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THE MAIL AND ADVOCATE, ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND, MARCH 10, 1915-2.

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The History of Sealing in Newfoundland

By James Murphy

"The stormy month of March is come, Boys, muster and prepare To leave your homes, o'er seas to roam And take the sealers' fare."

The above lines were published in a song written by Mr. George Webber, in 1842, seventy-three years ago. Mr. Webber at that time edited the "Conception Bayman," a newspaper published at Harbor Grace. He was the grandfather of Mrs. Nurse, widow of the late Rev. Mr. Nurse. In the days written of by Mr. Webber, the seal fishery was prosecuted with vigour. A mere handful, nowadays tread the frozen pans compared with those who went in search of the "golden fleece" in days gone by. The first mention of a seal fishery in history is made by L. Abbe Raynal. He says that in 1763 some English fishermen used to repair to certain parts of the coast of Newfoundland during the winter, for the prosecution of the seal fishery. In the year 1795 the total catch was 5000 seals. Small schooners shortly afterwards took the place of boats. These schooners carried from twelve to fourteen men each and left port about the 21st of March. As the fishery became more and more productive, larger vessels took part in it, until to-day we have ships like the "Florizel," "Nascopie" and "Beothic" going in search of the icefloes' wealth. The introduction of steam took place in 1863. In the early part of the last century St. John's sent a great number of vessels to the ice than any other port in Newfoundland, namely 126 sail. They were lively times. We had not the grandeur then, as now, which oftentimes proves a curse instead of a blessing and steals the love which fellow-men should bear to each other. However, the old folk managed to get along independent of the frills which their offspring are enamoured with to-day. They lived long lives, wore a rugged and a healthy people, and we shall never see their like again. If we believe in the Bible, we must admit of its veracity in relation to the race getting weaker and wiser, for this is what we are seeing around us. As I remarked, St. John's had not then achieved the pomposity which its present residents parade. The merchants then sold, as a Yankee writer once stated, "everything from a needle to an anchor, rum, sugar, soap, bluchers, pumpkates and sparobills." The garb of the toilers was rougher than it is now—mole-skin trousers, blanketing drawers, plaid worsted and white flannel shirts, grey worsted stockings, homespun jackets and canvas jumpers, were the common apparel of the fisherman, the "back-bone" of Newfoundland. We have men amongst us now, and women also, who would turn up their noses if they were told that their fathers donned such a dress, but they need not be ashamed of the garb of the men of bygone times. Clothes can never make the man. As Burns puts it:—

"What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddens grey and a' that,
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that."

Who ever spoke more truly than my favorite bard? Yes, "a man's a man for a' that." What men in this country can we look up to in our "darkest hour" but the men who, since their boyhood, have sailed the salt sea waves? Do you respect them as we should? If you respect yourselves, boys, you must respect them. Remain no longer "hewers of wood and drawers of water." Eighty years ago the class of vessels prosecuting the seal fishery averaged from 40 tons to 100 tons. A few were slightly larger. Then the sound of the caulking hammer and the ring of the blacksmith's anvil was heard throughout the land, watering and ballasting the vessels. Blasting channels to get them down the harbour was all the rage. It must have been a splendid and a soul-stirring sight to witness the bustle and commotion then in evidence. Lieut. Bonnycastle, in his history tells us that hundreds of men were coming to St. John's with bundles of clothes on their shoulders supported by stout sticks seven or eight feet long to be used as "bats" to kill the seals. They also carried the old time sealing guns, flat locks, many of which I saw in my boyhood. The sealers' voices sounded musical on the frosty air. Their merry "anchors ye ho" as they raised the hatches and their favorite ditties when warping the ships down the channel, was a treat which we know nothing about. A verse of a favorite song is as follows:—

"O now my boys, we're sound and clear
And then give Larry all his gear,
We'll make a bill this very year
And then give Larry all his gear,
So early in the morning,
The Larry mentioned in the verse was

