

Muscatine No. 1

History of St. John's Regatta

For Seventy Years Past.

By James Murphy. - - - St. John's, Newfoundland.

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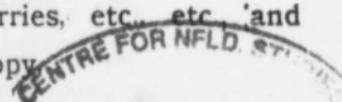
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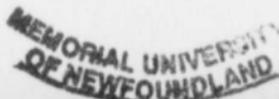
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DEC 12 1995



History of St. John's Regatta, For Seventy Years Past.

By James Murphy. St. John's, August, 1908.

“ IN summer, about the end of August, the young men get up a regatta on Quidi Vidi Pond, for oared boats, and some very spirited matches take place, at which time the adjacent meadow for three days is covered with booths, and looks like an English fair, excepting that every booth has a flag.”—Newfoundland in 1842.

The above quotation was taken from a work published on Newfoundland by Sir Richard Henry Bonnycastle, Kt., in 1842. He was a Lieut-Col. in the corps of the Royal Engineers stationed at St. John's at that time. Three days was the time allotted for racing by our ancestors at the outset of the races on Quidi Vidi; then it came down to two days, and as years wore on, one day only was set aside for the sport. In this short sketch of our annual regatta which I purpose to give through the pages of this little pamphlet it must be understood that all the details in connection with each year cannot be given. Since the year 1841 down to the present the most interesting items however I have endeavoured to rescue from oblivion for the benefit of those who are interested in the regatta. Before giving this information I would like to quote a paragraph taken from a newspaper published in St. John's in 1828, on the regatta, as follows:—“We feel infinite pleasure “in announcing that the annual regatta is about to take place “on an early day. We consider boat racing of every description as “synonymous with Newfound'and pursuits, in fact, a piece of the “ship, and the liberality always evinced to promote it fully sup- “ports our ideas on the subject.”

It may be seen by the above extract that as far back as eighty years ago, our fathers gave willingly to assist in having boat races on Quidi Vidi. Previous to the forties the boats were of an inferior build. The coming of the “Victoria,” built at Halifax in 1840, and

7, the "Ripple," built by Mr. Samuel Loveys of St. John's, gave a new impetus to boat-racing; these boats were of a class very superior to those used since the regatta came in vogue, but it must be understood that the boats were not equal to the racing boats of the present day.

In 1841 the following boats were on the pond:— "Maid of the Mist," "Ripple," "Red Rover," and a crack boat built at Halifax named "Lallah Rookh." The last-named boat out-stripped all competitors until the coming of the "Lucy Long," a boat built by Mr. Samuel Loveys, the celebrated builder of that period. The "Lucy Long" was built in 1844. She was a pretty model and measured thirty-six feet in length. The "Lucy Long" was a great favorite in her day, there are old-citizens amongst us who remember the days of the "Lucy Long." The same year a handsome boat named the "Gem" came here, She was built by Mosely at Halifax. Mosely was a noted boat-builder. The "Gem" measured the same as the "Lucy Long." The latter was painted white with a red streak, and carried a white flag; the "Gem" was painted vermilion with a black streak, and carried a red flag with her name in the centre.

The "Lucy Long" beat the "Gem" and also the "Lallah Rookh" which boat for years had beaten all opponents. This year the "Quiz," "Ripple," "Ferryland Lass" and "Repeal" also contested. The "Ferryland Lass" was built by the late Mr. Michael Kearney, ship-builder. The "Repeal" was built at Halifax, was painted green with a white streak, and carried a green flag; She was an inferior boat, and never did much for the time she was on the pond. A purse was put up for a race between the "Quiz" and the "Repeal" in 1844. The "Quiz" won.

In 1850 a boat named the "Banshee," built at Halifax and painted green, came to try her speed. Before coming here she had beaten all competitors at St. John, N. B., and at Halifax. She also remained a winner at our regatta for some years, until Loveys got his "hand in" in 1854 and built the "Undine," a handsome gig. The "Indian Chief" was built the same year by a Mr. Holden; a boat named the "Jenny Lind" rowed also. The "Undine" beat them all, and remained a winner for some years. Mr. Piers owned the "Banshee." He was a clerk in a Water Street store.

