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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### Colorful Takes Of Other Years

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I HAD a most interesting chat recently with Murray River's Norman MacLeod who must easily be the province's oldest former member of the legislature.

He'll be 95 in April but he "can read the Bible and the Guardian every day without glasses" although fading hearing makes it difficult to follow television. He has "tried to learn lip reading without much success."

I found many interesting sidelights to the career of this man who was elected as a 4<sup>th</sup> Kings Conservative in a 1926 by-election and quit the party in the 1927 election "on a matter of principle" when they advocated a system of government control for liquor sales.

Liberal Leader - Walter Lea - the Grits stuck to prohibition - asked him to cross the floor of the house, "but I couldn't see any acceptable alternative in the Liberal program", he told me.

THERE'S A reason for his hatred of liquor. He drank once as a young man, then quit for good. A strong-willed man, he used tobacco for seven years and then quit just as suddenly.

He was a lobster packer on Pictou Island when he finally gave in one evening to a colleague's persistent coaxing to "have a drink". Admitting he knew nothing about liquor and had no idea how much to take, he was urged "fill up your glass and drink it down like water".

One glass followed another, "I must have drunk a bottle or more" - he never could remember - until he looked out and saw two boats at anchor where he knew his boat was the only one.

The tobacco story was different. "I was nearly crazy for tobacco", he told me, "as I worked one day on a High Bank farm. Finally a man came along and gave me a fig." He took a mouthful and was chewing with relish when " suddenly I thought what this stuff can do to me, spit out the stuff immediately and never touched it again."

### Storied Days Of Early Settlers

I GOT a vivid picture of the storied days of early settlers, as Mr. MacLeod recalled tales told by his grandfather, for whom he is named, and added some of his own early recollections

Grandfather came from Raasay, Scotland in 1830, landed near Charlottetown, settled temporarily at Melville but chose High Bank when he walked along the shore one Sunday, because of its attractive location, abundance of fresh fish, a staple diet item of the time, and plenty of good clear water.

These were primitive days, but they had their advantages. Let me explain.

YOU CAN say there was no sugar, certainly not for meals as we have it on our tables now. "Father brought home 10 pounds in the fall and mother hid it in the cellar for special purposes," Mr. MacLeod told me. There wasn't even salt at first.

But the interesting gentleman, who has long since retired, told me there was oatcake from oatmeal - quern stones ground it - there was a big pot three-quarters full of oatmeal porridge, with plenty of fresh fish "and my grandfather would sit down to a meal of that and wouldn't call the Queen his aunt."

What advantages? Well, there were no grocery bills, and these can be pretty heavy these days, with a highly organized food sales promotion constantly giving the product "the hard sell".

Did you ever stop to realize the good oatmeal we used to get by grinding our own grain has disappeared? Now, we buy a packaged food on which advertising costs must be tremendous for cereal products are constantly being drummed into our ears by every conceivable medium.

### "They Would Sooner Eat A Snake"

THOSE PEOPLE were harder to please on some food items than we are now. People of that day would turn up their noses at Hake, "they would sooner eat a snake", I was told. Yet Hake is used extensively now as a salt fish food, and for Chicken Haddie.

Old Island potatoes were planted at the roots of trees - there wasn't enough cleared land - "and they grew to tremendous size".

There were woods almost everywhere. Trees towered 100 feet or more. After the meagre crops were planted in spring, men would gather to boast about how many trees they had chopped, or how much land they had stumped, he recalled.

And how about this one? Lobsters, which were plentiful, were roasted on the fireplace, with an iron "dogger" placed on top of the shellfish to keep him from wriggling, while he was being roasted. Cruel, you suggest? Well we plunge live lobsters into a pot of boiling water now, and nobody minds, unless it is the lobsters.

THE LOBSTERS "grew to tremendous size, some were as big as you are," he told me with a merry twinkle in his eye. Two men in a boat took as many as 100,000 pounds in a season. But that too was elastic. Fishing started as soon as they could launch their boats in spring. It closed August 25, but "nobody paid much attention to the closing date." They brought 50 cents per 100 pounds.

His father and mother went 16 miles to church in Montague in a two-wheeled cart. He recalls when the first truck wagon came to their place, and it was Norman who bought the first driving wagon, a real luxury of the time.

Norman bought the wagon - his father was not interested - "but I had females on my mind," he reminisced smilingly.

But Mr. MacLeod took me back to the days before there were horses. His grandfather had had no animal to haul for him at first. Later he got an ox. Still later there was a milk cow. The first horse was just as special then, as a fine automobile and farm tractor are today, for he did the work of both.

First Automobile Ride Recalled

“BRUCE STEWART of Charlottetown gave me my first ride in an automobile. He wanted to sell me one for \$400, but I didn’t buy,” he told me.

The former fisherman and packer did have the first boat engine in the province, though. It was a Kineo, he recalled.

The Murray River man who lives with his son and daughter, Hastings and Alice, seemed happy and healthy as I talked with him in his home. He had had a doctor call on him twice during his lifetime, and he appeared genuinely angry at the thought.

His mother had called Dr. MacIntyre, father of the present Dr. Preston at Montague, once when the son had a heavy attack of pneumonia. She had spent the night carrying hot mustard poultices to him. “She saved your life,” the doctor told him the next day.

HIS SON and daughter called a doctor last summer, and again the rugged man of 94 was disturbed about it. I got the impression that he considered it to have been a dirty trick. Certainly it had been completely unnecessary, he assured me.

I have room, I think, for one more story.

HAMMOND Nicolle was with him in a sail boat when it capsized and sank in a storm off Pictou Island. Nicolle clung to the bow as the boat went down by the stern but MacLeod, a strong swimmer, plunged into the sea and headed for shore.

His legs became numb in the intense cold and he finally lost their use. But the gallant, determined Scot crawled and clawed his way ashore, as he stubbornly refused to quit. He fell heavily on a stone when he tried to stand on the beach. Miraculously, the shock restored the use of his legs, and he found a boat and rowed back to the wreck, after a brief rest, and pulled aboard his friend who was still clinging to the wreck.

### “What Kept You So Long?”

“WHAT DID he say when you arrived?” I asked as he finished his tale.

“What kept you so long?” had been the greeting from his all but frozen companion. It was only one of many experiences at sea, I gathered.

One thing is certain, he’ll never die by drowning, or it would have happened long ago, his daughter suggested as she served a tasty lunch to Mrs. Matheson and myself, just before we left.