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Schooner Days CLVIII (158)
By C.H.J. Snider

WATERED WALNUT of the NEW BRUNSWICK

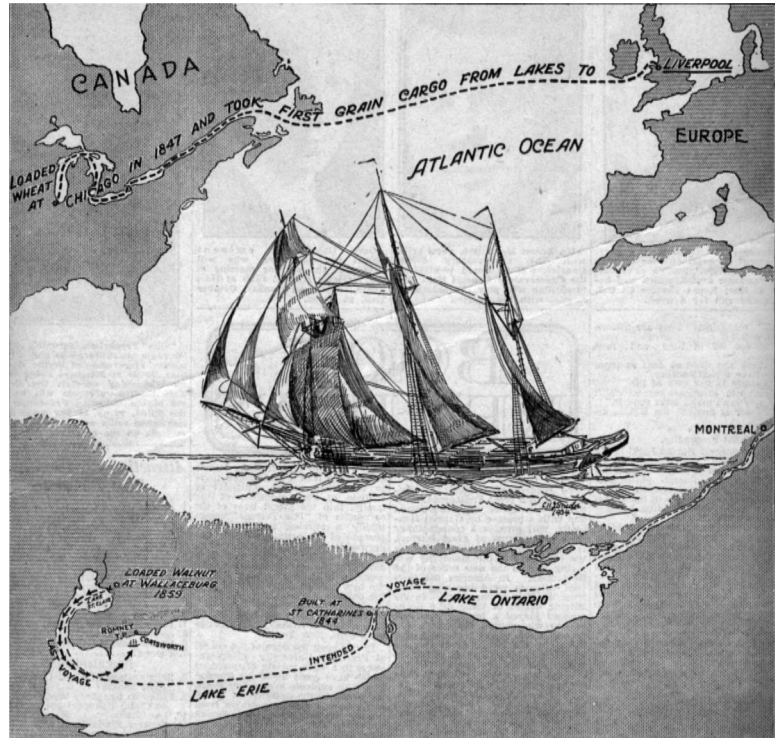
SINCE Mrs. Margaret Campbell Goodman, deep water diver, lady salvager, and advertising expert, entered the news columns this month by locating the wreck of the schooner *New Brunswick*, many have been asking what Schooner Days knows about this vessel:

This much:

There was a small three-masted schooner built in St. Catharines (by Louis Shickluna) in 1844. She appears in the earliest list of Ontario sailing vessels of which I have a copy (published 1856) as a 3-masted schooner of 278 tons measurement. Probably a topsail schooner or lake barque. Judging by the registered tonnage and carrying capacity of other three-masters this would make her a vessel capable of carrying a little over 500 tons dead weight. She was 128'8" feet long, 22' 6" beam and 10' 7" feet depth of hold; what was known as a small-sized Old Canaller, that is, a vessel which did not come up to the full capacity of the enlarged Welland Canal locks, although she probably made a pretty tight fit for them as they were when she was launched.

The *New Brunswick* loaded a cargo of timber at Wallaceburg on the Thames, near Chatham in August, 1859. She was then owned by Henry Eberts of Chatham, who, with his brothers Walter and William, were prominent merchants and exporters of timber. Their grandfather, Capt. Baker, is said to have built some of the gunboats Procter sank, and on one occasion he entertained the famous Indian warrior, Tecumseth, in his Thameside home.

The fine forests of old Western Ontario had not been denuded in 1859, and the Thames mouth was sending out millions of feet of white oak, white pine and black walnut. Walnut trees with their spicy nuts grow on the banks of the river yet, and seventy-five years ago sixteen-foot walnut logs, a foot at least in diameter, sold for from 50 cents to \$1 apiece, according to their



THE NEW BRUNSWICK and some of her voyages.

straightness.

The *New Brunswick* was loaded with logs or squared white oak sticks, taken into her hold through ports cut in her stern. They would be floated up to the quill-falls and hauled into the hold by a horse capstan till their weight brought the port-sills to the water level. Then the hinged ports would be closed, and barred and bulkheaded on the inside and caulked on the outside, with battens or strips of canvas nailed over the caulking. The remainder of the cargo would be hoisted in, and sent down the hatches or left on deck. The *New Brunswick's* deckload consisted of black walnut logs, with timber chains run across and tightened with toggles to keep it from shifting when the vessel heeled or was swept by a sea.

It is nonsense to talk, as recent despatches did, of the *New Brunswick's* "valuable cargo of mahogany." The only mahogany on the lakes in schooner days was the top of the brass-railed bar in the waterfront saloons. It is also nonsense to talk, as despatches did, of the *New Brunswick* having "115,000 cubic feet of white oak." A hundred thousand cubic feet of white oak would fill five vessels the size of the *New Brunswick*, and leave some over.

