

Under the Sea Grape Tree

BY WILL JOHNSON

Schooner Trade with New York

These days when most cargo comes in to the islands by container ship, it is difficult to imagine the schooner trade of former times. Up until the nineteen twenties, Saban schooners were transporting passengers and cargo to and from New York. And not only for Saba, but also for other islands in the Eastern Caribbean and as far away as Demerara. Some of our schooners were large three and even four masted and could carry substantial amounts of cargo.

There are websites on the internet which list trade with the port of New York such as the Ellis Island website. However, they deal mainly with immigrants going to the USA on large ships. I am still hopeful of finding a website with schooners from Saba listed. In my own research and in interviews with former captains for my book "Tales From My Grandmother's Pipe" I learned a lot about the trade with New York. I even have a photo of the schooner the "Esther Anita" in New York Harbour. In 1915 this schooner owned by Captain William

Benjamin Hassell made the trip from New York to Saba in a record nine days.

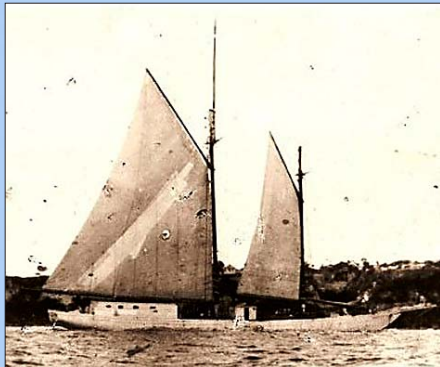
The late Capt. Irvin Holm (1891 - 1984) told me that as was the custom back then, he went to sea at the age of 13. His father had been killed by a falling rock while farming and he and his brother (later Captain Ralph Holm) were their mother's sole upkeep.

In 1906 he visited New York for the first time. He was the cabin boy on the schooner "Mary Love" belonging to Capt. W.B. Hassell. On that trip the schooner took 22 passengers from Saba, St.

This article I dedicate to my friend Sir Emile Gumbs, a man who appreciates what it means to be an old schooner man.



The Saban Schooner Esther Anita in the New York Harbour with the Brooklyn Bridge in the background, photo taken in 1915.



Captain Vanterpool's schooner The Mayflower.

Eustatius and St. Maarten.

On its return trip to Saba the "Mary Love" brought the lumber to build the home of Captain Ernest Alfred Johnson on Booby Hill. One hundred years later the home is still lived in and with all the hurricanes it has gone though it looks as if it was built yesterday.

On April 28th, 1896 the same schooner sailed from St. Kitts bound for New York and made it there in twelve days time.

In Captain E.A. Johnson's , Memoirs, "21 knot Johnson" he tells about his experience with Captain Ernest Vanterpool in New York. Freddie as he was called was

just a young boy at the time and had signed up with a clipper ship to go to India. His uncle, who was also sailing out of New York did not like the idea.

Here follows what Freddie tells about his experience with Captain Vanterpool in New York harbour on July 11th, 1901.

"My uncle, John Johnson, was in New York and he arranged with Captain Vanterpool (Ernest) to take me out to the West Indies on his two master schooner "Priscilla." This schooner was going to Barbados. He instructed the captain to send me home from there as

he thought I was too young to sail on a hard ship like the "Shenandoah."

Captain Vanterpool was from Saba and knew my parents well. He invited me on board his proud little schooner lying at Greenpoint, New York. He took me in his cabin with his brother Tommy Vanterpool. We set sail July 12th at 3:00pm with a crew of six men and only two to steer, Harold Simmons and myself for four hours each."

Captain Solomon Simmons ("Butchy Cooks") used to sail to New York already in 1876 and perhaps even before. He was Captain of the schooner the "Alice." By the

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way, "Butchy," a first cousin of my grandfather James Horton Simmons, had two families, one on Saba and the other in Jamaica. On his deathbed on Saba he instructed one of his sons from here, also a captain, to go to Montego Bay where he had a lovely Scottish wife with four children and take them to New York. Two of these children later married Saba captains as well.

I have a copy of a letter from Gustaf Ekerman dated May 25th, 1880, to his cousin Alfred Ekerman in Brooklyn, New York. Gustaf was married to Georgianna Simmons of Saba. He was a native of St. Barths and lived in a house on the property where the Saba Housing Foundation in The Bottom is now located.

