

Jewels
of the
Gulf

The Isles of Magdalene



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Hello There,

Welcome to the Magdalen Islands. We think you're in for a treat. Island hospitality and the warmth of the summer sun go hand in hand here. This small group of islands is only 100 km. or so from tip to tip as the crow flies, yet there are many sights to see, and friendly places to stay when you visit here. Driving is easy and distances are short, and the sight of the red cliffs, green hills and blue sea are infinitely soothing.

A ferry operates daily between Souris, P.E.I. and the islands. Daily flights connect the islands to P.E.I. and Quebec, and points beyond.

Red cliffs, white sand, green hills, blue sky and water - it is little wonder that visitors think of the islands as colourful. But we are colourful in another way too. There is a story behind every person you meet and every place you see. A few of these tales are told in this guide and we hope you'll discover some of the history and more of our legends as you come to know us better.

When you're surrounded by famous white beaches as we are, most summer activities center around the salt water. There is swimming, sunning, and windsurfing, just to mention a few. There are also family and group excursions to Brion Island, Bird Rock Island and Entry Island.

The islands are a paradise for birdwatchers; petrels, cormorants, gannets, razor bills, mures, gulls and others abound.

If you enjoy bicycling, the bicycle is recommended as a means of transportation to vacationers who really want to soak up the glorious local colour.

No seafood is better than that from the islands. As for the delectable island lobster, in season from May 10 - July 10, it is even better tasting when eaten outdoors. Why not consider a lobster picnic on the beach?

Fourteen thousand people live in this isolated, enchanted decor, scattered throughout the seven inhabited islands. Amherst, Grindstone, House Harbour, Pointe - aux - Loups, Grosse Isle and Grand Entry are joined by long sand dunes and bridges. Entry Island is the only inhabited island not joined to the main islands. Other islets and reefs are sanctuary to thousands of birds.

The Magdalen Islands have a gentle marine climate. Heated by the Gulf Stream, the waters attain 17 degrees celsius during the course of the summer. The wind, which gives you a feeling of freedom, makes the islands a paradise for amateur sailors.

The economy of the Magdalen Islands is traditionally based on fishing. Many Madelinots still make their living from the sea, or from the transformation of its products. Lobster fished from May to July on the rocky marine bottom makes the islands famous. Some other species (scallops, mackerel, snow crab, cod, herring, sole, flounder, etc.) are fished in season.

Tourism and the exploitation of salt have added to the economy of the islands. Agriculture is rendered difficult because of the division of the land.

AROUND THE ISLANDS

How can one be bored in the Magdalen Islands? As soon as you arrive, the islanders welcome you warmly, and they are easy to get to know. Their ancestry is evident in their gentle speech. As you walk, drive, or bike around the islands, cast your eyes on the architecture and fragile cliffs.

Now we would like to take you on a short visit to all the municipalities on the islands.

The major town and capital is Grindstone, through which the islands are provisioned. The large cargoes have made it into a seaport, the fishing boats a fishing port, and the sailing boats a pleasure port. A modern church, a handicraft co-op for the islands' artisans, a tourist bureau, the islands' only hospital, and also a modern shopping area are to be found here.

From Grindstone we will go on to visit Laverniere, where a very beautiful old wooden church welcomes visitors. Golf enthusiasts will enjoy the nine hole course in Laverniere.

The Butte du Vente (Wind Hill) of Fatima offers a most imposing view of the islands, even as far as Cape Breton, N.S. Fatima also boasts of a cinema and a drive-in movie, the only one in the islands.

At Etang - du - Nord there is a little fishing port and two tiny villages, Laverniere and Boisville. The more forested part of the islands is found in this area.

Travelling west, we arrive on Amherst Island which boasts two modern churches, one in the bassin, the other in the village of Amherst, the "Demoiselles Hill" with its panorama and cross, and the Millerand wharf, The Museum of the Sea at Amherst, with the theme "Man of the Sea", recalling the evolution of fishing and navigation in the islands, displays period pieces and historical works, shipwreck maps, and a model of the original "La Grave" Madelinot village, must be included in our itinerary.

In House Harbour we take a tour of another kind. We will stop along the highway of South Beach, walk along the cliffs as far as Butte Ronde, and we will see formations of gypsum of a colour you will find no where else. This part of our tour can end with a picnic on Butte Ronde, which offers an exceptional view.

And now we will go to Pointe - aux - Loups, a part of the municipality of House Harbour, where you can buy the most delicious clams, and swim along the beautiful shores or just sunbathe. After our picnic we will continue along Route 199 to Grosse Isle.

An anglophone community, Grosse Isle has two little wooden churches, one in Grosse Isle, the other in Old Harry. The first anglican church in the islands was built in Grosse Isle in 1850.

The cliffs just to the north of Grosse Isle offer you beautiful footpaths of red and gray sandstone and clay. We will be able to observe a fragile cliff literally collapsing from the action of the powerful waves. Here you will also find a fishing port where it may be possible to hire a boat to go to Brion Island.

This uninhabited island is situated about 15 km. from Grosse Isle, and saw its last inhabitants leave in 1953, and is now visited by fishermen and their families, and tourists. Another islet belonging to the municipality of Grosse Isle is Bird Rock. Situated about 65 km. northeast of the main island, this special isle has only one resident — the lighthouse keeper. The most beautiful birds on the archipelago have chosen it for their home port.

Back in Grosse Isle, we leave the wharf and continue along Route 199 to East Cape and Old Harry, still in the Municipality of Grosse Isle, Sand dunes and beaches stretch for about 7 km. from East Point to Old Harry Head. East Point and Cape Pailleur provide breathtaking observation posts for birdwatching. A small fishing port enables one to buy, or if adventurous, catch one's fresh lunch. (fish)

On the beach of Old Harry we can visit the cross that was erected in 1969 in memory of the "Miracle" disaster and of all the fishermen who have lost their lives in these waters. It is a long walk to the cross, so take your lunch and plan a full day of walking, swimming and sunning. (about 10 km.)

