

Toronto Telegram, April 5, 1947
Schooner Days, DCCXC (790)
By C.H.J. SNIDER

LAST of the “STRATH”

IT’S a sad sight to see on the dump the picked carcass of an old and very gallant defender of the Canada's Cup, that Blue Ribbon of yachting on the Great Lakes.

Out at Oakville, where the old harbor is being transformed inside and out by 1947 improvement, the mouldering bow of the last great English cutter yacht *Strathcona* is blocking the way of a modern marine railway being built on the west side of Sixteen Mile Creek, just south of No. 2 Highway bridge. So employees of the diesel marine engine firm are, under orders, breaking it up for firewood.



The End

No one is to blame for this. On the contrary Charles Kenney, the new comer from the U.S. who with H. Corbett, of Oakville, took over the Oakville Yacht Building works two years ago, is only carrying out the intention of the original owner of *Strathcona*, Norman Macrae, who had her built in 1903, wished to sink her or burn her when her life was done. His own was finished first. His brother Hubert, Vice-Commodore of the RCYC, to whom *Strathcona* had passed, had the tall cutter dismantled for this purpose, and all fixtures removed from the empty hull, including the ballast. But some uncertainty arose as to carrying out the final destruction, and an Ashbridge’s Bay sailor came into possession, honestly and honorably, of the remains. Vice-Commodore Macrae followed his brother to that bourne whence no traveller returns. What was left of *Strathcona* was transformed into a little cruising schooner, which rotted through the war and is now chips. The great shop in which she was built by Capt. James Andrew forty-four years ago is still standing, but Capt. Andrew and the *Strathcona*’s racing owners and greatest racing skipper, Aemilius Jarvis, have all joined the great majority. The ship is historic, for here all the Canada’s Cup candidates were built up to 1907 – *Canada* herself, *Beaver*, *Invader*, *Strathcona*, *Temeraire* and *Crusader*.

A GRAND SIGHT

With her long bowsprit spearing ahead and her lengthened topmast aloft *Strathcona* in her tall cutter rig was a slim dashing, handsome vessel, utterly different from the stubby cruiser of her last years. She had long graceful overhangs and a flush deck, broken only by skylights.

When she first came out she was white, with a black boot top, the Canadian coat of arms in full colors of the nine provinces on her starboard bow, the Royal Canadian crest in blue and gold to port. Later, and for many years, she was all black above the white boot-top; save for a gilt arrow-beading in the sheer-strake. Her under body was then painted bronze or copper.

