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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### Stirring Tales Told By Native Of Tignish

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MAYOR LEARD of Souris suggests the old Prince Edward Island car ferry should be saved from the destruction that normally would be planned for it when the causeway-bridge-tunnel crossing is completed.

The old ferry could be made into a combined restaurant, museum and gift shop, Ray Leard suggests. Certainly if we have any sense of history at all, this first reliable link with the mainland in our history should be retained.

I TALKED last week with a most unusual man, Captain Joseph F. Bernard, who shaped a colorful career in the Arctic and I want to share some of his experiences with you.

I want to thank Dr. J. H. Blanchard, retired vice-principal of Prince of Wales College, who lives in Charlottetown and Father J. H. LeClair, Rustico who put me in touch with this man who was born at Tignish 86 years ago.

Joe Bernard – he's a cousin of the late Joseph Bernard who was a one-time Lieutenant-Governor of this province – left home in August 1900 and arrived in Seattle after several stops along the way.

But it's his life in the Arctic that shapes my story for today and he took the first boat to Nome in the season of 1901. An uncle, Peter Bernard, had been in Nome at the time, so the nephew followed the same trail. The uncle had been in Dawson in the days of the gold rush and had remained in the north country.

Joseph spent several years in Nome where he ran a skiff to carry freight and passengers from boats to shore.

In the fall of 1903 he and his uncle built a 40-foot boat – it would carry 20 tons – and named it the Augusta C. He used the craft for freighting along the coast.

### To Siberia In 1904

"I WENT to Siberia in this boat in 1904," Captain Bernard told me. He landed two men from Nome in Siberia. He had also carried a cargo of milk and sugar from Nome.

In 1909 he traded in Siberia, and that was about the last trading done there by outsiders, he told me. The Russian revolution was in 1917, and there were unmistakable signs of it eight years earlier, Captain Bernard told me. The radicals were in evidence then, he explained.

It was the "Teddy Bear" that took Captain Bernard to some of his most interesting dates with his destiny. He had built her, with some assistance, as he had previously built the Augusta C.

The "Teddy Bear" was built in Seattle in 1908, it was a sailboat but it had an auxiliary engine of 20 horse power and used a distillate of gasoline that he could buy at the time for \$1.50 for a five-gallon can, he told me.

HE SPENT the winter of 1910 in Coronation Gulf, and the following winter he traded and trapped Arctic foxes. The skins were worth \$35 to \$40 each, and later they went up to \$60 to \$90 each, depending on the quality. But he was frozen in and did not get out until 1914 – actually it was on the day the First Great War was declared that he finally fought free of the ice in Dolphin and Union Strait.

By that time the fur prices had dropped so that he had to sell 800 skins for four dollars apiece. He was able to keep 400 skins for a few years, though, and finally sold them for \$30 apiece.

I have to skip many of the captain's exploits, because I have a few really good stories I want to tell you.

He traded a ball of cotton cord – it was about the size of a large egg – for one good Wolverine skin. This would be worth \$50, on the average, back in Alaska, but the transaction took place deep in the Arctic.

### Ball Of Cotton String Valuable

BUT THE man who got it from Captain Bernard came back a year later with two dog-sled outfits and \$800 worth of furs. The man had cut the string, or cord, into short pieces and sold it to the Eskimos who fished for seals through the ice. They would pierce a tiny hole in the ice, push the hook and bait down, and tie the string at the top. That way they would catch the seal, then chop a hole through the ice and get the seal.

Whalebone was eight dollars a pound in the area back in 1904, the Captain recalled. One large whale would be worth \$10,000 for the bone alone, he said. Corsets were made of whalebone in those early days – at least the stays were – so were many other things. They used whalebone for horse whips, for example. The bones would run to 12 feet in length.

Capt. Bernard was laid low with "Scurvy" in 1912 when his boat was stuck in the ice. He had a pain in his leg "like a boil on my bone". A companion insisted "It's not scurvy if you have pain". But "he changed his tune when my teeth started to fall out", the veteran of the Arctic told me. "And my nose bled every time I would move my head."

The remedy he used intrigued me. Somebody shot a couple of partridge-like birds and Bernard sucked all of the blood from the birds.

### Blood, Raw Meat Cures Scurvy

LATER HE was dragged on a sled to a vantage point between two rocks, and he shot two Caribou which were driven toward his hidden post by Eskimo's. He got about five gallons of blood from those two animals. And he drank every drop of the blood.

"I also ate raw meat, I still like raw meat," he told me. He ate Caribou meat raw, and it did him good in his fight for health.

When I asked him why, he replied "when meat is cooked you destroy the thing in it that's good for you".

I've saved the best part to the last. I think the story is terrific. Here it is:

During one of the winters he spent in the Arctic when his "Teddy Bear" ship was frozen in, a mother came to him asking him to operate on her son's throat.

## Operation On Son's Throat

THE BOY – he was about 16 – had an infection that caused tumors to grow on various parts of his body. Eventually they had to be removed. This time the tumor had grown against the boy's windpipe and it was gradually choking him to death as it became larger. It had just about reached that fatal stage when the mother asked the Captain to operate.

"But I couldn't operate on your son's throat, I would only kill him for sure", the veteran Arctic skipper explained emphatically.

The mother left the "Teddy Bear" and returned in a half-hour with the chief of the village.

The chief said "Boy will probably die within 24 hours if nothing can be done to help him. If you try to help him and boy dies nobody will blame you. But if boy dies and you don't try to help him, you look out for yourself", the chief announced grimly with looks of grim warning.

"The chief's word was law in the village. I had no choice but to try the operation," Captain Bernard told me.

Before he had left civilization a doctor had given him a medical book, and the captain always carried a stock of medical supplies – he even had a scalpel, for minor operations.

This was no minor operation, and Captain Bernard had no business even thinking about it. But the chief had given him a "try or else" ultimatum, and he just had to make an attempt.

"I GOT out the old medical book and started to study the anatomy of the throat", the old sea dog told me. Finally he made a shallow incision somewhere close to the windpipe. His greatest fear was that he might pierce the jugular vein.

Another incision went a little deeper, then the third brought the jugular vein into view. He found the tumor – it was two and one-half inches long, and about an inch thick, got hold of it with a pair of forceps, and soon removed it.

Then he carefully washed out the wound with a solution of chloride of mercury and water and sewed up the incision.

With the tumor gone, the pressure was removed from the windpipe, and the boy could breath easily again for the first time in many months.

The boy had opened his eyes, said "I can breathe now" and added in a few minutes "I'm hungry".

The operation was performed without any anesthetic. The boy's arms were strapped to an arm chair. He couldn't bend forward because the throat tumor prevented him.

A white man could not endure such pain, Capt. Bernard told me.