While in Old Harry, pause for a moment and admire the wood sculpture honouring Jacques Cartier's arrival at Old Harry in 1534. This sculpture was erected at a special ceremony on July 20, 1984.

Before leaving Grosse Isle, we must stop at Cape Dauphin; from here we will have a most magnificent view of both East Point Beach and North Beach.

Again following highway 199 east, we arrive in Grand Entry. Here, as is the case elsewhere in the islands, the main topic is fishing. Situated on the far end of the archipelago, Grand Entry has a fishing port, a processing plant for herring, lobster, cod, and mackerel, depending on the season. Observation posts for birdwatching are found along Clarke Road and at Oyster Basin.

Your stay in the Magdalen Islands would not be complete without a visit to Entry Island, the only inhabited island not joined to the others. The residents, of Scottish descent, live in semi-isolation and the English spoken is often reminiscent of their ancestry. A passenger boat leaves Amherst for Entry Island each morning at 8:00 a.m. and returns at 4:00 p.m.

Climb the highest summit on the island for a grand panorama of the Magdalens — “The Butte d’Ile” or St. Lawrence Hill. (Big Hill, as it is known to the islanders.) Random walks on the footpaths circling the island, the lighthouse, impressive cliffs and rocks are but a few things to see and do on this friendly and beautiful island.

We have given you a brief tour of the main islands, so after you have made your own tour, why not take time, yourself, to visit the smaller islands, such as Seal Island, Red Island, Deadman’s Island, and Bassin Island, to mention but a few.

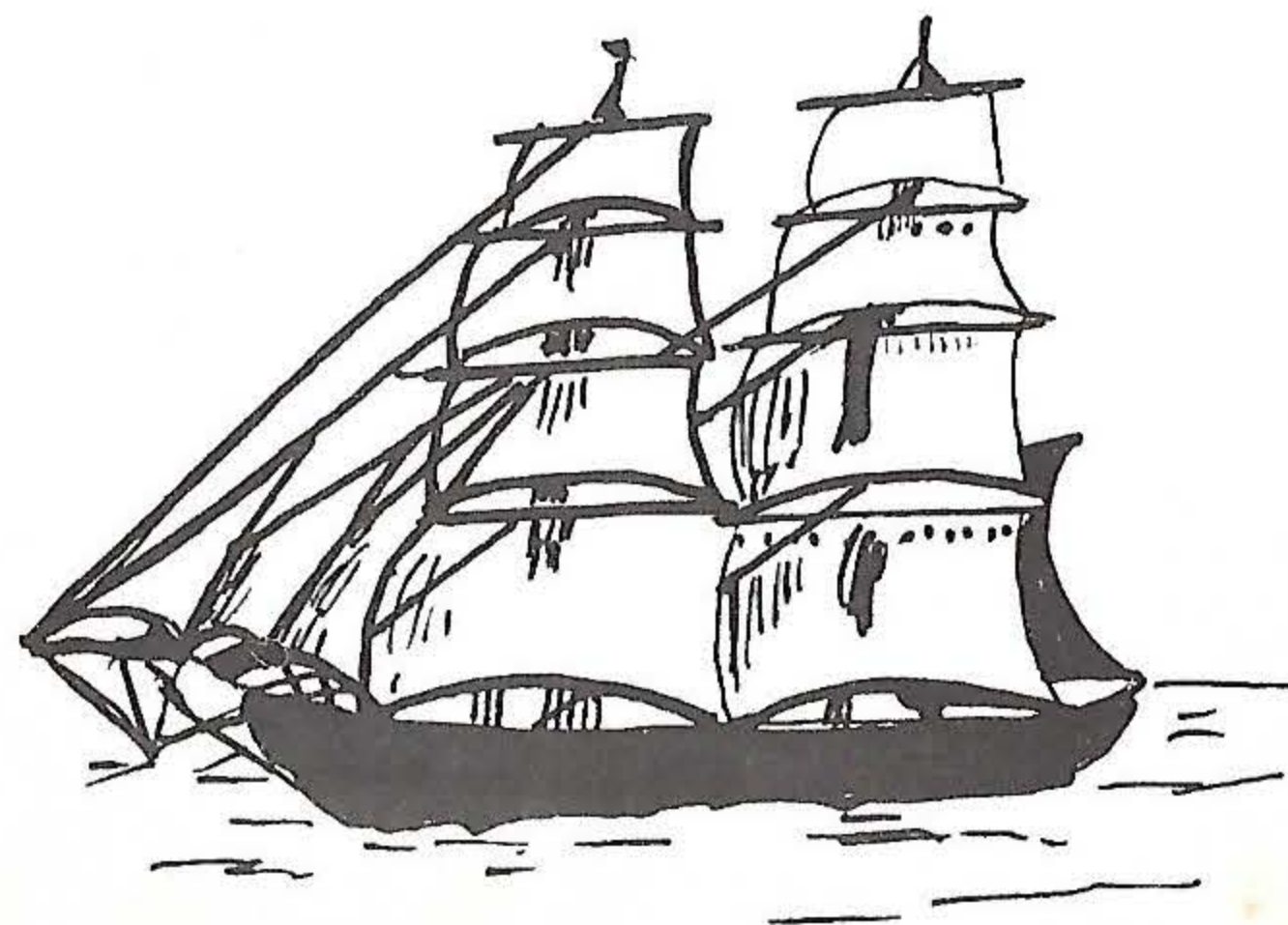
A LITTLE HISTORY

Jacques Cartier first visited the island in 1534. On his return visit in 1536 he named the islands “Les Araynes” (from Latin-Arena), which signifies sand. The Magdalen Islands lost this name given by Jacques Cartier, in the course of the 15 years following his voyage. Fishermen who frequented the islands, probably the Malouins from Brittany (like Jacques Cartier himself) renamed the islands “Les Rames” - Green Arbour, without doubt referring to the topography of the sand dunes joining the islands. This name didn’t last.

