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BY C.H.J. Snider

## LAST OVER JORDAN WAS "FLYING DUTCHMAN"



THIS is not a lighthouse lantern, although, with its red and white sectors, it suggests the friendly beacon that long beamed above the waves from the tower at Port Darlington. It is a stage coach station lamp, from the post road that carried Her Majesty's mails from Ancaster to Niagara more than a hundred years ago. The ruby glass pane in it, for the side facing the road, was the distinguishing mark for the station. This lamp was at the Beamsville station, and – depending on the amount of clearance of the country after 1862 – the Flying Dutchman may have steered by it, coming up Lake Ontario, homeward bound.

There were ghost ships on the Great Lakes in schooner days, but that's another story. If there were no *Van deckens*, doomed for all eternity to beat about Gibraltar Point, we did have a *Flying Dutchman*. Never saw her, but we have seen her entries on old ship registers and this is an all too divagatory attempt to describe the port from which she sailed.

### COURSE TO WONDERLAND

Steer S. true, or S 3/4 W, magnetic, from the tall stone lighthouse sending its gleam from Gibraltar Point – yellow a hundred years ago, now green – and you come to a wonderland on the

other side of the lake, where three centuries mingle.

You are in the heart of Ontario's "Vinland the Good," revelling from April to October in bees and blossoms, flowers and fruit, peaches, pears, plums and grapes, corn and wine and cider and honey, root crops, squashes, pumpkins, apples, happy folk and pioneer romance. Here lives yet the old coach lantern.

It is in the log house the Secord brothers hewed out in 1777, when they came, all powder-grimed and heavy-hearted, from the destruction of their Pennsylvania homestead in the bloody rancor of the American revolution. Peter Secord, who killed wolves and bears for the bounty in 1817, when he was 102, may have been one of these lads.

Settlement is said (Page's Atlas) to have been begun here in 1755 by Germans from Pennsylvania and New York, but the same authority later says the township of Louth was settled in 1787 when wild land could be bought for 30 cents an acre. By 1817 when Peter Secord was selling wolf scalps it had two grist mills and five sawmills.

This place was "The Twenty" when Mrs. Simcoe used her watercolors, Twenty Mile Creek and Twenty Mile Pond, being twenty miles from Niagara. Later it was Louth Harbor. Later Bridgeport, Jordan and Jordan Harbor and Jordan Beach.

Here Mrs. Simcoe landed in 1794 and drew a picture for her diary.

And here is the building place of the *Flying Dutchman*.

## **MIND YOUR HELM**

If you have "steered small," as we used to say in schooner days, you will hit the keyhole to this treasure chest with embarrassing accuracy. A wall will stop you for a concrete causeway under the four-lane Queen Elizabeth highway now spans the entrance through which Mrs. Simcoe sailed. From the lake you would not now guess there was an entrance at all. A double line of piling, bent in the middle, shows there was wharfage here once, but it is only when you get over – or under – the causeway that there bursts on your view a pond broad enough to harbor the British navy, running back for two miles, to the limestone ridge which swings all the way from Flamboro to Niagara.

Keep on steering "S. true," and you come to narrowing shores where the river pours itself over the ledge at the foot of the escarpment. You will leave to port sunken white oak evidences of a prosperous pioneer wharf, and a landing stage once served by the old mill road. The old mill itself stands close to the waterfall, all silent and dark.

## **THE FLYING DUTCHMAN**

On the starboard side (which is west, for we are on the south side of Lake Ontario and directions seem left-handed to north shore dwellers) are traces of an ancient settlement, which red brick houses have succeeded. Below this, somewhat nearer to the pond's outlet to Lake Ontario, is a low rounded hill, still green in Vinland the Good, even in December. Like many another, it is called the Hogsback. The little fold or valley beside it forms a runway to a tiny bay,

and here, in the year of grace 1862, the keel of the *Flying Dutchman* was laid, of good Twenty Mile oak, and here she was planked of good Twenty Mile white pine – the same priceless timber whose squared faces in the Secord log house show the original axe marks clean and undecayed after a hundred and sixty-nine years.

The earliest Register of lake shipping available, one Robert Thomas compiled in 1864, gives Bridgeport as the building place and port of hail of the *Flying Dutchman*, Richard Gilbert her builder, Moses Overholt her owner. Bridgeport, earlier known as St. Mary, was the name attached to the little village built around the station and high level bridge when the Great Western introduced the iron horse in Arcady in 1855. The name of this place is now Jordan Station, and the village at the head of the harbor, around the mills and the water power and the old coach road is now called Old Jordan. Bridgeport had been “Jordanized” by 1871, when the register No. 1 for Port Dalhousie and St. Catharines was opened, for in this the *Flying Dutchman*, with Richard Gilbert as master, is recorded as built at and owned in “Jordan.”

### **WHY THE NAME**

Why Moses called his argo the *Flying Dutchman* is more easily understood after a glance at the old atlas.

Moses Overholt was listed as a merchant in Jordan, the Overholt farm is in the name of “J. Overholt” in an atlas of 1876. Other names in the old Jordan list of inhabitants, Christjohn Schrober, the shoemaker; Rudolph Honsinger, carpenter; Jacob Linenbank, glazier; Soloman Wismer, cooper; Peter Zimmerman, blacksmith, emphasize the “Pennsylvania Dutch” connection. Many of the early settlers of Louth township did come from Pennsylvania, the Secords among them, and some were Mennonites, a sect founded by a Frieslander. Some were of Low German ancestry, but few were Holland Dutch. The Zimmermans were said to be French from Alsace. All were sound, thrifty settlers and made Louth a garden of Eden watered by the Jordan, if we may be permitted to muddle Old Testament geography.

So far as is known the *Flying Dutchman* was the last sailing vessel built in Jordan, though the port was in use for exactly fifty years after her launching. The *Flying Dutchman* did not retain “of Bridge Port” long on her stern. She was soon on the St. Catharines’ register. By 1871 she was owned by Henry Ferguson of Toronto, and hailed from here. In 1873 Dexter Eccles of Wolfe Island and John S. Grange of Napanee bought her, and she went to the Bay of Quinte grain trade, for which she was very well fitted.