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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Unusual Assortment For Year-End Column

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I HAVE AN unusual assortment of items for this year-end "Across the Island" column. I have a story on the Circus that played here back in 1864, when the Charlottetown Conference was held here looking toward Confederation; I have a definite statement that Hon. Paul Martin will be a candidate for the Liberal leadership – he told me by telephone. I have a delightful ghost story which I got last Friday night in Poplar Point, and a New Year's resolution.

It was the "Slaymaker and Nichols Olympic Circus" that showed here on the last two days of August and the first two days of September, 1864. The circus was set up on the south corner of Queen and Fitzroy Streets which now is the location for the Senior Citizens Recreation Centre that is operated by the Kinsmen's Club. The house was known formerly as the Messervy house. It was owned at one time by J.A. Messervy, who was a member of parliament for Queens back in 1925, I recall. Indeed this man may have built the house, though I do not know. Harold Messervy, former City engineer, is a son.

SLAYMAKER AND Nichols was not a big show. Two box wagons carried the "Big Top" canvas, the center poles and the side poles; several more took care of the seats and ring curbs; there was a wardrobe wagon and a few for miscellaneous properties, plus some carry-alls for staff, performers and band.

Even the performing horses plodded the weary miles from town to town, says a story in the Lewiston Journal's magazine section – Lewiston, Maine that is – which has been loaned to me by my friend Byron Burns, Charlottetown Jeweller.

The inference is that the horses pulled the circus from one town to another and did not travel on railways. There was no railway on the Island at the time, but there must have been rails linking some parts of New Brunswick, and the Slaymaker-Nichols circus came here from playing on the mainland. The Lewiston story I am quoting said the circus played Saint John, N.B., on Thursday, Friday and Saturday July 21 to 23.

Circus Names Changed Frequently

There is no explanation of where the circus was between the late July dates and the appearance here.

The Lewiston story says the circus had played under the name of "Goodwin and Wilder" until after the Saint John performance.

Then the main name was Slaymaker and Nichols with Goodwin and Wilder in small print below.

The Lewiston story suggests names were changed frequently in the circus world, the implication is that the actions of the people running circuses made changes of names necessary.

A copy of an advertisement from "The Islander" back in 1864 says the admission was 1 shilling, six pence for general admission and seven shillings for reserved seats,

though the Lewiston story says the charge for reserve seats in Saint John had been three shillings.

Some of the local advertisements are interesting. The Liverpool House was run by William Full. It was advertising merchandize – the word was spelled that way – cotton and dry goods, most of which was newly imported from London and other world capitals. (The small print is difficult to read.)

Family groceries were for sale at “Thomas’s Old Stand on Great George Street”. There was velvet and tweed cloth and felt.

Black, Long, Square Shawls

DAVIES AND Weeks were selling black, long and square shawls. There were ladies hats and plumes.

News included references to the “War between the States which was grinding to the final grim stage”. The reference is to the battle between forces led by General Ulysses S. Grant, the eventual winner, and the South’s Robert E. Lee.

And that reminds me that our daughter, Betty Carol – she is now Mrs. Jack Crelling – told me about the abundance of Confederate flags that were flying in the Girl Scout cars from the South on their way to an international rally at Button Bay State Park, Vermont – Betty Carol had spent some six weeks or more as guest of the Girl Scouts in the Deep South. The opposite of Girl Scouts here are our Girl Guides. Our Rangers correspond to the American senior Girl Scouts, I am told.

Enough of the circus, I thought a reference to it would be fitting in this last column of the year. I had often heard about a circus that played here the day of the Charlottetown conference, but had never previously heard a word about the circus itself.

Paul Martin Is Favored

PAUL MARTIN, Canada’s Secretary of State for External Affairs is a definite contender, and a top one at that, in the race for the National Liberal leadership.

My old friend told me that in a telephone conversation late last week. I have his permission to make this statement, though he did ask me to add that the official announcement will not likely come until the New Year.

Mr. Martin naturally was happy when I talked with him. The Gallop Poll had just revealed that he was a little better than a two-to-one favorite at this stage of the game.

Knowing this man as I do, knowing his capacity for friendliness, his capacity for organization, and his unexcelled reputation as a tremendous worker, Paul Martin is my favorite at this stage to win the convention when it is held in April.

A lot can happen in a few months, but I’d say the man who hopes to neat Paul Martin has a terrific fight on his hands.

Martin Consistently Friendly

I’VE TALKED of this man before. Let me repeat that he is the only national figure from my time in Parliament – 1953 to 1957 – who has consistently shown his friendship and his regard ever since. Paul Martin has never missed an opportunity to either visit

with me, or call on the telephone each time he has been here since I left the Ottawa scene just a little more than 10 years ago.

His executive assistant at that time told me Paul Martin was the hardest working minister in Ottawa at the time. I don't imagine that he has changed that work pattern since that time.

By the way, I shouldn't be surprised if this is the first column in Canada to definitely say Paul Martin is in the leadership race.

This Ghost Story Is Different

R.S.(REG) McKAY, Poplar Point told me a ghost story I like to finish up another year of Across the Island.

A Dundas man had spent the evening at a lodge meeting and the liquor had been flowing freely. As a result the man may have been seeing double. He was passing through a graveyard as he took a short cut across the fields to his home, and he saw some ghosts or fairies, dressed in white, playing among the tombstones.

Calling at the house of a neighbor, he persuaded the man to come with him and see for himself. The neighbor, who was sober, did not see any fairies, or ghosts, but he did see something perhaps even more unusual.

A white horse had been eating grass in the old cemetery, apparently, and the animal decided to lie down and have a roll.

The horse got cast on his back, between two tombstones and his four legs and feet were waving in the air as he desperately tried to extricate himself.

New Year's Resolution

IF ANYONE wants a New Year's resolution, here is one I got on a Christmas card from my friend John E. (Jack) Cameron, 260 Grafton Street.

As` Jack wrote it to me in a personal note:

"Live so that you need not be worried even if you sold your parrot to the biggest gossip in Southport." You can fill in the name of your own community. I got a kick out of it and some of you may enjoy it too.