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**Schooner Days, DCLXXVII (677)**  
**By C.H.J. Snider**

## **BRAVE BOAT WORK AT CENTURY END**

THE *Jessie Drummond*, black above and red below, third and largest schooner to leave the south shore of Lake Ontario with the last coal cargoes for Toronto in the 19th century, was a veteran of the lake marine with thirty-five seasons service astern of her. She had been to Hamburg and brought back German iron rails to Ontario in 1865. But she never rolled, pitched and plunged more on the Atlantic than she did that Sunday morning of Nov. 25th, 1900. That was when the clearing snowstorm revealed her consort, the *Augusta*, hard and fast on the north shore, above Port Credit light, and Capt. James Quinn gave the *Drummond* both her anchors in the raging lake to keep her from the *Augusta*'s fate.

All day, through the glasses, he watched the gallant efforts of Toronto and Port Credit volunteers to take the *Augusta*'s crew off. The Toronto men had much the better boat, but not enough manpower, to get their boat alongside. The Port Credit lads, stonehookers and fishermen from boyhood, had pluck and skill enough to effect a risky rescue in two trips after many tries.

Meantime, five Toronto yachtsmen had sailed up in a skimming dish that never should have been out in that weather. She was the *Adanac*, a half-decked centreboard sloop, 10 feet long on the waterline and 12 inches freeboard, and she did well to keep them afloat from the Queen's Wharf to Port Credit. All honor to these boys who tried, but all the lifesaving they accomplished was their own.

They managed to catch the stern of the tossing *Drummond*, with their boat half full of water and themselves so exhausted with seasickness and bailing that they were not much help to Capt. Quinn and his worn-out crew. The castings of the windlass had been broken when her big anchor took hold, and it was impossible to weigh anchor again.

The *Drummond* lads had had all they wanted with pumping and steering and handling soaked and frozen gear, and some of them were panicky and had begged the captain to run the ship ashore in Humber Bay when they heard the locomotive whistles through the snow. The welcome they gave the yachtsmen to their own reeling decks and wet bunks was not a cordial one. The whole party spent an unhappy night, the ship tossing and grinding frightfully at her anchors, the men pumping, and pounding all the running gear, and dosing it and the pump wells with coarse salt to keep them from freezing solid.

By Monday morning the wind was going around to the north, while the sea still ran in tremendous grey-backs from the east, and the *Drummond* was in the trough, rolling her tophammer adrift and filling her decks, so that her bulwarks started to go.

Capt. Quinn hoisted his Canadian ensign at the mizzen truck, in the hope of attracting assistance, either a tug to get the *Drummond* to Toronto, or someone to get the windlass in

working order, and bring food for his too numerous crew.

They could see the signal in Oakville, eight miles away, but not in Toronto, ten miles off, where lay the only tug then in commission on the north shore of Ontario.

“Nipper” Quinn, Capt. Jim’s youngest brother, and Allan Kemp, the Oakville harbormaster, drove down to the Credit to implore the Credit men to help Jim. They did not know how badly off the *Drummond* might be. Capt. A. E. Hare, who had taken off the *Augusta*’s crew, needed no urging, only a boat. The *Grace Darling*, Sons of England lifeboat, lay in the Credit harbor, where she had been left after her attempt the day before, her three men going back to Toronto. He first appealed to the crowded bar of the Port Credit hotel to man her, for he thought the Port Credit boys deserved a rest.

The mate of the *Augusta* explained that his captain had left him in charge of the wreck while he was away trying to arrange for her salvage, so – “You’ve brought her to an anchor in the lee of the stove,” said Al in scorn, and filled the *Grace Darling* immediately from outside the hotel.

His only difficulty was in keeping her from being overloaded with volunteers. Nipper Quinn and Allan Kemp had to be taken, of course, and Albert Block and Steve Peer, who had been in the *Augusta* rescue, and Billy Hicks from the Humber. He had plenty to take the *Grace Darling* out under sail, and that was the way he was going to handle her, but a young market gardener from the Lake Shore road, Billy Trenwith – he still has a garage near Lorne Park – begged and pleaded to be allowed to come.

“Never been in a boat,” he admitted, “but I’m strong, and I can bail, and I won’t be scared so long as I can see you.”

“I might be too busy to look after you if we got into trouble,” urged Al. “It’s too big a risk for you. Can’t take you.”

But when the *Grace Darling* shoved off there was Billy Trenwith crouched under the lug foresail, hidden from Al Hare’s sight. The *Grace Darling* had two stumpy masts and three storm sails, a jib, lug foresail, loose footed, and standing lug mainsail, with a little boom on the foot of it, to clear the coxswain’s head. She steered with a rudder.

They got out to the *Drummond* in no time, having the wind astern, and Al Hare swung aboard. A wornout yachtsman, said: “There are five of us here, and we’d like you to take us ashore, our own boat there astern is full of water,”

“Have to ask your captain first,” said Al comforting, “Captain Jim, what do you want me to do?”

“Well I want a tug, and I want to get my windlass castings fixed by a blacksmith. Can I get that done in the Credit?”

