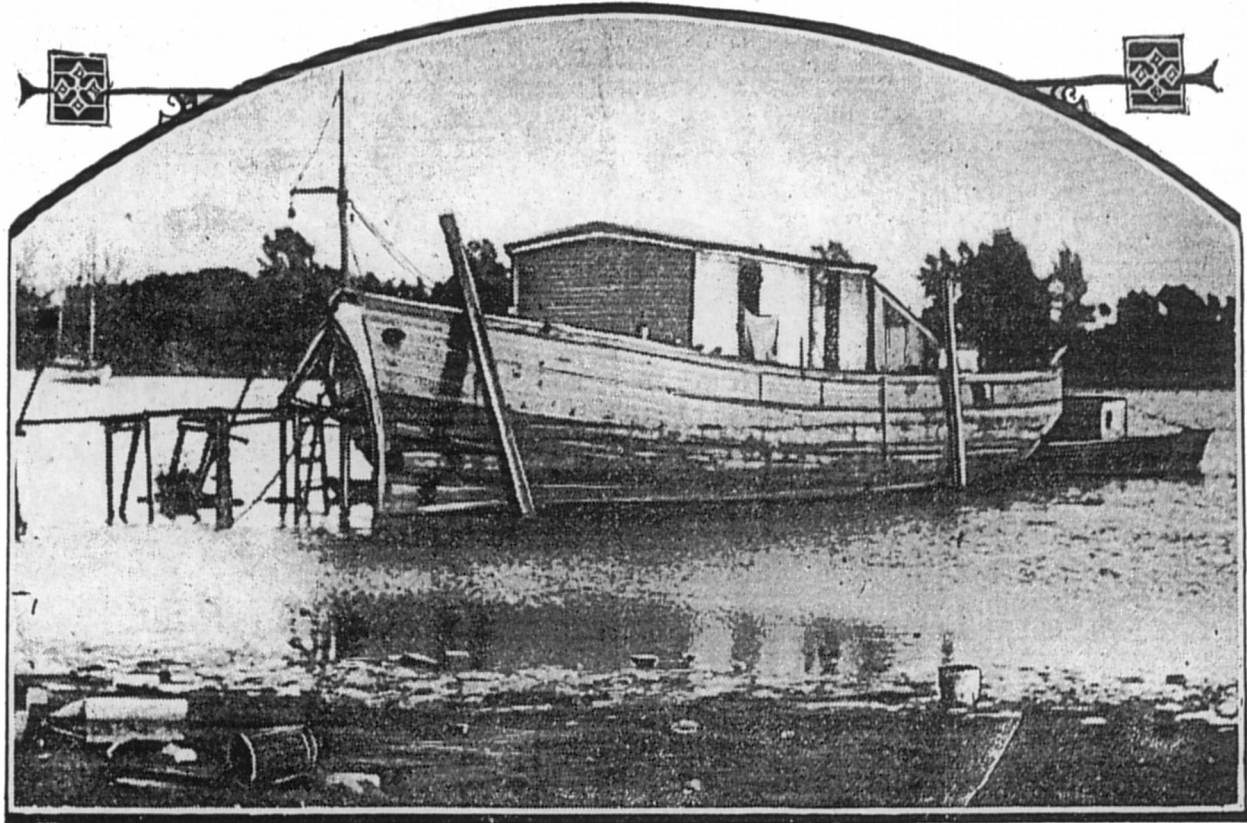


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Schooner Days, XXVIII (28)
By C.H.J. Snider

How 'Captain Jim' Kept Oakville Light Burning

THE "NEWSBOY" NOW. – She has retired from port-saving.



Jim Quinn of Oakville – not to be confused with Jimmy Quinn of Toronto, who is still briskly commanding one of the R. C. Y. C. steamers – was born in Oakville, sailed the White Oak of Oakville, carrying coal to Oakville, and was, as his brother, Capt. “Nipper” Quinn, once said of him, Oakville oak to the pegs of his boots.

Captain Jim died this week in the house where he was born 76 years ago. Of the many stories told of him this one is typical:

It seems that some time after Capt. James Quinn, master mariner, had graduated from the schooner trade – he did his later lakefaring in steam – he heard that his home port was in a bad way. The Dominion Government, finding the trade of Oakville diminished to the vanishing point, had decided to discontinue the lighthouse, let the piers “go to wrack and ruin,” and close the place up.

The Marine Department had a perfect mania for this during the war, when so many sailors were at the front that all the little vessels were laid up, and lake ports languished through lack of man-power. Port Credit is one example of a light the Dominion snuffed out. Newcastle is another. Frenchman’s Bay another. They even tried to blind the flasher on Gibraltar Point,

which has lighted the way into Toronto for a century and a quarter.

As far as Captain Jim was concerned, all others could go into outer darkness – but it was hands off Oakville!

He saw everybody he could about it. Everybody was indignant. Yachtsmen, fishermen, financiers and farmers all protested to the Government – and protested in vain. They were met with a stone wall answer from officialdom: “There is no evidence of commercial traffic in the harbor, and in the interests of economy, engaged as we have been in this colossal conflict to make the world safe for democracy, etc., etc., and a couple of so-forths, the port will be closed.”

Captain Jim hied him to Port Credit. In the harbor there lay sun-dry stonehookers, abandoned because the boys were in khaki or munition overalls. The biggest among them was the *Newsboy*, long sailed by the Naish brothers; tidy hooker of a hundred tons burden.

