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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### Man In Whale's Belly But It Wasn't Jonah

By NEIL A. MATHESON

A STORY in an old newspaper given me by my cousin Elizabeth MacLean, tells the story of a man who was swallowed by a whale who later was revived after being cut from the huge mammal's stomach.

Mrs. MacLean is from Breadalbane but she's living this winter at a motel in North River with her sister-in-law, Mrs. Donald McLure, also my cousin.

The story was found in an old Moncton newspaper found in the back of a large picture frame. It reminded me of the arguments I heard when I was a lad about the Biblical story of Jonah being swallowed by a whale, spending three days and three nights inside the whale's stomach, and then being spewed out on the ground, where Jonah survived.

I recall particularly a man holding forth with great emphasis one night. The Breadalbane man insisted that a whale could not swallow a man, for though a whale is a huge mammal, its "swallow", as he put it, is only small.

"I could choke a whale with my fist", he insisted to the man who was arguing against him. And now we have the story of a whale actually swallowing a man.

There are several things, though, which must be explained first.

### Swallowed By 'A Great Fish'

AS ANY BIBLE student will tell you, the Bible does not say that Jonah was swallowed by a "whale". The exact words are:

"Now the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." The Bible reference is Jonah Chapter 1, verse 17.

Again in Chapter 2, verse 10, it tells the fish "vomited Jonah upon the dry land".

The story in the old Moncton newspaper – the date is April 27, 1892 – is one about a group of men on a whaling vessel. They had harpooned an "exceedingly large whale" off Falkland Islands.

Two men, James Bartley, and one other were in a small boat from which the mammal had been harpooned. During the fight to tire and subdue the whale, the mammal came close to the boat, surfaced and thrashed around so violently, it upset the small boat.

"The men were thrown into the water and before the other boat could pick them up – there were two boats in the harpooning sequence – one sailor was drowned and James Hartley had "disappeared".

"When the whale became quiet from exhaustion the waters were searched for Bartley. But he could not be found, and under the impression that he had been struck by the whale's tail and had sunk to the bottom, the survivors rowed back to the ship."

By this time the whale was dead, had been brought alongside the whaling ship and the crew worked feverishly “with axes and spades cutting through the flesh to secure the fat.”

They worked all day and through a part of the night. They resumed operations next forenoon and were soon down to the stomach which was to be hoisted to the deck.

### Spasmodic Signs Of Life

“THE WORKMEN were startled while laboring to clear it and to fasten the chain about it, to discover something doubled up inside it that gave spasmodic signs of life.

“The vast pouch (stomach) was hoisted to the deck and cut open, and inside it was found the missing sailor, doubled up and unconscious.

“He was laid out on deck and treated to a bath of sea water which soon revived him: but his mind was not clear, and he was placed in the Captain’s quarters, where he remained for a fortnight, a raving lunatic.”

The man “was carefully treated by the captain and officers of the ship, and he finally began to get possession of his senses.

“At the end of the third week he had entirely recovered from the shock and resumed his duties. During the brief sojourn in the whale’s belly Bartley’s skin, where it was exposed to the gastric juices, underwent a striking change.

### Not For Lack Of Air

“HIS HANDS were bleached to a deathly whiteness and the skin was wrinkled, giving the man the appearance of having been par-boiled. Hartley affirms that he would probably have lived inside of the whale until he had starved, for he had lost his senses through fright and not from lack of air.”

Just how he figured that out, when he was unconscious, or at least nearly so while he was inside of the mammal is not explained. Readers can raise their own arguments on that subject.

The man did have some memory of the incident. He recalled being hurled into the air by the nose of the whale, and then falling into the sea.

Unfortunately our story ends there. I said the old paper was found in the back of a picture frame. Well the paper had been cut to fit the frame, and the rest of the story is missing.

### Size of Whale’s ‘Swallow’

IF ANYONE wants to enlighten me on the size of “a whale’s swallow” as one man called it, it would be interesting to hear about it.

I can imagine that the man was correct in his statement, so far as it went. He had probably seen a small whale that could not swallow anything as big as a man. But that doesn’t mean that other, much larger whales could not swallow anything of that size.

The story in the old Moncton paper was printed as a truthful one. Farther than that I cannot go. It was printed more than 75 years ago. There is no way now of testing its validity.

If anyone has any observations on the actual size of a whale's 'Swallow', I would be glad to hear from you.

INCIDENTALLY, for readers in the West Prince area, Elizabeth MacLean was married to Captain Allan MacLean who came from the Milo area, I believe. He was sailing out of Victoria when first I heard of him.