The name Magdalen was bestowed in honour of Madeleine Lafontaine, wife of the islands first seignorial lord.

The languages spoken by the Madelinots have a colourful history. One language is an Acadian variety of 17th century French. The anglophone Madelinots speak with a cadence often reminiscent of Scotland and Ireland. These languages have evolved in isolation for nearly three centuries and are liberally salted with nautical terms. The lilting and melodious language is a pleasure to hear.

The Acadian and Scottish/Irish descendants have always lived side by side, no animosity darkens the history of these two communities. Didn’t the two speak the same language? That of the sea!



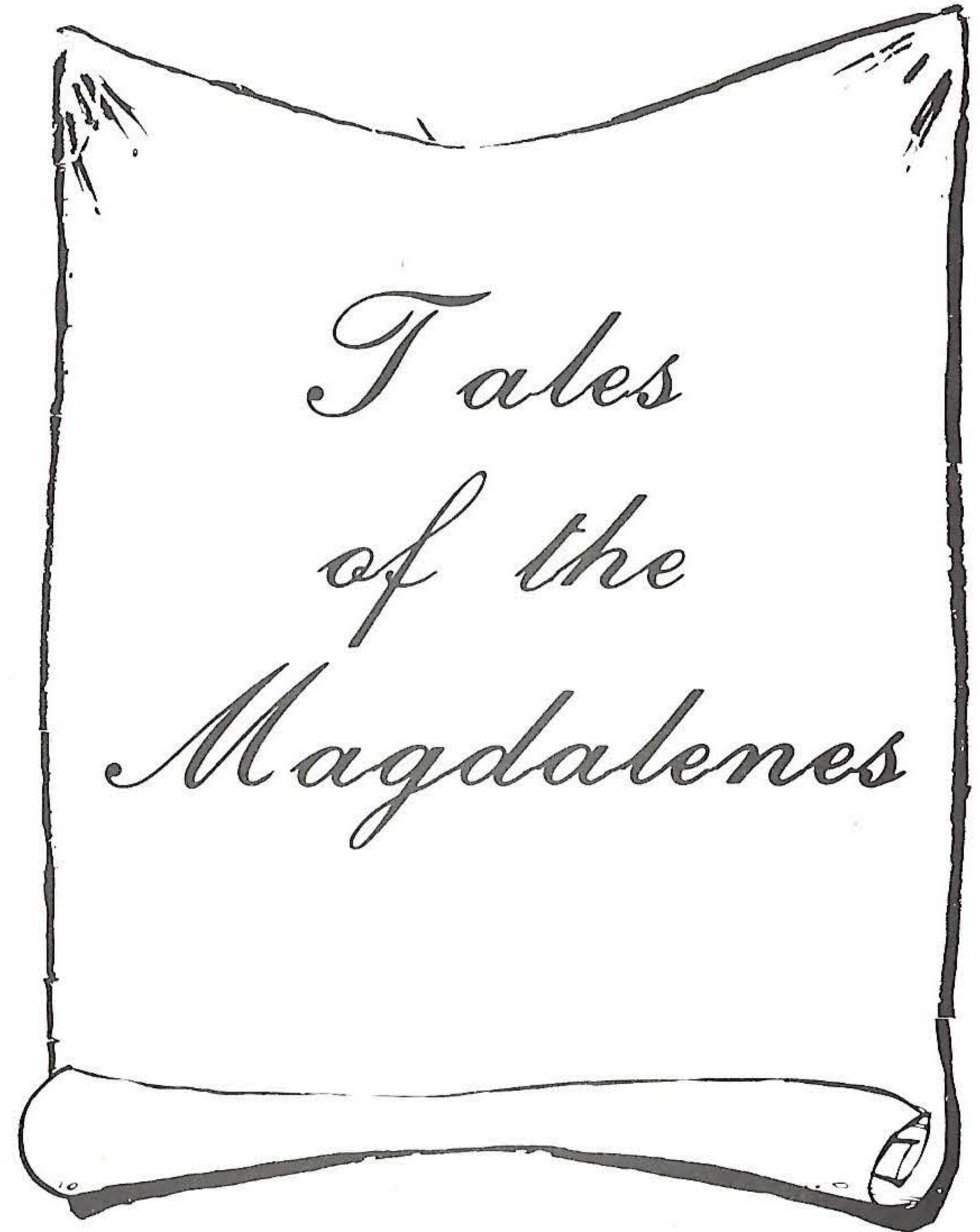
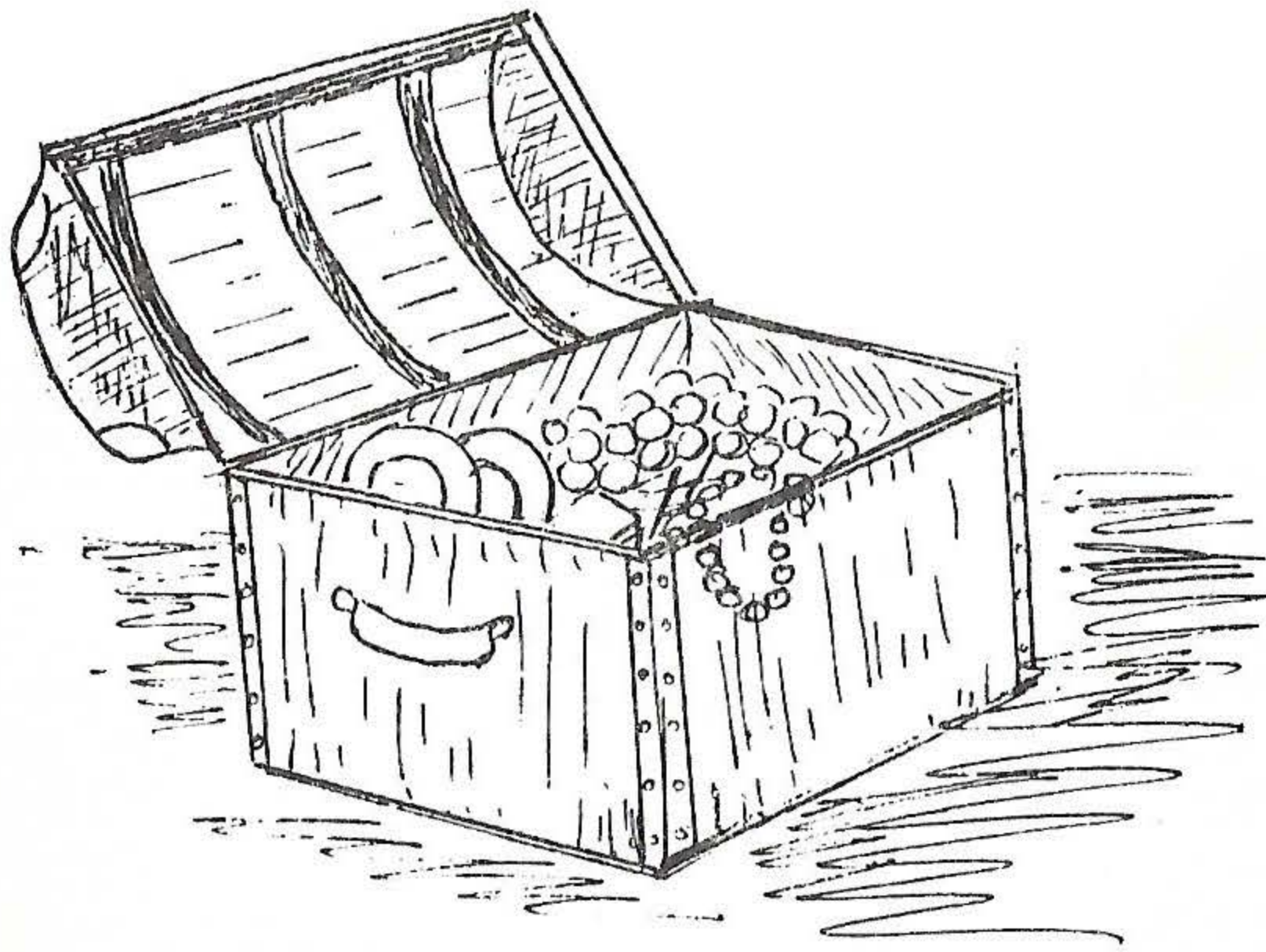
SHIPWRECKS

