

# G. HERRICK DUGGAN

Excerpt from *Who was Canada's Greatest Yachtsman*

By Robert B. Townsend

His sailing career started when three little Toronto boys drove the pigs out of a pond up Yonge street, north of Toronto, so that they could have a regatta for their own-made toy boats. They were all under 10. The oldest was "Milly" Jarvis, the youngest rejoiced in his nickname "Old George" Evans, because he was eight. And "Heck" Duggan was the other.

The three little boys sailed together and against one another for three-score years and almost for the other ten; and each by long and short tacks but ever steering straight and true made his contribution to the greatness of Canada. Herrick Duggan lived the longest. He was killed in a traffic accident in Quebec in his 85th year, in a genial afternoon's drive for thanksgiving leaves. He had done his full share to glorify Canada.

In August 1879, a big east blow lathered the lake with white and tawny breakers. On the third day of the blow, Herrick Duggan, seventeen, and his chum, Gordon Bedford, eighteen, tried to beat out to sea with *The Lugger*. Herrick was already "master and owner" for he had acquired the old 20-foot clinker-built lifeboat of the steamer *Cumberland*, decked her forward and put a 14 inch false keel on her, and masts and two lug sails and had been sailing her for two years.

To beat out through the breakers required a smart piece of seamanship but the boys succeeded. Once over the bar the waves were not so wild, and they made good progress against them and worked a mile out into the lake.

When they turned to come back young Bedford took the tiller for the home run. A treacherous sea tripped *The Lugger* and rolled her over. Both boys were spilled into the water. Bedford stayed to hand on to the upturned boat, Herrick Duggan swam on, and on and on. The next thing he knew men were chafing his limbs and rolling him in blankets. "Bedfords on the boat, get him!" he gasped.

Bedford and *The Lugger* were no more, in spite of Duggan's heroic effort to get help. Herrick had swum for hours, lost consciousness from exhaustion, and been found by the fishermen on the beach.

This brush with death did not keep Duggan from sailing, for the lure of sailing was ingrained in his soul. From babyhood Herrick had been able to see the billowing sails of schooners crowding Toronto Harbour. His bedroom window in the select west end residential section on Front street adjoining the then Parliament Buildings of Ontario had given him an overview of the bustling waterfront. Waterfront boat building shops were a strong attraction from old Upper Canada College - two blocks north of the Parliament House - when he was entered there to become a "young gentleman. Sails, sails, sails filled his mind. So he did not turn his back on wild, untameable Lake Ontario after the above sorry sailing event. He rigged another lugger from another converted lifeboat; studied designing as practised by the Esplanade boat builders like

Hodson, Aykroyd, Noverre, Warren. He found a patron in Captain J. G. Murray, the government engineer who was blowing up old wrecks around the harbour; and that winter financed by him, made a contract with Alex Cuthbert, then of Trenton, the rip roaring lake captain who audaciously built the *Countess of Dufferin* and the *Atalanta* for the *America's* Cup.

The contract was to build a 32-foot trunk centreboard yawl from Herrick Duggan's design for \$200 for the hull, sails extra. The hull was in the water by the time Easter holidays arrived at old Upper Canada. Herrick and a school chum went by train to Trenton and took the little treasure down the ice-filled Bay of Quinte to Kingston with snow on her deck. Here they completed her necessary outfitting hired a schooner sailor, and started west in April 1880, with only one day of the precious holidays remaining and Toronto 180 sailing miles away. At Point Traverse, at the end of the Upper Gap, fourteen newly fitted-out schooners were riding windbound by the westerly gale. Unable to go farther, the tiny *Escape* anchored inside them under the Little Red Onion as the old light at Point Traverse was called. At night the wind came fair, and the schooners one by one got away. The *Escape* was anchored so close in the Point that with the wind shift they had to fend off the rocks with a pole until daylight showed them the way out.

