

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Fri., Mar. 29, 1969

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Scrapbook Recalls Fierce 1905 Winter

By NEIL A. MATHESON

IT WAS 33 degrees below zero in Mount Stewart and that was the lowest temperature recorded on the Island back in the “big-snow winter of 1923”. The date of the month was the 18th and I believe the month was February. The same night the official reading at Charlottetown was 23 below, and that, I believe, is the coldest on record at the Experimental Farm, now the Research Station.

My information comes from an old scrap book loaned me by Mrs. Ella Chappell, York. The temperature at Murray River that night was 32 below, it was 28 below at Emerald Junction, 26 below at St. Peters, 25 below at Georgetown, 22-24 below at Summerside, 21 below at Tignish and Alberton and 18 below at Souris.

The winter of 1923 was also a bad snow winter, but I have done several columns on it, so I'm turning to the winter of 1905, the one that the old timers have been telling me about ever since I started this column.

February Storms

I AM quoting now from The Patriot of February 21, 1905: “On Tuesday night February 20, 1905, Conductor Kelly and his men overcame the last drift and brought their train into the city, the first train to come from Summerside in the last two weeks.”

“It was the worst winter in the history of the Prince Edward Island railway,” the Patriot story said.

This particular spell of stormy weather hit on February 7. Kelly's train from Summerside was stalled at Kensington. Tanton's train going west was stalled at the same place.

Davey's train from Souris was stalled at St. Peter's; the last train from Cape Traverse within the fortnight reached Charlottetown at 12:30. Mackie's train was held at Summerside – this must have been the train from Tignish, though the old story does not say so.

The storm raged through February 8, and there was no attempt to move any of the trains. The snow fighting trips to their destinations began on February 9 and the fight ended some two weeks later, some of the trains took even longer – to arrive at their destinations.

Mother, Infant Die In Storm

HERE'S A real old-time story – it's also in Mrs. Chappell's scrap book.

A March newspaper in this province of 1907 recalls that a woman and her infant child got lost in a storm on March 17, 1835 and both were found dead next morning only 100 yards from their home.

The woman was Mrs. William MacKay of French River and she left the home of James Bernard, about 300 yards from the MacKay home, but the woman got

bewildered in the fiercely blowing snow. When found the infant was pressed close to the mother's bosom.

On the same night, the same paper reported, John MacArthur, Lot 3, and his wife left the house of their son-in-law to go to their home 300 yards away. Becoming bewildered by the blinding storm the pair disputed the direction they should take.

Finally the woman sat down in the snow and covered herself with a rug which she carried. She was found "unharméd" in the morning. Her partner, about 73 years of age, was found one-quarter of a mile from his home and he was dead.

Here's an item that is a bit different:

"While many cattle in different parts of the province are leaning against the walls of the stable for support, and encouragement pending the arrival of the government hay, their owners will be gratified (note the sarcasm) that the officers of the Stanley had a ball while their ship was tied up at Georgetown."

Ice Breakers Criticized

HERE'S ANOTHER:

"On Saturday the Stanley and Minto got to within two miles of each other at the entrance to Pictou Harbor. Mails, passengers were exchanged. The story said congratulations were also exchanged, but one naturally wonders why the congratulations.

Indeed the old story suggests there is little doubt the ship could have reached the board ice on the Nova Scotia side if a real attempt had been made earlier in the week. The idea was that this would have allowed passengers to walk the rest of the way to the mainland so, "that after waiting for weeks, they could at least have been given an opportunity to walk to the railroad."

The story writer of many years ago observed that while the claim is made that it's more power in the steamer that is needed in the ice fighting, "it is now generally admitted that a greater want is sufficient power behind the captains to give them a forward impetus when conditions are somewhat unpleasant".

Winter Items Arrive Late

THE ISLAND FARMER noted on April 19, 1905 that "Our merchants are at present receiving large shipments of fur goods, hockey sticks and other distinctively winter goods which must now be packed away in moth balls until next winter."

The paper continued:

"But the unkindest cut of all was the receipt last Friday of a handsome driving sleigh, especially built for Lieutenant-Governor MacKinnon and which had laid all winter at Pictou."

That's the way Ottawa kept, or rather did not keep, its Confederation promise of "continuous steam communication" for many years. Not until the advent of the Prince Edward Island car ferry – it went on the Borden-Tormentine route in 1917 – did that promise start to become realistic.

Heath Macquarrie, MP, is naturally getting in a plug for his party when he noted with approval what I said about Sir Robert L. Borden living up to his promise to make that ice breaking car ferry available.

Heath observes that the building of a causeway crossing now would not be any more difficult today, relatively speaking, than the building of the Prince Edward Island and the installation of docks, etc., at either side were more than 50 years ago.

Tuna At Souris In 1917

WESLEY FRASER, Souris showed me this week a picture of a tuna caught off Souris more than 50 years ago. The year was 1917 and the tuna was caught in a net, but the picture showed it hanging from a block-and-tackle hoist. Mr. Fraser estimates the weight at between 850 and 900 pounds.

It was Mr. Fraser and Bruce Stewart, MLA, who caught three tuna off the Eastern shore of the province last year. One weighed 960 pounds, one 930 and the smaller one weighed 720 pounds.

There's no indication who caught the tuna in 1917, though Thomas Poole was in the picture at the time.

Seals In The River

J.B. (BULLER) MURLEY tells me that seals were seen in the river at Mount Stewart on Sunday, and later information indicates that seals were being watched in the river there on Monday, and Tuesday as well.

And one resident told me that a seal had made its way a long piece from shore, and was discovered in the barn of a Cherry Hill resident. These were adult seals in all cases, I was told.