

**Toronto Telegram, July 29, 1944**  
**Schooner Days DCLI (651)**  
**By C.H.J. Snider**

## **HUNTING OUT A HIDDEN PORT; A By-product of a Recent Sail to the Site of Upper Canada's Earliest Flour Mills**

Babby sat before his cottage door waiting for the cool of the evening to come. His arms were tattooed with anchors and other emblems of a sailor's calling. His eyes, blue and innocent as the Bay of Quinte itself, fell placidly upon a group of sunburned holidayers staggering under a thick steak, boxes of crimson raspberries, and bottles of milk, spoils of a foray on the local A. & P. store.

"Scuse me, boys," said Babby, politely, "would you know that fore 'n' after I see lyin' down at the foot of the street? Would she be a Gooderham and Worts yacht perhaps? We ain't seen anything else come in here under sail since the Lyman Davis was burned at Sunnyside."

"There are no more Gooderham and Worts yachts," answered the oldest of the yachtsmen with regret, "but the one you see is ours, and you're welcome to look her over." Babby was on his sealegs instantly. "You're sure you wouldn't mind? I used to sail, and I hanker for the sight of anything that does." He had sailed before the mast in the *Lyman Davis* with Capt. Jack McCullough, out of this very port of Napanee, though it is one hard to find, being uncharted, unlighted, and miles inland up a winding river.

He made a wonderful voyage with Capt. McCullough late in the fall, when they were paying \$15 for the trip. Not much better than \$1 a day if the trip took two weeks, as they often did, but this one didn't. Sailed out one Saturday morning and got a cracking run over to Oswego. Hunky Scott in the harbor tug picked them up and berthed them smartly at the trestle, and lay right alongside. "They'll have you loaded in two, three hours, Jack," said he, "and you've got a fair wind home already, so I'll snake you out as soon as they've finished trimmin'."

So he did, and they got away by dark, and the good "soldier's wind" held, and pushing her 400 tons of coal through the water like a steamboat across the lake, the *Lyman Davis* galloped, fifty miles north by west, past the False Ducks and through the Upper Gap, and thirty miles more up the Bay of Quinte to Captain John's Island off Deseronto. By this time it was morning, and the marvellous wind came fair for the real trick of the voyage — the last six miles up the river to where Napanee lies hidden from the lake.

Being vain of having performed this feat of navigation recently, we would ask your permission to interrupt the continuity of Babby's epic voyage to here describe the last lap of it.

With Captain John's Island (Foresters, since Oronhyatekha took it over) on your stern, you steer east by south past Unger Island between red and black buoys up the winding Napanee River. The river has recently been rebuoied, and there are now twenty-one marks — which means that the channel has at least that many bends, some big, some little.

It sounds simple navigation, and it is, for anything with power, for it has been dredged to 11 feet depth, for a width of 200 feet in some places — less in others — and the spring freshets keep it clean. Launches navigate it day and night, and the *Salvage Prince* of London, a big black oceangoing tug — well handled, too — hauls the Pyke Salvage Co's barges *Hilda M.* and *Warrenko* in with coal cargoes. Even the launches often get aground, and the tug or the barge may fail to take a bend quick enough, and get hung up. The river itself is much wider than the channel, half a mile in places, but the banks are low and wooded and there are acres and acres of water just covering the roots of the marsh grass.

Scenically, it is all perfect — willows, ash, evergreen, poplars and maples on its banks, sometimes apple trees, a church spire lifting up over the water-meadows here and there, as on the Norfolk Broads, wild rice, bulrushes and waterlilies shining white and gold and green on the reaches, with turtles sunbathing on the lily pads, and swallows, blackbirds, herons and other marsh birds singing in the bushes or spiking frogs with their beaks.

A lovely watercourse — but what must it have been to the *Lyman Davis* and her sister schooners, from a hundred to a hundred and forty feet long and drawing “all that the law allows” — in this case as much as eleven feet — and having to negotiate the turns and twists with no power but the wind of heaven in their many sails, and heaven's gift of good judgment in their master's heads?

The biggest of them, like the three-masted *J.B. Newlands*, or *Bertie Calkins*, would only have a crew of seven, with ten sails to handle, and two ton-weight anchors to wrestle. With a sailing vessel, there is no backing up. She has to make the bend by going ahead, and sometimes there would not be a hundred feet of clear water for her hundred-foot length. Or the wind would come slap in her teeth. Then there would be nothing for it but to pole her around, if the wind was light, or kedge her off if she touched, by running an anchor out with a long line in the yawl boat, and painfully hauling her up to it, tripping it, and sending it out again.

The schooners had two friends — a “fair” or a “leading” wind, for which they might have to wait days, or the two-hour tide. By the kindness of Providence the Napanee River breathes with a certain regularity, exhaling for about sixty minutes, inhaling for the next hour. The depth of the breath, in inches, varies. Our limited observations found a rise and fall of about six inches. Some have reported as much as two feet. Either six inches or twenty-four are a help worth waiting for, if you are stuck in the mud. But be sure to get stuck at low water.

This corkscrew tidal navigation confronted friend Babby and the *Lyman Davis* that Sunday morning in 1910 or so. And the buoys at this time were not twenty-one in number but two. Capt. Jack McCullough, then very modern and enterprising, had a little kicker, or gas engine in his yawlboat, capable of moving the *Davis* at a mile an hour, once he got her started. But he also had a lot of luck, and it stood by him. The wind whipped into the west-northwest, a “fair wind” up the river, and by four bells or 10 a.m. the *Davis* had wriggled through all the reaches, her raffee sometimes spreading wide over the trees on both banks at once, and oozed into the coal wharf below the old soap factory and the swing bridge and the pretty little park and

the mill wheels of the ancient and enterprising town of Napanee.

“Whadda ya come back fur?” demanded the dockwallopers who had cast the *Davis*’ lines off twenty-four hours before.

“To unload our coal,” said Capt-McCullough.

“Thought you wuz full of water and sinkin’ when we saw you comnin’ up the reach,” said they. “Where’d you get your coal, anyway?”

“Oh, it’s some old Captain John sold us in Deseronto,” said Capt. McCullough.

“Jack, you’re a caution,” was the reluctant acceptance of the joke, and the fact of his arrival coal-laden from Oswego, twenty-four hours after leaving Napanee. “If ennybuddy hadda told us this we’d a called him a damn liar.”

“Mebbe I am.” said Jack, but Babby knew different.

*(Caption) “HER WIDESPREAD RAFFEES HIGH ABOVE TREETOPS ON EITHER BANK.”*

*(Caption) This shows how the LYMAN DAVIS came back to Napanee. The raffee, a sail unknown to yachtsmen, is a sail set singly or in a pair, on a yard across the foremast. In the larger picture the LYMAN DAVIS has clewed down her raffees for the end of her record run.*

*(Caption) LAST OF THE LYMAN DAVIS Her nameboard bedded in the Western Sandbar, after she was burned at Sunnyside. The Odd Fellows' emblem of three links separated her name from her hailing port.*