The letter reads as follows:
Saba, 25 May 1880

"My dear cousin,

As Captain Solomon Simmons one of my best friends is to come today to take charge of the Brig "Alice." I embrace the chance to write you these few lines, hoping to find yourself and family well.

I gave him one of your cards so that he can find you. No doubt by this time Dodo is on "Magnus" and is yet with Capt. Scofield and Solo is mate of a schooner in St. Thomas. How can you give us some news of Clemence.

Do try and find out if he is dead or not and write me by the return of the Brig. The Captain will not refuse taking anything for me or for my family. He is a good man. You must treat him well. Also the mate James Hassell and the second mate Peter Simmons. They are all my friends. I am married to a young lady who is the first cousin of the Captain's wife.

"You must talk to Clem for me and let him know that his Mother is yet alive. Tell him for me. I pray every day that God will make him come home. He ought to be ashamed of himself. Remember me to Uncle John and his family. I am in Saba keeping a little school. Nothing much. Send me a little good smoking tobacco as we cannot get any good here and the Captain promised to bring me a pipe."

"There is not one word of mine to be written you. Write me by the return of the Brig and if Dodo is there tell him to go and see the captain and the mate. He must know them. Tell him the mate is Haddock's brother and he will know. Tell him we must write and if he has anything



The Schooner Phineas W Sprague. A 1910 New York Times article wrote of her when she was overdue. The Sprague came into port like a ghost of the sea. Torn sails, rigging carried away, and the scars left along her sides by the storm told the story of the fight she had made.

to send Mamma to give it to the captain and he will bring it safe. So I must now stop in hopes of soon hearing from you.

"Love to your wife and a kiss for the children Ekerman. Your true and affectionate cousin
Gustaf Ekerman"

The most remarkable story ever written about a trip by schooner was done by a semiliterate sailor Edward Beaks Hassell of Windwardside. This is taken from the manuscript by Mr. Kenneth Bolles "Caribbean Interlude" of 1931. We present it as written. In order to retain its unique flavour, despite the grammatical errors, I am sure that our readers will enjoy his story as he wrote it.

He made the trip to New York in 1876. He wrote it in

was the "ALICE" and she was in St. Kitts loading with sugar and molasses. The Captain and the Mate and myself was white, the sailors black all of them and the cook from Barbados waiting on the ship he was Mulatta.

"When we get to St. Kitts the first thing that took attention, was the blacks loading the ship. They was eating sugar all day. I suppose each fellow eat 25 pounds of sugar. When you look at his feet they would weight about twenty five pounds. I told a fellow the sugar he ate drain down to his feet and give him molasses feet.

"We left there seven o'clock in the evening and went to the South to weather the fort bay if we could weather it, and the captain give the ship all sail.

"About half hour later the wind blew harder, and the cap-

I put on the high shelf where it would not get wet and I began to eat crackers and I eat crackers all night from St. Kitts to St. Martin.

"We got in St. Martin during the night. In the morning we told the captain he must look for somewhere for us to sleep that we could not wait until we get to America to sleep.

"Bout a week after we left St. Martin we was in the Gulf. A heavy storm came on. We put the ship under close and canvas. Night came on and it came worse. Five of us, was oblige to get on deck and when the high seas would strike they they would roar like thunder between the molasses puncheons.

"I prayed for soulless sleep. If I went I would not know how until I landed in Abraham gulf.

"Fourteen days we was

hulk about three miles long and two in height. The Pilate told us that the doctors living quarters was on her. He came on board. He had the look of a grim specter. After examining both crews he admitted us but we laid there until the next morning.

"The Pilate came on board early hoisted all sail on the ship with a good breeze on in favour of us we dock to number twenty eight East River two o'clock noon.

"Being Sunday the spirit of the day was all around. No sound of traffic to be heard, only four men sitting on the dock. Then I said it looked like eart was Heaven. Later on there came on board twenty boys from five to fifteen as far as one could guess to beg tobacco, around their mouths full of the juice of it.

