

Harbour Grace History

125 YEARS AGO
HARBOUR GRACE—From old records of the history of Harbour Grace, some of Carbonear and Brigus, we propose to write a series of articles which will deal with the doings of these places a century and a half ago.

These three places were at that time carrying on important business, trading with European and foreign markets being done by the principal firms of which we will write as time goes on.

When Thomas Ridley started as a young man in the trade of our country, he was employed as a supercargo, looking after the fish as it was loaded on the vessels. He often went to foreign countries on these vessels and he became proficient in the exact requirements of the different places, and in this way formed an intimate acquaintance with the merchants in Portugal, Spain and Italy. He was able to find a ready sale for his fish at the best prices, and with his desire to please, orders came rapidly as they could depend on getting the best quality which meant satisfaction to all concerned.

It was therefore a common occurrence for vessels to clear from Brigus and Cupids for Oporto and Spain. There were also merchants in Adam's Cove and Lower Island Cove shipping their fish to markets in foreign countries.

The principal merchants and shipowners were in 1832, Thomas

Ridley and Co., William Danson, Thomas Hooper, Josiah Parkins, John Nuttall, Thomas Foley, Roger Hanrahan, Wm. Donnelly, Peter Rogerson, Patrick Hearn, David Power, Thos. Godden, Robert Parsons, Robert Oks, Moses and Israel Gosse, Peter Brown, Wm. Sheppard, Daniel Green, Henry Webber, John Stevenson, Darby Hartley Alfred Mayne, Power and Coady.

In those years this country was struggling through troubled times, following the Napoleonic Wars and it took at least a generation to recover.

In 1831, Danson's was the largest firm with branches at Holyrood and Bay de Verde. They owned a score of vessels, but they were in financial difficulties and so was Josiah Parkins, J.P.

Danson's place of business was where Munn and Co. and Murray and Crawford used to operate. Northeastern Fisheries now occupy the site. Josiah Parkins place was where the Public Building stood at the time of the 1844 fire.

Danson's headquarters were at Bristol and at the time of the failure, Hugh William Danson was mayor of that place. It has been said that they should never have been closed up, but for the ill-advised advice of the English firm. A few weeks later, every vessel of this firm arrived from the seal fishery loaded. It was considered a calamity when the firm of Danson's closed its doors. However, the old adage that "what is

one man's loss is another's opportunity" was proved true, and when Danson's premises closed in 1832, they were purchased by John Munn, then a young man about 25 years of age who joined partnership with William Puntun, and by perseverance, industry and ability, they built up the large business of Puntun and Munn and later on, John Munn and Co. which at the time of his death in 1878 was second to none in this country.

In 1832, Capt. Puntun commanded the Brig. Norval and in her made regular visits, summer and winter to Europe. The Norval sailed on December 1832 for Lisbon from Harbour Grace and was reported in March at her loading berth at St. John's. Capt. Puntun died in 1843 at Aberdeen, Scotland, where he had retired, and the business was carried on by John Munn and relatives. This firm carried on for well over a hundred years.

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Last week our heading read "Labrador History." It should have read as above for we finished our Labrador History a few weeks back and have now turned to a review of the history of Harbour Grace and surrounding areas in and around the years 1830.

Thorne Hooper & Co. was another firm which carried on business which William Donnelly later took over and was in more recent years the site on which Archibald's Boot & Shoe Factory stood. (This building was destroyed in the 1944 conflagration.)

It is recorded that Thorne, Hooper & Co., bought the premises from Denis McGrath, uncle of Denis Shea, who may be remembered by some of our old residents, and whose premises were removed by the Town Council from the corner of Victoria and Water Street only last year.

It is said that the firm of Thorne, Hooper & Co. had a record of four hundred years, which must have taken them back before the discovery of the island by John Cabot. They were largely interested in the Iceland fisheries and also in the Baltic lumber trade. Records have told that Robert Thorne of Bristol was one of the principal backers who sent John Cabot on his voyage of discovery to this land.

