

Launching of "Queen Mary" Recalls Days of Ship-Building

One of Greatest of Early Ships Was the "Marco Polo," Launched in Saint John in 1850—
Other Old-Time Vessels.

AT THIS time considerable interest is being aroused in ships and shipping by the new super-mammoth liner "Queen Mary," which will soon make her appearance on this side of the Atlantic on her maiden voyage. There is something about a super ship which seems always to awaken an intense interest in things of the sea. It was so in the golden era of the sailing ship.

One of the greatest of these early ships was the "Marco Polo" launched from shipyards in Saint John, New Brunswick, in 1850, and considered the fastest ship afloat in her early days, being a forerunner of the famous clipper ship era. She was a three decker of 1,600 tons, 184.1 feet in length, and designed for the East India trade. Her dimensions were such that it was decided to await the spring tide before launching. Unable to check her rapid movement when she was sliding down the ways, the Marco Polo ran aground in the mud on the opposite side of the creek and then heeled over. Two weeks later she was hauled off slightly hogged but not otherwise damaged. Her maiden voyage was from Saint John to Liverpool, on May 31, 1851, with a cargo made up of timber and scrap iron. Records indicate she made the trip in 15 days and then returned to Mobile, Alabama, for a cargo of cotton, arriving back in Liverpool after a passage of 35 days. From there she went into the Australian trade carrying immigrants from England and made the voyage out from Liverpool in 76 days, like time being made around The Horn on her return which earned for her on her arrival in Liverpool the title of the fastest ship in the world. After roaming the seven seas, the Marco Polo came back to Canada to lay her bones on her native soil, being wrecked on the beach at Cavendish, Prince Edward Island, in August, 1883, when carrying a load of timber from Quebec. Some relics of the Marco Polo are preserved in the New Brunswick Museum in her native city.

Many other fine ships followed the Marco Polo from Saint John shipyards, the White Star Line contracting for four from these yards of six to be built in the Province, to carry mails from England to Australia. They were the Ben Nevis, White Star, Mermaid and Shalimar. The White Star was claimed to be the largest merchant ship afloat at that time, being 284 feet in length on deck.

Nova Scotia also contributed some fine ships in the days of sail. One of the strangest mysteries of the sea concerns a Nova Scotia built vessel, the Marie Celeste. Built at Spencer's Island and launched in 1860, she eventually became the property of a United States firm. It was in the year 1871 that she sailed on her fateful voyage, the mystery surrounding which has never been satisfactorily cleared up throughout the years that have intervened and which has been the theme of many stories. On November 1 in that year the Marie Celeste sailed from Boston with a cargo containing a large consignment of alcohol and was manned by a crew of mixed nationalities made up of sailors from the United States, Sweden, Germany, Great Britain and Canada. Of the latter there were only two, one from Nova Scotia and the other a native of Saint John, New Brunswick.

And now comes the strange part of her story. Just the other day there passed away at Rexton, New Brunswick, a retired sea cap-

