

# THE NAUTICAL HERITAGE OF AMELIASBURGH

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The waters that surround Ameliasburgh always provide that feeling of coming into a world of wonders. Seen in the magic of Quinte from the end of the ancient Carrying Place trail, or from Massasauga Point and Big Bay, there is a magic that bathes the ridges, marshes and headlands of the Bay for 100 miles. There is little wharfage or cribbing because it is all natural harbour. Between the homes, large and small, the shores are richly wooded or are ripe in harvest.

With it's extensive shoreline on three sides, (Lake Ontario, the Bay of Quinte from Twelve O'Clock Point to Massasauga Point, and Big Bay), Ameliasburgh Township/Seventh Town- (now Ward Four) is very much part of the nautical history of Ontario.

In the old days every reach on the bay shores of Ameliasburgh had its wharves and warehouses, and the farmers teamed in their barley crops and shot them into the schooners' holds, sometimes by the shovelful, sometimes by wheelbarrow, sometime through square chutes built out from the warehouse, as at Rednersville, sometimes by troughs formed by the vessel's own sails, stripped for the purpose and stretched up the high bank.

It was a grand place in barley days, that is before the U.S. government passed the McKinley Act which put a stop to the import of barley from Canada. It was a time when the County of Prince Edward waxed rich on the appetite of Oswego breweries for the best waterborne barley in the world.

In the days of the sailing vessels there was a brisk, homely, local trade along the bay shores of Ameliasburgh. Little scows and schooners loading wherever they could, often from the very farm where the grain was grown, and carrying it down the smooth Bay reaches to Kingston, for transshipment in larger schooners to Oswego, across the lake, or in barges to Montreal.

Wellers Bay on the western side of Ameliasburgh, with it's difficult entrance from Lake Ontario, is cut off from the lake by a long sandbar and an island. It was hard to get into the bay because of a narrow shifting channel and no piers, but there was good shelter and water enough to float a large schooner. The Carrying Place landing, where all traffic used to cross on a wooden railway into the Bay of Quinte, was four miles away from Consecon.

Consecon, with its hotels, stores, and a vibrant population, was a major shipping port

for grain in the nineteenth century, some of the grain being shipped arriving by way of smaller boats coming down Lake Conseccon After the building of the Prince Edward Railway the port was used, for the shipment of ore from the mines of north Hastings County

We enjoy telling the story of how the schooner *Two Brothers* scampered through the crooked passage of the Bald Head and on down Wellers Bay to a small dock at Conseccon. That dock was cribbing about 20 feet wide, built out into the bay about 200 feet, It was a ticklish landing with the wind blowing hard on to the little dock, but Capt. McCrimmon knew his vessel, and the *Two Brothers* handled well, and right after dinner loading commenced.

And that was a hard job for the crew. The schooner had to be held to the small crib with a westerly gale blowing for three days and three nights, while 9,000 bushels of barley were trundled out to her in little cars holding twenty five to one hundred bushels each. The crew had to trim the grain in the hold, and in between times carried fence posts from a nearby farm to make fenders, for the *Two Brothers* was tearing her whiskers out ramping on the dock in the five-mile sweep of the wind across Conseccon Bay.

At last she was loaded, and the wind lulled and came so that the sleepless crew had to get her out while the going was good. They were misinformed about the depth of water and stuck on the mud of Bald Head for four hours, heaving through with a line run out to the kedge anchor ahead. The *Brothers* loaded to nine feet. The wind was foul for Oswego, so when they got out of Wellers Bay they ran across to Presqu'ile and into Brighton Bay in hopes of a night's sleep, which they did not get. The long cold trip to Oswego is another story..

Profits were not high in those days of the sailing schooners. The *Two Brothers* owners would have received about six cents a bushel for what turned out to be a long and dangerous late fall voyage. Out of that amount would be paid wages, food bills, and tow charges at Oswego where the grain was destined, and for the general maintenance of the vessel and sails.

Late season sailing was part and parcel of commercial sailing. It was the time to get the grain to market. The loss of the *Ida Walker*, or the loss of the *Belle Sheridan* or the *Queen of the Lakes*, or the *Garibaldi*, or several other vessels that went "ashore at Wellers Bay" are tragedies that till stir the imagination. There are many other interesting stories that need to be recorded.

And Ameliasburgh had a shipbuilding industry. The tiny village of Rednersville is situated on the south shore of the most westerly arm of the Bay of Quinte, about half way between Rossmore and The Carrying Place. During the days of sail, Rednersville was an important bay port, playing host to steamers plying the waters from Picton to Trenton, and for the commercial sailing vessels to pick up the local crops for market in Kingston and Oswego. It was also a place where a couple of large sailing vessels were

built.

The *Anna Mara* was built at Rednersville by B. Roblin in 1850. She was 66.50 feet long. 15.20 beam and registered 59 tons. Also built at Rednersville was the much larger *Jessie Conger* of 149 tons register, built by E. Beaupre.

In winter the extensive shoreline of Ameliasburgh freezes over, its shores, high and low, mantled in snow, its waters a firm pavement. In the old days more teaming was done on the Bay of Quinte than on the roads which paralleled it. The Bay was more level and less drifted. Now, in winter, it is snowmobiles, fishing huts and cross country skiers. In summer it is a sailors delight.

In all seasons, the story of our nautical heritage must be handed down to future generations.