

**Toronto Telegram, March 21, 1931**  
**Schooner Days, VIII (8)**  
**By C.H.J Snider**

## **The Sweepstakes**

*The late Magistrate J.J. O'Connor, of Port Arthur, pumped most of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario through her before she sank near the old Queen's Wharf. He here relates the story and tells how he became first mate. Has anyone a picture of her?*

"The tug she eased her towline  
For to give us some relief.  
And the *Sweepstakes* ran kerslick into  
The stern of the *Maple Leaf*."

In the fall of 1875 I shipped in the schooner *Sweepstakes* of Oakville, loading barley at Draper's elevator in my home port of Whitby.

It was another *Sweepstakes* that figured in this old lake ballad, sung in every bar between Buffalo and Sheboygan fifty years ago. The name was a favorite one, both for tugs and schooners, in the great days of sail.

The *Sweepstakes* of the come-all-ye was a large three-master American schooner of 457 tons register, built in 1856 by Quayle and Martin of Cleveland and owned by A. Handy & Co. of Cleveland. She was 144 feet long, 30 feet beam and 11 feet deep in the hold. And the *Maple Leaf* in the song was the *Maple Leaf* of Milwaukee, built in Buffalo in 1854. There were two Canadian *Maple Leafs* besides, in the fleets of lake carriers, for the name was as attractive as *Sweepstakes*.

This *Sweepstakes* of Oakville was built at the forgotten port of Wellington Square in 1867, nine years before I went in her. Wellington Square survives in the present Burlington, at the head of Lake Ontario. William Burton was her owner, and she measured 119 feet on deck, 22 feet 8 inches beam, and 10 feet deep in the hold; 218 tons register.

She was only half the size of her American namesake but she was a smart vessel, two-masted, or a fore-and-after as we called them, and she had the reputation of having an eight-day trip from Chicago to Kingston with grain. She had a very big foresail, so big that it dismasted her once.

When I shipped in her, Ted Thomas of Oakville was master, and Jim Martin, another Oakville man, was mate. We went to Oswego with the barley, and down near the place we found ourselves in crowded company. When I went aloft to stow the main gafftopsail, I counted seventy-five sail of vessels, either bound in like ourselves, grain-loaded for the elevators, or lumber laden for the yards, or coming out light or loaded with coal up the lake.

The *Sweepstakes* was chartered to go to Cleveland on lake Erie to load soft coal for Toronto. We got our cargo, and were soon bowling along on our way back, wing-and-wing, with

the big foresail out on one side and the mainsail out on the other, and all light sacks furlled. We had a brisk sou'wester over the stern, with a heavy following sea, but were making good weather of it.

Suddenly the iron traveller for the sheet on the foreboom snapped, and the foresail took charge of the deck for a few minutes, parting the pennants and slapping from side to side. It was a lively engagement until we got the foresail off her and rounded into the wind, with the seas boarding her and washing away part of the deck cargo of coal. When we got things straightened away, we found the foremast badly sprung, and the ship herself making water fast.

We manned the pump brakes and she drifted away before it with distress signal flying. The U.S. barquentine, *Erastus Corning*, bore down on us, but as the pumps were keeping pace with the water we asked that a tug be sent us.

The *Corning*, bound for Buffalo, shifted her course for Port Colborne and sent us the tug *Salty Jack*. We wallowed down the lake behind that tug, and reached Port Colborne with our crew in an exhausted condition from the back-breaking work at the pumps. Extra men were taken on to man the handles, while we worked her down through the twenty-seven locks of the Welland Canal to Port Dalhousie. We left there in tow for Toronto, but with our best efforts at the pumps were not able to keep her afloat, and she went down off the Garrison before could run her up to the old Queen's Wharf.

The *Sweepstakes* was raised, repaired and refloated, and entered the Lake Ontario grain trade for the balance of the fall. We laid her up at the old Northern Elevator, Toronto, near the foot of Brock street, after an exciting landing that nearly took the jib-boom out of her, which is part of another story.

The captain fell in with the captain of the *Wood Duck* down town that night. The latter was looking for a mate and I was pitchforked into the berth the next day and wound up the season in her after some thrilling experiences in that tight little ship, in the stormy waters of Ontario late in the fall.