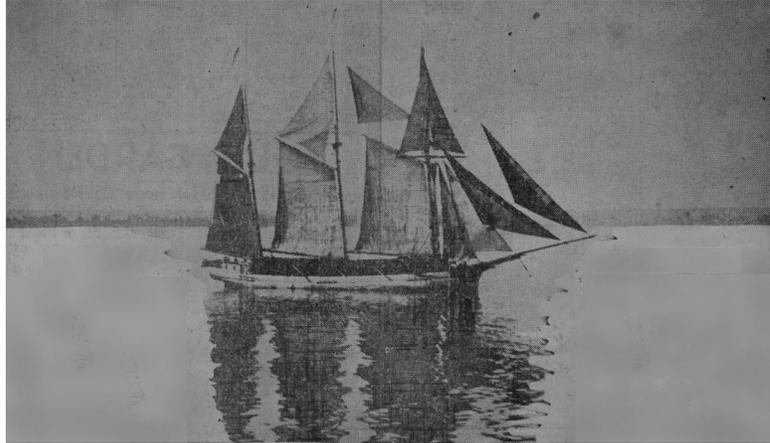


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Schooner Days DCCXLV (745)
By C.H.J. Snider

End of the AGNES HOPE

Phil McCrimmon was at the wheel of the *Agnes Hope*, and sweating, though it was the 6th of November, 1884, and cold and blowing fresh from the north as though someone had left the door of Santa Claus's refrigerator open. Young Will Savage, then a boy – he died in 1937, a veteran captain came aft to relieve him, at the end of his trick. "Did father send you to relieve me?," demanded Phil. "He did, or I wouldn't come," said Will. "Well I've been sailing longer than you have been alive and I'm telling you it's all I can do to keep her from broaching to. She's running wild with a deck load of lumber all soaked to the sheerpoles. It's got her by the head so much she wants to turn around and look at you".



Can anyone identify this Upper Laker? She looks much like the Agnes Hope in her later years. Note how high the deckload is piled.

Will balanced to reeling deck, ready to relieve the older man in obedience to orders, so Phil grumbled. "You take her if your Dad told you to, south-by-west!" "South-west" repeated Will bravely, pitting his 110 lbs against the kicking wheel. Fifteen minutes later the *Agnes Hope* did turn round and look at him, broaching to as a smashing sea burst over her quarter, and rolling in a trough until they thought she would roll completely over. With a crash of rending savings and ping of parting chains the lee half of the deckload slid overboard like a falling wood pile. Even with its weight gone she seemed to gain no freeboard, perhaps because lake water filled up the vacated space and poured down her pump well, hatches and forecastle. Her booms were flailing about, her sails banging and tearing, her spars whipping out of her. She was waterlogged and unmanageable. "Get the boat down!" roared Captain Savage, thinking she was going out under him.

They managed to lower the yawl-boat which hung across the stern on davits, and got into it on the Captain's orders. As they did so the *Agnes Hope* rolled over on her side, heaving up high above the tossing yawl. Captain Savage slashed the boat painter to keep it from turning the small boat over or take it down with the sinking vessel.

The little *Jessie McDonald*, single reefed and barley loaded, was following, coming like a steamboat with her safety valves tied down. Putting her helm hard over she ramped past to windward of the yawl-boat, her reefed sails thundering like drums as she luffed into the wind. Strongly thrown and true, a heaving line sizzled through the air, it's straightening coils dropping

squarely across the boat where William McCrimmon, Phil's brother, stood to his oar, keeping her before the sea. The line thudded on his oar, rasped across one gunwale, dragged along the thwart and hesitated on the next gunwale, then flicked away like a racing snake as the *Jessie McDonald* swept completely by. "What in hell did you let that line go by for?" cried Capt. Savage. "I want to get ashore in this yawl-boat," said Will McCrimmon, "and I'm not going to see her towed under like the *Agnes Hope* was driven under." Wm. McCrimmon was the best man in a small boat then in Prince Edward County. He was killed at Cleveland a few years later by an ore bucket falling on him when he was supervising the unloading of a vessel in which he was mate .

Will McCrimmon was the man to be in charge of the yawl-boat, for the Captain was so stunned by all that happened that he gave up. Will came aft and had his brother Phil sit in the sternsheets and crook an arm over the sculling oar so as to keep it in the notch, no easy task in a yawl-boat in a high sea. Standing up himself. Will steered with this oar, keeping her running before the rollers the rest of the day and all that night. He had a vocabulary as powerful as his sculling arms and he used both vigorously and kept the boys busy bailing with their hats or anything that would toss the water out. Before they had left the schooner he had thrown a coal-oil can in the boat. This he put in Phil's charge and had him drip a little at a time over the stern. In the slick thus made the 16 foot boat, with 7 men in it, crossed Lake Ontario in safety in a gale that had been too much for the schooner. They came ashore somewhere near Oswego 30 miles from where they left the vessel; wet freezing hungry but alive .

And the *Agnes Hope*? She didn't go down, as had been feared. The lumber cargo under her hatched and what buoyancy was left in her oak skin and bones and pine spars kept her afloat on her side, barely visible, like a half-tide rock. She washed in on the Ford Shoals, about 9 miles above Oswego, the port for which she had sailed from Belleville 2 days before. And here the pounding finished her, mixing her ribs and bottom planking with the lumber of her cargo as the poor young lady was strewn along the shore of Oswego County. She was only 15 and deserved better .

Young Will Savage grew to be a good sailorman, too, and was mate with his father when they had the *Annie M Innes*, later sailed that vessel till she settled into a comfortable old age as a river barge, about 1910. He was mate with his father in the *William Elgin*, a fine Prince Edward schooner of 300 tons some years after the *Agnes Hope*'s passing.

After they were well out of Charlotte one trip, in nice weather, his father said to him. "Well what's the matter with this lady. She's gone loggy on me and won't steer. Sound your pumps." "I sounded both wells before we cast our lines, dad, and there was nothing in them. Sound them right away, I'm telling you. Dad, the lanyards wet for 6 feet up! There can't be that much water in her. Wait'll I try with a dry line." "Get the boat down first!" shouted Capt. Savage, a command he had given before. By the time the yawl-boat had been unhooked from the davit falls and hauled alongside to leeward the *William Elgin* was swaying with a slow pendulum motion. The very moment they cast off the painter she sank, bolt upright, with little commotion, her spars vanishing in the smooth lake as though some merman was pulling them out below.