

Toronto Telegram, April 4 1953
Schooner Days MXCIX (1099)
By C.H.J. Snider

Two *Peggies* of 150 years ago

The Oswego *Peggy*, in which Mrs. Anne MacDonell Bride of the High Sheriff and Speaker of the Upper Canada Parliament, embarked at York with good companions, June 2nd, 1805, was a little black schooner fitted for passengers and freight. She was no larger than the present 50 ft. waterline yacht *Kingarvie*, RCYC. She had at least a foresail, mainsail and two jibs, the foresail loose-footed and railing to the mast.

Towards the stern she was bulk-headed off for living quarters. Six feet headroom was obtained by raising the after deck two feet above the waist, to the level of the solid bulwarks. This elevation was protected by a stout timber rough tree, or rail on stanchions. A hooded companion hatch in the midst would cover a short steep ladder to the “accommodations” below the “cabin neat but small,” which Anne mentions was maybe 12 feet long and wide, narrowed towards the stern, fitted with a table and seats and flanked by berths. There were six arranged in pairs, two on each side, two the stern. There were shelves with sides raised to retain the bedding and occupants, and curtains to give privacy. Travelers brought their own- everything.

Upper berths were lighted by the stern windows and by square scuttles, but on the vessel’s sides. There was a skylight in the deck over the cabin. Luggage was stowed under the cabin floor or in the hold.

Forward of the cabin was the galley (kitchen), provision locker, and “rooms” barely big enough to turn around in, for master and mate. On deck at the very stern was another hooded enclosure known as the necessary. This gave passengers the luxury of an enclosed toilet. The only other such accommodation was over the bows completely exposed.

Master and mate usually surrendered their cubbyholes to passengers willing to pay for them. They would then sleep with the crew in the forecabin. Let us hope that the “complaisance” of Mr. McLean which would not permit him to sleep in the cabin where the ladies were berthed was rewarded by the courtesy of the “obliging” captain. The 150 mile voyage in the *Peggy*’s home port was long. Gentlemen could not be expected to sleep standing up for three nights.

Besides the Speaker’s lady, the passengers for Oswego -and New York- were Mrs. McGill and Commissary Capt. John McGill a who had narrowly escaped hanging as a hostage in the American Revolution, and Mr. McLean whom we take to have been Clerk of the House of Assembly. With the cabin-in-neat but-small to themselves the ladies would not be too badly off.

The captain of the Oswego *Peggy* was Augustus Ford, Master, USN, who had 13 children. He came to Lake Ontario in 1797 and commanded “the first vessel on the American side of the “lake” according to his memorial to Washington. Ford also made the first U.S. surveys and charts and master of many vessels. The earliest American schooner after the Revolution was the *Jemima* of Genesee built in 1797, the year after the British surrendered the controlling forts at Oswego and Niagara Capt. Ford died at 85.

THE TORONTO PEGGY

There was more than one *Peggy* one said to have been built at Niagara in 1792, was, in

1799 owned in York, one half by the estate of Thomas Berry, merchant, lately deceased, and the other possibly by Capt. Joseph Kendrick, her master. The Oswego *Peggy* was one of a line begun by Matthew McNair, who came from Scotland to Oswego in 1802 and commenced a storage and forwarding business, including hotel accommodations. In 1803 he bought the schooner *Jane* of Genesee, and renamed her *Peggy*, after his daughter Margaret, McNair christened many of his schooners, for his daughters, the *Linda* in 1804, *Diana* in 1809, *Julia* or *Judy* in 1811. He owned the *Fair American*, too which Ford commanded, built for the U. S. government and the *American* and perhaps the *Penelope*, and others.

Reverting to the *Kincardine*, with which we compared or contrasted the Oswego *Peggy*, she has worked up Lake Ontario from Oswego to Toronto in 24 hours, against a breeze heavy enough to reduce her to half sail for part of the time. The *Peggy* took 72 hours to get down the lake from York to Oswego, though for 12 of these hours she had a good wind abaft. Still many a proud yacht to our knowledge has done much worse.

We have been so slow describing *Peggy* of Oswego that we have not yet got the adventurous Mrs. Mac Donell very far, either on her diary or her voyage. We shall try to remedy that next week.