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Schooner Days, DCXLII (642)
By C.H.J. Snider

2nd ANCHOR IN TORONTO PORT ONONDAGA'S?

LAST week we left off our account of the first anchor to part the then pellucid waters of Toronto Bay (November, 1792, according to the chart inscription) without deciding on what was the name of the first craft to enter our port, although it seemed probable that Lieut. Joseph Bouchette's survey schooner was the owner of the anchor in question.

As the portrait of his own vessel drawn by Bouchette fits neither the *Onondaga*, *Mississauga* nor *Caldwell*, only the *Bear* and the *Buffalo* remain to choose from, unless there was available a little old schooner named the *Lively*, built at Oswego 36 years before this, captured by the French, and recaptured by the English when they took Niagara. There were two *Livelies*, both alike, and Pouchot drew the pair of them on his map of Lake Ontario in 1757. and their appearance corresponds to Bouchette's drawing, except that they show no squaresail or squaresail yard.

Although by 1812 many gunboats were sailing vessels, as fully rigged as Bouchette's survey schooner, in the 18th century their sails were usually only auxiliary and some relied entirely on their oars for propulsion. The *Bear* and *Buffalo* may have been schooner rigged, but the picture does not look much like that of a converted cargo barge. The only mention of the *Bear* so far discovered is in Mrs. Simcoe's disparaging comment on "the two gunboats lately built on a very bad construction."

The poor *Bear* seems to have been doomed to be an anonymous freighter between Kingston and Niagara.

The *Buffalo* may have been no better but she gets an occasional mention in the Upper Canada Gazette and must have been in active service when Toronto harbor was first surveyed.

Bouchette's vessel as drawn by him does not appear to be built "unscientifically" or on any "very bad construction." She is shallow, round nosed and Dutch looking, just the craft for poking into unexplored places, but not good for beating to windward. There was an official prejudice against shoal-draught vessels for the Great Lakes in Simcoe's time, and it still exists. But shoal vessels have always been needed on the lakes because of the limited depth of the connecting rivers, canals and natural harbors.

Young Bouchette's father was commodore of the Lake Ontario establishment, and commanded the *Onondaga*, pierced for 14 guns and carrying six. She got ashore on the western sandbar in December, 1793. Apparently it was Bouchette's Jr's. watch. Mrs. Simcoe diligently recorded: –

(Sunday, Dec. 8th, 1793).

"The *Onondaga* was left under the care of a young lieutenant and ran

aground. It is feared she cannot be got off until the spring and then perhaps not without injury.”

The enormity of the young lieutenant’s crime will be realized from the fact that Mrs. Simcoe’s lord and master got wet viewing the wreck (with disapproval) from a small boat the next day. Whether he was to blame for the stranding or not, young Joseph stuck to the ship and got her afloat again; got her aground again coming through the harbor entrance in front of Governor Simcoe’s canvas house, which had seen service on Capt. Cook’s voyages; worked for her in the winter’s ice and snowstorms until he got her off again; and early in the new year at length brought her to safe moorings in the harbor he had surveyed fourteen months before.

The *Onondaga* was the flagship of the Lake Ontario fleet, when commanded by Joseph Bouchette's father, then commodore. She was much larger than Joseph’s survey vessel, with which she has been confused.

For all this he was very properly promoted to a full lieutenancy, and eventually became a commodore. He used a map of York Harbor in the Topographical Survey he wrote later on, and in it marked the two strandings of the “*Onondaga*,” as he spelled her name, and her ultimate anchorage. The indications of the vessel in this map are more rudimentary than his freehand drawing of his survey vessel, and were probably limited by the map engraver’s skill. They show the vessel once with two stumps of masts, as though she had been dismasted, and once with yards across both masts, indicating that she was a snow, or two-topsail schooner, and not the little pole-masted and baldheaded fore-and-after in which Bouchette had made his survey, and whose name we still do not know.

