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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Oyster Industry History Recalled

By NEIL A. MATHESON

LAST WEEK'S Guardian story of the Commercial Oyster Hatchery development by George Henderson – the hatchery is at Freeland – recalled some earlier stories of oysters. I'm going to write today about two of them.

Before I do, though, I want to say how glad I am that it is an Islander, Mr. Henderson, who is the first to put into practical commercial use the oyster hatching and feeding techniques that have been developed in this decade by an outstanding scientist, Dr. Ray Drinnan at the government station at Ellerslie. The experimental hatchery there is a joint effort of the Canada department of fisheries and the Fisheries Research Board at Ottawa.

I have done a number of stories on Dr. Drinnan. The first I have record of was back in 1961 – his experimental hatchery was not open until 1963 – when he had what were then new ideas, some of them seemed revolutionary, on what could be done to produce oysters in volume.

For example, the female oyster, average size, spawns something more than 4,000,000 eggs per year. That was the thought then at least. And American sources said a large female would spawn 10 million eggs annually.

Tremendous Mortality

RESEARCH SCIENTISTS had found that as high as 99 per cent die before they have a chance to mature. That is under normal conditions. This mortality has virtually been eliminated where oyster larvae can be grown under controlled laboratory conditions.

The result potentially is tremendously increased production.

I recall Dr. Drinnan telling me a half-dozen years ago or more, he envisioned the day when strains of oysters would be developed much like top-notch livestock men develop their purebred cattle now. One thought uppermost in his mind, as I recall it, was that faster maturing strains would be developed. Already there is rapid development of the larvae to bedding size. And much of that gain seems due to the culturing of oyster food at Ellerslie under the direction of Dr. Drinnan and his staff.

Oyster Smuggling

THE FIRST of the old oyster stories goes back to 1844 and it tells of a smuggling effort, as it was called at the time, by a Halifax based schooner that was taking oysters in Bedeque harbor.

Local law authorities were summoned and several sheriffs attempted to board the schooner, after warning the Captain.

Isaac Scales was injured extensively, the old story said and Harry Green, Under Sheriff of Prince County, was wounded slightly when the schooner fired on those

attempting to halt its activities. One other man was not expected to recover from his wounds.

Green, however, proceeded to Charlottetown – the story does not tell how he got there – and a large boat belonging to a surveying vessel, the *Gulnare*, was sent after the smugglers.

That effort failed – there were suggestions it was not pushed sufficiently – but the steamer *St. George* went after the smugglers, took their schooner under arrest five or six miles beyond Point Prim, and brought the smugglers to Charlottetown.

The schooner had made every effort to avoid arrest, but to no avail. Apparently they knew, says a newspaper of that time, that the man they wounded seriously in the Bedeque area, George Tanton, had since died, and the charge against them would be serious.

“Finally capture was effected by the *St. George* flinging her weight over the hull of the saucy little craft, pitching her down, and carrying away her main mast, in the collision.”

A man named Hisscock, master of the smuggler, was put on trial at a special session of the Supreme Court at St. Eleanor’s on December 3, 1884.

The judge charged hard for “murder” but the jury relented and found him guilty of manslaughter,

The jury, says “*The Palladium*”, incurred the severe displeasure of the court as a result. But Hisscock got away with a sentence of “three years, to be kept during that time at hard labor in the House of Correction” in Prince County.

Were Used For Lime

JOHN STEWART wrote in 1806 that most of the lime used hitherto on the Island had been from burned oyster shells.

It was a common practice, Stewart said, to burn the live oysters for that purpose. Many hundreds of barrels would be placed in a kiln to be burned for that purpose.

Oysters are in great plenty in all of the harbors on the Island, he said. “In some places beds of some acres in extent may be found.”

Though the oysters were being burned for lime, the Stewart story said that “Island oysters are preferred to any other American oysters by any Europeans who have eaten them.”

It was in 1825 that action was taken to stop the waste of the tasty oysters.

It provided a fine of ten pounds, for each and every offense, for any persons taking oysters to burn for lime.

Another clause said that no oysters should be exported from the Island for a period of seven years. The master of any boat taking oysters for export would be subject to a fine of twenty pounds.

Church Of Scotland

A FRIEND who called about last week’s column points out that Rev. Donald MacDonald was a minister of the Church of Scotland, not Presbyterian as said by the

American writer whom I quoted. The man has tipped me off to the sources of many good stories in the past, for which I thank him.

But I stick to my statement that MacDonald's monument is in the cemetery at Orwell Head Church. I checked on the material provided for The Guardian last March, just before the new church at Vernon was opened, and it was referred to as Orwell Head. Back in the days when I was a member of a mixed quartette I sang in that church several times, and I recall that was the name members of the congregation gave to it.

Sonic Boom Story

THE MATHESONS were worshipping at Morell last Sunday afternoon and enjoyed the fine singing of the John Fisher male choir. Mr. Fisher is from Upper Stewiacke.

Going into the church I met Bob Compton who told me a most unusual story.

Recently a jet plane flying over his home had broken the sound barrier, with the resultant sonic boom that was really severe. It shook the house violently and when Mr. Compton went to probe for any damage, he found two boxes of matches in the kitchen had been set ablaze. The two boxes were a part of a three-box pack. Mr. Compton doused them in the kitchen sink after opening the taps.