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Schooner Days DCCLXV (765)
By C.H.J. Snider

TORONTO'S TIMBERMEN

The timber drogher was picturesque figure in lake life for century, and at her acme in the 1870s and 1880s. She began as we all do, "in a small way." The first droghers, in the 1830s, were little wooden schooners of less than 100 feet length, finding employment in carrying squared timber cut on Ontario farms and intended for rafting down the St. Lawrence for export. The drogher loaded her timber from where it was cut on the shore, and got it to some convenient rafting place, like Garden Island at the head of the St. Lawrence or Carleton Island farther down the river. Some of the old men-of-war of 1812 made good droghers, notably the American brig *Oneida*, for these were straight-sheered and stoutly built. They carried heavy cargoes on deck, where they used to carry cannon, and could stand pounding on the bottom. Often the drogher, getting as close as possible to the shelterless beach from which the timber was floated out to her, was

caught on a lee shore and had to bump there until a change of wind and rise in the water enabled her to kedge off. Some, like the *W.Y. Emery*, were doubly floored and framed for this reason. The *Emery*, built at Port Burwell in Lake Erie, was so strengthened for general purposes. She was too small for the timber trade as it had developed when she was launched, and she was not provided with hinged sternports of the typical drogher. She was later owned in Toronto, but never carried timber from this port.



By 1850 the type was crystallizing into longish, wall-sided vessels, almost flat on the bottom, full in the bows, and square in the stern with moulded runs. In the stern she would have four hinged doors or ports, two above the deck and two below. These latter would be irregular in form, being cut and carved to fit the shape of the ship's run. In then bow she might have similar ports, and on each side small square staveports for loading barrel-staves and lumber. The hold would then be filled through these bow, stern and stave ports, until the port sills were down almost to the water's edge. Then the doors would be closed and caulked all around with battens or strips of canvas nailed over the caulking. The remainder of the cargo would be loaded through the deck hatches, and a deck load of the lighter wood preferably would be run in through the upper ports in the transom or hoisted over the rail. Whatever came in had to be hoisted out again at the destination.

TORONTO'S SHARE

Toronto had her timber droghers once upon a time, although no record of a drogher being launched here is to hand. This port's timber shipping began with the logs floated down the Humber and was stimulated by the Midland, Toronto, Grey and Bruce, Great Northwestern, Canadian Pacific and other railways bringing down the season's cuts of square timber from the Georgian Bay district. The flat cars would reach the old Esplanade in the area between John and Bathurst sts., just below the spar-strewn Prince of Wales Walk, or Front street escarpment, overlooked by the Greenland Fishery and Duke of Cambridge waterfront taverns.

Those were the places that rang with chanties like the "Cruise of the *Bigler*," when the Calvin fleet would be in from Garden Island, or the *Straubensee*, *Fulton*, *Albacore* or *Emerald* were fitting out for the Georgian Bay trade. The *Bigler* was another drogher, an American – "the timber drogher *Big-a-ler* belonging to Deetrite."

The flat cars would dump their sticks into the slips between the grain elevators of the old "Northern docks" area, which was a lumber yard the year round, and a timber cove in spring. Frenchmen from "below," Garden Island at the foot of Lake Ontario, or maybe even the Quebec timber coves, would sort out the floating sticks into rafts for towing down to Garden Island or Collin's Bay, where they would be turned into "drams" for running the river. Personal memories do not go back to the times when Capt. W. B. Hall had the Fenian Raid tug *W.T. Robb* towing rafts out of Toronto for the St. Lawrence, but in the 1890's we saw probably the last raft weaving through the newly cribbed Gap, which it blocked for most of the afternoon. The *Robb* also towed the schooners *John Bentley* and *Marquis*, but these were lumber carriers rather than timber droghers. The difference was that the lumber carrier piled more on deck, for quicker dispatch.

LAST OF THEM

The droghers around Toronto surviving into this century were the Calvin fleet from Garden Island, which made annual visits, and the *Sir C.T. Van Straubensee*, three-masted schooner, when Capt. Johnny Williams took her over in 1892. She was built for a drogher in 1877 or 8, a mate of the *St. Louis*, and experienced Lake Superior's buffets during the C.P.R.

construction. Straubensee Reef and Straubensee Bay on the chart are testimonials of her service. She spent one winter in the ice. She was a stout, strongly built vessel, and when taken over by Capt. Williams went nine seasons without needing caulking. After some years in the coal trade, with sideline grain and lumber carrying, he put her back in the last flickerings of the timber trade, towards the end of the century.

