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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Hauling Of Church Episode Is Recalled

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I REFERRED several weeks ago to the hauling of the old Roman Catholic Church at St. Andrew's to Charlottetown where it is part of the St. Joseph's Convent. Sister Antonette DesRoches, Miscouche suggested to me several months ago there had been "a miracle" in the transfer of the old building.

Thanks to the co-operation of a Sister at St. Joseph's I have the little booklet "A Leaf from the annals of St. Joseph's Convent" which tells the story of the tremendous task of hauling the old church and has a reference to the "miracle". Apparently it was a miracle of faith and dogged perseverance of the people triumphing over adversity.

St. Andrew's Church was built in 1804. The booklet says that Father William MacLeod of Arisaig, Nova Scotia – it's in Cape Breton – was ordained there in June 1824.

FATHER PERRY – first name not given – was ordained in 1828. This man was the first Acadian priest ordained in this province, I was told by an Egmont Bay man several years ago. Indeed the man told me that neighbours told of seeing the ghost of the beloved priest climb the stairs of an outbuilding, it was a granary and woodshed then, but formerly had been a dwelling house.

The St. Joseph's booklet says Father Perry was "for so many years parish priest of the parishes of Miscouche, Mont Carmel, Egmont Bay, Cascumpec and Tignish on this Island". What huge territories pioneer clergymen had to serve.

It was in 1864 that the people of St Andrew's built themselves a new church and offered the old one to Bishop MacEachern, they added a promise of help to transport it to Charlottetown.

Near the end of January 1864 Rev. D. MacDonald, known to most people as "Father Dan", went to St. Andrews to supervise the job of getting the church ready for moving. For more than a month this work went on. Then, having made it ready for the long journey – it was long in those days – the people waited for a severe frost to freeze the river ice hard enough to carry the building and the more than 100 horses that were to haul it.

Two heavy iron runners had been placed under the church building and the moving started on March 1. There was swampy soil in the area and the people took all day building "a road" to get the church on to the ice.

Severe Storm Developed

THE FOLLOWING day a snow storm developed that was so severe it kept the people from resuming the hauling for a week. But on March 7<sup>th</sup> there were 500 men, "Protestants as well as Catholics" assembled on the spot ready to work.

“Father Dan” and seven other priests were present as the starting signal was given. The progress was triumphant for 12 miles, it looked so good that “Father Dan” went on to Charlottetown to tell the good news.

But trouble was ahead. The building was just rounding the head of Apple Tree wharf, some seven miles from Charlottetown and the enforced approach near to the channel took them onto thinner ice and “with a tremendous crash, the whole building was submerged and was firmly embedded in the mud at the bottom of the river”. This is a direct quote from the little booklet.

The people worked until evening trying to dislodge the building but in vain. Some went to town for the night, others camped on the riverside where they built bush fires to ward off the biting March winds. The next day, the 8<sup>th</sup> of March Dr. MacDonald being too fatigued to resume his place, it was taken by Rev. Angus MacDonald, Rector of St. Dunstan’s. He left Charlottetown at four a.m. accompanied by a large number of men, and spent the entire day on the ice, nothing daunted by a drifting rain, working heartily as any of the band.

“Things looked gloomy and the Protestants who, from neighbourly feeling, had given a helping hand to their friends of St. Andrews could not resist saying that the church would remain in the river despite the Priest’s attempt to work a miracle.

#### Miracle Of Achievement

BUT THE faith that can remove mountains was not wanting here; it worked well combined with the muscle and sinew of the faithful, and at four o’clock in the afternoon, by almost superhuman effort the chapel was dragged from the water and the march resumed.”

That is the text of that part of the story, as I have taken it from the little St. Joseph’s booklet that was printed 25 years ago.

The church reached Charlottetown that night and landed that night opposite Mr. Morrissey’s foundry.

As it was very dark they went no further that night but the procession of 120 horses, nearly 500 men and their leaders drew every eye next morning as they hauled the church and placed it on its present site.

In this building, on September 7 of the same year, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame opened school classes for 120 children. The Sisters came each morning from the convent on Hillsborough Square in an old vehicle – it “was rickety, shabby and most uncomfortable”.

But some of the prominent Catholics of Charlottetown purchased a large, covered carriage and presented it to the Nuns of St. Josephs.

Recently one of the Sisters at St. Josephs kindly showed me through the part of the convent that was hauled from St. Andrews. The chapel is on the second floor and is so attractive to the eye one would doubt its age.

It was with great interest that I saw the boat that was used by Bishop MacEachern which is in St. Joseph’s near to the chapel.

From the “Memorial Volume The Scottish Catholics in Prince Edward Island, 1772-1922” I find the following:

“The primary reason for the adoption of this strange mode of transportation was to carry the missionary outfit which Father MacEachern was obliged to carry with him from place to place as he went on his rounds through the settlement.

“He had to take with him all things necessary for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. As these were valuable and exceedingly difficult to procure it was imperative that he should take even extraordinary precautions to ensure their safety. Should they be lost they could be replaced only from Quebec, and at great inconvenience and long delay.

“The difficulty was considerably enhanced owing to the fact that he travelled a great deal on the ice, especially during the spring and fall. This was often times very dangerous but his little boat fastened with iron stays to the runners beneath, things were comparatively safe. Should his horse break through the ice the boat would float secure and the valuables it contained could easily be saved from what under other circumstances might prove a perilous situation.”

### First Winter Boat?

THE REFERENCE suggests that “without any doubt this was the first winter boat ever seen in this part of the country”.

Examining the little boat I could see no method by which it could be propelled through the water. I wondered if indeed it was used merely to transport the precious materials it carried over parts of Bishop MacEachern’s journey that were on ice, and it was hauled by horse over the ice as one part of the descriptive piece printed here suggests.

At any rate it is a valuable and interesting historic link between the present and the past of this Island.