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## **AMATEUR in an ancient CRAFT**

THE kindly old McCraney boys, so long the bosses of the original Niagara packet *Defiance* (in so far as any one or two could boss her), laid her up as the silver thickened in their hair. Well remembered is one hot summer afternoon when we crept into Oakville Creek on a tiny southerly catspaw. Sweet clover fragrance swamped the tannery output as the fresh cut creekside herbage dried in the flood of sunshine. Blinking blinding white in the noontide light a hooker lay above the Oakville Club landing, long laid up, gaunt and bare and stripped of sails and running rigging. Across her wide transom hung a huge shadow, in shape like a wishbone. Close to, it resolved itself into one scythe, taking its noontide rest on the vessel's taffrail. The shadow of the blade, lying outward like a court-martial sword when the verdict is against the defendant pointed to the name below:

"DEFIANCE"

It needed no emptying hour glass to complete the allegory. Time overtakes us all.

After this Mr. Fred Kirk got her. He was young and strong and not afraid of hard work. He had watched hookers sailing past Balmy Beach all his life, and yearned to be more than a spectator of their ancient mystery. It seemed simple. The stone was there for the taking, on the beach or in the water (if lake frontiers did not chase you) and all you had to do was pull it out of the water and into a hooker and out of the hooker and on to a wharf in Toronto. You would get from \$20 to \$50 for a load like the *Defiance's*. It only meant lifting 50 or 60 tons of stone four or five times in two days, two weeks, or as long as the trip took. Pumping Lake Ontario through a septuagenarian hull for the same period. Sailing the said hull up and down the lake. Patching her sails and sides and her bottom. Keeping her attendant deck scow serviceable. Mending your own clothes and doing your own cooking. You might, with luck, uncover a competent culinary artist in the one-man crew who shared the toil, the groceries and what was left of the freight after the bills were paid. There was no law against carrying a dozen of him, but one-twelfth of that number was all the "paid hands" a hooker like the *Defiance* could support.

The wet-to-the-waist trade of stone hooking was never a wage-paying industry. Honest hardworking hooker captains reared families and acquired properties, and retired to old age comfort; but such go their vessels cheap in the first place, and either worked with good partners, who, like themselves, drew no wages, or had a steady supply of crews in growing families which lived aboard until they went out into the big world on their own.

The work was not harder than many a man does in his holidays, building docks and boathouses and rock-gardens for his summer cottage, nor more uncomfortable than getting up in the dark to sit in a leaky skiff till the ducks come to be shot.

There was a lot of good sailing and sunshine in the simple life, unhampered by the conventions and expenses of camping, canoeing or yachting. If friends and brothers came along and took pot luck at your picnic everybody had a good time and the hooker paid her way.

Mr. Kirk had some happy times in the old *Defiance*. Succeeding generations of sore-tired and sore-handed mariners had tamed down her original reluctance to do what she was told, and he had her eating out of his hand. When she was new she insisted on a square topsail spread on two yards on the foremast; otherwise she sulked. She had her way, because, as a Niagara packet, making passages all the time, she needed four men or so to work her cargo and keep her going. That was enough' to handle the topsail as well. Later she grumbled and accepted a crew of three, but insisted on having trimming ballast. The McCraney boys carried a third hand when they could get one, but often sailed her by themselves. Her masts had been moved to new positions, which made her more answerable to her helm.

Fred Kirk sailed the *Defiance* with his young brother, Roland, in his holidays and such help as he could get; sometimes half a dozen friends, sometimes only a boy. It was heavy work for two, sailing down to some stone bed off the Highlands of Scarborough, anchoring the *Defiance* there, putting off in the-big flat-decked scow she towed and loading that scow and getting its load aboard the hooker. If the hardheads, or granite boulders, were exposed on the beach and riparian right holders were not hostile, the pair might ground the scow and load it by hand, pushing it into-deeper water as they did so, so that it could be poled off and sculled to the schooner.

Such luck was rare, however. Usually the hardheads were bedded in the bottom of the lake, often weed-grown and anchored as securely as the *Defiance* herself. The scow would be brought over such a bed and the pair would dislodge their prey with long-handled rakes with two hook-shaped teeth, and jerk them up to the scow's deck. Fourteen feet of water was about the limit of depth for raking. Sometimes stones weighing a hundred pounds could be raked up by the two men working together. That was a good way to capsize the scow and lose the whole load. Hundred pound stones were not profitable, for they had to be sledged for handling. Every stone had to be lifted chest high to get it over the hooker's rail. Most of the cargo had to be thrown or lowered into the hold and trimmed back. Then lifted out again on to the deck, over the rail and on to the dock and piled there for measurement.

Dockwallopers got 15 cents an hour for helping to unload, but there was no one there on the lake to lighten the hookermen's labors at my price.

*(Caption) "If friends and brothers came along and put luck at your picnic everybody had a good time" - Snapshot aboard Defiance, 1913.*

*(Caption) DEFIANCE under new management in her sixty-eighth year. She was registered in 1845.*