

Toronto Telegram, November 3, 1945
Schooner Days DCCXVI (716)
By C.J.H. Snider

‘RAGING RIDEAU’ HAD TRADE ALL ITS OWN

WE stopped at Kingston Mills one sunny morning last July – a lovely spot a few miles northeast of the Limestone City, crisp and clean like everything in the limestone belt, It was difficult to believe that the sharp cut stone blockhouse at the turn of the road was more than a century old, and part of the defenses of an ingenious inland waterway laid out to avoid invasion perils in which the upper St. Lawrence was involved in the War of 1812. It was as hard to believe that the blockhouse bridge once had to swing a dozen times a day to accommodate steamers, schooners, sloops and barges puffing and poling and plying all the way from Oswego to Ottawa. It did, though. It’s all gone now. But once upon a time – and it was your time – the dreaming reaches of the Rideau hummed with traffic like a four-lane highway.

Some of it was very “local” – cordwood cut just around the corner, going a few miles to where the old three-decker HMS *St. Lawrence* served as a fuel dock in Kingston harbor. But some of it was “foreign.” There were the famous Blue Barges, each with the owner’s name emblazoned on the stern, which were towed across Lake Ontario from Oswego by the lake tug *Charlie Ferris*, and turned over in Kingston to the river steamer *Colonel By*. She commemorated R.E. By, the founder of Bytown, which became the capital of Canada, but nine out of ten called her the *Colby*, as that was the way her name was spelled on her paddle boxes. The *Col. By* would tow them from Kingston to Ottawa and bring them back, loaded for transfer to the *Ferris’* ministrations for the lake passage, the *Ferris* meantime having brought over empties from Oswego, which the river steamer would take up for filling.

KINGSTON WOOD TRADE

The wood trade, which was one of the big features of the Rideau route, was a happy, hardworking, free but not easy life, with plenty of fresh air and fresh water in it, and not much else, although it spelled modest prosperity for the diligent. The little wood carrier would leave Kingston with her hold swept clean of even the chips and sawdust and sail or pole through the Catarauqui swing bridge and up the broad estuary of the river back of Kingston, where it comes to join the St. Lawrence. At Kingston Mills the Catarauqui river narrowed. There were two formidable obstacles – the first lock of the canal and the fixed level of the old Grand Trunk Railway bridge.

If the trader were one of the tall-funneled slab-burning steamers of the old days she might have to telescope her smokestack here. If a sailing craft of much loftiness she would have to lower her mast.

She would have to do that, anyway, farther on, for some of the fixed highway bridges. The approach to the lock is rock-walled, tree-covered, narrow and picturesque to this day. With the wind light or ahead the sailing craft would have to be poled along for hundreds of yards.

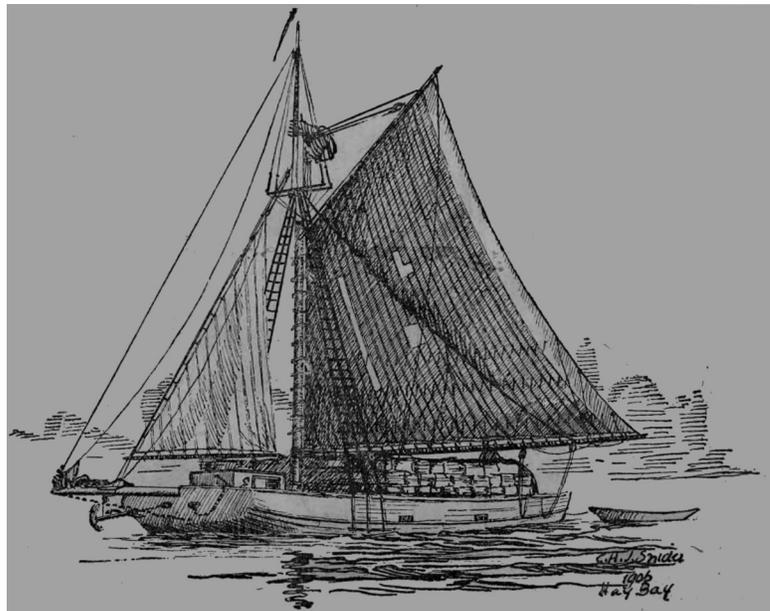
Once the first “step” had been taken – the lift of the first lock accomplished – and the first bridge crossed underneath, then would be clear sailing – or poling – for miles ahead, across sparkling reaches, or dreary drowned lands full of stumps and deadheads, through lily-starred channels and steep banked cuts, sometimes so narrow the mainboom would shake off sprays of pine cones or maple leaves from either bank as it swung from port to starboard, when the broad-off mainsail had to be gybed in the twists of the course. Up one flight of stairs and down another, climbing the locks and levels of the Catarqui and descending the levels and locks of the Rideau, the little hooker could cruise all the way to the Ottawa river and the capital of Canada, had her master the mind.