In 1855 Loveys built the "Darling," named after Governor

Darling, after whom Darling Street, now Bond Street, was named.

A boat named the "Fly," sent here from Halifax, competed the same year.

The "Darling" was the winning boat. The Quidi Vidi fishermen rowed the "Darling" against the "Undine" on the second day of the regatta 1855 and won. They were made a present of her and a special bet of fifty pounds. In 1856 Loveys was again to the fore. This time he built the "Eugene." A unique feature in the regatta took place this year: it was a women's race, the first and last ever held at the races. The Quidi Vidi women rowed the "Banshee." the "Undine" was her competitor. In her were a crew from the North and South Side of St. John's. The "Kitty Vitty" women came off victorious. Their names were:—ELLEN WALSH, Stroke; JENNIE KING, MARY BRACE, GLISSIE SQUIRES, LIZZIE HAUTON, JESSIE NEEDHAM, ROBERT HENSEBURY, Coxswain.

From 1856 up to 1860 the "Hazel" and "Elector" were the two favorite boats. The year 1860 His Majesty King Edward, then Prince of Wales, visited Newfoundland and spent a few hours at the races. There were no races from 1860 until 1871.

The following named gentlemen arranged our Derby Day in 1871: Judges—Capt. T. H. WALTERS, JOHN MEEHAN, Esq., and Capt. PHILIP CLEARY, Comm. —Messrs J. E. ROACH, ALLAN McDUGALL, EDWARD KIELLY, JOHN BAIRD, and C. S. MILROY.

The boats which rowed were male-boats and ships gigs. The whale-boats were the "John," "Janette" and "Henrietta."

In 1872 Mr. Fred Lewis, pilot of the port, who is living and as keen a "sport" on racing as they built the "Lady of the Lake."

The same year the old "Hazel" and "Elizabeth" rowed. Wilson's prize, a silver cup, was competed for this year, and was won by the "Elizabeth." Mr. Wilson was a famous play-actor, giving shows in St. John's at the time. In 1873 the old "Native" was built, and a boat named "L. L. L." the same year. The "Heather Belle" contested in 1874. A downpour of rain put an end to the races, only three or four being rowed. This year was famous for the great sculling match between George Ferguson, the champion sculler of Halifax, and Richard Squires, of Broad Cove. Ferguson rowed and defeated his opponent on regatta day this year, and became so elated over his victory that he challenged all New-

foundland. It was accepted by Richard Squires, an humble fisherman of Broad Cove, District of St. John's. The following is a copy of Squires' challenge to Ferguson:—

“NOW or NEVER!

I, plain Richard Squires, of Broad Cove, by this publicity do tender a challenge to Mr. George Ferguson, the successful combatant in the late sculling race on Quidi Vidi Lake, to contest a similar race, and on the same waters, for the sum of \$50 or \$100 as may be agreed upon, our mettle to be tested on Saturday next at any hour agreed to. If the challenge be not accepted to-day business will require me to leave town for my home.

St. John's, Wednesday, Aug. 19th, 1874.

Squires gave Ferguson an “awful” thrashing. He left him half-way down the pond. Ferguson rowed ashore where the City Club boat-house now stands. Squires was brought through the town on the shoulders of his countrymen, and was feted for a week at Foran's Hotel. He is alive to-day, and a fine man despite his age.

In 1875 the “Volunteer” and “Lady Hill” came along. Scull races were in vogue in those years but were done away with some ten or a dozen years ago, and more is the pity.

In 1876 the Prince of Wales' prize was won by the “Mary,” rowed by the Outer Cove fishermen. The “May Glover” rowed this year.

The year 1877 saw the boat “Placentia” built by Mr. Sinnott at Placentia, and rowed by a crew of Placentia men, beat her competitors badly in the fishermen's race. The Placentia men were a fine crew of fishermen. Seven boats contested in this race, namely:—“Placentia,” “Volunteer,” “Native,” “Queen of Beauty,” “Orient,” “Rosetta” and “May Glover.” The crew of the “Placentia” were: PHILIP MORRISSEY, DANIEL MORRISSEY, PATRICK MORRISSEY, JOHN MORRISSEY, MOSES MORRISSEY, JAMES WHELAN, SINNOTT, Coxswain. On the 13th. of July, 1878, the “Hawk,” built by Loveys at Toronto, arrived in St. John's, she did poor work her first year, but she was the winning boat until 1882. The “Swallow” owned by Bowring Brothers, also the “Contest” came on the pond this year.

