

## SAGAS OF THE EARLY DAYS.

# THE SEA-DOGS GO ASHORE

BY WINDSOR LANG.

**N**OT a few of these "sea-dogs" closed their well-served sea-calling only to perform further praiseworthy work ashore. One such was Captain George Richard Easton, who forsook the sea, and quitted the quarter-deck of the schooner "Margaret and Mary," in 1853, to become first pilot at Ballina, a post that he continued to occupy for several years—until the time of his retirement.

William Tudor Yeager, a young Canadian sailor, who had served in the "Margaret and Mary" under Captain Easton, left the sea in 1858 to begin a personal enterprise.

Purchasing from Mr. Thomas Ainsworth a 10-ton lugger that had been built at East Ballina for Mr. Henry Barnes, Mr. Yeager engaged himself in droghing supplies direct from the ships at Ballina to the squatters in the Casino and Lismore areas. He operated the craft by himself, using both sail and paddle, and working with the tide.

In due course he used larger craft, and engaged assistance. He extended his operations to employing some of his vessels in the timber-carrying trade between the Richmond and Sydney. A 15-ton cutter belonging to him, and fully-laden with return cargo for the river, became a total wreck when

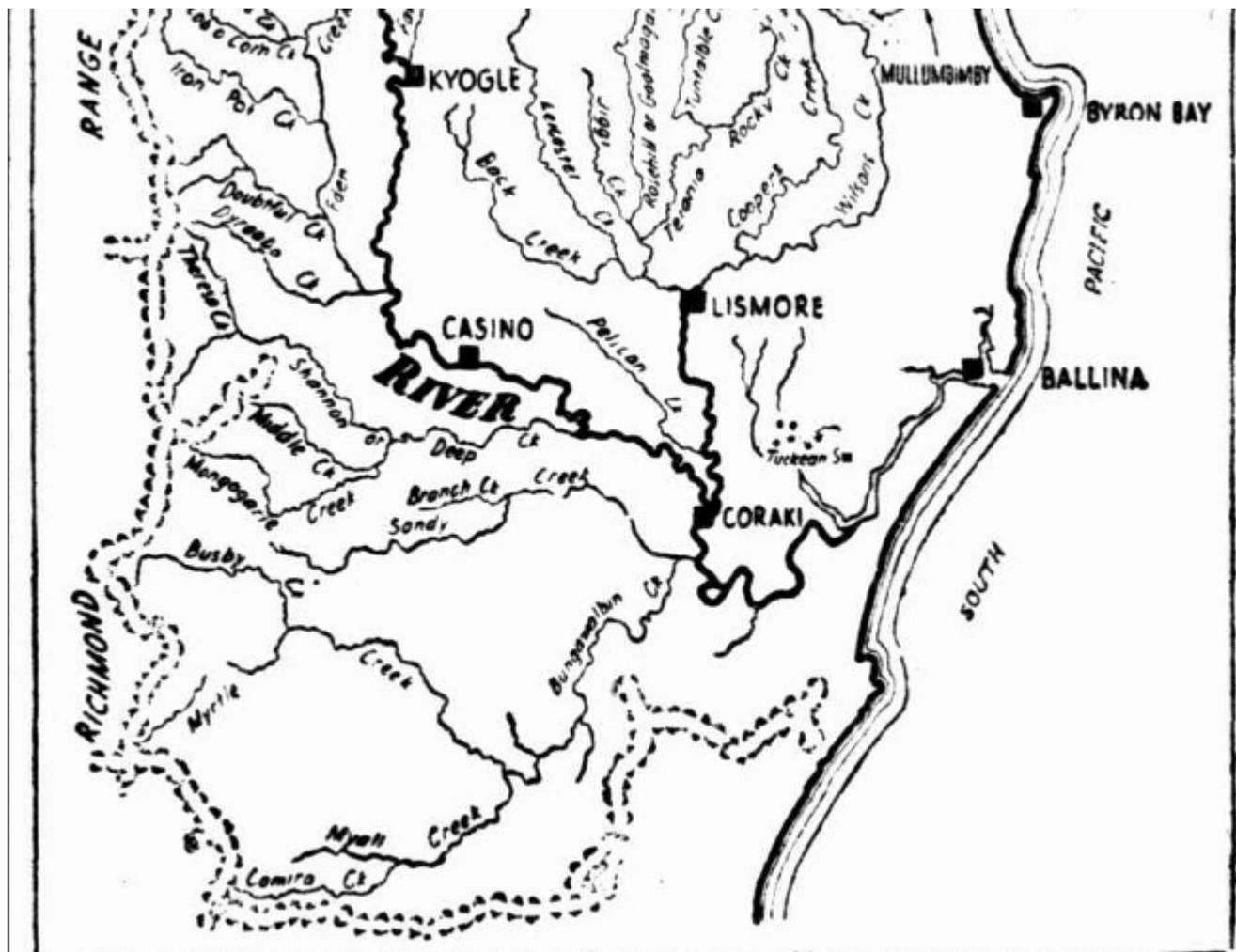
river, became a total wreck when crossing the bar. Undaunted by this disaster, he continued with other craft until eventually he had amassed a respectably-sized fleet comprised of both sailing ships and steamers—river-droghers, craft engaged in the coastal trade, and the tug-boat "Athletic" for service at the river crossing.

