

Wooden Ships And Iron Men

By "Chips"
W. R. Mitchell

Dedicated to those who went down to the Sea in Ships

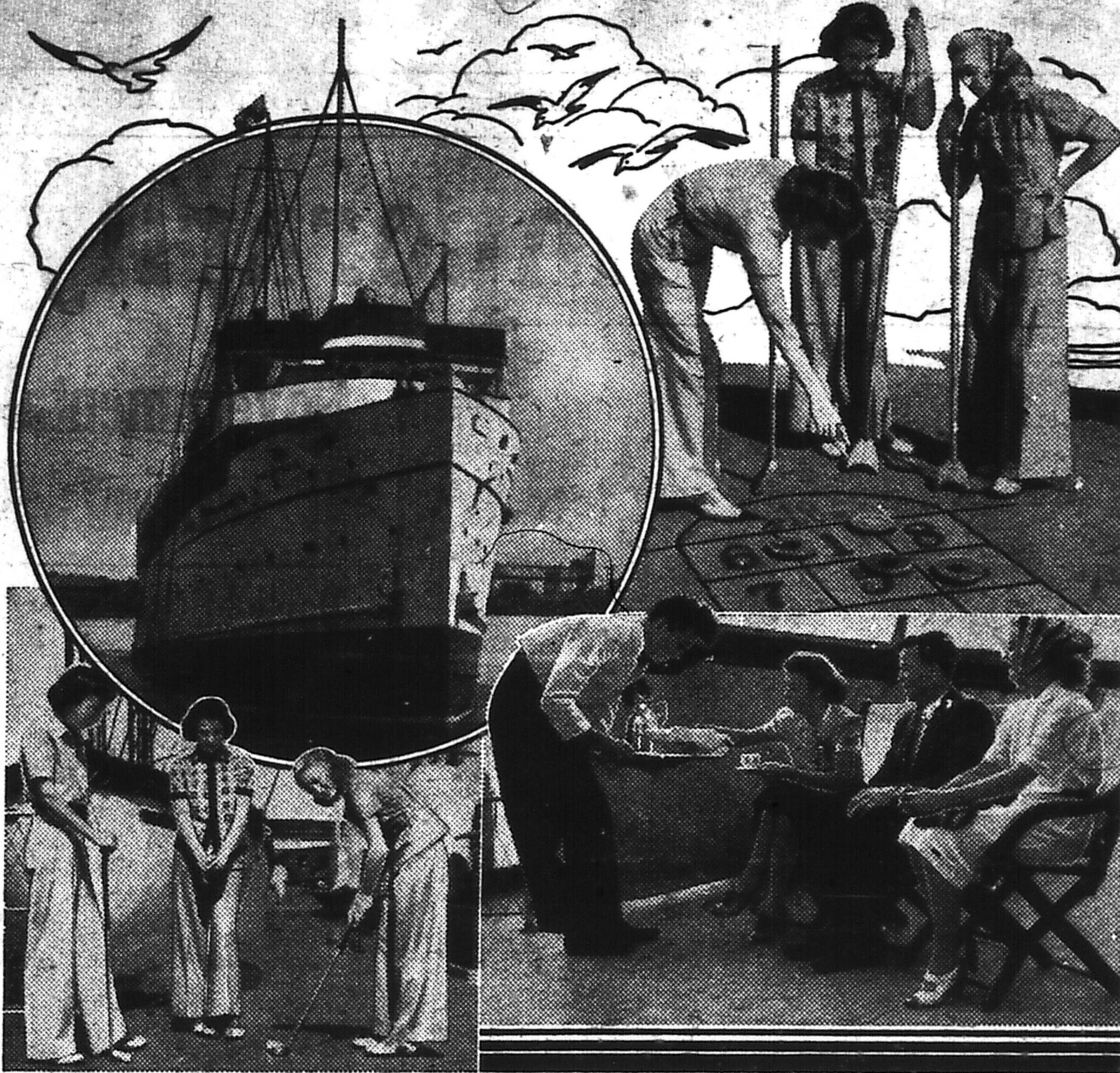
Having heard a great deal about the Great Lakes Navigation while living up here in Ontario, I have often wondered if the Great Lakes navigators ever can realize something of what the old time shellback of the windjammer days went through.

From the steamboat man with his clean, comfortable and steam heated quarters, steam heated pilot houses, his meals put before him by a uniformed waiter, and a menu card from which to select his favorite dishes, where the deck hands expect the same grub as the "Old Man", their high scale of wages, where a "deck hand" not a seaman, gets about \$45.00 a month, or about 8 or 9 pounds in English money, one hears of the bad weather, huge seas and ice conditions.

But what of the windjammer sailorman? This the story of a trip in the late nineties.

