

The Western Star

Teak from SS Baccalieu being used to make new memories



Cory Hurley, Published on May 28, 2016
If only those boards could talk. Oh, the stories it would tell.



The S.S. Baccalieu — a cargo passenger ship used in the coastal service around Newfoundland and Labrador — was stripped and scuttled off St. John's in 1969.

Colin Karasek and his son Gary were two of the people who took advantage of the public offer to take the remnants at a bargain price. They loaded up on teak boards from which

the ship was built, recognizing its value for durability and weather resistance.

A deck was built on their St. John's family home for entertaining outside and a dining table was created to do the same inside, said Jane Hogan, daughter of Colin. She has that table still, which is now in her Steady Brook home.

While she says her late father likely appreciated the history behind the wood, she believes the bargain was the greatest lure.

A "pioneer of repurposing," the elder Karasek made some things, but the majority of the lumber remained in their yard for decades until Hogan had it delivered to the west coast.



She contacted local businessman Joe Dicks, who she knew could find a use for it, and in exchange for a jewelry bowl she gave him the rest. Hogan now has a new ring dish as well as a cutting board and a set of bones (musical instruments).

I wasn't really planning on commemorating my parents or anything, that was more Joe's idea," she said. "It was pretty nice of him I thought, and he did a great job."

Dicks, who says he didn't realize the quantity of lumber coming his way, wanted every piece put to use.

The serving counter at The Cove café in Marble Inn now has a teak top and a board is being used as a footrest along its base.

This is the only place in the world you can put your foot on the deck of the Baccalieu and have a beer," Dicks said. "It is just kind of cool."

It is a great conversation piece, especially with the older generation.

This week, Dicks and some friends launched a handmade kayak of Inuit design in the Humber River. Dubbed Nanuk (polar bear), the sleek vessel sliced through the calm waters as John Ramwell — a British sea kayaker and author — took a quick paddle through the mist hovering over the water. Ramwell has the sister kayak in England that the teak wood is also featured in. They are the creations of boat builder Terry Breault of Cottlesville.

The teak was also used in a cedar strip canoe made by Dan Geneux of Steady Brook. It is being donated to the Western Regional Hospital Foundation for auction.

Another set of bones was given to local musician Robert Murphy, who passed them along to an old friend, Fred Graham, a member of The Irish Rovers.

“This is all a very nice way of keeping history alive,” Murphy said.

Graham has already used them in performances in Ireland, western Canada and the United States. Next year, he says they will travel to Florida, a popular destination for many Newfoundlanders.

The different types of wood make a distinct sound, and Graham has taken a liking to the teak instrument.

“I don’t play them all the time,” he said. “When I am on tour with the band I always keep them in my



kit bag because you never know, there is always a Newfoundlander in the crowd.”

He sets aside his favourite oak bones to use these when the band specifically plays “Brady of Strabane.”

Dicks still has one plank left, but is uncertain, or just not telling, what it will be used for at this time.

It appears these pieces of teak will keep gathering stories. If the boards could only talk.