

TIMELY NOTES ON TOPICS CONNECTED WITH Silver Fox and Mink Farming

The following article was compiled and submitted at the meeting of the International Fur Conference held at The Charlottetown Hotel on Monday. It is an authoritative account of the origin of the fur farming industry, showing the difficulties which confronted Sir Charles Dalton and his co-partners, Robert Oulton and other pioneers in their breeding experiments. It shows, too, how nobly they overcame these obstacles and originated an industry that has spread to 10 countries and led to the production of over a million dollars worth of furs that had the efforts of the pioneers not been successful would never have been sold.

By Lt.-Col. D.A. MacKinnon, D.S.O.

Silver fox farming has been called the world's greatest fur industry, and while we may question this statement today there would be no doubt about its accuracy some years ago when silver fox pelts were produced on thousands of ranches large and small, in ten countries and marketed by the hundreds of thousands by the world's leading auction companies. It is therefore of interest to inquire into the origin of this unusual and fascinating industry.

First we may state that silver fox has been known to be worn as far back as 1606 at the coronation of Ivan the Terrible of Russia, and silver fox pelts found their way from Canada—then New France—to Old France in the days of Louis XIV. Colonists who came to this Province—then the Isle St. Jean—noticed the quality of the native Indians and Samuel Holland, a surveyor sent out by the British Government, wrote: "I have never seen such quality black foxes as are found here."

Silver or black foxes were also found in other parts of Canada, notably the Peace River Valley and to some extent in Labrador. The idea of breeding them in captivity originated with Charles Dalton of Tignish, Prince Edward Island. He was a man who loved the outdoors; born to the life of a hunter in the woods—in fact shooting, fishing and trapping were his principal avocations. He had from boyhood observed nature and the things of the wilds and after buying and re-selling some trapped black fox pelts at what appeared to be big prices, he became convinced that the black fox was no mere freak of nature and that it could be successfully mated and bred in captivity.

Dalton's Story
Dalton's own story is that in 1874 the first pair of Island black foxes that were used for breeding purposes in captivity had been dug out of the ground at a place called Fox Hill near North Cape, P. E. I., by a fisherman named Thompson. They were purchased by Benjamin Haywood, Tignish, for £5 (about \$16.25). Mr. Haywood kept them for two years in an old barn. They produced one litter of pups, two of which were raised to maturity, but they failed to produce another litter and were pelted. Mr. Dalton continues: "I bought two pelts from Haywood and sold them to Daniel Cronan, a fur buyer of Halifax, N. S., for \$150. It was then that I commenced to think seriously about farming silver foxes and came to the conclusion that if one litter could be bred in captivity, why with proper care could they not be bred annually? I kept a good lookout to see if I could get hold of a pair of black foxes. I had a long wait but eventually my eye caught an advertisement of two silver foxes offered for sale on the Island of Anticosti.

"I answered the ad and secured the pair for \$100. I kept them for two years in a shed attached to my barn. They were medium silver foxes, of good size and perfectly clear color. I managed to get them to breed but to my surprise and great disappointment the offspring were all crosses, and in those days cross fox pelts only fetched about \$12 on the London fur market.

"Then I heard of a black fox for sale at Lot 6, P.E.I., and I bought it for \$50. I mated him with a native red female fox and got a litter of five reds. The following spring the male died and I sold his pelt for \$100. It was my intention to keep a pair of the red pups but one night they all escaped. The next fall I pelted the Anticosti foxes.

"I had been ten years constantly thinking and endeavoring to successfully procure and farm silver—or black foxes as they were then known—in captivity, and with very meagre success; but I was not finally discouraged and in 1885 I bought a pair of dark silver foxes from John Hill of Lot 40, P. E. I., for \$100. He had dug them out of the ground the previous year but could not get them to breed.

"This pair of foxes from which I got two litters, was the foundation of the domestic Prince Edward Island Silver Fox. I pelted the poorest ones and realized \$30—(about \$150) for the skins, which was then considered a high price. Two years after (1887) I bought two pairs of black foxes from Louis Holland of Bedouque, P.E.I., and thereupon, together with three reds, were dug out of a den and I gave him \$300 for the lot.

Precious Litters
"From these two pairs of silvers and the silvers I got from Mr. Martin, I produced litters for two years. Then they stopped breeding, which I attributed to the conditions under which they were kept. That convinced me that if I were to make a success of silver fox farming I must ranch them as nearly as possible under natural conditions.

"In 1890 I entered into an arrangement with Robert Oulton of Little Shemoque, N.B., who came here and settled on Cherry Island, near Alberton. This proved an ideal location for a fox ranch. I later took Mr. Oulton in as a partner. We had hunted and fished together and he was a man after my own heart. I cannot speak too highly of his assistance in solving the difficulties and many early problems in breeding and raising foxes to maturity in captivity.

