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ACROSS THE ISLAND

1917 Borden Service Hailed As New Era

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I WENT BACK this week to September 24, 1917 when the "Prince Edward Island", the ice-breaking car ferry, made its first run on the Tormentine-Borden route. The ferry may have covered the route prior to that, but The Guardian of September 26 said the date I have given you here was official.

I couldn't find a mention of the event in either The Patriot or The Examiner, but The Guardian gave it most of the front page.

"NEW ERA DAWNS FOR GARDEN OF THE GULF"

"New carferry receives rousing welcome from residents at the Docks."

These were the large headlines on the front page of The Guardian, on September 26, 1917.

Conservative Prime Minister

THE GUARDIAN USED a lot of its front-page ink on Sir Robert L. Borden, Conservative Prime Minister of Canada, and the fact he had kept his promise made in an election speech six years earlier. Sir Robert was the man who was responsible for the Island finally getting something that gave it the continuous communication with the mainland of Canada. At least it was considered "continuous" at that time.

Now the car ferries, with the long waits in busy season, are out of date we are told. If some other Canadian party leaders had kept their promises we would have a permanent crossing well underway by this time. Diefenbaker promised it when he was Prime Minister; in a campaign speech at the Forum he even predicted when the job would be completed.

Pearson promised it when he was Prime Minister; he sent Watson MacNaught, then an MP, and a bunch of public works people here to tell the story in style.

The Grits even had a sod-turning ceremony on the New Brunswick side and, as I have said previously, they were so smug about it they insulted this province by not inviting its premier to attend.

A Five-Year Job In 1965

FELLOW STAFFER Lorne Yeo just brought me a photostat of The Guardian's front page July 9, 1965 with the Liberal announcement the causeway would be a five-year project and would "provide many jobs". Five years from 1965 would make the completion date 1970. But we are still far away; one of the chaps here suggests "we are further away now than we were then".

The same July 9, 1965 Guardian carried a headline "Borden residents concerned over Causeway announcement". They didn't know it then, of course, but they had little immediate cause for concern over any causeway construction.

The Guardian I found in the Library, thanks to Archivist Doug Boylan and his courteous staff, emphasized the cheering crowds that gave an ovation to Captain Murchison and the "Prince Edward Island" as it docked without a hitch.

The Island people of that day were excited, they had reason to be. The advent of the car ferry, a powerful ice-breaker, at that time represented a bigger change from the old ice-boats which had previously carried mail and a few passengers across the Strait, than a Causeway, or some other permanent crossing combination would be now over the present ferry service which some people now label inadequate.

The arrival of the "Prince Edward Island" meant that freight, express, etc. could move freely on the railway cars which the big ferry carried. Previously merchants and other businessmen here had to lay in their winter supplies before winter actually arrived.

The "Prince Edward Island" changed that situation. It brought great changes in many areas.

There were early handicaps. My friend Major Dan MacDonald, now of Moncton, told me this week that he built the road from Tormentine station to the ferry wharf at Tormentine in 1930. Prior to that, men loaded their cars on flat cars at Tormentine and were shunted down on to the ferry. The same happened at Borden. I don't remember just where the automobiles were loaded on the flat cars there.

First Automobile Deck

THEN CAME the Charlottetown car ferry in 1931 and for the first time motorists could drive on and drive off the ferry. The Prince Edward Island was later changed so that it did have an automobile deck with limited capacity. Of course she could still carry automobiles on her railway deck, after certain alterations had been made.

Older readers from Kinkora will be interested to know that Rev. J.J. MacDonald (Father John) and Rev. A.J. MacIntyre, Kinkora were among the people who welcomed the new car ferry at Borden on that September 24th day in 1917. I recall these men, particularly Father John, when I hauled milk to Kinkora the following year.

The car ferry was engaged until October 10, the old Guardian story said, in carrying railway supplies.

Of course the "Prince Edward Island" had arrived a long time before the first official crossing date. She was built on the "Tyne" in 1915 and she ran on the Georgetown-Pictou route in the 1916-1917 winter.

Interesting Reactions

I HAD SOME interesting calls arising out of last week's column. Millar MacFayden, City, called early Friday morning to tell me that he saw Fred J. Nash get the ovation that had been meant for Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Millar was at the auditorium with his father. The meeting place was the Arena, used as the city's skating rink prior to the erection of the Forum.

Gordon Holmes, City, also called and retold the story as he had heard it as a young lad. Mrs. Lemuel MacDougall is a niece, she too had heard the story. And Mrs. Fred Nash, Kensington writes to say her husband was in hospital for a checkup. I hope Mr. Nash is feeling better soon.

Bonnell LePage, City, Sterling Moore, Esher Street and Mrs. Lloyd Weeks called concerning the William LePage who "rediscovered the art of making fish glue". Looks as though I shall get a good story on this man. All three callers have offered to help.