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Schooner Days CCCCXXXVIII (438)
By C. H. J. Snider

QUEENS, DOMINIONS, GOLDBUNTERS, and a PORT BURWELL BELLE

JOHNNY WILLIAMS had been sailing for nine years by 1875, though he was still in his teens. Hitherto most of his voyaging had been with his father and the family in the little *Rover* and not-much-larger *Brothers*. Now, with the *Brothers* sold to Frenchman's Bay, and the poor old *Rover* plodding along the Rideau Canal, Johnny was striking out for himself, with no homely hooker for a lee if he did not make good.

But he had no hesitancy, and his confidence was justified by his experience hitherto. He had begun as a cook and now he could handle a small craft with anybody. He also knew freights, charges, wages and a little of marine law. He had sailed in larger vessels whenever family obligations were permitted. As a boy still it might-be difficult to win man's wages. But he could surely earn them, and eventually they would come. And just as surely, he would eventually have a vessel of his own.

The *Duncan City* had been his first "big vessel," to which the *Brothers* compared as a coaster to a deepwater ship. The *Duncan City* hadn't been his only one. After coming triumphantly with her through the storm which wrecked the *Fearless* and the *Olive Branch* he made the acquaintance of the *British Queen*, of St. Catharines. This schooner was not to be confused with other two-masters bearing the same honored name in *Queen Victoria's* golden days, such as the big brigantine built in Port Credit, in 1847, whose model have photographed, or the smaller topsail schooner built in Prince Edward at Waupoos Creek in 1853. Another *British Queen* was built in South Bay ten years later. Nor was the captain of the *St. Catharines Queen*, Baird by name, to be confused with Capt. Andrew Baird, Sr., who sailed the *Marcia A. Hall*, *Snow Bird*, *W. Y. Emory* and other vessels, or his son, Capt. Andrew Baird, Jr., who also sailed the *Snow Bird*, and was lost with all hands in the *Mary*.

Capt. Baird, of the *British Queen*, was a pious man, and would not sail on Sunday if he could help it. Johnny Williams noted with respect that while Capt. Baird was at the wheel in the dog watch the family Bible was placed on the wheelstand, and the captain kept one eye on the spiritual and the other on the spirit compass. The Bible was well worn, and favorite passages were underlined in red ink. Capt. Baird's piety did not save him from afflictions. He had family ones, and when he owned the schooner *Baltic*, after putting years of work on her, she burst like a pea-pod on the rocky beach under Fort Ontario at Oswego. Like Job, he said: "Though he slay me, yet will I put my trust in Him." His last remembered vessel was the schooner *S. and J. Collier*, in which he prospered moderately. When Johnny Williams was with him he was sailing the *British Queen* for N. and D. J. Phillips, of St. Catharines, ship owners and lumber merchants. She was a good-looking schooner, rather shovel-nosed, of the flatiron model, with a sharp flaring bow and rather wide stern. She carried lumber out of Toronto for her firm.

Quite different from his experiences in the *British Queen* was life as he sampled it in the South Bay schooner *Goldhunter*, when Capt. Jimmy Jackman had her.

James, uncle of the present member of Parliament for Rosedale, was a rough diamond with a heart of gold, if lapidaries will admit such classification. It was after the present stage of our hero's nautical development that he went in the *Goldhunter* – after, indeed, he had become a master himself. He always retained the hunger to learn and the desire for experience, however hard the school, and Capt. Jackman needed a good man for his last trip. Johnny went with him late one fall as a mate when his own vessel was laid up. Another fall he made a trip with him before the mast, with other choice spirits.

Going into Oswego this time was a memorable experience. It blew hard, and they had to take in the topsails and double reef the mainsail, though it was a fair wind. Jack Mowat, another old-time master or mate, was also before the mast in this trip of the *Goldhunter*. He was at the wheel when it was necessary to wear the schooner around, jibing the sails from one side to the other, and it was a treat to watch his helmsmanship. He kept the vessel off until the mainmast fly, or wind-vane, was pointing straight for the truck at the head of the foremast, like the needle to the north star. Slowly the foresail, partially becalmed by the reefed mainsail, dropped inboard. Without letting it swing back or swing out to the other side with a crash, Mowat kept it shivering while the boys hooked on the boom pennant and let them haul it out gently, gently. Then with half a spoke of the wheel he began to "scandalize" the reefed mainsail, bringing the wind a little more on the end of the boom. Never enough to produce one of those soul-wrenching jibes, just enough to let it come inboard slowly, hesitate while crotch-tackles and boom-pennants were changed, and then ease out again as though in a June zephyr instead of an autumn gale.

No orders were necessary. He knew his job from years of experience, and the *Goldhunter* was a sweet steering little thing. Oranges had featured her launching, and she must have absorbed the bottled sunshine of their juice. Capt Cummings Hume, William Ellis and Jacob Jackson had provided a crate for the crowd when she first kissed the waves at the mouth of Black Creek in 1862.