"This friendship and partnership continued for eighteen years during which time we never had an unkind word pass between us. Mr. Oulton was a believer in large size pens, 50 x 50, considering that the extra space caused the foxes to exercise more and produce better pelts. At first we neglected to put up an over-hang and that winter lost three beautiful foxes. Our foxes on Cherry Island in natural surroundings in the woods never failed to breed and gave us large litters of fine, healthy pups.

"Our style of den was at first a hollow pine log, for in such our hunting expeditions we usually found red fox dens. Later we built a medium sized box inside of a larger box and found it worked out satisfactorily. I am convinced that Prince Edward Island silver fox is a distinct strain. I have bred Island silver foxes year after year and have never had an off-color fox except when mating to imported foxes.

At Cherry Island
"In our Cherry Island days we always selected the darkest colored foxes we had and after several years succeeded in producing an absolutely perfect blue black pelt, heavily furried. The production of these pelts had a most remarkable effect on the London market. Such furs had never before been seen and never could have been produced except by selective breeding. Pelts from our Cherry Island ranch obtained world wide renown and brought the highest prices in London year after year. In 1905 we shipped a skin from a nine-months-old silver fox which brought \$290 (\$1,095). It was purchased by a buyer from Paris and re-sold by the same auction company three months later for \$580 (\$2,110).

"In 1910 we sent 28 skins to C. M. Lampton & Co., London, England, and received a cheque for \$31,000. Three of these skins sold for over \$1,500 each and one of them realized \$540 or \$2,050. Their quality was incomparable. They always showed a bluish tinge which scarcely ever faded even up to shedding time. This quality was never obtained from an imported fox.

MAMMOUTH FIELD DAY

AT Charlottetown Experimental Farm Monday afternoon and evening August 2nd

PROGRAM:

- 1:30—Registration.
2:15—Official welcome and organization of tours.
2:30-4:00—Farm tours and demonstrations.
4:00-5:30—Sports competitions. (See below).
5:00-6:30—Supper on lawn. (Tea and cups provided).
6:00-7:30—Ball Games. (See below).
7:45—Farmers mass meeting at P. W. C. Hall, Special Speaker: H. H. Mannam.
10:00—Business meeting—P. E. I. Federation of Agriculture.

Recreation period—Junior Farmers and visitors.

SPECIAL PROJECTS:

National Film Board.
P. W. C. Science and Vocational Departments.
S. D. U. Extension Department.

SPORTS:

- 100 Yard Dash (open).
75 Yard Dash (girls).
Running High Jump.
Running Broad Jump.
Standing Broad Jump.
Half mile relay. (4).
50 yard backward race (open).
Shot Put.
Baseball Throw. (boys).
Softball Throw. (boys and girls).
Volley Ball Contest.

BALL GAMES:

Hardball—St. Peters vs. Eastern Stars (Elmira).
Softball—Hillsborough vs. Cherry Valley.

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ever sold was to Robert Tuplin of Alberton, P. E. I., in 1900. He paid us \$340 for them. I was also associated with James Rayner, Killdare, P. E. I., and we were fast friends and fur farmers. "In the year 1912 I sold out my entire interest in the Tignish ranch to a company—the Cherry Island ranch having been discontinued in 1910 due to termination of partnership with Mr. Oulton, who desired to go back to his old home in Little Shemoque, N.B. The agreement was for me to furnish twenty pairs of Dalton silver foxes with a guarantee of forty pups the following season, raised to maturity.

"The company was capitalized at \$625,000. I was paid \$400,000 in cash and \$100,000 in stock of the company. Over forty pups were produced and sold for over \$12,000 a pair in 1913. The company paid its shareholders a dividend of 40 per cent. The directors decided that the ranch should be moved from Tignish and a new ranch was built at Southport, near Charlottetown. That move, a strange caretaker and other factors made the breeding season of 1914 a most disappointing one."

Intervening Years

Filling in the story of fox farming in the years covered by Mr. Dalton would be a tremendous task, so I shall touch briefly on some of the principal figures connected with it. Robert Tuplin, who bought the air of foxes from Mr. Dalton in 1900, soon mastered the details of fox farming and after a few years set his son James up in business. His Tuplin strain of foxes were "tops" for many years and he received prices of over \$2,000 at auction for several pelts. His ranch at Black Banks was widely known and furnished breeding stock, some of the descendants of which are producing winners at fox and pelt shows not only in this Province but in Ontario and other parts of Canada.