"We give them plenty. We had bought it in St. Martin where it was cheap like tobacco. Their greed for it surprise us. Each one would take a big life role it into a big ball and put it in his mouth. They all look like they had a bad toothache and their face was swollen. They behaved very good around asking plenty questions, what is this, what is that, how do this work and how do that work and soon then they begun to spit the deckful. The mate said to hell with you. I'll let all of you remain half our longer it will take the whole of the ships crew to wash down her deck.

"That night a fellow came on board after eight o'clock with plenty brass buttons on. He said he work in the "HERALD" office. He told us that the "HERALD" had to sell papers for forty thousand dollars a day to cover her expense now.

"I ask the cook if I could give him some pudding and coffee. All he says is you don't want it if you like give him all of it. I brought one pan pudding and ask him if he would have some. He said yes, I never gets eny thing like this here. He ate the first pan. Can you eat more I said. He said yes and he ate all four pans that was intended for the supper and coffee of ten men.

"Then I said that is why you hear so often people of New York eat too much. We dident see him any more. After a long time I ask a fellow about him. He said that supper of pudding that fellate ate on board your ship made him air tight for a month.

"The next morning being Monday the ship began to unload. The unloaders were all Irish. Each fellow when he come to eat a bucket with about three gallons of oat meal

in it to put water on the oat meal and to drink during the day when they was thirsty. They would not drink ships water. They said the ships water from the West Indies was too thick for them. Then they ask me to go up in the street to the storm pipe as they call it for water to pur on the oat meal. I told them where in hell was I to find the storm pipe when I had been here in New York in my life.

"Later on I consent to go ashore in New York for the first time. I went with clothes on that I wore on the ship and barefooted. Being accustomed to wear no shoes I didnt mind the July hot sun. The soals of my feet was as thick as a Texas bull head, that is why I didnt mind sun. I went and found the storm pipe.

"On my way back I got into a thick of shoe blacks. Each one of them said to me; Say fellow when you comes back put on your shoes, we want a shine. I told them I was coming back after five when my work was done, then I would have on my shoes. After five that was done I was in decent clothes and put on my shoes as I want to go on Broadway.

"When I got to the head of the dock the crowd was waiting for me. They made a rush on me. One fellow said he want a shine, the other said he want one and the whole made a rush on my shoes. The shine the first put on the second made darker. From the rubbing of so many brushes on my shoes I found I was contracting bo leg. I push them off and give them a quarter. It was all I was worth. I thought it was the best way I could spend it.

"Then I went into Broadway. Being late there wasent many people and traffic must have slowed down. The Horse and Buggie moving along so slow on two occasions I was oblige to push them out of my way instead of me getting out of theirs.

"Then I though a fellow was safe in Broadway. Only a horse and buggie to be in your way and if they happened to get in your way you could push them out being too slow (1876). Now (1931) I hear Broadway compares to a battlefield.

"I left Broadway to make my way to the ship. Being late I hurried. When I got within hearing sound of the ship I heard singing. When I got on board I met a crowd of young men and girls jiggling Kenney doule keep

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Sailor Jim Simmons aboard the Schooner Sprague. He later became the harbourmaster of Santo Domingo.

1931. He died in his eighties in the late nineteen thirties.

"Fifty-five years past I was to America in the horse and buggy period and Yendy double was the topic of the time.

"I made my start there with a man from Saba, Capt. Solomon Simmons. The ship was a Dutch Brig. Her name

tain give orders slack nothing let her go. Soon I come sleepy, but could not get into the cabin it was full and the forecull had only room for the sailors, so I got to the gallery and sit on the stove. Then the cook's cracker pan began to wim. I picked it up and found it was full of crackers good and dry.

on the sea, then we gets into a thick lot of Pilate boats. I counted twenty-four of them. They began to dodge around us to get the first chance. The lucky twenty-six number on her main-sail was the early one in the morning. Five o'clock night we was in quarantine.

"I look a head and saw a big



Brenda's Corner



By Brenda Cary

Household Hints

- Fasten your bracelet without help by securing one end to your wrist with scotch tape and fasten the clasp with your other hand.
- To clean a candle holder, first put it into the freezer for about one hour and the wax is easier to remove.
- Restore the shine to gold jewelry by putting 1 teaspoon of dishwashing liquid and 4 drops of ammonia in a cup of warm water. Dip the dirty rings and bracelets into the solution and scrub gently with an old toothbrush. Rinse in warm water and rub dry.
- A tablespoon of cornstarch in 3 pints of water makes a good cleaner for windows. Squeeze out your cloth in the mixture and rub on to the windows.
- Moth-proof your drawers with dried orange peel.

