



SUBMITTED PHOTO

REV. JOSEPH J. CURLING

The *Sapper* was Rev. Joseph J. Curling's mission ship in the Bay of Islands late in the late 1800s. It is said by the descendants of Absalom Noseworthy, that Rev. Curling gave each of the crew a copy of this 1889 photo of the *Sapper*. Taken in St. John's Harbour, it is believed to be that of the crew who sailed on this final voyage to England 115 years ago.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE REV. ED LEWIS, GREAT-GRANDSON OF ABSALOM NOSEWORTHY

Trans-Atlantic voyage of Bay of Islands boat celebrates 115th anniversary

By LINDA ELKINS-SCHMITT
Special to The Log

It was 115 years ago this month when the *Sapper* sailed out of St. John's Harbour bound for Portsmouth, England.

Reverend Joseph J. Curling, Anglican Rural Dean for Bay St. George to Hamilton Inlet, and a former officer in the Royal Engineers, commanded the 33-tonne schooner and his crew of six men across the Atlantic.

Many families living in the Bay of Islands today are descendants of those six crew members. My great-great-grandfather, George Benjamin Hunt, from Summerside, was mate. George, who was born in Liverpool, England, was about 55 years old in 1889. He was no stranger to the sea, having spent many seasons fishing at Chateau Bay, Labrador, where his wife, Lucy Mills, had died six years earlier. He was also familiar with the *Sapper*, often having accompanied Joseph Curling on his voyages throughout the Mission.

As was the situation with the rest of the crew, George and his family were active members of the Church of England in the Bay of Islands. He also helped erect the first School Chapel at Summerside in 1886.

Samuel Batt, of Benoit's Cove, who had been born in Dorchester, England, 42 years previous, was cook. George Perrett from Mount Moriah, who at 22, was the youngest member of the crew, was steward. Ed Knight, age 31, was a sailor. Born in Labrador, he had moved to the Bay of Islands with his parents, Thomas and Patience, by the early 1870s. Absalom Noseworthy, age 42, was also a sailor. His father-in-law had played a major roll in the construction of the boat on which he would now sail. John Compagnon of John's Beach, age 24, was the third sailor. Ten years before his death in 1948, this elderly gentleman recalled many of the details of this story of their Atlantic voyage.

Not only were the crew from the Bay of Islands, the *Sapper* had been built in Petrie's Cove in the early 1880s, eight years before the trip to England.

Colonel Richard Jelf wrote about his friend's activities in the winter of 1880-81 in his book *The Life of Joseph James Curling, Soldier and Priest*: "All this winter the new Mission vessel, which he was building him-

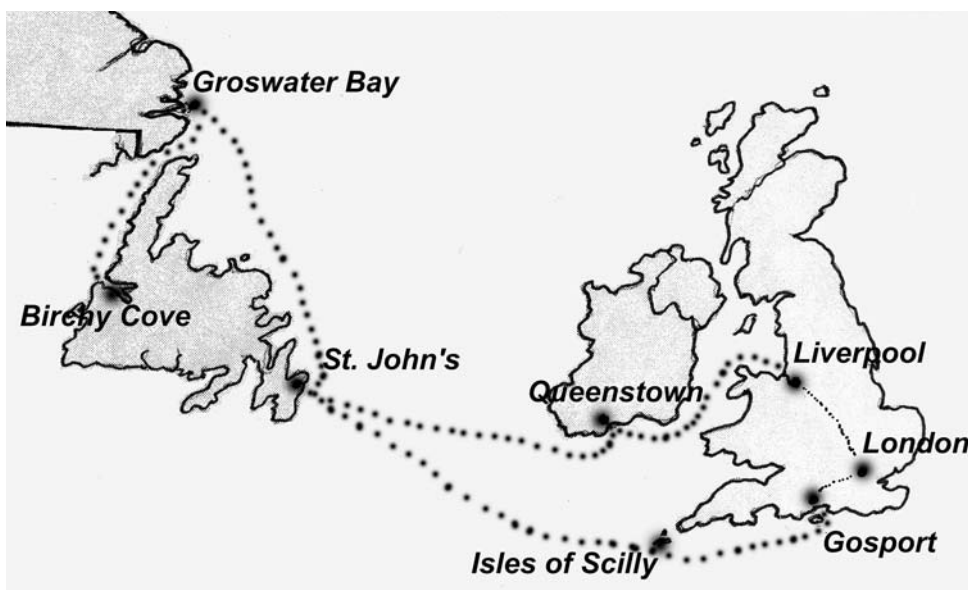


ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA ELKINS-SCHMITT

This map (not drawn to scale) shows the journey of the *Sapper*, a voyage that saw the ship never return to Newfoundland where it was built and launched in the Bay of Islands.

