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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Winter Crossing Pledge Ignored

By NEIL A. MATHESON

NOW THAT Col. Edward Churchill has been given the task of seeing that the permanent crossing between this province and New Brunswick is actually constructed, I am hoping that at long last the government of Canada will finally fulfill its pledge made almost 100 years ago – it was in 1873 – that it would provide continuous communication between this province and the mainland of Canada.

It's true that the service has been reasonably good since the old Prince Edward Island ice-breaking car ferry entered the service almost 50 years ago – freight was carried late in 1917 – but the “continuous” part of the bargain was never actually provided. I am referring now to people that missed connections with the last crossing of the day and had to wait overnight, or turn away and go somewhere else.

But prior to the Prince Edward Island, the attempts to maintain winter transportation were often completely ineffectual. I have read, for example, of hundreds of carloads of freight being tied up at Pictou and other points awaiting transportation.

An old newspaper clipping from The Evening Patriot that recorded the death and reviewed the career of Captain Allan Finlayson, has some interesting information on just how ineffectual the ice-breaking attempts were in other years.

Commanded The Northern Light

CAPT. FINLAYSON had charge of the Northern Light which was practically the first ice-breaking steamer that tried to maintain regular winter communication between Georgetown and Pictou. The Albert had made a previous effort but only made one crossing, the old Patriot story stated.

The story, incidentally, was received from Muriel M. Lucas, Halifax, a granddaughter of Capt. Finlayson.

The Captain received his master's papers at Glasgow, Scotland in 1876 and was in command of the Northern Light until 1888, the old story states. He was a native of Belfast.

He was later on the Stanley and was given command of the Minto in 1899 – Captain Angus Brown succeeded him on the Stanley. The two ships carried on the service until the arrival of the Earl Grey when the Stanley was transferred to the lighthouse service at Halifax, N.S.

To complete the reference to Captain Finlayson's career, he took the position of storekeeper on the Marine Wharf, Charlottetown. He had refused command of the Earl Grey. After 53 years at sea he decided he had had enough. He naturally had sailed for some years before he became a captain.

Stanley Out 70 Days In 1903

BUT HERE'S the part I really want to emphasize here. The Northern Light was out once for forty days which stood as a record for a time. But "the Stanley was out 70 days in the memorable winter of 1903", the old Patriot said.

The Stanley had become stuck in an ice pan while on the Summerside-Tormentine run. She was carried up and down the strait and her situation became so critical the Minto was sent to her assistance. The Minto lost two blades off her propeller in trying to free her sister ship. So both vessels were helpless.

Finally on St. Patrick's Day, 1903 the Stanley cut her way through to the Minto and towed her into Pictou. The Minto had been helpless for sixteen days before she was relieved.

Some winters it was impossible for the ice-breakers to break through the heavy board ice in the Georgetown harbor, and freight and passengers had to be taken to and from the ships by sleighs. But this did not occur very often.

The officers and men of the ice-breakers used every opportunity, apparently, to break the monotony of the long periods they were stuck in ice in the Strait.

Miss Lucas's mother told her once of a time when two of the ships were stranded in the Strait. They collected as many brooms aboard as possible and played a game of hockey on the ice.

The letter writer notes also that a government publication "Fisheries Protection and Marine Services of Canada" in the listing of officers on January 1, 1902 placed her grandfather, Capt. Finlayson in the senior position.

Away For Christmas 29 Years

ISLAND PAPERS had front-page stories that Capt. Finlayson would be home for Christmas for the first time in 25 years. But that night a storm came up and he had to take his ship out, and it was four more years – 29 in all – that he had not been home for Christmas.

There is no suggestion of criticism for the hardy, resourceful men who captained and manned those ice-breakers of former years. But that does not minimize the fact that Canada never did fulfill the promise of "continuous communication" with the mainland. Indeed Canada never even came close until the Prince Edward Island arrived.

But the performances at Ottawa of the past few years, since the Causeway was promised, and later the causeway-bridge-tunnel complex, compare with the earlier efforts to provide efficient communication by ice-breaker. Both have been futile and frustrating.

The performance of Col. Churchill who has established a tremendous record for getting things done will be watched with keen interest. This man should get things done, if he is given the solid backing of the government people who have put him on the spot with his appointment.

Oyster Hatchery Development

ELSEWHERE IN this issue is a story on the oyster hatchery development which Dr. R.E. (Ray) Drinnan is directing at Eglerslie. I visited the likable scientist during a recent

trip to West Prince. As usual I found him courteous and helpful, though a group of university research students had just arrived that morning.

Dr. Drinnan is highly rated as a scientist among people who are in the best position to appreciate his ability, and the way he applies his efforts to the problems at hand.

One of the senior people in the department of fisheries at Ottawa told me a few weeks ago "We are fortunate indeed to have a man of Roy Drinnan's caliber working for us." The hatchery experiment he is directing could have a tremendously beneficial effect on the oyster industry in this part of Canada. The story of the development is interesting.

Improvement In Mrs. Matheson

I HAVE travelled in recent weeks from East Point – I was there this week – to Tignish in the West and everywhere I went kind people were asking me "How is Mrs. Matheson?"

There has been a great deal of improvement though there still is a long way to go. Since the roads and weather improved I have been taking her for drives with me. Though the distance is necessarily restricted as her strength is limited, the trips we have made together have been beneficial. After some nine months of confinement you can realize, I am sure, how much those outings mean to her. Having her with me again in the car has meant a great deal to me also.

I had planned for her to accompany me to Fredericton where I was singing a couple of Gaelic songs at a district women's institute convention. Margaret had agreed to sing with me the last chorus of a song we had often sang together. The weatherman decided otherwise, though, and she was not able to come with me. The rain really poured that afternoon and the wind was blowing fiercely.

I enjoyed my appearances at a number of these district conventions in the last two weeks. My thanks go particularly to the ladies of the convention which centered in Fortune Hall, for a gift of a handwoven tie, and a set of handcrafted tie-pin and cuff links.

I did not open the parcel until I got home – I wanted to share that part of it with Margaret – hence my belated thanks.