

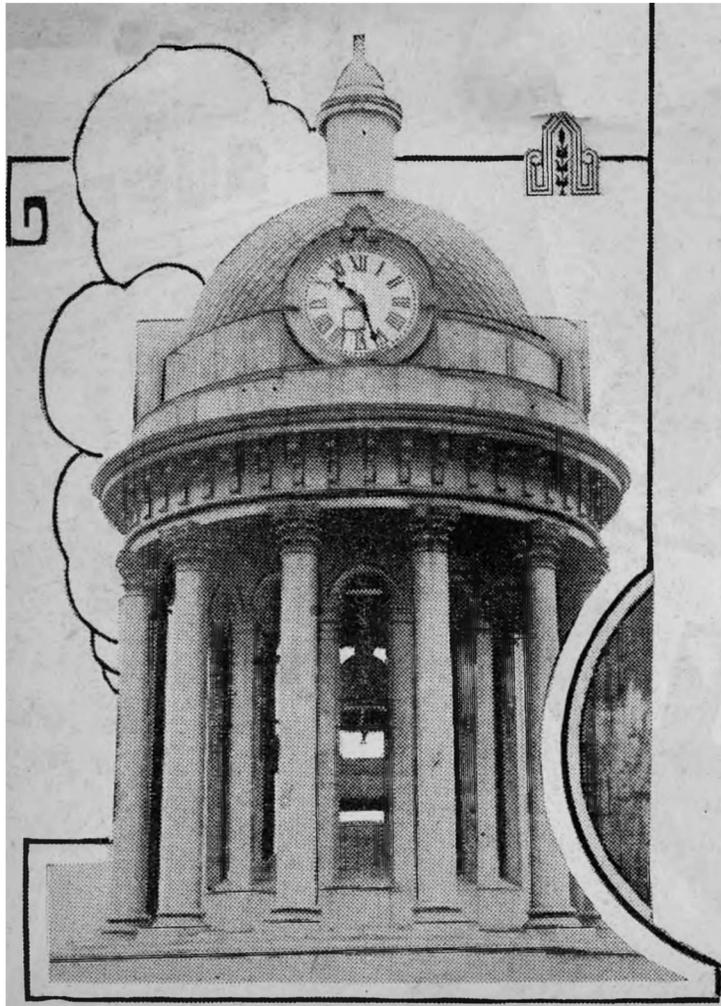
Toronto Telegram, May 10, 1947
Schooner days, DCCXCV (795)
By C.H.J. Snider

STEERING BY the MARKET CLOCK

THREE little boys were left (last week in Schooner Days, and fifty-five years ago in time) at the old Eastern Gap one Saturday afternoon, when the old gap was so new its foundation cribs were being filled with beach stone by a motley fleet known as stonehookers. This was partly because they got their cargoes “by hook or by crook” – which you may take to mean by the pastoral staff of righteous purchase and the equally righteous and more laborious method of raking it from the lake bottom with steel hooks set on long poles, like forks but at an angle to their handles.

Past the unfinished pierhead crib came a dashing little black tub with one mast and patched sails of yacht linen, and a bright red bottom and bright red rail and bright red stripe. She looked as though the name *Rob Roy* would just suit her. But “*Mary of Hamilton*” was what was crudely lettered on her round stern. A yacht turned stonehooker. She was outbound, light as a cork and empty as a drained beer barrel. Going home to the Credit for Saturday night. There was not enough shelter to lie in the Eastern Gap if the wind was southerly of any strength and the little hookers used to flock to West Market street for the weekend, if not unloaded at the Gap, for there was no more work till Monday morning.

The stonehookers proper were small enough to handle under sail in the harbor and very seldom used a tug. The big schooners that had poked their jibbooms into the stone trade required more room and used a tug for shifting or berthing. To save harbor dues, the labor anchoring and Frank Jackman’s moderate tow bill they usually hung on at the Gap until unloaded and sailed



away when they could – and shortened their lives in consequence. Sometimes they took a fearful banging at the unfinished piers.

A flaxen-moustached young fellow was sailing the Mary.

“Comin’ home, Wall, when you’re thrown out?” he hailed to another hooker which had just finished unloading near the pier end.

“Gotta slide across to town first, Handsome, and get our sett-pole from Old Doughnuts,” returned he of the mural appellation from the cabin top. It was a practice among hookermen to hail one another by aliases for strategic reasons, but “Wall” was only short for Walter. “Handsome” did look like a viking dandy, but what Old Doughnuts looked like the children could only guess; perhaps a vacancy entirely surrounded by wrinkles.

The oldest boy, who was intended for the ministry, had an idea.

“If you’re going to the city, Captain,” said he, “could we go with you?”

“Sure thing, hop aboard,” said Walter, not unflattered by the form of address. Besides, he had children at home.

