

**Toronto Telegram, April 8, 1944**  
**Schooner Days DCXXXVI (636)**  
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[Note: This was published as number DCXXXV (635); however, from the continuity of the press dates, there is little doubt that this article was wrongly numbered.]

## **ONE APRIL MORNING SIXTY-FOUR YEARS AGO**

SOMETIMES – rarely, though – lake schooners ran all winter. Capt. John Williams fitted the *Speedwell* out in February, 1889, and made two voyages to Charlotte with cargoes of ice before navigation opened here. The *Baltic* of Wellington Square made five trips to Oswego in March in the 1870s. By April, in the old days, all the vessels that were going to fit out had fitted out by this time. What follows is the story of the end of the first trip of the season for one of them.

“IT was about ten o’clock of a lovely April morning, all of sixty years ago, and I was in the field by the lake with some of the other children. We lived west of the Village of Port Credit on Lake Ontario, at Slade’s Point, as it was then known. That was a little past the old Lorne Park cranberry marsh and near the new oil refinery at Clarkson. It was east of Marigold’s Point and the Anchorage Farm where vessels used to anchor on the clay to load from the shore, instead of having to go into port.

“This bright morning we law a spick and span new schooner, a three-master, away out in the lake, but plain as plain, because her sails were new and her paint was fresh. She was white with green trim. She looked to be brand new and on her maiden voyage, picking up grain at one port or another to complete a load for Kingston or Oswego. Sometimes they still loaded grain from the shore then, ferrying it out in bags on scows, but most of it was loaded in little places like Bronte, Oakville or the Credit. Large storehouses then lined the east side of Port Credit harbor, all long since burned in a great fire.

“The shining ship seemed to hang suspended between the lake and the sky, for the wind was very light and she made no progress on the offshore tack. A long slow roll was coming up the lake against her. Even when the spring wind freshened she seemed unable to gain any ground, no matter how often she tacked. This may have been because the current was running up the lake faster than she could sail down over the bottom. Or something was wrong.

“As the day advanced the east wind blew stronger, a dry gale, with the sun shining clear and the whitecaps showing and turning into big rollers that broke on the point in great clouds of spray. The waves were very high after dinner and still the fine new ship breasted them and tried to beat away from the shore.

“That fine looking vessel, beating all the time against the wind and getting nowhere, was on my mind when I was called into the house, and when I was helping to get supper ready I ran upstairs more than once to see how she was doing. It was blowing harder and harder as the sun

went lower and the white-horses were galloping up the lake all a-lather, all the way from Kingston.

“The vessel was still in sight and in that sea that had risen she rolled hard, alarmingly, especially when she tried to get from one tack to another. I stood at the staircase window watching until she righted; and it took a long time. Then I went back downstairs, but I could not finish setting the table, and ran up again.

“She was in sight still, rolling most fearfully, down, down, down, as though her crosstrees would brush the names of the white horses. Sometimes she would disappear in the troughs, then slowly sway back almost to an even keel as a big wave would run under her and froth up on the lee-side. I watched her come back once, and then roll down again worse than before, and stay that way.

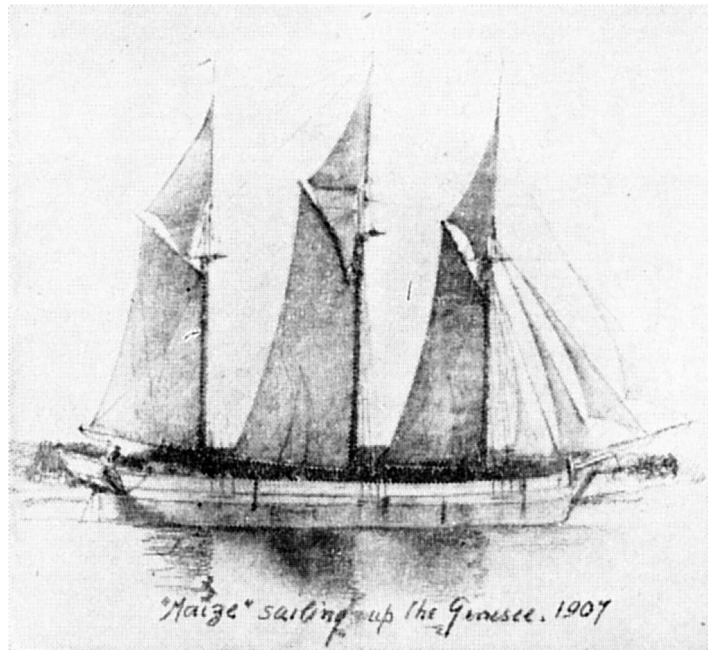
“And then in a split second she wasn’t there at all. She didn’t sink bit by bit. She just vanished. It was as though she had suddenly freed herself from the spell which had held her there on the lake all day and sped away. Like in the Ancient Mariner, ‘with far heard whisper o’er the sea, off shot the spectre bark.’ The far heard whisper was the equinoctial gale roaring, but the spectre bark had vanished. I waited and waited for her to reappear. But she was gone.

