



Stanley Johnson "The Sailor's Sailor"

Stanley Johnson was born to Rebecca Elizabeth Vlaun and John George Johnson on Saba on February 6th, 1890. At the age of fourteen he first set sail on various local schooners, traveling through the various West Indian Islands. He sailed with local captains including Knight Simmons, Benjamin Hassell, Thomas Vanterpool and Augustine Johnson.

In 1910 already he was sailing through the West Indies on the schooner the *Dreadnought* with Capt. Knight Simmons and Captain Tommy Vanterpool. Because Capt. Tommy was a wanted man in Cayenne for smuggling escaped prisoners from Devil's Island, when the schooner went there Captain Tommy remained in Barbados or elsewhere. In 1912 Stanley went to New York and sailed out on large schooners throughout the world. When I interviewed him he was 95 and could not remember any of the names of those first schooners he sailed on. He sailed with his first cousin Edward Johnson who in 1984 died at the age of 96 in New York. Ed-

ward was married to Lucille Hassell who was the aunt of Capt. Eddie Hassell of the Swinging Doors restaurant in Windwardside. On January 2nd, 1922 he married my Aunt Alice Eliza Simmons (19) daughter of James Horton Simmons and Agnes Johnson.

At the age of thirty-seven, Stanley sailed to the United States aboard the *SS Caracas* arriving at Ellis Island in New York on April 13th, 1927. Along with him on the steamship were six other men from Saba: Reuben Johnson (age 45), David O. Johnson (age 16), William Johnson (age 36), Moses Johnson (age 52), David Johnson (age 17) and Richard Johnson (age 45). The official Ellis Island Ship's Manifest indicates that all seven men listed their destination as 27 South Street, in lower Manhattan. This was the address of the Sabans' godfather for fifty years, Mr. Hyman Kalisky a Jewish merchant who was of Eastern European origin. He and his wife operated a boarding house and clothing store which was primarily used by sailors from Saba during their stays in New York. People on Saba even named their children Kalisky back then. Mr. Kalisky served the sail-

ors well, assisting them with employment on ships, collecting their pay and sending mail and money back home to the families the men had to leave on Saba. The Kalisky family embraced Stanley as if he were a member of the family.

AFTER ARRIVING in New York in 1927, Stanley was not to return to Saba until 1936. During those nine years he sailed for four years on the four master schooner the *Albert F. Paul*, with Captain Southard and his wife Ruby, who were like family to him. The *Albert F. Paul* sailed from Nova Scotia and the New England fishing grounds to the Gold Coast of Africa. The other schooners upon which Stanley sailed carried various goods and products as diverse as corned codfish from New Bedford, Massachusetts and potatoes from Long Island, to salted cowhides from Brazil. He traveled around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and the Horn of Africa while sailing for Moore-McCormack Lines and Kerr McGee. During these years he also sailed the inland waterways, particularly the Hudson, from the St. Lawrence Seaway to New York harbour. He sailed on the *Georgia*, the *Tennessee* and the *Mohawk*, carrying timber down the Hudson. After sailing inland for several years he returned to the sea, sailing out of Mobile, Alabama and New Orleans, Louisiana for the Waterman Steamship Company of Boston, Massachusetts.

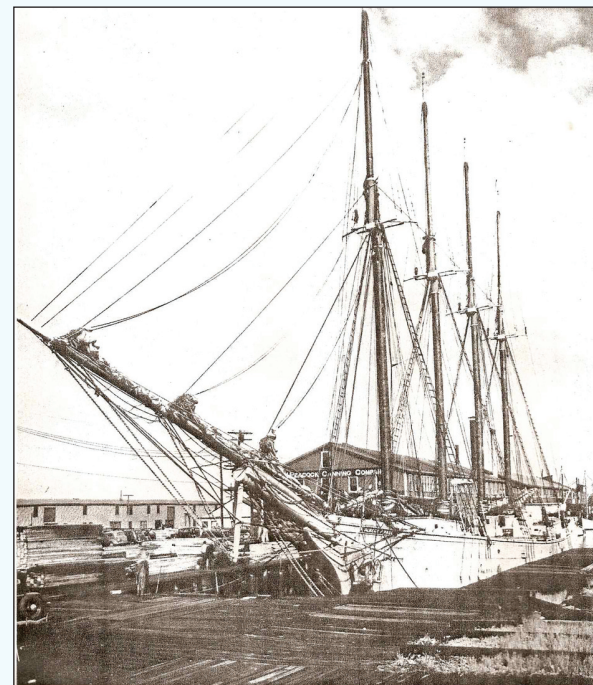
During this nine year period sailing out of New York, he, like many other Saba men, decided to become an

American citizen. On March 17, 1932, while still listing his residence as 27 South Street in New York he was sworn in as a United States citizen. His decision was based in large part because of the opportunities the United States had provided to him.

In 1936, he returned to Saba and sailed again on local schooners. He remained on Saba until shortly after the death of his beloved mother Rebecca, in 1938. He never had the opportunity to see his homeland again.

NOT LONG AFTER his return to the United States, World War II began. He sailed with the Seafarer's International Union as a Merchant Marine. As such he sailed on unarmed cargo ships in convoys to Europe and Russia, bringing aid and much needed supplies. I stayed at his home in Richmond Hill for two months in the winter of 1967 and I remember him telling me stories about how cold it was in Murmansk, Russia. If you made the mistake and held on to the rail your hand would stick to it.

During the war he frequently sailed on the *Robin Tuxford* under Captain Kenneth Chamberlain. Along with him on the *Robin Tuxford* was Stanley's first cousin, Edward Johnson, who served as Chief Engineer. The *Robin Tuxford* made numerous trips to Murmansk, Russia, one of the most northerly open water ports in Russia. Stanley also sailed on the *SS Graylock*, which was sunk off the coast of Murmansk in 1943. He and his shipmates were rescued by a British Corvette and brought to Glasgow, Scotland, where



Stanley Johnson's schooner

they remained for some months recovering from pneumonia. Stanley also had the unfortunate luck of having another ship torpedoed by a German U-boat off the New England Coast.

As a result of his service to the United States, Stanley was awarded four service medals, including two medals for service in the Atlantic War zone. The United States did not, however, issue these medals until decades after his service, because Merchant Marines were not traditionally recognized for their wartime service, since they were considered civilian. This oversight was corrected by the U.S. Government in the 1980's and these brave men received the honors they deserved.

STANLEY JOHNSON also

received a medal of honor from the Russian government for his service in the convoys which brought life saving necessities to the ports of Murmansk and Arch Angel during the war. He was honorably discharged from the United States Maritime Service on August 15, 1945.

During his fifty plus years at sea, Stanley sailed to the ports of Africa, Asia, Europe, South America and North America and was devoted to the sea. Upon his final retirement from the sea he lived out his remaining years in Richmond Hill, New York with his wife Alice, his children Bessie, Carl Lester and Arlene and his beloved grandchildren. He died peacefully at the age of 98 on April 7, 1988.



Stanley Johnson and family