But the master’s mind was practical, and most voyages were shorter and more prosaic, though still picturesque. For many this navigation was almost as simple as a trip to the woodpile. The hooker went through the lock to the nearest place on the river or the canal where a farmer had a pile of wood to load, got out his loading planks, piled in as many cords as his vessel would float, and pushed off for market. The river was unlighted and buoys were few. Many skippers called it a day when the sun went down, but veteran pilots like Capt. Mallen would run the route, however dark the night, if they had a leading wind. A favorable wind might shift if they waited for daylight, and if they missed it they might keep on waiting for a week for clear sailing.

FIRST STEP ON STAIRWAY

Kingston Mills has the first lock in the Rideau Canal, which climbs up the course of the Catarqui and down to the Ottawa after crossing the height of land between Kingston and Ottawa by the series of Rideau Lakes. At Poonamalie, near Smiths Falls, you are 275 feet above either end of the canal.

The old Canadian defense plan which the Rush-Bagot agreement made unnecessary was to switch the imperilled St. Lawrence traffic up the Ottawa and down the Rideau Canal to Lake Ontario; ingenious, and not at all a waste of the \$13,000,000 at which the canal stands on Canada’s books, although the



Wide shoal scow sloops were used in the Rideau navigation. This one was drawn in Hay Bay in the Bay of Quinte and was named the Ilya. The Rideau sloops were similar, sometimes sharp-bowe, as will be told next week. The sloop rig was easier to dismantle, and rerig, for passage under fixed bridges.

purpose served was different from the one first contemplated. The Rideau Canal affected the choice of Ottawa as the capital of the Dominion. Much maligned as imperialism is today, it was the Imperial government that put up the first £70,000 which started the important waterway development.

Lockmaster John Doyle showed us, in the sunny and silent canal office, that July morning, records of former canal traffic quite astounding, although only a few pleasure launches were passing through in 1945. Smart little passenger steamers, the *Rideau King* and the *Rideau Queen*, used to make daily trips between Kingston and Ottawa up to a few years ago, and these trips were a scenic delight to the passengers, though they took 24 hours or more. It was only in 1938 the Ottawa Transportation Company's four little steam freighters, *Ottawan*, *Hull*, *Denis Murphy* and *Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, puffed their last trip - to the auction block.

They were the successors of 94 freight barges using the route. In 1937 four hundred and one craft of all descriptions, most of them were launches, used the Rideau, but this was only a fraction of the traffic of a hundred years before. In 1837, the Rebellion year, 3,635 vessels carried 232,438 tons of freight through the canal. There were then no railways to handle it.

SOME GRAND OLD NAMES

On the First of July, 1868, the second Dominion Day for the infant Canada, there went through this lock at Kingston Mills the steamer *Hemlock*, 72 tons, Mr. Chaffey's little tug *Elwood*, with eight tows, including scows *Miner*, *Mineral* and *Algoma*, each with 80 tons of iron ore from Dog Lake. The tug *Swan*, 9 tons, took three 100-ton barges, *Montreal*, *Try*, and *Bedford*, each loaded with sawn lumber. And these sailing vessels passed, sloops and schooners, most of them scow-built and all under 100 tons burden:

ROSE OF ERIN, Capt. Glidden, 57 tons, laden with cord wood

SARAH BOND, 34 tons, lumber laden

PERSEVERANCE, 72 tons, lumber

SCOURGE, Capt. Downes, '30 tons

TRADER, Capt. Stewart, 47 tons

LOUGHTON

DELTA

QUEBEC

ONTARIO

CHAMPION

SKIFFS, Capt. Orser's and Capt. Byrne's, 20 tons each. These must have been large open boats, perhaps like the pointers of the north country, with sails to move them.

There were fine names among the little sisters of the Rideau trade – the *Rose*, the *Shamrock*, and the *Thistle*, of 35 tons each, the *Argyle Lass*, 25 tons, and the *Highland Lass*, 35, and the *Maid of Erin*, 39, and the *Forest Queen*, 28, and the wee *Will o' the Wisp*, 25 tons; and the *Lion*, and the *Unicorn*, the *Wild Duck* and the *Queen*, the *Hunter* and the *Forwarder*, *Tom Dick*, (but not Harry), the *Lark* and the *Humming Bird*, the *Clipper* and *Caesar*, and *Sarah Ann*

and *Mary Ann*, *Sunbeam*, *Bloomer*, *Cygnets*, *Dreadnought*, *Moravian* and *Ox*. The patient *Ox* carried cordwood and plaster in 1875, and the *Gipsy Queen* then carried gypsum.

The *Moravian* was probably the Bay of Quinte sloop scow of that name, built either on Amherst Island or near Kingston. She was large and could-carry nearly 3,000 bushels of grain.