In 1879 the “Dora,” built by Johnson, and afterwards, re-

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modelled. rowed. In 1882, her crew of amateurs made the quickest time ever made up to then, rowing the course in 9 min. 21 sec. The "Lizzie" and "Fly" came next year. (1880)

The year 1881 saw the "Lurline" and "Buttercup" two good boats in their time. The "Olivette" came in 1882. She was owned by the late Moses Monroe. In 1884 Philip Mahoney built the "Terra Nova." At this regatta a sad accident happened in the sixth race. While the boats were coming back to the starting point and when a little below Woodley's, the "Terra Nova," having taken in some water, careened over, and her crew, all Torbay youths, were thrown into the water. Three of them, Gosse, Martin, and Power, were drowned. Their bodies were recovered.

The "Terra Nova" was re christened next year and was named the "Myrtle." She continued to be a winning boat for twelve years afterwards, until the coming of the "Glance" and "Cabot."

In 1885 a scull race took place between John Coaker, of St. John's and Thomas Leahy of Halifax, who claimed to be a champion sculler. On the day of the races, in the scull race after the boats started, Leahy broke an oar and came back, the outcome of which was a challenge sent by him to Coaker, who won the race. The challenge race took place on August 25th. The Lakeside was lined by thousands of spectators and great enthusiasm was shown. The course was two and a quarter miles and at the finish Coaker came in fully twenty boat lengths ahead of Leahy.

The "Resolute" rowed in 1885 and the "Avalon" in 1886.

There were two days' races held in 1887. This was known as the Jubilee year, being the Golden Jubilee of the late Queen Victoria, mother of our present King. The "Gypsy" and "Mascotte" were first seen on the course in 1889 and the "Iris" in 1889.

In 1890 Mr. John Ryan, Shipwright, placed the "Lilly" on the pond. She was a handsome boat, though she never came to much account. There were no races in 1892, it was the year of the big fire of July 8th. The "Daisy" was first seen on the pond in 1894.

The "Glance," "Cabot," "Iris," "Daisy" and "Bob Sexton" were the boats that rowed until the "Red Cross" showed up in 1900. The "Blue Peter" was built in 1901. The "Shananditti" was built in 1900 by Rev. Father O'Brien. The "Doctor" came in 1903 and the "Togo" in 1904. The "Red Lion" was built in

1906. The boats now rowing are the "Doctor" "Togo" "Red Lion" "Blue Peter" and the "Nina," all except the latter built by the famous builder Bob Sexton, whose skill as a boat builder is undisputed. May he live long to enjoy the reputation which he has won is the heart-felt wish of the compiler of this pamphlet, who has known "Bob" as a jolly good fellow for a period of twenty-five years.

The "Nina" is a new boat built this year by Mr. John Taylor, shipwright.

Before I close I think that the following names will be of some interest to the present population of St. John's. They rowed the "pond" in 1828. It was a race between Brooking's gig and Hoyle's whale boat. Brooking in those years kept a large premises and supplied hundreds for the seal and cod fisheries. Their place was where Harvey's Coastal premises is to-day. The gig was rowed by LASH, FURNEAUX, HEBBURN and WINTER, the latter was the father of Sir James Winter. Mr. Pearce steered the gig. The whaleboat was rowed by HOYLES JUN. (the late Sir Hugh Hoyles,) KEOUGH, LEGGE and HOWLEY, (the latter was the father of His Grace Archbishop Howley), Capt. MOVSE steered the whaleboat. The gig won the race. If the official time of the boats was kept previous to the interval of eleven years following 1850 it is not on record. I found the time for only one year published in the press of the old days, and that was in the year 1856. This year the "Undine," built by Loveys, outstripped her opponents in the amateur race, covering the distance in 11 min. 45 sec.

As far as can be known the races on Quidi Vidi began over ninety years ago, as noted in a preceding paragraph taken from a newspaper published at St. John's, in 1828 relating to what it terms "the annual regatta." It must have been going on for some years before that date.

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