



The North

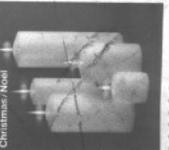
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GROWING WITH THE NORTH

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The Amazing Voyage of the Minnie M.

-by Donald Pugh

Michipicoten has witnessed an exciting past. Isolated on the fringe of civilization, a wild rocky land with a long frigid winter, Michipicoten has always demonstrated frontier individualism; that coarseness and strength demonstrated by labouring men whom dis- regarded sophisticated niceties, restraints and scruples of the larger city centres.

During the construction of the C.P. R. illegal whiskey flowed freely at Michipicoten. Frontier individualism took another bend in 1904 with the appearance of rank political opportunism and corruption. Since 1896 the Liberal Provincial Government under the Honourable George W. Ross had held the reins of power. In the 1904 election the Conservatives under James P. Whitney hoped to overthrow the liberal regime. The Liberals, determined to keep political power, resorted to illegal methods. The 'Minnie M', a steamship of the Algoma Central Steamship Line, was diverted four days prior to the election from its regular run to Soo, Michigan, where six or seven half barrels of beer, one case of whiskey, a ten gallon jug, and a quantity of cigars were picked up. The Minnie M then boarded twenty passengers from a Michigan Lumber Camp and departed for Michipicoten while the lumberjacks proceeded to become royally drunk. At Michipicoten, on election day, the lumbermen were met by the train of the Algoma Central Railway so that they could be run quickly to the polling booth at the Helen Mine. It soon became apparent that the men were being paid to vote. Each man was armed with a slip of paper with his name on it, and swore on the Bible that they had worked at the Helen Mine

for three years and were entitled to vote. All twenty-one men voted at the Helen polling booth, then returned to the Minnie M for dinner. After dinner the men voted a second time at Michipicoten Mission. Three men were not entitled to vote here since one was too well known, one was too boisterous and the other refused. None of the men were compelled to pay the fare, nor were they required to pay for food & drink on their return trip on the Minnie M. Following the election, the men were returned to Soo, Michigan. It was reported that the men were sworn on false bibles anyway, that the wrong leaves were in the "bible". The men had been told to vote for Smith, the Liberal candidate. They did so and drank all the beer and whiskey on the trip. The story emerged from Nick Cole the purser on the Minnie M, and a Conservative supporter.

In spite of such activity, the Conservative Government emerged victorious in 1905 with a majority of twenty-nine seats.

On the pioneer fringe, the law is a less restrictive force than in the better regulated urban centres. From such incidents as this, a better understanding is gained of early life at Michipicoten.

