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ACROSS THE ISLAND

First Public School Date Here Discussed

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“THE FIRST school house erected in Charlottetown – it was called ‘The National School’ – was built on the western corner of the College Square in 1820.”

The information came to me from Charles S. MacDonald, himself a former school teacher, who now resides in the Montague area and is hale and hearty and keen of mind and memory at the age of 100 years. Mr. MacDonald told me that the above information was written by “Henry Smith, a distinguished citizen of Charlottetown, about the year 1931.”

Mr. MacDonald explained to me that Mr. Smith did not say that was the first school built on this Island.

This province was settled long before 1820, and Mr. MacDonald suggests the early French settlers may have established schools at an earlier period.

That sent me to my highly respected friend, Dr. J. H. Blanchard whom I regard as the Maritimes’ leading French historian. And sure enough he had some information for me.

The first school in the province was opened at Rustico in 1815. It was opened in the old parochial house, after a new one had been built. The teacher was Frances Buote and here’s a most interesting note on him. Father Beaubien, the parish priest, was responsible for opening the school and he wrote a letter to Joseph Octave Plessis, Bishop of Quebec, explaining that the teacher “can read and write, and has a small knowledge of arithmetic”.

Father Beaubien explained that he was going to supervise the school himself. The priest added that he considered the only proper way to bring up the young people was to give them sufficient instruction.

Dr. Blanchard suggests the school built in Charlottetown in 1820 may well have been the first school house actually built specifically for that purpose, though he is not sure of that.

DR. BLANCHARD is not sure that the Rustico school was the first public school on the Island. Note the term “public school” for it’s important. There were no public schools during the French period, he told me.

And here’s something even more surprising to present day readers. There was no public school system in England before 1910, Dr. Blanchard tells me. There were all kinds of private schools, but not public ones, he explains.

The first public school, financed by the government did not come in England until 1910, he tells me. He has searched through voluminous records of the French period here, but never found any reference to a public school. No doubt there were private schools, though, he tells me.

‘Mayor Of Southport’ – That’s Not Me

OUR POSTMASTER, Estelle Jones, handed me a letter a few days ago addressed to the Mayor of Southport. It's from Joyce McKinnel of Southport, England, which celebrates its Centenary in 1967. The Stephen Newspapers Limited is publishing a special supplement to mark the occasion.

The England Southport is famed for the "world's largest summer flower show . . . shrimping has long been an industry".

Our Southport is not a town, it's not even an incorporated village, but it's important to those who live in it because it is our home.

The request of the newspaper lady is for a message, some details, if possible, and a picture or two. If somebody – how about our chairman of school trustees, for example? – wants to oblige, I'll give him the letter. Otherwise I'll probably send this column excerpt with a few comments on our district.

### 36 Cars A Day, Record In 1930

I HAD AN interesting chat with Frank Howatt one evening last summer while I was waiting for the Abegweit to dock at Borden. Mr. Howatt, a Carleton man, is a trainman.

That was in mid-summer, when the lineups of automobiles often became pretty long. Then he started thinking back through the years for me, and comparing the traffic now with what it was in earlier days.

Mr. Howatt recalled that on July 1, 1930, for example, the Prince Edward Island – it was the only ferry at that time – had carried a grand total of 36 automobiles to Tormentine, and that was a record to that date.

They were carried on flat cars, four automobiles to a flat car, so the 36 autos were carried on nine flat cars.

"The Charlottetown" went into service the following year – in 1931 – and she was the first to carry automobiles on her deck, the first ferry on which automobiles could drive on and drive off again. She was sunk in 1941.

I do not have the dates but the Prince Edward Island – it went into service in 1917 – was remodeled some years later to provide the deck space that is now available.

### Drove On Ramp – Then To Flatcar

THE AUTOMOBILES drove up on to a small ramp from which they were driven on to the flat cars. The first time I remember was back in the summer of 1927 when I was a member of the Charlottetown Fire Department's athletic team that was participating in a tournament at Truro, N.S. We travelled by automobile and I believe Wallie Scantlebury drove one of the cars. Jack Lockhart drove another and I think the late Ern Hertz drove another of the automobiles – I was in the Lockhart car.

There may have been other automobiles carrying our athletic team, and members of the brigade who went along as spectators. The ones I have listed are those I remember.

I forget the details but I believe the car drivers had to be at the spot at least one-half hour before the boat sailed.

After loading on to the flat cars, the engine hooked on and shunted the automobiles around until they finally landed on the rails in the Prince Edward Island.

Nobody seemed to mind then, for there was no better service available. Likely the motorist of that day was pleased. The Prince Edward Island carferry was such an improvement over what we had previously – there were only ice boats to N.B. in winter from Cape Traverse – that the new service was a veritable heaven by comparison.

I'm not forgetting the winter boats, like the Stanley, the Minto and the Earl Grey, for example. At best they were uncertain, and anyway I'm referring here to the crossing in the Cape Traverse area.

#### Authentic Comment Invited

IF ANY old-timer wants to check up on that statement, fine. I'll be glad to hear from any of you who really know. I'm writing this from memory, and very scanty information on what happened. If some of you can furnish really authentic information, I'll come back to this subject in a future column.

I know about the narrow gauge and standard gauge cars, and how the material had to be unloaded from the narrow gauge car into the wider standard gauge. I've reviewed that several years ago. My desire now is for information on the loading of automobiles on to the ferry via the ramp-flat car route.

I recall also the old second-class passenger cars – the ticket was considerably cheaper – which ran on our railroad. One man told me there were third-class tickets sold at one time, but that I doubt.

#### Montreal-Ottawa Car Shabbiest

THAT REMINDS me that the shabbiest railway car in which I ever travelled, so far as I can remember, was on a run from Montreal to Ottawa back in 1956, or 1957. I had completed my business in Montreal earlier than I expected, went to Central Station for a look at the bulletin board, found a train for Ottawa was leaving in a few minutes, and boarded it.

There was no room in the first-class cars – the good ones – so I wandered into a car where there was room. As I said, it was pretty shabby – it reminded me of the old second-class cars on the Island when I was a boy, except the Montreal-Ottawa one was much shabbier.

When the conductor came around and I showed him the pass which Members of Parliament carry, he was flustered because an MP was riding in such a dingy accommodation. He suggested I move into one of the good cars, but I told him they were packed, and that was that.

It's fun to look back on it now, even though it lacked a good bit in comfort and attractiveness.