The wind was blowing from the east now, and the farther they went, the higher were the seas - but they made a great run, close reefed. Off Scarborough three following seas struck her in succession swamping her dinghy and tore it adrift. She broached to, rolling down on her beam ends and almost swamping, through the cabin companion slide being open. At about this same moment the 3-masted schooner *Northman*, foundered and was lost with all hands off Port Credit. But the *Escape*, well named, righted. They furled the reefed mainsail and mizzen, bailed her out with a bucket and she staggered on.

They got around Gibraltar Point of Toronto Island, and raced down the submerged Western Sandbar, setting the reefed mizzen, and hauled up for the hardest half mile of all, the beat in to harbour through the Western Gap. The first tack the jibsheets parted, and the sail flogged itself to ribbons. All they could do now was to anchor in the partial lee of the old Queen's Wharf and here they hung all night in the bitter cold, wet, foodless, and without means of reaching shore.

So Herrick Duggan was late for term. Hon. G.R.R. Cockburn, then headmaster at Upper Canada college, talked rustication expulsion, or some such nonsense for this serious affront of discipline.. Herrick kept his hot temper under control, apologized most civilly and saved his "year" and the threatened disgrace. It became apparent that this experience on the open lake off Toronto harbour in his early sailing career gave him the incentive to study boat design. His boyhood haunting of the boatbuilding shops bore fruit. While still a student at Upper Canada College he designed several other small boats and was admitted as a junior member of the Royal Canadian yacht Club,

The *Cygnets* was a large heavily spared centre-board yacht owned by Hugh C. Dennis of Cobourg. Herrick Duggan and George Evans sailed the *Cygnets* one or two seasons for Mr. Dennis, but kept the *Escape* until 1884 when Herrick had to go west on surveys and construction work. "Old George" was then one of her purchasers, along with F.A. Turner. Herrick was an artist in many

senses - bridges, marine architecture and water colours - and his pictures were so prized by Mr. Dennis that he had them copied by photography.

It has been said that when the *Escape* was built the rules of the Royal Canadian yacht Club forbade yachts of the fleet getting under way on the Sabbath. No such bylaw can be found, but in Victorian regard for respectability, Sunday sailing was looked upon with disapproval. The *Escape*, returning from a cruise one Sunday at the end of her first year sighted the *Ella*, centreboard sloop, capsized off Port Credit. Ten men were clinging to the upturned Hull. Herrick Duggan picked them up and brought them to the yacht club, rescuers and rescued alike drenched and bedraggled. Their unseemly appearance shocked the starched shirts, who had the honorary secretary-treasurer, Col. H.J. Grasett, afterwards Chief Constable of Toronto send Herrick Duggan a letter which was much resented - and also much regretted. The indignant Escapists held a meeting in Hodson's Boat House, then at the foot of Simcoe street, and formed the Toronto Yacht Club of which Herrick Duggan was its first Captain. Its purpose as recorded in its act of incorporation, was "to encourage yacht racing." Its sailors realized the necessity of promoting small boat sailing.

It was a live organization of young and active sailors and flourished for nine seasons by which time the original rancour had died out and a happy amalgamation with the Royal Canadian was effected.

**\*The idea of an association of yacht clubs on Lake Ontario was conceived by Duggan, while still an active member of the Toronto Yacht Club. Duggan, the originator of the idea of the Canadian Yachting association, and it's prime organizer, together with two other members of the club, O. F. Evans and W. H. Parsons, brought the matter of an association to the notice of meeting of January 5 1884. Thus was formed the Canadian Yachting association<sup>1</sup>**

When Upper Canada College lost a "young gentleman",\* **upon his graduation in 1883.** Canada gained a great engineer. In the sixty years following the escape from being a "young gentleman" - futile for he lived and died a great and very gallant gentleman - he satisfied his soul with sailing.