Amongst them were such vessels as "Triton," "Neptune," "Emu," "Amphitrite," "Vesta," and the later ocean-going steamers—"Wyoming," "Oakland" and "St. George."

In partnership with Mr. William Webster, he founded the Oakland timber-mills. These developed into extensive works, with roomy timber yards, and serviced by up-to-date machinery, blacksmith's shop, tramways, and other conveniences.

In the beginning, owing to channel limitations, the schooners discharged and loaded their cargoes at Shaw's Bay. Shortly afterwards an auxiliary depot was established at Mobbs' Bay. A larger and more protected stretch of water existed there for such an establishment. A few vessels such as the "Anna Maria" and "Louisa" were able to utilise this depot both as a discharging and a shipping base. In most cases, however, the cargo had to be rafted from there to Shaw's





previous instalment, "depression" conditions during the "forties" had obliged the squatters to slaughter their cattle, and boil them down for their tallow.

In 1845 skippers of the schooners returning with their cargoes of cedar made it known in Sydney shipping circles that a quantity of tallow was lying at Mobbs' Bay awaiting consignment to Sydney. This tallow had been rafted down

from Pelican Tree to Mobbs' Bay, there to await the arrival at Shaw's Bay of any vessel prepared

Shaw's Bay of any vessel prepared to lift the freight. When that time arrived the tallow would have to be rafted over to Shaw's Bay and loaded on to the vessel.

Two skippers—Captain Thomas Ainsworth of the "Matilda Ann" and Captain John Skennar of the "Urara," set out from Sydney, at about the same time, in an en-

deavour to collect that cargo of tallow.

Arriving off the Richmond Heads, both found that weather conditions were unfavourable for the crossing of the bar. Thomas Ainsworth continued on to Byron Bay, where he anchored the schooner, rowed ashore, and set out on foot for the East Ballina settlement. On arrival there he was greeted triumphantly by John

Skennar, who had outwitted him and secured the cargo. Skennar had forestalled his arrival by anchoring off Evans Head, landing through the surf and footing it to Mobbs' Bay. As a result Ainsworth was subjected to plenty of good-natured chaff from the settlers whilst awaiting for a following shipment.

Down to the mid-60's, tallow from the stations and timber continued to comprise the main items of outward

cargoes. As the depth of the channel improved the craft were able to make their way up the river mainly by using the tide—the sailors providing additional motive power by manning rowing boats, and giving the craft a tow. In the 70's and 80's the river steam-tugboats gave this aid, sometimes having a string of two or three sailing vessels in tow. Right down to the "mid-80's" ships continued to render a service that was much appreciated by the settlers.

The passage of Sir John Robertson's Land Act of 1861 was responsible for a great influx of "selection before survey" settlers. From the 60's onward not only was the shipping service improved, but both the inward and the outward cargoes became more diversified. During the years, mishaps at the crossing had been frequent, and from the time when John Skennar's schooner "Urara" fell first victim to the treacherous bar, disaster to other vessels, both in-coming and out-going, followed disaster until the flanking beaches, and the shores of Shaw's Bay became literally littered with all manner of flotsam and jetsam from the wreckages.

As far as I can gather no attempt has been made to gather the names of the boats wrecked before 1856 into anything approaching a full list. I doubt if it could be now done. However carefully it were compiled so many

carefully it were compiled so many inward-bound had left Sydney for the Richmond practically without comment, and so many of the principals closely associated with the outward-bound vessels have passed on without leaving any records, that the list could not now be completed.

Even in those early days the fate of a vessel was often only hazily known. "Foundered at sea," or "Lost with all hands" became the newspaper presumption in each case where a boat had failed to report.

Under such circumstances the schooner "Australian League" (Captain Cambridge), had been posted "Missing" by the Maritime authorities in Sydney when she had become some weeks overdue, and had not been spoken of or sighted during that time.

However, three months after she

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had left Sydney for the Richmond, one afternoon she stole quietly and unexpectedly into view directly eastward of the Richmond entrance. Skipper Cambridge explained that shortly after leaving Sydney she had encountered a series of strong westerly gales and had been blown out to sea, hundreds of miles off her course, and, evidently, well off the regular trade routes. Eventually the "Australian League" was wrecked on North Head in 1857.

## North Head in 1857.

Not all of those early shipping mishaps ended in tragedy. Because of the winding, shallow, and narrow channel many a schooner was unwittingly grounded on one of the many sand-banks from which she was later drawn off by bullock team, or other traction, and re-floated on the deeper waters. A case in point was that of Mr. William Wilson's schooner in 1844. She was re-floated and taken into Mobbs' Bay. Although the

danger existed at all times of these schooners having their timbers strained, in many instances the most disturbing item in the whole incident was the vexatious delay at a time when delays were far too frequent from other causes.

In other cases a stranded vessel was in danger of having her "back broken" by the pounding from unfavourable seas. Even in that eventuality much of her cargo, although sustaining some damage, would be salvaged before the final "break up"—salvaged by men going out in relays, and manhandling the stock on to rafts, or, by part-wading and part-swimming, bringing it in themselves.

Mr. J. G. Snow, of Bangalow, has told me of bags of flour that were

told me of bags of flour that were thus salved. The bulk of the flour in the bag did not suffer so much as might be expected because the water had provided a temporary "sealer" by caking the outside layer.

**(To be continued.)**