

Old Time Shipbuilding in Newfoundland

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

BY JAMES MURPHY.

Shipbuilding in Newfoundland was carried on extensively in the olden days. Hundreds of our ancestors sought and found employment at this industry, especially during the winter season. Unfortunately for the country the industry received a set-back, but we hope it is to become more perfected as in our fathers' time, by President Coaker, of the Fishermen's Union. It is with no little pride that I take for my theme for the columns of the Mail and Advocate "Shipbuilding in Newfoundland." Others have written on this topic, but since the adoption of the scheme by President Coaker no person has informed the men of the North, or of other parts of our island of how the building of vessels progressed in the past. From the most reliable sources I have gathered my statements of shipbuilding, and I believe that before I conclude my series of articles, that the intrepid and hardy fishermen will be mentally recompensed by their personal.

In the report of some of the cases adjudicated one hundred years ago, in the courts at St. John's, mention is made therein of the custom prevailing in relation to the construction of vessels. One report says: "A custom prevails in this country of advancing supplies to dealers to enable them to build vessels, that the vessels so built are held as securities to be reassigned upon payment of the supplies, and that a reasonable time is allowed to the debtor to work out the debt and clear the vessel."

There is a report of a case which came before the Supreme Court in the fifties. It was a breach of contract concerning the remodelling of a vessel called the "Mary", owned by a prominent merchant of Conception Bay. The shipbuilder, the defendant, was Albert Pittman of New Perfection, of whom I will have something to say in relation to shipbuilding later on. Mr. Pittman was told to have the "Mary" ready before the time, he was to lengthen her twelve feet and one foot wide, and one foot deep. The plaintiff said that "Mary" was not as perfect as the contract had called for, and that she was not ready in time to proceed to the ice-fields. The jury brought in a verdict of one shilling for the merchant, the latter claimed his loss at many hundred pounds.

Before I dilate on the versions given on the building of vessels in those years I will give the appearance of a miniature vessel made by William Knight, over sixty years ago. She was a sealing brig, and was, so the records inform me, the first of her kind built in Newfoundland. The brig was in a glass case on miniature ice; the case was seven feet square, she was named "Governor Hamilton" and was three long on deck, eight inches beam, built of mahogany, on a scale of one inch to three feet giving a brig, of 108 feet long, 24 feet beam and 160 tons. She had ten punts, with oars, gaffs, iron cambouse, water casks, pound boards and every other requirement used at that time on board of a sealing vessel.

It can be seen by this portrayal of native talent that a taste in architecture, of shipbuilding kind, was in evidence, even in men who have not figured in the construction of big vessels. Newfoundlanders were always adepts at building craft of all sizes, and that ability so much in vogue fifty, sixty and seventy years ago is still with us yet, and it only remains

for President Coaker to revive the skill now lying dormant among my countrymen.

One of the most ardent admirers of progress in this country was His Grace, the late Archbishop Howley, in a lecture on general topics delivered by His Grace to the members of the Catholic Institute in the seventies. Speaking on shipbuilding His Grace said: "There is not one ship on the stocks in St. John's, and the total number built in the country during the past year was only 60, tonnage 2,971, being an average of only 50 tons per ship or boat. The average number of ships annually built in the Colony up to the year 1865 was about 60, but those are mostly a very small craft, the average tonnage being twenty-nine tons. Newfoundlanders buy ships from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward's Island; but a large number of fishing crafts are built there. In 1865 these so built were in tons 2910, value \$80,400. From these figures it appears that our country, even in this, its own specialty, does not sustain a favourable comparison, and yet it ought not to be so. The timber which abounds in the vast interior of the country covering thousands, nay millions of acres, is of the very best quality for shipbuilding purposes. I have heard it stated by merchants who had ships built of native wood in Trinity Bay that after twenty or thirty years in the ocean it was found as sound as the day it was launched, and yet, Anspach's History, of Newfoundland page 364, says: "The ships of native build might perhaps live seven years at most, that they were ominously designated 'Newfoundland coffins' thus have writers misrepresented this country."

Had His Grace lived to see the undertaking in shipbuilding contemplated by President Coaker, knowing that he dearly loved the advancement of his native country, I believe with all my heart that he would be one of the foremost in sounding a note of praise. One of the peoples representatives in 1852, speaking on shipbuilding told his hearers that it had been practised here in all time past. It was stated to be the natural pursuit of the people of the Colony, who were bred to it from their youth. He said that a vessel could be built here as cheaply as in the other colonies. The vessels built here were said to be superior and more durable than imported ones.