We were a full rigged ship of over 1800 tons, loaded to a five foot freeboard, bound to Port Pirie, S. Australia. The crew came

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A delightful break in the long trans-Canada rail journey and perfect summer cruises are combined in the services offered by the Canadian Pacific Great Lakes steamers. Two gleaming white ships, the "Assiniboia" and the "Keewatin" make convenient connections at Fort William and Port McNicoll, terminal points for their water journey of 542 enchanting miles, and cruises are operated especially for vacationists who like the charm of the vast inland seas.

These two fine passenger ships travel westbound on Wednesdays and Saturdays; eastbound on Saturdays and Tuesdays. The route of these "Circle Cruises,"

from June 15 to mid-September, is most interesting. Westbound from Port McNicoll, the ship glides through beautiful Georgian Bay, past Manitoulin Island, and into Lake Huron. It sails up St. Mary's River, through Sault Ste. Marie to Lake Superior, largest of the Great Lakes, to Fort William.

The schedules provide for popular week-end cruises from Sault Ste. Marie or either terminal point, half the length of the full cruise.

Other delightful five-day cruise trips are made by the spacious cruise ship "Manitoba," 303 feet long, 2,616 tons and of steel construction. These cruises from

July 1 to August 26 are from Owen Sound and Port McNicoll to Fort William but the route is via the North Inside Channel of Manitoulin Island and there is a special stop at Mackinac Island, rich in stories of early explorers and fur traders.

Shipboard activities on all these vessels are patterned on those of an ocean liner — morning bouillon, afternoon teas, midnight snacks, impromptu parties, masquerades, dances and moonlight promenades on deck. Pastimes include shuffle-board, deck quoits and other sports. The ships are equipped with spacious decks, cozy lounges and airy staterooms — the last word in luxurious comfort.

ward \$21.87; 10 A.B.'s at \$14.58 2 O.S. at \$9.72 and apprentices who got their grub (?) and bunks. Three of these apprentices were first coyagers and therefore too small and inexperienced to be of much use.

We were towed out of the crowd of shipping about 4 p.m. and got our departure off Lundy Island the following morning, which, by the way, was to be the last sight of land for us until sighting St. Paul's Island, twenty miles off, in the Southern Ocean, after three months at sea. We worked south against contrary winds until we picked up the North East Trades which carried us to the latitude of the Doldrums.

The running down of the N. E. Trades is the yachting period of the old windjammer voyages; days and nights of fair, fresh winds, when, should there be a fiddle, or even a mouth organ among the crew, a little music or dancing could be indulged in during the Dog Watches; or perhaps in one's watch below if fish were playing around the bows, one could rig up a hook covered with a bit of white rag and with a strong line, try for Bonito Albacore or Dolphins from the jibboom end, also Flying Fish would frequently strike some part of the rigging when flying over and drop on deck.

All these would be very welcome to vary the everlasting salt grub. In the Southern Ocean I once caught an Albatross and got it cooked. This bird, by the way, measured nine feet from tip to tip of its wings. Sharks were often caught, and to those of us with strong stomachs, shark steak would not come amiss. I remember, one fine moonlight night that seemed as bright as day, feeling something rubbing the ship's bottom, and after a while a large whale came up close to the side, so close that on blowing, the spray came on deck. This fellow stayed with us for about fifteen minutes close enough to jump on, had one been in the mind.

Well, we worked our way through the Doldrums, with the

wet; one turns into a wet, or at least damp, bunk and shivers through the watch below; one turns out when called and the work may, or may not make one warm, but not dry. There is no heat in the windjammer, except in the galley range, and even this is locked up for the night. Since, by this time grub is not so good, one is reduced to making shift with cracker hash, dog's body, dandy funk etc., all, by the way, just a variation of ship bread or biscuit. If there should be a good cook aboard he may warm this up, if not, one eats it cold, and is thankful for small mercies. Then there is the going aloft to handle the sails, when canvas, gasgets and running gear is stiff and wet; a man not hardened to it would have his fingers ends rubbed raw. Often the men would spend a whole watch aloft, hours on end, fighting refractory sails.

One day, after being at sea three months and seeing no land all that time, a hand was sent aloft with orders to look about twenty miles northerly for St. Paul's Island, merely to check up on the "Old Man's" reckoning. Then on again past the region of Cape Levin, here we met a real gale coming out of the Great Australian Bight. This drove us off to sea again until it moderated enough to enable us to make our landfall after 112 days at sea.

We unloaded our cargo of coke (which by the way, is done by the crew themselves) for the local smelter, took in ballast and sailed for Newcastle, N.S.W. We took the inside passage between the old Penal Settlement of King's Island (Botany Bay) then on through Bass Strait, around Cape Howe and so up to Newcastle. This pas-

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