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Schooner Days No DCCCXCVIII (898)
By C.H.J. Snider

Duke of the Ducks or, Farming Afloat

The *GENTLE JANE* was an oversized fishboat of pre-power days, old and weak, and limber as a basket, but very full too big for tow men to row, but not big enough to run fish across Lake Ontario to Oswego or down the St. Lawrence to Cape Vincent, which were the best markets. Capt. John Walters, "that greathearted man" of Prince Edward County ballads, used her as a ferry for his pasture farm on the Main Ducks. He could pack a dozen sheep or pigs or calves into her for a quick run from Point Traverse, eastern extreme of the county, to the low-lying island group which hung twelve miles away, below the eastern horizon .

Capt. Walters' greatest feat of navigation on the hoof was to bring across two bulls in the *GENTLE JANE*, moored fore- and- aft between the thwarts, head to tail, one facing forward, the other aft, and the centreboards hung from their horns, rings in their noses, and no scope to toss or stamp. Capt. Walters "worry was lest their weight should shove the garboard strakes of the *GENTLE JANE* from her tender keel, but the torrid tauros proved as mild as twin Ferdinands. Seasickness is a great pacificator. Try it on Joe.

John Walters and his brothers, Dyer and William, built the 30- ton schooner *HARRIET ANN* on the Main Duck in 1856, upon the bottom of the old schooner *ROBERT BRUCE*. He owned in whole or in part, during his forty-year reign, from 1848 to 1892, the small schooners *TRADE WIND*, *F. F. COLE* and *FLORA*, the larger *J WALTERS*, built upon the *SUSAN BOND*, and the *PICTON*, *NELLIE HUNTER* and *FABIOLA*, big vessels, and the scow schooners *SAUCY JACK*, *SEA BIRD* and *JESSIE BROWN*.

Capt. Walters sometimes had as many as 400 sheep on the Main Duck and 200 more on its satellite Yorkshire; 36 head of cattle, 30 of them milkers; 60 hogs; 30 horses and colts working or boarding. Twelve boats fished the Ducks then; and a good day's haul was four tons of lake trout and whitefish, worth at today's price \$2,800. The fishermen lived ashore in shacks with their families and their wives milked the cows and churned the butter. It was shipped to Kingston in the little schooners that could wriggle between Yorkshire and the Main Duck and even into The Pond or boat harbor .

Late in the fall everybody, the bulls included, went home to the mainland, and a couple or more caretakers reigned till spring. Before the snow melted they would broadcast bluejoint hayseed and it would come up fast and be waist- high in June. By this time the fishermen, farmhands and the livestock would be back. The hay would be whisked off with scythes and sickles, and the hogs would be turned loose in the stubble to exterminate the new crop of snakes. They would pounce on a blacksnake with their sharp hooves, snap him in two, and hold one writhing part firmly under foot while they tore the other writhing part into bits with their tusks. The pigs would also fight the musk rats, which were so numerous and so bold that they would

snap at men when cornered, and everybody wore ploughboots knee high before going near the marsh, for the rats would jump kneehigh to get their teeth in. Alex Taylor, still alive in Picton and a champion steeplejack, flagpole painter and hayrope splicer at 87, made a haul of 1,260 muskrat skins in one season, and sold them to a buyer from Kingston.

Oats and corn and buckwheat could be grown besides hay and apples. One season had a thousand bushels of buckwheat to ship to Sackets Harbor in the little schooner named after Francis Farrington Cole. Capt. Walters had bought her in 1881 or thereabouts. She had a regular run, picking up "rough fish," all the way from Brighton to Oswego, calling at the fishing stations at Wellers Bay, Wellington, Wicked Point, Gull Pond, Point Traverse and The Ducks like a mail boat.

(Passing Hails)

Sir, --Who do you think is farming the main Ducks now?

John Foster Dulles of Wall Street, in what time he can spare from the United Nations.

– Schooner Days.