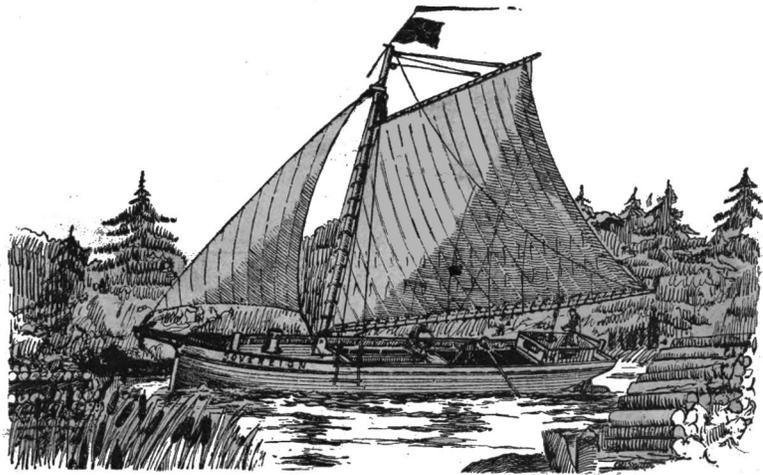


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By C.H.J. Snider

RIDEAU TRADE – its SOVEREIGN

WHEN Michael Mallen came to Kingston in 1840 from Monaghan in Ireland, he came in the fine sailing vessel *Sovereign*, which made the Atlantic passage in three weeks, a wonder for her time or any time. The record sailing passage is twelve days and six hours, but that is eastbound with the assistance of the brave west winds, which make the westbound passage slower, even for airplanes. His talk of her so impressed his son Michael, born in Kingston, that when he grew to man's estate and had a sharp-bowed scow sloop built for himself in 1870 he called her the *Sovereign*, too.



THE SAUCY SOVEREIGN poling in for a landing, drawn from a portrait of her by Nick Henderson, of Kingston in the possession of the Mallen family.

Michael II was an early exponent of the Ontario wood trade, which was once a national institution.

Up to the 1870's wood was the fuel of industry as well as for domestic use. Trains and steamers ran on cordwood quite as much as they did on iron rails or bumpy waves. Factories depended on wood for their boilers. One of the *Sovereign's* first contracts was the supply of cordwood for the heating of the "penal institution at Portsmouth," known as the Kingston Penitentiary. Another, in 1877, was hauling stone for the principal building of the Royal Military College, whose mansard cupola still dominates the Kingston landscape.

Dozens of small craft swarmed about Kingston seventy-five years ago, supplying cordwood slabs and bunchwood for houses and foundries, steamers, locomotives and public institutions. One great supply of cordwood came from the lakes and rivers of the Rideau Canal, put through by Royal Engineers of the British army in Canada in 1826. The canal, connecting Kingston and Ottawa, both tapped and flooded a heavily wooded country and offered easy transport for its staple product, fuel.

Michael II knew the Rideau route well, for he had already tested it with a little sloop called the *Forest Queen*. So when in the 1870s he ordered the *Sovereign* of Martin Clayton, the

builder, in the old shipyard west of the Tete du Pont barracks in Kingston, afterwards used by the Montreal Transportation Co., he knew what he wanted.

She had to be shoal, to scrape over the weeds and logs and stumps of the Rideau route and the five-foot sills of the canal locks. She had to be sharp, for time was lost when headwinds blew so hard that scows could not be poled against them. And she had to be a good carrier, for freights were low and it took a good many cords to make a freight that would pay the wages of the three men needed to work a wood-sloop. So he had her built shaped like a flatiron, with a pointed bow and a square overhanging stern. Her rudder hung on a wooden post from the stern, and was balanced, that is, with the blade both before and abaft the post. A long tiller came up over the stern and over the little cabin. This had three berths, one athwartships, under the stairs at the after end, and one on each side. The helmsman stood on the cabin top to steer. The main sheet was belayed on the cabin top, at his feet. The rig was simple, a “stump sloop” just mainsail and jib, no topmast, the jib thrust out on a short stocky bowsprit, which served as a cathead for the anchor.