They entered Oswego harbor this time on the crest of a sea so big it obliterated the piers. Johnny had been told off to stand by the main halliards, for when mainsail had to come down it had to come fast. Another good man was , on the fore halliards for a similar purpose.

"Main halliards, throat and peak, let go!" roared Jimmy Jackman, and for a few seconds Johnny was so busy keeping his coils clear and the thundering sail coming down without a stop that he saw nothing else. But he heard "Hard up! Hard up! Hard up!" roared to the man at the wheel, telling of an obstacle to windward to be cleared. And right away "Hard down! Hard down!" showing that destruction waited immediately around the corner to leeward.

The jibs had already been down-hauled, and the crowd were finishing the muzzling of the foresail when Johnny jumped to help them, his reefed mainsail being already down. The *Goldhunter* speared her long jibboom at the great piles of lumber dimly discernible through the

snow. She stopped so short Johnny thought she must have hit the bottom or the lumber pile, but there was no sound. Someone jumped over the bow as though going overboard. He landed on the invisible dock, dragging with him a heavy new line, and took two swift turns around a spile with it. Next second the turns were smoking the snow into steam as the wood burned with the friction, and the schooner settled back with the full force of the gale on her 114-foot length and 219 tons register.

"Guess we stopped her in time!" roared Jimmy Jackman, shaking the snow from his sou'wester: "Get out the snub, and breastlines and springs – she'll need all the hemp she's got to hang on here this night. '

There was another *Goldhunter*, hailing from Chicago, but her Johnny never encountered.

Another of the full-sized freighters in which Johnny had sailed while still in the *Brothers* was the *New Dominion* of Toronto, one of half a dozen *New Dominions* launched in 1867, the year of Confederation. The wreck of the last of them, the *New Dominion* of Quebec, 110 feet long, 30 feet beam and 250 tons register, was blown up at Pert Dover only two years ago. The Toronto one was owned by Donalds, the grocer firm, and was sailed at one time by Johnny Williams' old Manx acquaintance of the *Mary Ellis* and *Jenny Jones*, Capt. Dick Curphy, and earlier by Capt. Alex Peters, who then owned her. She was a fine-looking vessel with a good sheer, clipper bow and rounded quarters; usually painted white, with green trim. She measured 97 feet on deck, 21 feet beam, 8 feet 6 inches depth of hold, and 150 tons register. As far as can be learned she was the *New Dominion* lost with all hands, six men, In Lake Erie, Oct. 26th, 1884.

Still another of the samples of the larger life in schooners was the *Clara Youell*, of Port Burwell. She was his first three-master.

Capt. Curphy had her freshly painted and shining like the handle of the big front door when Johnny, with a little time on his hands between trips of the *Brothers*, strolled along the waterfront to admire her.

"Gosh, captain," said he, "she looks well! When you get that water barrel painted to match they'll mistake her for Gooderham's yacht."

"That water barrel" was no water-barrel at all, but the schooner's cast-iron capstan, which alone of all her deck fittings had escaped the ministering touches of the paintbrush; probably because it was in use while she lay at the wharf, heaving her into her berth.

"Like to sample that bar'l?" asked the Manxman. "I've got a site for a boy."

Johnny shipped. So did another lad of his age, and a seasoned old sailor. When they went aboard the *Clara Youell* had been hove out to an anchor in the bay.

The mate was a stranger, and he sent the boys aloft to shake out the gafftopsails, preliminary to hoisting.

"You, waterbar'l, cast the gaskets off the mizzen gafftopsail. If you don't know where it is it's up that mast at the stern, see? And you," to the other boy, "do the same for the

maingafftopsail, up above your head."

Johnny ran up the mizzen rigging to the cross-trees, out on the crosstree legs to the Jacob's ladder, and cast off the gaskets and hailed "Tack on deck!" in no time. The other boy was still wrestling with the turns of his gaskets and the mate was howling at him from below. Johnny came down and ran up the main rigging to help him. In a few minutes he had the tangle cleared up and the topsail ready for hoisting, and came down. The mate was giving the other youngster a bawling out for his clumsiness.

"I don't think you'd ought to as a boy like that to handle that sail alone the first time he was aboard," said Johnny, coolly.

The mate was not as bad as he sounded and he did not reach for a capstan bar.

"Up aloft to the fore-gafftopsail, if you're so smart," said he, and Johnny hopped to it.

The crew were experiencing some difficulty in hoisting the sail, some of the gear being foul, or supposed to be foul. Johnny was a nimble climber, and he knew the pitfalls which beset gafftopsails, especially fore-gafftopsails, which have sheets which need shifting, as well as tacks, clew'-lines and halliards to foul. In a moment he was singing out: "Sheet clear! Hoist away! Tack on deck!" like an old topman, and the sail was spreading beautifully without a wrinkle.

"By gravy, boy," said the mate as he slid down the topmast shrouds to the deck, "you may not know a capstan from a water-bar'l, but I'm going to have you in my watch from now on."

Young Johnny thought of all these experiences, as, without a ship for the first time in nine of his eighteen years, he set out to find a "site."

(Caption) Lake Life of Capt. John Williams, Master Mariner, Toronto