



Grand Mancin

As Seen by
John Fisher



Introduction

In the pages which follow, one of Canada's outstanding radio commentators pays tribute to the Island of Grand Manan, New Brunswick. It is both an honour and a privilege to associate myself with Mr. John Fisher's acute observations concerning the places and people on this beautiful little island.

We at the provincial government Travel Bureau are well aware of Grand Manan's value as a tourist attraction. We have occasion to make many references to the island in our publicity and news releases. We know the island as a place of physical beauty; we know its people as generous and hospitable with a community spirit that is a credit to the province and the country.

I feel sure that those who know Grand Manan will concur with Mr. Fisher's sentiments and observations; those who don't know the island, I am certain, will be stimulated to find out for themselves. One can but commend the publishers of this document for making Mr. Fisher's words available in print.

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“John Fisher Reports”

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The CBC's Wandering Reporter and Observer of Canadian Ways, on a tour of the Maritimes, finds a story set in the corner of New Brunswick and Maine. His story of Grand Manan is titled;

“Aunt Lindy's Island”

The housewives in this community also sweep the main street . . . the kids chew seaweed in preference to candy . . . they are surrounded by water but they have never seen a river. This is “AUNT LINDY'S ISLAND”.

Pick up the telephone and ask the operator to give you Aunt Lindy and she will get her without a moment's hesitation. Ask any school child on the Island of Grand Manan to direct you to Aunt Lindy and he will show you where the 100 year old sweetheart of Grand Manan lives. Strangers even know her name. Long before the word Canada was sprawled across the upper half of North America, Aunt Lindy's father was believed lost at sea. His vessel, built with his own hands and those of his father and brothers, had drifted from Canada to Ireland. Unknown to the bereaved on Grand Manan, New Brunswick, he staggered ashore in Ireland. Fourteen months later he knocked on the family door and introduced his Irish bride to the folk of Grand Manan. Aunt Lindy, the oldest living resident of this island between New Brunswick and Maine speaks of it as if it happened with last week's tides. In her little home beside the muffled orchestrations of the ocean, she showed us the picture of her Irish mother and spoke of her sailor father who slipped the noose of Neptune.

This gentle old lady of the sea-kissed complexion who lives on an island 15 miles long—5 wide—has seen in her full century of living—the slow death of canvas and the rise of gas. Gone are the fulsome sails and the gentle pitch of schooners. The telephone, the washing machine, the ship-to-shore telephone, the diesel, paved roads—all these she says have come to Grand Manan, N. B., but, she is proud that really the island has not changed. It is unspoiled . . . highly individualistic . . . different in speech, pace, food and ways. An island of first names and proud old surnames. Like most of them, Aunt Lindy can look way back when.

Aunt Lindy is typical of these Grand Mananers. She was born on

this sea girted sentinel. She wouldn't live in any other place . . . and she will be happy if she can see her last sunset here where the sea gulls search and where winter frosts are light and the seas rumble.

Aunt Lindy with a full century behind her is proof of the Island's proudest boast:— alone on their island they have not been trampled by the throng or hurried by the host. Individualists they are—saved by a stretch of water from the onslaught of the twentieth century steamroller which makes us all mere numbers on a flat road. Aunt Lindy will tell you that in Grand Manan, N. B., nearly everyone owns his own home . . . and with his own hands helped build it. She will tell you that the fishermen build some of their own boats, fix their own engines, mend their own fences. The age of the craftsman is still flowering in Grand Manan. Most fishermen work for themselves or they work on the share principle. For neatness, prosperity, pride, there are few places anywhere in the world to equal Grand Manan. Only ten minutes from the Mainland by air—or two hours sail from fashionable St. Andrew's, New Brunswick, Grand Manan is unspoiled. Yet, their fishing boats have radio telephones, high powered engines and depth sounders . . . and just about 100 per cent of the homes are equipped with electricity. Usually, fishing communities are associated with poverty but, not here in this kingdom of sardines, herring, lobster, halibut, haddock, cod and scallops where the waters lap and lurch, growl and grind and make castles in the sand.

