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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Monty Warren Visit Interesting

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ONE OF the many interesting suggestions I get for column stories directed me to Monty Warren, a Charlottetown man who has led a most interesting life, though the gift of sight was all but taken from him when he was a small boy.

The poor sight – he is almost completely blind – came from an attack of Scarlet Fever. “My mother was washing and I was on the floor and got into a draught. The cold got into my eyes and this was the result,” he told me when I talked with him.

Milton Stewart of Charlottetown is the man who suggested I see Mr. Warren. He had two stories about which I was to ask Mr. Warren. One said that Mr. Warren’s hearing is so acute, so finely in tune, that he used to call the railway people up and suggest they “clean their whistles” because the tone indicated they were dirty.

THE OTHER story said Mr. Warren was attending a concert in Charlottetown once – performers were a string quartet, or perhaps the violins were a part of an orchestra. Mr. Warren turned to a companion in the audience and remarked “That chap playing second violin must be an old man.”

Asked how he could tell, when he couldn’t see him, Mr. Warren reportedly observed “I can tell by the way he tunes his violin”.

Mr. Warren could not remember either occasion when I talked with him at the home of his son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Warren, Great George Street. But there were other items I found interesting.

Now in his 96th year, Mr. Warren has been confined to his room since last fall, but he expects to get up and around again when summer arrives, I understand.

Monty went to the Halifax School for the Blind as a youngster in 1881. He started to study music at 14, carried it on for seven to eight years and “just sort of drifted into the occupation of tuning musical instruments” which he followed through the greater part of his life.

Taught Music At Halifax School

MR. WARREN taught music, piano and organ, at the school for a time. He once started a band of 22 pieces.

Lack of sight is no handicap in tuning musical instruments, “except when you strike a job that requires sight, where your fingers can’t readily reach the desired spots”.

Mr. Warren has completed extensive repair jobs, like putting completely new actions in an organ, for example.

This unusual man was 94 when he fell into (a?) depression on the site of the Confederation Center – in front of Reddins’ Drug Store. He was there from 10 or 11 at night, until he was discovered at seven o’clock the following morning. He “had on a

warm overcoat, and was not too cold," he told me, though the night was actually fairly cold.

His memory was "pretty good" when I talked with him. "I can recall the names of the boys and girls who were in school with me, also the teachers and the members of the board of management," Mr. Warren told me.

"Professor Vinnicombe used to do pipe organs. When he died, I had to do it," Mr. Warren told me. Joe Curran was in the service at the time, but when Joe came out of service, "he and I used to do them between us". Gradually, Mr. Warren explained, "I shifted my part of it over to Elmer Sutherland.

"I worked for one piano company for 25 years, until it went out of business," Mr. Warren said. There would be 20 to 30 pianos on the floor. He checked them regularly, and kept them in top condition.

Taylor Concert Company Recalled

HE WENT "all over Nova Scotia at one time, a part of New Brunswick and a lot of Prince Edward Island, as a member of the Taylor Concert Company . . . There were six of us. We travelled in a two-horse rig."

He played the cornet, or trumpet. He could play a tune on mostly any instrument. He played in a dance orchestra for 15 or 20 years. "I played all of the instruments, but the piano was possibly the only one at which I made a success", Mr. Warren recalled modestly.

On the concert tour he, and other members of the troupe, practiced six to seven hours each day. He played Mozart, Chopin and Beethoven, he said. They used a variation of the covered wagon for travel. It "was reasonably comfortable", Mr. Warren recalled.

HIS COMPARISON of comfort would naturally be based on the travelling that was available at the time. Back in those days of horse-drawn vehicles, travel was often punishingly uncomfortable. The traveler would get soaked to the skin in rain storms become indescribably cold when the piercing cold of a severe winter day was made more fearsome by a high wind.

We drive today in our closed motor vehicles, with an efficient heating system keeping us comfortably warm. In the days when I was a boy, and before that when Mr. Warren was young, there were no such comforts. You travelled in the cold and the rain and got along as best you could. If the weather was fine and the travelling good, you accepted that as the bonus it was.

Mr. Warren's "reasonably comfortable" reference has to be considered in the light of those conditions, not to be compared with the kind of travelling we associate with comfort today.

Glen Valley Seeks Recognition

A LETTER this week from a Glen Valley lady took me back to the days when I was a frequent visitor to that district, which lies between Springton and Fredericton. My sister Margaret lived there – she was married to S.A. Blondon – and I spent many happy hours in the area.

The letter tells me that the people of the district are having trouble getting any recognition for Glen Valley. They don't have any highway signs pointing the way to Glen Valley, the letter complains.

"We were omitted from the last census of P.E.I." my letter-writer complains with good reason.

I have no intention of making this a pressure column, but I direct this to the attention of two good friends of mine. Premier Shaw is the member for the district – it's in First Queens – and Philip Matheson is Highways Minister. I believe the lady who wrote me is a supporter of their party, which should make the appeal a bit more urgent, with an election coming up in a few weeks.

The district used to be known as The Junction Road, when I first visited it. But the name was changed, and I'm told the late Malcolm Gillis was the man who chose the new name.

The matter is being discussed at the Women's Institute meetings, the letter tells me, which seems to make it even more important.