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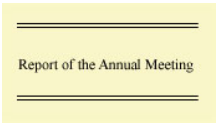

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THE PASSING OF THE SAILING SHIP AT QUEBEC

BY

PEMBERTON SMITH

I am going to ask you to imagine yourselves for a while in the fresh, breezy atmosphere of Champlain's old city of Quebec as it was in the year 1888—a very different city to the Quebec we know to-day. I am not saying that Quebec has not grown, developed and improved, but that it was different. Its appearance, type and smell was that of a seaport town. You would have seen a "forest of masts" on both shores of the river, from the Dufferin Terrace in the summer. This was long before the Château Frontenac was even planned. During the shipping season, there were in port as many as a couple of hundred ocean-going sailing vessels. Black hulled, three masted, by far the greater proportion of the "barque" rig, (that is, with square sails on the fore and main mast, and fore and aft sails only on the mizen), with but a few full-rigged ships. The mass of spars and cordage formed a thick fringe along the docks where the vessels lay often two deep on both shores of the river. The harbour, besides, was alive with tugs, large and small, an army of them, large tugs employed in towing the ships into port from below the island of Orleans, or for setting them well on their way down the lower river when loaded with lumber; small tugs towing lumber from cove to cove, or from cove to ship. The harbour front was filled with ship's chandler's stores, sail-makers' lofts, and the shops of dealers in nautical instruments and supplies of every kind; while all through the lower town was the distinct odour of hemp and tar and the flavour of the sea.

Every winter these ships scattered to the seven seas; but in the spring they all flocked back to Quebec again, to carry timber in the log to Great Britain. Some of them would bring in cargoes, but many would come "in ballast," and then would first anchor in the centre of the broad part of the river just above cape Diamond, long known as the "ballast ground." There they would dump the rock ballast overboard into the river, to be towed into the cove or dock where they were to be loaded with lumber. A good many were of British register, but a number were Norwegian vessels, and a few, Swedes. The trip from Bristol to Quebec would generally take from three weeks to a month, and the loading all of three weeks. These vessels would therefore as a rule be able to make two trips in the summer; but some of the faster ships had a record of three trips each season. They were of all ages and stages of repair: some bluff-bowed old carriers with the lines of a canal barge, like the *G. M. Carins*, some famous clipper barques like the *Maud* and the *Canova* (who used to race to Bristol and back year after year), and some of

them old East India packets, full-rigged ships, like the *Paramatta*. No one of these vessels was without an elaborate and gilded figure-head under the jib-boom. Many of them intended to sail the Quebec route until they actually fell apart; for it was a tradition that no wooden ship loaded with Canadian pine could ever sink.

They were a fine, clean, manly lot, these old Norwegian and British ship captains. They created, every summer, an atmosphere of wholesome salt-sea air in the old city. Captain Hazelton, master and part owner of the *G. M. Carins*, for instance, used to say "that he had lived all his life from a boy in his ship, all his savings were in the ship, and he intended to sail the same old ship until he died." His wish was granted. His vessel finally went to pieces in a storm off the coast of Newfoundland, and he and all hands were lost. Many were the wonderful deep-sea yarns one could gather in, by making a Sunday afternoon call on the captain aboard his own ship. The sailor-men, also, of whom you would meet groups wandering and singing along the countryside near the city during their long shore leave, were an honest trustworthy set, and no general menace to the home-keeping citizens. A sailor on a modern steamer is not, properly speaking, a sailor, but a mechanic or ordinary day-labourer: and it is often said (perhaps unjustly) that he is gathered from the "scum of the earth." But the sailor on the old "Wind-Jammer" was a very different type of man. Accustomed month after month to face the wonder and the power of the deep seas in a puny little craft, depending entirely on the navigating judgment of the captain, and his own agility and endurance during the storms, it would seem as if the open sea-air had blown most of the viciousness and self-indulgence out of his life. These were the days when a man was proud of his "A. B." certificate.

