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By C.H.J. Snider

when "BELLE SHERIDAN'S" luck ran out

CAME into Consecon last week end, and there was a hale old gentleman of 87, nailing up the storm shutters around the porch of his neat white home. He was Walter B. Locie, and he had lived in Consecon most of his life, and he was the last survivor of the improvised lifeboat that went to the rescue of the *Belle Sheridan* crew sixty-six years ago, on that windy Sunday with its piercing westerly blasts.

Never a November comes or goes but the fate of the *Belle Sheridan* in the Great Gale of 1880 is recalled by lake men. She was but one of a score of vessels wrecked or disabled in these two fatal days, Nov. 6th and 7th, but she was a "family ship," with a father, the captain and owner, and four sons with him in the crew, and of the seven on board only a boy was saved. Her tragedy made a deep impression.

And here, miraculously as it seemed on the 66th anniversary, was the only actor in the drama, busily putting up storm shutters against the blasts of his eighty-seventh winter, while a younger brother not quite eighty yet, handed him the nails. His recollection, caught between hammer strokes, was thus:

"Don't just remember now how we first got. word of the wreck. D'you mind, Willard? You'd be about twelve at the time."

This to his younger brother.

"Guess we saw her spars weaving back and forth above the treetops from the farm as she dragged into the breakers. You see," explained Willard, "she was more than an hour dragging across from Presqu'isle, where she tried to get in, and let go her anchors. She came over sideways, six miles, one chain parted, the other holding across her bows, so she struck the beach broadside on, headed north. She was deep, drawing ten feet with her load of coal, and the shore was shoal. The seas looked to be a mile long and they'd run up to the beach hundreds of yards and suck back, taking sand and gravel with them.

"Anyway," resumed Walter, "it was about noon when we got to the beach. It was lined with people, for they'd driven from Trenton and the Carrying Place and all over.

LAST LIVING RESCUER FRAMED IN SHIP'S HORSE SHOE

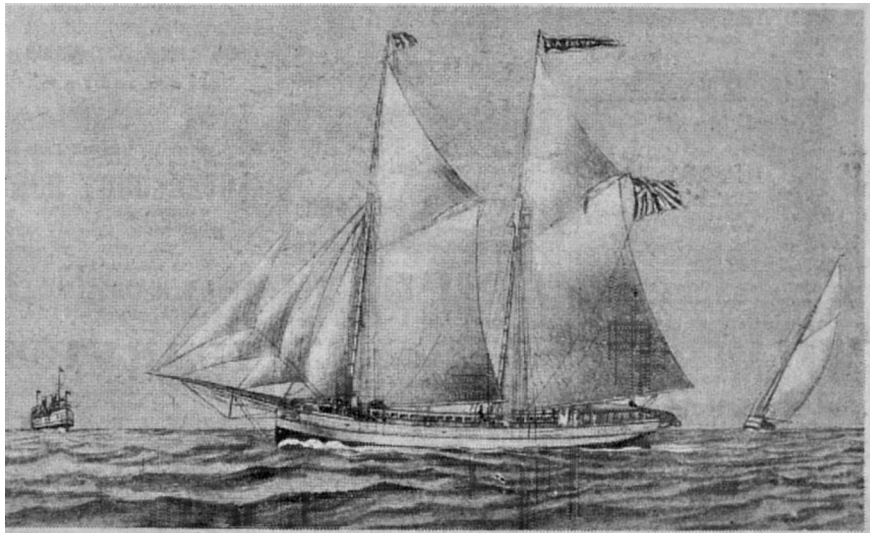


WALTER B. LOCIE of Consecon, Prince Edward County, interrupted while putting up storm sash against his 87th winter, tells Schooner Days of the lifeboat trip.

OH HOW IT BLEW!

“Never saw such a wind,” Willard interjected. “There was a schooner had got safe into Weller’s Bay and was riding it out to her anchors. Capt. Corson’s *Nellie Sherwood*, I think it was. That sheltered bay was one lather of whitecaps, covered with a regular mist of spindrift six feet high. Dolph Corson, the old man’s son, tried to scull across the bay to the lake in the small boat, and so did men from the schooner *Gearing*, but they couldn’t make headway and were glad to get back on the schooner. Their main gafftopsail had been done up in the usual way, with three round turns and two half hitches, but the wind burst the gaskets and it blew out like a balloon. The captain sent two men to strap it down, but they couldn’t get up the rigging, it was blowing so hard, and rather than have them thrown into the bay he told them to come down and let the sail go. It soon flogged itself to bits no bigger than your hand. They found piece’s on the fence rails miles away.

“Outside Weller’s Bay,” the older brother went on, “the *Belle Sheridan* lay grinding on the sand, with seas breaking on her as high as her mastheads. The crowd had helped Robert Rogers take the masts and sails out of his fish boat and dragged her up the beach to a place where there seemed some chance to get her out to the wreck. The cabin was gone and she was all under water when the seas broke, but her bow was a little higher than the rest and there we could see the crew huddled when the spray let us.



Belle Sheridan THE WRECKED SCHOONER, from a crayon drawing by C. I. Gibbons tug fireman and marine artist. This picture has long been treasured by the McSherry family in Toronto, even if the artist did misspell the vessel's name.

A FARMER AND A TEACHER

“I was only a farmer, twenty-one and young and strong from work on my father’s farm. He was James P. Locie. There were plenty of volunteers for the boat but they took me because I was husky, I suppose, and not too heavy, and could pull with the rest of them. Who were the crew? William Andrew Young, whose daughters’ pictures you had in The Telegram at their reunion in Toronto sixty years afterwards, and Frank Bonter, Stephen Clarke the fisherman and another Clarke, a young fellow who taught school in Consecon just that year. Yes, and me. The others are all gone. They were good boys, if I say it myself.

