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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Long River History Is Interesting Volume

By NEIL A. MATHESON

A NEW BOOK covering the 180-year history of Long River ranks at the top in my opinion, among the many such histories I have read.

My thanks to my friend William E. Johnstone for a copy. The book is credited to the Long River Women's Institute, but I detect in it many items that reflect the historic knowledge and story-telling ability of Mr. Johnstone.

There are many interesting stories. With the Long River people's permission, I want to refer to a few of them. Everyone likes story about a good horseman, and here's a real dandy.

Robert Fitzimmons learned the blacksmith trade in his youth – there were 623 blacksmiths on the Island in 1881 – but his real ambition was to breed and train race horses.

MR. FITZIMMONS realized his ambition. He had thirty head of the finely bred race horses. They included Dean Swift, Chief Jolly, Gold Clip, Brilliant Wilks, Lady Chief and Breezy Jane, the history related. His name as a breeder and trainer of good horses became widely known. And now to the meat of the story:

"In 1895 an American horseman arrived at the Revere Hotel, Charlottetown looking for "the best young mare on Prince Edward Island for his stock farm; price was no consideration".

Hotel proprietor P.S. Brown said "I know where she is. Tomorrow morning at six o'clock we leave for Long River".

Arriving at Sunny Side Stock Farm they found Robert busy with his horses. Introductions over, the American asked if the Long River man had any horses for sale. Robert answered modestly that he had horses, and would be pleased to show them.

The buyer's keen eye soon spotted the beautiful mare and he had Robert put a halter on her and lead her out.

The mare being just what he wanted – the American was pleased to find that she was evidently so well trained – he offered \$500, a handsome price at that time. Robert refused.

Lady Chief Was Not For Sale

THE HORSEMAN also shook his head at \$550.

Finally the offer came up to \$700. The American wanted the mare for his own breeding farm at home, and was willing to pay almost anything for her, apparently. That would be the equal of \$2,500, or even more now, I suggest.

Robert took the \$700 in his hand, looked at it, then back at the mare. This happened several times, and Robert observed:

"That is a lot of money, and I could use it."

Very slowly the Long River horseman walked back and forth, looking all the while at the beautiful animal. Then, his mind made up, he exclaimed "No, no, mister you haven't enough money to buy this mare."

The mare was Lady Chief, and a year later she met with an accident and Robert had to shoot her, the book observes.

It doesn't say so in the Institute publication, but many people in those days would naturally have shaken their heads and suggested such a thing was bound to happen.

Mostly anyone in those times believed that a man who turned down a big price for a beautiful horse, would lose the animal later. I don't know whether that belief prevailed in Long River, or not, but it most certainly did where I lived in Rose Valley and all through the old Scotch "Strathalbyn" area.

Tena Finlayson Witty At 100

I ENJOYED last week a chat with Tena Finlayson who was 100 years of age on Monday of this week.

Born Christina Gillis, she lived at Point Prim through her lifetime. She had married William Finlayson when she was 22.

They were married in the manse at Wood Islands because their own minister was away at the time. When I suggested that she just couldn't wait until her own minister returned, she told me with a straight face "I had nothing to do with it."

Full of ready wit, Mrs. Finlayson had a quick answer for most questions. When I asked her "Did you ever smoke?", she retorted "No, I am not old enough yet."

The ladies skirts swept the ground when she was young, but she likes the present short skirts. She wouldn't criticize them at all.

Hector Murchison with whom she lives suggested I ask her what she got for picking potatoes when she was a girl.

Her reply was short and to the point: "I'd get a cookie to eat at night".

The lady has bound grain behind the reaper, but refused to say that the work was hard, though most old stories suggest it was a real grind.

She went to Scotland in 1911, when she visited her aunt, Christina Munroe who had married Capt. John Gillis.

SHE SAW a 'burial at sea' on her voyage. They sewed the body in canvas and slid it off a plank at the side of the ship.

A drive to Charlottetown by ice was a common experience in the days of horse travel. It measured about 15 miles. It's twice that by road. A good horse would make the trip in one and one-half hours, Mr. Murchison observed. It would be a good horse that would average 10 miles an hour even on ice.