

Toronto Telegram, November 2, 1935
Schooner Days CCXII (212)
By C.H.J. Snider

Queer, Isn't It?

IN the centre of the picture of Owen Sound's waterfront fifty years ago at fitting-out time, published in The Telegram last spring, was a prominent white hulled schooner with square sail yard a-cockbill, as sailors call a spar upended.

Now, here is a little mystery to begin with: in the photograph as published the name of the schooner was not and is not apparent. But "Schooner Days" stated then that "SARY JANE" had apparently been painted on the starboard bow of the vessel in rather unorthodox fashion. Under a microscope the letters had been discernible on the original photograph. The name did not seem convincing, and "Schooner Days" said so.

Old timers of Owen Sound, who played around the waterfront there half a century ago, declared without hesitation, as soon as they saw the pictures in The Telegram, that they had never heard of a *Sary Jane*, and were quite sure no such vessel had ever belonged to Owen Sound. The *Mary Jane*, owned in Toronto by Capt. Flanagan, was quite a different vessel. But they were equally positive that the schooner pictured was the *Phoebe Catharine*, owned at various times in Owen Sound by Mr. Park, Capt. Pearson and Mr. Bishop, and others. Mr. J. B. Foote, in Toronto now, and Mr. Douglas, in Owen Sound, made the same assertion independently.

How did the *Phoebe Catharine* get the unknown name *Sary Jane*?

Perfectly simple, my dear Watson. Some waterfront painter with a brush to clean from white paint, dried it out by painting letters on the *Phoebe Catharine*'s bow, and the fresh paint stood out against the faded white already there. *Sary Jane* may have been his sweetheart or his landlady or no one at all.

Just as you say perhaps, Sherlock. Then how would you solve this next problem?

As we all know, there is nothing in ghost stories, but the *Phoebe Catharine* was one of several lake schooners which, fifty years ago, bore the reputation of being haunted.

This *Phoebe Catharine*, remember, is no figment of the imagination. She was built at Picton, Ont., in 1864, and was 97 feet long, 22 feet beam, 8 feet 8 inches deep in the hold, and registered 141 tons. She had her share of mishaps, and they began early. She got ashore with a cargo of salt at Wellington on November 6th, 1865, in her second season. Perhaps that is why her Lake Ontario owners sold her. James Park, of 3 Owen Sound, was her registered owner in 1874, but bad luck followed her to Georgian Bay. She was stranded on a small island in Michael's Bay, Manitoulin, 1878, and Captain Campbell towed her off with his tug.

She was one of a group of three Lake Ontario vessels hailing from Picton which were sold to Owen Sound at about the same time, the *Maple Leaf* and the *Prince Edward* being the others. The *Prince Edward*'s captain died aboard her one winter in Manitoulin Island, where his

vessel had been frozen in; but that would not be a reason for the *Phoebe Catharine* being “visited.” She was a fine, well-built vessel of the type which the Bay of Quinte produced in the golden days of the barley trade with Oswego. The photograph shows she was a good looker, and she lasted a long time. She was in evidence at Parry Sound only a few years ago, cut down to the humble station of a stone-barge, with one stumpy mast.

The more imaginative, of the waterfront saga singers attributed the *Phoebe Catharine*’s “ha’nt” to the famous Black Dog of Lake Erie, that sable canine whose midnight passage across the deck and soundless vanishing overside was held responsible for the mysterious disappearance of the *C. T. Jenkins*, the *Thomas Home*, the *Mary Jane* – not *Sary Jane* – and other lake vessels.

A recent “Schooner Days” article dispelled that myth as far as the *Mary Jane* was concerned, and showed there was little mystery about her loss and none in her “disappearance,” for she didn’t disappear. Her wreck was found at Dunkirk, N.Y., a week after she left Port Colborne. All the crew had been drowned.

If the Black Dog did appear on board the *Phoebe Catharine* the omen didn’t work in her case, for she outlived many of the ghost-story tellers and died a peaceful death of old age. The Black Dog, by the way, is usually blamed on Lake Erie, but Prince Edward County, where the *Phoebe Catharine* was born, is also the home of the animal or the legend, and the old cemetery at South Bay was, sixty years ago, one of his ports-of-hail.

The *Phoebe Catharine* was also said to have the plague of “doubles” for her helmsman, or for the man who shifted her gafftopsail sheet, or for any sailor who found himself, of a dark night, alone at any point in the vessel. A shadowy form would be found opposite him, going through his motions.

And it was said that her cabin doors wouldn’t stay closed and her hatches wouldn’t stay on.

These spiritual manifestations were the product of too much spiritus frumenti upon wandering seamen of great thirst.

A “woman in white” was also said to haunt the schooner, and this legend had, according to the late Capt. Campbell, some basis in fact. At one time – whether during her Lake Ontario ownership, or after coming to Georgian Bay, he could not tell – the wife of one of the crew broke up a drinking party by appearing at the cabin door, wrapped in a sheet. Her husband saw the apparition and fell down in a fit – and the party broke up. Being a decent lad at heart he went home to his wife and took the pledge, and next day confessed to the captain the abuse he had been making of the cabin’s comforts in the Old Man’s absence.

(Caption) The PHOEBE CATHARINE in the picture of Owen Sound’s waterfront of fifty years ago. She is the white schooner above the lattice work. On her bow, invisible in this reproduction of the photograph, the name “SARY JANE” was in white letters.