the late Hon. Laurence O'Brien, an Irishman and at one time President of the Legislative Council. He had some fine vessels, amongst them being the "Kingslock" and the "Michael Anthony Fleming," called after Bishop Fleming. It must be remembered that the old sealing vessels, after ice time, made trips across to Liverpool, London, Waterford, Cork, Hamburg, Genoa, New York, and other places, and were commanded by the men who were masters of them at the ice. This is a thing which we rarely see nowadays. Houlihan, Lynch, Burke, Knight, Feehan, French, Cole, Woodford, and the famous "Capt. Bill Ryan" who left Terry behind to paddle his own canoe, were Master Mariners, besides many others whose names I have not at hand just now. Eighty years ago the vessels sailing to the ice took from 20 to 30 men each. Some of the best known, when a few old-timers may remember, were the "Dick," "Drake," "Goose" and "Gull." These four vessels measured 107 tons each. The largest vessels out of St. John's at this time was "The Lady of the Lake," Capt. Butler, known as the "bulky boy." He was the grandfather of Joseph Perez, of the Reid & Co. Electric Light Department. The "Kingslock" was next in size to the "Lady of the Lake." Then came the "Nine Sows," "Angler," "Amity," "Shaver," "Adelaide," "John Stewart," "Mary," "Britannia," "Calypto," "United Brothers," "Daniel O'Connell" and the "Eliza," owned by Richard Howley and called after his wife, Eliza Burke, mother of His Grace the Late Archbishop Howley. She was a vessel of 97 tons, in charge of Capt. Thomas Foran. Some of the captains names of the time was as follows:—Healy, McLoughlin, Brien, Burke, Houlihan, Brier, Parcell, Cummins, Knight, Carew, Furneau, Furness, Butt, and "Paddy Murphy" who commanded the "Hope," owned by Molly Woodley, 78 tons, carrying 18 men. The names of the supplying merchants were:—Newman & Co., H. Aisop & Co., Rempe, Stuart & Co., W. Watson, R. P. Hunt, C. P. Bennett & Co., Bennett, Morgan & Co., Cadner Jennings, John Bulley, John Nicholas, Stewart & Chestham, McBride & Kerr, Richard Howley, Ewen Stabb, Baine, Johnston & Co., A. J. Kerr, Pennerd & Boag, J. Stewart & Co., W. & H. Thomas, John Barron, John Ryan, Patrick Jordan, William Blake, Bulley, Job & Co., Howley & Co. Bland & Tobin, Laurence O'Brien, Patrick Morris, John Mitchell, John Eales, John Brine, James Hogan, John Wyatt, Mary Woodley, John Harvey, Mudge & Co., A. Horwood & Co., J. Butler & Co.

The sealers were charged berth money in the early days of the seal fishery. A strike or two ensued in consequence, brought about principally by its being raised more than usual. It was finally dispensed with. In 1842, on the 18th of March, 2000 sealers assembled on the Barrens and struck to get the berth money lowered. They marched around the town to the tune of a fiddle and drum, and the merchants lowered the berth money from £3 to £2 and the bow gunners went to the ice free as before.

The standard price in those days for a seal, large, medium or small, was five shillings. Bills of forty and sometimes as high as sixty pounds were made. An old citizen, since gone to his eternal rest, informed us a few years ago that berths were had by boys of fifteen in his time far easier than men can get them to-day. The year that Piccott, of Portugal Cove and his crew were lost, which was 35 years ago, there were a goodly number of boys who went with him. Piccott was in the "True Blue." He was spoken to coming down the shore off Cape Spear by Pat Mackey in the "Devonport." Piccott had 5500 seals on board. It was very stormy and blowing a blizzard, and snowing fast. Piccott was behind Mackey and shouted, "Aren't you going to run in, Pat?" "No," replied Mackey, "I don't think it is safe." "It's safe enough for me," said Piccott. "Good luck to you," shouted Mackey. The latter put to sea. Although he was a brave man, yet he was a careful one. Piccott ran for the land and was never afterwards heard of, and he and all his crew met a watery grave.

In the old days, there was a rivalry shown between the captains, stimulated by the merchants, who presented a flag to the captain who brought in the greatest number of seals for the season. I find that in 1833 Capt. Carew, of St. John's was presented with a prize flag by R. B. Job, Esq., for bringing in port the year before the greatest number of seals.

Sometimes persons of note took trips to the ice in the old sailing vessels. We notice that as far back as seventy years ago, John Johnson, Esq., of the firm of Balne & John-

ston, left for the frozen pans in the champion "Cape Corbin." Speaking about Johnson reminds me that on about the same date the late famous native shipbuilder, Michael Kearney, launched a handsome vessel of 160 tons from the shipyard on the South-side of St. John's, for Mr. Johnson. She was christened "Gauntlet" by Harcourt Moony, Esq., then a well-known lawyer. Lieut. Chambers and Asst. Surgeon Martin also took a trip to the ice in the old sailing vessels. Coming down to the sixties we find a larger class of vessels at the ice, the largest ones of St. John's being the "Henry Thomas," "Elizabeth G. M. Johnston," "Triumph," "Eleanor Davys," "Dumbarton," and "Christian," two of which were over 200 tons. The others were bordering on the 200. At this time, St. John's had a fine lot of sealing captains, and many amongst us will remember them to-day. They were the Houlihans, Quinlan, Staunton, Goss, Connors, Gallishue, Geran, Burke, French, Hallern, Jackman, Prior, Ryan, Duff, Woodford, Feehan, Glinden, Rhodes, Mealy, Callahan, Colbert, Sheehan, Joy, Lynch and Capt. Mullowney, the father of the wife of my esteemed friend, Hon. M. P. Cashin, Finance Minister. Some very funny songs were sung in the early years of the seal hunt, one composed by a sealer of the "John and Martin," of Carbonear, written in 1845, reads as follows:—

"When we got into the 'Jam'
The 'soles' was very thick,
And the Captain, he cam for'ard
With a junk of a stick,
He said, 'You burnt all my 'lassy,
And you roasted all my pork
So now, you mortal sons of gons
I'm going to make you work'
To my ring too ra laady, to my ring
too ra lee."

