

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Fri., 13 April, 1962

## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### Perils In Strait In Other Years

By NEIL A. MATHESON  
Provincial-Farm Editor

I TALKED this week with Bob MacPherson who has many interesting recollections of battles with the ice in Northumberland Strait. The former Chief Engineer on the Prince Edward Island - his son Don is Chief Engineer on her now - recalls one Sunday evening when the boat got caught in a raging snowstorm and was carried off course so far they found they were at St Peter's Island by the time the storm abated next morning.

Capt. John Read was Master and the boat had completed four trips when he decided they'd make a fifth before dark. They were not far out of Borden, though, when the heavy storm developed. It took them from early morning to seven that evening to beat their way back to Tormentine, a distance of about 40 miles. Dates are hazy but he thinks, perhaps, it was in 1928.

THE RETIRED mariner lives quietly now in Charlottetown but he has many memories of old ice battles. "It took 12 hours to go 100 yards one morning" as they tried to get out of Borden, where the ice had packed in solidly. Once they were out, though, they made good time the rest of the way.

He recalls another time when the Prince Edward Island was a mile off Tormentine, and unable to make any headway against ice that was grounded from there to Tormentine. Teams came out after the passengers and mail, and brought back the new passengers and mail. The boat made good time to Borden as there was no trouble the rest of the way.

### Incident of 1925 Recalled

IT WAS Walter O'Brien who suggested I see Mr. MacPherson, with whom I've often chatted at my favorite grocery store, although we never got around to talking ice fighting before.

Mr. O'Brien recalls an incident on the Prince Edward Island when he was on her as fireman back in March 1925.

Crossings had been extremely tough for sometime, Walter recalled this week, "and on this occasion we were stuck for 76 hours a short distance from Tormentine. Captain Read had kept the engines running ahead and astern . . . with not an inch of movement . . . the ice was black with soot from the stacks, and when the reserve bunker was nearly empty, the Captain decided the ship was stuck until the wind and tide changed."

IT WAS decided to let the passengers walk ashore with First Officer A. P. Paquet going ahead to test the ice, and crew members hauling baggage in an ice boat that was lowered. They had scarcely reached shore when a shift of tide lifted the ice and the ship freed herself, made port an hour later and made the return trip to Borden in an

hour. Few are left, Mr. O'Brien says, who spent that vigil. I talked with Mr. MacPherson - he was second engineer at the time - but he couldn't recall it.

Mr. MacPherson has many fond memories of the old Prince Edward Island "a grand boat". Built on the Clyde, she came here in 1915, ran through 1916 from Charlottetown to Pictou and only missed one trip, ran from Georgetown to Pictou in the winter of 1917, drydocked that summer in Montreal, and reached Tormentine in September to begin her cross-Strait service.

### First Automobile Is Ferried

SENATOR BEN Prowse, uncle of Hon. T.W. L. Prowse, was the first man to bring an automobile across the strait, he recalls. In the early days the autos were loaded on flat cars, two to a car, and the P.E.I. could take a maximum of 24. There were very few cars at first, though, and "it was not until well on in the Twenties" that there were many cars to carry. There were none at all in the winter, or in the muddy months of spring and fall in those years. There was no thought of plowing snow in those days. Paved roads were unknown and so were gravelled roads.

The automobile deck was not built on the P.E.I. until 1938, Bob told me.

PRIOR TO that, though, the "Charlottetown" had been in service with an automobile deck to carry 45 motor cars. She carried 16 freight cars on the railway deck.

Built at Lauzon, Quebec in 1931 she was sunk four miles off the Nova Scotia coast on June 19, 1941 while being sailed to St John for drydock overhaul. It left the province dependent on the Prince Edward Island through the perilous days of the war, but despite numerous protests, mass meetings here and subsequent demands on Ottawa, a replacement was not available until the M.V. Abegweit arrived in the summer of 1947.

### Minto Trips Were Perilous

IT WAS on the old Minto, an earlier icebreaker that carried passengers and mail, that Engineer MacPherson had some really hazardous trips. There were many occasions when she was stuck for a week at a time between Georgetown and Pictou.

She only had two feet of freeboard - from the water line to the top of the gunwales - and once she caught in a field of ice that tilted her over so far the ice came crashing on to the deck through the guard rail, smashed in some of the doors, and threatened to sink the ship.

Passengers were disembarked onto the ice and kept there for one and one-half hours until finally the Minto righted herself.

SHE HAD a "sleigh-runner bow" which would ride up on the ice and it often took many hours with saws, axes and tackle to free her when the ice was too heavy for her to break down, he recalled. There was some heavy slugging on an ice-breaker in those days.

The Minto was built in Dundee, Scotland. She came here in 1899, was sold to Russia in 1915 and sailed there by Capt. Read. The Earl Grey, another ice-breaker came here from Scotland in 1909 and was sold to Russia in 1914. Capt. Read also took her to the Russians. She also was used on the Georgetown-Pictou run.

The Northern Light and Stanley represented previous attempts to keep the Island in touch with the mainland through winter months.

### Speed Skating Victory At 93

THIS ITEM came to me from J.W. Don Campbell, MLA, Alberton and Fred S. Teed in Florida. It's a syndicated "Strange as it seems" cartoon feature which says "Joseph Arsenault, Prince Edward Island won a speed skating championship at 93, competing against racers less than half his age." Mr. Campbell got it from a brother in Rochester, New York and Mr. Teed writes from Pompano Beach. A former Ch'town man, he left here many years ago.

It was Hon. Henry Wedge who told me that Mr. Arsenault was a Wellington man who used to take on the younger chaps in skating. He's not sure of the age, but a son Emile lives in Wellington, and I hope to talk to him on my next trip to Prince County.

### Buckwheat Flour Gift Arrives

MY SINCERE thanks go to Winfield Gamble, Belmont Lot 16 for a box of real Buckwheat flour. It arrived in fine shape, the Southport Mathesons have had a couple of grand treats, and there's still some left.

I didn't mean to beg when I asked if someone could tell me where I could get some of the old fashioned flour, but my appreciation is none the less sincere. "We are happy to share part of what we have with you", wrote Mr. Gamble, which is a real example of good old fashioned friendliness.

He got the flour at a mill in New Brunswick and agrees "it's a wonderful dish. I too remember the good old days", he says, when buckwheat pancakes and maple syrup were on the table almost every day." I wonder sometimes, how we allow those things to slip away from us.