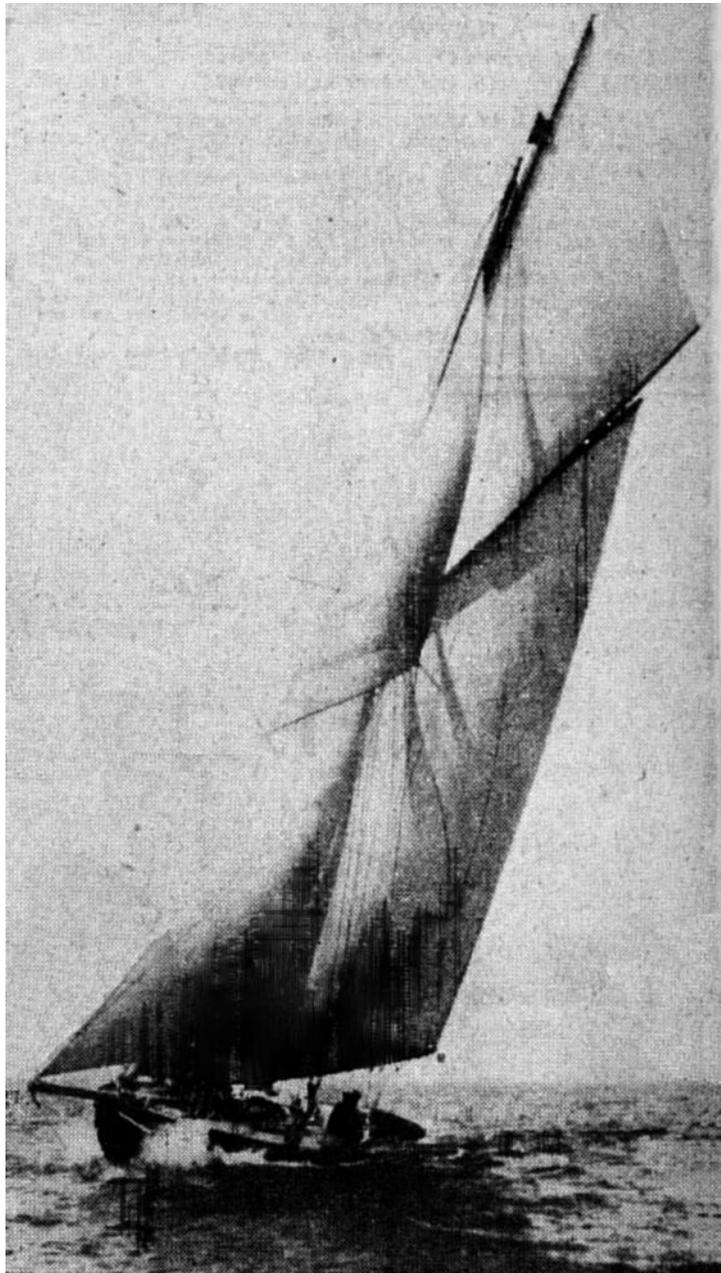
HIGH TIDE IN YACHTING

Strathcona is a ghost from the gay beginning of the 20th century when everything was on the flood tide, the Grits were getting out of the Parliament Buildings after “32 years in the saddle,” Hydro-Electric power was being debated by engineers and Northern Ontario mining was a geologist’s dreams. She was named after Lord Strathcona, early High Commissioner for Canada in Britain.

Aemilius Jarvis had won back the Canada's Cup at Chicago and the Rochester Yacht Club had challenged for it. Competition was wide open. The Royal Canadian Yacht Club, in keeping with the dignity of the trophy, had agreed to the largest class of competitors for the contest, the new 40-foot water-line cutters. Rochester produced the challenger *Irondequoit*, designed by Wm. Gardner of America’s Cup fame and built by Wood at City Island, New York, and sailed by a professional racing skipper, a nephew of the great America’s Cup pro Charlie Barr. When the pro. had lost two races the challengers put in the great amateur, Addison G. Hanan, of the big American shoe firm.

INTO THE BREACH

The RCYC had been promised three new cutters for trial defenders – but none materialized. None of the existing cutters fitted the new measurements. The Macrae brothers,



Strathcona in her prime.

George, Ernest, Hubert, Norman and Evelyn, were then prominent in Toronto yachting with the Scotch designed hornless cutter *Vivia*, to which they had added a bowsprit and many winning flags. Norman Macrae, long afterwards known as “Skipper,” wanted a larger yacht, and generously offered to build one for the 40-foot class for this contest. But he would only agree to a solid mast, as his yacht was primarily sailed as a cruiser, and hollow spars were at this time considered purely racing equipment, and experimental at that. The advantage of hollow spars is that they save weight aloft, and ballast below to counteract it.

So *Strathcona* was rushed to completion at Oakville, built of Douglas fir, from the designs Mr. Macrae had secured from A. E. Payne, of Southampton, England, a great naval architect. There was trouble from the beginning about her ballasting. She was cut away forward and aft and tapered down to a graceful wooden fin and moulded ballast. With her solid mainmast rising 60 feet up in the air, with topmast and topsail yards going still higher, she sat too deep, and had to be “skinned out” of moveable [sic] fixtures to measure properly on the waterline.

Aemilius Jarvis sportingly consented to sail her, Norman Macrae not feeling competent for so important a contest. George Ernest was at that time the *Vivia*’s racing skipper, but he, too, was not in the first flight.

A GALLANT CREW

When Commodore Jarvis saw *Irondequoit* hauled out at Medlar and Arnot’s for measurement, and had look at her light, beautifully-built hollow spars and sharklike under body, he shook his head. He knew that, short of a miracle, we were licked. But though *Strathcona* was slower she won the first two races by the sheer skill and seamanship of Aemilius Jarvis and his amateur crew. These were:

Topmast, back stay and jib topsail sheet – F. A. Turner (port), Norman Gooderham (starboard).

Starboard waist – C. S. Lownde (port), G. Francis (starboard).

Main sheet – G. E. Macrae (port), H. (Pud) Logan (Starboard).

Forward – James McMurray and two professionals – Wm. Bruce and John Hunter, both schooner sailors.

But the enterprising challengers, with no scruples about changing horses crossing a stream, especially when one seemed a dead one, put Addison Hanan aboard *Irondequoit* by launch, after she had left the moorings for the third race of the series of five. Then the advantage of *Irondequoit*’s hollow spars became apparent. *Strathcona* was defeated by narrow margins in “three straights,” fighting gamely all the while – and the Canada’s Cup went to Rochester. It’s there yet, though we have tried for it five times since. Perhaps 1947 or 1948 will tell a different tale, for another challenge is in prospect.¹

As the last big cutter built in Canada, *Strathcona* had a long and honorable career in the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, racing against the earlier cutters, *Vivia*, *Yama*, *Zelma*, *Canada*,

¹ The first edition of the Canada’s Cup after the War was held in 1954, and won by the RCYC. There have been a further fifteen editions, the RCYC winning nine times, American yacht clubs six times. *Editor’s note, 2019.*

Merrythought, Vyeda, Aggie, El Viento, Gardenia (the latter a younger sister of *Irondequoit*) and against the schooner *Yolanda* and winning thirty-two trophies in her racing career of 25 seasons. She won the Prince of Wales Cup the RCYC's blue ribbon once, the Lansdowne Cup, the Queen's Cup thrice and the Lorne Cup nine times, besides Lake Yacht Racing Association flags and championships. She ceased racing in 1928.