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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Ice-Breaker Stories Stir Great Interest

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I'VE HAD a terrific amount of correspondence on the ice-boats, and the ice-breaker days since I wrote last week's column. I can only deal with a few items because of production problems this week, but the first thing I want to do is correct the statement I had made last week that Captain John Murchison took the Earl Grey to Russia. It was completely my own mistake. I said a Mr. White told me that, but he did not. I misunderstood his letter.

The Earl Grey was taken to Russia by an English crew. All of the crew were paid off at Halifax, except the third engineer, a Mr. Smith – his first name is not available – I am told by William E. White who was the quarter-master on the old ice-breaker.

Several people have written me saying it was Captain John Read who did the job. Captain Read took the Minto to Russia and later the John D. Hazen, which was an ice-breaker from the Quebec area, I am told. The Hazen was named, apparently, for a man who was a one-time federal minister of Marine and Fisheries.

CAPTAIN ANGUS BROWN, Wood Islands tells me that a man who was on the Earl Grey on the long trip told him that the ice-breaker was attacked at one point in the voyage by a couple of German destroyers. The tremendous splashes made by the shells – they luckily missed their target – constituted the first warning of the attack. The English captain headed the Earl Grey into the teeth of a fierce storm, and she had so much power that she was able to pull away in the bad weather. That's the story the man told Captain Brown.

The first Master of the Earl Grey when she first came to this province, was Captain Angus Brown, but he was the grandfather of the man who talked with me a few days ago. The present Captain Brown – he is now retired – was named for his grandfather.

Congratulations to the chaps who successfully completed the crossing of Northumberland Strait with an ice-boat, even though they had no previous experience. And that reminds me that some of the stories written about the stunt, including the picture story on CBC-TV national news, said the real ice-boats last ran in 1915. That is incorrect; the ice-boats ran through the winter of 1916. The Prince Edward Island ice-breaking car ferry did not begin the regular Borden-Tormentine service until late in 1917.

Missed More Than A Week

ALEX SCOTT, retired railway engineer, tells me that the Prince Edward Island was running between Charlottetown and Pictou in the winter of 1915-16 and there was a period of more than one week that she did not make Charlottetown. Mr. Scott relates that the ice-breaker had been sighted from the top of the old Post Office building in the Pownal Bay area, and they had expected she would be in soon.

But a sudden storm blew up and the captain "turned the ship about and made for the open". It was more than a week later before she reached port, Mr. Scott adds.

The ice-boats “had been put into service and were making regular crossings simultaneously from both Cape Traverse and Cape Tormentine”, Mr. Scott adds.

### First Freight Trip Made

THE PRINCE Edward Island carried its first regular freight on October 15, 1917 according to The Island Patriot of that date, and, of course, the freight was mostly potatoes. It had previously been carrying material for the dock and other installations at Borden.

The same paper of October 30, 1917 carried a front-page story which said the staff was being reduced from 79 to 47. One mate, two Bos'ns and 12 men were among those to be laid off. The Conservative government was in power in Ottawa at the time, and I imagine the Patriot was making “political hay” out of it.

Sorry I have to cut this column short, but I have several interesting stories on the ice-boat, ice-breaker days for next week.