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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Shipwreck Victims Scale 350-Foot Cliff

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Provincial-Farm Editor

I HAVE to thank Mrs. Gertrude Allen, Cardigan for the story of a shipwreck which involved her father, the late Senator J. A. Macdonald and his ship the "Barbara Macdonald" which was sunk in a fierce storm that wrecked many ships off the rocky coast of Newfoundland back in December 1919.

The sturdy Barbara Macdonald rode out the first two days of the storm while lesser ships succumbed to the furious storm and seas, but she was dashed to pieces on Black Head, Cape Pine about 20 miles from Cape Race on Sunday night, December 14. By that time the storm had abated and it was relatively calm but the fog was dense and the seas still fiercely churning from the effect of the previous gales. They left Georgetown Saturday, December 6 and the ship struck the outer rocks at Cape Pine December 14.

Mr. Macdonald and five companions were the first survivors from a ship that had been wrecked in that treacherous spot to survive and tell the tale, which caused the Island Patriot to ask in a front page story more than 45 years ago "Was there providential intervention?"

THE FIVE who walked ashore with the owner were Joshua Whittle, mate, of Charlottetown who took charge when his brother, Captain Thomas Whittle, was washed overboard and drowned; Arthur Yorston, cook of Georgetown; Stephen Pike, Charlottetown; Michael Burke, Georgetown and Robert Emery, Wood Islands. They reached the Island on Christmas Eve which must have been the most welcome Christmas present their families ever received.

Captain Whittle was standing amidships directing the removal of the foresail in a fierce wind storm when he was struck by a huge wave. Washed overboard and in the storm and darkness was unable to grasp a line tossed to him.

Reason For 'Miracle' Description

THERE WAS some reason to suggest a miracle was connected with the fact the six men escaped as Mr. Macdonald described the experience.

Had the ship not been unusually sturdy, he explained, she would have broken up on the outer rocks and all would have been lost – a boat they had tried to launch had been dashed to pieces. But she held together as the heavy seas drove her closer to shore.

"We each got a rope over part of the forerigging, let ourselves over the lee side and hung on. The vessel had listed outward as she started to sink and the sea struck her bulwarks so we did not get its full force. . . . We knotted the ropes and held on in the darkness for five hours. It was so dark we couldn't see each other, but occasionally over the roar of the sea we kept shouting to each other and making sure everyone was still there.

“The vessel was gradually being torn apart and death in the darkness and surf seemed to await us”, said Mr. Macdonald who added “about midnight a portion of her stern that twisted off, became wedged in between the portion of the hull to which we clung and the shore.” It was about six feet wide and 20 feet long. It was just big enough to form a plank bridge over which the shipwrecked sailors dashed to safety as they got the chance, between the seas.

350-Foot Cliff Was Scaled

THE PEAK of this old story concerns the 350-foot cliff which the cold and battered shipwrecked Islanders had to scale before they were out of real trouble. This is how Mr. MacDonald described it on his return:

“It took us seven hours to get to the top of it, digging ourselves in with fingernails and at times even with our toenails. It was a seven-hour nightmare and I cannot tell you how we succeeded. At daylight we were at the summit completely exhausted, and chilled to the marrow of our bones. Our clothing was torn and our limbs bruised and bleeding. Far below we could see the battered fragments of what had been a \$30,000 vessel and a \$15,000 cargo.”

All that had held together of the fine new schooner wrecked on her maiden voyage, was the part from the forward rigging. The rest had been carried out to sea by the strong undertow, the old story said.

“We had no idea where we were but we had heard the fog whistle before daylight”, Mr. Macdonald said on his return. “At dawn the fog had disappeared and the whistle was no longer sounding but we made off in the direction of where the sound had come from. We finally came in sight of Cape Pine lighthouse after walking, or rather stumbling along for probably three miles over a trackless waste of rock and tangle of scrubby spruce.”

Continuing his recollections of the grim experience Mr. Macdonald said “It had been raining. Then it turned colder and our clothes were frozen stiff, but fortunately we escaped being frostbitten.”

When the Islanders reached the lighthouse they received every possible kindness from the keeper and his wife. “They did everything they could for us. They provided us with food and dry clothing,” Mr. Macdonald said with deep appreciation.

They “turned in and slept all day and the greater part of the night.” Next morning the men left on foot for Trespassey, 16 miles away, following a narrow trail. “We didn’t meet a living soul until we reached our destination”, continued Mr. Macdonald who had wired home the news of the wreck and the information that all men were safe with the exception of the Captain.

The mate, Joshua Whittle, who had been following the sea for many years described the gale as the worst in his experience.

Horses Featured Farm Sale News

GLANCING THROUGH the old paper of 1919, I find a front page story tells that the St. Dunstan’s University drive had reached \$8,000. The objective was not given.

Peter Brodie of York, a one-time member of the legislature, was the auctioneer at the sale of C. H. Robertson's farm in Marshfield. And the leading items were six horses. One mare was by Crown Right, another by Eskham Waggoner, a colt was sired by Baron Kelvin and a driving horse by Waggoner, in case any of the older horsemen will remember any of those stallions.

Kennedy, Webster and MacKinnon were advertising they would charge and store car batteries for car owners. It was late December and cars were laid up over winter in those years.

SAMUEL KENNEDY Jr. was advertising "Our sleighs for our roads," also fur robes, Saskatchewan robes, sleigh bells and horse blankets. He had a complete line of harness and parts from which to choose. Mr. Kennedy was also selling International Kerosene engines. They were "of throttle governor type whereby the fuel consumption is regulated according to the work load."

An Ottawa news page story said that wartime restrictions had been removed on horse racing and predicted "a keen battle in the coming year" between "those who think the race track promotes horse breeding, and those who think that it must be separated absolutely and for all time from the gambling features which have become attached to it."

THE ABEGWEITS of 1922-24 still have many ardent fans in this city and province, I've found from comments on last week's column which recalled their feats. To those who are keeping scrapbooks make Dalton's first name "Art". Don MacLeod tells me that Art Dalton is running a corner store in Pictou. It's roughly about the size of "P.J.s which Wilt Cudmore runs now on the corner closest to this office.

Letters From Queen, Mrs. Kennedy

MY FRIEND W. D. Johnston of Montague tells me that he has received messages of appreciation from the widow of the late President Kennedy and from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Mr. Johnston wrote a poem "The World Tragedy" after the assassination of the young president. His poem to the Queen was on "Her Majesty's Visit To Our Island Province."

"I appreciate these letters all the more, Mr. Johnston states, "because they have come to me in my old age." This fine old gentleman will be 85 in March.

"I am enjoying life even though I am crippled, cabined and confined", observes Mr. Johnston whose interesting history of Montague takes the reader over the period 1804 to 1963.

MR. JOHNSTON'S writing fulfils a dual purpose. It enables him to pass on to others something of the past, and it also takes his mind off an agonizing condition brought on by a stroke back in 1952.

For a man whose physical disabilities have been impaired so greatly by the stroke, Mr. Johnston writes a most amazingly good hand. The first time I heard from him I thought surely someone else must have written the letter for him. But Jim Cudmore of Montague assured me that Mr. Johnston does his own writing. "He is a perfectionist", Jim told me, and that is an accurate description of this fine old gentleman who maintains a keen interest in life and an active mind despite his crippling handicap.