Robert Tuplin also loaned a pair of foxes to his nephew, Frank Tuplin, of New Annan, and in a few years he was producing a very beautiful type of blue black silvers. His finances had been at a very low ebb when he started fox farming, but in 1909 he could not resist an offer made by a leading business man of Summerside on behalf of a syndicate, of \$25,000 for ten pairs of pups. There had been a tacit agreement between the fox breeders up to that time not to sell live foxes as they feared the market would become flooded and pelts would drop very greatly in price; but the lure of the large prices changed things and all the ranchers were soon offering foxes for sale. As a matter of fact they did not have to advertise or solicit. The savings banks were full of money and ranchers were besieged with offers to buy. Six farmers near Victoria, P. E. I., bought a pair of breeders from Frank Tuplin for \$25,000. The female rewarded them with six pups and they sold them, cleared off their original investment, paid a handsome dividend and had the pair left.

But to return to Frank Tuplin. He was one of the first to follow the example of Dalton and cash in, selling his herd to the Tuplin Fox Corporation for \$250,000. It was stated at the time of his departure for the United States that

he was "rated" at nearly a million dollars.

Among other notable pioneer breeders were the Rayners; Silas the father, who bred some of the very best that were produced in captivity from Dalton stock, and his sons B. I., James and E. H. B. I., Rayner became one of the "greats" of the fox farming world. His foxes were more silvery than Dalton foxes and were usually very prolific. He established ranches in Nova Scotia, and his breeding stock was used by many of the most successful farms in this Province. B. I. formed a company in 1913 capitalized at \$600,000 with 20 pairs of proven breeders. In order to carry out his promise to the letter he was known to have paid \$24,000 for a pair of two-year-old breeders necessary to complete the twenty pairs.

Soaring Prices

As word got around about the tremendous prices being received for silver fox pelts, the price of live foxes kept soaring. In 1913 the last pair of pups was sold in the fall of that year for \$17,500 and dozens of pairs changed hands at \$16,000; but the usual price was \$12,000 per pair. Money poured in from the United States and all parts of Canada and companies by the dozen were formed. The usual practice was for the buyer to purchase an option in the spring on a pair of foxes, male and female pups, paying 10 per cent; the balance of 90 per cent was to be paid when taking delivery September 1st. If delivery was not taken the 10 per cent was forfeited. Practically all these options were taken up and there seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of money to establish new fox farms. Of course the reason was that the companies already in existence were paying enormous dividends.

To cite an example I may mention the Willow Hill Fox Ranch near Summerside, founded largely on the savings of a female fox owned by the Willow Hill—Lady Evelyn—bred by B. I. Rayner, Alberton, from B. I. and Silas Rayner foundation stock, produced offspring that realized upwards of \$300,000 for the company. The Royalty company with whom outside capital, paid a dividend of 600% in 1913. Dividends of as high as 1000% were known to be paid. Shares in companies were freely sold by exchanges set up for that purpose, and trading in foxes assumed large proportions.

Before going further I think this is an opportune time to pay tribute to pioneer breeders other than those mentioned above. For instance, John Champion, James Gordon, Henry Lewis, Robert Oulton's son, W. R. Oulton, the Hunters, the Wells and many others whom I cannot readily recall. The war, which broke out in 1914, put an almost complete stop to the spread of silver fox farming. Prices of breeding stock slumped to one-fifth and sometimes even one-tenth of previous value. The ranchers were confronted with a situation which seemed to be rather hopeless in that London, which had been the market for our furs, would be largely inactive due to war. Happily a new market was created in 1916 in the United States and W. Chester S. McLaure, representative of the Fur Sales Board, a local organization of breeders,

- NEWSY NOTES -

By Agricola

ADVENTURES OF BAILLE MACRAE

At certain seasons of the year Baille Macrae went to London, and even at an odd time crossed the Channel, in the interest of business. On such excursions the worthless of Auld Ayr, away from home and in a sense incognito, indulged in a kind of impishness, that would have been quite out of place in their home town. For instance there was that episode in the train between Carlisle and London. The Baille had a compartment all to himself till he got to Carlisle, but just as the whistle blew for leaving the Cumbrian city, the carriage door opened, and a fellow traveller, popped in. The Baille hated to be disturbed, but he said nothing, stretched himself along the seat, arranged his wraps, and prepared to enjoy a good sleep. The other did likewise, and the two of them dozed away till the train ran into the station at Northampton. Here the intruder started to open the door and a third individual pressed himself. This was too much for the Baille but he concealed his displeasure and smiled. "Come awa' in, sir; come awa' in," he said pleasantly; "my friend here," he continued, pointing to the sleeping man opposite, "is just convalescent from smallpox, but I assure ye there's nae danger whatever." The intruder started back and exclaimed, "Sir, you have no right to be travelling here with a smallpox patient! If I did my duty, I should call the guard (conductor) and have you both put off." "For Heaven's sake, dinna dae that," remonstrated the Baille; "I assure you he's nearly better. Come on in, and say naething about it."