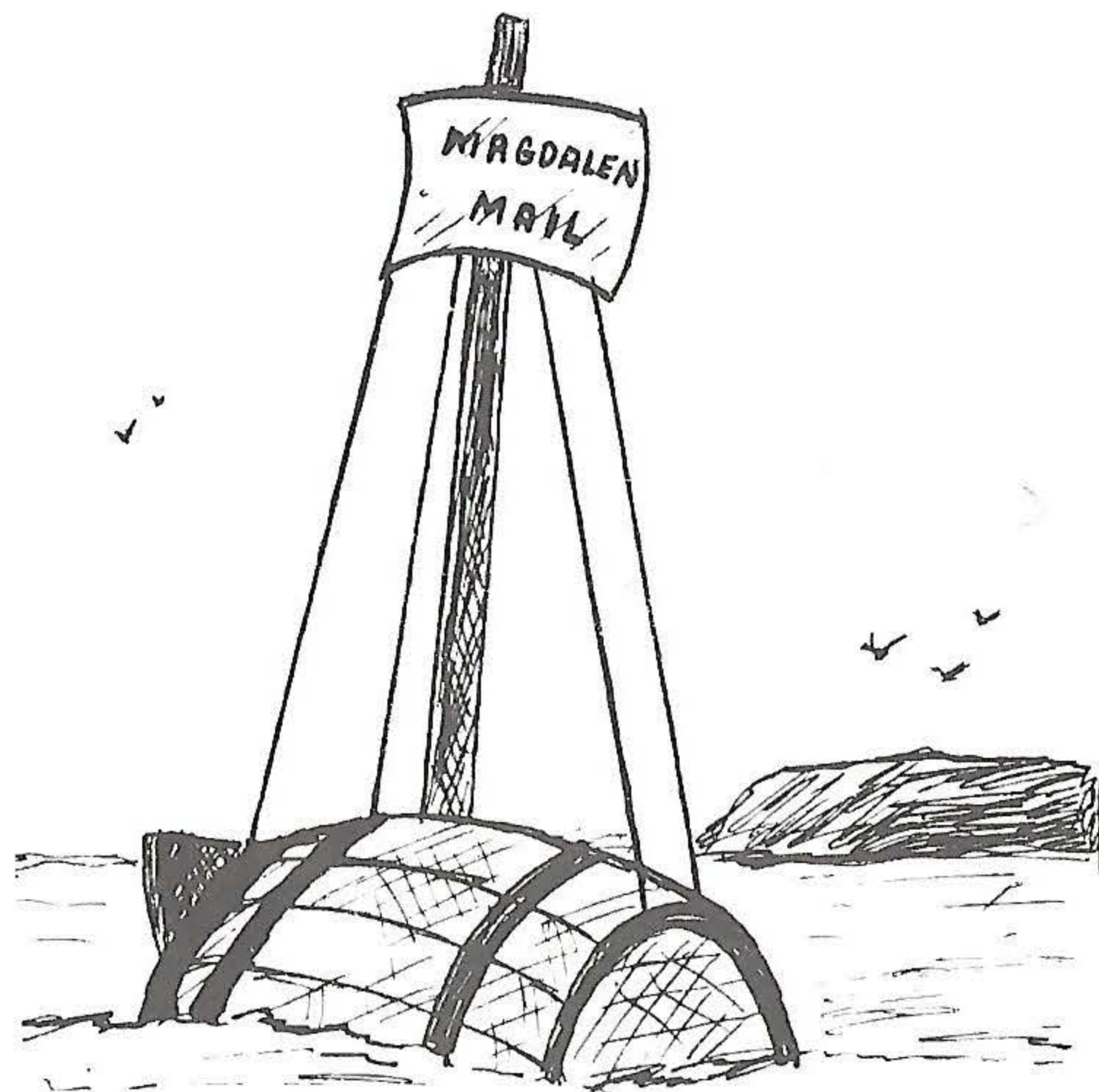
The Magdalen Islands have acquired a reputation rivalling Sable Island as a marine disaster area. Some estimates put the number at 600, but precisely how many ships have been wrecked here is uncertain.