“They pushed us out, wading up to their necks in the water to give us a good start in the backwash, and then we shot from the shore like a bullet. Within 30 feet of the wreck, three seas, one after another, rolled right over her and on to us. That stood the big fishboat right up on end and spilled us all out, with the boat falling over backwards over us, bottom side up.

“No, the water wasn’t cold; at least it was warmer than the air, and we all clawed our way up on to her bottom, digging our fingers into the edges of her lapstreak planking. Then she rolled over gunwales up and we crawled into her again, but she was full of water and the seas broke over as fast as we could bail. There was a strong current down the shore and that set us away from the wreck, so we had to let the boat wash in on the shore and try again. The crowd waded out, and dragged her up the beach farther than before for another try.

“I’ve lost track of how many times the boat was pushed off and forced back. I would say at least six.

LAD’S PLUNGE FOR LIFE

“The sun was getting low and the schooner’s mainmast began to sway back and forth as though the shrouds and chainplates had parted. She was breaking up aft.

“As we were pushed off for one more try we saw a single figure, black against the western sky, work his way aft along the rail, pick up a broken plank, almost as big as himself, and leap overboard as the next sea struck. We were too busy bailing and keeping her head to the sea for the next few minutes to see what became of him, but all at once we saw a head in the water between arms stretched out on a broken plank, like a surfboard.

“We grabbed for him and while we were getting him in a sea burst and tossed us boat and all on to the beach. Men ran down neck deep and dragged us. The young fellow was still hanging on to his plank. His arms were clamped on it as though frozen. They weren’t, but I the water that filled his long hip boots was freezing them to him in the cold wind blowing.

“We stripped him in a fish shed and rubbed him to life, wrapped him in buffalo robes and hurried him to John Howes’ farm kitchen. He was young Jimmy McSherry of Toronto, nineteen, I think he said. He gasped “Little Eddie kept crying’ for ma – until he died in my arms – and a sea washed him away. Dad died before that. – Tom and Johnny were too numbed to hold him up – Jack Hamilton says he’s through – never sail again – Sam Boyd’s club feet are frozen under him.” “Talking of his father and brother,” Willard explained. “Hamilton was the mate and the club-footed man was the second, and cook too. We got his body afterwards. Hamilton must have been crushed when the foremast fell. Eddie was the youngest brother, only thirteen. He was washed up afterwards and Jimmy, the one that was saved, came down from Toronto with Mr. Gooderham, from the Gooderham grain elevator, and took him home to St. Michael’s Cemetery.

“The mainmast fell just after Jimmy jumped overboard,” said Walter Locie. “The foremast swayed for a while longer, then down it came, topmast and all, lying across the wreck for a while. The fishboat made some more tries before dark, but when the foremast fell and we could see nobody left we gave up and lighted a bonfire on the beach. I went home. I guess that’s about all,” and he vigorously resumed nailing his storm shutters. “There was another wreck that month,” added Willard.

We’ll hear about that next week.

Shortly before he died last year Capt. Richard Goldring of Port Whitby gave the writer a light, thin horseshoe, such as racers might wear. It was just such an ornament as one used to see nailed to the paul-post afore the windlass, in every schooner on the lakes, a good luck token.

"Sixty-five years ago, after the Great Gale," said he, "we were becalmed in the *Maple Leaf* off Consecon. It was thick fog, and we were closer in towards Weller's Bay than we knew. We had ridden out the gale at Black River Bluff in South Bay on the other side of Prince Edward County, with the windblown trees crashing down the banks, and a South Bay schooner scow driven high and dry ashore the other side of the bay. We were making our way home. I saw a black square post sticking up about a foot above water, and I lowered our yawlboat and rowed to it. It was a schooner's paulpost, and this horseshoe was just showing. I took it off. That was all that was left of the *Belle Sheridan* above water when the gale went down."

It is an old Irish belief that the horseshoe should be nailed with the points up to keep the luck from running out. The *Belle Sheridan's* was nailed just the opposite way like most lake schooners' horse shoes, with the toe-caulk upper most. She was an Oswego vessel built there in 1852, and had been prosperous, so Capt. McSherry left the horseshoe as he had found it. He bought the *Sheridan* in 1879, when she was lying sunk in Church street slip, Toronto. Being an experienced ship carpenter he and his boys, the eldest being 21, made extensive repairs during the winter, and the resuscitated schooner classed high, enough to be allowed to carry grain.

The McSherrys had the misfortune to lose the *West Wind* at Cobourg the year before. They felt that their luck had turned when they got for the rebuilt *Belle Sheridan* a cargo of grain for Charlotte from Adamson's elevator at the foot of old West Market street, and made a fast run down the lake with it, this first week in November. The *Belle Sheridan* loaded coal for Toronto for the return trip, and was well on her way home, with this double freight, when the gale burst upon her in furious squalls at midnight, on Nov. 6th. When within ten miles of Toronto she lost her mainsail, gaff and boom in the first onset. Thus disabled she could only run before the wind under the peak of her foresail. Off Port Hope she lost her yawlboat, and the maintopmast was rolled out of her. Hounded by the gale she tried to luff into Presquisle, the nearest port of refuge, but without after-sail she could not head up and was swept past Presquisle Point. Both anchors were let go, in the hope of holding the partial lee, but they could not bring her head to wind. Fishermen put out to help but could not reach her. One chain cable parted, and she dragged the other anchor with her all the six miles across to Weller's Bay.

Her luck had run out.