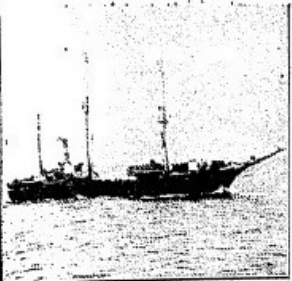


Ropes And Gaffs—Saga of The Sealfishery

OLD-TIMERS



THE OLD "DIANA" HEADING NORTH. BOTTOM—



The famous barque "Queen", under full sail.

It is a series of articles that tell the story of the sealfishery. It goes on to tell us about the old-timers, the men who have been in the business for many years. It tells us about the changes that have taken place in the industry over the years. It tells us about the men who have made their names in the business, and about the men who have been forgotten.

VETERAN'S OF BY-GONE DAYS



CAPTAIN JOHN NORMAN



CAPTAIN JAMES NORMAN

LEFT—Capt. John Norman. RIGHT—Capt. James Norman; two sealing captains of the old days. Both were residents of Brigus.

It. Our ancestors went all out in their enthusiasm for the sealfishery and talked "seal" from day light till dark. Where our modern youngsters dream of becoming Hopalong Cassidys or Space Men, the lads of long ago had as their heroes the rough, sawney sealers who thronged the streets of St. John's every spring and manned the scores of vessels that cleared from here for the Northern fleet. It is interesting to compare the enthusiasm shown then among all classes to the apathy that prevails today with regard to our sealers. And speaking of the boys they tried their best to emulate their heroes in the strenuous and dangerous sport of copying, or jumping from gun to gun, on the ice that blocked the harbor of St. John's practically every spring in the days of long ago.

And this great interest in the seal hunt was often demonstrated in an amusing way. There is a story told of a Mr. Hutchings who owned a premises in the West End and had one vessel going to the sealfishery. Her name was the "James". She was commanded by a man named Kent, a native of Bell Island. One spring, the "James" arrived on a Sunday with a large cargo of seals. As she came up the harbor, an old Irishman, employed as a watchman by Hutchings, became frantic with delight. He rushed up to his master's residence on Water Street, and almost battered in the door, shouting all the while, "Bliss yer yob and damn yer hides, got ye! Don't ye see the 'James' is comin' in wid a load o' sealers!"

SEALERS' STRIKES
Strikes were fairly common among the sealers in the days of the old sailing vessels. Writing on the subject in 1882, John Valentin Nugent, one time Member of the House of Assembly, said, "The question of the amount of berth money has agitated the sealing population for many years, and still has its tendency rather to increase than diminish, but at length the sealers determined to procure a reduction of the charge for berths, and in order to effect this, they, on Monday last, held a meeting on the Barrons and

passed a number of resolutions pledging themselves to the adoption of every constitutional means to defend their rights, to refrain from entering upon the voyage until the merchants should consent to reduce the berth money from £2 10s. per man to £2 for common or ordinary hands, called 'basemen'; £1 for after gunners and bow gunners free, and to insist that they should be allowed to take themselves not to use any coercive means for the oppression of their object."

Speaking of the above, the Rev. Philip Tompey, in his history of Newfoundland, says: "The meeting of the sealers referred to in the preceding article by Mr. Nugent, took place in St. John's on the 12th of March 1845. The berth money that year had been raised for the merchants and owners of vessels to three pounds, and three pounds ten shillings currently for the basemen, and one pound for the chief gunner who had hitherto gone free. Some of the parties committed a trifling breach of the peace and were imprisoned for a short time. The berth money, however, was lowered to two pounds sixteen, one pound ten shillings for after gunner, and the chief gunner went free as before."

This was the first sealers' strike. The new scale of prices for berths was suggested by Richard Walsh, known as "Native" Walsh, a well-known merchant of his day. "The strike was organized by Henry Supple, a man of superior education, but a fisherman like myself, with whom I worked for many years," says David King, an old resident of the strike, in an article in the press many years ago. "The object of the strike was to secure a reduction in berth money. The sealers assembled at the head of King's Road, and with Brodley the fiddler, a fiddler, and a drummer, they marched through the town, visiting all the wharves, and searching the ships for those not in sympathy with them and such men had to fly for their lives. The strikers were masters of the situation, and the merchants reduced the rates to 20, 10, and 5 shillings. The town was small then and the strikers made

out prominently in the procession. On this banner was inscribed the following verse:

"The traveller heeds not the weary mile,
As he comes to bask in the angel's smile,
Low tending to earth his heavenly brow
As he pledges his faith in that holy vow."

The last big sealers' strike took place in March, 1902, and on that occasion the sealers were championed by that stormy petrel of Newfoundland politics, the late Sir Alfred B. Morine, K.C. The strike began on March 8th, and ended on the 12th, when the demands of the men were granted. A song that went the rounds of St. John's at that time has this to say regarding the strike:

"They halted just before the Bank
Wholly South is a line,
They went inside to state their case
Before A. B. Morine,
He got the terms to suit the men
And from the van did call
That he received three fifty
And free berths for one and all."

