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## The *ALBATROSS* Timber Drogher

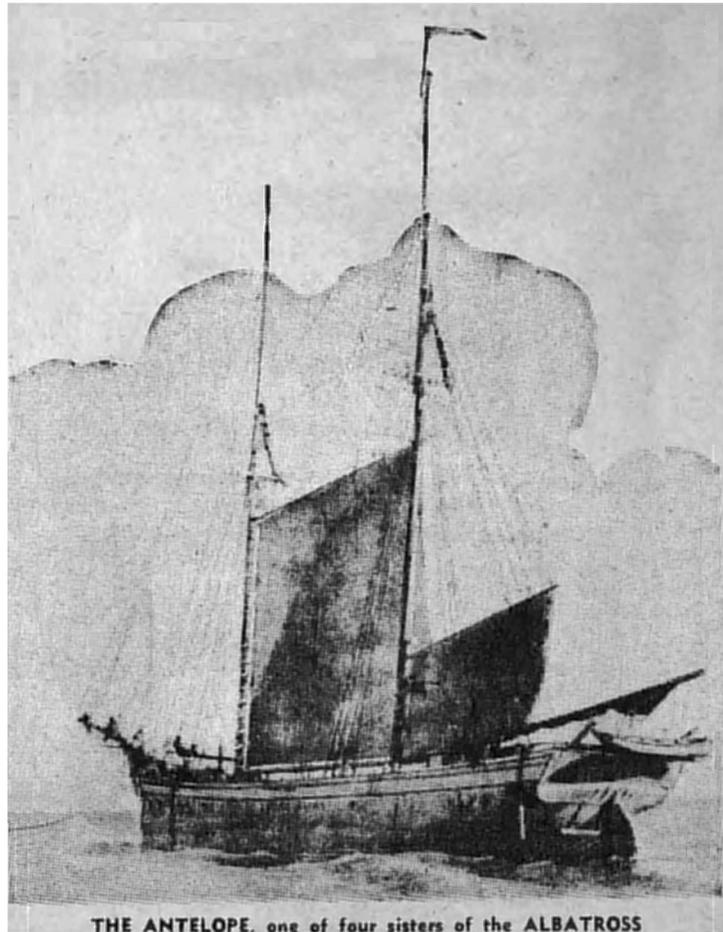
*Floating Stable for Horseboy and His Horses Yielded Her Captain Less Than \$500 a Year for Eight Months of Wet Hard Work.*

HERE continues the tale of the once homeboy who became Capt. James W. Baby, of Hamilton, who joined Muir Bros. timber drogher *Albatross* of Port Dalhousie in 1871. This will have to do principally with the horseboy's first ship.

When this writer last saw the *Albatross* she was "going on for thirty" and looked much the worse for wear. She was still in the timber trade, and was passing down the old Welland Canal in May, 1898 with a load from either Georgian Bay or Toledo for Kingston. What paint the years and canal locks had left her was still black, and her trim was or had been white, particularly the covering board. This was the uniform of all the Muir timber vessels, initiated in the *Ayre*, which they built in 1855. Usually they were well painted.

There was another *Albatross* out of Oakville, which I never saw, but the Muir *Albatross* I knew well, having sailed in a sister schooner of the same vintage, the *Albacore*.

These vessels were straight in the side and flat in the bottom, but not scow built, their bilges rounded between side and bottom with a quick hard turn for most of their length. Their stems were straight up and down, and one or two frames or ribs forward were also straight, being canted outward to give their round bows a flare and reduce their width under water, but in general they were just "long boxes with rounded corners, narrower at the back than at the front." Their runs were moulded and shipshape, but their quarters were heavy, to enable them to carry as big a load as possible through the old Welland Canal locks, for which they made a tight fit. They were hard to steer, with their fullness at bow and stern, but good carriers and good sea boats



THE ANTELOPE, one of four sisters of the ALBATROSS

unless overloaded. They were strongly built of good white oak, with four-inch planking thickening to five in places. Well salted and seasoned, they had a natural lifetime of thirty to forty years, and sometimes attained it. The *Albatross*, we are informed, was burned at Owen Sound about the end of the last century and her remains were used as a boathouse or storehouse.

