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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Love Finds A Way As Couple Reunited

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This is far removed from the type of story you normally read in this column, but John A. Steele told me such an unusual love story at Montague recently I just have to pass it on to you. For the most part it's told in Mr. Steele's own words, as he brought back to memory a yarn he read in a Charlottetown paper perhaps 40 to 50 years ago.

The time goes back 100 years or more, for the story was old then, and here it is. It concerns Helen Essex, the beautiful daughter of a Colonel Essex, a wealthy, retired English officer who lived in a brownstone mansion in the Royalty of Charlottetown and one Captain Angus MacDonald whose mother had been born Flora MacKenzie of Cardigan and whose father was Hector MacDonald, Brush Wharf, Orwell.

Captain Angus was skipper of the ship "Eleanor" on which Helen Essex sailed one summer for England to pursue her education. On the trip to England she became acquainted with Capt. MacDonald and they became very fond of each other.

Four years later the pair met at Stamper's Corner (later Prowse Brothers). Captain MacDonald was on his way to the colonial building to get customs clearance, and Miss Essex had been visiting some sick friends. On the short walk of a little more than one block they became engaged. Then he left for Baie Verte and she returned home.

Only 1,000 Pounds Left To Family

COL. ESSEX was reading in his library when his daughter returned and noticing the unusual expression on his daughter's face, asked and received the true story. The wealthy Englishman told his daughter that he had long since had his heart set on her marrying one Dr. Robert Thornton, son of a wealthy Englishman who in all probability would leave his entire fortune to the son.

But Helen replied, "No, though I admire Dr. Thornton, he is not the type of man I would choose as my life partner. One thing I shall promise, though," she told her father of whom she was very fond, "I shall not marry Captain MacDonald as long as you live, since the thought seems to displease you."

Just before that Col. Essex had protested that Capt. MacDonald's father had died leaving "only one thousand pounds" to his family. That would be no small amount in those days, though it was not in keeping with what the wealthy Englishman had in mind for the daughter whom he loved so dearly.

Captain Angus received his clearance papers, sailed for Baie Verte for the cargo which took 28 days to load. When he returned to Charlottetown to take on certain supplies, he was met at the wharf by a messenger bearing an urgent invitation to appear at the Essex mansion that evening at six o'clock.

There he met Rev. Donald MacDonald, pastor of the church in which he worshiped on the Island, who informed him "I have been summoned here this evening to unite in the holy bonds of matrimony yourself and Miss Helen Essex."

The two were married with Col. Essex's full blessing, the one condition being that Captain MacDonald should complete the one voyage for which he had then contracted and then retire to live in the brownstone mansion with his wife, and the eldest son was to have the surname "Essex" added, and he would inherit the wealthy grandfather's money and estates, both in Charlottetown and across the seas.

Next morning Col. Essex and Mrs MacDonald accompanied Capt. MacDonald to the wharf, bade him goodbye and sent good wishes after him as he cast anchor and sailed out of the harbor.

Captain Arrested As Privateer

SIX DAYS LATER, a terrific storm blew up as they were crossing the Grand Banks off Newfoundland. Finally the ship had to be abandoned. The crew of 18 boarded one lifeboat and were never heard from again.

Captain MacDonald, his first mate and steward manned another lifeboat. The steward died and was buried at sea on the second day, but the captain and first officer were picked up after seven days by a Turkish boat bound for Constantinople. The Turkish captain took the "Eleanor's" papers and 2,000 pounds Sterling which Captain MacDonald carried, under the guise of safe keeping until they reached port.

But the treacherous Turk trumped up a charge of privateering against Captain MacDonald and had him cast into a Turkish prison, where he remained for eight years until the English consul learned of his plight, negotiated his release and compensated him in part at least for his long and completely undeserved punishment.

In the meantime Col. Essex and his daughter, Mrs. MacDonald, had made every possible effort to learn something about the ship "Eleanor" and her master without any result. Helping in some measure to ease their sorrow and anxiety was a baby boy who was born within the year to Captain Angus MacDonald and his wife, the former Helen Essex, and the youngster became the pride and joy of the mother and grandfather.

One evening as winter was approaching Col. Essex said "Helen, I am growing old and will not likely survive another winter. But I would like before I die to see you comfortably married. You must long since have given up any hope of seeing your husband again, and by this time believe him dead."

But Helen replied "No, though I have every reason to think Captain MacDonald is dead, a secret something is telling me he is still alive. But whether he is living or dead, I will always be true to him and die, as I have lived, the wife of Captain Angus MacDonald."

Before Christmas Col. Essex died and was laid to rest. That fall friends arrived from England to spend the winter in the Essex mansion, among them a Helen Essex who bore the same maiden name as Mrs. MacDonald. And the younger Helen Essex sailed for England the following spring as the wife of Dr. Robert Thornton.

Where Was The Old Brownstone?

WHEN CAPTAIN ANGUS MacDonald was released he went to England and the first thing he saw at an hotel was a copy of a newspaper announcing the marriage of Helen Essex to Dr. Thornton.

Realizing that he had been missing for eight years, and his wife doubtless had believed him dead, and thinking his wife had now finally married, Captain MacDonald had enough love and respect for his wife that he did not wish to mar her happiness, so he set sail immediately for South Africa where he made a fortune in a diamond mine during a four-year stay.

He returned again to England but this time was fortunate enough to meet on the street Dr. Thornton who assured the Captain his faithful wife was still in Charlottetown waiting for him.

So the faithful pair were reunited after a separation of 12 to 13 years for which neither of them were responsible, according to the ancient and beautiful love story which Mr. Steele recalled for me almost a half-century after he had read it in a Charlottetown paper.

Enquiries I have made have failed to indicate just where the "Brownstone mansion" referred to in the story might have been located. I would appreciate hearing from anyone who may be able to clear up that part of the interesting story.