February 2nd 1832, was a memorable day for at 8 a.m. the schooner "Jane" was launched at

Bears Cove by Mr. William... She was 82 tons. At 6 o'clock, about the same hour, a new brig of 132 tons, the property of Mr. George Forward, sailed in the presence of a large number of spectators. Suitable modulation had previously been arranged for the ladies. At the moment of her leaving the band of music which was then began to play "God Save the King." At the same time, she was named "King William the First." The King William as she was usually called, went to the spring in command of Capt. Taylor but she only brought in 1000. However, Capt. Taylor's foreign voyage in her first year, so she was untouchably staunch vessel and a year's two launches in one for a common occurrence, but this only a beginning.

My next article will give a count of the celebration of the centenary of the association of Fishermen and Seamen at Harbour Grace on that day, this being the second of their founding.

Hr. Grace History With Historical Record Of Brigus

HARBOUR GRACE—Last week's article took the form of reference to and quotations from a poem written about 1830 by one James Sharpe, then High Constable of Harbour Grace, describing the events of Squire Leamon's House warming.

Squire Leamon became a member of the House of Assembly and the home referred to in the poem stands in Brigus today and is considered one of the prettiest around. It is now occupied by the daughters of the late Captain William Bartlett, who are descendants of Squire Leamon. The house is known as Hawthorne Cottage.

"Billy the Dandy" was Captain William Robbitts. He was so styled owing to the name of his famous little brigantine, the "Dandy." A familiar expression of his was "My ship is the 'Dandy' and she is a dandy." Some historians tell that he was called Billy the Dandy because of the aristocratic way in which he dressed but according to Mr. Shortis this is "rubbish." For he says that Capt. Robbitts never wore anything but a reefed tacket and cloth pants and an Eton cap and that he would as soon put on a straight jacket as a fan tailed coat.

"Silly" as his poem says "you know had a Persuading way" was an Englishman who settled at Cupids and was a famous ship-builder.

"Up gets John Cousins, solemn and sure" John Cousins was the principal merchant in Brigus for many years.

"Up gets Steptaford, modest and mild" He was head man with Cousins and a well known musician.

John Niner Harris was the schoolmaster at that time and educated a famous number of men who made their mark in this country's history. He was lame and used a crutch with which Sharpe says was ready to cudgel the duellists if they persisted in the duel. In the same manner as he treated his scholars.

athaniel Munden was a famous seal-killer and his brother William made two trips to the seal fishery nearly every season to other captain's one. His descendants, the Makinsons, are well known in this country as are many descendants of others named in this poem.

Next week's article will tell of Mutual Assurance Clubs and their meetings

JUNE 29, 1957

July 17, 1957

Historical Records Of Harbour Grace

HARBOUR GRACE—It is said the earliest Mutual Insurance Newfoundland was started by James Wats at Carbonear in 1806, and in an advertisement he says that he is prepared to accept insurance for local vessels in Conception Bay, but this insurance club was the manager can annual returns, as low as 2% per annum, and about a single loss, according to Mr. H. Wats, the general manager of the firm of James Kemp of George Kemp, and Mr. Wats was a new-returned from business in England. Mr. Wats having had conference with this large circle of friends to start business for the season was from March 4th to May 21st. It was decided that all payments of losses should be made in Spanish dollars, valued at five shillings each. They all agreed to remunerate the owners for total loss occasioned by winds, tides, rivers, rocks, ice, lightning, fire, the port or at sea, enemies, pirates, thieves or by any means whatever, provided the mariners shall not be able to prevent it. The club shall not make good any loss arising from barratry or the masters or mariners. Neither shall it pay for losses occasioned by smuggling or in illicit trade.

The officers of the club at this time were, Carbonear, Wm. Taylor, Felix McCarthy, John Nicholl; Bay Roberts, Samuel Mercer; Port de Grave, Patrick Delaney; Spaniard's Bay, William Andrews; Spring Cove, John Richards; Bannock, Robert Gosse; Brigus, James Ormsay, William Percy and John Gushue.

The following were appointed joint treasurers of this society or club: Robert Pack of the firm of Gosse, Pack and Fryer; John Elson of St. John's; and George Forward and William Bemister.