### **OLD TIME TIMBER DROGHER**

The *Albatross* was a fine stout vessel, well built by a good firm, and meant to be a credit to her calling. In spite of her box-like model she was heavily rigged, with four jibs, two gaff-topsails, foresail and mainsail, and she had a yard across the foremast, with a squaresail and raffe as well. All this was to “make time,” for time was money. When she reached the Welland Canal her two deck horses were reinforced by four others – the Muirs had their own stables of canal horses – and the six steeds snaked her down the long levels and the twenty-six locks which then formed stairsteps from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. It takes eight hours to pass the Welland Canal now. Forty-eight hours was a good passage then, and sometimes it took a week. The old wagons sashayed from bank to bank, grounding and blocking traffic both ways, until hove off by horse and man working windlass and capstan. Sometimes they had to be unloaded and loaded again to drag them over the lock sills

### **DOWN THE RAGING CANAL**

Rightly named the “raging canal,” the Welland gave Jim Baby, our new horseboy, worse shocks than the *Albatross* had already administered to him. The day they arrived in Port Colborne a woman whose husband had been drowned threw herself into the harbor, a man fell from aloft in a nearby vessel and was picked up in pieces, and two Swedes failed to maintain a neutrality pact which existed on board the vessel and, jumping out on the dock, went at each other with unsheathed knives.

It blew so hard going down the canal that sometimes a vessel would “take charge” going around a bend and, putting her thousand tons of weight and windage against the six horsepower on the towpath, would pull the three teams and the horseboys into the canal. To avoid that, the canaller would be moored to the bank to “ride out the gale.”

The banks were lined with slippery, muddy towpaths, along which horses, mules, horseboys, and helpers and crews dragged lines, slipped, swore, fought and disentangled themselves and their vessels as best they could. Timber droghers like the 138-foot *Albatross* were tight fits for the locks of the “Old” canal. Their jibbooms had to be run in and topped up, their yards cockbilled, their yawlboats got inboard or overboard and their taffrail davits and catheads capsized. Even so, ten feet draught and 22 feet beam dragged on the lock sides and sills usually had to be hove through with the capstan, before the canal was enlarged. One captain built a new vessel and got her hopelessly jammed in one of the old locks. No amount of adzing would permit her to pass. He walked into an adjoining woods, taking his razor with him and cut his throat from ear to ear.

### **PIGEON BAY TO GARDEN ISLAND**

Having survived the canal, the *Albatross* and our hero tackled Lake Ontario and reached Garden Island, opposite Kingston, where the Calvins had their great enterprise. The squared timber was here hoisted out and formed into rafts for Quebec. This was the round of the *Albatross* all that season – Garden Island to unload, then up Lake Ontario, the canal and Lake Erie again, to Pigeon Bay – where wild pigeons fed on the wild rice and clouded the sun in their flights – near Kingsville, for another load. Then back down to Kingston to unload. It was tough, but it could not kill the ambition of the little lad who said he was going to be a sailor. That, however, was deferred by a more urgent ambition – to grow heavy and strong enough to give the captain the licking of his life.

Yet the *Albatross*'s same little captain – Charley Staley was his name – had his good points. He felt he was doing the best he could with what the devil sent him, and he spared neither himself nor anybody else. He navigated the vessel, hired the crew, paid the bills, managed the ship's business and “worked timber” in the hold like any stevedore. He always took the starboard side against the first mate's, hustling his watch so as to get the vessel listed with the weight of the incoming timber, which would make the mate's port side higher and harder to load. The port side gang would work all the faster to avoid the harder labor. He was the “big shot.” And he got his pay, \$60 a month, while the season lasted. Eight months at most; \$480 a year to keep a wife and family 12 months, and “amass a competence,” which was the Victorian phrase for present-day “security.” At the other extreme of the wage scale was the horseboy at \$12 a month.