Up to 1846 shipbuilding was on the increase, that year a calamitous fire occurred at St. John's, then the building of vessels suddenly declined. The returns from that year to 1851 showed in 1847, 17 vessels, the total tonnage of which was 854. In 1848, 19 vessels, the total tonnage of which was 994. In 1849 30 vessels, the total tonnage of which was 1055. In 1850 there built 31 vessels, the aggregate tonnage of which was 1621, of those six were over 100 tons. In 1851 38 vessels were built, the united tonnage of which was 1653.

The Hon. William Beckford Row, once prominent in mercantile business and afterwards a noted counsellor of law, could not paint such a rosy picture of shipbuilding as some of the members and merchants as in the Assembly in his day. This gentleman said: "That shipbuilding had been tried by many of the large houses in former times, as for instance, Danson's of Conception Bay, Garlands of Trinity, and Newmans of St. John's, and to the Southward and Westward, all of which had discontinued it, simply because they

could buy vessels cheaper elsewhere."

Now this explanation above "Buying vessels cheaper elsewhere," was to use a local expression, "knocked in the head" by Mr. Targett, a very prominent man in his day. He said in giving evidence before a select committee on shipbuilding: "I have built six vessels in Green Bay, and in my judgement vessels can be built as cheaply in this Colony as elsewhere. One-third of the men in the outports, can work as ship-carpenters and are trained to boat building from their childhood."

George H. Emerson, Esq., returned unopposed for Pogo, in 1852, said: "I am an advocate for giving a bounty for shipbuilding, because I think it will be the means of affording employment, and consequently bread to hundreds who are willing to work and would otherwise remain unemployed, and as I am aware that very many coasting vessels are built yearly in your district, should any bill pass in the next session for the encouragement of shipbuilding, I shall use by best efforts to apply the bounty to all vessels of forty tons and upwards."

Bryan Robinson Esq., afterwards Sir Bryan Robinson, in his address to the electors of Bonavista Bay said in relation to shipbuilding: "I am aware of the arguments that are urged against the doctrine of bounties, but I think that the condition in Newfoundland renders its shipbuilding an exception to the rule, and I am favourable to the Legislature extending encouragement to that branch of trade. Many a hard and industrious man in our outports would be enabled by shipbuilding to earn a livelihood for himself and his family during our long winter, who, otherwise, would be devoid of employment."

(To be continued.)

MORE FISHERY NEWS.

Sept. 30th: From W. Chambers (Hr. Buffett to Brine's Island)—Twenty dories and skiffs and 15 boats are fishing, and the catch is 3,400 qts., with 150 for last week. Prospects are fair and there is a good sign of herring and squid.

Sept. 30th: From T. Soper (Chapel to Port aux Basques)—The catch to date is 1,722 qts., with 50 for last week. Fourteen dories and skiffs and one boat are fishing. Prospects are fairly good and there is sufficient liquid for bait, but dogfish are hindering operations. Many of the skiffs are re-fitting for the fall fishery.

Sept. 30th: From C. C. Pittman (Muddy Hole to Allan's Island)—Practically no fishing is now being done and the voyage will likely end up with approximately 24,000 qts. from Lord's Cove to Point May. The total catch here is 9,250 qts.

NEWFOUNDLANDERS WOUNDED AND MISSING

The name of Private James Payton, of St. John's appears in a recent Canadian casualty list as missing, and of Ptes. N. Burton, Twillingate, and Matthew Hooper, McCallum Hr., Hermitage Bay. Pte. Payton, who left here some four years ago, is the son of Mr. Rd. Payton, Bannerman Street, and was in Cuba when the war began, enlisting later at Sydney. He has a brother in "Ours." Pte. Burton joined the 25th Canadians in Glace Bay in March, 1915 and for sometime previous was in the 94th Regiment of the Canadian Militia. Pte. Hooper enlisted in Sydney.

BLASTS FRIGHTEN WOMEN.

Blasting operations are being carried on at Haw Building corner of Adelaide Street and New Gower St. Three explosions occurred there shortly after 7 last evening with the result that a woman named Tucker, living near, received a great shock, and fainted from fright. Sgt. Mackey, who was on the scene called a doctor, who prescribed for her and after a while she revived. For a while she was in a bad state.

THUNDER STORM THIS MORNING.

Shortly after 1 o'clock this morning an electrical storm broke off to the S. E. and the rumbling of thunder could be heard in the distance. There were some very vivid lightning flashes and after a while there was an interval of about 30 minutes when the storm recommenced and came nearer the city. Heavy rain showers occurred and till well after 3 o'clock did it cease.

BADGES FOR NAVAL MEN

Besides the badges being given men who tried to enlist in the Regiment, we learn that badges will also be given the men who volunteered for the Naval Reserve but were not accepted. These badges, we hear, will be somewhat similar to those issued for the Regiment and will be distributed shortly.

The S.S. "Alconda" reached Botwood yesterday to load paper and pulp for England.

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