Aunt Lindy's island is a little ocean paradise—as yet undiscovered by the tourist hordes . . . but, known to the discriminating taste—to the bird lovers, artists, poets. Franklin Delano Roosevelt knew these waters as a boy. His summer home is on the next island—Campobello. The Rockfellers bought an island nearby as a bird sanctuary. Those who come for the summer always return—for here is something in a class by itself. The moles from city canyons, the subway expatriates come here to build their sunset homes.

Aunt Lindy spoke of the spell of the Island for her. In a little pamphlet issued by The Anchorage Inn was the following verse which would appeal to her. It is titled *The Call*;

“Oh, there's freedom for me
In the sweep of the sea,
And joy in the call of the tide;
The challenge of the skies where the lone seagull cries,
Where beauty and romance abide.
Timeless, eternal, the sea speaks to me,
Bidding me live, and seting me free”.

Aunt Lindy, the 100 year old sweetheart of this 15 mile shelf of wave washed rock has the tides of Fundy in her veins . . . “Fundy's fog has blown in from the sea weaving veils of misty pearl for me”.

Let's look at Aunt Lindy's island and see what she means when she talks of the Grand Manan way of life. There are nearly 3000 people on

the Island, which means everyone knows everyone. You don't drop into Leon Small's garage or George Cronks store . . . you go to Leon's or to George's. They use the first names. Everyone knows that Nookie is the telephone operator—and Nookie must operate the most efficient switchboard anywhere—she can find anyone in a flash. You will find old world graces here—people are courteous. They will take the time to stop and talk . . . a kind of innate kindness. And the accent of these island Canadians is as soft and flowing as a southerner's. They have a drawley speech using the slow soft "R". For instance a 'car' is a 'caw' . . . a steamer is a 'steam-uh' and they say 'over theah' for 'there'. A most engaging speech and as distinct from the near mainland and other islands as salt is from fresh water. You can spot a Grand Mananer anywhere as soon as he talks.

The food he eats is different too. Surrounded by the farm of Neptune, his diet is naturally influenced—Grand Manan dinners are what the New Englanders would call Shore Dinners. They feature lobster stews, fish chowders, steamed clams and a delectable fish dinner made from corned pollock, potatoes, turnips and fat pork. They even have a recipe book called the Grand Manan Cook Book. And frequently the ladies will make cakes with gulls eggs. The kids row out to the little islands and bring back buckets full of Gulls Eggs . . . these big eggs make wonderful meringues. Often the lobster or scallop fishermen will jump ashore at lunchtime—climb up the cliffs and bring back a pail full of Gulls eggs for lunch. You can have your scallops fried or stewed . . . and they say there is nothing so tasty as roasted periwinkles flavoured with sea-brine . . . get a big hat pin and pull out the succulent meat . . . and if your appetite can stand it—there is another delicacy which will make any Newfoundlanders happy—cod fish tongue or codfish cheeks . . . and, of course, kippered herring . . . almost any kind of fish that swims is here. The greatest lobster shipper in the world . . . Connelly's Limited is just over on the Mainland—and Connor's Brothers is also one of the largest sardine packers in the world at Black's Harbour.

Aunt Lindy is right when she speaks proudly of "here . . . (he-ah) on the Island". So proud are they that their main paved road is the cleanest highway I ever saw. They showed me an old man of 75 who sweeps 100 yards of the Queen's Highway every morning in front of his property. You'll see the store keepers and housewives always sweeping the highway in front of their properties . . . they just like things to be neat. Even kids walking along will kick off any pebbles. A dirty car is a rare sight. On this island where people build their own homes—and have full title to them, the pride of property runs to public things too. It is their island. Their show. If they seek position in a strange place, always they mourn for the sea girted land of haddock and cod.

