

# C.H.J. SNIDER

## 1879 - 1971 "The Skipper"

By Robert B. Townsend

This biography has been produced to give an insight into the genius of one of Canada's great sailors, with over *seventy years practical sailing on the Great Lakes*, marine artist, historian, and most prolific marine writers. In modern times he would have been made an officer of the Order of Canada and have received many other notable awards. In his own day he had the respect and admiration of all who knew him, sailors in Ontario and beyond, and the thousands of dedicated regular readers of his weekly newspaper columns.

Charles Henry Jeremy Snider was a fifth generation Canadian. The Snider family were Palatines who left Hanover in 1742 for Holland, the American Colonies. eventually settling in Pennsylvania. The family migrated with the United Empire Loyalist wave, trekking northward in a two-year wagon journey, and reached Vaughan Township, York County, Ontario in 1797.

C.H.J. Snider, known to his many close friends simply as Jerry Snider, was born May 26th 1879 at Sherwood, a hamlet near Maple Ontario.

At the age of five he pestered his elders to draw him pictures of vessels. Before he was six he was aware they were wrong. He came to the conclusion that "ships", vessels, were hard to draw from imagination. He studied pictures of them in books and tried to draw from them. He learned from pictures of vessels what was right and what was wrong. Throughout his life he continued to study vessels, admiring their beauty of form, of line, of colour, and of motion; expression of character; such wealth of associated ideas.

He attended Klienburg Public School. He was 10 years old when he journeyed to Weston Ontario (now part of Toronto) to write his High School Entrance examinations, which he passed with honours. He had one term at the Auditorium of Art, predecessor of the Ontario College of Art, which was then situated at the corner of Queen and James Streets in Toronto, later the site of Eatons Store. He graduated from Toronto Collegiate Institute (ex Old Grammar School and now Jarvis Collegiate Institute), in 1896 with the highest marks in French of any matriculate in Ontario.

While still a junior in high school he "descended the lower reaches of Jarvis St. still stopped by the stench of the open sewer mouth at the bottom of that stately thoroughfare", where he observed the *Barque Swallow* an old schooner being used as a stonehooker out of Port Credit.

*"Are you going to Port Credit sir?"*

asked the knee panted junior.

*"Kin you steer?"* replied the captain.

*"Yes"*

*"If I take ye to the Credit how'll ye git back?"*

*"Shanks Mare and the radial,"*

(referring to the electric railway that at that time ran from Long Branch to the Toronto city limits at Sunnyside) answered the thirteen year old. He made the trip at the helm of the schooner while the Captain did all the heavy work, usually done by the crew who had, it turned out, deserted him for a local tavern. And so started Snider's love of the sea.

*"I began sailing in 1891, in the timber drogher Albacore of St. Catharines. We were in the Ontario coal trade."*

In boyhood, starting in 1891, he "sailed before the mast" in the lake schooners *Albacore*, *Vienna*, *Loretta Rooney*, *Oliver Mowatt*, *Antelope*, rising to the rank of Mate aboard the *Stuart H. Dunn*, and made acquaintance with many other vessels, the people who sailed them, their stories, which he recorded in his photographic mind, and the ports into which they sailed. At first he was "before the mast" as crew, but in his later voyages he was a certified first mate. In partnership with his brother Roy he was the owner of the *White Wings*, then a stonehooker out of Port Credit, the first of two stonehookers owned by the Snider Brothers.

His first shore job was in the employ of McCrae and McCrae of Melinda Street, Toronto, delivering a flyer "bargains" to Parkdale residents. He also filled the role of telephone messenger. At that time there were only about 3000 telephones in all of Toronto.

Snider drew a sketch of the *Barque Swallow*, (the name of the Schooner rigged stonehooker) and before he got his senior metric had sold it to John Ross Robertson, MP, founder of the Evening Telegram of Toronto, along with an illustrated article on the ancient landmark of the stonehooker fleet. This was the start of his voyage through the broad ocean of newspaper life, which saw him become City Editor, Managing Editor, and, as a trustee of the John Ross Robertson Estate, a Publisher of the Toronto Evening Telegram.

