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Schooner Days, XIV (14)
By C.H.J. Snider

Eight Days Across!

Recent reference in "Schooner Days" to the Jessie Drummond, recalls the following narrative of the late Capt. Robert Maw, well-known even to recent Torontonians from his boathouses at Sunnyside and the Humber. Capt. Maw died in Toronto January 5th 1908, after a picturesque career. Born in Newport, Yorkshire, he sailed with his father, a north country seaman, until twenty years of age. He came to Canada in 1857. On the lakes he owned and sailed the "barque" Stork and the schooner Pacific. The latter vessel was wrecked in a furious gale of wind and snow in Humber Bay in November 1861, while the mate was in charge. Capt. Maw lost every cent he had in the world. But he went to work in a coal and wood yard until he had saved enough to get afloat again, and ere long he was once more on the quarterdeck. He owned in turn the Evelyn, Wood Duck, Gulnare and Jessie Drummond.

"Yes," said Captain Maw, "the *Drummond* was a fine vessel, but the smartest thing I was ever in was a little fore-'n-after called *Gulnare*. Don't mix up with the three-master *Gulnare*, the old canaller, which was a horse of quite a different color.

"It was in the sixties – 1865 – and I was in the oil trade with another fellow. We used to load crude petroleum up near Sarnia and bring it down the lakes to Montreal or Quebec, in a lake vessel, and then ship it to the Old Country. The shipping, it was the worst part of the job. Sometimes we'd have to wait weeks or even months before we could get a vessel to take it, for petroleum's not a nice cargo.

"There was a Government schooner for sale we heard of – the *Gulnare* – that had been surveying on the coast of Labrador. We got her for \$5,500 and, though she didn't carry much, she was a dandy – long raking spars, a 50 ft. squaresail yard. 216 yards of canvas in her main topmast staysail. And other sails to match. She was 104 feet long 25 feet beam and 16 feet deep – and you couldn't stand up anywhere in the hold except on the keelson, she was so sharp and fine. She had full Aberdeen clipper bow and an elliptic stern, and was coppered to the channels, She was a Charlottetown vessel, and when we got her we agreed that I should carry oil across the Atlantic with her while my partner kept bringing it down to salt water in our lake vessel.

"I put a spar deck in her for 48 feet from the taffrail two feet above the main deck, and raised her bulwarks; and, since she was so small in the hold. I loaded about fifty barrels of petroleum on the spar deck and more in the waist.

"We were just sinking the coast of Newfoundland when it came on to blow from the north-west. It was in October. It freshened and freshened, and we shortened her down, but kept her traveling and she was certainly making great time.

"Next morning, just at eight bells, I sent a hand aloft to put another stop on the fore gaff topsail, for the sea was getting big and the sail had gone adrift. When he got in the crosstrees and she was on top of a sea, he sung out, "Sail ho!" There was a ship dead ahead of us, but you

couldn't see her then from the deck. By the next eight bells – noon, that is – we had caught up to her and passed her. She was a big southern-going vessel, too, homeward bound, so you know how fast we were going.

"The seas piled up until they were running a thousand feet long and sixty feet high, with waves crests all of twelve feet deep on the top. When she'd drop into a hollow everything would flap. The reefed foresail was so low you see.

"The whole crowd, except me and the men at the wheel, were forward reefing the forestaysail, when an enormous sea pooped her. We managed to hang on, but it swept clean forward into the eyes of her, and I looked to see all seven go clean over the bows, when just as the sea struck the break of the forecastle deck she gave a roll and shoveled it off to leeward.

"That was a close shave, but it was the only sea that boarded her. We mastheaded the three-reefed foresail with the winch, and sent the reefed staysail and jib as far up the stays as they would go, and then she didn't get becalmed in the hollows and we kept her driving.

"Big seas would chase her up and rear away up over the taffrail and then fall, but they would slip under her. You see, the barrels of petroleum on the spar deck kept leaking and the stuff trickled off through weepholes in the bulwarks and smothered the water under her counter.

"I think it was the next day that we sighted the *Wild Rose*, a big timber ship that had left Quebec ten days ahead of us. She was riding out the gale, hove to, but when they saw a little thing like us staggering through they thought they would make a try at it, so they waited for a smooth, swung her off, and squared away. The *Wild Rose* had not gone a mile when a big sea caught her square and almost swamped her. It stove in her upper works aft, washed out the bulwarks, carried away the deckload, and started her stanchions from stem to stern. They managed to heave her to again, and we learned afterward they were five days making repairs before they started to limp into port.

"After that we fell in with an Inman liner. I forget her name, but it was either *Iberian* or *Hiberian*, and she was a crack mail steamship. She was going the same way as we were, but it's the solemn truth we kept her in sight four days, and we were alongside of her the greater part of three days, going it neck and neck, sail against steam.

"Three days in succession we made exactly the same run – 366 miles of longitude. The fourth day was a few miles under. By the time the mail steamer was out of sight we were on the coast of England, and the gale was breaking. We made the run in eight days and nine hours, from the coast of Newfoundland to the Lizard, and if I remember right that's 2,050 miles.

"The carrying on paid us well, too, for we sold our oil £8 a ton higher than the other oil carriers. A fleet of them had left the same time we did, but we were in London two weeks ahead of any of them and got the cream of the market."

Coming back with the *Gulnare*, Capt. Maw had to thresh against head winds and gales all the way and made the passage in forty-four days, from Lizard to the to the Brandy Pots in the St.

Lawrence. Forty-four days, five times as long as when outward bound, and yet a record too, considering the weather. For days the *Gulnare* was hove too, making no progress at all. She was clean swept by monster seas, and, getting under weigh when the gale abated, she snapped her main boom. This was the longest spar in the ship, and as she had been swept clean there were no spare timbers to repair it with. But Capt. Maw spliced it without shortening it, in very ingenious style.

"He laid the pieces on the top of barrels on deck and ripped both up with a saw four feet from the break one way, and eight feet from the break the other. Then he sawed halfway through each piece to the line of the split, took the half section out and turned them end for end, and spiked them in place. The boom now had a twelve-foot splice in it, and two breaks, four feet apart but only going half-way through. He frapped this split with bindings of rope at intervals, wedged tight and set up prevented topping lifts. With this rig he threshed the *Gulnare* home without further mishap.