If Grand Manan is the home of the Herring Choker, it is more famous for its dulse. Grand Manan dulse is shipped all over the Continent and even to India and far off places. Dulse is a coarse, reddish dried seaweed which is gathered at certain tides. It is left in the sun to dry. It is rich in iodine and looks like pickled cabbage. On

Grand Manan, kids chew on it instead of candy. People carry it in their pockets and glove compartments of cars. They eat it at the theatres as we would peanuts. There is no case of goitre on the Island . . . some attribute this to dulse. A lady suffering from goitre in India wrote the postmaster and asked for dulse. Occasionally these Islanders toast their dulse over driftwood fires—it curls and crackles like cornflakes. And nothing can equal steamed clams on the seashore under the stars.

It is an Island unique alright. Take the kids. They pick up pocket money by catching live rabbits. As in Australia, the rabbits were imported a few years ago. Now they are thicker than fleas. They are shipped live to the States to stock the game reserves. Nearly every Grand Manan schoolboy is in the business. Before going to school he will slip into the woods and examine his box traps and reset them. The box is about 20 inches long. It is set on the rabbit trail—there is a hole in each end. Mr. Rabbit enters and his feet hit a little plate which immediately closes both doors. The kids carry bags—they put the sack at one end and tip the box. Mr. Rabbit is then lugged home in the bag. Then the boy puts an empty sack on the telephone pole outside his home. This is to notify the man in the rabbit truck that live rabbits are for sale at his home. The rabbit truck comes every morning in season. The kids get about 95 cents per live rabbit. Thousands and thousands are shipped from Aunt Lindy's Island, an island free of skunks, but, thick with deer and racoons. Muskrats are also plentiful on the outer islands.

Being an ocean country the water never freezes. In fact, it rarely ever goes below zero in this kingdom of sardines and birds, birds, birds . . . millions of them screeching, searching, soating and adding shrill notes to the symphony of the sea . . . Black ducks, whistlers, shell ducks, Eiders, Old Squaw's, Coots, Plover, Sand pipers, sea pigeons, sea parrots, puffins and partridge. Aunt Lindy would say—even the birds like our island.

In the basement of the high school they have a bird museum of very rare specimens collected by Allen Moses, a famous native ornithologist. Bird men from distant lands come to see this collection. Visitors come in summer to rest . . . to stroll on the beaches, climb the cliffs, wander over the windswept fields. They revel in the pungent ozone from the ocean and the rich aroma of smoke from the herring smoke houses which are clustered around wharves like seagulls on a sandbar. There are lighthouses on the headlands and rolling names like: Swallowtail Light, North Head, Castalia, Little Dark Harbour, Whale Cove, Grand Harbour, Seal Cove, Long Pond Beach, Buck Rock and Southern Southwest Head.

And at sunset the little white boats nestle in the coves like ducklings in a pond—dipping their heads in rythm with the swells . . . and maybe a cluster of fishermen around a herring weir trying to corner a shark or whale . . . the waters flash their teeth and overhead the scavengers of the sky glide and cast their sharpeyes below . . . and high up in their lonely

rocky perchs the lightkeeper readies the lights for the sharp flashes which turn the headlands into spectres of the night. When night comes to make peace with the sea, ocean and earth are one.

Now as Keith Ingersoll, local poet exclaimed . . . now comes the muffed surf and muted calls . . . Like

“Treble reeds of some
Gigantic organ,
The cry of lonely, searching birds
Cuts the mist
But never fully cleaves.
If sound were made of substance
A million paths of light---
Like sunshine filtered through a
Heavily shaded window- -
Would rend the air

The Notes
Of lightly pounding waves,
Follow in triple time.
The rolling pebbles slip and fall
In modulated recession,
Scarce heard by the undiscerning.
This is Neptunes music;
A drumhead service and the muffed drums
Beat on

The crescendo
Echoes from the undulated cliff
To trace a line of deep, dark sound.
A foghorn blast—a Falstaff song of opera—
(Written with impulsive feeling
But staffed by an immortal master),
Shatters the air and holds the stage,
Then fades behind the subtle wings of thought.