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Schooner Days DCXXXVIII (638)
By C. H. J. SNIDER

SEAGOING POSTIE GETS HIS BIKE

H. M.C.S. TORONTO, frigate of 1944, isn't so big that her postal rating has to take a bicycle to cover his R.R. deliveries from port to starboard – but a bicycle was the very first response to the call for comforts issued last Saturday. The lady who provided the silent steed was ready to ride it down to where the frigate is fitting out, if it were needed over the weekend. That's how good she felt.

You see, postie has to ride shanks mare, or pay for a taxi, every time he goes to get the mail from headquarters, which may be miles from where the ship is moored in port, or from the landing jetty. That bicycle means that no mail is going to be left behind next time *H.M.C.S. Toronto* sails at "00 hundred hours." Thanks a lot, lady.

Scarcely had the list of articles needed for the well-being of the ship's company of *H.M.C.S. Toronto* been published when they commenced to arrive. Maybe you thought it a joke when Schooner Days said the boys could do with everything from cigarettes to grand pianos – but pianos for the wardroom and mess decks were the second and third items underwritten. Those who took them on know that a ship's piano is as good for morale as the grog-tub.

This was proved in a Christmas passage Schooner Days made across the Atlantic two years ago when the subs were sinking a ship a day. We were in convoy under an umbrella of planes and an overcoat of escorts one-half the way, and were on our own, unprotected, for the rest, which was the most dangerous part, for the sub packs had shifted. Every night before we laid-us-down-to we had a come-together around the little piano in the banana boat's two-by twice lounge, and the tinkling ivories, manned principally by an American army flyer, a navy lieutenant engineer and a Warsaw escapee, did us more good than the ship's bar. This was so hard worked the stokers could not raise steam Christmas Day. For men fried and frozen twelve months out of twelve in a steel-walled pen two pianos can be the balm of gilead.

The fourth answer to the preliminary call in Schooner Days was from E. J. Guy, whose father shipped enough grain out of Oshawa in schooner days to feed all Europe. His was the first cash contribution, and he rang the bell by making out his cheque to "*H.M.C.S. Toronto* Comforts Committee." This gave just the lead desired. Everybody wanted a name for the committee sponsored by the Mayor and Board of Control, and Mr. Grey's intuition suggested exactly the right thing. Gordon C. Leitch is the chairman and he is at the receiving end of EL. 7161, Toronto Elevators Ltd., Queen's Quay, until the boys on *H.M.C.S. Toronto* get what they should have.

THIS FRIGATE' TORONTO, now fitting out, whose newly posted captain, Lieut. Commander Henry Hill, recently revisited his home town after three years' service in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, is not the first *H.M.C.S. Toronto*.

The very day the frigate was christened last November, by curious coincidence the last vestige of His Majesty's original Canadian ship *Toronto* disappeared from Toronto's waterfront.

For a century and more the skeleton of a small wooden sailing ship lay on the shore of Toronto Island opposite the stone lighthouse on Gibraltar Point authorized in 1803 and completed in 1810. It was identified by tradition as an armed vessel, built on the authorization of Governor Simcoe, for survey work and the conveyance of the mails, official personages, governmental dispatches, Indian presents and government stores; known locally as the *Toronto*; listed in the ancient Provincial Marine as the "schooner *Toronto*," or the "*Toronto*, yacht." She usually appeared in the old Upper Canada Gazette and local publications as the Toronto Yacht and so she has come down in history.

"Yacht" was only the current Admiralty classification for a dispatch vessel or messenger craft. It had nothing to do with pleasure yachting, which was begun by the Merry Monarch and remained the sport of kings exclusively for a long time afterwards. Admiralty yachts were as much working vessels as the frigate *Toronto* of 1944. A century and a half ago she too might have been classed as a yacht. Frigate at that time was a rating corresponding to our heavy cruisers. *H.M.C.S. Toronto* is an escort support vessel.

