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By C.H.J. Snider

Chronicles Of The Credit

RESCUING A RUNAWAY

The Old White Wings

THERE was the day when Farmer Orr came galloping in from Clarkson barebacked on a little grey colt, all in a lather and sobbing for breath, for he had never been ridden before.

“The boy’s adrift and goin’ to be drowned!” he shouted, pulling rein at Port Credit bridge. “He’s out in a punt and blowin’ across the lake.”

Everyone in Port Credit knew the boy. He was one of Chester Ferrier’s charges at the Mimico Industrial School. He had been sent to work on a lake shore farm – and look at what he’d gone and went and done. But it was blowing hard offshore, and Lake Ontario was no place for a boy in a punt just then, whether he hailed from Mimico Industrial, U.T.S., or Buckingham Palace.

The only hooker in the harbor, as it chanced, was the old *White Wings*, ex-racer, now ten years in the backbreaking stone trade. There was no life saving service at the Port, but Al Hare was by common consent the captain of all lifesaving and salvage enterprises, and he had no hesitation in commandeering the rebuilt *White Wings*. Young Harry Fowler owned her, and was proud to place himself and his ship (which he had just bought) under Al’s command. Tom Leitch and Fred Hamilton piled aboard after them, and they mastheaded the old linen mainsail that once had done service in the *Chicago Verve*, and the yacht *Condor*’s flying jib, and the *White Wing*’s original fore staysail, which had won twenty-two firsts, three seconds and one third for her out of twenty-six starts in one racing season twenty years before.

She boiled out of the piers under those three pieces, towing behind her her big square-ended stone-hooking scow, for yawlboat or dinghy or tender she had none. As she heeled under the press of canvas there was a crash in the cabin, and old Danny Fowler, Harry’s father, rolled out of the berth where he had been snatching an unsuspected siesta. Even his son did not know he was on board. He clawed his way up on deck just as Al was sending Harry aloft to *White Wing*’s crosstrees to search every inch of the wind-torn lake’s surface. It was a great plain of blue and green plentifully specked with white, but the leaning hooker seemed the only thing afloat on it.

“You’ll never send my little boy away up that pole!” cried old Mr. Fowler, watching the spar’s dizzying sways, as it hung far out over the lake.

“He can sail this hooker,” said Al, reassuringly, “and for all I know he can climb much better than I can. See anything, Harry?”

“Nothing in sight on the lake,” hailed back Harry. “But sometimes I can see a flash like the sun or a looking glass away down to leeward.”

“I’ll keep her away, and you hail when she heads on it,” answered Al, and off the *White Wings* tore, scalding her bottom in the water.

In a few minutes Harry hailed: “It’s the punt! Steady as you go!” and then it was visible from the deck, and then Al put the helm down to round up to it. But the others yelled, “Keep her away, keep her away, Al, or you’ll run her down,” just as the cabintop blotted the boat out of the helmsman’s sight, and so he missed her on the first try. He got a glimpse, as they shot past, of a boy bailing with a tomato tin in one hand, and in his other a comic paper, probably containing the adventures of the Yellow Kid, Happy Hooligan, or Buster Brown and his dog Tiger, who were always “resolving” in those days.

“Now you sail your own ship, Harry,” said Al. “I’m leaving you,” and he leapt for the scow painter.

“What’ll become of us?” wailed some of the fellow rescuers.

“Harry’ll pick me up when I get him,” called Al from over the rail, “and I’ll take you all home.”

To the seasoned stonehookerman, used to navigating a deck-scow in rough water with a couple of tons of stone or gravel on deck without dumping, it may have been no great feat to scull to the punt, now tossed up on a wave, now hidden in the trough. It would kill you or me. “Don’t try to jump on the scow or you’ll dump your boat,” he called to the boy. The youngster turned from his funnies and his bailing and Al took him in tow and got him alongside the *White Wings* and on board.

Perhaps the tomato tin had held the boy’s “provisions” for his intended voyage, and had been emptied to use as a bailer. It was the means of saving his life, for as he turned up the sun shone on the bright tin of the bottom, and heliographed for help. But for that flash the *White Wings* would have turned back, for there was no other indication of boy or punt. It takes a lot of forethought on the part of Providence, doesn’t it? – to arrange that the sun shall just be so high, at a certain moment, to send a flash from an upturned tomato tin, to save a boy to grow up and be a useful man.

Then began a race back to the Credit. Young Tommy Blow, in Oakville, had also received the alarm, and was tearing down in a fast fishboat – and those Oakville and Bronte-built mackinaws could sail like witches. The boy was worse off than he had seemed, for he had been drenched through and chilled and now that the strain was over he was near collapse. After all, his absorption in Buster Brown was probably because he was trying to wave the paper to attract attention. Anyway, Al saw it was necessary to get him – and the *White Wings* – home fast, and besides, he wasn’t going to be beaten by that fishboat, and have her claim the rescue! Three tacks he made, slogging the *White Wings* through, and on the third she was fetching the piers when he saw a hot squall racing down off the land. “Run down your flying jib, Harry!” he

yelled, and they all got that sail off her right at the pierhead. But when the squall hit them Al couldn't luff her up to ease her, but had to bear away to avoid smashing her bows on the crib. Down, down, down she went, until all hands were hanging in the air from the weather rail, their toes unable to get hold on the deck. It seemed as though she was rolling over on top of them, that if the mast didn't go out of her she would never right, or would fall apart with the pressure.

But she did right, and beat the fishboat in, and Farmer Orr was very grateful, and the boy less so, for he had to go back to work. And the Mimico Industrial School was still less so, and demurred at the bill for \$20 or so Harry Fowler presented for the expense he had been put to. It cost him more than that to haul the *White Wings* out and caulk and repair her, for she was almost split in two with the strain of that squall.