But the man was not to be caught that way; he slammed the door angrily and made for another compartment where he found a seat, and sat brooding over the iniquity of the Scot who had brought a smallpox patient on board the Midland Express. While thus darkly glooming he was shocked to see the door suddenly thrown open, and the smallpox convalescent prepare to enter. "You can't get in here," he shouted. "Get away at once or I'll call the guard!" "I can't get in," asked the astonished man. "Why not?" "You know very well why not. You know very well that in your state you ought not to be on the train at all." "In my state, did you say?" "Yes, sir, in your state." "What in the name of goodness do you mean?" "What do I mean? I mean what I say. You are just recovering from the smallpox, and if you in the astonished man. "Who told you that? It's an infernal lie!" "It's nothing of the sort. Your friend told me; that Scotchman you were travelling with." "Me travelling with that Scotchman! God forbid! He's as mad as a March hare—stark, staring mad. I never saw him till tonight, and I hope to Heaven I may never see him again." "But why?" "Because I was awakened up by somebody slamming the carriage door, and there he was sitting glaring at me. He put his hand into one coat pocket and pulled out a razor, and into another and

pulled out a strop and then he began to strop the razor with the wildest look I ever saw in the eye of man. After that he put the edge of the razor to his own throat to see if it would cut and then he looked at me. That was enough, and I escaped. The man's a raving maniac. There was method in the madness tho'; for all the rest of that night Baille Macrae slept secure from intrusion.

"SHOOTING STARS"

On certain nights, in certain months, we may look for the long bright streaks which we have referred to as "shooting stars." The astronomer, however, refers to them as "meteors" and tells us that their appearance is caused by solid fragments of matter, from outer space, entering the earth's atmosphere at a high speed. The air offers resistance and the friction generated usually burns up the fragments which leave the familiar luminous train as they are vaporized. Sometimes the fragments are too large to be entirely dissipated, and their remains reach the earth's surface as meteorites or aerolites, as they are indiscriminately called. Occasionally these larger meteors explode in mid-air with a brilliant light and a loud explosion, before their fragments reach the earth. Analysis of the meteorites reveals nothing that is not found on or in the earth; some are nearly pure "meteoric iron," while others are fragments of limestone, magnesia or silica. As to size the average meteorite is very small; no larger than a pea. And as it is estimated that several million of them enter the earth's atmosphere yearly we have good reason to feel thankful for their disappearance.

Much rarer is the fall of the larger aerolites. Perhaps the largest of all was that prehistoric meteor that fell in Arizona, and buried itself so deeply that nobody has yet seen it. Its impact is said to have shifted the polar axis of the earth. In 1784, at Atumpka, near Buenos Ayres, there fell a monster aerolite weighing 35,000 lbs., part of which (4,400 lbs.) is in the British Museum. At Durango, Mexico, in 1811, fell one still larger; it weighed 35,000 lbs. but was afterwards broken up and distributed. There are 45 notable "heavyweights" in the list. The greatest meteor fall of recent years, says the Astronomer Royal, occurred on June 30, 1908, in a remote part of Siberia near Vancouver, about 700 miles north of Lake Baikal. Prof. Kulik, who visited the scene in 1927, estimated the weight of the meteorite at 130 tons. When this monster struck the ground the rush of air levelled the trees for a distance of 20 miles around. "About 1000 reindeer were said to have been killed, but the loss of human life was slight, the fall occurring in a thinly populated region."

As with many other natural phenomena, there is a periodicity in the appearance of meteors. The known showers occur annually in August and November. The August meteors are believed to describe a very large elliptic orbit round the sun, and to

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Four-leaved Clovers. This season has produced a great crop of these monstroities, for such they are. In their way they are just as odd as the genetry with extra digits mentioned in Scripture. When clover attains a lush growth, favored by good soil, plenty of rain and perhaps not too much sunshine, then look for extra leaflets. Even the steady little white clover is exuberant this year. On the other hand the "daisy" (the Moon-daisy of England) is very steady in its flowering here, and pursues the even tenor of its way without any oddities no matter what the season. In England however, it produces monstrous flowers, two of which I sketched. The first is a twin flower on one stalk, side by side, and reminding one of owl's eyes! The other is stranger, and could be limited by pinching a flower from its stalk and attaching it, face to face, to a growing daisy flower! The soil in England is generally good (except on the mountains), and this is conducive to these abnormal growths.

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