**He sought admission to the new School of Practical Science of the University of Toronto, plunged into engineering, and bridged the continent with steel, and the ocean with ships. The threatened reject of Upper Canada College became a D.Sc. of Toronto University and an honorary LL.D. of both Queens and McGill, for building the giant Quebec City bridge**

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<sup>1</sup>Reporting this meeting the TORONTO GLOBE of January 7th says, "At the Toronto Yacht Club meeting the formation of a Canadian Yachting Association was discussed, and it was felt that other clubs might think The Toronto Yacht Club forward in taking the initiative." In spite of this modesty, the club appointed Messrs. Duggan, Evans, Parsons and William Dickson, the club secretary, as a committee to write to all the Canadian clubs, the object being "to bring members and yachts of all the Canadian clubs together once a year for mutual enjoyment and for the discussion of matters of interest to the yachtsmen of the country generally."

**when all others failed. He was chief engineer of the St. Lawrence Bridge Co. and planned and constructed the steel superstructure which united the two high shores of the broad St. Lawrence where the racing river is 180 feet deep. He also became president and director of Dominion Bridge Company and a score of heavy industries and financial concerns. In that famous photograph of Mr. Smith driving the last spike in the Canadian Pacific Trans-Canada railway, Herrick Duggan is standing beside Mr. Smith. In the winter months, during World War Two, when in his eighties, he supervised both in the draughting room and in the frozen shipyard below Montreal, the construction of a fleet of large freighters to replace those sunk by German Submarines.**

After arriving in Montreal in 1884 he joined a group of sailing enthusiasts, leading them including the said Donald Smith, in the organization of the St. Lawrence Yacht Club (later named the Royal St. Lawrence Yacht Club) Montreal, in 1888, and was its charter vice-commodore. He assumed the post of commodore on the death of founding commodore within the year, and was again Commodore for the years 1889 and 1890. He was honorary commodore of the Royal St. Lawrence Yacht Club from 1914 to 1926. A building on the RSLYC property was erected "*with the hope that the junior members of this club and the junior squadron will be imbued with G.H. Duggan's spirit and his sportsmanship also with his great ability as a racing skipper and a yacht designer in addition to his many other fine qualities.*"

In the early years of that club much time was spent discussing measurement, shifting versus fixed ballast and waterline. Duggan was the leader in those discussions. He maintained that by rounding the forward lines which automatically cut off the forefoot he could save several feet in measured waterline. In 1896 he designed a 19 foot boat which, while equal in corrected length of the older boats, was very much longer vessel with fifty percent more deck. This meant more power to carry sail, or what was a more important change, he planned a hull which slid over the water instead of cutting through it. His application of scientific calculation and ingenious radial treatment led to many novel experiments in yacht design in the 1890's.

In Montreal, he built a little yacht, smaller than the *Escape*, called the *Valda*. He was out in her on Lake St. Louis in a heavy August thundersquall, which tore through the fleet and capsized many craft, including the sloop *Black Eagle*, flagship of Commodore Levin of the Royal St. Lawrence Yacht Club. Herrick Duggan had only one man to help him, but he brought his own craft through in safety and worked like a Trojan in the squall, sailing around upturned or sunken boats and saving the drowning. Commodore Levin perished, but Herrick Duggan saved several members of his crew and twelve lives in all. For this he received the Royal Human Society's medal.

In 1902 he moved to Nova Scotia where he became Commodore of the Royal Cape Breton Yacht Club for three years. Following his return to Montreal in 1910 he was very much involved in the establishment of the "R" boats as a prominent racing class in Canada, particularly on Lake St. Louis and Lake Ontario.

Probably his greatest success as an amateur designer and sailor was in the many successes he had

in international competition.

For the purpose of promoting interest in small yachts the Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club of New York donated an International Challenge Cup for yachts from 15 feet to 25 feet corrected length under its then rule of measurement, known as the *Seawanhaka Rule*. *L.W.L. plus the square root of the sail area divided by two*. The First match was sailed in 1895 when the Minima Yacht Club of England challenged with *Spruce IV*, the defender being *Ethylwyn*, designed by W.P Stephens. The cup was retained by the Seawanhaka Yacht Club.

