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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Many Bits Of History Viewed At Convent

By NEIL A. MATHESON

MANY BITS of history were viewed in the Convent at Miscouche several months ago when Sister Antoinette DesRoches discussed with me some of the old documents which concerned the life and work of her grandfather, Joseph Jesse DesRoches. He was a carpenter, plasterer, a blacksmith at times apparently, from some of the documents she showed me.

Mr. DesRoches was born in 1822 and would be 146 were he living today.

Some receipts and other documents related to his career dated back as far as 1854.

This man led a life of many activities. He was treasurer of the church in his village in 1857. He made oyster tongs, he made cart wheels, he shod and removed horse shoes.

The shoes removal cost two and six, or two shillings, six pence in the English currency of that day. Shoeing a horse cost two shillings, or 50 cents as Sister DesRoches estimated it. This contrast, or comparison doesn't make sense with removal costing more than shoeing a horse. At best it must have been nailing used shoes on.

One Charles Compton worked one-half day for about 84 cents in Canadian money. Another paper shows James Kinesman worked one day for the equivalent of 89 cents.

Lumber By The Ton

Eight tons of lumber – apparently that was the measure used – cost six shillings and nine pence.

One quart olive oil cost four shillings and six pence. The name was James Holman. One and one-half dozen 4-inch screws cost one shilling, six pence. Grandfather DesRoches took stuff from Summerside firms and sold it in the Miscouche area.

The man himself worked in many places; he worked on the construction of the Tignish church which was built considerably more than 100 years ago.

The present Miscouche church was built in 1890. The old church served as the parish hall for many years. Now it's used by the Boy Scouts and Cubs, Brownies and Guides. It is 143 years old, Sister DesRoches said.

Sister DesRoches is a sister of Benoit DesRoches, a retired school teacher and a man I met at Prince of Wales College many years ago.

Mile Race Is Recalled

I REMEMBER one day in our year at PWC – it was in the autumn – Benny and I went out to the old CA grounds which was maintained by the Abegweit Club as an athletic field.

Sort of naturally we strolled on to the one-quarter mile track and started to jog. Nobody suggested it but first thing we knew we were engaged in a one-mile race which we contested to the bitter end, though neither of us had had any recent training for that sort of thing, although both of us played on the football team. Benny and I had mighty sore muscles for a week or more.

Grandfather DesRoches made window frames, one document showed; indeed he made many things, so far as I could learn.

There were some interesting notations on land tax assessments. One man paid \$1.30 for tax on a piece of 30 acres of land, which was one-fifth of one per cent of the retail value.

George Kelley was a custom tailor at St. Eleanors and he charged 90 cents to make and trim one pair of pants. That was in 1900.

A truck wagon cost \$15.00, the wheels cost \$3.00. "Painting that wagon" cost \$1.50 more.

One set wagon wheels cost \$11.00. The type of wagon was unclear.

One double truck wagon cost \$18.00; painting that wagon was \$1.50 or one and one-half times the price for painting a single truck wagon.

"My mother tells me my grandfather used to go to the mainland in a boat to sell some materials used in shaping boats" the Sister told me.

Judge DesRoche Is Brother

I FORGOT to say Judge J.S. DesRoches, Montague is also a brother.

Two sets of wheel spokes cost \$3.20, and picks 30 cents. I can't tell you what they were. Mr. DesRoches had to get another man to put the iron on the wheels, the tires, and other iron, apparently.

One document said that in 1890 truck wagons were made to order for \$12.00. Ironing the shafts cost \$1.00.

Shoeing a horse cost 70 cents at the same time.

There was a tax of 30 cents on a piece of land worth \$200. There was a tax of \$1.31 on thirty acres of land.

1875 papers showed rubbers cost 50 cents, mending same 20 cents – what was done was not listed.

A paper of 1870 indicated a pair of cart wheels cost \$8.00, a woodsleigh \$5.00. "Boxing wheels" cost \$1.00.

John Dickieson sold fan mills and seed separators. The fan mills were called fanners.

Cossitt's mowers were for sale, also reapers, rakes, grain crushers, plows at Summerside in 1899.

Another old paper listed four and one-quarter pounds of iron for three cents a pound.

A paper of 1877 said one Dr. Firmang, Wellington had come from France. He sent a bill for one shilling, eight pence, using the English currency, though the present money system was in use here at that time.

B.D. Tanton was receiver of taxes in 1903 and tax on 40 acres of land was 40 cents.

Service Without Priest

SISTER DESROCHES told me at one stage:

“When Grandfather was a young man, there was no resident priest here and on several Sundays there would be no priest. But the people of Miscouche used to gather in church. My grandfather stayed down on the first floor with a part of the choir, the rest was up in the gallery. One part would be sung by those in the gallery and those down below would answer.

“The people could say the first part of the Mass, the prayers. When it came to the reading part my grandfather would read the epistles and read the Gospel, after that the creed; then the people could go no further without the priest. So they had that part of the service and would go home.”

The Sister was looking through an old book when she asked me if I ever read of the hauling of St. Andrew’s Church on the ice to serve as the chapel at St. Joseph’s Convent here. I told her I did a column on it once.

The building was hauled with several hundred horses, as I recall the story. Then the Sister asked me if I had ever heard about the miracle connected with getting the church out of the water when it broke through the ice at one point.

In a recent letter she told me where to look for the book that describes that part of the operation. This I intend to do in the near future. I’ll tell you about it in this column when I find the appropriate reference.