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Schooner Days LV (55)
by C.H.J. Snider

JOURNEY'S END

*"Tho' Neptune's waves and Boreas' blasts
"Have tossed me to and fro,
"By the Almighty God's command
"I'm anchored here below,
"Here do I harbour at the last
"With many of the fleet,
"Until that day we shall set sail
"Our Saviour Christ to meet."*

With all reverence, this epitaph of an 18th century man o' warsman in Halifax Dockyard Cemetery might serve, too, for the requiem of many of the lake schooners which went across the Atlantic and even into the Pacific. For with few exceptions they came home to die. Here did they harbour at the last. They left their bones in the fresh water into which they were launched, years before.

Of fifty or sixty lake vessels which crossed the oceans in the days of sail, some few were lost on salt water but the majority succumbed to the perils of the Great Lakes after facing the hazards of the seven seas.

This curious fact is accounted for by the peculiar dangers of lake navigation and the length of time for which lakers were exposed to them.

The lake vessel went to sea once only as a rule, although a few made several voyages on the ocean. If she survived, she came back to the lakes and braved their dangers year after year, till wrecked or worn out.

Salt water sailors have often scoffed at the "puddle perils" of the Great Lakes—but never after experiencing them. On the ocean the well-found sailing vessel fears nothing while she has sea room. She can fight and conquer wind and wave so long as the land does not conspire against her. On the lakes, even on the greatest of the Great, there is no sea room, in the sense that it is not possible to lie hove to, or scud under bare poles, before the fury of a gale, for day after day. A few hours fetches the vessel up on a lee shore. She must either find shelter or pound to pieces. The land always menaces her.

The St. Catharines schooner *Edward Blake* was hove to for nine days, going across the Atlantic in 1875, with square timber from Sheboygan. In that time she may have drifted a thousand miles. Had she been hove to for nine hours on Lake Ontario she would have had breakers under her bottom, no matter where she started from.

The *Edward Blake* came back to the lake trade, after ocean voyaging which did not end before she had seen Rio. How she ended her days is not known, but she participated in an exciting incident ere she did so. We'll talk about that next Saturday.

The *W. W. Grant* was a brigantine, another member of the little argosy of six lake vessels which the late Ben R. Clarkson, of Toronto, loaded with square timber and sent overseas on a venture in 1875. Mr. Clarkson's extensive enterprises afloat and ashore met with ill fortune at this

time, but the *W. W. Grant* came back to Lake Ontario after delivering her cargo of oak and deals in London.

She was the smallest of this Clarkson fleet, and only measured 100 feet on deck. She was 21 feet 6 inches beam and 7 feet 8 inches deep in the hold, and for some unexplained reason registered under 100 tons. Her carrying capacity was about 300. She was named after Mr. W. W. Grant, a St. Catharines merchant. She had been built at Port Burwell, on Lake Erie, in 1867, and was only intended for lake navigation. Alfred Eccles, of Wolfe Island, opposite Kingston, was her owner in 1875, when she breasted the Atlantic. She was then eight years old.

The *W. W. Grant* came to grief on Lake Ontario in 1884, six years after her return from England.

Louis Hudgin, seventy-eight and blind these last seven years, whose son-in-law, Kenneth McConnell, keeps the False Ducks light, recounted the circumstances to a Telegram man this summer. The *Grant* had loaded coal in Oswego and began to spew her oakum in a hard spring westerly, on her way up the lake. They pumped till they were ready to drop, and the Old Man squared her away for the nearest beach.

They fetched in between the Scotch Bonnet and Salmon Point, or Point Wicked, as it is well and truly named, on the west shore of Prince Edward: a frightful array of grey boulders and limestone, with the breakers spouting high over them. Ere she struck they could see there would be no landing in the surf; to a man the crew could not swim.

But there was no turning back, and with a crunch and a roar she began grinding on the beach.

She lay so that the yawlboat on the stern davits could be lowered, and into this they all piled. Hudgin was the last man to leave her, for he ran back to the forecastle for some of his dunnage, and when he came up the boat was casting off. He jumped and alighted in her.

She was far enough out that they were beyond the worst of the breakers, and after vainly seeking any soft spot where they might land they squared away in the yawlboat before the wind, and never stopped till they fetched up near Kingston next morning. Long before then the *W. W. Grant* had gone to pieces under the pounding of the lake seas.

Another member of the fleet which Ben Clarkson chartered was the *Thomas C. Street*.

