recall any damage from fire to the boats in the harbor.

So this *Twilight* fades into the cheery past as the blue flames of the floating alcohol burn low, alike on Christmas puddings and on Belleville Harbor. There was another *Twilight* belonging to the Bay of Quinte, a big, blocky burdensome schooner of four or five hundred tons carrying capacity, a mate of the *Speedwell*'s, built, like her, in South Marysburgh. Like the *Speedwell*, she came to her end by fire.

Bulky as she was, she held the record of an eight-day passage from Chicago to Buffalo – or perhaps Kingston, which seems less probable – in the grain rush one fall. That means a fair wind and hard driving all the way, and if the twenty-six locks of the Welland Canal had to be navigated it means not more than seven sailing days for the thousand miles, with at least one of these seven lost in running the rivers between Huron and Erie.

TYPICAL of the Bay of Quinte, Telegraph Narrows are a dredged channel a mile long (including approaches) but only a hundred feet wide, in a deceptive part of the Bay about midway between Belleville and Deseronto. The Bay of Quinte, seventy-five feet deep in many places, is about a mile wide here and shoals up to a limestone bottom covered with only a few of water except in the curving groove where nature and the dredge and dynamite have given a narrow track twelve feet deep. This is now well marked by lighted approach buoys, catseyes.

and stakes. Telegraph Island, close to the south shore, is about halfway along the channel. It was once a kept light, with a house for the keeper, but it is now automatic. Why called Telegraph, when there is no telegraph office within ten miles? Can any reader explain?



Incredible as it may seem, *Telegraph Island - Why?* even the biggest three-masters used to grope through the Telegraph Narrows, with the lead going from one cathead and a kedge anchor handy on the other. There was no room for them to tack, so if the wind failed them they sent the kedge ahead in the yawlboat and hauled through. It takes a good yacht to beat through the Telegraph Narrows, if she is over fifty feet long.