### **COLD WET JOB**

The timber was loaded at anchor, as weather permitted. As the oak was often heavier than water, it had to be buoyed up with pine or balsam to get it out to the schooner.

The oak sticks were floated out to the open sternports, hinged near the deck and hanging down to within a few feet of the schooner's light waterline. Quill-falls, depending from the timber-davits or quills in the schooner's taffrail, were hooked into the chains around the ends of the sticks, and the dripping, watersoaked timber was quilled up to the port sills. Quilled by horses turning the big oak post which was the cylinder or drum of the timber capstan, on the “circle deck,” so called from its circular track walked by the horses, hitched to the long arm. It had scores in it to take “two messengers,” or hauling lines, at once. The horseboy both drove the horses and held the slack, or free ends of the messengers, as the drum wound them in. He had both hands full, and was helpless until relieved, if the turns began to slip or anything else went wrong.

The timber entered the hold through the sternports, sliding down “brows” or inclines of heavy plank, and persuaded into position in the wings, or sides of the ship, by breasters, short iron bars, with one end chisel-edged and the other sharpened into a spike. The spike was stuck into the ceiling, or inner lining of the hold, and the chisel end into the stick. The angle trained the timber into its required place, with the aid of canthooks, peavies, rollers, mauls, wedges, and much hard swearing. Men sometimes had their feet crushed under the bite of the square-edged

sticks, or the flesh torn from their bones by the slipping of hooks and breasters.

When the vessel was loaded to her port sills, the ports were closed and caulked and payed with pitch. Further loading then went on through her upper ports in the taffrail, above the deck, or over the side, the timber being hoisted up by masthead tackles or gaff purchases.

Sometimes the timber on deck would be piled higher than the schooner's bulwarks and rail, which was three or four feet above the deck, but timber deckloads, being wet and heavy, could not be built up so high as deckloads of cedar posts or pine lumber, which sometimes towered like the piles in a lumber yard.

The inside of the bulwarks and the stanchions above deck in the timber drogher were protected by fender strakes, square timber having a deadly habit of catching on corners as it was skidded along. Sometimes the bulwarks were completely closed with a ceiling or inner lining, as was, of course, the hold below.

Next week we take the horseboy to Chicago.

#### **WET SPELL OF 1894**

What do I remember of the seventeen days of rain in May of that year?

“Lilacs that topped the yellow highboard fence around Upper Canada College being so heavy that their mauve and white and purple plumes seemed to drip perfumed wine through the thick heartshaped leaves of green...

“Old Upper Canada was in a boardinghouse district then, in the block bounded by King, Adelaide, Simcoe and John streets...

“Street piano, with monkey, playing the noble Leonora-Manrico duet from *Il Trovatore* in the puddles in the macadam on King street, with the hollow groans of the foghorn coming up from the harbor in the Miserere chorus...

“Scraps from Shelley – ‘Wet wind and sullen cloud ... tolls all the night long ... wail, for the world's wrong.’ We were having it in the High School Reader.

“Windbound schooners three abreast at Sylvester's Wharf at the foot of Church street, with rain running from their scuppers and hawsepipes, running gear shrunk as taut as their standing rigging, light sails, swollen thick as bales of carpet, and so heavy with wet it took the capstan to shake them up. . . .

“In particular the *Skylark* of Detroit, a black three-masted newcomer with small mizzen, sharply raked, lead-colored bottom and name painted in big bold letters on the quarter.

“Talk along the docks of the *M.J. Cummings*, Lake Ontario vessel from Oswego, being lost with all hands or most, near Milwaukee, because she had shipped a hoodoo. He had been in one vessel that was burned and another one sunk in collision, since the spring fit-out...

“But the sun came out. It always does.”