Quick & Easy Recipe

Brownies

Ingredients

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ cup cocoa powder
- 3 eggs
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla essence
- Pinch of salt

Method

Combine butter and cocoa. In a separate bowl, beat eggs, sugar, vanilla and salt. Add to the other mixture and mix well. Then add the flour and baking powder. Pour into a greased pan and bake at 350° for 20 minutes. Cool and cut into squares.

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it up, yanky dougie dandy mind the music and the step and with the girls be happy.

"Then a number of boys would join hands and form a ring with one standing in the center of the ring. He would pick his match from the ring and begin to have boxing sport. Everyone around would like the sport of it."

"One day a shoemaker came aboard the ship and asks us if we had any shoes to be repaired. We went around and picks up quite a lot the sailors had left from one voice to another. Probably some might have been Noths that he threw overboard from the ark. We had quite a lot of them asking him to take two or three pair and make one pair."

"He must have thrown away the old ones and bought new ones on our expense. His bill surprised us, and a dispute started between us. He told me we had better pay the bill or he would put a lawyer. The Captain told us we had better pay the bill and we paid it. The End."

The writer married the widow of Dr. Nicolas Anshyn and is the one whom Carl Anshyn described as a lazy good for nothing. If

Bush had been around back then I would swear that "Baker," as he was called, had learned to write from him. Anyway it will come as a surprise to many today that there was a time when schooners from Saba sailed to New York on a monthly basis and traded with that port for the islands.

The New York Times of December 16th, 1910, carried the following story of a Saban schooner. The Captain was Peter Gosling Simmons and I have his father's family Bible here at home. The article reads as follows:

Schooner Phineas W. Sprague given up for Lost. Gets in after weeks of suffering. Skipper's niece aboard. Played with her dolls while the vessel was being tossed in West Indian waters.

"The long overdue schooner Phineas W. Sprague sailed through the Narrows yesterday morning and came to anchor off Staten Island on her way to Perth Amboy. J.A. Elliott of J.A. Elliott & Co., 50 South Street, agent of the vessel, who has always believed that she was safe, was on the floor of the Maritime Exchange when news of the arrival of the Sprague was written up on the board. He ran to the nearest telegraph office and sent a message to Mrs. Simmons, wife of the skipper, who was been ill in Brooklyn, and in-

formed her of the arrival of her husband.

"The Sprague came into port like a ghost of the sea. Torn sails, rigging carried away, and the seats lashed over her sides by the storm told the story of the fight she had made. A single can of meat and a few sea biscuits were the end of short rations. On board, Capt. P.G. Simmons and his crew united in giving thanks that they were again safe."

"The Sprague sailed from Baltimore for Paramaribo on July 31. She arrived there and sailed for Trinidad, where she took on a cargo of asphalt and on October 20 set sail for this port. Day after day went past and no tidings came from the vessel. Her agents scanned with alarm the record of storms which swept along the coast in October and devastated the West Indies.

"Mr. Elliott was confident that the vessel had been found a long way off her course and would come in. The skipper's wife lives in St. James Place, Brooklyn. She became ill with worry as to the fate of her missing husband. She was at the home of Capt. Huyler (Heyliger?), another Captain of the same line when word came that the Sprague had passed in Sandy Hook and signaled all well on board.

"The crew of the Sprague consists of the skipper and

Church News Bits

Pope's university visit cancelled

Following a letter of protest signed by 67 professors and demonstrations by students, Pope Benedict XVI cancelled a planned visit to Rome's Sapienza University. He was to speak at the opening of the academic year January 17. On January 14, students began a planned four days of protests against the papal lecture. Fifty occupied the rector's office January 15, the day the Vatican announced the pope's visit would be cancelled. Andrea Frova, a professor of physics, told the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale* that he and his colleagues were "offended that a pope hostile to science" was invited to give a major lecture at a formal university event. Frova cited Benedict's latest encyclical *Spe Salvi* (On Christian Hope) as setting science and faith in opposition. In *Spe Salvi*, Benedict wrote that the hope science offers humankind can be "deceptive." He wrote that science "can also destroy 'humankind' unless it is steered by forces that lie outside it."

