

Toronto Telegram, February 5, 1944  
Schooner Days DCXXVII (627)  
By C.H.J. Snider

## HARRY out of PICTON

HE is Uncle Henry to all Prince Edward County now, one of Picton's grand old men. Sixty-odd years ago he was Harry-out-of-Picton, the smart young Canadian sailor-man who could hold his own in any forecandle on the lakes and any winter lumber camp in Michigan. What's more, he was mate of the *George Thurston*, with seventeen sailors, one of the few lakers to fly a royal, and one of the fewer to sport a sail above that.

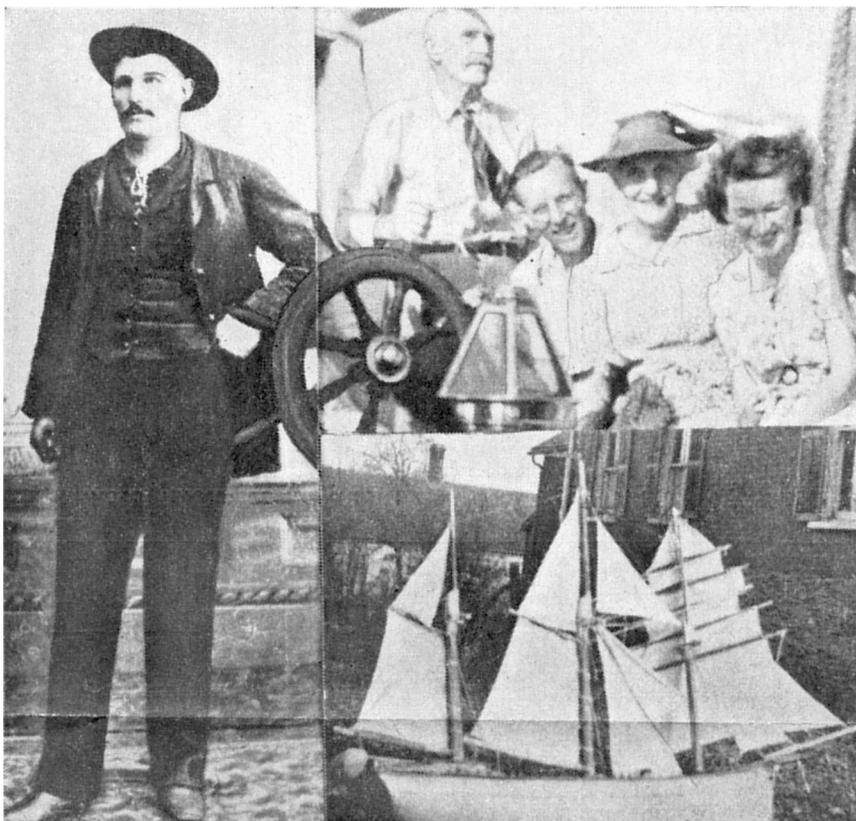
This is how he got there.

Harry saw from the beginning that there was no money for sailors

in short runs with payoffs at the ends and long spells in between looking for "sites." Especially if four or five months of each year was spent sitting around the stove after the vessels were laid up for the winter. So he made it a practice to go to the lumber woods at the end of the season, cut pine till spring and then make his way to Detroit to ship on some big vessel engaged in the long haul between Chicago or Duluth, at the head of the lakes, and Kingston at the foot.

This program didn't always work out perfectly. One spring when he arrived at the Union Hall in Detroit, fresh from running logs on the Herbert River and hard as nails, he found the spring fleet had fitted out early and sailed, and the hall was full of thirty-five late comers looking for berths which had already been filled.

*Sixty years ago HENRY McCONNELL last summer*



*(Left) Match for four with his fists, in Michigan woods or lake barque. (Right) Hand on the wheel as firm as Paderewski's on the piano and deft to complete full rigged model of the "George Thurston" for 1944 Mariners Service at Cherry Valley.*

There was a vessel lying across in Windsor, a square rigger, and a chap who called himself her second mate said she would need men soon, but that some law business was holding her up. They didn't know when they would sail and the captain was away in Toronto on the lawsuit, and he was ship-keeping and wouldn't hire anybody until the captain got back. And anyway they didn't want any Canadians.

Harry diligently reported to the hall day after day, first thing in the morning. He found it deserted then, for the American sailors, knowing things were slack, slept in till noon. Before the end of the week, as he waited for the doors to open one morning, the captain of the vessel over in Windsor showed up.

"We're ordered to Chicago," said he, "and I'm looking for men. You look as though you'd do."

"I'll be across by the next ferry," said Harry, and ran to his boarding house for his sailor's bag. Three Americans who showed up were hired and they all went across in the ferry together.

### **The *George Thurston* barquentine**

The vessel was the *George Thurston*, of Kingston, Capt. John Gordon, a fine big ship, sailed by a fine big headed man, the only Canadian aboard until Harry came over the rail. All the crew turned out to be Americans, for the vessel was on the United States register, had been laid up for some time opposite Detroit and her original crew had shipped in the schooners which were fitting out.

She was impressive, the *George Thurston*, a big white hull of 352 tons registered, 133 feet long, 23 ft. 6 in. beam, and 11 ft. 3 in. depth of hold. Five yards crossed her foremast, fore yard, lower topsail, upper topsail, topgallant and royal, then a rarity on the lakes. Each yard, a long spar pivoted across the three-sectioned mast, spread a square sail, and above the royal was a three-cornered raffee or pair of batwings, reaching to the very truck.

She had the usual triangular jibs but no fore staysail. Between the foremast and the mainmast she had three staysails, and on her mainmast and mizzen fore and aft sails, gaff topsails above lower sails spread by gaffs and booms. Not a schooner, a true barquentine rig.

She was supposed to have been built in Europe and to have taken seven weeks to cross the Atlantic. Thomas' Register, the old international insurance guide, told a different story. It gave her builder as George Thurston, whose name she bore, and the place of building was Kingston, Ont., the year 1857. She had made more than one voyage across the Atlantic the first in 1858 when many lake vessels went to England. How she got on the American register by 1864 Thomas didn't disclose, for in that year she was owned by Norris and Neelon, in St. Catharines.

### **Forecastle bunk no bed of roses**

None of these things worried Harry, nor anything else, indeed, now that he had got a situation but he soon found he was bunking in no bed of roses. Yanks and Canucks got on well

enough together as a rule in the lake forecastles, but this particular crowd resented Harry being hired “when there were good men walkin' the streets Detroit lookin' for berths.” Harry might have retorted that the streets were a poor place to find them, but he had a civil tongue in his head and knew how to hold it. As he was six feet of solid bone and muscle and weighed 190 lbs. stripped, no one man gave voice to the general grumbling. He had bought a revolver in Alpena when he came out of the woods and the bulge of it in his pocket prevented them from ganging up on him.

Sorry, boys, Eight bells have just gone and we must relieve the wheel. More about Harry next week.