But it would not do to pretend everything was lovely; to every sea port there is a seamy side. During the three weeks the vessel was in port, the mate had full charge, and the captain would take a well-earned rest. There were some hard-drinking captains, and they were even known to retire into seclusion in Champlain street, below the hill; from whence they would be produced by the stevedore when the vessel was ready to sail, and be called on to sign the ship's bills of lading. Cases were known when the captain, at such a time, would be in a pugnacious alcoholic humour, and absolutely refuse to sign anything. The merchant's clerks, the mate, and the stevedore would all wrestle with his obstinacy till human patience was exhausted. His ship would then start down the river next tide, in tow of its tug, the captain loudly boasting that he would "show the world." But the merchant could not let his cargo leave port without his bills of lading to vouch for it; so, as a result of a quiet message from him, a swift steam launch, with ten or fifteen men in neat blue

uniforms, would slip away from the dock. This would be the Harbour Police boat *Dolphin*, who would soon catch up with the outward-bound barque moving slowly behind her tug and "arrest" the vessel for leaving port without a proper clearance, ordering her back (as Jacobs puts it) a "shame-faced looking" ship. By that time the captain would be in the sobering-up stages, and ready and willing to sign anything put before him.

Dark and mysterious deeds were said to happen on Champlain street. Certain it is that common rumour made it dangerous in the extreme for a stranger to enter the street alone after dark. The business of "Shanghai-ing" sailors throve exceedingly. There were several men who lived with the unenviable reputation of being "Crimps," the name then given to that dubious profession. A harassed ship-captain would often lose several of his crew soon after reaching port; and after exhausting time and patience trying to locate them or replace them, would in desperation call in the services of one of these "Crimps," who, for a consideration, would agree to deliver him the required number of A. B. sailormen, who were being kept in stock, drunk and drugged, somewhere down in Champlain street, the hold-overs from the crew of some former vessel. Grim tales there were of men having been delivered as live sailors, but "doped," who were stone dead when they came aboard.

From St. Joseph de Lévis, up both sides of the river, through Wolfe's cove to Sillery and Bridgewater coves (where the Quebec bridge now crosses), the shores were strewn thick with square logs of pine, oak, and elm; and the sound of the axemen filled the air. I may say that good timber gives to the stroke of the axe a clear musical ring; and, in the distance, on a still afternoon, the music of the axe was very noticeable and pleasant. There was another musical note when the tide was "out," that was the shout of the foreman to his men, as five or six of them worked with canthooks to turn over a heavy log of pine on the beach. From tradition, this shout was always sung out by the foreman in a quaint minor sing-song "Ahoy, Aha-oy," the men heaving together with each shout. You can imagine to yourselves this music of industry, rising faintly to the ear from every direction, if you were seated on a still, warm afternoon, say on Sillery hill.

A highly-skilled workman was the Canadian broad-axe man. Alas! he and his broad-axe have passed away for ever. One edge of the blade was flat; and this tool was used for shaving off a fraction of an inch of the outside of a log, which had been stained by mud and weather, so as to give it the bright, clean appearance of new wood. The most spectacular work was the cutting off of the end of a log; which meant chopping across the grain. The culler would mark off with blue pencil say a quarter of an inch from the end, in one spot.

The broad-axe man would stand on the end of the log as it lay on the beach, possibly four feet in diameter; and, swinging up his axe, hew to the mark by a hair's breadth all through the thickness of the log. His eyes and arms combined to a marvel of accuracy. If he felt the axe descending out of the true he would swing that blow harmlessly off to one side; and, raising it again, bring it down the second time exactly to the line.

The late W. E. Gladstone, famous for cutting down trees at Hawarden for exercise, having heard of the operation of the Quebec broad-axe men, once wrote to the late Mr. Dobell, asking him to send him in a couple of Canadian broad-axes. This was done, but with the warning that these were highly specialized implements, not only unsuitable, but dangerous to the operator if used for felling trees.

