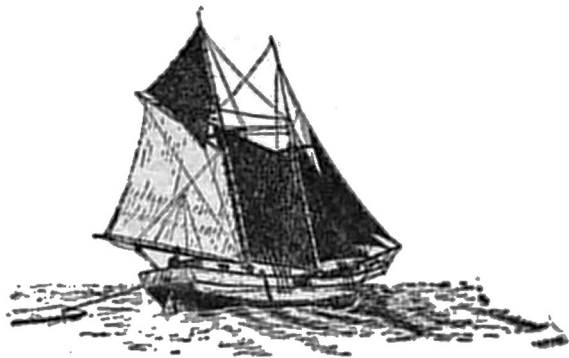


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By C. H. J. Snider

Telling more of *ELLA MURTON*

THIS *Ella Murton*, the white schooner which ramped into Oswego that January sixty-two years ago with a midwinter cargo of barley at a phenomenal freight, was no figment of imagination, she was a very real vessel.



This is a tiny contemporary of the ELLA MURTON, of double her age and a tenth of her tonnage, the stonehooker LILLIAN, whose story will follow one of these Saturdays.

When the island ferries ran from the foot of Church street (which was not last summer nor the summer before) the *Ella Murton* was a steady caller at Dickson and Eddy's or the Ontario Coal Co.'s wharf, which was west of the ferry slip. Her long jibboom at one end and long mainboom at the other many's the time threatened to swipe the bells from the wheelhouses of the *Arlington*, *Gertrude*, *John Hanlan*, *Truant*, *Mascotte*, *Jessie L. McEdwards*, or other little ferries which puffed in and out from the Don, or Ward's or Wiman's or Centre or Hanlan's.

Ferry service was service in those days, with a boat from anywhere to anywhere almost any time, at five cents a ride. The "big boats," however, the *Sadie* and *Canadien*, *Primrose* and *Mayflower*, were too big to crowd into busy Church st. slip.

The *Ella Murton* had been built at Mill Point (before Deseronto replaced that name) in 1875, the year before the *Empress of India* of which we told last week. She was owned by J. W. Murton of Hamilton. About that time some very fine schooners were built at Mill point, like the *Flora Carveth*, *L. D. Bullock* (later *Volunteer*) and the three *Rathbuns*, the *H.B.*, *E.H.*, and *E.W.* The last mentioned was the first built, in 1866.

The *Ella Murton* measured 229 tons, and was 118.3 feet long, 26.2 beam and 10.1 deep. Having a big rig and being clean cut aft, these vessels were smart, and being full bosomed and flat-floored they were great carriers for grain or lumber.

The *Ella Murton* had many adventures. Some of them have been related, and more are to come.

ONTARIO EXODUS

Like the *Azov*, *White Oak*, *Vienna*, *Ontario*, *Kolfage*, *Singapore*, *Cataract* and other Lower Lakes schooners of medium size, she went to the Upper Lakes for the lumber, tie, and

post trade when Ontario freights on coal and grain did not afford a living for the smaller vessels and the local lumber trade had petered out. She was sailed there by Capt. Peter McKinnon, a nephew of Squealing Hughie and Black Dan of that ilk. She was such a stepper that she overran her distance and fetched up in South Bay, Manitoulin, forty miles north of where she was supposed to be, about the time they expected to raise Cove Island light at the parting of the ways.

There she lay for years. One would expect she went to pieces there. But Prince Edward County, which knew her well in the barley trade, preserves the memory of her being turned into a wrecking lighter by the Donnelly Wrecking Company, and being herself wrecked on Point Peter, at the southwest corner of the county. Perhaps this happened before she went “Up Above.” Perhaps afterwards. Another tradition is that she never was the same vessel after carrying sandstone for the new post office for Hamilton.

LAST SIGHT

Our own last glimpse of her was one dirty morning off the Devil’s Nose on the south shore of Lake Ontario. We were beating down for Charlotte in the *Loretta Rooney*, with the gaff topsails and jibtopsail furled and the pump going for an hour in every watch. Our Old Man, Capt. Frank Barnhart, was as mad as a wet hen, because he had had her on the dock only the trip before, and here she was leaking as badly as ever.

At the end of the middle watch, 4 a.m. that morning, Lake Ontario was as gaunt and desolate a place as could be found outside the Sahara. The only sign of human life in the whole leaden waste of lake and sky was one sharp spire of topsail poking up to the eastward. It grew amazingly, for it was coming towards us at twelve miles an hour and we were punching towards it at eight.

While daylight still lingered as though afraid to get her feet wet in the lake dew, the spire resolved itself into the grey and straining sails of a largish schooner, mainsail off to the rigging, main gafftopsail stowed, foresail stretched to the very crosstrees aloft under the driving urge of the fore gafftopsail, jib arching ahead like scimitars.

The outer fifteen feet of her jibboom looked as bare as a toothpick, for the jibtopsail had gone to Kingdom Come. She was loaded deep, with piles of soft slack heaped over her hatches, and every time she settled in a sea a ton or so of it washed through her freeing ports. We carried coal as a deckload at our own risk, in those days.

“No wonder companies won’t insure deckloads,” commented our Old Man, grinding at the *Rooney’s* wheel. She was smaller than the *Murton*, and the master and mate stood their wheel tricks like the men. In larger vessels only the sailors steered, except in emergencies.

The newcomer rushed by in a great wash of suds and coal dust. I could, when she lifted in a sea, identify her by the great spots of rust streaks along the line of her salt pockets. The *Ella Murton* was a well-built vessel, costing \$18,000 to launch, and she had been well oiled and salted, to preserve her timbers.

LAKE ECONOMICS

“Yes,” said the captain. “That’s the *Ella Murton*, with a fair wind of it for Hamilton. Cost \$18,000 to build, twenty year ago, and who’d give \$1,800 for her now? Good and strong yet – but what can a vessel earn when all she can get is 20 cents a ton for carrying soft slack?”

They had to overload the *Murton* to get 500 tons of soft slack aboard, and at best that would mean \$100 for a week’s work or longer, for six or seven men. They had to be fed, too, and a new jibtopsail had to be bought (it could be done then for \$50 or \$60) and tug bills had to be paid at each end of the road. And there would be no freight paid on the coal washed overboard.

So the *Murton* went Up Above to earn a living.