The death toll mounts to thousands; were all the ghosts to haunt these isles, what a confusion of race and tongue would reign.

Though the islands have witnessed many wrecks with terrible loss of life, other wrecks have often brought additional settlers and other unexpected bounty in form of supplies and goods.

Adventurers in increasing numbers are diving and digging for buried treasure, but thus far they've brought up more rusty propellers and portholes than gold or silver. The thrill of the hunt makes their experiences memorable.



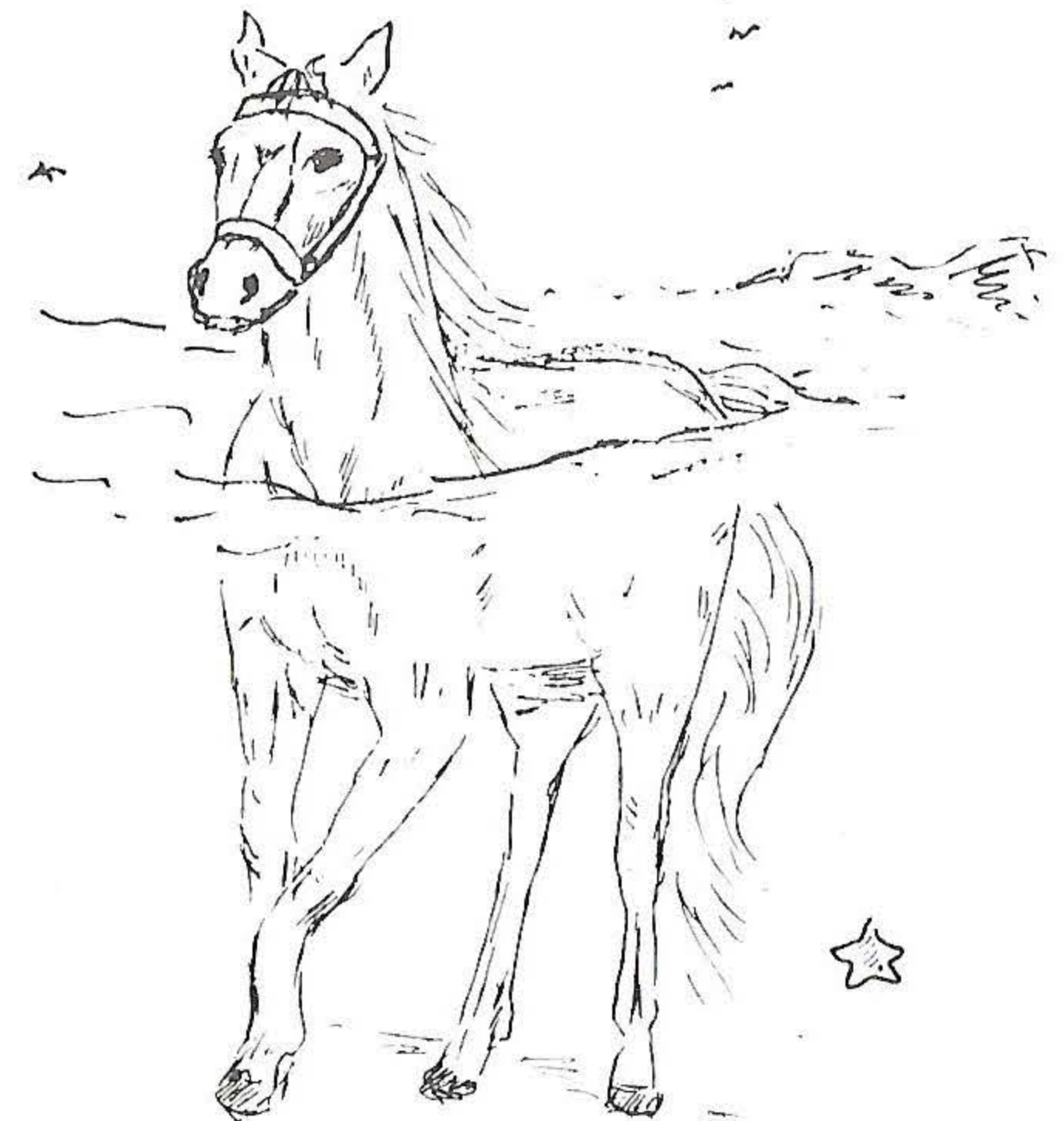


MAGDALEN WINTER MAIL

In the winter of 1910, stranded without any means of communications with the mainland, the residents of the Magdalen Islands sent out some mail and an urgent request for help in a molasses barrel (puncheon). This was found in Cape Breton Island, N.S. The Federal Government reacted swiftly and the icebreaker Stanley was promptly sent to the rescue. Though used only once, the puncheon became famous in Island history; models of it are sold to this day, to tourists throughout the islands.

FARMER

The story of Farmer, the ocean going horse of Entry Island, is well known in the Magdalen Islands. In March of 1925, Farmer was traded by his owner, Richard McLean, who took the horse over the ice to Amherst Island three miles away. He then drove the horse across Amherst Island, up along Grindstone, Pointe - aux - Loups, and Grosse Isle, where he delivered him to his new owner. Farmer became homesick, and in June galloped back the route he had travelled, swam the three miles to Entry Island, and reported to his old owner. He had come more than fifty-five miles under strange conditions, but he had accomplished his purpose. Richard McLean allowed Farmer to stay on Entry Island for the rest of his life. And, not unlike Farmer, many former Magdalen Islanders return home, again and again.