She may have had 115,000 feet board measure, which would be less than 10,000 cubic feet. That, with a good deck load would be about the *New Brunswick's* carrying capacity on a voyage to Montreal, with the nine-foot canals to negotiate.

It was to Montreal she was "cleared" from Chatham. The export timber trade was then in full swing. Four years before, the barque *Reindeer*, built up at Coldwater on the Georgian Bay, had gone to Europe with a cargo of black walnut, and other vessels had followed with pine and oak.

The *New Brunswick* was commanded at this time by Capt. McTavish, although she had been sailed earlier by Capt. Horn. "Buff" Warren was her first mate. She had good weather down the river and into Lake Erie, but twenty miles east of Point Pelee she was caught in a heavy storm, and east of the Coatsworth dock in Romney township she foundered.

Newton Eberts, of Chatham, now eighty years old, and son of Henry Eberts, the owner, was a child of five when the *New Brunswick* went down, but he recalls seeing her spars sticking up afterwards, and remembers the stories told of how she went to the bottom three miles off the Romney township shore.

According to the survivors the wind blew seventy miles an hour, and the bows began to burst out of the heavily laden craft. The crew had passed more chains across the walnut deckload to keep it from shifting; perhaps it got going in spite of their efforts, and strained the *New Brunswick* forward. At any rate she went down.

All the crew got ashore alive except the negro cook. He died in the yawlboat which put out to rescue the shipwrecked mariners. Three of these came ashore by trusting themselves to the broken spars and paddling with their hands.

C. S. Coatsworth, Chatham lawyer, after whose family the Romney township village and

lake dock were named, heard the story from his father Caleb. After the vessel sank her three masts stuck up above the water for a year or more. Thus the location of the wreck was well fixed. A tree on the Meredith Dawson homestead, in line with one of the windows of the house, gave the range. But when storms and ice swept the projecting spars away, and the lake sand rose around the bulwarks, fishermen swept the lake bed in vain. The wreck was known to lie in a certain line, but at three miles distance offshore the range was too wide, or the sand had bedded her in too smoothly, for them to find anything with their drags.

Having debunked the alleged size of the *New Brunswick's* cargo it is further painful to consider the \$500,000 estimate of its value. It is easy to talk of black walnut as "priceless," but you can buy it in lumber yards. One inch and two-inch walnut costs retail dealers in Toronto from \$154 to \$165 per thousand feet, board measure, according to one wholesale dealer consulted by The Telegram. Mahogany runs \$180 to \$200 per thousand; white oak, \$95 to \$118.

If the 115,000 feet board measure in the *New Brunswick* were all black walnut it might sell for \$18,075, at the rates quoted. If it were all white oak it might sell for \$13,570. If it were 115,000 cubic feet it would, of course, be worth twelve times as much. It has probably been improved rather than deteriorated by its submersion. Both walnut and oak darken and harden under water. For the sizes in which the *New Brunswick's* cargo may be obtainable – possibly 12 inch sticks – dealers may be willing to pay more than the above market quotations on one inch or two-inch boards. They may also be willing to pay more on account of the water-curing. Some of the white oak recovered from wrecks of vessels sunk in the War of 1812 is blacker than ebony and takes a beautiful polish.

But it is hard to see \$500,000 worth of wood in the wreck of the *New Brunswick*, even if none of it has decayed or washed away. The hulk itself will be of no marine value, but it would be a splendid museum if brought ashore.

Stories of fabulous wealth in sunken rafts and timber cargoes all along the lake shores are plentiful, but the "fabulous" is the best part of them. Port Credit stonehookers worked all one fall raising sunken oak sticks from the water off Ducks Bay. They all agreed stonehooking paid better.

Capt. H. E. Crow, of Chatham, 75 years old last August, just like the wreck of the *New Brunswick*, mentioned the prevalent story of the scow sunk in the Sydenham River with a "priceless" cargo of black walnut. The facts of this were a scowload of this timber was placed under seizure between Dresden and Wallaceburg. The skipper evaded the officers, got his scow through to Wallaceburg, sold the black walnut to Detroit and brought his scow back to the river and scuttled her. He gave out that she had gone down, cargo and all, and those who had caused the seizure did not take the trouble to have the scow raised and the fraud exposed.

In 1847 the *New Brunswick* is said to have carried the first grain cargo from the Great Lakes to Europe, 18,000 bushels of wheat, from Chicago to Liverpool. That is all a vessel of 201 tons register would be capable of carrying across the Atlantic. Eighteen thousand bushels weigh

540 tons, and the *New Brunswick* did well if she got away with that.

