THE HISTORY OF COBOURG HARBOUR

CAPTAIN DAN ROONEY

Left to Right: C.H.J. Snider; a friend of Mr. Snider; a friend of Murray B. Smith; Madeline Rooney; Captain Dan Rooney (Photo by Murray B. Smith, c1970)

One of Cobourg's most famous and colourful skippers was Captain Rooney or "Little Dan" as he was known in early years. This distinguished him from his Uncle Dan Rooney, the Harbour Master. Captain Rooney was born in Cobourg's Corktown in 1864. (Corktown was an Irish community west of D'Arcy Street and south of King Street.)

Little Dan came from a family of sailors and vessel owners plying out of Cobourg. When he was fifteen, he himself went sailing on the schooner *Hannah Butler* of Cobourg, and at the age of 21 he commanded his first schooner, the *Eliza Fisher.* In the years following, he was master of a number of famous old schooners including the *Annadale, Picton, Annie Falconer* and *Jesse Drummond.*

Little Dan was reputed to have accomplished many sailing feats including sailing two ships at once. How did he succeed in such an amazing task? Here's how:

The Richardsons, Kingston grain merchants, owned two schooners, the *Sophie J. Luff,* a three master of 253 tons, and the *Charlie Marshall*, another three master of 219 tons.

Little Dan made an agreement to buy the *Charlie Marshall* from them through a profit sharing scheme. He wanted the ship for his rapidly expanding coal business. The Richardsons entrusted the sailing of the *Luff* to Rooney alone. But Rooney wanted to sail the *Charlie Marshall*, so an agreement was made whereby the Captain would sail both vessels and receive two separate master's wages plus his share of the earnings from the *Charlie Marshall.*

Typically, Rooney would sail the *Charlie Marshall* from Cobourg to Oswego to load coal. While the coal was being loaded, he would travel by steamer to Kingston and sail the Luff with its cargo to Charlotte (Rochester). As the *Luff* was unloaded, he would take the train to Oswego, run the Charlie Marshall to Cobourg and catch the Grand Trunk ferry to Charlotte where the *Luff* waited. Rooney made such a profit for everyone concerned that he was able to force the Richardsons to sell him the remaining shares in the *Charlie Marshall.*

During World War II, Captain Rooney, who was now retired, was honoured by the Town by being asked to accompany *HMCS Cobourg* from Toronto to Cobourg. On May 24, 1944, amidst the flying of flags and cheering throngs of citizens, Rooney proudly piloted *HMCS Cobourg* into Cobourg Harbour – his last command!

Motor launch driven by Capt. Dan Rooney for owner Mr. Schoelmaker

The Jessie Drummond - 1864-1902
An ocean-going ship wrecked off Cobourg on December 2, 1902.
The crew was rescued by Harbour Master Dan Rooney.