THE MAGDALEN ISLANDS "SNOWMAN" — A True Story

On Sunday, November 22, 1871 the Magdalen Islands were hit by a terrible blizzard. No one could leave their homes until the storm abated on Thursday.

On that day, two youths in Pointe - aux - Loups found the wreckage of a ship scattered at the foot of the cliffs, beyond the high tide mark. For several hours they gathered salvage from the wreckage. At dark they lit flares and started homeward. As they passed a large mass of wreckage a gigantic creature, eight feet tall and snow white, emerged from behind it. Dropping everything, the boys fled for home.

The next morning the storm returned in full force, but abated by afternoon. About twenty men went down to the shore where the disaster had taken place. Few of them paid any attention to the strange story of the two boys, dismissing the huge creature as a giant white owl or polar bear which had come in on an ice floe.

All day long the men salvaged from the wreck they found to be the "S.S. Wasp". When night fell, they lit their flares and began their homeward journey. As they passed a hay barn, an enormous white shape, eight feet in height reared up at them from out of the snow drifts, and slowly advanced. The creature was so terrifying that every man dropped what he was carrying and ran as fast as he could for home, screaming with terror.

They told their story to Father Charles Boudreault, who tried to comfort them. He promised to accompany them to the scene the next day.

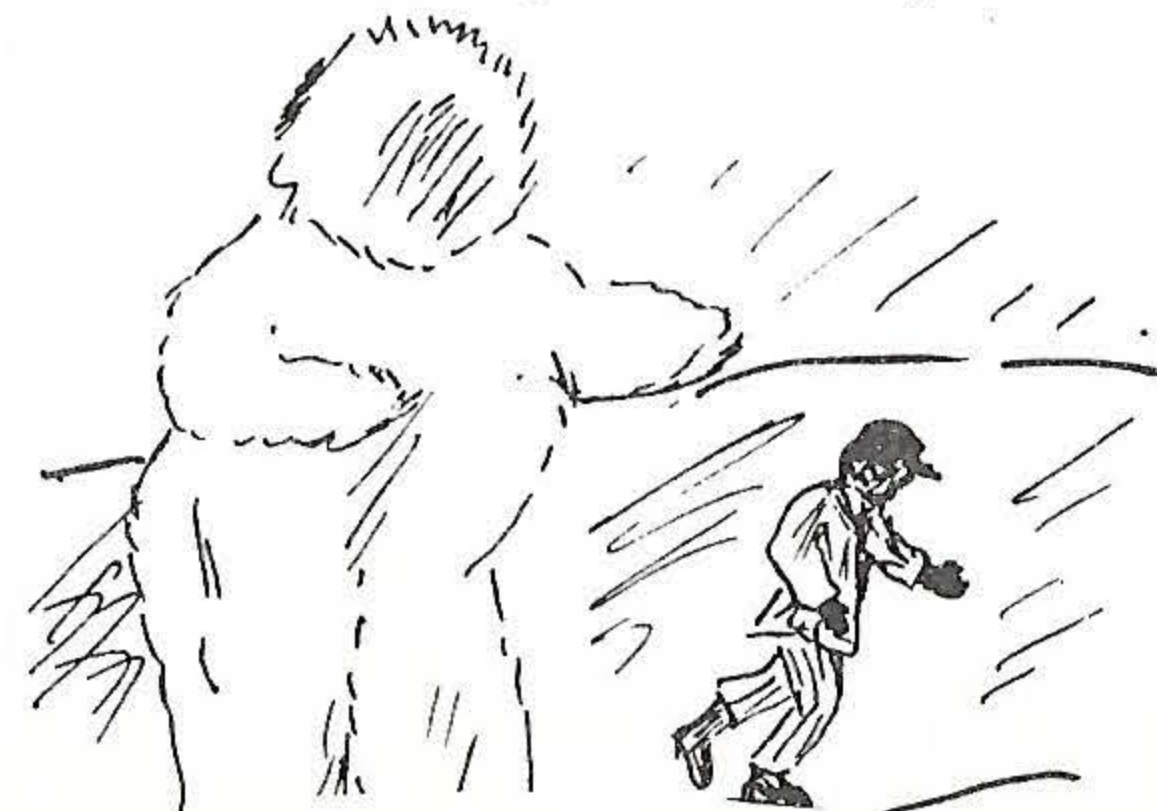
Early the next morning, Father Boudreault and a dozen men, each armed with a gun, set out for the haybarn. The others stayed home to protect their wives - or so they claimed. They found no evidence in the morning, and in the afternoon walked to the scene of the wreck, and again to the haybarn.

In the meadow behind the barn, Father Boudreault found footprints twenty-two inches long and twelve inches wide, which they followed and found to be those of a two-legged creature. On and on Father Boudreault led the others, all with their guns ready to shoot the creature — ghost, giant, or polar bear, whatever it might be. Then, far in the distance, they saw a huge form lying on the beach. The men lit their flares and Father Boudreault advanced alone. On reaching the form, he touched it, and encountered frozen snow. He walked around the creature, and found it to be more than nine feet in girth, and almost eight feet long, with a head almost four feet wide and three feet long!

The creature was carried into a house, and from within the fantastic shape emerged a man six feet eight in height, and weighing no less than 300 lbs! It was his enormous physique that saved him. He was found to be Augustus LeBordais, the first mate of the "S.S. Wasp", and the only survivor. He had clung for a full day and night to a piece of wreckage in the sea and had eaten nothing for days but snow. That Augustus LeBordais did not perish during his long exposure is rather short of miraculous.

Le Bordais' sufferings were terrible as his limbs began to thaw. A week after his rescue, the islanders realized that his legs would have to be amputated, and it took 10 men to hold him. But he lived!

