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Told to C.H.J. SNIDER

ONE TRIP of the CAROLINE MARSH

OLD BOB COLWELL, as he was so long and so favorably known, sailed the *Caroline Marsh* for years for E. S. Vindin, of Port Hope, loading at the Vindin warehouse with grain or lumber for the south shore ports on Lake Ontario, and coming back with coal for Toronto or some of the Canadian harbors, or in ballast for Port Hope if no coal offered. Once he had to be left behind. James A. Craig, of 75 Macdonell venue, Toronto, eighty now, and a ship carpenter in Port Hope, from boyhood, tells the story:

“There were ten of us in the *Caroline Marsh* that trip, and of the ten I’m the only one now living. It was in 1883 or 1884. We loaded lumber in Port Hope for Fair Haven, N.Y., till the boards were three feet high above the rail, for the *Caroline Marsh* was a grand carrier. She was bound for a little American port fifteen miles west of Oswego, where there was no labor to be had to unload her, Fair Haven being a small village far in from the lake, so Vindin asked some of us Port Hope fellows if we would make the trip to work the cargo as lumber shovers. ‘I went in that capacity with Jim Sulair and Mike Curran. My brother, Albert, was a sailor in her, and so was George Robinson, who later sailed the *Mary Ann Lydon*, and got the *Oliver Mowat* ashore at Oshawa, a big fellow named Charlie Martin, and another named Bob Rankin. Walter Colwell, old Capt. Bob’s son, was first mate, though he had captain’s papers himself, and Tom Connors was second mate. And Louie White was the cook, a red-headed lass with a vocabulary to match her galley repertoire.

“We were all ready to go, but the Old Man was under the weather and couldn’t get aboard. Vindin was anxious to have the *Caroline Marsh* on her way, for it was good working breeze and no time to be lost—it was the second of November—so, after a lot of walking up and down the wharf and looking for the captain to show up, he told young Walter to get her going.

“Up went the sails—the *Caroline Marsh* had new canvas for the fall— and out she went at 5 o’clock, as the day began to wane. The wind was easterly, and she worked short tacks down the lake, doing pretty well in spite of her high-piled deckload that forced us to tie lumber-reefs in the sails to swing them clear of the tophammer.

“On about 10 o’clock it freshened and blew hard from the east, and the sea made up quick and she began to jump. Her sails were new, but her running gear began to let go, and what with stranding halliards and parting topping-lifts we were soon in a mess, with the big sails dropped like falling circus tents on the deck-load and the jibs in rags, held together by their downhaul. The only sail that would stand was the fore staysail, and under that we let her run up the lake, thinking to get in under Toronto Point and ride out the east blow and refit.

But by the time we were up off the Highlands of Scarboro the wind hauled round as it does so often in the fall and came howling out of the northwest. So around we came and

staggered down the lake, and by dusk next evening, 24 hours after we started we were back off Port Hope again, well out in old Ontario.

“Old Capt Robt. Colwell had recovered by this time and stood watching us from Port Hope hill, tearing his grey hair with concern, for the *Caroline Marsh* was like a daughter to him. He was more concerned for her than for his son, Walter.

“ ‘She’s met trouble, the poor lass’, he insisted, as he saw only the stay sail flying, ‘but she’ll bring them through all right if they only keep her off the land!’

“We kept her off the land all right, giving both shores of Lake Ontario a wide berth, but hanging on to the north one as long as we could and as far as we could, for it was to windward and kept the water smooth. But before midnight we were down off Presqu’isle Bluff, and the Prince Edward County shore was coming out ahead of us, so we would have to haul further out into the lake to clear it. And just then we had a vicious squall and our last hope, the staysail, blew into ribbons.

“Without any sail now to give her steerage way the *Caroline Marsh* fell into the trough of the sea and rolled fit to loop the loop. Louie’s pots and pans raised Cain in the galley, and the stove fell to pieces, Louie herself rolled out of her bunk - she had been seasick and we hadn’t had a meal since leaving Port Hope - and the deckload commenced to shift.

“ ‘Up and shore it back, boys’, bawled Walter Colwell and his acting first mate, Tom Connors, ‘or we’ll never be able to look Vindin in the eye on pay day.’ We jumped to the job, but it was worse than trying to clear Toronto streets of ice. That deckload walked from side to side and from aft forward and forward aft, and in half an hour 40,000 feet of it had gone overboard, never to return. We were lucky to get rid of it without it taking the crew with it crushing anybody or tearing away the booms. The wind unloaded it as much as the water or the rolling of the ship, for it was blowing 60 miles an hour, and when she would a come stern to it would pick up loose boards and blow them off like shingles.

“Well, thank God, that’s gone!” yelled Walter as the last bunch of planks floated off on a sea that burst aboard. “Now we’ve room to work, and we’ll get some sail on her if we don’t she’ll blow in on Wicked Point or Point Peter.

“ ‘And then both Vindin and Old Man will be madder’n the Port Hope undertakers at missing funerals,’ chipped in Tom Connors.

“We had sewn up some of the rip the jibs on the run down from the Highlands, and the sails were good enough if we could get them up. We daren’t try reefing and setting the big sails, without our lifts and it blowing so hard. Some of the lads got aloft, though she was rolling so that she almost shot there out of the crosstrees, and they rove off new halliards where the old ones had gone, and after a lot of pulling we got the standing jib and the flying jib on her, and she paid off, out of the trough of the sea.