There is a degree of vagueness about the early marine of Toronto harbor from the looseness of writing and spelling and dating in the original records. Bouchette himself has misled Dr. Scadding and other historians into the belief that the harbor was first surveyed in 1793 by the following oft-quoted passage from his second work, *The British Dominions in North America*, in 1831: “It fell to my lot to make the first survey of York harbor in 1793. Lieutenant-Governor the late General Simcoe, who then resided at Navy Hall, Niagara, having formed extensive plans for- the improvement of the colony, had resolved upon laying the foundations of a provincial capital. I was at that period in the naval service of the lakes, and the survey of Toronto (York) harbor was entrusted by his excellency to my performance. I still distinctly recollect the untamed aspect which the country exhibited when first I entered the beautiful basin which thus became the scene of my early hydrographical operations. Dense and trackless forests lined the margin of the lake and reflected their inverted images in its glassy surface. The wandering savage had constructed his ephemeral habitation beneath their luxuriant foliage – the group then consisting of two families of Mississaga – and the bay and the neighboring marshes were the hitherto un-invaded haunts of immense coveys of wild fowl. Indeed they were so abundant as in some measure to annoy us during the night.”

Bouchette appears to have been sent from Niagara in May, 1793, with the sloop *Caldwell*, built at Niagara in 1774, thirty-seven tons burthen, two guns, fourteen men, and the gunboat

Buffalo, possibly schooner rigged, and built at Kingston, to survey the harbor on Gen. Simcoe's orders. But this was not his first visit. It was a task he had already performed in some detail in November, 1792, according to a chart he made, signed and dated.

It does not appear probable that Bouchette would make a mistake in dating his own chart at the time he made it, but it is quite understandable that he might be a year out in his reckoning by 1831, and especially because the formal "establishment" of the harbor was actually made in 1793. Bouchette corrected his unconscious error by stating that the Governor and the Queen's Rangers removed from Niagara to Toronto "in the following spring." This must have been in the spring of the year following 1792, for Simcoe came over in May, 1793, and his Rangers followed in two divisions in July of that year. Bouchette had presumably by this time completed the survey he began in 1792, which would be necessary for the landing of the troops and their stores.