self from his own designs, was being proceeded with. Her hull was constructed by one set of men in the Settlement, while all her inside fittings were being made, from his working drawings, in his own workshop by his own men. By dint of great effort, the little vessel was launched in April, 1881, and christened the *Sapper*, in compliment to his old Corps."

The *Sapper*, which was fitted with one deck and two masts, and measured 54 feet in length, was built near the site of the present day Allen's Cove Marina. Thomas Doman, then in his early 60s, is generally referred to as the builder. Mr. Doman's abilities were well known to Joseph Curling since he had also been involved in the erection of the school house at Ballantyne's Cove in the early 1870s.

For about four years, the *Sapper* was the only Mission Ship in use for the whole rural deanery. In September 1884, Rev. Curling launched the nine-tonne vessel, *Dove*, which he had built for use on shorter trips within the Bay of Islands.

The *Sapper*'s 1889 voyage began in July when Reverend Curling left Birchy Cove to pay a final visit to the communities of his west coast mission. By August, they had reached Groswater Bay, and from there they set a direct course to St. John's. After the

necessary preparations were completed and sufficient supplies were taken onboard for the journey ahead, he and his crew of six sailed out of the Harbour on Sept. 4, 1889.

In 1938, crew member, John Compagnon, told Reverend and Mrs. G. S. Templeton of the adventure. He recounted that they were in St. John's for three weeks, where they took on coal, water and provisions, before setting sail for Portsmouth. The weather had been good during the first week, but it became quite stormy the second week when they ran into a line gale or equinoctial storm.

Indeed, around that same time, severe gales had been reported on both sides of the Atlantic, bringing with them, rain, winds, wrecks and loss of lives. However, the *Sapper*, made it through without any damages or losses. Mr. Compagnon said the weather improved during the third week, and the winds were favourable.

They reached the Scilly Isles, on a Sunday. Since these Isles are 20 miles from the mainland, they signaled for a boat to come alongside. From there, Rev. Curling sent a cable to his wife, telling her to meet him at Portsmouth. The 180 remaining miles to Portsmouth took three days, and on Sept. 24, they docked at Gosport, flying the burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron, of which Reverend Curling was a member.

"This voyage took 20 days and the arrival of the strange little craft at Portsmouth, flying the Royal Yacht Squadron burgee, was a puzzle to many an old sailor and coast-guard'sman," wrote Richard Jeff. "Curling subsequently presented her to the St. Andrew's Waterside Church Mission, for which she did a good deal of work, when converted into a yawl."

From Gosport, Rev. and Mrs. Curling and all the crew took the train to London. The crew stayed in the Guardsman Army Coffee Tavern, an alcohol-free boarding house near Buckingham Palace. Joseph Curling met them the next day and accompanied them to Westminster Abbey for the morning service.

In the days that followed they visited the sights of London, such as Madam Tussaud's, the Tower of London and the National Gallery. In October, they boarded the *S. S. Caspian* at Liverpool for the nine-day trip back to St. John's. They made a stop at Queenstown, Ireland, the last port also to be visited by the Titanic in April 1912.

By the end of October, the crew from Newfoundland finally returned home on the coastal steamer, however, Rev. Curling did not visit the Bay of Islands again.

His first voyage to Newfoundland had been 18 years earlier when he sailed his own yacht, the *Lavrock*, to Newfoundland, to offer her as a replacement for the Church Ship, *Star*, which had been wrecked off Little River.

According to Ian Dear, author of *The Royal Yacht Squadron 1815-1985*: "His offer was accepted and before he sailed her across the Atlantic he had her equipped with an altar and the necessary vestments, perhaps the only occasion in which a Squadron yacht has become a floating church."

The following year Joseph J. Curling wrote the Bishop of Newfoundland, offering himself to the Mission as well.

It is fitting, I think, that his final voyage from his Mission was on a vessel that he had designed himself, which had been built by his parishioners, and was crewed by men from the Bay of Islands.

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