

Toronto Telegram, August 17, 1935
Schooner Days CCI (201)
by C.H.J. Snider

TWO SHEEP FOR \$1, BEEF CENT PER LB., CABBAGES 1c EACH

If they did not live well in the early timber trade it was not because of high prices - More adventures of a Master Mariner who could not swim.

ALEXANDER MUIR'S life-log, written by himself in 1890 and already largely quoted in *Schooner Days*, broke off last week with his attaining' command of the schooner *Queen Victoria*, one of the many vessels Louis Goler, the French Canadian shipwright, built because he had a large family of daughters married to ship carpenters who had to have jobs. The *Queen Victoria*, was a member of Calvin, Cook and Counter's early fleet of timber droghers, which loaded on the shores of Lake Ontario, often around Stony Creek and Grimsby, and carried their dripping cargoes to Garden Island, where the great rafts of timber were assembled, for running down the St. Lawrence to Quebec. Splendid white oak and pine then grew close to the water's edge, and the farmers would cut it during the winter and haul it to the beach, where it would be rafted out to the anchored schooner for loading into her hold and on deck. Timber droghing was a hard, wet, exhausting job, for the crews handled all the cargo, as well as sailing the vessel.

Alexander Muir was still a young fellow when he got command of the *Queen Victoria*, and he took his younger brother Bryce with him as mate. He was still young when he left the *Queen Victoria* and Bryce became her captain.

It was this timber trade which made Alexander Muir well-acquainted with Port Dalhousie, then at the mouth of the Twelve - Mile Creek, near which much timber was loaded, Young and ambitious, he saw Port Dalhousie's shipping possibilities, and modestly invested \$60 in a home site there, his first stake in the new world of Canada. His vision of the port as an ideal dry dock location was to come later, and how he acted on it will also be told later. Meantime, let us get on with his early experiences as a timber drogher.

"After I had been in the *Queen Victoria* for about a month the timber was all carried down and she was ordered to be laid up for the season, at Garden Island, where she was owned.

"That season I made up my mind that Port Dalhousie was the most convenient and best place on the lakes for a sailor, as trade would always be through the Welland Canal; so I purchased a quarter acre of land on Queen street for \$60 and built a small house on it.

"This was my first investment, purchased with my first earnings and savings. There were then only ten or twelve families living in the port. They were all immigrants who had landed at Niagara and had gone to work on the canal, finished in 1829, twelve years before the time of which I speak.

"After laying the *Queen* up I came to Port Dalhousie to see my new purchase before going home to Lower Canada. While at the port the schooner *Harrie Calvin*, which I had

commanded earlier in the season, came to the piers, and while Capt. Scott was checking his vessel, with his bow lines on the forward timber heads, his foot got into the coil of the rope. He was drawn up to the timber head, and his leg was cut off between the knee and the foot. The severed foot fell overboard into the canal.

“I ran on board the *Harriet Calvin* and took charge.

“The old piers were short, and it required great care in bringing a vessel in, or she would run into the lock gate. The schooner was bound for Cleveland, where, after we had discharged our cargo of salt, we loaded flour for Buffalo at 20 cents a barrel. Our freight was all paid in silver. We made a second trip to Cleveland, and then laid the vessel up in Buffalo for the winter.

“While in Buffalo in November had purchased fresh beef for use on that vessel from the farmers at 1 cent per pound. Cabbages were 1 cent each and pork \$5 per barrel. Sheep were purchased that season for Invent's apiece and salted down for use the next season.

“I worked at Garden Island part of the winter and assisted in fitting the rigging and making the sails for the schooner *W. Penn*. This vessel, rebuilt and renamed the *M. L. Brick* was long afloat and at one time took part in the Georgian Bay and Lake Superior trade. I then took a trip on the cars from Buffalo to Lewiston and crossed to Toronto. I went from here to Kingston on the schooner *Rose*, Capt. Wm. Towie. She was loaded with flour. She was owned by McPherson and Craine of Kingston. I then went with Capt. Duffy of Kingston to Montreal with a small propeller. She was loaded with inch lumber. She ran the rapids.

Alexander records a narrow escape from drowning, crossing Kingston harbor in a small skiff with five heavy men. They were picked up by a passing vessel before swamping. This was in 1842. He returned to Port Dalhousie and recorded a census of the then inhabitants, according to their rating as drunkards and moderate drinkers, male, and female. “There were three taverns licensed by our Christian government to supply fourteen families with the poison. What I call a sober man is one who neither touches, tastes nor handles liquor. There have been only about four sober old men who died in Port Dalhousie in the past 50 years.”

“The four years following I sailed the schooner *Queen Victoria* with Bryce Muir as mate. This period covered the years 1841 - 1844. Bryce sailed this vessel after I left her.

“In those days we made a trip a week in the timber trade between Garden Island and Port Dalhousie. The timber at the port came from Chippawa Creek and Grand River, and was brought down in rafts. We made one trip in the *Queen* in three days up to Stony Creek and returned to Garden Island. In those days there were no tugs to help vessels in and out of the harbors.

“On this vessel I had many escapes with my life. While taking on a deck load out in the lake near Port Dalhousie I had a narrow escape from having both legs broken. The piece of timber had butted the hatch coaming. The dog drew out and passed between my legs and flew up forward under the windlass. In passing it cut a gash about two inches long in my leg.

“Once I fell out of her small boat in Hamilton Bay. One while coming into Port

Dalhousie in November, while handing the snubbing to Mr. Woodel, the lighthouse tender, my foot slipped, and I went overboard with the line in my hand. The sailors were lowering the foresail at the time, and the wind was after the vessel. I held on to the line, thinking the man at the wheel, William Gates, would haul me up at once, but the thought never seemed to cross his mind. I was holding to the line, and as it was heavy 6 inch hemp it dragged me to the bottom. The vessel was brought up, the small boat lowered, and two men got into her. Poles and oars had been thrown on to the piers. Wooden grasped a pole and as he saw my head come to the surface he pushed the pole down by my breast. I laid hold on it, let the hawser go, and was pulled up. I could not swim, so I was afraid to let go of the rope before.

“Twice while stowing timber in the hold of the vessel I came near having my legs taken off.

“The cabins of these vessels were of inch lumber, built on deck so as to leave the hold for loading, and they were very much exposed and cold in winter. In the fall of 1844 I caught a severe cold, and when I arrived home on the Chateauguay I was sick all winter with pleurisy. Old. Dr. Sims, who obtained his education in Scotland, came to see me. He bled me, and I commenced to improve at once, but I was never bled before or since.

“For about a month in the following spring I was in the schooner *Queen Victoria*, and when coming up the lake on the first trip a man named Fish was ordered up to the head of the mainmast. When near the crosstrees he missed his hold and fell to the deck, a distance of fifty feet. In falling he caught his arms around a rope which guided him straight to the deck, and on this account apparently he did not seem much hurt. The next morning, when we arrived at Port Dalhousie, John Martindale sharpened his pen-knife and bled him in the arm. Fish took some physics and in a short time was all right, for his allotted time had not yet arrived.”

(Caption) Capt. Bryce Muir, who first joined his brother as mate in the Queen Victoria in 1841.

(Caption) The Schooner Marion L. Breck, Steambarge Bruno, Schooner Richard Morewood and Steamer Butcher Maid or Butcher Boy snowed up in Heron Bay, Lake Superior.