



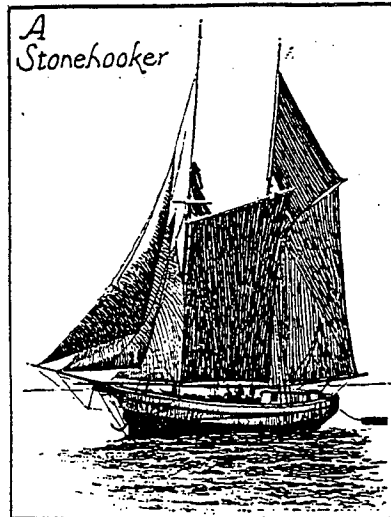


## A STONEHOOKER . . .

by Bob Stephenson

From 1850 to 1900, fleets of "Hookers" were owned and operated on a family, or partnership basis throughout the Great Lakes. Due to the hazardous nature of the work, these small Schooners could only work during relatively calm lake conditions. During windy periods they were often seen wind-bound in North-shore harbours and shore-ponds, waiting out even moderate blows from the South East.

Anchoring a Hooker close to a boulder strewn reef the crew would pole or row a flat bottomed scow into the reef shallows. When the bottom was visible from the surface, a 2 pronged "stone-rake" was lowered into the water and manipulated under a fair sized boulder. The boulder would then be winched to the surface and manhandled into the scow. When loaded to capacity, the scow would return to deeper water to the Schooner and the "hard-heads" lifted into the larger vessels open hold.



This back-breaking task continued until the Schooner had a full cargo of stone. Then, usually with very little free-board, and with the scow in tow...also full of rocks...the Schooner would sail to a village or town where a dock was being repaired, or harbour constructed. The Hooker would pull alongside the new construction work and the boulders would be lifted, shoved and dropped into the massive wooden cribbings used in dock, pier and breakwater construction in those days.

Many proud and independent Schooner Captains were forced into this lowly stone-hooking trade. Hard pressed financially, as new means of transportation were being developed, the Schooner owners found themselves helping to build new piers and deeper harbours for their competition...the Steam-Ship trade!

Several factors brought an end to the days of the Stone-Hookers. With the development of new techniques in concrete dock construction, wooden cribbing became obsolete. During the era of the Hookers thousands of tons of stones were scooped out of Lake Ontario for the paving of Toronto streets and side-walks, but with a public demand for smoother road surfaces, the demand for beach cobble-stones dropped off.

## THE HELEN . . .

As a result of the hard work, and far-sightedness of her Captain and owner, the Schooner HELEN survived the changing times long after other Hookers had disappeared from the Great Lakes. The HELEN was built, c.1870, at a small ship yard near Long Point, Lake Erie, and first given the rather unromantic name J.J.PUGSLEY, by her original owners. She was acquired by Captain John Goldring...age 31...in 1872. John was the elder

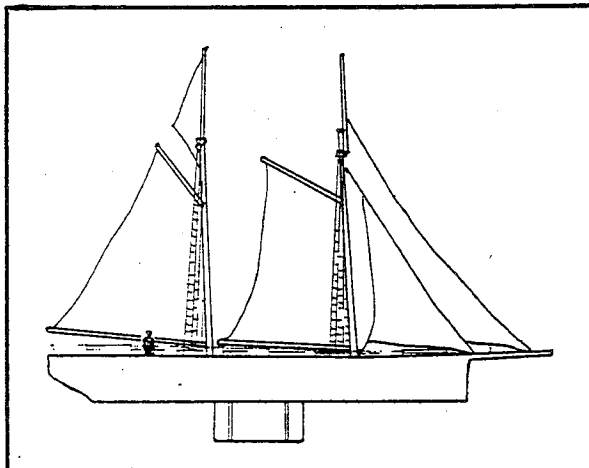
half-brother of Captain Richard Goldring, who owned and operated a fleet of sailing vessels out of Port Whitby, between 1890 and 1911.

The *J.J.PUGSLEY* was a typical Great Lakes tow-barge. She was of sturdy build, with a flat bottomed, broad beam, and seven foot clearance in her hold.

Bob Stephenson suggests that the bulky lines of the little vessel were of little credit to the ship-designers art. However, to the young John Goldring, who acquired her after years of thrift and hard work, on sailing ships on the Great Lakes, she represented a chance for an independent way of life.

At the opening of the 1872 shipping season Goldring had the *PUGSLEY* towed down Lake Erie, and through the Erie Canal into Lake Ontario. The vessel was then drydocked for re-building and re-fitting. It is said that Captain Goldring actually stepped the two 60 foot masts, and converted the 70 foot tow-barge into a gaff rigged Schooner by himself.

For operating in shallow water, and in small grain ports along the North Shore, the Captain installed a unique "side pivoting centre-board." This large "board," was hinged to the ship's keel, and held by chains fastened to each side of the hull, in a vertical position when the ship was sailing. The center-board was massive. It was iron-bound. It was 18 feet



A scale drawing of the Schooner *HELEN*, from a photograph, showing the massive "side-pivoting centre-board" which looks small on the 70 ft ship.

long, and hung 8 feet down under the boat; it was 4 inches thick at the top and tapered to 2 inches at the bottom. With a deck mounted hand-winch, Goldring could pull the board up to Port or to Starboard, giving the vessel eight additional feet of clearance. This allowed the Captain to work from the *HELEN* in shallow water, rather than having to use the smaller scow, and by using the boom from the mast, extended over the end of the boat, he could lift huge boulders using a block and tackle arrangement. With this system, and with the *HELEN*'s deck removed, Captian John Goldring had one of the most efficient "Stone Hooking" operations in the Great Lakes.