Most of our writers on French Canadian folklore have classed the dwellers of the country parishes comprehensively as "town dwellers" or as "habitants" ("les cultivateurs"). But there was a third class, the "lumber-jack" or "l'homme des chantiers." This man never bothered to till the soil; and, in his love for a free outdoor life and the thrills of a dangerous occupation, he might well be likened to the old "coureurs de bois" of earlier days. Every summer the lumber jack worked in the "coves" at Quebec, "dans les chantiers de M. Wade," or "dans les chantiers de M. Dobell." But when the fall came, they were off to the shanties in earnest. In the year 1888 that I have mentioned, they gathered in by train. Prior to that, they used to make Ottawa their rendezvous, and team in. Again in the spring, when the "drive" was on past Ottawa, this city would be teeming with lumber men. They went off to their winter's work singing. Several of the songs that our friend Mr. Barbeau has collected so carefully are lumber men's songs. Some of them refer directly to Ottawa; such as, "Oh, Bytown c'est une jolie place;" and "Laissez passer les Raf'-man!" For a long paddle none was more popular than the old favorite, "En roulant ma boule," the stroke of the paddle fitting in with the word "en" and the word "boule," whenever they were repeated in the chorus. "A la claire fontaine," with its quaint sad air, was another great paddle favorite. For a cheerful evening song after a hard day's work, it was "Tu danses bien, Madeleine," which goes with a ring and a swing. And one very famous old paddle song in English was, "The Opeongoo."

A lumberman, who died and was buried prior to 1888, would be amazed were it possible for him to visit a typical lumber camp of to-day. The bunk houses and the cook camps would seem to him the acme of luxury, and the food better and more varied than he ever dreamed of. But the camp is usually near the mill, which is a rough-looking, almost "portable" mill; and the mill is near the limits—thick, small, ragged-looking groves of spruce (a wood that once was

scorned as worthless). The whole aspect is that of a cheap, sordid, money-making commercial concern. Gone are the great pine trees, a hundred, a hundred and twenty feet of straight stems before the branches spread out to form a curtain of needles. Gone also are the camps where the men slept in their bunks on fresh-cut "sapin" boughs; where one iron kettle served for all the meals that were cooked. The railways now have brought the post office close to the camp. But prior to the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the men who went into camp from Mattawa, or up the Opeongo, were "dead to the world" from fall to spring. From this remoteness and loneliness grew the legend of the "chasse galèrie." The Devil used to arrive in person, but disguised, on New Year's eve, and he always succeeded in gathering a crew to run the "chasse galerie." The lumbermen would start off boldly in a York boat or a canoe, Satan himself steering with a paddle, the crew paddling bow and sides. And presto! the canoe would lift. Soaring high above the trees, it would steer south and east through the air, and deliver each member of the crew at his chosen parish (Ste. Croix, Cap Santé, or St. Nicholas), to spend New Year's Day dancing and feasting with his "blonde." Satan would gather his crew together again, at midnight, and set them safely back at work in the camp the morning after New Year's. Their comrades never "peached on them;" so the only way the camp boss could tell which of his men had been out on the "chasse galerie" was by suspecting that some were more tired and exhausted than the others. The "return fare" was very moderate. No "cash down," the only cost was the promise of the lumber-jack's soul after death! But there was a come-back, and a well authenticated way of taking advantage of the trip while yet avoiding payment. After they had passed over Ottawa, it was for the bow paddle to overcome the steersman's direction, and drop down so as to graze the cross of some parish church. If they could manage this, the spell was broken; Satan himself would vanish in a burst of sulphur flame; the canoe and crew would spill into the soft snow; and the agreement to deliver their souls after death was "null and void." There would only remain the long tramp back to the camp; a small price to pay for the New Year's Day holiday. I can remember being snowbound in the little parish of St. Barthelemi one New Year's eve; when, on the good man's opening the front door at night, such a burst of driving wind and snow came in that it was difficult to close the door again, whereon the good wife remarked quite calmly and naturally: "Ah, c'est rien que la chasse galerie qui passe!"

With the opening of spring, and following the breaking up of the ice on the rivers, came the third phase, the "drive." The drive to-day is a puny affair compared to the driving of the entire log from the tributary down the whole length of the Ottawa river, and the St.

