

Little Incidents in the Lives of Famous Canadians

William Lyon Mackenzie—Saves a Woman's Life.

Shortly before sundown, April 11, 1831, William Lyon Mackenzie took passage from Montreal on the river steamer Waterloo for Quebec, to pay a visit to some of the leading politicians of Lower Canada. The passengers and crew numbered upwards of 50 men; of these about fourteen along with Mackenzie occupied the upper cabins.

The night passed uneventful. The following day the weather turned colder and drift ice was seen floating down the river in ever increasing masses. Speculation arose among the passengers as to the clearance of the channel. However, when one of the company's pilots came aboard off Dechenbault with the information that the ice at Cape Rouge had gone down and left the river clear, all gloom was dispelled. By midnight they would arrive at Quebec.

At sundown while still thirty miles above the city they came dangerously near to a great body of ice choking the channel, and the pilot judged it prudent to turn about and anchor in what was considered a safe place up the river.

The night was cold and clear, back on the banks the world took a grotesque shape in the increasing darkness; beneath the black water stretched limitless, giving back the image of the stars. By eleven the passengers were all in bed except Mackenzie, who sat in his cabin reading. At one o'clock, just before retiring, he lighted a candle and went around the vessel and found that all was well. There was no appearance of storm or danger.

An hour later he was awakened by some of the passengers pounding on the cabin door informing him that they were in immediate danger. The ice had come down upon them driving the ship into the ice field above Cape Rouge, where there was great danger that all would be lost. Per-
groundless, Mackenzie turned over in his berth and went to sleep.

Three hours later the aspect of the ice was extremely unfavorable. A ship of tremendous force between two gigantic, blue-white floes set the Waterloo vibrating like a fiddle string before she arose to the pressure.

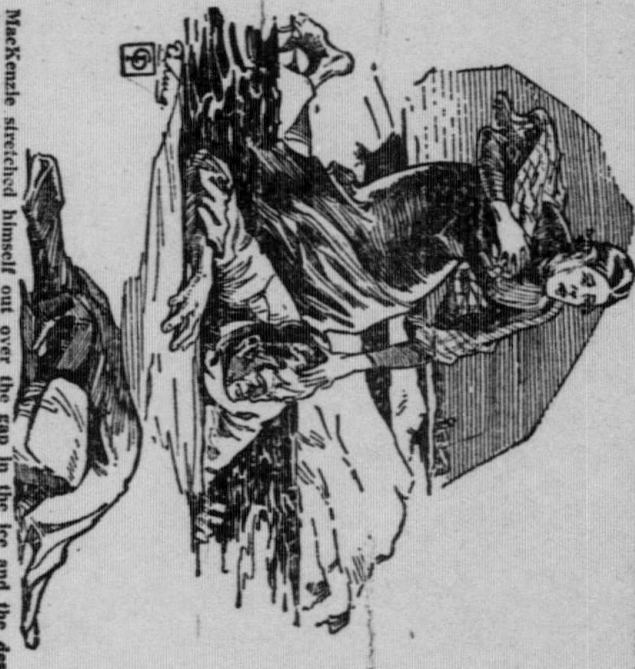
Mackenzie jumped hurriedly into his clothes and came on deck. Dawn was blushing the sky. The ice floes rushing seaward with race-horse velocity were wedging the ice pack through the channel into corrugated, mountainous upheavals that cracked and groaned viciously under the in-

tense pressure. The din was frightful. Vigilantly watching the ice, and taking advantage of every opportunity, the river steamer was squeezed and manoeuvred into spaces of open water until a heavy floe surging down struck the vessel amidships. At the impact the Waterloo reeled and shook. Then leaped slightly toward the crowding ice.

For an instant she hung, quivering with the strain, her ribs and braces cracking like muskets, then slowly began to fill. The passengers frantically jumped over the rail on to the ice and stepping from floe to floe endeavored to make the shore, a mile

was coming up the river and the water rushed up through the rent and rotten ice hindering his progress. Picking his way cautiously from floe to floe, borne high one moment upon the shoulder of a passing cake only to be pitched forward the next on to one less balanced. He kept on over the livid debris of ever forming, ever breaking ice. One floe gave way under his weight and he went up to his neck in the icy water before he managed to scramble to one of more surer footing.

Suddenly he espied a woman completely exhausted, staggering across the ice. Mackenzie rushed to her aid



Mackenzie stretched himself out over the gap in the ice and the desperate woman clambered over him to safety.

distant. Captain Perry, Mackenzie and a few others stood on the ice by the wreck.

As the ship hung perilously on the shelving pack, Mackenzie sought the captain's advice as to the chance of his going down should he return for his clothes and baggage, and receiving the reply that he might dare the venture, went on board. Recovering his watch and pocket book from under the pillow, seizing hold of his saddle bags, valise, great-coat and other clothes, and without hat or boots he jumped overboard and made for the land.

He was the last to leave. The tide

and taking hold of her by one arm he lifted her bodily and carried her over the huge swells and across the rocking ice cakes.

Nearing the shore an open channel of water confronted them. The woman was unable to jump the intervening space, but Mackenzie, without hesitation, threw himself across the breach, clinging desperately with hands and feet to two separate cakes of the pack as the woman walked to safety.

At 6 o'clock they reached the shore at the village of St. Nicholas, 16 miles above Quebec, soaked with icy water and hungry.

King, Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie (MG
26 J 7 volume 23) William Lyon Mackenzie
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