At the time there was not about Montreal one professional yacht designer or sailmaker. Pride forbade the purchase of wire, cordage and fittings from the then only source of supply, the United States.

The Royal St. Lawrence Yacht Club entered a challenge, using the fifteen foot rule class, for the 1896 race, and built eighteen boats for the race. It was said that over thirty boats were specially built in the United States for the race, many of which were from the boards of leading designers. In the race it was the selected challenger, Herrick Duggan's gunter rigged *Glencairn*, (actually owned by Commodore J. Ross) Canadian built at the pattern shop of Duggan's company, Dominion Bridge Co., by it's Canadian crew, with 100% Canadian material and fittings, against *El Hierie* designed by Clinton H. Crane.

The rating formula dictated the longer the water line, the less the sail area, and visa versa. The Americans tended to maximize the water line (15 feet) and only 220 square feet of sail. Duggan gambled on a scant 12'6" of water line and 300 square feet of sail, "a most audacious amount for a crew of two."

With all their presumed handicaps, Duggan and his crew Shearwood and the stout *Glencairn* stunned the Americans by making a rout of the first race with a margin of 47 minutes 11 seconds. The defenders never recovered from the shock. *Glencairn* captured the next two races with ease and the Cup going to the Royal St. Lawrence Yacht Club. The cup now belonged to the Canadians.

The results of this race were the basis of the report in *Rudder*. In writing about Mr. Duggan, Mr. Day, the famous editor of *Rudder Magazine* wrote in the August 1896 issue "*For the first time an American yacht has met defeat such as cannot be explained away. A more decisive victory than that achieved by (G.Herrick Duggan's) Glencairn has seldom been registered in the annals of yacht racing. On every point of sailing the Canadian craft was the boat - reaching, running, and going to windward, and she easily sailed away from El Hierie.*"

Mr. Day went on to say in *Rudder* "*If the Crane yacht had been just one boat, the significance of the victory would be less marked, but she is practically twenty-seven; and twenty-seven for whose bringing out all the talent of the eastern seaboard was laid under contribution. Men, who have some reason for believing that they are designers, engaged in building that fleet. It was one head*

*against twenty. That is what makes Mr. Duggan's feat remarkable."*

It was recorded that the most expensive boat was *El Hierie*, but there was not a better built boat - as far as essentials and good workmanship and finish are concerned - than *Glencairn*.

That first race was not without its humour, as recorded in the RSLYC's centennial book, attributed to Duggan's lieutenant, Fred P. Shearwood.

"A few days before the races at Oyster Bay, Duggan and I were sailing *Glencairn* and an American boat, one of the unsuccessful contenders for the honour of defending the Cup, came up behind us. She looked so beautiful that I said to Duggan 'kill our boat speed so that the American can pass us and I'll get a picture of her', which I did. When we got ashore, we hauled the boat out and scrubbed the bottom, having no paid hands to help us. After this, I was pretty tired and went up to the clubhouse veranda where I soon fell asleep. As I awaked I heard two men talking near me. One said 'I'm going to New York and bet every cent I've got on *El Hierie* (the American defender) . I was out sailing today and I went past that Canadian boat as if she were standing still."

"This posed a difficult question in sporting ethics for me. Of course, I didn't want the chap to lose his money and, on the other hand, I didn't want to give away the fact that, at the time, we had killed *Glencairn's* speed, and she was very much faster than he thought. While I was trying to decide on the right thing to do, I went to sleep again, and when I woke up they had gone, and my difficulty was solved".

The publicity of that first race was phenomenal. The celebrations were equally phenomenal. "For sixteen miles the shore of the lake (St. Louis) was illuminated, by thousands of Chinese lanterns and scores of bonfires, rockets, fire balloons and roman candles, hundreds and hundreds of people came by train."