She, too, survived the fury of the Atlantic, and made several crossings, only to perish on the Prince Edward shore not many miles from where the *W. W. Grant* laid her weary bones.

The *Thomas C. Street* was the pride of the Niagara Peninsula when she was launched from Louis Shickluna's shipyard in St. Catharines in 1869.

Many shareholders, including the late Thomas Champion of Toronto, had a "piece" of her at times, every ship, as is well known, having sixty-four shares in nautical law. In the early 1870's, when Capt. Edward Anderson sailed her, she was owned by the Georgian Bay Lumber Co., W. I. Sheppard, president, and made famous runs between Chicago and Collingwood, with forest products one way and grain and packing house wares the other. She carried 20,360 bushels of wheat or 330,000 feet of lumber handily on ten-foot draught. She was 139 feet long on deck, 23 feet 4 inches beam, and 11 feet 6 inches deep in the hold, registered 369 tons, and cost \$16,000 to build.

For her ocean voyaging the *Street* was rigged as a barquentine, with square foresail, that clewed up instead of brailing, old style single topsail with three reefs in it, topgallantsail, and royal, on the foremast, besides topmast studdingsails and lower studdingsails, and staysails between foremast and mainmast. When she came back to Lake Ontario the main staysail was removed and a fore-and-aft foresail, with gaff and boom, took its place, but the square foresail was retained.

Capt. John Macdonald of Goderich, later master and owner of the *Azov* and other lake schooners, was before the mast in the *Thomas C. Street* the night she met her doom, and this account of her ending comes from him through his son, John "Red" Macdonald, well-known Goderich fisherman.

It was in the great gale of 1880, which swept Lake Ontario like a stable broom on the night of Nov. 7th, and spread death and destruction all along the eastern shores. That was when the *Belle Sheridan* was lost, and the *Zealand*, and the *Norway*, with every soul on board the three, save one—Capt. James McSherry, who is still living.

The *Street* was laden deep with 23,000 bushels of No. 1 wheat, a dead weight of almost 700 tons, not too much for her, but too much to let her rise properly. She was down to 11 feet draught, twelve deeper more than her best trim.

Capt. Ben Tripp was sailing the *Street* at this time. He had taken her across the Atlantic three voyages, and she was every whit as staunch and well found as when she first supped salt water.

When that wild sou'-wester smote her at midnight her storm sails of No. 1 canvas went out of her like brown paper. Everything streamed in ribbons. She had a deep monkey-rail around her, above the main rail, and when a sea would board her she would fill up to the top of this topgallant rail and spill it over. Her scuppers and swing ports could not carry it off before another sea would roar over her.

Had they been able to keep canvas on her she would have weathered Long Point, and perhaps kept clear of the seas, deep-laden though she was. Without sails she was just an overflowing tank for the breaking water. At times she was carrying three or four hundred tons of water on deck.

The crew beat the bulwarks out of her with windlass brakes and capstan bars, fighting madly in water up to their necks, in the effort to free her. In this they succeeded, but she was shouldered on by the roaring billows until she was embayed by the great peninsula which Prince Edward thrusts southward into the lake, terminating in Long Point and Point Traverse.

She hit the beach in the blackness of early morning, two miles above the little settlement of Wellington. It was so black that nothing could be seen of the shore. Only the ever receding, ever recurring, snowdrifts of the breakers showed where it lay.

The crew of seven took to the rigging. Daylight did not come much before seven that wild Sunday morning. It showed farmers lining the beach and shouting against the raving wind, their waggon-wheels awash in the shingle. John Macdonald, Wm. Carradice, and Mr. Gagen, the mate, struggled to the belaying pins in the shattered bulwarks and braced the fore yard sharp up. This brought one yardarm of the sixty-foot spar near the land the way the vessel lay. From this perch above the billows they swung the lead on the end of the sounding line until letting go with a mighty heave, it struck the beach where the farmers, rushing in, could get it. To the leadline

they next bent a hawser, and made the other end fast in the fore cross-trees. Then the farmers hitched on their horses and dragged the hawser well up above high water mark, On the hawser, sloping down from the masthead to the beach, was rigged a boatswain's chair, like a a child's swing. As spiders slide down their silken webs man after man of the Street's freezing crew slipped down the hawser to the safety of the bonfires blazing on the shore.

So well built was this old lake waggon that her wreck lay along the Wellington shore for two years before the waves, broke it all up.