At a later date the *HELEN* became the first Schooner on the Great Lakes to have a gasoline auxiliary engine. C.H.J.Snider writing in "Schooner Days," in the *EVENING TELEGRAM*, in 1943, suggested that the Captain's "internal combustion engine... was as far in the future as the flying machine."

With her engine and a 22 inch cast iron propeller, the *HELEN* could operate during the "becalmed" conditions that stopped

other Schooners. During stormy lake conditions, Goldring could manoeuvre his boat into harbours and docks, while other "Hookers" anchored off-shore waiting for the wind to drop. Her versatility guaranteed the HELEN's survival long after others of her kind had disappeared, and C.H.J.Snyder credits the vessel with the distinction of being the last "Stone-Hooker" to operate on the Great Lakes.

### THE SEARCH . . .

Bob Stephenson was a pioneer of scuba diving. Arriving in Canada just after World War II, he worked at Duplate Canada Ltd, and in his spare time became an expert on marine archaeology. He even built himself a small but fascinating Sea Shanty Museum on the Oshawa waterfront.

Capt Bob Stephenson became interested in the HELEN in 1954. At that time, the vessel's shallow water location seemed like an "unlikely diving target." One could imagine the old ship, lying in about 12 feet of water on a boulder strewn clay bank, torn apart by shifting ice, with her timbers scattered by 30 years of storms and wave action. Her fittings and hardware would be buried under tons of sand, since over the years, shore erosion has dramatically altered lake-front contours in that area. Another challenge...a comment on modern times...the Oshawa sewage outfall, close to the wreck, would guarantee a prolific growth of algae in the area during summer months. It was anticipated that this would conceal wreck site objects from the archaeological diver.

As Bob Stephenson saw it, spring would be the most opportune time to start a survey, and preferably during a period of off-shore winds when clear water from deeper parts of the lake are brought to the shoreline. A massive, legendary boulder, sitting on Darlington shoal, about 300 yards from shore would be the focal point of the search. In 1964, when diving in this area, in 18 feet of water, Bob could sit and rest on this boulder with all his upper body out of the water.

At the base of the boulder bits and pieces of marine hardware are found...parts of present day motorboats as well as fittings from old steam vessels. A long trail of heavy items was located by Bob, leading into deeper water in a South Westerly direction. There were splicing thimbles, iron spikes, stud-link chain, and one piece of iron on which was an encouraging message...the one word "SUCCESS."

Month after month, Bob Stephenson searched the area. Years passed...and he found he had spent 200 hours underwater. Finally one day a length of wire was located on the bottom, again leading to the South West. It crossed a channel that was 10 feet wide and about 6 feet deep. Wallowing under 3 feet of algae Bob found a small "Belaying Pin"...a wooden "Sheave"...several large unidentified fittings...and finally the wire led through a collection of "mast hoops" and other rigging parts to the edge of a 20 ft drop. And peering into the dark water below Bob could see a number of massive timbers pointing up through the green gloom. The HELEN!

During the first few dives on the wreck-site, several finds seemed to confirm that this was Captain Goldring's boat. The massive iron bound centre-board; the cast-iron propeller; part of a clay pipe...knowing that the Captain was a clay pipe smoker. Later other items were found including the rudder which still bore the marks of the square iron spikes that Goldring hammered in between the rudder and the steering flange, in the midst of the storm, as he tried to save his ship.

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ONTARIO REFORMER, Thursday, Sept 29 1921 - In a few days the last of the Schooner HELEN will have past out of sight. All that can be seen is a small portion of the masts protruding above the surface. The engine has been recovered and taken to Newcastle in a scow by CAPTAIN GOLDRING.  
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In 1921 the ORONO NEWS went to press once a week on Thursday. On Wednesday the 20th, as the Oshawa Recorder told its readers that, "only a small part" of the HELEN was still above water, the type setter at the NEWS was preparing a poem for the next day's paper. The first verse started with:

September days --September days --  
An' autumn fields are callin'  
O'er woods there hangs a purple haze  
An' acorns are a falln'

One wonders if Captain Goldring thought much about the distant purple haze as worked his way along past Bowmanville and into Port Newcastle.

There was never any mention of the HELEN in the ORONO NEWS. There were other local events to think about. The ORONO NEWS tells us that on the Saturday that John Goldring arrived home, "An important event in the life of the village took place...on Saturday afternoon...when the first sod in connection with the new Community Hall donated by the Massey people, was turned. Two bright young scions of the family, Lionel and Hart Massey, had the honour. Speeches were made by Mr Vincent Massey, Mr A.A.Colwell, Thos Montagues and others. The proceedings opened with a prayer by the Rev.J.E.Fenning. Reeve George P.Rickard presided. The attendance fell short of what might be anticipated."

One might wonder why Captain John Goldring would be bringing stones from Toronto to his home village. Why "Carry Stones To Newcastle?" Maybe they were for the new Community Hall! More about the HELEN, and the Captain, in another newsletter.

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