

Old Time Shipbuilding in Newfoundland

Names of Some Well Known Vessels, Where Built, and Builders Names.

BY JAMES MURPHY.

The Hon. Chas. Fox Bennett, at one time Premier of Newfoundland, and leader of the anti-Confederate Party, in 1869, sent the following letter to the press in relation to the ability displayed by Capt. Richard Kearney, brother of Michael Kearney, the great shipbuilder. It appears that Capt. Kearney was a very ingenious man, he dwelt at Monkton, St. John's, and for many years sailed out of Tessier's employ. The letter reads as follows:

Dear Sir.—You and many of your readers remember of the circumstances of the stranding in St. Mary's Bay, of the splendidly built and equipped barque, "Envoy" of the burden of 390 tons loaded with deals, of her being towed into the harbour of St. Mary's with loss of rudder, masts, sails and rigging with serious damage to her keel and stern post of the subsequent unsuccessful attempt with the aid of a steam tug to bring her to St. John's of the dangers and difficulties encountered in getting her back to St. Mary's of her subsequent sail as she lay there in her hopeless condition, and of the impossibility of effecting the requisite repairs at that remote and inconvenient place. That vessel, sir, is now in the harbour of St. John's bottom up, with her cargo of deals and 50 tons of stone ballast, as I am informed, on board. I think it due to that intelligent, ingenious, persevering and energetic man, Capt. Richard Kearney, to state by what contrivance she was brought to this port, to the public or such person thereof as feel an interest in such matters. I think it may be useless before the appli-

cances are removed to give place to permanent repairs, to call their attention to the singularly novel manner in which Capt. Kearney, at a depth of 17 feet beneath the surface of the water supplied a large piece of new keel, the lower part of the stern post, a considerable portion of the dead wood and a new rudder, also to the ingenious means he adopted to heave the vessel down, in the absence of any dock, patent slip, or other convenience by which he could get at and repair the damages. In a few days hence all these temporary appliances will have been removed, as it may be interesting to those to whom it is inconvenient to visit the vessel, to know in which manner the appliances of which I have spoken were made and the vessel under July mists with the aid of the small steam tug Dauntless in a terrific gale of wind then encountered to reach St. John's. I will endeavour briefly to explain that Capt. Kearney prepared, in the first place, a piece of new keel of the length of 22 feet. He then attached a new stern post to the keel and fitted in the required dead wood, he then fitted and fastened the braces to the stern post, by which to hang the rudder. Then pressed strong iron clamps under the keel, and some small chains of sufficient length to reach upon both sides of the vessel to the deck, so that they could be securely lashed, bolting the clamps to the keel when everything was thus ready. Capt. Kearney sunk the whole with the aid of removable weights and ropes to below the keel of the vessel and secured the chains on deck by strong lashings, the stern post he secured firmly by

means of bolts driven into the remaining part of the old stern post above water. He then slipped his new rudder, which worked well, and enabled him to steer his vessel with perfect ease in the midst of a hurricane of wind safe to St. John's.

C. F. BENNETT.

There were many ships built in this country and fine ships at that. The "Fleetwings" was built for the firm of J. B. Barnes & Co. The Arabella Tarbet was constructed for Puntun & Munn, there were others as well. Of late years the class of ships being constructed are mostly fishing schooners. I am informed that a large vessel is now on the stocks at the West part of Newfoundland, being built for a gentleman connected with the fish trade, now residing at St. John's.

In Monday's edition of the Mail and Advocate I made mention of the hardships which seamen underwent coming on the coast of Newfoundland, especially in the winter season. In the fifties a ship called the Totnes left Dartmouth, England, with a general cargo, for the Labrador, when near Bonavista Bay she became a wreck, having been caught in the ice. The seamen escaped out of the ship and got on the ice, six men were on one pan and eight men on another pan. A heavy sea hove in and half the men were drowned. The remainder of the men were picked up by the British Queen and brought into Greenspond, Bonavista Bay. Many of my readers will recollect the loss of the Jura on a voyage from Tilt Cove, copper ore laden for Swansea in the seventies. Her crew were Newfoundlanders, they were picked up and brought to Philadelphia, U.S.A. In verses of a song composed on the occasion I find the following:

Come all you Newfoundlanders
And listen unto me,
I'll tell you of the Jura
When she went down at sea.
On the twentieth of September,
I remember well the day,
We hoisted up our topsails
And from Tilt Cove sailed away.
The song then goes on to describe the toil undergone by the seamen, the

huge seas breaking of the Jura, and the thoughts of mothers, wives and children at home. It speaks as follows of the sinking of the Jura:

With four feet of water in the hole,
The masts and booms just gone,
She would be at the bottom
Long before the day was done.
With a heavy load of copper ore
The Jura she went down
And she was bound from Tilt Cove
Across to Swansea Town.

Maybe the names of some of the foreign going vessels of the olden time will be acceptable to my readers. Here are a few which left the port of St. John's. Of course there were others, but I think the following names will suit: The Margaret Cummins, Christian Rainbow, Sterling Clipper, Star of the East, Dumbarton, Kinglock, Arrow G. M. Johnston, Myrtle and Chedebucto.

Out of Harbour Grace some fine vessels left on foreign voyages. Puntun and Munn sent the Topsy Rothsey, Favourite, Three Sisters, William Puntun, John Munn, Arabella Tarbet, James, and others. The firm of Rudley & Sons sent to market the Adamant, Belle, White Mouse, Hardee, Margaret Ridley, Mary, Scipio, Greyhound, Thomas Ridley and others.

Before closing my series of articles on the old time shipbuilding in Newfoundland, I wish to state that I am in entire accord with a statement made by the Rev. H. D. Nicholson, a Protestant Clergyman from the old country who resided in Terra Nova, on a temporary visit some twenty-seven years ago. This learned and cultured gentleman said that our chief dependence is on our fisheries and on our minerals and not upon our soil, that it would take many years before the latter would be of any service to us. Now I am sure that the Rev. Mr. Nicholson spoke the truth, for despite all the attempts made by us to foster agriculture in this country, to my mind they have not as yet been productive of much value. The fisheries are still our mainstay, it is at this toll that the great majority of our people make a living. Our mines in the main remain unopened, there are a few, it is true, but the vast number of which



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we read are still lying dormant, and of course in consequence of employment, the hardy toiler seeks a living elsewhere, in the mines of Sydney for instance, while mines are existing in the land of his birth hungering for the hand of the developer. Shipbuilding then should be fostered by all true lovers of their native land. It will be the means of many finding work at this healthy avocation, and the money made at it will be circulated in the country for the country's good. My earnest prayer is that President

Coaker may be successful in his undertaking of shipbuilding in Newfoundland and that his Egls may well stand the shafts of ridicule or spite, which may at times be thrown against it and that Catalina may become the Utopia of his dreams, for it is evident that he has at heart the upbuilding of this centre, which he intends to out- rival in commerce, many places of more prominent trade at present in the money made at it will be circulated our Island Home. With those few remarks, as the Hon. Gentlemen of the House of Assembly,

would say, I have done, and now I bid the readers of the Mail and Advocate au revoir till some other day, when I may regale them with matters of interest on some topic typical of the land of my birth.

(The End)

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