When the ice floes melted at the end of May 1872, LeBordais was taken to Quebec for another operation. He was fitted with peg legs. Returning to the Magdalen Islands, he eventually founded the government office there, at Grosse Isle. Even with peg legs he could stand up against anyone in a fight! (N.B. The Government office he founded was the first telegraph office in the Magdalen Islands.)



A STORY OF HEROISM

One winter day two men, Paul Chennell and Rubin Welsh set out in a fishing boat off the Magdalenes, and a gale of wind blew them out to sea. A change of wind carried them into the mouth of Grand Entry Harbour. There they became trapped in the ice.

Three other men, Alan Clarke, Jack Keaton, and Daniel Dunn went out on the thin ice in an attempt to save them. Clarke crawled along the jagged ice pack with two dory oars and a rope. Finally, they reached the boat, drove a line through the painter, and hauled the two men almost to shore.

Jack Keaton and Daniel Dunn then hitched a horse to the boat and pulled it high on the beach. Clarke had been struggling on the broken ice continuously for almost eight hours, and his clothes were frozen stiff. He collapsed after the others were saved.

For this daring rescue, the Canadian Humane Society awarded Alan Clarke, Jack Keaton, and Daniel Dunn with bronze medals.

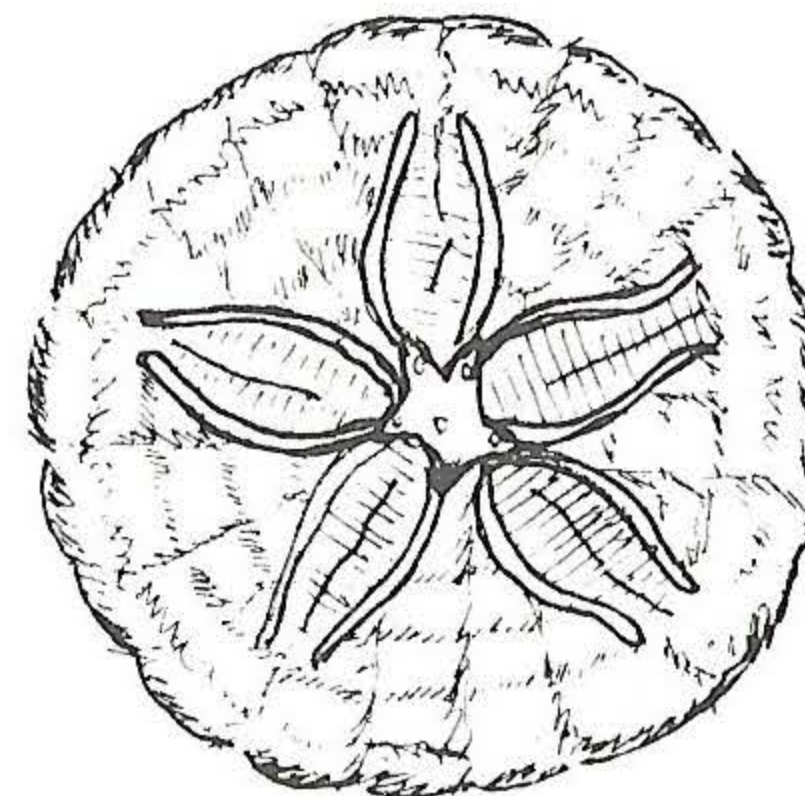
THE "MIRACLE"

The wreck of the "Miracle" in 1847 was a fireside topic for many years.

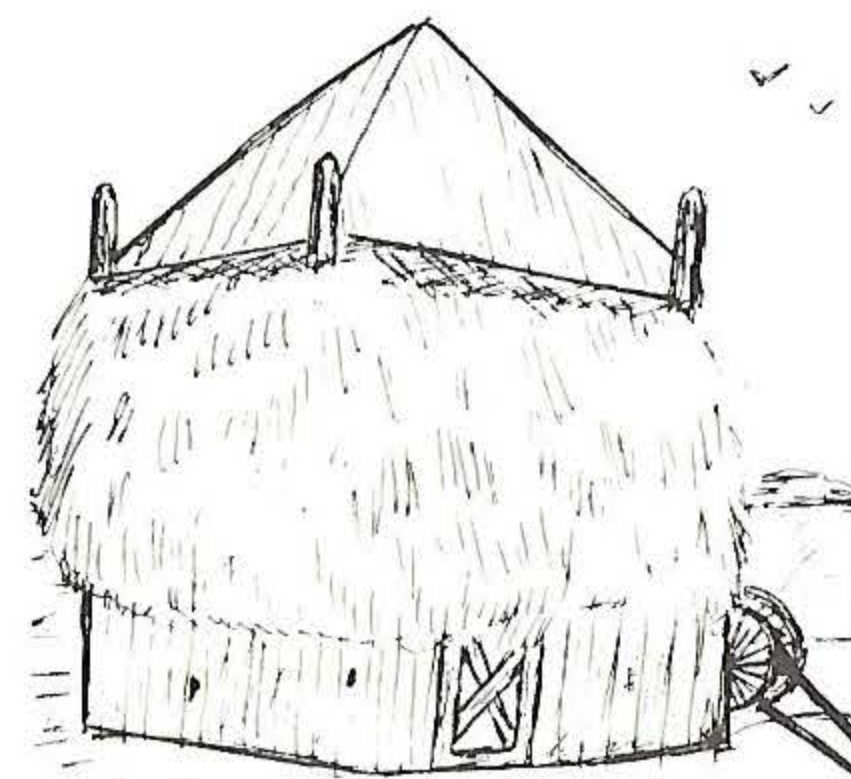
The "Miracle" was a full-rigged Irish immigrant ship sailing from Liverpool to Quebec with approximately 400 immigrants aboard, which floundered in a storm off East Point, on the night of May 19, 1847. Weak with dysentery, some 150 people died, at least half by exposure, rather than by drowning. The surviving people were taken in by the people of East Island, who shared their provisions.

The recovered bodies were buried in a common grave, which is now shadowed by a cross erected on July 6, 1969 in memory of the "Miracle" disaster and of all fishermen and seamen who lost their lives in these waters.

