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By C.H.J. SNIDER

QUINTE WAR STATION 132 YEARS AGO

TALKING of Telegraph Island, off Sophiasburg Township in the Bay of Quinte, the late Alf Rubbra, who was a bright young newspaperman in Toronto fifty years ago, once cruised the Bay in the mackinaw *Billy Kid*, with some other choice newspaper spirits. He came back with a story which sheds a sidelight on the name of the island.



“We came to a channel with a lighthouse on a little island on one side of it, and began to beat through. It was broad daylight. As we neared the lighthouse we saw a man

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in the lantern tower waving his arms vigorously, like a switchman trying to stop a train, so we tacked away from the light. When we thought we had cleared the unknown obstruction we tacked again towards the light, and again the lightkeeper vigorously semaphores the keep-away signal, so again we tacked off. This kept up till the wind died out, so we anchored and rowed across to the lighthouse in our dinghy to ask the keeper what was wrong with the channel.

“Nawthin', ye darn fools,' said he. ‘I wasn't wavin' to you. Can't a man polish his window-panes from the inside without havin' a lot of city dudes ask questions?’ ”

Many have come forward with suggestions explaining the name of this pastoral islet without any telegraph.

Manly Macdonald, A.R.C.A., O.S.A., whose brush has sympathetically interpreted the wharf life of the Bay, offers the possibility that the island may have been a station or a landing place for a telegraph cable crossing from Hastings to Prince Edward County. Gilbert H. Walters, manager of C.N. Telegraphs, which took over the pioneer Great Northwestern, can find any trace of a telegraph line here for forty years back – or at any time.

Ottawa has a record of the lighthouse on the island being lighted first in 1870, but no hint

as to the name. It appears on an Admiralty chart of 1890, perhaps based on the Bayfield survey of 1817, and it is found in a township map of 1878.

Harry S. Powley, 44 Wilson avenue, offers the opinion that the rows of stake buoys on either side of the long channel suggested telegraph poles and hence the name of the narrows and the island.

WE are talking, of course, of the island with the prominent lighthouse on the south side of a long buoyed channel, in the Telegraph Narrows, in the upper reach of the Bay of Quinte, twelve miles east of Belleville and four miles west of Deseronto. Fred B. Meyers contributed a discovery from Canniff's book in 1866 that an island west of Belleville in the part of the Bay west of the Nigger Narrows and, therefore, near Trenton, was then named Telegraph.

There is no island there now so named, and the mind runs back to the word Alf Rubbra used casually – "semaphore." May it be that in the War of 1812, or in the Mackenzie Rebellion, the Sophiasburg island was used as a visual signal station, operated with flags or semaphore arms?

Such "telegraphs," and so named, were in use in England in preparation for the Napoleonic invasion which did not come off, and they were in use in Canada at the same time. There was such a telegraph on Scarboro Bluffs, which relaid the approach of the American fleet on York, April 26th, 1813, the evening before the battle.

As the Bay of Quinte was raided by Commodore Chauncey and Pirate Bill Johnston and the self-styled Commodore Benjamin Lett, in the War of 1812 and in the Mackenzie Rebellion of 1837 it is reasonable to suppose that warning signals would be devised. Telegraph Narrows in the upper reach of the bay would be a good position from which to signal towards the Carrying Place, by way of Massasauga Point.

The Carrying Place was an important strategic position, the only water approach to the Bay of Quinte from the west, where goods, canoes and bateaux were carried across from Lake Ontario into the Bay on a wooden railway operated by ox power. The distance across the narrow isthmus was less than two miles. American prisoners of war were sent to Fort Henry in Kingston by this route.

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