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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Finest Tweeds Made At Tryon

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I HAVE often talked in this column of the many articles of wearing apparel that were made in this province in other years, but I learned recently that one company, the Tryon Woolen Mills 1856-1920, made some of the finest tweeds in the world. But I wonder if most of you will be as surprised as I was, to learn the mills were founded by Charles E. Stanfield, grandfather of Robert I. Stanfield, premier of Nova Scotia.

The founder sold in 1867 to S. E. Dawson, Jr. who was a brother of his wife, and seven years later the mills were sold to John Dawson Reid, father of Mrs. James Stevenson, Charlottetown who first put me on the trail of this story, and Hon. S. E. Reid. To complete the historical detail, the mills were burned in 1874, were rebuilt and became incorporated as the Tryon Woolen Mill Manufacturing Company Limited in 1881 with John Dawson Reid, sales manager and Hon. S. E. Reid - he was provincial secretary-treasurer, I am told by Earle Howatt, Tryon - was named secretary-treasurer of the company.

JOHN DAWSON Reid died in 1903, his daughter told me, the mills were closed two years later, were opened in 1915 as a knitting mill to make underwear for the troops in the First Great War when they were run by Reid and Raynor, and they were burned in 1920.

Mrs. Stevenson tells me that Stanfield's first partner was Edward Dawson who contracted tuberculosis and moved to a dry climate in Denver, Colorado in 1869, hoping for a cure which never came, also that Charles Stanfield's daughter Nell, an aunt of Premier Stanfield, is still living. Charles Stanfield, the man credited with inventing "unshrinkable underwear" married Phyllis Dawson, sister of Mrs. Stevenson's grandmother who was Charlotte Dawson.

Blanket Sought As Souvenir

MRS. STEVENSON is wondering if there are some blankets around that were manufactured in the mill, as she would like very much to get one for a souvenir. I know that there is still some cloth around because Charles Easton, Georgetown, told me last fall his wife had a suit made from Tryon Woolen Mill cloth. And this cloth ranked with the very best when the mills were at their peak. Mr. Howatt had some excellent statistical information for me when I called on him recently. It included a story written by The Guardian October 15, 1902.

The old story said the tweeds made there compared favorably with the best of the imported cloth. A Maine tailor had said his principal importations had been from Tryon, and he had found no better goods anywhere else in the world. The name of the Tryon

Woolen Mills, another authority said, "is a guarantee of the highest excellence in quality with a minimum of cost."

THE WOOL was purchased mostly from Island farmers - there were many sheep raised here then - though some of it came from New Brunswick and some of the finer wools came from Australia and the Cape of Good Hope.

The coarser wools were used for lumbermen's blankets, the next quality for union homespun, and the finest for the manufacture of tweeds.

After sorting, the wool was scoured, dyed and dusted, put through a picker, then oiled and picked again, the old story explained.

Many Looms - 45 Yards Each

THERE WERE a large number of looms in action, each capable of about 45 yards of finished material a day. This compares with the yard an hour that was considered a really good average for hand weaving as explained to me by ladies who could do that, like Mrs. Malcolm MacLeod, Strathcona and Mrs. Andrew Johnstone who lived formerly in Long River, but now resides with her son, William, in the Kensington area. Incidentally those ladies also told me they used to get eight cents a yard for doing the weaving which was pretty small pay.

The Tryon mills had three dyeing vats that would handle 500, 300 and 200 pounds of wool at one time. The vats were heated by the exhaust from the steam engine. The power was supplied by water power from the river and the steam was used for additional power when needed. Coal was hauled from Victoria where it came by schooner.

I SAID the quality was excellent and here's the proof. The mill boasted a diploma and commemorative medal won at the Great Colonial Exhibition in London. Other honors involving Tryon tweeds include a gold medal won in a Paris exhibition around the turn of the century by a Summerside tailor John MacKenzie, who was the grandfather of Ross MacKenzie, proprietor of MacKenzie's House of Fashion in Summerside. Mr. MacKenzie won several awards, Ross tells me. They included those at the Philadelphia World's Fair, the Paris exhibition, and an international show at London.