Long out of commission and dismantled, the *Newsboy* had settled on the bottom, and the river silt had formed around her until she was thoroughly mudded in. An optimist from the Georgian Bay had bought her to make a floating lath mill and storage barge of her, if he could get her up north. He pumped the water out of her hull and bailed and scraped out the mud and ooze-but the *Newsboy* would not float. She snuggled in her bed of harbor mud and refused to leave it.

The lath maker was stumped. There were many men in Port Credit who offered advice, which was a commodity available in large quantities in the Credit for the use of strangers. Those who could have helped the outlander raise the *Newsboy* withheld their aid.

“I guess I’m stuck,” the lath-mill man averred. “I wish to heck I could get back the money that I paid for the old trap.”

“I’ll give you what you paid for her,” Captain Quinn offered.

“She’s yours,” the owner cried gratefully.

“I don’t go in for stinging anybody,” Captain Quinn explained. “I can raise that hooker. Anybody can that knows how. If you want her more than I do I’ll help you raise her. But I want her if you don’t.” “Fair enough,” the stranger said. “I’ll be tickled to death if you’ll give me what I paid for her, and I’ll beat it back to Georgian Bay and build a scow like I ought have done in the first place.”

Captain Quinn bought the *Newsboy* and was ridiculed by former stonehooker skippers of Port Credit. “Whaddaya figure to do with her now you’ve got her?” they jeered. “There hasn’t been a payin’ cargo for a vessel of that size on Lake Ontario in the last twenty years – exceptin’ stone, and who wants stone now?”

Captain Quinn grinned cheerfully. “I’ll save Oakville harbor with her,” he promised. “It’s well worth the price.”

For a dollar or two he bought the decaying masts of a derelict and lashed them athwart the *Newsboy*’s rails about a foot apart. He bought a big barrel, and stood it at one end of the lashed spars. He filled it with sand and headed it; then he tipped it on its side and rolled it to the opposite end of the spars and back. The *Newsboy* moved slightly. Captain Jim rolled the sand barrel from end to end of the spars again. The *Newsboy* rocked perceptibly. At the fourth journey of the sand barrel she freed herself from the restraining mud bed and popped up to a

normal floating poise with such force that the sand barrel was hurtled off the spars. So also was Captain Jim. He came up smiling.

The *Newsboy* was fitted out and cleared from Port Credit for Oswego, the longest voyage she had made in her lifetime. In Oswego her skipper wired his friends in Oakville to “Get after the member! I’m bringing a load of coal.”

The load was less than 100 tons, but it reached Oakville and was docked. Ottawa was notified that a lakewise cargo vessel was trading into Oakville; had brought in a freight and had been properly entered at the harbor office, and would shortly clear, bound for an American port and another cargo.

In the face of this condition, the Dominion Government could not withhold an appropriation for harbor repairs when it was requested. Nor could the lighthouse be abandoned. When the *Newsboy* arrived at Oakville with the second cargo, the appropriation and the continued existence of the lighthouse were both assured.

The *Newsboy* cost Captain Quinn \$550. She is a boathouse in Ashbridge’s Bay now. Profits from the sale of the coal did not nearly pay the expense of fitting out and faring twice to Oswego. But the old lakesman considered that he was well repaid by having the harbor kept open. He was all that his brother said of him.

MANITOULIN WRECK.

Sir, – interest created by the series of articles which appeared in The Telegram some time ago, recalled to my mind many stories told to me by my father with reference to Manitoulin Island.

He went to Manitoulin Island in July, 1875, as a minister of the Methodist New Connection Church.

As he was the only preacher during part of the time, he travelled the length and breadth of the Island.

He kept in touch with the Island until 1898, as he owned some park lots at Manitowanning.

The following six years, that is from 1878 until 1884, he lived in Warton and Parry Sound.

My father died in 1910. Although he occasionally spoke of Manitoulin Island, I never heard him mention the wreck.

I would therefore conclude that it was washed ashore after his time in the north.

There were many Indians on the Island in my father’s time, both civilized and uncivilized. The Indian Agent’s house was rebuilt as a parsonage, so the Indians felt quite free to walk in at any time. If the wreck had been there I think they would have told my father, as he learned to talk with them.

That is fifty-six years ago.

One solution is – it may be the timbers of the *Asia*, which was wrecked during a severe autumn storm on Sept. 14th, 1882, forty-nine years ago this week. She was one of the largest boats on the lakes at that early date. She was due in Manitowanning and Gore Bay the night she

was wrecked. She sank with all but three who survived.

As the wreck is in the Inside Channel it is quite probable that it is the last of the fated *Asia*. In all probability the *Griffin* never sailed the Narrows, but went down in the open lake or Georgian Bay.

The *Asia*'s timbers have had plenty of time to become weathered. The presence of large iron spikes might be accounted for in this way.

Old people on the North Shore were wont to tell harrowing tales of the wreck of the *Asia*. These I have heard my father recount.

OTCHIBWE.

Thanks, Miss Otchibwe, and all readers who contribute like helpful suggestions. Of the two survivors of the *Asia* tragedy, in which eighty persons perished, one, Miss Morrison, is still living in Owen Sound. The other, Mr. Douglas Tinkiss, died recently. The wreck on Manitoulin Island looks to be much too old and decayed to be the remains of the *Asia*. – Ed.