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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Rather Unusual Fare For A Chief Justice

By NEIL A. MATHESON

NOT SURPRISINGLY I find some interesting comments on olden times in a scrap book loaned me by my friend Mrs. Mary Brehaut.

One item from what was then the Old Charlottetown column, thanked W.F. Alan Stewart, Strathgartney for information from an old volume with a long name "The Annual Register or a View of the History, Politicks, and Literature for the Year 1768" The book was published in London, England in that year.

The Annual Register, to use the short name, noted that Charlottetown had been designated the Island capital in 1765, but conditions were still quite primitive when the government officials arrived from England in 1768.

"The first Chief Justice was not commissioned until 1770", the Guardian item said, and a year later we find him writing to the Secretary of State for the Colonies complaining that he was in "the greatest distress imaginable".

He had stretched his credit to the utmost in procuring salt pork and brown biscuit to sustain him through the winter.

And that does seem rather unusual fare for a Chief Justice, even in those very early days.

Shipbuilding On Island

A GUARDIAN STORY by "J.F.L." – he is not further identified – said there had been 4,667 ships built on this Island between 1781 and 1947. The research for the story had been done by Preston Ellis of Port Hill.

"Were it not for his untiring efforts", the item said – he had searched through thousands of records – "it is quite possible that the history of this important industry might never be known."

The first record of any shipbuilding on the Island – of course it was the Island of St. John then – was in 1781 when one was built in Charlottetown and one at Vernon River both of 30 to 40 tons.

Only 79 small ships were registered in the period up to 1800 and only five of them were of more than 100 tons.

It was around the year 1810 that "experienced shipbuilders began arriving from England and the work started with a rush," the old story said.

From 1800 to 1810, 35 ships were registered ranging from 31 tons to 242 tons. In the next decade 132 ships were built ranging from 14 to 389 tons.

Eight ships of more than 400 tons were registered in the decade 1821 to 1830.

Ships were then being built at Charlottetown, Bedeque, Hillsborough Bay, Rustico, Port Hill, Covehead, Bideford, Souris, Three Rivers and Tryon.

Two ships of more than 500 tons were built in the period 1831-40 and the largest, 575 tons, was built at Three Rivers.

The breakdown on the number of ships of various tonnages in that period goes like this:

175 were under 100 tons, 114 between 101 and 200 tons, 16 between 201 and 300 tons, 11 between 301 and 400 tons, three between 401 and 500 tons.

Shipyards Were Numerous

A FOOTNOTE says ships were being constructed at almost every available place. In the period referred to 18 were built at Murray Harbour, 16 at St. Peter's, 14 at Rustico, 15 at Charlottetown, and Hillsborough Bay, 10 at Port Hill and Bideford, 10 at Three Rivers and nine at Bedeque.

In the decade 1841 to 1850, 476 ships were built and the size of the ships was increasing. Seventeen of them were of more than 500 tons and the "Richmond" of 1,162 tons was built at Port Hill.

Shipbuilding was carried on at more than 60 locations on the Island in the decade 1851 to 1860. To name some of the largest building centers Charlottetown built 60 ships, St. Peter's 49, Hillsborough River 48, Pinette and Three Rivers 42 each, New London 39, Souris 34, Rustico 35, Vernon River and Vernon 34, Grand River 30, Orwell Bay 28, Georgetown and Richmond Bay each 24, Port Hill and Bideford 33, New Glasgow 23, Mt. Stewart and Pisquid each 22, Bedeque Bay and Summerside together accounted for 36.

Peak Period 1861-70

THE PEAK PERIOD of shipbuilding was in the decade 1861 to 1870 when 914 ships were built in about 60 different yards.

This period showed the largest number of ships over 300 tons of which there were 89. J.C. Pope headed the list with 14, James and John Yeo together had 17, William Richards had seven.

A decided falling off in shipbuilding was noted in the period 1871 to 1880 when 571 ships were registered.

The largest ship, the Jessie MacLeod, was built at Vernon River and she was of 1,480 tons.

Mount Stewart seems to have hit the high spot in that decade with 104 ships, either built or registered, ranging from 60 tons to 649 tons. Summerside came second with 47 ships, ranging all the way from 300 tons to the Gondolier of 1349 tons.

An interesting note is that the Charles E. LeFurgey of 975 tons was built by John LeFurgey. The old story says this ship is perhaps the best known of the larger ships built on the Island because she was for years sailed to all parts of the world by the late Capt. Joseph Read of Summerside

A FURTHER DECLINE was shown in the decade 1881 to 1890 when only 132 ships were built. In the next decade only 82 ships were registered, and "most of the shipyards were closing out" at the beginning of the present century, the old story said.

And from 1921 to 1947 only 21 ships were built, only one of them being over 100 tons.

The old Guardian item explains that certain discrepancies crept into the listed information which we have repeated here. For example, it explains that there were differences between ships registered and ships actually built on the Island. The figures given here are for ships registered. But that was unavoidable, it was explained, "because no actual building records were available".

Sports Hall Of Fame

DON'T FORGET that Friday, July 3 is the last date on which to get your nominations in for selections to the P.E.I. Sports Hall of Fame. The directors meet on Saturday, July 4 and make the selections. Nominations may be mailed to John McNeill, Journal-Pioneer or to me at this newspaper, or at my home in Southport where the address is Charlottetown RR 1.