Vatican debates Harry Potter

The Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* dedicated a full page in its January 14-15 issue to the debate about the novels by J.K. Rowling. The Italian translation of the last novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, was released in early January. Paolo Guisano, a physician and the author of a biography of J.R.R. Tolkien, said that the Harry Potter books counter the individualism of the modern age by making a hero of a boy "guided by moral values such as the choice of good, giving, sacrifice, friendship and love." The stories, he said, teach young people "without moralizing." But Edoardo Rialti, a professor of English literature at the University of Florence, said the books "communicate a vision of the world and of the human person that is full of profound errors and dangerous suggestions." He said the books teach that "evil is good" and that violence, lying, trickery and manipulation can be positive if used to obtain something good.



BY GERARD VAN VEEM

Vital seniors welcome

The Merrill, Wisconsin-based Holy Cross Sisters have dropped the age restriction that prevented women over 50 from being considered for entrance to the congregation. Sr. Celine Goessel, the provincial, said the decision was spurred by the vitality of their elderly sisters and the congregation's motto "The need of the times is the will of God." She said, "For us retirement has a very different meaning because there is always something that draws us to bring the good news to others, even at the age of 90."

his brother, who is his mate, and six men. Emily Hook, the skipper's fourteen year old niece, was on board. The log of the vessel is a record of some of the worst weather encountered along this coast in many a day.

Twice the Sprague was nearing Sandy Hook only to be caught in a northeast gale and sent whirling off to sea again with the sails whipped to ribbons.

"The vessel met with rough weather soon after leaving Trinidad. After some of his sails had been carried away, Capt. Simmons fled to the coast. He had a hard trip ahead of him and stopped at Saba Island. There he picked up three additional sailors. There came times in the days which followed when every man on board had to do more than a man's work. Capt. Simmons admitted yesterday that he had not put into Saba and shipped additional hands, the vessel with all hands would probably have been lost. In the long days when the schooner was battling with gales and swept by mountainous seas the skipper's niece proved to have great courage.

"She was a comfort to us all," the Captain said. "It was too stormy for the little girl to be on deck most of the time, but she had the cabin to herself, and there she played calmly with her dolls, even when the storms were at their worst."

"Leaving Saba, the Sprague fell in with gales which made it impossible to hoist more than a few

square yards of canvas, and time again the wind tore away the reef points and the canvas went leeward in fluttering shreds.

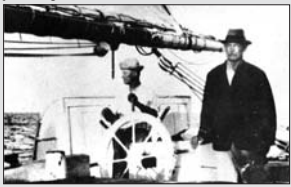
"On November 15, the Sprague was within 130 miles of Sandy Hook and Capt. Simmons had hopes of sighting a tug to take him into port. Instead a northwest gale veering to north struck him, and he was sent scudding to sea under bare poles. For days the crew battled with the elements in the effort to keep the vessel up before the wind. Waves broke over her bows and she was running a-wash most of the time. When the wind finally abated, the Sprague was off the Georgian Banks. On the day the wind let up a three masted schooner was sighted. She, too, had evidently been blown away from the coast and had little canvas to spare.

"The voyage back to Sandy Hook was a fight against the adverse winds nearly every knot of the way. On Thanksgiving Day the schooner was back off the Hook and proceeding under shortened

sail. Just down another gale swooped then on her from the northwest and again she was sent reeling out to sea. This time the passing of the storm left her some miles east of Bermuda.

"Again what little spread of canvas could be made was put up and the Sprague began to beat back towards Sandy Hook. Twice storms overtook her and left her miles off the course. Fortunately the Sprague's agents provision all their vessels for a month beyond the time required for a voyage. This saved the lives of the crew. Day by day the provisions diminished and two weeks ago all hands were put on short rations. Even these grew alarmingly small toward the end of the voyage.

"The battered vessel got inside Sandy Hook yesterday, just in time to escape the 60 mile gale of the early evening which would probably have sent her out to sea again. She came in minus all her sails, but the job."



Captain Ben and Thomas Hassell aboard the schooner "Maid Hassell"