Very shortly after victory by *Glencairn* the Seawanhaka Club challenged in the 20 foot class in the year 1897. The sleeping Giant had been aroused.

The minutes of the RSLYC November 26, 1896 reveal a clear outline of Duggan's position.

*"He dwelt on our having caught our American cousins napping, they probably not realising any chance of defeat from unpresuming Canadian yachtsmen with amateur designs of local reputation to rely upon. This would not be the case in the next contest....being assured we ere opponents worthy of their best efforts, they would leave nothing undone to reverse their defeat 1896 but endeavour, with all their renowned yachting skill to recover the coveted trophy which we are the proud holders".*

Herrick Duggan, *Glencairn II* easily defeated the challenger *Momo* of the Seawanhaka Club.

The Seawanhaka Club again challenged in the 20 foot class in 1898. This time Duggan and the Royal St. Lawrence Club built four potential defenders, Three of the *Glencairn II* type, and the *Dominion*. All designed by Duggan. The *Dominion* was chosen to defend. It was of an unusual design. The centre of the floor was raised to reduce frictional surface when inclined. When the boat took sufficient inclination to raise the weather bilge out of the water, she was sailing on a semicircular bottom to which all the displacement had been transferred, so that her waterline, for which the measurement was 17 feet 6 inches, was in sailing position about 27 feet. The extreme features of her design however raised a great controversy but it was finally decided that she was a legitimate product of the Rules. *Dominion* was later described as a "Real freak scow, that was so speedy she was (much later, long after the race was over) ruled against."

The American challenger was also a freak. Designer Clinton F. Crane's *Seawanhaka* sacrificing everything in the hull for lightness. *Seawanhaka* bent so much out of shape during the trials that she had to be replaced by *Challenger* of the same design, which was estimated to have had lifespan of only six races.

In fact the 1899 Seawanhaka Cup race reverted to the more conventional *Glencairn II* type, and Duggan's *Glencairn III* defeated *Constance* of the Seawanhaka Club. In that same year the White Bear Club of the Minnesota Lakes challenged *Dominion* to a race on Lake St. Louis. The Challenger *Yankee* was an out and out scow, but was not able to defeat Duggan's *Dominion*.

Duggan and the Royal St. Lawrence successfully defended the Seawanhaka Cup against all challengers in 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, with Duggan as skipper and designer, and in 1902, 1903 and 1904 in Duggan-Shearwood designed boats..

W.P. Stephens, a much respected American designer and a contemporary, wrote about G. Herrick Duggan, "I believe that all credit for the scow type (of racing vessels) and for the full exposition and promulgation of its principle of design is due to Mr. Duggan".

Duggan helped form the Lake Yacht Racing Association of Lake Ontario in 1884, now the second oldest yacht racing association in North America (after the *America's Cup*), that did so much in the early years to foster small boat sailing.

Herrick Duggan was welcomed with an honorary life membership in the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, for his brilliant victories in the Seawanhaka Cup contests, his eminence as a designer, and his several life-saving exploits, including the one which brought the Toronto Yacht Club into being.

Duggan designed many vessels, but it is thought by some that his 123rd design, a 65' long luxury auxiliary ketch, *Kingarvie*, built by him at Port Hawkesbury, Nova scotia was his greatest accomplishment. In 1937 Mr. Duggan cruised the Great Lakes in *Kingarvie*.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the name of Duggan, and the boats he designed, *Glencairn, Dominion, Trident, and others* were as familiar as names of Hockey Players of today. He thought that there was nothing that anyone could do that a Canadian could not do as well or perhaps a little better. In his own professional career and particularly in his sailboat racing career this confidence was justified by the events.

One of his many cruising friends, C.H.J. Snider, purchased *Kingarvie* in 1940, and sailed her on the lakes until 1952.