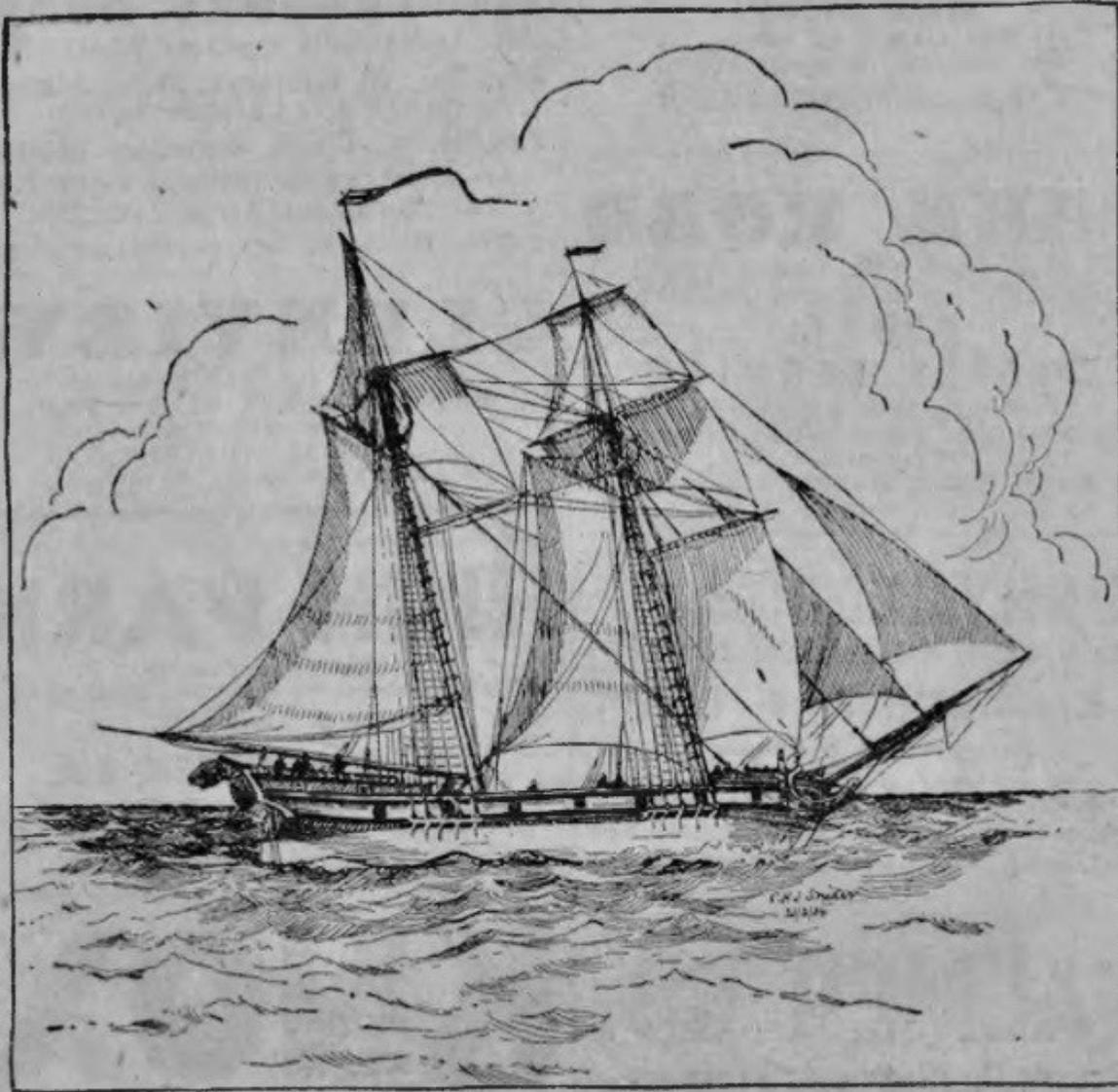
Confusion is increased because there appear to have been six early vessels bearing three Indian names. George A. Cuthbertson, who made a painstaking search of the old Provincial Marine records for his Freshwater shipping history, found a square-rigged *Mohawk*, a "snow" built at Oswego by the British in 1760, and a fore-and-aft rigged *Mohawk*, a sloop, built in Carleton Island in 1781. A rebuild and a rereg, or a new vessel? He also gives the *Onondaga* (U.C. Gazette spelling) as a snow built at Niagara in 1759 from an uncompleted hull captured there when the French capitulated – and also as a schooner built at Kingston in 1795. This could hardly be the "topsailed schooner" Mrs. Simcoe first saw at Kingston three years before. Perhaps the *Onondaga* stranded at York in December, 1793, was the original *Niagara* snow, and she may have been rebuilt at Kingston in 1795 after the stranding. She would need it by then, being 36 years old.

Cuthbertson gave *Mississauga* snow built at Oswego in 1759. There was a schooner of that name built at Kingston in 1792, according to Rochefoucault, the voluble French traveller, who wrote in 1795 that "the timbers of the *Mississaga*, which was built three years ago, are almost all rotten."

Rochefoucault may have been correct, but he was exuberant when he added: "All these vessels are built of timber fresh cut down and not seasoned, and for this reason they never last longer than six or eight years." The *Mississaga*, "built three years ago," may have been the *Oswego* snow of 1759, rebuilt at Kingston. In this case her original timbers would be also thirty-six years old, and nail sick after having new work spiked onto them.

In the records there is a hopeless interchange of letters in the names of vessels called, as Mrs. Simcoe says, after the Indian tribes, *Onondaga* and *Mississaga*. The o's and a's seem to be playing a game of hide and seek in the first name, and in the second the a's and i's change places with impunity. The letter s is single or double at the whim of the writer, and sometimes a u pops in. The aborigines were wise in leaving letters to white men, but the whites were foolish in what they did with them.

"TOPSAILED SCHOONER OF 80 TONS"



The ONONDAGA as described by Mrs. Simcoe at Kingston, July 2nd, 1792, from a drawing for the John Ross Robertson edition of her Diary.