The boys scrambled across what was to them a fearful water jump, of two feet or so, to the deck of the square built hooker. This looked rather like a section of sidewalk fenced in by low railing with a box at one end – the cabin – and a square hole in the middle, the hatch, giving access to the hold. The hooker, being a “modern” one, carried most of her cargo on deck, for convenience of loading and unloading. Leftover stone chips in the shallow hold served for ballast. This hatch was divided by a double wall, the centreboard box. The vessel was trussed together by a pair of steel cables led fore and aft from the top of the centreboard box headledgers to the keel, a trick the Egyptians taught thousands of years ago. They had their turn at stonehooking when they put these ten-foot granite cubes into the pyramids. They couldn’t have raked them from the Nile delta.

But to our tale. Wall cast a weather eye to the deep blue horizon, observed the wind was going down with the sun, and began breasting his charge off from the cribwork. He had two men with him, one called Samson and the other Headwinds, which may have been an alias for Edwin. They began hoisting the foresail, which was patched with blue and white ticking and therefore looked very gay. One man pulled on the throat halliard and one on the peak. When they had finished with it they began on the mainsail, which was heavier.

“I can steer,” said the oldest boy.

“Keep her as she goes, then,” said Wall, and lent his weight to Headwinds on the throat halliard.

After the great area of holey mainsail had risen aloft they started on the gafftopsail. Its gear had become entangled and one man went aloft, up the dangling wooden ratlins, which seemed designed to break a man’s neck or drown him.

A gafftopsail clewline fouled at the masthead can give as much trouble as a sliver in the small of the back, and it took all three men to disentangle the sail. While they were at it the oldest boy conscientiously kept her as she went, so much so that a dull and sickening impact with the opposite corner of the Gap was imminent. Without a word good or bad Wall rushed to the big wooden tiller, a curved beam shaped rather like a partially straightened S, and shoved it over till it creaked against the rail. The hooker seemingly changed her evil intention and postponed her attack upon the other side of the Gap.

“You’ve gotta be rough with ’em to make ’em mind, sometimes,” he observed dispassionately.

The older boy was grateful for the lack of censure and for not being relieved of his post. In fact he steered all the way across the harbor. Nearly a mile! Off the foot of West Market street all sail was lowered.

“Steady as you go,” was all Wall said,

Under her accumulated way the hooker glided slowly towards an impossible gap between a green three-master, the *Clara Youell*, lying at the old Adamson elevator on the west side, and a gaudily painted red-white-and-blue craft named *Lillian* moored on the east.

“We’ll hit one or the other!” chirped the boy.

“Not if you steer straight for the Market clock,” said Wall. “It’s been there since the time of the horse-ferry, and never known to budge.”

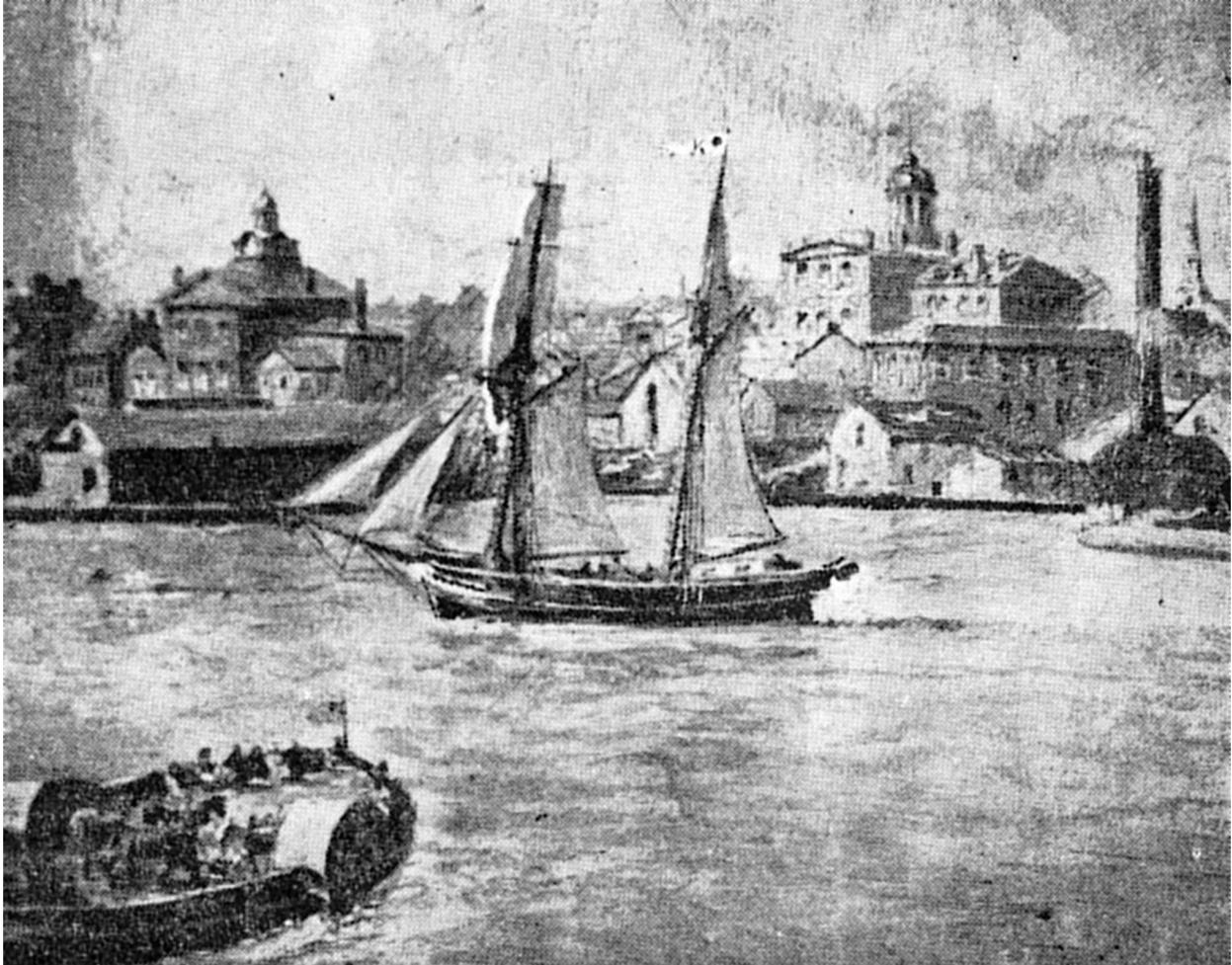
Miraculously, it seemed to the boy, the hooker passed between the two obstacles as easily as a shadow, six inches to spare on either side. An old man aboard the *Lillian* called on the first person of the Trinity, a young man named the second, as she floated through.