LAKE SCHOONERS CAME THROUGH

Many of these vessels were engaged in the wood trade exclusively at the time, but some are recognized as general lake traders. Either there were two "S. Bonds," or the one mentioned was a 200-ton schooner *Sarah Bond*, large for her time, built by George Thurston in or near Kingston in 1852, repaired and refastened in 1861 and sold to F. H. Bond and Co., of Oswego, who may have renamed her. Many lake vessels were built at Storrington, Battersea, and Dog Lake, northeast of Kingston, and these would have to pass out through Kingston Mills lock, to reach Lake Ontario, for which they were intended. The lock was large enough to accommodate the largest schooners of the time if they were light, that is, empty of cargo, for there was five feet of water on the sills, but they would have to be dismantled to get under the bridge. Many new vessels were towed through the lock as bare hulks and were masted and rigged at Kingston.

The *Bloomer* was another American vessel, built at the now abandoned port of Oak Orchard, N.Y., in 1852, by H. Murray, and later owned by John Wright, of South Bay, Ontario. She is recorded in the Port Whitby harbor books. The *Loughboro*, or *Loughton*, was perhaps a new built vessel, bound for Kingston for outfitting, for the tonnage given her, 127, would make her too large for sailing on the Rideau route.

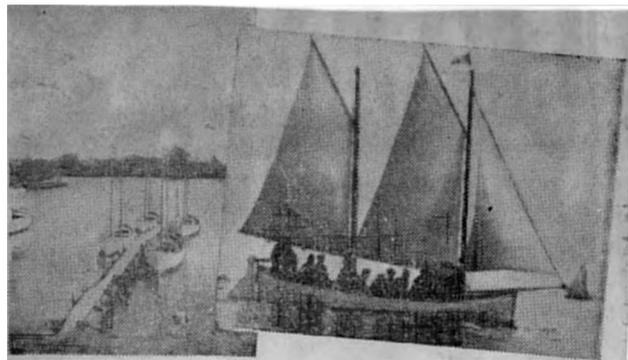
Passing hails

HELP IS NEEDED TO REPLACE GULLS' BURNED WINGS

It was a wicked blaze that devastated the 51st Sea Scouts clubhouse on the shore of Ashbridge's Bay on Oct. 25. It destroyed the boys' 16 years' gathering of gear and sails and spars for the four schooner-rigged boats that make up their fleet.

The clubhouse and all that was in it were acquired through the painstaking efforts of the boys themselves. The 51st troupe of Sea Scouts were organized in 1929 by William Fowler, Captain John Williams and T. K. Wade.

"Billie" Fowler is now lieutenant commander, RCN, HMCS Perengine, N.S. He was serving in the *Ark Royal* when she was torpedoed and sunk in 1942, and for three years he was stationed in HMCS Avalon at St. John's, Newfoundland.



Four little lake gulls of the Sea Scouts' flock which have been refeathered. They are good birds and deserve new plumage.

Captain John Williams is one of the best known and most loved of all Great Lakes mariners. T. K. Wade rates high in international yachting, and has unobtrusively done wonders for the Sea Scouts.

The Sea Scouts' clubhouse is located just west of the foot of Woodfield road, on the shore of Ashbridge's Bay. Its upper structure is fire wrecked. The hulls of the four prized boats, "Commodore," "Captain," "Skipper" and "Commander," were saved. Two were not stowed away inside for the winter.

All the gear, spare tackles, signals and running lights, spars, spare canvas, rudders, tillers, floor boards, life belts and fittings were destroyed. But the boys are not dismayed. They are all resolved to "build it up again."

There are about 20 of them in the troupe at present under the supervision of William Waddington, in the absence of Lt. Com. Fowler. 10 Scouts have recently returned from war service. There were 58 in all who volunteered for the forces, 40 for Navy, a dozen or so for Air Force, 3 or 4 for Army, and 2 for Merchant Marine. It is hoped that most of them will be home for Christmas. Two of them, in Air Force, were killed in action.

Some of the boys are still at sea, many are at overseas clearing depots waiting to be repatriated. In all about 400 boys have trained with the Sea Scouts troupe in the 16 years of its existence.

They have learned seamanship and citizenship, and manly deportment under the tutelage of masters of all three. In the years before the war they sailed their four boats into nearly every harbor on Lake Ontario, every summer. During the war years their cruises were perforce confined to trips along the north shore and in the Bay of Quinte.

Their boats are each 22 feet long, and were fitted with loose-footed foresails, mainsails and jibs. The boys have learned to handle them in any kind of weather, and with wonderful skill. They are as much at home in the lake as the gulls themselves, but like the gulls, they must have wings.

"We're not beat by a long way, just because the fire mopped up all our gear," a representative group of Sea Scouts declared. "The troupe got it all for themselves, before and we will again. We've started already. Some of us are putting on a salvage drive. Some are making model ships in bottles to sell, others are doing other things. Everybody's doing something. We've got in touch with this War Assets Corporation to see about getting one of these disused 'temporary' war buildings for a clubhouse. There are several that we know of that aren't any use for anything else, and we can do all the work of fixing it up for ourselves. We'll have two boats going when the season opens next spring. Just wait and see.

Let us hope they don't have to wait too long to see their gallant quartette refitted, and able to train four hundred more boys in sail.