In 1893 he saw and sketched replicas of Columbus' discovery vessels, the *Nina*, *Pinta* and *Santa Maria* which had been built, outfitted and sent as a gift from the Queen of Spain to the World's Fair in Chicago. These three vessels sailed from Spain without benefit of auxiliary engines. When snider sketched them they were laid up for a few days at the Royal Canadian Yacht Clubs basin off Toronto Island.

He loved and gloried in the serious racing of sailing yachts, and he wrote, sketched, painted and talked about them.

It was in 1896 that Amelius Jarvis, long time commodore of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, Toronto, skippered *Canada* in an international race off Toledo Ohio, U.S.A., for what has since been called the *Canada's* Cup. That event started Snider's coverage of thrilling sailing events.

In 1897 he joined the staff of the Toronto Evening Telegram as a police reporter. He was special correspondent for the Telegram in Britain from 1915 and was at the first disarmament conference of 1921. He travelled for the paper in Palestine and the Mediterranean and the Orkney Islands in 1928, in German in 1923, in Iceland and Spitzbergen, Russia and Northern Europe in 1928, and as a special correspondent in Britain, Germany, Poland and Danzig during the Easter crisis in 1939, and in England and France, Ireland Europe. {Palastine, Spitzbergen Palastine, and the West Indies during both world wars. He attended the Washington Disarmament Conference, and the United Nations organization in San Francisco, and every important international sailing contest in North America after 1898.

He became a personal friend of Captain Angus Walters, of the fishing Schooner *Bluenose*, and participated as crew and as an official observer in many of those famous races.

As he climbed up the rungs of the old Toronto Telegram newspaper from cub police reporter to City Hall and City Desk, he covered, on the side, every yacht race and every marine event he possibly could, and illustrated his own books and articles of men and ships and the shoals and storms that wrecked them. His spare time was spent talking to the owners, skippers and crew of the many schooners, stonehookers and other vessels of the great lakes, as well as their families. His encyclopedic mind acquired a knowledge of the maritime heritage of his adopted City of Toronto and of the Great Lakes, that was to make him an outstanding historian of the Great Lakes, and the men and ships that sailed them, and of the Province of Ontario. His extensive research into the conflicts between the British, French, Indians, and the war of 1812, particularly the from a maritime perspective, is beyond comparison.

In 1911, after much research, he dived deep into the murky depths of the Nottawasaga River and located the remains of the *Nancy* which had been burned and sunk during the War of 1812 without ever firing a shot for Canada. Later he was instrumental in having the original *Nancy* raised, restored and placed for all to see to this day at Nottawasaga. An exact four-foot model he had made of her, complete in every detail even to her guns, is encased in splendor at the Marine Museum of Upper Canada of Toronto.

In his day he was an outstanding marine archeologist. Because of his intelligence, knowledge of vessels, his experience and his extensive research, he was called upon as a consultant in identifying wrecks by all levels of government.

In 1948 Snider reported "Forty years ago we started to seek remnants of those honorable sailing vessels which fought on either side in the war of 1812 on the Great Lakes. A harmless folly of extreme youth, with the emphasis of extreme. To date we have found a dozen of the two hundred ships, brigs, sloops and gunboats that took part in that conflict."

In his early days he published books based on his extensive research. In the year 1912 saw "In the Wake of the Eighteen Twelvers" published, the first of a series of historic novels, written in his own wonderful style, lavishly illustrated by himself, about marine action in the War of 1812. In due course followed "Faded Flags of Fadeless Fame" "The Glorious Shannon's Old Blue Duster" (both in 1923), "The Story of the Nancy and other 1812ers" (in 1927). "Under the Red Jack" (in 1928). "The War Log of the Nancy", and "Tarry Breeks and Velvet Garters" and "The *Lucky Penney*, Privateer" (in 1929), "The Flag and How to Fly it" reprinted 12 times, (in 1931), The Annals of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, 1852 - 1837. and 100 Years Royal, published in 1954.