“When I got back to the kitchen the clock struck five.

“We were told afterwards the vessel was named the *Northman*. All that summer a wrecking outfit with a diver dragged and explored the lake bottom. The old sailors said at the time they were dragging too far to the eastward. Many thought she had got five miles southeast of the Port Credit light, but that could not be, for Slade’s Point is to the west of the Credit, and she was at least that far to the west when she went down.

“No wreckage came ashore from her at our place, and as far as I know no bodies were ever found, though there was said to be a crew of eight on board.

“I was only a child at the time,



*THREE-MASTED SCHOONER "MAIZE," similar to the "NORTHMAN" of this story. The Maize, launched before the Northman, had a longer life. She was built by C. V. Jennison at the village of Perrysburg, Ohio, in 1856, for Carrington and Casey of Toledo, and rebuilt seven years later. In 1903 Capt. W. H. Matthews of Colborne bought her in Cleveland and brought her to Lake Ontario, keeping her at Presque Isle. She was burned about 1910*

and I may have made mistakes in the telling of this, but I can see her as plain as ever, yet, a most beautiful ship – and then, nothing.”

SHE is a bright matron, the narrator of the above, living in York Mills this winter, but retaining her own home back of Port Credit on the old Mississauga road. Mrs. Josephine Bonner is her name, and she is a daughter of a pioneer lakeshore family. She likes Schooner Days, and says so.

Her story is as clear as the sunshine of that April day, and unblurred by any tricks of memory.

The vessel was the *Northman*, and she may have been on her maiden voyage, for the *Northman* had been a propeller, and had just had her machinery removed and been rebuilt and rigged as a full-canal-sized three-masted schooner. This may have been her first voyage as a sailing vessel. She had been refitted in Hamilton, where she was owned. Old Collingwood port records show her arrival with 24,000 bushels of grain in 1879, a full load for her size.

Capt. David Reynolds, long master of the R.C.Y.C. launches *Hiawatha* and *Kwasind*, was a smart young sailor out of Oakville when this happened. He was helping Three-Finger Jack Andrew fit out the schooner *Baltic* when they saw some wreckage in the lake, west of the Oakville piers. It washed in east of Bronte. It was a new cabin trunk of a schooner, such as usually stood on deck in timber vessels to give the squared logs the run of the hold when they were quilled up and run down the brews ahead of the sills of the sternports. The cabin had three windows on each side, two windows and a door on each end. Half in and half out of one of the window frames hung the body of a young man with a bristly black beard. They thought he was a French-Canadian by his clothes, but they never learned who he was. The cabin was the *Northman*'s. Her name was on it.

Capt. Joseph Williams, brother of the evergreen Capt. John, who is still with us, passed the new *North-man* working down the lake while he was coming up in the Brothers of Bronte. She had the wind ahead then, but all seemed well with her. She had two gaff topsails set, and the third clewed up, as was usual in making short tacks. She was partially loaded with grain, perhaps from Wellington Square or one of the little ports at the head of the lake, and was apparently working eastward to complete the cargo.

Capt. Williams' theory was that taking the partial cargo shifted and made her unmanageable. She got into the trough of the sea and rolled from side to side, and opened up her stemports. She had ports cut in her stern for loading timber. These would be bolted and caulked before she was loaded above the port sills, but timber ports were always a suspected point. Hers may have leaked and wet the grain and caused it to swell and burst her where it was stowed near the stern-posts, or they may have let in so much water that the cargo shifted like a bowl of gruel spilling.

Capt. John Williams was in the *Clara Youell* at this time, and did not see the *Northman*. His belief is that she had come through the Welland Canal or at least from Port Dalhousie with a part cargo of corn, and that this shifted when she rolled. From contemporary newspaper reports the Canal does not appear to have been opened until the following week.