Historical Records Of Harbour Grace

SHIP PACKETS ON CONCEPTION BAY
PORT GRACE—The route from Port Grace to the west coast of Newfoundland was the path persons to the west coast of Newfoundland. The route was called the "Express" and was the first direct line from Harbour Grace to the west coast of Newfoundland. The following advertisement is given in the "Express" of 1832.

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of the coach drivers who ran the mails around Conception Bay to Flenmilla and Ferryland and other places as well.

The name of Dooley is the first documentary evidence that the late Mr. P. Short had any regular packet being run on Conception Bay, but during the thirties the six eared skill had developed into packets of thirty and forty tons. These packets had their headquarters at Carbonear, Harbour Grace and Brigus and plied direct from each port to Portugal Cove and there was great rivalry between them.

Edward Phelan also ran a "packet" but he lost her in a storm near Cupids, several lives were lost. Robert Oke was manager of the "Express" which left every second day from Harbour Grace for Portugal Cove. The fare was ten shillings for first class or cabin passengers, five shillings for second class or stowage. Single letters were carried for free, double letters were one shilling and parcels in proportion.

Another company ran the packet "Zephyr", George Volsey master, and charged the same rates. She left Peter Brown's wharf at Harbour Grace at 9 a.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, weather permitting and returned the next day from Portugal Cove. Old George Volsey had a left on Water Street at Harbour Grace, and was the first man to use Luffier matches. He used to charge the youngsters a half penny to see him strike one. His wife was famous for her black puddings and their house stood up to a few years ago at the foot of Stretton's Hill.

July 5, 1757

Historical Records Of Harbour Grace

Last week, this article told of the first Mutual Insurance Club and of an annual meeting of the Club held at Carbonear in 1835.

Further on this meeting. Those present also arranged to continue the insurance for the summer season, but the Sealing Risk and the Fishing Season were to be kept separate. It will be noted that the managers of the principal firms looked after the financial part of the business, but each member of the Club was directly interested and was to render assistance whenever the Club Flag was seen, which was a white flag with the letter C in the middle.

Some very famous names of that time are mentioned. Capt. Edward Pike, better known as Capt. Neddy, was one of the most successful seal-killers of his day. He always loaded the Melrose.

Capt. Francis Tylor was he who first fitted the schooner Providence for the sealfishery in the month of January, then took a load of fish to Oporto and was taken prisoner off the coast of Bordeaux, France, who mistook him for a pirate with his large crew, all fully armed. He eventually turned up at St. John's in the month of April with over 5000 seals and was presented with a silk flag by the Commercial Society to honor his wonderful and successful exploit.

The Insurance Club at Harbour

Grace held some interesting meetings also. The firm of Thomas Ridley & Sons was one of the most progressive in the country. Mr. Ridley was one of the most aggressive spirits in the place and it shows the independence of the other members of the club when, at one of their meetings, they "sat on" Mr. Ridley.

It happened March 11th, 1834, and the following members were present: J. C. Nuttall, Wm. Puntun, Joseph Soper, Peter Rogerson, Thomas Ridley, George Thorne, Thomas Foley and John Fitzgerald, Secretary.

Proposed by J. C. Nuttall, seconded by George Thorne, that the schooner Elizabeth, Johnson, Master, Thos. Ridley, owner, is excluded the benefit of insurance in this club in consequence of damage received in this port, being unseaworthy this day and proceeded without being surveyed.

The Secretary certifies that Mr. Ridley had left the meeting previous to the passing of this resolution, but he left a copy at Mr. Ridley's residence who replied that he would not receive the same, but the Secretary said that he left it on the table.

The following day another meeting was called to receive a letter from the firm of Thos. Ridley & Sons regarding two of their vessels, one of which was the Elizabeth.

Proposed by Mr. Puntun and seconded by Mr. Soper that the proposition regarding the Elizabeth is inadmissible as not according in a resolution made the previous day. Mr. Peter Rogerson dissented and stuck out for Mr. Ridley.

It was then proposed by Mr. Puntun that the thanks of the meeting were due Mr. Thorne for his impartial conduct while acting as chairman. They appear to have shaken hands and agreed to bury shaken hands and agreed to bury the hatchet, as the matter was dropped.