His many articles on sailing and sailing related matters were published, not only in the Toronto Evening Telegram, but in such prestigious publications as Yachting, Rudder, Lakeland, and Fore-and-aft, Colliers, Macleans, Canadian, Willison's, Queen's Quarterly, Canadian History review and special contributions to the London Times.

In addition he did extensive research in all manner of nautical history, delving into the records at Ottawa, Greenwich and London England and Paris France. He prepared transcripts, never published, on such subjects as "The Canadian Privateers", "The Provincial Marine" and about the lives of many important mariners of Canada, French, English and Canadian. He translated many lengthy French documents and diaries into English.

His extensive research (in France) located Rene LaForces nine day diary of the battle of Niagara, 1759. His translation and interpretation of this diary is a scholarly masterpiece, and is now at the Archives of Canada.

In 1908 he married Mary Adelaide Dawson, first woman telegraph operator on *The Telegram*, Following her death. in 1932, he continued to reside in the Parkside Avenue, Toronto, home they had shared since their marriage. They had no children.

Snider's dedication as a marine researcher of the schooners of the Great Lakes started in his early youth. He made notes of the schooners he saw in Toronto harbour and elsewhere, made sketches of most of them, and talked extensively to their crews.

His search for the remains of the 1812 American man-of-war *Sylph*, probably the worlds largest schooner in her time, measuring 340 tons. was spread over many years and was typical of his dedication to accuracy.

As well he was involved in numerous marine archaeological surveys, including extensive analyses of wrecks thought to be remnants of LaSalles' *Griffon* and the early French-English fleets of the Seven Years War. He also located and surveyed the remains of the French Vessels, *L'Iroquoise*, and the *L'Outaouaise*, the *HMS St. Lawrence*, and many other significant Great Lakes vessels.

His archaeological studies and writings (unpublished) were extended to personally seeking out and studying Dolmens and Cromlechs (akin to Stonehenge) throughout Britain, France, and Spain. While in his 80s, he was attempting to trace the survivors of the Spanish Armada.

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The extent of his research into the nautical history of Canada, including the Great Lakes, is, to put it mildly, mind boggling. He has left, unpublished, many transcripts of books, including "The Provincial Marine"; "Canada's Privateers"; "First Canadian Commodore" Rene Hypolite Pepin LaForce; "A journal of the seven years war"; several detailed biographies of naval officers and lake seamen who have made a major contribution to the history of Canada and the Great Lakes; shipping lists with personal comments on hundreds of the sailing vessels named there in. He translated many lengthy French documents, from French to English, including diaries of French naval officers of the seven years war

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Having been blinded in one eye, he did not serve in the armed forces during World War I or World War II, but he did stints as a war correspondent and made a significant contribution to the war effort of Canada. In World War I he started a special "Watch Fire" edition of the Telegram at 10 p.m. each night to keep Torontonians up to date on the ebb and flow of the overseas action. During W.W. II he was a War Correspondent in Britain, taking a stint as an air raid warden. In one series of articles he describes a transatlantic crossing in a "banana boat" in December of 1941, during the worst of the battle of the Atlantic.

He was the founder and leading promoter of the British War Victims Fund, a highly successful venture supported by the people of Ontario which won the hearts of the British People.

He crossed the ocean 17 times, including being the only Canadian on board the lighter-than-air dirigible R100 on her 57 hour journey from Canada to England in August 1930. He sailed the length of the Great lakes at one time or another, in Winter and in Summer, in both Steam and Sail.

He personally owned eight sailing vessels from the *Blue Peter* to the *Kingarvie*. He raced and cruised thousands of miles in every kind of sailing craft from dinghies to Banks fishermen and three masted schooners, and that included his active participation as crew and on board observer in a dozen hard-fought contests aboard the champion Nova Scotia Schooner *Bluenose*, as well as winning four successive season championships in the Toronto area as owner of the *Gardenia*.

Snider was a member of three prestigious yacht clubs, the Royal Canadian, the National and the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron