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Schooner Days CMLXIII (963)
By C.H.J. Snider

WHATCHACALLIT?

How to pronounce forecandle? Take a good look before you open your mouth.

Once I took a university professor down into a lake schooner's, and after five minutes survey he pronounced the word distinctly thus: "I think if you don't mind I'd like to have a look around on deck – immediately" He meant putrid.

That was merely begging off. But if you are a sailor, at sea you say "folksel," on the lakes you might get by with "forksel." In either place you would be labeled as a greenhorn, or what was worse, a dude, if you said "forecandle." The Lunenbergers, who have a language of their own say "fawkes" just as they say "fawsley" for forsail and "nothe" for north.

WITH THE VIKINGS

Yet fore castle, two words, was exactly how the thing began; a square platform with wooden walls, shield high, built on the lofty stemhead of the viking ships, wherefrom the archers plied their arrows and hurled their javelins, stinkpots and fireballs into the lower waists of their enemies. The platform at the other end of the ship was the after castle.

When both came down in the marine world, the after one was the quarterdeck and the forward one the forecandle head, under which the seamen slept, when they could.

Modern forecandles are of course steel apartments almost anywhere in the ship except the tailshaft tunnel. They can be and ought to be electric lighted, steam heated, air conditioned, chromium plumbed with plenty of toilets and hot and cold showers. I would like to hold forth briefly, however, on schooner forecandles I have known.

BEST EVER

My best was the *Oliver Mowat's*, the three-masted schooner sailed by the late Capt. James Peacock of Port Hope.

"Take the top bunk forward on the port side," said James when I signed on, at Oswego.

Forward of the foremast was a square doghouse with a top-leaved door and a sliding top; the fore scuttle and a big one, 40 inches wide. Outside it was painted buff, with pale blue trim. with the double door hooked back and the slide pushed over, the sun streamed down to a yellow-painted floor, eight feet below. The inside walls of the scuttle were painted white and reflected light.

Two long chests, or lidded boxes, on the floor, painted a light buff, made good seats, and they were also beds – for a couple of tons of chain cable. The chains, flaked down in long lengths in these lockers, led up through the deck to the windlass barrel and after several turns around it out through hawse pipes and back again to the rings of the anchors, bedded inboard

from the catheads. The forecastle was walled with four bunks on each side, two and two, one above the other, the other ones at the level of the chain lockers.

In the blunt V of the bows and forward of these bunk rows, was the fore peak, where were stowed the lanterns and pieces of spare gear.

The eight bunks were shelves of inch boards, faced with ledges a foot deep, required to keep the straw mattresses and their occupants from spilling to the floor when the vessel rolled.

The mattresses were of blue and white ticking, well stuffed, and one patch quilt and a pillow covered with ticking, was on each of the four bunks used. The spares were filled with coils of rope, spare block, and gear.

The paul-post, a central pillar coming up from the keelson, was not concerned with bunks and beds. Above deck it was a lodgement for the heel of the bowsprit on its forward side and aft for the hinged paul which kept the windlass-barrel from backing up.

All the interior woodwork was painted, either buff or white or pale blue. A tin lamp was screwed to the after side of the paul-post, but not needed by day.

PAINTED AND POLISHED

On the floor, at the foot of the paul-post, was a pot-bellied little Quebec heater, which could burn anything but ice-cubes. Its tummy was bare, for it got red hot on the least provocation, but all the rest of it was *mirabile dictu*, varnished black. It was the only polished forecastle stove in captivity. In front of the stove was a square box with flared sides, filled with sawdust; the spit kid, height of pullman luxury in a laker.

"And see," said red-moustached tom Patginton, "that you hit a first shot every time, young fellow, for the man who misses has to clean up!"

The *Mowat's* forecastle was the non-pareil of schooner days. Jim Peacock was a clean man, inside and out, and he kept his vessel that way. He made a fortune out of her, where owners who begrudged the price of a paint brush or laundry soap went broke by their own miserliness.

WORST EVER

My worst forecastle I shall not name. It was typical of some out of nineteen in lake sailing days, the combined product of owners' niggardliness, master's indifference, and sailors' laziness. They called it the boar pen, and it was.

It was so dark that you could not see into it by day or night without a lantern. The tin lamp on its paul-post had burned till the oil gave out, without ever having illuminated anything. Its wick was short and rusty and eked out with a strip of torn canvas, its burner was foul and its chimney was black with soot.

If you swung the lantern like a switchman at a siding you would discover that the wretched hold had never been painted. The wood that went into it fresh from the plane was darkened and stained with coal dust, soot, grain dust and iron ore. It was stained with spray and

rain through the open scuttle, the sweat of an unventilated enclosure, and the seepage of the five Great Lakes through deck and sides, and the return of bilgewater from the pumps, which could not escape through the scuppers.

SWEET DREAMS

The bunks were filled with mouldy straw, pounded into a mat by countless uneasy slumbers, and covered with sacks of mildewed bedding.

The stove was a raw red rusted shell of oft-burned iron. The place was alive with bedbugs, and if a bucket of water was spilled on the filthy floor the swung lantern would reveal an insect drama of the Johnstown flood. Rat holes plugged with the broken necks of whiskey bottles served as scuppers.

The slimy bunks were jackknifed with initials and the obscene pictographs then common in the water closets of country schools. The place stank of burnt out lamps, bilgewater, nicotine and mustiness. Every corner had its bottle of cure-alls for diseases of men.

Old Captain W.D. Graham of St. Catharine's, who died recently in his nineties, told me that when he was a horse boy in a timber drogher, he used to sleep with the horses on deck, rather than in the forecastle.

It was a good tip, but we had no horsebox.

The captain of this other vessel was a decent, silent man of Mohawk blood. He confided to me: "That hellhole forward's too good for them that makes it what it is. Some day I'll throw a lighted lantern down there and burn the damn thing out!"

His owners did not collect fire insurance.

Thank goodness we never had to eat in the forecastle. Lake sailors always dined where the captain and mate dined, at the cabin table, and of the same food. The cabin was always clean, or the cook walked the plank.