At that time, Sir Alfred (then Mr.) Morine had his office in the

Bank of Montreal building. The last verse of the song reads:

A ringing cheer the sealers gave,
With hearts both light and gay,
And three more cheers they gave
The man who won the day,
With happy hearts they fetched
Their bags
As lightly they did trip
With huc and bags and baking
To go on board their ship."

REFLECTIONS ON THE DAYS

OF THE SAILING VESSELS
To show the vast changes that have taken place in the sealing industry during the past one hundred years, and the tremendous decline in the number of ships and men taking part in the annual hunt let us go back to the year 1857 when the proclamation of the sealfishery by sailing vessels was at its height. In that year nearly 15,000 men and nearly 400 vessels sailed from various parts of the island in search of whitetails. The following list shows the number of vessels and men from each place:

Place	Vessels	Men
St. John's	81	3,319
Brigus	87	3,580
St. George's	57	3,382

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(Continued from Page 9)

Carbonar	38	1,467
Greenpond	30	1,044
Trinity	23	1,096
Catalina	22	841
Trinity	20	762
St. John's	7	293
Mr. Main	7	293
	370	14,635

Besides the above, there was a number of ships from other parts of the island, which would make the total number of ships near the 400 mark, with nearly 15,000 men at the ice that spring.

From the above, it is seen that the sealfishery, besides altering social customs, largely increased the importance of the outports. Many residents of the outports carried on a large business in such places as Trinity, King's Cove, Harbour Grace, Carbonar, Brigus, and Port de Grave. The effect of the sealfishery was to give vitality to the wealth of the various settlements where it was carried on. Prior to the 1840's, when merchants began buying vessels from Lower Canada, nearly every vessel at the sealfishery was built in this country, and consequently ship building was a big business in many settlements. In many places the seal fat was rendered into oil and there were vast amounts of the principal settlements. All this brought strength and wealth to the outports and increased the growth of a great middle class—traders and sealing skippers—and often the two occupations were combined. "Enormous amounts of money," says Frowse, "were made in those days. Steam completely changed the whole aspect of affairs. The men got much smaller shares, the big bills of the forles and fifties are no longer earned, a man's share to-day hardly ever goes over £20 or £10, and the great army of sealing skippers and agent planters, where are they? When Mr. Walter Grievé sent the first sealing steamer to the ice it was a poor day for Newfoundland."

And speaking in the Legislature Council many years ago, the Hon. James McLaughlin said, "I am filled with melancholy reflections as I take a retrospective view of the past thirty years ago, when we had a large fleet of sealing vessels prosecuting the sealfishery. It would be difficult to imagine a more beautiful sight than

the long array of vessels ranged before daylight, during the hours of yelping dogs to try for fuel. I have had a companion, the first of which used to tick the log for nights away in my bed. The cooking stove on the place of the dog house no longer behind the cabin, the light of which faintly glows in the dark setting room. Then the jolly pot sitting up waking a planter who had gone out in right to his merchant. The introduction of the steamship has taken some of the rough manhood out of a day is not far distant when some traveller from New Zealand had to be carried across the ice to the sealfishery. The introduction of the steamship has taken some of the rough manhood out of a day is not far distant when some traveller from New Zealand had to be carried across the ice to the sealfishery. The introduction of the steamship has taken some of the rough manhood out of a day is not far distant when some traveller from New Zealand had to be carried across the ice to the sealfishery.

heard shouting upon the deck one day, during the hours of yelping dogs to try for fuel. I have had a companion, the first of which used to tick the log for nights away in my bed. The cooking stove on the place of the dog house no longer behind the cabin, the light of which faintly glows in the dark setting room. Then the jolly pot sitting up waking a planter who had gone out in right to his merchant. The introduction of the steamship has taken some of the rough manhood out of a day is not far distant when some traveller from New Zealand had to be carried across the ice to the sealfishery. The introduction of the steamship has taken some of the rough manhood out of a day is not far distant when some traveller from New Zealand had to be carried across the ice to the sealfishery.

When the planter barked with his broad back. "Fed his men on good potatoes and Ham and butter." "Or when the father of 'manus' By name Val Kélas. Led the crew of the brig Against old Captain Ser (Next week: The coming Steamers.)

FAMOUS CAPTAINS



CAPTAIN A. KEEN
Governor of the Fleet



TOP—Capt. Abraham Keen. LOWER LEFT—Capt. William Bartlett; LOWER RIGHT—Capt. George Whiteley.



RIGHT—Capt. George Whiteley.

TOP—Capt. Abraham Keen. LOWER LEFT—Capt. William Bartlett; LOWER RIGHT—Capt. George Whiteley.