“Never thought you’d do it,” chorussed both.

“Knew she would,” answered Wall. Then, to the boy, “Always get a good range well ahead to steer on, and keep your eyes off what you think you’re gonna hit.”

With this aphorism, the kids scrambled ashore with mannerly thanks. The Market clock, still far beyond them, high in the cupola above St. Lawrence Hall, where Jenny Lind once sang, had his two gold hands up and down across his black face. That’s the way he was painted then. Six o’clock! “Ding-dong!-Ding-dong! Come home! Come home! Ding-dong! Ding dong! Work’s done! Work’s done!” the market bell began to peal. St. James, on the other side of King street, with smooth white face and black gloved hands, struck the quarters and then six sedate ecclesiastical strokes. Big Ben had not been born yet in Croydon, and so couldn’t take up the tale from the unfinished tower of the “new courthouse” then growing behind the tight board fence at the head of macadam paved Bay street. The Market clock still gave the time of day for most of Toronto. Especially at noon time and quitting time. People worked earlier and later then, sixty hours a week, if lucky enough to have a steady job. Why, man, at 15 cents an hour, the corporation rate, that meant \$9 a week! And you could rent a house at \$6 a month, and fore-

quarter beef was only 4 cents a pound! King street was filled with carriages, buggies, express wagons, rigs, gigs and citizens on foot, hurrying by thousands home to supper. Street pianos, with or without monkeys, were playing La Traviata, Sweet Marie, Little Annie Kooney and Leezie Lindsay, making sweet music with hoofbeats and footfalls for applause.



“IT’S BEEN THERE SINCE THE TIME OF THE PENINSULA PACKET, HORSE FERRY, AND NEVER KNOWN TO BUDGE” - A glimpse of old Toronto waterfront from Owen Staples' fine painting at the City Hall - the present one. In horse ferry days, and at the time of this episode, which was much later, the City Hall was south of St. Lawrence Market, on Front street. It is shown on the left of the picture.

The boys watched narrowly for an express wagon, westbound, slowing to a walk, and tumbled over the tailboard, conveniently lowered. The driver turned his head and grinned, “Fares, please!” which was a joke as new as the new electric tram cars. Had he responded with a slash of the whip, the children would have dropped off yelling, “Hook-behind-your-horse-is-blind,” but they returned his courtesy with a polite imitation of street car conversation – “Stop at Simcoe street, please.”

In a few minutes he slowed up there and they dropped overboard astern and trotted to the Helping Hand. Mother, white aproned, was peering from the front door against the westering sun. One side of the street was already in shadow.

Mother was the wisest woman in the world. Instead of making the waterfront a forbidden pasture and increasing its temptation she would travel the dusty plank-sidewalked Esplanade from dusty end to dusty end with her little brood, when day's work was done, explaining its mysteries, admiring its attractions, and avoiding its perils. So she walked with them till her last sunset.

Mother's day was twenty-four hours in mother's time and seven days a week.

"Hurry upstairs and wash," said she. "Supper's on the table."

"Look – we saved 15 cents," blurted the boys in chorus, "we had a sail across the bay in a stonehooker." "You be careful going near those stonehookers," said mother, gratified at both pieces of intelligence. "Some of them are rough. And put five cents into the Sunday school collection box each of you. And be sure to black your boots before you go to bed. Tomorrow's Sunday, remember."