When a ship came in from the ice in the old days she notified her arrival by firing guns. Here are a few lines of a song written about the same:—
"Whist! there's the guns! Be off for
buns,
Now, Kilty, don't be long,
Get a pound of 'lay,' the best Bohay,
Your daddy likes it strong."
A verse of another song in vogue about forty or fifty years ago was
"Greenspond is a pretty place,
And so is Pinchard's Island
My! ma, we'll get a new silk dress,
When da comes home from swillin'."

God help us, 'tis not many new silk dresses the present race of women can get when their husbands come home from "swillin'." The game now is hardly worth the candle, and every year it seems to get worse. A verse of a song which I often heard sung when I was a boy, was as follows:—
"The 'Eagle' is gone to Pool's Island,
Commanded by Capt. Bill Kneec,
Arthur Jackman is gone in the 'Falcon'
The 'Head of the 'Star of the Sea'
in the year 1860, 291 vessels, 34,854 tons and 14,121 men was the outfit to the ice. The vessels went from St. John's, Hr. Grace, Brigus, Carbonear, Bay Roberts, Trinity, Hant's Hr., Channel, Harbour Main, Catalina and Greenspond.

As my readers know, many lives have been lost since the beginning of the seal fishery. There is one pathetic incident recorded in which a noble Newfoundland dog took part. It happened in 1867. Two women went with a number of men in search of seals

off Catalina and Ragged Harbour. One of the women was found dead with a dog standing over her body. The other woman perished also. When her body was found, the dog refused to move away from her late mistress. A gaff was used freely to compel the animal to go away, and it was finally done, but not before the dog had bitten one of the men in the leg. What a faithful animal! How truly Byron wrote on the monument over the Newfoundland dog buried at Newstead, London. Speaking first of the rich man's death he said,

"When all is done, upon the tomb is seen,
Not what he was, but what he might
have been."

He then records the dog's faithfulness in the following lines:—
"But the poor dog, in life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, the foremost to defend,
To mark a friend's remains these stones arise,
I never knew but one—and here he lies."

Here we have one of the grandest minds ever created declaring that a dog was his best friend. And for one would take sides with him, for I and hundreds of others have seen more kindness shown by a dog than by some so-called Christians, and this is a fact which we see in evidence every day. As the space in the Mail is limited, I must soon close my narrative, but not before showing, as far as I believe, that the seal fishery is a lottery, and that many of the best men get left. In 1861, the "Mary Ann," Capt. Winsor, left Pool's Island on March 5th. She carried away her spurs shortly after leaving. She put into Greenspond and made repairs. She sailed again on the 12th and returned loaded with seals on the 24th. The "Echo," Capt. Greene, got jammed in the ice on one occasion. All the other vessels got clear. Some days after the "Echo" got clear, ran into the young harps, and got a full load, while the other vessels made poor trips. In 1862, the "Naomi," Capt. Parsons, carried away her main mast off the Narrows of St. John's. She put in here for repairs. The captain was almost crying, but what happened? Why he got 4000 seals. After he left St. John's, Mr. Thomas told Capt. Parsons that all things worked together for the best. Michael Carroll tells us that sealing is a game of luck, that he has known men who have started to go where they would get the seals, and on the way a gale had sprung up and they had been driven into thousands of seals, while had they reached the place where their minds had appointed, they would not have got enough fat to grease their boots.

There are many spring known in the annals of seal fishing as notable ones, less of lives and vessels having taken place. In the spring of 1838 the Association of Underwriters sent a vessel to White Bay laden with provisions and clothing to the assistance of a number of St. John's vessels who were icebound at White Bay. Seals have struck in near the land on many occasions. In 1862 thousands were hauled ashore by the people of Green Day. In 1841 numbers of seals were near the Coast. The Methodist clergyman at Grates Cove, killed and sculpted a great number of them. Seals

were numerous outside of St. John's the spring before the 9th of June 1846. The "William Warren," Carroll, Master, which lay a few miles off the Narrows, was boarded by William Vinnicombe and James Cantwell, pilots, who told the captains where the seals lay. Carroll placed his men on the ice, one crowd to kill and sculp, the other to haul. He got a load and the pilots were complimented on their courage in boarding the vessel. In the 'sixties, Calemson of Trinity, was driven into White Bay on the 4th of April by a gale of wind. He tied the vessel to a pan of ice and the seals around him were so numerous that every vessel in the country could have got a load if they had been in that vicinity. Here then, is another case of a man's judgement in relation to seal hunting.

If I have made only one person happy by my compilation of the old sealing days, I shall be pleased, for in any case to me it is a labor of love to dilate on the achievements of the past, of which we all should feel proud. I must now finish, as I have trespasssed already on more space than I expected the Mail to allot me, and before doing so, I wish our noble captain and their hardy crews, an abundance of good luck, bumper trips, and a safe return to their loved ones, one and all. Sometimes it depended on the disposition of the captains or a captain, who used persuasion in a marked manner; oftentimes he kept back his man from "manusing"; other captains became rash and bullied their crews.



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