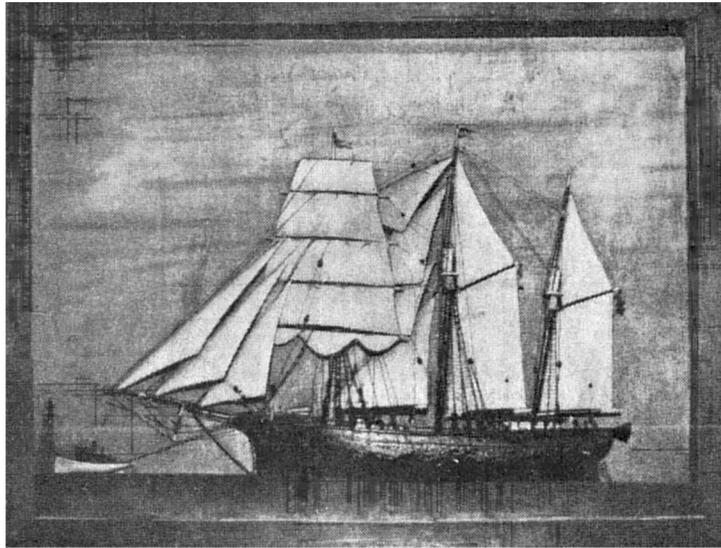


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Schooner Days, DCCLXIII (763)
By C.H.J. Snider

TIMBER DROGHERS – half a hundred out of St. Catharines

EVERGREEN CLUB'S vice-president, Capt. W. D. Graham, of St. Catharines, raises a ripple with his statement that St. Catharines alone had forty timber droghers. He answers in the most practical manner giving a list of the vessels of his own time – and he went sailing in the 1860's, if you please. Many of these are old friends or "personal acquaintances," although some had gone under long before Schooner Days was hatched. Capt. Graham names these vessels in the timber trade from the port of St. Catharines:



Model of the Jennie Belle and her tug, by the late Capt. John Covell, of Toronto. Nothing is now known of the Jennie Belle, but she was a typical "barque" (barquentine) of the 1870s.

*Jennie Graham, "barque."
Fanny Campbell, "barque."
Laura, three-master.
Maggie McRae, three-master.
Bessie Barwick, "barque"
Pride of America, "barque."
Edward Blake, "barque."
Canada, "barque."
Sylvester Neelon, three-master.
Augusta, "barque."
J.R. Benson, "barque."
Dominion.
Georgian.
Sir Leonard Tilley, steam barge.
Clyde, three-master.
Malta, "barque."
Clinton, steam barge.
Grimsby, two-master.
Lincoln.
Gleneiffer, two-master.
Gibraltar, "barque."*

*Lisgar, two-master.
China, two-master.
St. Louis, "barque."
Mary Battle, "barque."
Shannon, three-master.
Emerald, "barque."
Jane C. Woodruff, "barque"
St. Andrews, two-master.
Sligo, "barque."
T.R. Merritt, three-master.
St. Lawrence, "barque."
Clyde, three-master
Mary Merritt.
Niagara, steam barge.
James Norris, three-master.
Manzanilla, three-master.
Magellan, three-master.
Alexander, "barque."
Dundee, "barque."
Grantham, "barque."*

We would venture to submit these St. Catharines vessels also, which may have been in the timber trade:

Pride of Canada, “barque.”
Teresa, two-master.
Sir E.W. Head, “barque.”
Mary Jane, “barque”
Cambria, “barque.”
Valetta, “barque.”

Louisa, “barque.”
Sir C. T. Van Straubenzee.
C.G. Alvoord, ex-California.
Bismark, topsail schooner.
W.H. Merritt, three-master.

More than half of all these came from Shickluna’s yard in St. Catharines. Many others were built in the Welland canal, at Allanburg, or Port Robinson or Port Dalhousie, especially at Muir Bros. drydocks and shipyard, where a large fleet of timber droghers, some of them oceangoing, were built between 1850 and 1880.

It will be seen that some were “barques,” quoted, because lake sailors called any three-masted vessel that had a square topsail a barque, although true barques must have at least two masts, the fore and main, square rigged, and in three sections. There were only one or two such true barques on all the Great Lakes, and none on Ontario.

Timber droghing began on Lake Ontario, for our lake is nearest to the sea, whither the timber went for export, but it soon spread all the way to Superior as the lake forests fell before the axe after the Welland Canal opened the lakes to through commerce. Capt. Graham says, of the period from 1860 to 1880:

“The counties on the north shore of Lake Erie, namely Essex, Kent and Elgen, were a huge forest of virgin timber, oak, ash and walnut. The timber was cut and hewed by expert craftsmen brought up from the province of Quebec, who could operate a broadaxe equal to a real planing machine.

“The square timber was drawn to the different lake ports, commencing at Canard River four miles above Amherstburg, and thence to Amherstburg, Leamington, Buck Horn, Coatsworth, Rondeau, Morpeth, Glasgow, Eagle, Tyrconnell and Port Stanley.

“The timber of value grown in Norfolk was rafted and towed down the old Welland Canal and also down the feeder from Dunnville to Welland thence by the old canal to Lake Ontario.

“The fleet of timber vessels would start about the 10th of April, arriving at the loading place. As time and tide wait for no man, hours of work were daylight to dark, and no kick as to overtime. Sixteen hours was considered a medium day.

“After some years the Ontario timber was gone. Our timber merchants then bought large tracts of timber land in the state of Ohio, the shipping port being Toledo on the Maumee River.

“Our Canadian vessels traded there for many years, and delivered their cargo to Calvin and Breck at Garden Island, who rafted the timber and towed it to below Prescott. The raft had a large crew, who used long sweeps of oars to guide the raft successfully down the current to

Montreal and then towed to Indians Cove, Quebec.

“A large number of these vessels loaded timber at French River, Thessalon, Cheboygan, St. Ignace, Whiskey Bay, Copper Harbor, Bay City and up the Saycarte River to Thamesville, and on Lake Ontario outside of Port Dalhousie Harbor and the Fifteen and Twenty Mile Creeks. The attached list of steamers and sail vessels were only a few of over two hundred built at St. Catharines, which was the second seaport town in the Dominion at one time.”

The first Ontario timber droghers were small fore-and-afters, but when they grew to “canal size,” or 140 feet in length, this two-masted sail plan became cumbersome so three masts were used, with smaller sails. The reason for the popularity of the barquentine rig was that the fore gaff and boom between foremast and mainmast being replaced by staysails easily triced up, there was more room for the horses to work at the timber capstan, and the circle deck or horse track, could be moved amidships, which was more convenient for loading the cargo. A few later timber droghers were “fore-and-afters.” Two-masted schooners lake sailors always meant by that term, although it is properly applied to any number of masts, from the stump sloop to the 7-masted *Thomas W. Lawson*, so long as the sails are abaft the mast and spread by gaff and boom.

Our “barques” were at best barquentines, with only the foremast square rigged, and some were only topsail schooners, with a topsail and batwings on the foremast, above a fore-and-aft foresail. As time went on the surviving “barques” were re-rigged as 3-masted schooners, sometimes retaining a raffee in memory of their shorn square pinions.