“Boy did she fly with those two small sails set! Every second we expected them to twist

out of the bolt-ropes, but once they stopped shaking they were safe. They dragged like a team of mad bulls, their sheets whining on the belaying pins and showering sparks every time the chain pennants struck the headstays. It was the wildest night in the lake I had ever seen, and every mile we went the sea was mounting higher.

“Soon the red light on Wicked Point and the white light on Point Peter were in turn on our port quarter, and we had nothing to fear from the lee shore of Prince Edward. We were tearing for New York State at twelve miles an hour. Before five o’clock that morning - it was Thursday evening we started and this was now Saturday - we were off Fair Haven. Its fixed light was now shining, now dark, and we knew we couldn’t go in. The seas were running higher than the lighthouse.

“So we kept her away for Oswego - Hobson’s choice. The sea here was bigger than off Fair Haven. It was blotting out the red light on the outer end of the pier, though the lighthouse was twenty-five feet above water level. The first thing we saw was the bright light inside, on the lighthouse sixty feet high; and even it was drowned in spray from time to time. And we knew there was a regular Niagara whirl pool rapids spuming off the harbor entrance, with the Oswego River running out, the lake seas running in, and the backslap from the break-water rushing against the east pier.

‘We got to get more sail on her,’ young Walter insisted. “ ‘She’s got so much with them two jibs,’ said Tom Connors, ‘if she gets any more she’ll jump the piers like a flying fish.’

“‘Get the fores’l on her,’ roared the young captain. “ ‘She’s got to have so much sail on her forrad she can’t broach to in the seas at the pierhead.’”

“‘Come on, boys,’ shouted Tom Connors, ‘give the fore throat-halliards hell!’

“We were very full-handed, and all tailed on to the ropes, and in spite of the wind and the rolling we walked the throat of the foresail up fourteen feet. Then we belayed and gave her the peak, steadying the gaff as it rose and flailed, by using the stout new downhaul as a vang. The new foresail bloated up like a bladder and fairly lifted the Caroline’s bows out of the water.

‘C-R-A-S-S-H-H-H!’”, something went right over our heads. We were too busy to guess what it was, for waves leapt up at us from all sides, like a sea of geysers exploding. We were in the swirl of the pier-heads, with river meeting lake and the hurricane for referee. The *Caroline* was a sweet steering thing, and with the tremendous pressure of her canvas she never faltered, but shot straight between the piers like a hunter taking a fence.

“ ‘W-what was that?’ asked big Charlie Martin, with the crash still echoing in our ears.

“Reveille gun in Fort Ontario, Six o’clock,” snapped young Walter. “Stand by your downhauls and halliards! Let go the fore throat! Ease away the peak! Downhaul that peak! Let them jibs run! Down with ’em! Down with ’em! Stand by both anchors, and give her the starboard one as soon as you can. Let go!’

“The anchors got her before she poked her jibboom into John S. Parson’s ship chandlery

at the bridge, up town. Even above the bridge the Oswego River was at times no lily pond. Then Tom Connors ran aft for the coal oil can and crammed the fore-castle stove with broken plank-chips and soaked them well with oil. We were all perishing with the November cold, and the let-down after the excitement. But there was more, quick.

“We were all crowded in the boar pen. Tom struck the match and whoof! the flame blew him clear up the fore-castle ladder and out of the fore-scuttle. He called back, ‘Any of ye alive down there still? Check the damper, there’s too much drought in this wind. And come up and get the yawlboat down, so’s we can snaffle a scuttle or two of coal from the trestle before it gets too light.’

“The gale blew out by Sunday afternoon. We had everything all straightened up by then, and Louie was on her feet and making things hum. We sailed up to Fair Haven, and began to unload on Monday. We saw a fine field of what looked like watermelons (must have been citrons, from the time of year), and made a note of it for future use.

“Next night, unloaded and ready to sail, we sneaked across to the field and each man got the biggest watermelon he could under each arm and ran for the wharf and hid them under the sail covers in the dark. Next morning, out in the lake on the way home, we examined our prizes, and found everyone of us had picked two large pumpkins. Louie made us pies from some and the others we planted on the doorsteps of the leading citizens of Port Hope for a sailors’ hallowe’en.”

(Caption) MR. JAMES A. CRAIG, 75 MACDONELL AVENUE, TORONTO, sole survivor of the ten who made the trip fifty-five years ago.

((Caption) Oswego Harbor ENTRANCE WITH TWO VESSELS ASHORE, WRECKS IN THE GREAT GALE OF Nov. 7, 1880. - The inner light, sixty feet high, over with the spray was flying when the Caroline Marsh came in, is inline with the foremast of one of the wrecks. When the Caroline Marsh herself was wrecked six years after the trip here released, she struck close to where the other wreck shows in the foreground. Capt. Wm. Wakely, Sr., father of Capt. W. R. Wakley and Capt. Charles Wakley, was mate at that time, as a Port Hope reader kindly points out. Fort Ontario is on the rise of the hill shown at left.

(Caption) CAPT. WALTER COLWELL, mate and acting captain of the CAROLINE MARSH.

(Caption) TWO SKIPPERS ASHORE. - Capt. ROBERT COLWELL, long master of the CAROLINE MARSH, and his son, Capt. WALTER COLWELL, master of the WM. JAMIESON, and other vessels, who sailed as mate with his father and was acting captain of the Caroline when she made the wild trip recorded.