

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Fri., July 10, 1964

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Grass Grew On Sides Of City's Main Street

By NEIL A. MATHESON
Provincial - Farm Editor

NOTES WRITTEN by John Morris in 1875 recalled his early days here when Charlottetown "had 12 or 15 houses scattered over it, when the main street had a pathway up it and at each side there was good grass."

Mr. Morris was the great, great grandfather of the late Jack Morris, and of his cousin, T. Harry Morris, Charlottetown both of whom helped me compile the information for today's column.

John Morris was born in County Carlow, Ireland on March 19, 1794 and came to this country in the ship "Four Brothers" in 1819.

He built the first brick house in Charlottetown in 1824 and was laughed at by the grand jury. A prominent citizen, Mr. Dockendorff, told him "it will fall within the year". But the old house is still standing 140 years later. Folk here know it as the building that houses the Harland Apartments on Water Street, Harry Morris tells me.

"THERE WAS one grist mill about three miles from town owned by Mr. Wright", according to the old notes, which must be the spot which is still known as "Wright's Bridge" on the St. Peter's Road, though I have no proof of that statement, and am open to correction.

There are many interesting revelations including "the members of the House of Assembly brought their food with them generally." Unfortunately Mr. Morris did not say how many members there were. He also omitted to give first names of people to whom he referred.

Roads Nothing But Bridle Paths

THE FIRST roads "were nothing but bridle paths. The first road, heading to Malpeque, was opened by a Mr. Yates. The Old Town Road was opened in 1797.

"The first store of any note belonged to a Mr. Cambridge. Others were owned by a Mr. Brecken and a Mr. McKay."

I found this paragraph interesting but a bit unusual. "The first church was built before I came here and the first minister of the Church of England was a Mr. Desbrisay - the church was open to all. A Mr. Bulpitt, a Methodist, preached in it. The Bishop came over from Nova Scotia to consecrate it but was refused."

There was not a regular school but Mr. Bulpitt had a school. Mr. Morris recalled that Mr. Chappel who kept the first post office, had a weathervane, the shape of a fish over his house, which indicated the way the wind was blowing and "by this he could tell when the wind was fair for the Packet" - A Mr. Smith kept a small vessel that ran between Pictou and Charlottetown."

THERE WERE no wagons or gigs in town when Mr. Morris came, but a Mr. Cambridge got a Carriole (a small open wagon) from Quebec soon afterward. There were a few saddles on the Island.

“The court house was built sometime before I came here and it was used for the House of Assembly, and all public assemblies.

“Grain was carried to the grist mill on horseback, and made into oatmeal.” There were “a good many dances and thickening frolics when I came,” the notes report.

Some Moose Reported On The Island

BEARS, lynx and wild cats were on the Island. There were moose but they were not native. Mr. Morris observed “Island papers reported many bears were killed in earlier days and there are few here now in 1875.”

“The first blacksmith was a Mr. Robinson, he had a shop on the main street in Charlottetown. A tailor was named Trampling and a shoemaker was named Hood.”

All of the Morris statements were in a reply to a series of printed questions, but it is not indicated who was seeking the information. One question listed a series of 28 localities, from Souris to West Cape and asked “How did people from those areas get to Charlottetown before they got their present road?”

The reply said “very few of those people ever got to Charlottetown and those who did came by blaze. They rode on horseback or travelled by the shore or seaside. A blaze is when the trees are cut with an axe in a straight line.”

THE FIRST brewer was a Mr. Haslam on the road to Malpeque, the old notes indicate. For people who had to travel from Malpeque to Charlottetown there was “an empty house in the woods where “they stayed”.

The first houses were lighted with oil and very few had carpets on the floor. Mr. Morris did not know when people started to use kerosene for lighting.

Dr. St. Croix was the first medical man he recalled .. He lived in Charlottetown.

The first house was one in which Col. Desbrisay, father of the parson, lived.

“We Seldom Had Mails In Winter”

HERE’S AN interesting commentary on life in Charlottetown 125 years or more [ago].

Question - “Where did the mails cross in winter?”

Answer - “We seldom had mail in winter.”

It took about two months for letters from England to reach here. “I don’t know what the postage was but the postmaster kept it for his fees.”

Mussel mud was not used in the earlier years. Farmers who lived close to the sea hauled sea weed from the shore. Lime wasn’t used on land either in his first days in this colony (as it was then) but was used later.

“Fox hunts were held on the Island about 1840. Governor Sir Charles Fitzroy had hounds from the Duke of Grafton, old papers contain many accounts of such hunts.”

To plant potatoes in the early days “they made holes in the earth and dibbled them in.” A dibbler was a pointed instrument for making holes in the ground for seeds, bulbs or young plants, the dictionary reveals.

“There were very few bridges in the country 80 years ago” - that would be in 1795.

Mr. Morris knew of plowing being done in January and February, and had heard of some being done in March; which indicates the weather must have been somewhat different at that time.

Teachers Officiated At Weddings

REPLYING to a query “How were weddings celebrated in time of your earliest recollection?” Mr. Morris wrote “I was married about 60 years ago (about 1815) by Mr. Desbrisay according to the rites of the Church of England, but there were others married by schoolmasters. There was a law making all valid.”

Before I leave Mr. Morris’s notes on Charlottetown, I must note that he referred his questioner on one occasion to a history of the Island written by John Stewart. I find in the library that Stewart in 1806 suggested there were about 70 houses in Charlottetown, an observation I record without comment as I have no way of finding which estimate was closer to the truth.

IT WAS the late Jack Morris who first made the notes of his great, great grandfather available to me, though Harry had also told me about them before that. And it was to Harry’s home that I went a few days ago to discuss certain phases of the interesting old document, even as I looked over the interesting group of pottery pieces which he and his charming wife are producing in their home on St. Clair Avenue.

It sounds simple to listen to Harry explain how he does certain pieces, but it’s easy to see too that the Morris couple have a flair for producing something that is artistically different and most attractive.