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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Granite Stone Is Seen Key To Unusual Yarn

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A MODEST block of Black Granite I saw in the Anglican cemetery at Alberton last weekend was the key to an interesting story told me by Herb Leavitt, a master craftsman who is one of the most modest men to whom I have ever talked.

Some of you may recall the story in this column of the A. J. MacKean rescue in which William Leavitt, father of Herb, played a vital part while he was still a young lad.. Back in the early 1950's - I think Herb told me it was about 1951 - William Leavitt gathered the family names and addresses of as many as possible of the sailors who had died in the waters off Alberton. He wrote to the relatives suggesting if each would send a small donation a common headstone could be erected to their memories.

When no replies were received William Leavitt decided to erect a memorial stone on his own. Recalling that he had played on a large granite stone when he was a boy, Mr. Leavitt sought help to load it on a drag sled, and have it hauled to the cemetery. He prepared a concrete slab and the stone was rolled on to it.

ON THE big rock - it's shaped just a little like a huge potato though it's much bigger - the Alberton man had a stone mason cut the words "Sacred to the memory of those who drowned off Alberton since 1873".

(See page two for picture of the stone.)

Shortly after this stone was placed, however, Mr. Leavitt had a visit from a Mr. Doggett who was the youngest brother of a John H. Doggett from the Nova Scotia south shore who had lost his life in Nail Pond back in 1885 at the age of 21 years.

The old story says young Doggett was swimming while his ship was taking on fresh water, and while diving from the yard arm, he struck his head on a submerged object and was killed.

Old Story Is Interesting

THE BROTHER of John Doggett bought the black granite stone to which I referred earlier, and placed it to the memory of his brother, but the story Doggett told the Leavitts is most interesting.

Here it is as Herb Leavitt related it to me. Doggett's mother had been terribly afraid of horses, and one day a horse chased her in her farm yard. Fleeing in near terror from the closely pursuing animal, Mrs. Doggett managed to reach the barn and slam the stable door in the animal's face.

But the door was a two-part affair, and she was able only to shut the bottom half. So the horse pushed the top half open, and thrusting his head through the opening,

reached into the barn as far as he could, and dropped a piece of paper from his mouth at Mrs Doggett's feet.

On the paper was the one word "DEATH".

Mrs. Doggett who feared that something terrible was going to happen, spent a sleepless night. But she knew when a message arrived saying her son had been killed.

The man who told the story was a solid, reliable citizen Mr. Leavitt told me. So the incident was recorded as another of those unexplainable events. I'm reminded once more of the term Charles MacDonald, Murray Harbor uses "Tales of the occult".

I called Herb Leavitt a master craftsman, and what else can you call the man who has built up a flourishing business bringing out the natural beauty in the wood he fashions into so many acceptable gifts for discerning people.

Gifts For Christmas Biggest Thrill

ARTICLES FROM the Leavitt shop have been presented to many distinguished visitors in recent years. The government of this province has purchased them for special gifts, for example.

I asked Mr. Leavitt "what gives you the best feeling about your product, what has given you your biggest thrill?"

Mr. Leavitt told me that he gets the most satisfaction from the knowledge that many of his articles are being given at Christmas time to bring joy and happiness to the people who receive them. It's these acts of human kindness that this man regards as the biggest things in life, not the fact that some of his work is presented to the so called important people who visit this province from time to time.

Noises Foretold Mother's Death

A FORMER Montrose girl, Florrie MacWilliams, who is now Mrs. Leslie Wheeler and lives in Providence, Rhode Island recalls a "true ghost story" associated with her former home here.

"As long as I shall live," she writes "I shall never forget what I call a real ghost story I heard my father tell so many times to his relatives and friends while we listened attentively." One night in 1908 while my father and mother were in bed talking quietly together they suddenly heard heavy scuffling of feet by their bedroom door, that opened out into the kitchen.

"MY FATHER who was never afraid, spoke up angrily and said 'Come in whoever you are.' But everything remained quiet, with no noise of any kind. Father then got up, dressed and even walked up stairs over the kitchen to see if we children were awake. But my sister who was 10 years old, my 13-year-old brother and I were fast asleep.

"Father then walked outside and looked for foot prints on the snow but he didn't find a sign of anything.

"Soon after he came back into the house, father and mother heard three loud knocks on the side door, but there was nobody at the door when father looked.

"That happened," says Mrs. Wheeler, "three months before my mother died. My mother suddenly became so seriously ill that she had to have an operation. One of the

doctors, a Dr. Johnston, called at our home the night before mother died. He gave three loud raps before he entered the house, to tell father that he did not expect mother to live but a short time. My dear mother passed away the next morning.

Same Noise Of Shuffling Feet

“ON THE day before the funeral my father removed the bed from his room and had my mother laid out in the room. At her funeral when the pallbearers were taking the casket from the room to the kitchen, a side wall close to the door prevented them from getting the casket out without a good deal of difficulty. So my father heard the same noise of shuffling feet, he had heard three months previously.

“AS a family we never did believe in ghosts, but my father believed this had happened as an omen.” (The older folks called them “forerunners” and they usually foretold a death in the home or in the community.)

The “father” about whom Mrs. Wheeler speaks was Arthur MacWilliams. A big man, he was scared of nothing, I am told by Mrs. Edith Eldershaw, Tignish who should know, for Mr. MacWilliams was her uncle. He died in 1952.