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Schooner Days LXXVI (76)
By C.H.J. Snider

The Rights of It

"Cockney Bill" of the waterfronts of forty years ago, Mr. William Kingston, of this city, at the present time, came into the office last week with half a gale behind him and an acre of foam in front.

"One thing I don't hold with," quoth William o' London, "is this fashion of talking about 'three-'n'-afters.' Whoever saw one? I never did, and I sailed the water forty years, and much of the time was in three-masted schooners. That's maybe what they mean by three-'n'-afters. And as for two-masted schooners being called fore-'n'-afters, will you tell me what they'd call a four-masted schooner then? Nossir, it's all wrong. All vessels with fore-and-aft sails are fore-and-afters, no matter how many their masts, and all vessels with square sails, such as ships on salt water, are square-riggers, and I'll lay to that."

Assured of the soundness of this linguistic and etymological theory, it was explained to William that, for no reason other than pure cussedness, apparently, lake sailors persisted in catling three-masted fore-and-aft rigged schooners "three-'n'-afters" and two-masted fore-and-aft rigged schooners "fore-'n'-afters," until all the white or dusky pinions vanished from the lakes. Such was our fresh water depravity.

The English tar snorted contemptuously and reiterated: "Well, I've never seen a three-'n'-after yet, and never will, though I sailed in lots of three-masted schooners, and one of them was the *Lady Macdonald* that you had in the paper the other day. I was in her when she was lost."

"Were you now?" he was asked, the recent question of Mr. J. B. Chalmers, of Acton, Ont., regarding this long ago event coming to mind. "Tell us how it happened."

Which he did; as below:

"Yes, I shipped in the *Lady Macdonald* here in Toronto that spring, and a fine vessel she was too.

"But I've noticed this: when a ship is named after somebody, and that somebody dies, then look out. The vessel is going to die too.

"That's what happened with the steamship *Princess Alice*, named after Queen Victoria's daughter, who went to her grave through kissing her own little daughter with the scarlet fever.

"And that's what happened to the *Lady Macdonald*, bearing the name of the dead wife of Sir John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister of Canada.

(Unfortunately for Mr. Kingston's interesting theory, when the steamer *Princess Alice* sank in the Thames on Sept. 3rd, 1878, after a head-on collision with the *Bywell Castle*, drowning seven hundred passengers, the Grand Duchess Alice, after whom she was named, was

still alive. The princess did not die until Dec. 14th of the same year. And the Baroness Ernescliffe, second wife of Sir John A. Macdonald, and namesake of the *Lady Macdonald*, lived until Sept. twenty-seven years after the schooner had gone.)

To continue:

"We towed out one day with a fine northerly breeze, bound for Fairhaven in Yankeeland, to load coal for Toronto. Capt. David Ewart was the master of her, as you said in *The Telegram*, and Andy Wilson was the mate.

"We made a good run of it. By the time the watch was called at midnight the south shore was in sight and Andy Wilson and the crowd began figuring on going into Fairhaven. It's a fine big harbor inside, with the entrance in through a pair of piers, and the coaltrestles down near the shore. The village is away back up at the head of the bay.

"We saw the lights of the place, and thought we made out the lighthouse at the pier end, but there were two lights there instead of one, and we couldn't understand what had happened.

"She was tramping down with a bone in her teeth, the sails all on the starboard side, a strong north wind on her quarter, and the sea running high as it bounced and pounded on a lee shore.

"After a while we decided one of the two lights was the lighthouse, though we couldn't account for the other, and we let her drive for it. As she squared away for the light the foresail came over to the port side with a bang, and something carried away, and the boom struck the port fore rigging, and smashed the port lantern, in the lantern box.

"Then there was a wild hurraw, for the spilled oil caught fire and the wooden box was ablaze and the flames went shooting up the foresail, and Andy Wilson and the whole crowd jumped forward to put the fire out.

"Andy Steen was at the wheel, a cool steady helmsman. There was none of the 'Keep-her-up! Keep-her-up!' as I heard, although there was singing out enough, and all kinds of orders, and things were pretty confused, and us still puzzled by the two lights at the entrance where there should only be one.

"In the midst of it, while we were trying to get the fire out, a hard puff caught her, and she went shooting past the end of the weather pier.

"As soon as Andy Steen saw she had missed the pier he sung out 'Get aft, boys, get aft. Get aft, I tell you, and clear of the masts!' He had a cool head and knew her spars were likely to go when she struck the bottom.

"But she didn't pile up on the beach, as was said the other day. It might have been all right for her if she had for the beach there is soft sand. Outside of the channel but inside the line of the pierheads, and intended for their protection, was a big crib, filled with stone, and as bad luck would have it, this she smacked head on as soon as the words were out of Andy Steen's mouth.

"What a smash! The hole she made in her own round bows was big enough to scull the yawlboat through. It was for a fact. I was out to the wreck afterwards and measured it. The seas boiled into it like water pouring over the dam, and in no time she had filled and settled to the bottom, with the lake two feet deep over her decks.

"We all lost everything we had, except what was on our backs. All I saved out of the *Lady Macdonald* was a pair of wet blue overalls. The sea that whacked her after she stopped smashed our yawlboat that hung on the davits and broke it in two, leaving one half hanging and carrying the other half away. We got the cook and her lady friend, who was with her as a passenger, up onto the cabin top, and boats from the United States Government Lighthouse supply steamer *Haze* came and took us off. We all dried out in her engine room.