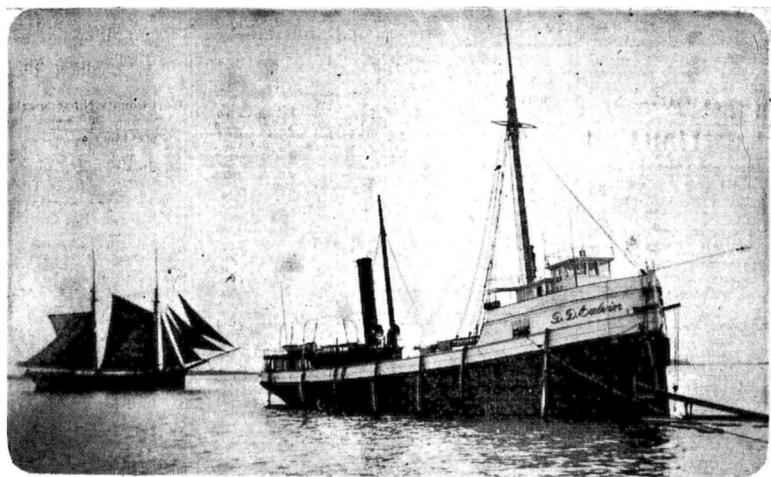
He had never worked timber before, but nothing ever daunted Capt. Johnny by its novelty. He was fortunate in getting a mate who was a good timber man, and had a profitable season carrying square timber from the south shore of Lake Superior for the Collins Bay Rafting and Forwarding Company. Being in tow of a congenial steamer, he put tremendous loads into her, over 22,000 cubic feet of oak, which would weigh 770 tons, a whopping burden for an Old Canaller. When he was "on his own hook," under sail, he modified the load to 21,000 cubic feet, which was still a whopping burden. He went to Georgian Bay ports the second season.

His success spurred the two-masted *Albacore*, and the *E.A. Fulton*, ex-*A. Boody*, which had been droghers, to try the timber trade again, and possibly the *Emerald*, which was lost in Lake Ontario a few years afterwards. They only traded to Collins Bay and never came back to Toronto. The *Albacore* was lost at Oswego in 1900, but not in the timber trade. She had gone back to coal.

THE CALVIN FLEET

The Calvin fleet came from Garden Island, but in the 1890's and 1900's was almost a Toronto institution, from the regularity of its spring calls for the accumulated winter cut. Old-timers will remember them, steamers like the *D.D. Calvin* and *Armenia*, bulbous bowed and painted green and white, and the barges and schooners they towed painted black-and-lead color, like the *Norway* and *Valencia*, or all black, with perhaps a bright yellow beading, like the three-masted *Ceylon*, which had top-masts. The black *Augustus* had none.

The Calvin firm began as Calvin, Cook and Counter in 1838, and became Calvin, Cook & Co., and Cook, Calvin and Breck, Calvin and Son, and finally the Calvin Co., Limited, ending with the lake timber's disappearance in 1914. The following list of their vessels in three-quarters of a century cannot be taken as complete, for some of the craft mentioned may have been hired and others may have been omitted. Many of them were built by the firm at Garden Island,



Steam barge D. D. CALVIN loading timber at the Northern Docks.

centre of the great timber industry so admirably described by D. D. Calvin, third generation, in “A Saga of the St. Lawrence.” This mentions some but not all of the ships:

2-masted schooners:

Granville
Britannia
Queen Victoria
Harriet Calvin
Hanna Counter
Minerva Cook
Bismark
Denmark
Oriental
and possibly
Aurora Borealis
Prince of Wales

Steam barges:

D.D. Calvin
Armenia
India
Simla

3-masters:

London
Sweden
Siberia
Prussia
Bavaria
Jessie Breck (chartered)
Norway
Stuart H. Dunn

Tow barges:

Burma
Valencia
Augustus
Ceylon.

Brigs:

Lafayette Cook
Liverpool
Wm. Penn, becoming *Marian L.*
Breck

These were some of the firm’s droghers, that is, long distance timber carriers. They also had tugs and river steamers and barges. And they built a true barque at Garden Island, which sailed the ocean for many years. The Calvin fleet brings the Ontario drogher list up near 100. There were more on our lake and on the Upper Lakes, and more may be told about them.