THE "MAGDALEN ISLAND SAND DOLLAR"



The markings on this shell symbolize the Birth, Crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ, and it is sometimes called the Holy Ghost Shell. On the top side of the shell can be seen the Easter Lily, and in the center, a five pointed star representing the Star of Bethlehem. Reversing the shell, the outlines of a poinsetta appear. When we open the sand dollar we find inside five little birds called the Doves of Peace.



MAGDALEN HAY BARRACK

A Madelinot invention! These cleverly designed structures without walls consisting of four poles and sliding roofs, are used to store and shelter hay. Since less and less hay is being cut here today, these shacks are being relegated to folk history.

CAPTAIN ROWE'S ACCOUNT

Captain Joshua Rowe was shipwrecked off Amherst Island in a fishing schooner, the "Checker". At this time Captain Rowe was only twelve years old. In his diary he wrote these words:

"We tried to get underway, but on account of a strong current and heavy seas our only hope was to trust in Providence, and our good anchors. Not ever being at sea before, I thought it would be best for me not ever to go again, if I could get on shore again.

At 9 a.m. Sept. 9, 1849, we piled up on Amherst Island. We stayed about ten days in a tent made out of our own sails. There was some inhabitants on this side of the island, but they were not disposed to help us any. In fact they stole the provisions that we took from the wreck. We later recovered part of it."

A kindly Magdalen Islander took the shipwrecked sailors to his house and gave them warm cereal served in dishes which the islander had salvaged from an earlier wreck. Unknown to the kindly but ignorant benefactor the dishes were actually "chamber pots".

Young Joshua Rowe reached home in Maine the following summer and changed his mind about not going back to sea. He followed the ocean for the rest of this life.



"DEAD MAN'S ISLE"

Deadman's Island always catches the eye of passing sailors. It seems to lie floating in the water like a dead man in a shroud. Many a luckless vessel has crashed against its sheer cliffs; only a few fragments of wood or clothing remaining of a group of voyagers who had sailed down under the sea forever.

When the poet John Thomas Moore saw Deadman's Island for the first time, on a dark September evening in 1804, he composed a fitting ode to it, linking to a phantom vessel. The last stanza reads as follows:

To Deadman's Isle in the eye of the blast,
To Deadman's Isle she speeds her fast'
By skeleton shapes her sails are furled,
And the hand that steers is not of this world.

AN OLD SALT'S TALE

The Magdalen Islanders have shared their homes and provisions with many a shipwrecked crew, as any old salt will tell you. One such story was told to Rev. Edwin Smith in 1932. This is what the old sailor had to say:

"I mind a ship as went ashore a half century gone. All her canvas blowed off. Water-logged she was, too. A Christmas day, aye! Every man-jack was froze, but got 'em under hatches at our houses, put 'em in tubs, thawed 'em out, an' packed 'em in wool and cod ile. We saved 'em all. Not a one perished, Sir, but there was one who couldn't walk till March. They stayed all winter. Each family took some. Ah, them was the days to remember."

There are many more such stories in what is commonly called the hard old days; those were the days when people shared what little they had, the days when heroes were made!

TRAGEDIES AT BIRD ROCK

Bird Rock has been visited by many famous people, including Jacques Cartier in 1534, and Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1939, but the ones with the stories to tell are the lighthouse keepers.

Shortly after the turn of the century, there was a prolonged spell of thick, dense fog in the Magdalen Island area. In those days there were no automatic fog horns to warn away ships at sea, and a cannon was fired at regular intervals during the heavy weather - day after day, night after night.

The three keepers, John Turbid, Paul Chennell, and John Pigeon grew tired of carrying only three charges of gunpowder at a time to the cannon (as regulations permitted). One day they took the whole barrel of gunpowder over to the cliff.

Inevitably, soon after the lighthouse keepers began this forbidden practise, the cannon backfired, and the priming cap flew into the open powder barrel. In the explosion which followed Chennell and Pigeon were blown to pieces, one of the keeper's children was killed, but Turbid, who had been blown into the sea, survived to swim ashore, and made his way back to the lighthouse.

Another disaster at Bird Rock took place during one Seal Hunting season. In the early winter the seals penetrate the Gulf of St. Lawrence in great herds. By the middle or end of March the female seals climb up on the floating ice to have their young, which they nurse for the next three weeks.

The winds of March usually push one or two of these ice-packs, loaded with seals, against the shores of the Magdalen Islands, and this particular Spring was no exception. When the seal came to shore, the lighthouse keeper Whalen, his son, and his assistant J. Pigeon went out onto the ice and killed many seal. They took with them a galvanized iron floatboat for safety.

That night the wind came up, pushing the ice off shore, and they were unable to return to shore. Before morning, both Whalen and his son had frozen to death. Pigeon was still alive and he decided to make an effort to reach Bird Rock.

He abandoned his boat and made his way over ice packs which were bobbing and crashing; by the following morning the wind had shifted, and the icepack began to move back towards the Magdalenes. Pigeon was soon in sight of Bird Rock and battling his way across slush and soft ice, he reached Bird Rock late in the afternoon, and told the tragic news of death to Mrs. Whalen. The two of them continued to run the lighthouse until help came a month later.

Several years later, about 1910, Lighthouse keeper Telesphore Turbid, his son, and keeper Damien Deveaux, went out on the ice floes after seals, leaving Mrs. Deveaux alone on the island. The wind increased, and they floated off towards the South. The lighthouse keepers soon froze to death but young Turbid somehow reached Cape Breton Island alive. Here he was rescued in an unconscious condition and cared for. As he was taken to the hospital, he revived long enough to tell his tragic story. Then young Turbid said, "Annie Deveaux is alone on the rock. Will you save her? Within an hour he died.

The following morning a Government Icebreaker was on its way through the ice, and three days later Annie Deveaux, a solitary prisoner at Bird Rock for four long weeks, was rescued.

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