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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Tunnel Promotion Activity Is Recalled

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THE ANNOUNCEMENT this week that approximately two miles of the planned link between this province and New Brunswick will be a tunnel, reminds me that I did a great deal of research this year on the vigorous effort made some 80 years ago to have a tunnel built between Cape Traverse and the Tormentine-Jourimain area.

My old friend Charles S. MacDonald who lives now in Kilmuir - the address is St. Mary's Road post office - assured me that Senator George Howlan of Tignish, a one-time Lieutenant Governor of this province, had been the most powerful advocate of the tunnel and I was fortunate enough to uncover some evidence that indicated my friend's estimate is well founded.

Alma Buote, Tignish, made available to me - Mrs. Edith Eldershaw gave me the tip - a letter Senator Howlan wrote to her father, F. J. Buote, who with his father, Gilbert Buote, was the owner and editor of the "Impartial", the only French newspaper published in the province and he published it for 22 years. Mr. Buote purchased the Howlan home and Alma lives in it now.

THE LETTER was written on stationary with the letter-head "The Northumberland Strait Tunnel Railway Company" and other directors included R. H. Bell, W. H. Hall, Edward T. Dyer and Hon. T. R. Jones, (No addresses are given).

Senator Howlan told Mr. Buote that he had been at "The Capes" with the engineer for the past few weeks boring the Strait every 1,500 feet from Cape Traverse to Cape Tormentine.

In the letter which was dated September 24, 1886 he told his friend:

"We have bored down 20 feet and found at the outset six feet of mud and sand, and 14 feet pure brick clay with decreasing mud as we proceed until four miles out, there is only one foot.

Deepest Water Is 82 Feet

"THE DEEPEST water is about 82 feet and the bottom is entirely free from rock until you strike the Jourimain and Tormentine reefs which are like a saddle on a horse's back, and on either side of them we found a continuation of brick clay to the shore.

"The bottom over which we have surveyed fixed lines, is like an ordinary hill ashore sloping gradually from the Island to the middle of the strait and then rising gradually to the New Brunswick shore.

"The P.E.I. Railway now runs to Cape Traverse daily and the Sackville and P.E.I. Railway is now open out to the shore on the New Brunswick side. If this short link were supplied, we could have swift communication - East and West."

That completes the direct reference to the tunnel in Senator Howlan's letter but there are several interesting observations I want to pass along.

HE INTERPRETS the French word Cape Traverse as the "crossing cape" and surmises, although he "can't find such a word as Jourimain in French, that it must be the word for journal which has become Anglicized." Then Senator Howlan puts the two together and sees "daily crossing", the dream for which he fought in his lifetime.

I was also shown an old post card which had been mailed to A. J. MacFayden, Tignish by A. E. Burke and ingeniously publicized the tunnel project. The card was made so that the tunnel link between P.E.I. and N. B. could be seen by holding it to a strong light, and verses printed on it discussed briefly the difficulty of Strait crossing, then added:

"But don't be discouraged, despondent or blue,
Hold this to the light and you'll see your way through."

No need For Further Delay

WRITING ON the card advised there was no need for further delay in printing and distributing circulars and ended "all will be confirmed and enough has now been done."

So much for the interesting correspondence of Howlan and Burke. I want to give you some of the information made available by Mr. MacDonald on whom I call so often for information.

"There were other Islanders who favored the tunnel project, but none caught the public ear so effectively. Senator Howlan's voice was the most eloquent and continuous of all, very little attention was paid to most of the other advocates, because they were far behind him in driving power," my friend writes.

Mr. MacDonald recalls that a great deal of excitement had been stirred up by the Senator as far back as 1879 or 1880, and then recalls that very little had actually been done about the tunnel though it was dangled before the public eye for many years, particularly at election time.

MR. MACDONALD told me once that he had interviewed Hon. George E. Foster on the tunnel question for the Guardian in the late fall of 1891 or January 1892. Mr. MacDonald comprised the one-man reporting staff of the Guardian which was edited then by Benjamin Higgs.

Foster was one of Canada's most distinguished finance ministers, Mr. MacDonald recalls, and served many years in Canadian cabinets. He told Mr. MacDonald that Canada was bound by the terms of Confederation to provide a tunnel, said that Canadian cabinets (?) He told Mr. MacDonald that Canada was not bound which the Liberals were advocating then - Foster was a Conservative - and replied in the affirmative to a question if prohibition of intoxicating liquor would be good for Canada, then added the reservation "if it could be made workable."

OTHER SUBJECTS were discussed in the interview but, after the lapse of 72 years even the remarkable memory of Mr. MacDonald fails to recall some of the details.

I have stressed that Howlan was the leading figure in the tunnel fight, but of course there must have been many others. I recall that there was a large, detailed plan of the proposed tunnel on the wall of the board of trade rooms in the old Market Building here.

Constituency Changes For P.E.I.

THERE IS a strong possibility that a slice of Eastern Queens County may be tacked onto Kings, for electoral purposes, and a slice of Eastern Prince added to Queens on that side, when the “independent” people get around to the task of revamping our four federal constituencies in the redistribution chore that is ahead, Solicitor-General J. Watson MacNaught told me a few days ago. Also in the offing is a division of Queens, and Halifax, the only two federal constituencies that have two members now.

I seriously questioned the slicing question when an Ottawa story reported it several days ago, on the ground that present federal members from the Island would offer strenuous objection, but Watson assured me that the changes will be recommended by independent people, and the MPs will have no say in the matter. So it will be interesting to watch developments.

The problem of Queens - and it has been a problem for these many years - has often been discussed, but nothing was ever done about it, because the partisan views that went to Ottawa never presented any clear pattern for a change.

I'm wondering right now how the people responsible for the planning can hope to get an impartial committee to do the job. Someone has suggested a committee of three of our Supreme Court judges might do the job on P.E.I., and I believe that would be possible, if the federal government requested them to act, though normally our judges are completely removed from anything that has any relation to political developments, even voting.