It has been suggested to me that the site of the old mills should be marked by a plaque by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, and I draw the attention of those people to this worthwhile suggestion.

Promise Recalled, About Harry

I WAS reminded this week that I promised a long time ago some further stories on Harry, the big black horse we said a regretful farewell to back in September 1961. We bought him in 1946 when the Keppoch Road was still tree-lined and narrow and impassable for cars except in the summer and the better part of the fall and spring weather. So we left our car on the Southport Highway and Mrs. Matheson drove me there each morning with Harry in a sleigh.

One morning I got the idea I'd take Harry myself and let him come home alone, so Mrs. Matheson wouldn't have to make the early morning trip. The big fellow justified my faith in him, behaved perfectly and sauntered proudly into our yard to be unharnessed and stabled.

But our closest neighbor, Alyre Gallant, had always seen my wife in the sleigh, as he met it each morning on his way to work, in Dr. J.P. Lantz's Keppoch Jersey herd barn on the Keppoch Road. He thought at first that my wife was hiding on him as the sleigh approached without anyone visible, then saw the sleigh was empty when it came opposite him. Becoming worried lest something had happened to Mrs. Matheson, he harnessed a horse and drove down to our home before he could rest assured that nothing had happened to her.

I OFTEN thought of training Harry to come and meet me in the evening and I'm sure it could have been done, for he had a sweet tooth and loved sugar. A few lumps at the end of the Keppoch Road would have given him the idea, I believe. But the combination of the Keppoch Road being widened, graded and later paved, combined with the greatly expanded highway plowing operations, removed the necessity for Harry's daily trips. (What am I talking about? I snowshoed across the fields from our home on the Langley Road to the Southport Highway Tuesday morning, following Monday's storm. But that's unusual. Blake Wood gives us good service when it is possible.)

There are many other stories, but I'll tell you just one. A big black dog, Trixie, who is still active at 15, used to come with me each morning, and would sit up proudly in the sleigh behind Harry as she rode home all alone. The sight of the black dog in a red sleigh, drawn by a big black horse, became a fairly regular part of the early morning scenery on our road for a time.

'Drive To The Right' Incident

FRANK ACORN recalled for me a few days ago that his father, Ed Acorn, and a friend whose name he cannot recall, were probably the first two men on the Island to drive their horses to the right side of the road back in 1924. Art Roper, Charlottetown, also recalls the event "as though it were yesterday", but he has forgotten who the other man was. Mr. Acorn was driving a little horse named "Abegweit".

Ed was running a restaurant at the time, where the taxi stand is now, and the two men went to their stables, and harnessed their horses. One man drove to the monument on Great George Street, the other to Worthy's corner on Euston. They turned, drove to meet each other and saluted as they met, then drove back to their barns. I wonder if anyone reading this can recall the event and tell us who drove the other horse.

MRS. IRETA Sutherland recalled last week that her father, Sam Kennedy sold the MacKay car in partnership with Richard Grant which reminds me of a letter I received about the MacKay Brothers who manufactured it. Kenneth Ross, Bridgetown tells me the brothers John, Dan and Stanley ran a carriage shop at Bridgetown, then moved to Souris where they manufactured carriages and sleighs. The MacKay Brothers moved

to Amherst with the advent of cars and built the car which Mr. Kennedy and his partner sold, and several people have told me that it was a good automobile.

I can recall hearing early motorists boast that their car took a certain hill in second gear, but Mrs. Sutherland recalled for ...(?) they used to get out and put stones behind the wheel of their car because it wouldn't take a bad hill in low, and that apparently, was not unusual in those days.

Cars Were Unusual Sight Then

MR. JUSTICE George J. Tweedy reminded me of my own boyhood days when he recalled last week that they used to run to the road to see an automobile go by at his home in Vernon River. "We could see one coming several miles away from our place," he told me, and that gave them plenty of time to get close to the road and watch it go by. I can recall sticking my head out the window when I heard a car at night, and following its progress by the lights as it labored up the Matheson hill, and "labor" was the word, for often it seemed as though it would stop before it reached the top and finally disappeared.