Lawrence to Quebec, there to be loaded in its entirety into one of the sailing ships already described. The skill, agility and daring of these chaps on the drive was almost beyond belief. If a couple of logs got stuck on a rock in the very middle of a rapid, their duty was, somehow, to pry them loose and put them on their way. Down the old "timber chutes" the logs passed the Chaudiere falls at Ottawa, bound together into "cribs" of thirty to sixty logs; each crib was then manned by a crew with long sweeps and floated down the lower Ottawa, running the falls at Grenville and Carillon; and so by the "Back river" behind Montreal to Charlemagne, at the foot of Montreal island. At that point, the cribs were assembled into one huge raft (on which was built a regular camp, cook house, and bunk houses) and placed in tow of a big side-wheel tug. This raft would be about a week on the water from Charlemagne to the cove at Quebec, to which it was destined. There was one old side-wheel tug with a black hull, very powerful, but very slow and careful in the handling of its load. It was an old tradition at Quebec, that whenever the "John A. Macdonald" (which was the proud name it bore) came into sight, it was going to rain.

Such is a rough sketch of the export lumber trade of timber in the log, which had reached its height about the year 1888. If you had returned to Quebec in 1891, only three years afterwards, you would have found the harbour empty of sailing ships, the many coves all idle, no big rafts coming down the river. This export of lumber to the Old Country was, in 1888, the biggest item of Canada's export trade, exceeding then her grain exports; and Quebec, the ancient capital, controlled and dominated this trade. In 1891 it was gone, never to return, so completely that in many coves the huge booms, which confined the timber when the tide was high, were left on the beaches actually to rot away. What was the cause of this sudden change? What evil fairy made all this organization disappear, and forced the older ships to seek a beach where they could be hauled up?

It has been said that this catastrophe was due to the domination of the "Quebec Ship-Labourers' Union," a very highly organized and dictatorial union. It is true they had a strike about 1890, which, so far as I can learn, has never yet been called off. There was no need. Their arbitrariness may have helped; but the main causes lay deeper than that.

For many years Quebec had held her position as the leading city of the Saint Lawrence, both socially and commercially. But in 1888 Montreal had far outgrown Quebec in commerce and wealth. In one line only, that of the exportation of lumber, had Quebec continued to rule the trade. This trade, however, depended on the tradition that no vessel could load lumber except a wood-hull vessel, in the bow of which square ports could be cut at the water line, and

through which the logs could be shoved by the stevedore's men. As all the tramp steamers were steel hulls, this confined the trade to sailing vessels, and Quebec was the farthest point up the river to which a sailing vessel could conveniently proceed. With the passing of the sailing ship would pass Quebec's usefulness as a port.

One of the leading merchants of Quebec conceived the idea of trying out the experiment, in 1889, of loading a tramp steamer with logs of timber, hauling the logs out of the water up over the side of the vessel by steam donkey engine. The experiment, in spite of tradition, proved a great success, for it was found that the cargo could be stowed in a week, instead of requiring three weeks as in the case of a sailing vessel. Still, one of the merchant's prominent confrères asked him if he knew what he was doing—"planning to destroy the chief trade of the city of Quebec." This he denied, asserting that he was planning to improve it, that his experiment was so satisfactory that he would spend $20,000 the next year in building steamer docks (which he did).

In 1891, however, the lumber trade was all gone. While the 200 miles of up current tow from Quebec to Montreal was of vital importance to the sailing vessel, it was nothing to the steamer; and the advantages of the still-water loading berth so short a distance from a high-tide harbour appealed very strongly. Then, with the change over from sail to steam, the Ottawa lumberman (who was at that time the real producer) took a hand. If he was going to ship lumber by steam, he was going to saw to dimension, and earn the milling profit in Canada. This was absolute; and from that time, Great Britain had to buy in deals, boards, and planks sawn in the mills that began to crop up in every direction and loaded into tramp steamers at Montreal. Gone practically in one summer season were all the white-sailed ships, the running of cribs down the rapids of the Ottawa, gone were the immense rafts (the size of a farm) that used to drift from Montreal to Quebec, gone were the valiant broad-axe men, and all the industry of the coves or "chantiers" around Quebec.

Cairn of Dease and Simpson near Port Epworth, Coronation Gulf, N.W. Territories, erected in July, 1839. (Photo by Dr. R. M. Anderson in 1915.)