“Sure,” said Al. “How about these men that want to get ashore?”

“Take ’em,” said Capt. Quinn. “I’ll take the castings to the blacksmith shop myself when you go. Possum Mercer here and the rest of my crowd’ll keep ship while I’m away.” “All aboard,” said Al. “Ship the oars, for we’ll need ’em going back.”

So shorewards the *Grace Darling* sped, more slowly now, for she was full of men, and the wind was ahead instead of astern. The big seas were still roaring up the lake, unsmoothed by the offshore wind, and rolling in on the wreck of the *Augusta*, and on the beach at the river mouth, in long breakers from which the crests were blown back smoking like the tossing manes of wild horses.

“Keep her up to windward Al, keep her up!” everybody advised the coxswain.

Oars out on both sides and all three sails pulling the *Grace Darling* came rushing directly for the squat white lighthouse on the end of the east pier. The spray was going over the lantern. Three monster seas piled up in one mountain and burst at the critical moment.

“Aft, everybody!” shouted Al, “my rudder’s out of water and she won’t pay off for me!”

For one second it seemed as though she would shoot over the lighthouse. Then the explosion of the triple sea tossed her across the hundred-foot harbor mouth and she looked to be going to destruction on the opposite pier. Al kept his helm up, and she cleared that and the sails crashed over like a three-gun salute as she lurched her other side in and was almost filled with the bursting foam. Three oars were broken, those who had been pulling them were head over heels in the water between the thwarts, and she seemed to have a cargo of chaos.

“Beach her, Al, beach her to loo’ard of the pier!” yelled Jim Quinn.

“And have her roll over on top of us?” answered Al. “Not on your life! She’s going out in the lake again.”

“Your mainboom’s snapped – she’ll never make it!”

“Shift over them good oars to the lee side and she will,” Al answered back.

And they did.

And she did.

Foot by foot, fathom by fathom, helped by the hard offshore wind and the three oars, pulled doublebanked on the lee side, the *Grace Darling* waded out through the breakers, settled down to steady going in the deeper water, gained an offing on the lighthouse, and swung around again for another try.

This time Al got a spare oar over the stern to steer in the rough water, held her back till the biggest fellows had broken, and then drove her hard for the entrance.

Once more it was touch and go. She lapped the lighthouse when the next breaker-burst came. On that she flew like a stone out of a sling. There was no directing her, with oar, or sail, or rudder. She was a chip on a torrent of water roaring through the funnel of the piers at train

speed.

She just grazed one pier, at the inner end. But that graze stove in two planks like a cannon shot. Al gave a herculean sweep with his oar and ran her on the mud in Goose Bay the tiny cove inside the harbor, beyond the west pier. She was full of water, and of wet men. But safe.

Then Al for the first time saw Billy Trenwith. He was jammed in a corner of the bulkhead and the foremast-thwart so tight he could not get out. But even so, he was bailing manfully, as he had done throughout the trip. And he was still afraid Al would be cross because he had stowed away.

“Were you scared, Billy, at the pierhead?” asked Al.

“No,” said Billy. “I could see you wasn’t.”

Capt. Quinn got his castings forged, and out to the *Drummond* again as the water smoothed. With Allan Kemp and Nipper and Possum Mercer and his whole crew helping he hove in on his cables and found he had parted the one for the little anchor, and lost that hook, and had been riding to the big one all the time. They hove that one up and made all sail, even to the fly-by-night and the bluedevil that went to the foretopmast head – except the main gafftopsail which had flogged itself to ribbons and stranded the main topmast shrouds.

On the 27th of November, with the help of the late running Island ferry *Ada Alice*, Capt. Joe Goodwin, to dock her, the *Jessie Drummond* ploughed through the mud of the Princess street slip with 550 tons of hard coal for P. Burns & Co., the last schooner coal for this city in that century.

*(Caption) GUN CREW OF THE SONS OF ENGLAND NAVAL BRIGADE IN SOUTH AFRICAN WAR -TIME*

*Patriotic Sons of England had a Naval brigade known as the Britannia Life Saving Service from 1895 till 1905, when their lifeboat was somehow sunk in Toronto Harbor. The lifeboat had a crew of sixteen men. Jack Nuttall was the coxswain. The society also had a cutlass corps, in charge of H. Evans, a bugle band, and a gun crew, with a 25-pounder gun, built by Mr. Thomas L. Southam (on the left in the picture) in his Church street bicycle shop. It had the honor of firing a 21-gun salute for the Duke of Cornwall and York (later King George V) when he visited Toronto in 1901. The salute was fired at the foot of Cherry street. Mr. Harry Warry, 110 Hazelton avenue, is one of the few surviving members of the old naval brigade which did its best in voluntary service forty and fifty years ago.*

*(Caption) This schoolboy effort was made fifty years ago when the “GRACE DARLING” was drying sails at her mooring outside the Sons of England lifeboat house at the foot of York street. Below it is another of the JESSIE DRUMMOND off Toronto Island, five years later, with “positively the last” waterborne coal Toronto received in 1900.*