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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

Unique Stories Told Of Editor, Politician

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I HAVE on my desk today a brief case with the name of Fred J. Nash stamped on the front. It came from his son also named Fred, who had earlier phoned me about it from Kensington.

The brief case had been in my home at Southport for a long time. The contents deal mostly with Mr. Nash's essays and speeches on Island poets and poetry; I do not feel qualified to discuss such things; though I have discussed thousands of different subjects in this column. (A small photo of Fred J. Nash appears in this column.)

Because of my great interest in this man, though, I am going to tell you a few good stories that were told about him, and possibly I may even discuss a few of the items the case contains. I started newspapering as a young man with The Patriot in November, 1932 and heard almost every day of what Mr. Nash had done when he was editor. I was told of his fluency with the pen – newspapermen did use pens then – it was before the days of typewriters.

I heard also of his many fine qualities, of his kindness and understanding, how he always took an interest in Patriot employees, all of them. I heard many people talk of Fred Nash. I cannot recall that anyone ever said anything unkind about him. Indeed I often felt that I had really missed a great deal because I did not have the privilege of working under his guidance. Memory tells me that Mr. Nash died in 1929.

### Man Of Many Talents

I SHOULD say also that Mr. Nash was a member of the legislature. From memory alone I believe that he was a member of a Liberal government. The Premier was John H. Bell. My friend Frank Walker has confirmed it for me.

One story said to be true concerns a visit Sir Wilfrid Laurier made here to speak in a general election campaign.

I never saw either Sir Wilfrid or Mr. Nash, but my informants in my early newspapering days told me Mr. Nash looked very much like the great French-Canadian statesman. Mr. Nash also dressed much like him, I was told, and that set the stage for this story.

The people in the crowded auditorium – I have no idea what auditorium it was – had been waiting eagerly for a half-hour, or more, for Sir Wilfrid to appear. Liberals all, they were ready to acclaim him.

Suddenly a mighty roar of welcome went up and the crowd rose to its feet in one spontaneous movement. Sir Wilfrid had arrived, the Charlottetown and other Island Liberals let loose with a full-throated roar of applause.

“Sir Wilfrid” Was Mr. Nash

BUT IT wasn't Sir Wilfrid after all. It was The Patriot's Fred J. Nash.

The other story is even better. I cannot recall where I heard it but it was perhaps close to 30 years ago. It also concerns Mr. Nash's likeness to Sir Wilfrid.

Mr. Nash was travelling on a train in Quebec. The time was late at night and the veteran conductor had been sneaking the add drink of liquor to help him while the weary hours away.

Suddenly he spotted Mr. Nash sitting quietly in a seat in one of the passenger cars. Sir Wilfrid had died sometime before, and that added to the dramatic effect.

To the old conductor what he saw was indeed Sir Wilfrid and he promptly fell on his knees to thank God for sending the ghost of Sir Wilfrid, his long-time idol, back to ride on the train which he had the honor to have under his charge.

To Mr. Nash's son, and his wife, I say merely I don't know whether this latter story is true. But it was told to me for the truth when I was a newcomer to this profession; I most certainly did not make it up. It's a good story anyway, and I pass it along simply on that basis.

I have heard many things about Fred J. Nash, all of them good. If anyone ever disliked him, he never told me about it.

I've been told, for example, that he was the first man to publish anything written by the late Lucy Maud Montgomery.

The Nash brief case contained a number of pages, apparently clipped form some Island magazine – the pages have many advertisements from old Island firms.

#### Lucy Maud Also A Poetess

MR. NASH'S reference to Lucy Maud Montgomery said in part:

"Probably one of the best known, and second scarcely to any modern writer of fiction in Canada, so far as the sale of books is concerned, is a poetess of considerable merit, namely Lucy Maud Montgomery, now Mrs. Ewen McDonald of Leaksdale, Ontario."

It's probably not generally known that Miss Montgomery, as she was then, wrote poetry first – she had one book of poems published, "The Watchman and Other Poems" before she wrote Anne of Green Gables which was to achieve international renown. The book of poems contained 106 pages, says Mr. Nash and I'll admit this is the first time I knew that she had written that book.

"The Watchman and Other Poems" was dedicated to the memory of the gallant Canadian soldiers who laid down their lives for King and country, Mr. Nash says in his review of poetry.

The title of his work in this regard was "Island Poets and Poetry".

His review contains some work from Thomas A. LePage, a teacher at Prince of Wales College in other years. And that reminds me that my friend Chief Justice Thane A. Campbell has sent me some material which indicates "William LePage of Prince Edward Island originated the art of making fish glue between 1870 and 1880. This resulted in the formulation of "LePage's Original Liquid Glue" and "for the first time we had a ready-to-use fish glue that could be held in storage for months", the accompanying brochure from the LePage company states. If anyone can help me find just who this William LePage was, I'll appreciate it.

#### The Poet Laureate

BACK TO Mr. Nash and his reference to Island poets John LePage was called the Island Minstrel, and was recognized as the “Poet Laureate” of Prince Edward Island, Mr. Nash stated. W.L. Cotton, J.H. Fletcher, John Caven, Colonel Hunter Duvar, Miss Bessie Gregor, Dr. Cyrus J. MacMillan were others Mr. Nash listed.

He also had reference to James Jeffrey Roach and Mrs. Susan MacLeod and modestly he added his own name at the last of his story.

One more personal reference to Mr. Nash – I asked Pius Callaghan, our assistant managing editor, and he recalls with deep appreciation the times when Mr. Nash would come and speak to the school pupils – Pius was one at the time. He recalls the warmth and kindness of Mr. Nash when he came to speak to the school pupils. Everyone to whom I talked said he was a most interesting speaker.

### The Belle River Bear

TO THE lady who wrote me about the verses on the Belle River bear story, I believe I now have found the key to getting it and will act on it as soon as possible.

The verses were written by a blind girl and some of the descriptive parts were really good. Sorry, I forgot the girl's name right now.