In 1856 the *New Brunswick* was listed as owned by W. Jago of St. Catharines, and of the modest insurable value of \$4,000. This is presumably the same *New Brunswick* whose hull has at last been located by Mrs. Goodman from an airplane.

It is remarkable how much the airplane facilitates the search for underwater objects. Having had some little experience at wreck hunting (not to compare with Mrs. Goodman's) and having covered about six thousand miles by air, one can speak with conviction about this. On the surface of the water it is difficult to distinguish objects at a depth of over twelve feet, even when the water is smooth and clear. Sometimes, with the light right, I have seen an anchor in five fathoms, thirty feet, but a little ripple on the surface or a little mud in the water, or a little cloud over the sun, and the submarine scene vanishes. Still it has been noticeable, in poking around among the ruins of 1812-ers and others which have engaged attention, that when one couldn't see anything at all by leaning over the side of a rowboat, much might be discovered by standing up.

This is not recommended for Mrs. Goodman's use or anyone else's, because standing up in a rowboat may be fatal. But it contains the explanation of why scouting by plane gets results when other methods fail. We see everything through rays of light striking the object and being reflected into our eyes. The light rays which penetrate the water and strike a submerged object, and come back to our eyes are mingled and confused with the light rays reflected from the surface of the water. The higher we get above the surface the less our eyes are affected by these second reflected rays, and the more plainly we see objects on the bottom.

These objects are seldom shown in detail or natural hue, but they are very distinct in their contrasts against the colors of the water.

When we were going over to England from Montreal in the R-100 we saw dozens of icebergs, half a mile below us. I had seen bergs face to face before, at half a mile distance, but had never had a glimpse at their underpinning, which I had read was eight times the bulk of the visible structure.

This was very evident from the deck of the R-100. Each berg was gleaming white on the blue black sea. Around each berg ran a rim of pale green. This was the face of an ice shelf dipping twenty or thirty feet below the surface. Around this again was another irregular belt of brilliant green, showing another under-water terrace of the berg a hundred feet further down. Then would come a ring of peacock-blue, revealing the berg to a depth of five hundred perhaps, and showing an area four or five times as great as the white part in the air; and beyond this would be a deeper ring of blueish green ice, reflecting light from a depth of possibly a thousand feet.

Similarly, sailing over Lake Ontario and Lake Erie in the Buhl sedan G-CATO, one could see the varying depths of water marked as plainly as on a chart, and unsuspected objects – among others kegs of liquor hidden by rum-runners for a haul – were quite easily discerned.

So it is no wonder that Mrs. Goodman, flying 2,060 feet high in a plane from Leamington

last week, came back in half an hour with the announcement that she had seen, three miles off shore, the wreck of the *New Brunswick*, lying in fifty feet of water, although fishermen had been hunting this wreck for sixty years or more, with tugs and rowboats dragging weighted cables over the spot where she had sanded in after sinking in 1858.

Mrs. Goodman may be the only woman deep sea diver – except the pearls who go down for pearls in Ceylon or wherever they practice that enchanting art – but she is not unique among her sex as a salvager. Eight years ago I was at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys, where the German high seas fleet was scuttled after surrender to the British. The first of their scuttled battleships, the *Moltke*, was being brought to the surface by a firm of English salvagers, Cox and Danks. At Stromness, on the Flow, I met Mr. Cox, and was invited out in his tug to see the prize. On the way I ask for Mr. Danks. “Oh,” said he, pointing to a ruddy-faced woman in serviceable tweed coat and skirt, whose presence on the tug puzzled me, “that’s Danks. Pardon me. Let me introduce you to my wife. My dear, this is –” and so on.

Danks was Mrs. Cox’s maiden name. The pair had been married five or six years before, and the bride’s father had given them £20,000 as a wedding present. They were both practical and energetic people, with rub knowledge of salvaging but a willingness to try anything. Mrs. Cox suggested raising the sunken ships in Scapa Flow as an interesting enterprise, and they put their £20,000 into contractors’ plant, principally surrendered war stores from Germany which were embarrassing the Admiralty. They had raised a dozen destroyers, without making a penny, because the cost of “wrecking” them outran what they get for the scrap. But this first battleship contained so much armourplate, gun-metal, fine non-ferrous material that the profit on her repaid their whole outlay.

[Note: The *New Brunswick* capsized and sunk in a storm abreast of Pelee Island, Lake Erie, Aug. 26, 1858 with a cargo of black walnut timbers. Wreck was located in 1985 and cargo salvaged.]