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Schooner Days, (MCI) 1101
By C.H.J. Snider

Happier Bride's Diary - They Missed the *Toronto Yacht*

“We were a little mortified on seeing the *Toronto* go into the harbor as we came out – thinking it would perhaps be better to have waited and gone in her – she was being ordered up on purpose for us.”

So wrote Anne MacDonnell 148 years ago in her diary of her journey from Etobicoke to New York. She was referring to her departure on June 2, 1805, from York in the schooner *Oswego Peggy*.

A cannonball from the *Toronto* she mentioned was found on our Island shore when the winter's ice left it in 1949, and some of the ship's timbers are still buried in the sands of Gibraltar Point, where she was wrecked 141 years ago. Brock dashed across Lake Ontario in the *Toronto* to quell a mutiny and her wreck was long a landmark. So an interlude about this black and yellow, white and red little schooner with two square topsails may at the worst only emphasize the tedium of the fair Anne's voyage to Oswego against a light headwind so long since.

Governor Simcoe had recommended an armed yacht or governmental vessels for the use of the civil administration of the province before his departure and apparently the *Terrahoga* or *Tanoga* was built for this purpose in 1794, either at Niagara or the Humber River, where Simcoe established sawmills. In the same handwriting which left this vessel's name in doubt she was called a “petty-auger”, which meant periagua. She was a sailing gunboat, with oars and a weird schooner rig suggesting donkey's ears. Commissary McGill's inventory showed her decayed and sold by 1799.

A LORDLY VESSEL

The schooner *Toronto*, 6 guns, was the second vessel to be added to the Provincial Marine in accordance with Simcoe's order. From the description of her at her launching “mortification” at having to travel in an American coaster instead of the dilatory government vessel can be understood.

“The *Toronto Yacht*, Captain Baker,” said the Upper Canada Gazette on Sept. 14, 1799, “will, in the course of a few days, be ready to make her first trip. She was one of the handsomest vessels of her size that ever swam upon Lake Ontario, and if we are permitted to judge from her appearance and to do her justice, we must say she bids fair to be one of the swiftest sailing vessels. She is admirably well calculated for the reception of passengers, and can with propriety boast of the most experienced officers and men. Her master builder was an American (meaning Joseph Dennis, a Loyalist emigre who founded Mount Dennis) “on whom she reflects much credit.”

The *Toronto Yacht* was what His Majesty's armed schooner *Toronto* of the Provincial

Marine was familiarly called. She was built on the bank of the Humber River. Her accommodation while of the same nature as the *Peggy's* were much more extensive with three state rooms on either side and ample deck space.

ANNOYING, BUT –

It was exasperating to have waited several days as Anne and her fellow passengers had done, for the arrival of the provincial yacht in which they were entitled to transportation and such comfort as the service could provide, and then to see her slipping into the harbor just too late for them, while they were outward bound in humbler accommodation.

Though the *Toronto Yacht* had been built for the civil administration and always carried Gen. Peter Hunter, the Governor, up and down the lake, with the union flag at the main topmast head, the commandant at Kingston exercised priority on the service of the Provincial Marine. The *Toronto Yacht* was based on Kingston, and the commandant had not seen fit to send her to York in time to accommodate lesser lights than the Governor who was also a Major General.

Lieut. Hugh Earle, who then commanded the *Toronto*, knew when not to hurry. Voyages to Oswego were only made two or three times a year by the King's vessels, the Duc de La Roche-Foucault Liancourt, had written in 1795. They were probably fewer after Oswego had been given up, in 1796. And before 1805 the Provincial Marine had begun to suffer from dry rot.

The mortification of the *Peggy's* passengers might be somewhat modified by the recollection that eight months before, in the preceding October, 1804, the Provincial schooner *Speedy* had been lost with all on board at Presqu'île. Alexander MacDonell's brother Angus, first Clerk of the Upper Canada House of Assembly, treasurer of the Law Society, and member of Durham, Simcoe, and the East Riding of York was among the elite of the province who then perished. The *Toronto Yacht*, never paralleled such a disaster but was wrecked at Gibraltar Point late in 1811 without loss of life.