THE most convincing answer to the quiz of last month as to the identity of the schooners shown in a good picture of Picton Harbor in the 1890's comes from W. J. Ostrander of South Bay Prince Edward, who like most Ostranders, has been a sailor all his days.

He says that about 1893 or 1894 the schooners *Two Brothers* and *F. H. Burton* were laid up side by side, as in the picture, in Low's Cove, Picton Harbor. As there is general agreement on the outside vessel in the picture being the *Two Brothers* the case for the inner one being the *F. H. Burton* seems pretty strong.

Mr. Ostrander says the inner one could not be the *Fabiola* because "the *Fabiola* only had three jibs. I know, as I sailed in her for five seasons." That was Schooner Days objection to the *Fabiola* identification – the bow was similar, but the bowsprit differently rigged.

These "three-jibbers" had a large forestaysail, with a boom on the foot, and the forestay came out to the bowsprit end. The "four-jibbers" had a narrower forestaysail, with a boom on the foot, set on a forestay coming down to the stemhead. Another stay came down to the bowsprit end, and on this was set what we called the standing jib. Sometimes this sail also had a boom on its foot. Outside of the standing jib, on the projecting jibboom was carried the flying jib, which was just as much a "standing" sail as the standing jib, for it was hanked to the stay and tacked to the jibboom. Outside of it, again, on the jibboom end was the jibtopsail, hanked to its stay and differing from a yacht's jibtopsail in not going aloft to the topmast head. If a lake schooner sported a jib like that it was called a jib-o'-jib, blue devil, or flying jibtopsail. They were rather rare. In a few instances the *Erie Belle* and the *Bertha Barnes* for examples, the fifth and outermost jib was tacked to the jibboom end – like the other jibs.

The forestaysail – which lakers called "the staysail" – was always counted as a jib. Atlantic fishermen call it a jumbo, if it has a boom on it, otherwise the stem staysail. "The staysail" to them is the big quadrilateral main topmast staysail set between mastheads, which yachtsmen call a fisherman staysail. Fishermen don't.

Mr. Ostrander mentions the *Flora Emma* as an alternative for the inside schooner in the picture, but E. J. Guy, late of Oshawa and for some time now of Toronto, confirms the

recollection of the *Flora Emma* as a three-jibber like the *Fabiola*. He was in her in 1881, with Capt. Sam Philp, when she was dismasted, and quite definitely recalls her long staysail boom, painted slate color like her deck, on which the boys hung their washing by knotting the ends through the foot-stops of the sail.

The *F. H. Burton* of Port Hope had four jibs, like the one shown in the picture. She was a real old-imer, having been built – where do you think? – at Dundas. Ont., in those early days when the iron horse was a novelty in Canada. The year was 1854, and the railway which gave her her name was new that year, the Great Western, afterwards absorbed in the Grand Trunk.

It had a station in Toronto at the foot of Yonge street.

Great Western was what the *F. H. Burton* was called and so she was known until 1889, when she was rebuilt and renamed. Dundas was the actual head of navigation for Lake Ontario, being then connected with the lake by the Desjardins Canal of which a little of the old piling may still be found in Burlington Bay. Dundas was so situated as to command the portage to the Grand River and Lake Erie, and had a great waterborne traffic. The *James Coleman* was another schooner built there, and there were several steamers and barges.

The original *Great Western* had a different appearance aloft from the later *F. H. Burton*, having long lower masts and short topmasts, set up with deadeyes and futtock shrouds. She kept going, as a barge or lighter in Kingston, up to the time of the Great War, a lifetime of sixty years. She had been sunk in collision and had a fire. She was 103 feet long, 20 1/2 feet beam, 9 feet depth of hold and measured 137 tons. Peace to her ashes.

Capt. Johnny Williams, up-and-coming as ever and completing his 88th year, puts his finger on the flaw in his old friend Capt. Redfern's suggestion that one of the schooners in the picture might be the *W.T. Greenwood*. While the *Greenwood* was a smart looking schooner like the Two Brothers, she had a metal weathercock at her foretop-mast head. Old Capt. Ewart put it there, and that rooster crowed in the direction the wind was coming from until the poor *Greenwood* was lost near the Devil's Nose on Nov. 20th, 1895, long after Capt. Williams had left her and Capt. Ewart was dead. The way she was lost was hard. Capt. "Old Andy" Beard had her, and was bound for Toronto with coal in the fall of the year. The wind coming hard from the southwest, with snow, when he was halfway home, he was forced to run back for shelter in Charlotte. While reefing his mainsail the schooner ate up and ate up towards the American shore, and, being deep laden, struck on one of those offshore patches and swung around almost head to wind.

Capt. Williams, coming along next morning, sighted the defiant weathercock at the fore truck and recognized his old ship. His crew thought she was at anchor, close in, but he knew better. No vessel would willingly anchor where the *Greenwood* was caught. Farther down, under Braddocks Point, vessels sometimes took shelter in a westerly, but never near the Devil's Nose, where dozens of vessels have been lost. When he reached Charlotte he met Capt. Beard at the lifesaving station.

“Why, where’s your vessel, captain?” he asked.

“In pieces on the beach by now ” quoth Capt. Old Andy. “We left her when she started to break up below the Nose. And we’d never a-reached land alive if it hadn’t been for our good yawlboat. She swung round when we struck so we could get our boat across the stern clear. It was new and good and carried us all safe ashore.”

(Caption) MORE PORT CREDIT WORTHIES

Can any of the old-timers or new-timers interested in Port Credit and schooner days identify this dear old couple of the 1870's? Mr. and Mrs. Caven have been suggested, and Mr. and Mrs. Watson. Both families lived east of the Credit, and it was on the foreshore of their farm that the scow schooner MARY E. FERGUSON was built in 1868.