THE year of the *Toronto* Yacht's launching was 1799, the place the mouth of the Humber river, and the builder honest Joseph Dennis, United Empire Loyalist, of the family for which Mount Dennis is named. The schooner did good service for twelve years on Lake Ontario without having to use her six-pounders in defense against the Indians, as did happen farther west. In 1811, presumably, she was wrecked on Gibraltar Point, opposite the new town and fort of York. Capt. Gray, sent to report on building a man-of-war at York, said, in January, 1812, that the work could be done very readily here, because the *Toronto*, having been broken up here, would supply much of the necessary ironwork and other equipment.

If a schooner *Toronto* was wrecked on the same point in 1817, as reported in the Montreal Gazette, she would appear to have been a successor, for the *Toronto* Yacht stayed where she struck long enough to be mentioned by Dr. Scadding in the 1870's. Remains believed to be hers were visible up to a year ago.

THIS wreck had been rubbed out by the ice of 1942 and scrubbed out by the high water of 1943, until ; it had all disappeared except one slab of the starboard bow, seventeen short pieces of plank, the remains of the stem, and a few bow timbers, which washed down to near the Centre Island bathing station, and grounded near St. Andrew's avenue. It lay there all summer. Was photographed, marked and measured. The day *H.M.C.S. Toronto* was christened at Levis it was there on the deserted shore of Toronto Island, bedded in the sand. The next day it wasn't. Had the old ghost set sail to convey the new frigate on her Atlantic patrols?

Separated by five hundred miles distance in space and one hundred and forty-four years distance in time, it seemed as though the hoary veteran only waited to hear her name bestowed upon a worthy successor.

At any rate *H.M.C.S. Toronto*, launched in 1799, was at last completely below the horizon.

Despite her name the crew of the *Toronto* Yacht lived in no floating palace. If hard lying made the sailors of the wooden walls era “tough” it also made them crippled pensioners hobbling around Greenwich Hospital, by the time they were Lieut. Commander Henry Hill’s age – and he is as active as any commando.

Capt. Baker, Capt. Fish and Capt. Earl, who commanded the *Toronto* Yacht by turns a hundred and forty years ago, slept in wooden compartments not as comfortable, coffins and not much bigger.

“This tenement,” wrote the chaplain of the Gloucester, 74, a much larger ship, describing his own quarters “appeared to be 8 feet long and as many wide; inside, however, it was not quite 5 feet broad at one end and less than 2 at the other, the ship's timbers projecting in the form of a shelf, on which my cot rested in the day time . . . When the cot was slung, as it was termed, the entire space was occupied.” Light came “from the stern porthole and the after-port on the ship’s starboard side, which latter was occupied by a 32-pounder, and open only in fair weather.”

This gives a fair idea of the “magnificence” of the captain’s cabin in that first *H.M.C.S. Toronto*. The crew slept between the guns on deck where there was nothing but ventilation or slung hammocks under the deck beams in the hold, where there was no ventilation at all. They lived on iron rations of salt meat and hard biscuit, cooked in a community stew-pot in a brick hearth in the galley. That was the only heat in the ship. They must have had fish and venison occasionally, swimming as they were in Ontario Whitefish and salmon, between shores swarming with game. But the pre-Nelson navy always did things the hard way, and this tradition is all too faithfully followed.

WE have not counted the wash basins in the *H.M.C.S. Toronto* of 1944 but it is a safe bet that out of each fifty, not more than one will have a hot water tap. If Admiral Benbow shaved by freezing his bristles and cracking off the resultant icicles, why soften the rugged tars of 1944 with hot water, even if hot water is always running to waste from the exhaust? That’s the Nelson spirit they still sell the troops. That is why we are out for comforts for the *Toronto*’s boys which treat ’em rough, make ’em tough regulations do not provide. We may even have more about both Toronto’s next week.

(Caption) AS LATE AS NOVEMBER, 1943, REMAINS SUPPOSED WRECKAGE OF THE “TORONTO YACHT” LAY ON THE ISLAND SHORE.