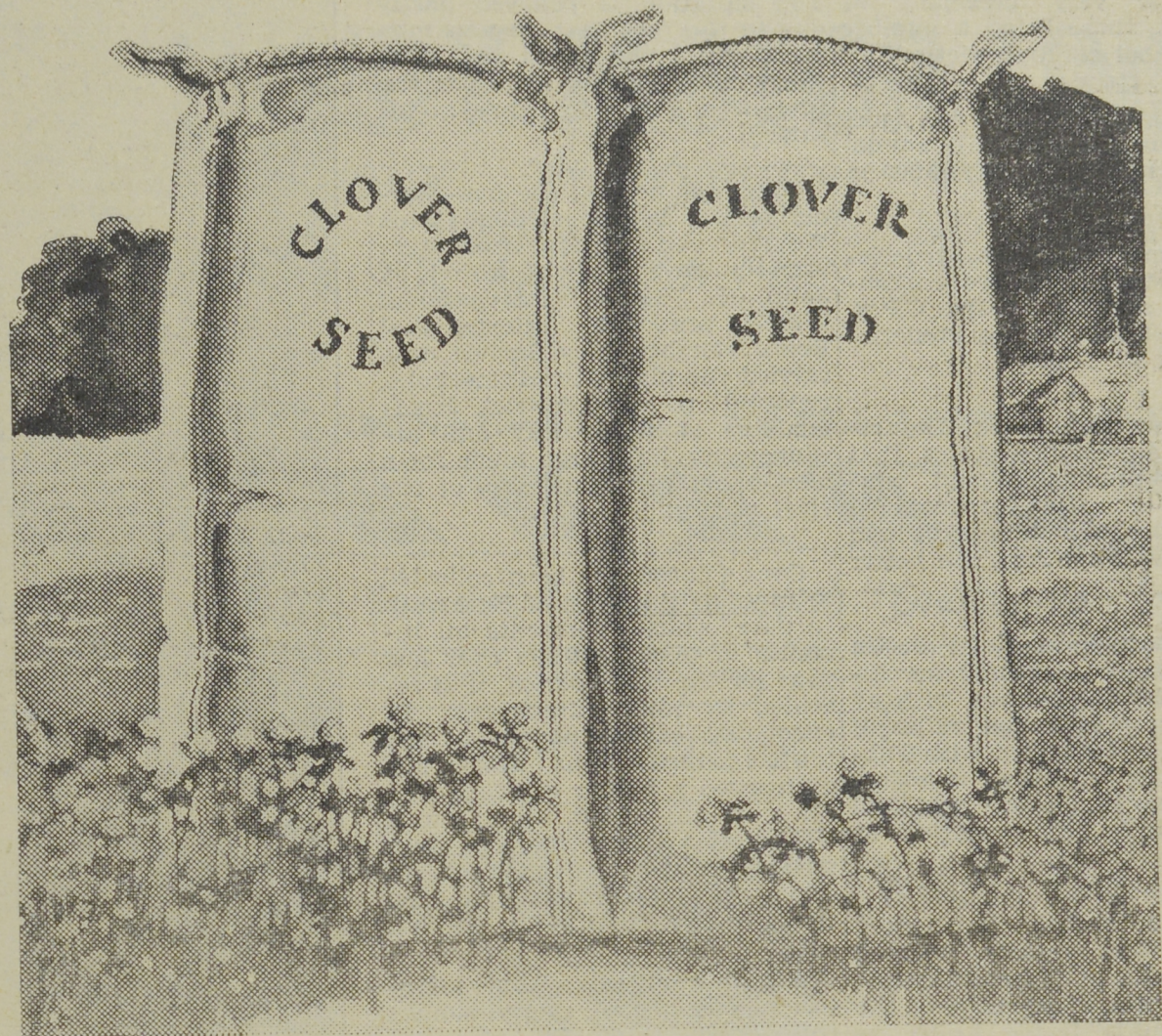
tain who was in his 87th year and who, at the time, was a member of the crew of the British barque Dei Gratia. While the Dei Gratia was sailing on the high seas in a light breeze, the mate sighted a brigantine with the Stars and Stripes at her peak and all sails set. There was an uncanny appearance about the ship, however, which was heading up and falling off to the wind without, apparently, anyone at the helm, so the master of the Dei Gratia decided to investigate her. Coming up alongside, the crew made her out as the Marie Celeste but not a soul appeared in sight. Mooring the Dei Gratia alongside, the whole crew boarded the Marie Celeste but not a single person could be found. The lifeboats were in their proper places and embers still smoked in the galley stove. In the fore-castle was a table on which rested plates of food and cups filled with tea which was still warm, showing the vessel had been only recently abandoned. In the cabin, a dress which the captain's wife had been making for her daughter lay on the sewing machine. The navigating instruments and log were found in the cabin. Not a thing seemed to be missing except the captain, his wife and child, who were known to have accompanied him, and the crew. The pumps were tried and the ship was found to be staunch. On the deck the crew of the Dei Gratia found a stained broken cutlass with silver trimming and red tassels, lying on top of a hatch. The sword was long and tapering such as those once used by French and English duellists but what part it played in the apparent tragedy has never been found out. The master of the Dei Gratia detailed half of his crew to sail the Marie Celeste into Gibraltar and when the Dei Gratia reached New York, each member of the crew received \$700 as salvage money. The sword remained in the possession of the retired sea captain of Rexton and his family now retains it as an heirloom.

Prince Edward Island also contributed her quota of sailing ships as did likewise Quebec, Eastern Canada having made a name for itself for the many fine ships that came from those shipyards. During the War old-time shipwrights again picked up their tools to construct sailing ships to augment the fleets which carried munitions across the ocean.

Today, where once the frames of sailing ships rose from the stocks in Saint John, a huge drydock, one of the largest in the world, and steel shipbuilding plant is located, and likewise in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is a large drydock and plant for building steel ships. Another large drydock and shipbuilding plant is located at Quebec.

Wooden shipbuilding is still carried on in Eastern Canada, particularly in Nova Scotia. Along the southwestern shore of the Province where the line of the Canadian National Railways threads in and out of the various picturesque fishing towns and villages, following along the coast for its entire length, and particularly at Lunenburg and Shelburne, one can see fishing schooners being constructed, while Shelburne has also contributed some fine yachts. That the present-day shipwrights have not lost the art of their forebears who turned out some remarkably fine and fast ships, the performance of the famous "Bluenose," international fishing schooner champion, which is a product of Lunenburg yards, and the yachts constructed by Shelburne builders testifies.

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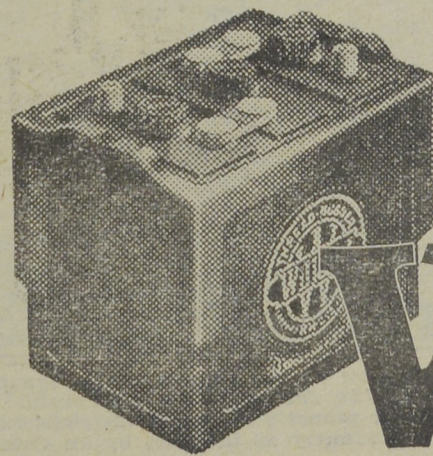
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