On the foredeck, forward of the mast, was a sturdy capstan in place of a windlass. The mast stood on the deck, not on the keelson, as is usual. It hinged between two heavy jaws, forming a tabernacle. It had to be lowered to go under the fixed bridges on the Rideau route. This was accomplished by easing up on the forestay, which set up on a purchase to the bowsprit end. It was hoisted back into position by a head-rope, led to the capstan through a block, and assisted by the forestay purchase. The mast came down and lay fore-and-aft with its gaff and boom and sail resting on the cabin trunk, astern.

The *Sovereign* was completely decked over at bow and stern and along her sides, but amidships, from abaft the mast to the cabin, she was open, except for the long centreboard box and a narrow strip of decking across her at the after end of this, bracing the after ledger of the centreboard box and the pump. In the open space aft of this two heavy deck beams crossed the little ship. Then came the beam for the forward end of the cabin.

The gangways on either side of this long open hatch were walks for the two men who had to pole the sloop through the narrow cuts and channels on the Rideau. When in the wood trade there her cargo, which was piled into the hold and for five feet above the deck level, would not be allowed to spread out on to these pole-walks. But if she was running lumber from Kingston to Cape Vincent it would be piled five feet high and from rail to rail, because this was all plain sailing and the poles would not be in use.

The mainsail had two reefs. It stowed itself without much labor, for it dropped down into six lazy-jacks, zig-zagged from the topping lift to the boom.

The *Sovereign* has been described in some detail because she was typical – except for her wedge-shaped bow – of dozens of little sloops and schooners engaged in the Kingston wood trade. The last of these was the *Pilot* of Pultneyville, long sailed by “Saucy Jack” Oliver, in the Bay of Quinte lumber and grain trade. She was too lofty to get under the railroad bridge at

Kingston Mills without shortening her masts, and some question her plying the Rideau route at all, but the last seen of her, in 1910, old Capt. Jimmy Mahoney, who then owned her, had her hove down for repairs in the wide reach of the river above the highway bridge at Kingston. She was schooner built, and a fine little vessel in her time. With her topmasts out she might get under the Grand Trunk bridge at Kingston Mills, for she was a tippy craft, and her lower masts were short to help her stability.

Most of these wood carriers were out-and-out scows, square at both ends. While usually built at Kingston or Battersea, Dog Lake, or Cranberry Lake on the Rideau, some of them were “foreigners.” Among these latter was the famous Port Credit-built scow, “*Brig Rover*,” in which our old friend, Capt. John Williams, served his apprenticeship as cook in 1867. She was in the Rideau trade in her last years, about 1903, when Capt. Dan Smith brought her down from Toronto and solved the bridge problem by removing her topmasts.

Michael Mallen so prospered with the *Sovereign* that he set up a fuel business for himself in Kingston, when coal was coming in as a fuel, and his coal and woodyard was long a Kingston enterprise. He died in 1931, leaving two sons and two daughters, Frank Mallen, of 44 Wilson avenue, Toronto; Leo Mallen, of Ottawa, and Miss Frances Mallen and Miss Anna Mallen of Kingston. In their lovely old square-plan home, with its graceful doorway and gracious central hall and fireplace is a picture of the *Sovereign* by Nick Henderson, the well-known Kingston artist.

Michael Mallen, through his experience with the *Forest Queen* and the *Sovereign* mastered the tricky Rideau navigation so well – over drowned lands, stumps, deadheads and sawlogs, through cuts then unbuoyed or marked, by bushes tied to stakes, and crossed by bridges that were swing or bridges that were fixed – that he was in great demand as a licensed Rideau pilot, for the steamers and pleasure launches that crowded out the slow-moving sailing scows.

The *Sovereign* ended her days without ever crossing Lake Ontario. She was sunk beside a coal wharf at Belleville, and her sturdy bones are visible there yet at low water. Her first recorded entry on the Rideau canal books was in 1876, her last in 1884, after which Capt Mallen sold her and she went into the Bay of Quinte trade.

James Shappee, of Belleville, was so impressed by the *Sovereign* that he bought the *Peruvian* from Capt. Jack Randall of Seeley's Bay, because Christopher Harris had built her sharp-bowed and scow-sterned after the *Sovereign*'s model at Harris Mills, Battersea, on the Rideau. Shappee had sailed the *Sovereign* herself for a Belleville coal company in the slab and bunchwood trade, on the Bay of Quinte, between Trenton and Kingston.