

# FROM TIMES PAST . . . .

THE SEA-COW FISHERY by Hon. A.B. Warburton -(From Acadiensis)

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The term 'Sea-Cow' Fishery has anything but a familiar sound to men of the present day. It may be doubted if, in the Maritime Provinces, there are any now living who can remember a time when this industry was prosecuted. Yet, at one time, the sea-cow abounded in our waters, and the fishery, if such it can be called, was of much importance, of so much as to claim the attention of the home government and to call for special local legislation for its regulation and preservation. Unfortunately that legislation failed in its object. The sea-cow has long since ceased to frequent these waters. In its time the fishery was actively followed. The unwieldy animals were of considerable value to the early settlers of this island, as also to those on the coasts of the mainland.

After the formation of this island into a separate government, legislation affecting the sea-cow fishery was enacted, almost at once. Walter Patterson, our first governor, when leaving London to take up his residence here, received particular instructions to enquire into the method of conducting this industry. In fact it appears to have engrossed more attention, in official circles, than any of what we are accustomed to consider our principal fisheries. Oysters, lobsters, not to mention codfish, mackerel, and other deep seafish, seem not to have been "in it" with the sea-cow.

Patterson only arrived in Charlottetown on August 30th, 1770, but he lost no time in investigating the manner in which the business was carried on, and was equally prompt in taking measures for its protection. In a dispatch dated 25th October of that year, now on file in the Record Office in London, Patterson wrote to Lord Hillsborough as follows:

"Agreeable to Your Lordship's directions, given me at your office, the last time I had the honor of seeing you before I left London, I made as soon as possible after my arrival, all the enquiry I could into the manner of carrying on the Sea-Cow Fishery at this island, and finding there were likely to be disputes between a Mr. Gridley, who lives on one of the Magdalen Islands, for the purpose of carrying on the same sort of fishery there; as he generally sends people to this island either to take the Sea Cows, or to prevent their landing and by that means force them to resort to the Magdalens: and some New England fishermen, who frequently land for a few days, to kill Sea Cows; and the inhabitants of this island, who have endeavored to carry it on for some time past and fearing by that means the fishery might be rendered useless to all parties, if not entirely ruined, I have, by the advice of His Majesty's Council, passed an Act for the better regulation of it, which will be herewith transmitted to Your Lordship, that I may know His Majesty's pleasure concerning it."

So far as I can learn this was the first legislation of the new government. I suspect that His Excellency, the Governor, himself was "His Majesty's Council," and that it was his own advice upon which he acted.

Lord Hillsborough, in his reply, dated Whitehall, 2nd January, 1771, says:

"The putting a stop to these practices which must have the

