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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Brig 'Fanny' Story Has Interesting Sidelight

By NEIL A. MATHESON

THERE'S AN interesting sidelight to the story of the Brig "Fanny" which carried a group of Prince Edward Island men to California back in the days of the 1849 Gold Rush.

The Brig was under command of Capt. Irving, a name well known among mariners in earlier days. He was deeply in love with a beautiful Cape Traverse girl, Laura Eliza Clark, who later was to become the grandmother of my friend Keith Boswell, Victoria.

Keith, incidentally, has been ill with a coronary, but he is now "doing nicely", his daughter tells me, though the "no visitors" sign still is on his door at the Prince Edward Island Hospital.

An old manuscript Keith has given me indicates that Eliza's parents "recognizing the danger of her unusual charms, she was seldom allowed to go out of their sight, except as the ward of some trusted chaperone".

Laura Had Many Admirers

THE BEAUTIFUL Laura had many admirers and when she was about 18 she and Captain Irving fell madly in love. Unable to meet each other as they wished, the situation became really serious when Irving found himself virtually on the eve of sailing for California, something he did not desire to do without his Laura.

Irving told the story to two chaps, McKinlay and Dean, who boarded in the same place. "We have been unable to even exchange a letter in months", he told them as he emphasized the problem.

Dean, a Yankee, said "that's an old cruel game. I'll place a letter from you in the lady's hands before this time tomorrow, or my name is not Dean . . . I'll undertake to set the girl free before another week has begun, provided she's all you represent her", Dean promised with emphasis. McKinlay was just as enthusiastic.

Irving wrote Laura an outline of the proposed plan, and next day Dean and McKinlay put their plan into action. Dean hired a horse and carriage, and McKinlay went on horseback. Irving gave them a plan of the road, and a good description of Laura's home.

They drove and rode the animals in leisurely fashion, so they would arrive in good condition.

Arriving at Clark's they presented themselves as a pair of travelers on their way to Bedeque. But "not wishing to tire their horses", they would remain overnight if they could be accommodated.

The two men were well dressed and had an air of manly politeness that could scarcely fail to win esteem. So the Clark's consented to keep them overnight.

A Rare Piece Of Rascality

THE PAIR had now arrived, says the manuscript, at a stage where their measure of success would be calculated on the impression they made on the Clark's. "While in the commission of a rare piece of rascality, they must impress upon their hosts that in reality they were a couple of angels travelling in wingless disguise", the old manuscript states.

During the evening Dean and McKinlay were extremely sedate. When their host referred to the California-bound company and the Fanny, the travelers remarked on "the folly of a mad rush after gold". Hinting they were accustomed to retire early – that in itself was looked on as a desired virtue in many homes of that period – the pair asked if they could be shown to their rooms long before the usual hour.

Next morning the guests were a trifle less quiet and McKinlay began to twit Dean at the breakfast table about travelling alone in his fine carriage, which could comfortably accommodate two.

Dean replied he would be happy to have company particularly a lady, and asked Laura if she would accept a drive the rest of the way. He'd guarantee to have her back home the following evening.

"You must ask Mamma for that" replied Laura who had read her lover's letter and knew the plan. One of her brothers suggested it would be a good time for Laura to make the trip to Bedeque, especially in such a fine carriage. That part of the plan worked even better than the schemers had hoped. Laura's mother even put in a special silk dress, the height of fashion at the time, just in case she might need it. The girl managed to slip other necessaries into her satchel.

Before proceeding far on their way, the pair of schemers took the first road to Charlottetown and arrived without mishap.

The reunion of Irving and his Laura was naturally jubilant. But their troubles were only beginning. The marriage ceremony was planned for Friday morning November 9, the day after Laura's arrival.

Stricken Pair – Cruel Decision

THE BRIG was ready for sea and was to sail Saturday morning, and Irving took his beautiful bride aboard to introduce her to his crew. Some of the crew disapproved strongly – an old superstition said a woman on board ship was really bad luck – so a vote was taken. The objectors had a slim majority.

A cruel decision faced the stricken pair. Irving must leave his beautiful wife ashore and go with the ship. The alternative was to forfeit the 100 pounds Sterling he had invested in the enterprise, and that was a large sum in those days. In addition there was the lure of the gold Irving hoped to harvest in California. In two, or three years at the most, he would return with enough wealth to keep himself and his bride for life. They decided to take the separation, with the pot of gold at the other end of the rainbow.

Monday morning Irving kissed his wife of three days a fond and lingering goodbye.

It was months later when the word came from California that Capt. Irving had died. Laura was naturally stricken sorely.

Three years later she became the wife of Mr. Boswell who was a merchant. Their son, Edward Boswell, was a member of the firm of Wright Brothers, Victoria when I was a young lad in Rose Valley. On his death Laura married a Captain MacKenzie, whose ship sailed out of Charlottetown and was never heard from again.

The lovely Laura died in January 1914, according to a note on the manuscript from Rev. Dr. George M. Young, Fredericton, N.B. The day of the funeral saw roads piled high with snowdrifts, and as the coffin was being lowered into the grave, "a fierce blizzard, with the temperature at zero, hurled a curtain of white across the open grave, almost shutting from view those on the opposite side of the narrow opening."

Peace came at last to a lady who had had all too many sorrows through her lifetime.

THE ITEM in the Fairview Community History stating Glen MacFayden was involved in the cemetery ghost story is not correct, I am told. The item dates back for many years, my informant states.