That lighthouse tender was the real cause of our trouble. She was lying between the piers of Fairhaven, just inside the harbor entrance, with her side lights burning and her masthead light shining, as though she were under way. It was her masthead light that we'd seen, and taken for the lighthouse lamp, until we didn't know rightly how we were to get in. The poor *Lady Macdonald* went to pieces where she sank, but some of her spars and gear were saved by Capt. John Ewart of the *Albacore*, Dave's brother, and some of them lay in the boneyard at Oswego nearby, until other vessels that needed this or that bought them.

"YES I had my fill of the lakes in my time. One of my wildest trips was in the *W.Y. Emery*, with Capt. Alex. Ure, bound for Hamilton, with a gale of wind from the eastward behind us. She had a big mainsail, new that season, and it split across the after leach and went into ribbons. Then our staysail gave a shake and flew off like feathers on the wind. There was nothing left of it but the boltropes.

"I've never been seasick in my life, but I was dizzy this trip.

"We went to settle away the foresail to save it, but the sail wouldn't come down because the jaws of the fore gaff had jumped over the halliards and jammed 'em. We hung for an hour in the fore crosstrees, working with spike mauls and crowbars to split the jaws of the gaff and get the halliards clear.

"Never in my life before or since have I felt such motion as there was up there on that mast. As she rolled it seemed to spring and snap like a whip. Every time it jerked I had to bury my head in the bunt of the fore gafftopsail to save myself from being shot into the lake from sixty or seventy feet up in the air. It fair shook the inside out of you.

"By this time we were close in on Burlington piers and we just had to take it, for, with the east wind behind us, there was no turning back. The *W.Y. Emery* was weaving back and forth like a worm with convulsions, almost broaching-to in every trough, but, by the mercy of God she stuck her jibboom between the two pier ends and followed it in. Alex. Ure made us stand by with axes to cut away the halliards and let the sail go by the run if she fetched up on either pier, for so there might be some small chance of saving the mast when she struck. Like a miracle she shot through the two draw bridges and into Burlington Bay; and in the smoother water we got

her rounded up and her sail down at last.

"YOU were talking about Jim Quinn in the paper the other day. I sailed with him in the *White Oak* more than once, and he was a rip-roaring devil to drive her.

"I almost went with him when he got the *Jessie Drummond*. Late one fall I got a job ashore in the King Edward Hotel here, and who should I run into but Jimmy Quinn himself.

"'The very man I wanted to see' shouts he. 'I've got a fine contract, Bill, carrying coal to Cobourg from Oswego, and I'm going to sail the *Drummond* till there's a crust on the lake a foot thick. Where's your bag? Throw it down the forecandle and come along.'

"'Well, I'll tell you,' says I, not wishing to rile him. 'It's like this I've shipped in the *King Edward*, and she don't sail nights or Sundays.'

"With that he let a roar out of him and slapped me on the back and wished me luck. Next thing I heard of Jimmy Quinn his *Jesse Drummond* was beating into stave on the shoal below Cobourg, when they'd mistaken the pumping station lamp for the lighthouse, as they came up the lake with a cargo of coal from Oswego. The crust of the lake soon afterwards froze over the poor old barkie's bones."

PASSING HAILS

"A SAILOR," sending some interesting pointers about Oakville vessels and their pictures, writes: "In reference to your Saturday article on Schooner Days – these are very much appreciated by everyone interested in the old sailing days on the lakes, and we hope you will continue. Do you expect to bring this series out in book form?"

Not yet, Sailor, but in the words of the pre-depression joke about the darky asked to change a twenty, thanks fo' de compliment, boss.

The same goes for the Pickering patron who thus comments on the snakewood stick which surprised this writer last week, after thirty-six years on The Telegram's deck – "It should have been a round trip ticket to Europe and a pocket book of gold, the same as our preachers get." Been to Europe, and as Clara Bow would say, it's some place. Best part of the wish is the return half of the ticket. As for the gold, we've no driving liquor or export license. And beside we hope we don't preach.

Just A Wanderer contributes an excellent sketch map of Oakville in the old days, which pins down exactly the site of the old shipyard on the Sixteen Mile Creek from which Oakville vessels fared as far as South Africa.

"Where the present boat works are, south and west of the highway bridge," says he, "was in 1830 just a marsh, and no buildings on it. A few years later two brothers, John and Pharis Doty, came here from the States, and John built the foundry on one side of the street and Pharis built a sawmill on the other. That was in 1842. His brother-in-law, Merrick Terry, and he ran the mill for thirty years and sold out to William McCraney, M. P., and he in turn sold to Charles Doty, a son of the former owner. When Charles Doty sold the mill it was taken down and moved

to Milton. No boats were built on this old mill site, now occupied by the Oakville Yacht Building Co., until Capt. Andrew established his yard. The old shipyard was up the river, above the bridge, and its site is not at all like what it was up to 1873. In that year someone ploughed it up and planted potatoes and had a good crop from the oak sawdust and chips which had been rotting for forty years in the ground. This broke the surface up, and on the 17th of September there came on a week of rain and the river rose four feet deep over the shipyard from bank to bank and swept off two feet of top soil. Now the water and ice go over it when the river breaks up the spring."

Caption: THE OLIVE JEANETTE, ONE OF THE FEW FOUR-POSTERS ON LAKES

"If they called two-masted schooners fore-'n'-afters here on the lakes, what," demands a Telegram visitor, "would they call a four-masted schooner?" That's a problem for you. When sail was supreme on the lakes there were a few four-masted schooners and one five-master, the barquentine *David Dows*.

The four-masted schooners were very few in number and became towbarges, if indeed they did not tow from the beginning. A fine typical four-master was the *Olive Jeanette*, depicted above. She was towed by the steamer *L.R. Doty*, and came safely through the gale on Lake Michigan to which her consort succumbed in 1896.