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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

Hon. D.A. MacKinnon Started W.I. Ferry Idea

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I'VE ALWAYS heard that the Wood Islands–Caribou ferry service was the brain child of J. Walter Jones, who later became Premier in 1943 and served in that capacity for 10 years before going to the Senate. Jones was first elected to the P.E.I. Legislature for Fourth Queens in 1935. His colleague was Dougald MacKinnon, the man from whom the story for this column comes, thanks to J.B. Murley who got the story from Mr. MacKinnon.

Dougald's story, brought to me by Mr. Murley indicates the idea was first conceived by D.A. MacKinnon who was Lieutenant-Governor of this province from 1904 to 1910, and Member of Parliament for Queens 1921-25. Mr. MacKinnon also served for some time as member of the P.E.I. Legislature and once held the portfolio of Attorney General, I find from a search in the Library here.

The very short personal biography reveals that Donald Alexander MacKinnon was born February 22, 1863, a son of William MacKinnon and his wife, Catherine Nicholson. After attending public school, Prince of Wales College and Dalhousie Law School, he got his LL.B degree and later the honor of being named Kings Counsel.

### Man Of Wide Interests

HE WAS honorary colonel of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Batt., on entering public life, the Parliamentary Guide says. Mr. MacKinnon proposed that a railway be constructed for the Southern descendants of Settlers of the period 1803-05, and succeeded in having the Belfast, Murray Harbor line and the Hillsborough Bridge provided.

"He devoted himself to many other public services which would fill a book", the Guide adds.

D.A. MacKinnon was a great booster for the tourist industry for this province and one of his pet schemes was the ferry service to which I have referred.

Mr. Murley believes that D.A. MacKinnon's idea developed when he was Lieutenant-Governor. It lay dormant for many years until 1935 when Dougald MacKinnon and J. Walter Jones were representing the Fourth District of Queens after the mid-summer election which returned 30 Liberals and no Conservatives.

Dougald MacKinnon recalled the idea he had heard many years ago that was conceived by D.A. MacKinnon. (The two MacKinnons were not closely related.)

"Dougald mentioned the idea to his colleague, Mr. Jones, and the active mind started immediately to find a way to make the idea become a reality," Mr. Murley relates.

The federal election also came in 1935, on October 14 and James Larabee, Eldon and Peter Sinclair were elected for Queens.

As Mr. Murley tells it:

"Jones, a very energetic person, embraced the idea with enthusiasm and commenced to campaign to make the suggestion become a reality.

“He talked to the Legislature of which he was a member. Most people, including the Legislature members, thought it was a ‘far out’ proposal and would never come to fruition.”

Continuing, Mr. Murley says Mr. Jones did not belong to the local league, so far as politicians were concerned. He had lived in Ottawa for two years when he worked on his book “Fur Farming in Canada”, which was completed in 1913. Thus Mr. Jones knew the most prominent people in Ottawa and had known most of them for more than 20 years, Mr. Murley said.

Thus Mr. Jones was not overawed by their ability, nor their positions.

Hon. Charles A. Dunning

AT THAT time, 1935, Hon. Charles A. Dunning, who had been premier of Saskatchewan and a federal cabinet minister in former years, was wanted by Prime Minister W.L. MacKenzie King for his finance minister, as he had proven himself to be a very able administrator. Dunning had no seat in the House of Commons, though, having been defeated in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Jones became aware of the situation and when Mr. Larabee who had just been elected to the House of Commons was approached, he agreed to resign his seat to make an opening for Mr. Dunning.

As a result Dunning was made available as Cabinet Minister when he won a by-election on December 30, 1935. Dunning was unopposed, to the best of my knowledge.

Mr. Jones arranged the transfer, Mr. Murley recalls. “Shortly afterwards Mr. Larabee was made supervisor here of the Canadian department of fisheries.

This was one step,” Mr. Murley adds, in the Jones campaign to have the Wood Islands-Caribou ferry service inaugurated.

Mr. Jones’ next step was to bring Mr. Dunning to Charlottetown to meet with the Provincial Government, and for a special meeting with the members of the Legislature - All thirty of them.

“The next day, the members of the Legislature, all who cared to do so, went to Wood Islands. Mr. Jones pointed to the far side and gave Mr. Dunning a rough idea of where the terminals would be located.

Was Almost A Joke

“IT WAS almost a joke” Mr. Murley observed that the people who had previously called the proposal a joke, so quickly jumped on the bandwagon when they saw Mr. Dunning so interested. “I had seen them one day curl their fingers around their heads behind Mr. Jones back, suggesting there were wheels loose in his head,” he told me.

After Dunning had listened to Mr. Jones presentation he, sort of drowsy, lay down on the ground with his back to a lobster pot and went to sleep for 20 minutes to one half hour.

“When Dunning got up, he didn’t say much,” Dougald told Mr. Murley, but then Dougald, Mr. Larabee and Hon. Mr. Dunning went to the Larabee home in Eldon for supper.

After supper the three men went into the living room, chatted awhile, then Dunning said to them:

“Well boys, I think I am going to build your ferry for you.”

It was Walter Jones who had driven the thing and had worked his head off to make the thing a reality,” Mr. Murley added.

There had to be a company to operate the ferries. The tender went to a Halifax firm, but this firm did not accept it and the Northumberland Ferries, a local company was developed to run the ferries.

Of course there were other developments concerning the ferry route, terminals had to be built, suitable ships had to be procured to start the service. The second World War had broken out before the operation began and two of the ships the company had bargained for were taken over by the government for the “war effort”, as it was called.

#### Service Started In 1940

BUT THAT belongs to another story. From the Northumberland Ferries Ltd. office here I learn that the ferry service finally got underway in 1940 with the Prince Nova and the Charles A. Dunning, the latter appropriately named for the man who really swung his influence at Ottawa to establish the ferry route service.

Mr. Murley added a word about Dougald MacKinnon and his ability as a negotiator at Ottawa, indeed he was well liked in the Ottawa offices where the affairs of the ferry service were discussed.