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Schooner Days DCCLXXXIX (789)
By C.H.J. Snider

Brig Sails over U.S. City

One of the honors recently heaped on this humble head has been the freedom of the City of Oswego, conferred by His Honor, Mayor J.T. McCaffrey, and City Clerk Hobbie, the appropriate signing officers of that great port of schooner days. This freedom could not be more appreciated even if granted without bail by the Chief of Police of Oswego, Tom Mowatt, an old Toronto waterfront graduate who, like his Honor the Mayor, is an art connoisseur, yachtsman and lawyer, continues an interest in nautical affairs. Tom Mowatt has been with the Oswego police force for forty years, and no old shellback of the lakes, however barnacled, has ever had anything but the fairest of treatment from him and his boys – for he was a sailor and a tugman before he became a policeman. In fact the police badge of Oswego is not the full-rigged brig of the civic crest but a fore-and-aft schooner, standing off and on opposite the old entrance to Oswego Harbor, waiting for a tug.

It was thus the writer entered Oswego for the first time, without a



nickel to bless himself with, in the Schooner *Vienna*, Capt. John Ewart, in July, 1895. Oswegonian hospitality began right there. A hardware store, Osterhout's, gave all hands painter's caps, with glazed peaks, in a goodwill gesture. And no cocktail bar will ever serve as appetizing refreshment as a little Yankee gave, without asking, from a tin dipper, and a hand pump on the east side of the harbor, under the guns of Port Ontario.

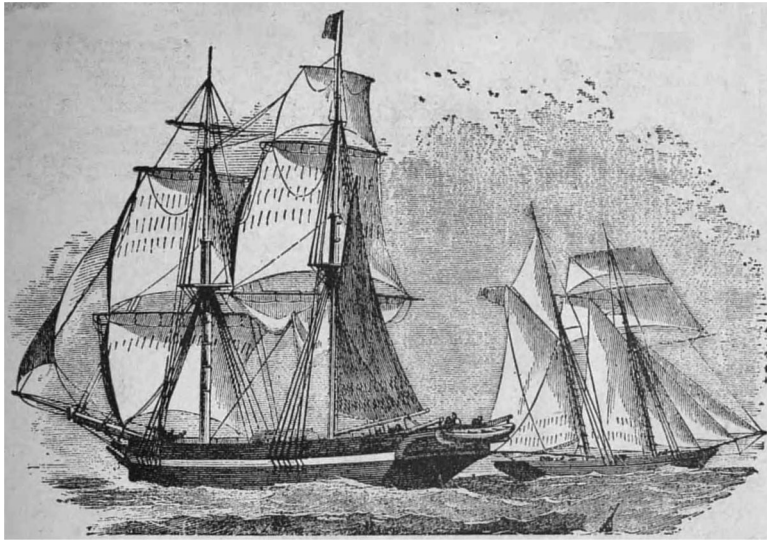
Oswego, N.Y., which was a British port while Toronto was yet only a French trading post, has a full-rigged brig for its civic crest, as above. One of the supporters of the crest of our own fair city is a full-rigged Indian with his elbow on the counter, regarding with one eye a lady with a fish spear, labelled "Integrity," and with the other a beaver, well above the word "Intelligence." Below the Indian's moccasined feet is "Industry."



Oswego Police Chief and His Badge. Thomas Mowatt, Toronto boy, joined the Oswego police force in 1906 and has been the efficient Chief thereof since 1917.

Where lake brigs began

The first full-rigged brig on Lake Ontario was the *London*, 80-foot British man-of-war, built at Oswego in 1755. The last one may also have been Oswego built. The 14-gun U.S.



FULL-RIGGED BRIG OF 1843, date of Oswego's incorporation as a city. On the right a topsail schooner, sometimes erroneously called a "brig," on the Great Lakes.

things to work to windward. Commodore Chauncey called the *Oneida* “a veritable slug.” Alexander Muir, who sailed the *Liverpool*, admitted he was lucky to make a trip a week with her by getting favorable winds both ways. A schooner would make passages while a brig was lying windbound. The brig was fine for long runs with the wind free, but not so good for beating about in narrow compasses or anywhere else.

Lost with all hands

The last full-rigged brig on all the Great Lakes was the *Robert Burns*, built at Port Huron in 1848. She was 126 feet long, 23 feet beam, 9 feet 10 inches depth of hold and 307 tons measurement. She was lost with all hands in the Straits of Mackinaw in a great gale in November, 1869. She left many relatives, known as "brigs" but really brigantines, a cross between a full-rigged brig and a fore-and-aft schooner. There were forty or fifty of them. Some were very fine vessels, and Oswego had its share. They were all gone now, like the schooners which were on Lake Ontario before the brigs came, and persisted long after they had gone. Topsail schooners, that is, schooners with square topsails on the foremast, were also sometimes called “brigs”, incorrectly, by hayseeds.

Like the fretful porcupine

The full-rigged brig, bristling with yards projecting from both masts like a cat's whiskers, seems to have vanished from the face of the waters. The last one the writer saw was in Copenhagen in 1938. It was being kept as a museum piece, beside a dainty bronze sculpture of a mermaid world-known as The Little Harbor Lady. Both objects, and the beautiful background of

cruiser *Oneida* was built there in 1808. After the War of 1812 she was laid up at Sackett's Harbor and refitted there as the timber drogher *Adjutant Clitz*. This was in 1826 or 1827. She may have survived for years in that hard, wet trade. The Canadian brig, *Liverpool*, built at Garden Island, was also in the early timber trade. We do not know which lived the longest. A brig would be handy for timber loading, having her deck free from the booms which split a schooner's into two narrow corridors, but they were poor

plane trees, made the beholder think of the Cherry street cesspool on Toronto's waterfront, it was all so different. Hope the Nazis spared them.

The only other full-rigged brigs in his life were the Italian *San Antonio*, with mastheads and yards painted blue, in Naples in 1928; the Norwegian *Hansen* at Shoreham, in 1915, a war casualty; and the *Niagara* at Erie in 1919, Commodore Perry's second don't-give-up ship, resuscitated from her bed beside Graveyard Pond a century after the Battle of Put in Bay.

Once square-rigger port

Oswego had her full quota of brigs, brigantines and other square-riggers.

Our old friend The Pocket Compass quotes these Oswego harbor regulations: "Every brig schooner, sloop, float, canal boat or steamboat, while lying in the port must have their anchors kept inward upon deck, and their upper yards braced up sharp, and their lower yards cockbilled."

The "yards" were spars aloft which projected beyond the sides of the hull. "Every brig" had to trim hers so as not to foul her neighbor or adjoining wharf structures – one of the inconveniences of the square-rig, which is about as comfortable a bed fellow as a porcupine.