

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Mon., May 5, 1969

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Old Beliefs Noted Regarding Animals

By NEIL A. MATHESON

A FELLOW STAFF writer brought this item to my desk and it concerns some of the odd beliefs that some people had regarding animals, as a man in the government circle here told it to my friend.

This story – the man said it came from the Ellerslie area – deals with animals and their connection with the weather, or something like that. I didn't have an opportunity to talk with the man myself.

The government man told my friend that a group of people in the western center carefully inspect the color of the liver of an animal, when it is slaughtered in the autumn. The idea is that the color indicates, or foretells that the coming winter will be severe or not, as the color may vary.

The man suggested that the story probably comes originally from the Indians, who relied greatly on a study of nature to form an opinion on what the coming winter would be like.

They studied the behavior of birds, as well as animals the man recalls.

A Mild Winter?

HE SAID, for example, that hornets sometimes build their nests high in the trees, and sometimes on the ground. When the nests are low down the theory is that the winter will be mild, that there will be very little snow.

I've watched that one myself since I moved to Southport back in June 1945, but it doesn't always work out that way. I recall for example an autumn when a veteran nature observer said "there'll be little snow this year". I hoped he was right, of course, since I had to get to Charlottetown each week day for work. But, alas, there was plenty of snow – too much of it for most of us.

There are many old beliefs, and theories about the effect of certain turns of nature on crops also. For example I recall the idea of sowing buckwheat each spring in the dark of the moon – I'm sure many readers have heard that one.

Bacon Shrivels In Pan

A FRIEND of mine insists that bacon will shrivel up in the pan if the pig is killed in the dark of the moon, or not killed in the dark of the moon; I'm not sure which it is.

I reminded my friend that hogs are slaughtered every day of the year, virtually, at packing plants. But he still insists the moon phase could ruin the bacon.

Just for fun I called Jerry Hartien, who was manager here for Canada Packers at the time. He had never even heard of the old superstition.

I thought of the belief the other morning when the bacon did seem to shrivel in the pan at home. The reason, I suggest, is that the stove was much too hot – the oil was turned too high.

And now someone who really can fry bacon will probably disagree with me. I'll be glad to hear from you, the more the better.

'It's Eating That Hurts'

THAT REMINDS me that last fall, after my daughters had left for their respective spheres of activity, a brother-in-law asked me "How do you like cooking for yourself?"

My reply was brief and it really expressed my feelings:

"I don't mind the cooking so much, it's the eating the stuff that hurts."

A couple more weeks and Margie Dawn will be home. It'll be a real pleasure to eat good meals once more at the Matheson home.

I found some interesting old notes this week that I made several years ago on a visit to the Alberton, Montrose, Alma area.

Charles Dalton – he was later Sir Charles – said once that Ben Haywood had the first pair of black foxes to be used for breeding purposes. They were dug out of the ground at Fox Island in 1874 by a fisherman named Thompson.

The pair mated once and two of the litter were raised to maturity, but the pair never did mate again.

My friend Gordon Barbour, Alma told me that his father, James Barbour, once buried a female that had died while whelping a litter of pups.

Then a youngster, Gordon dug her up, skinned the head and back a piece behind the shoulders – it was early in the year and the rest of the body was not furred – and he received \$15 or \$20 for it. Some pelts were sent to Lampsons that year, and this piece of a pelt was sent along with the rest.

'30 Pups From One Fox? ?'

ONE MAN whose name is associated with the early days of the fox industry here, once had a particularly good female – Gordon tells me she had only three legs.

But she was a remarkable female, for there were 30 pups registered to her in a single year. Of course this was impossible. Litters ran to six, and rarely to eight.

The reputation of that female must have sold a lot of pups that she had nothing to do with.

Beans Work Miracle

THIS IS an odd story and it comes from Rae Barbour's scrapbook. Originally it was published in an old Dr. Chase's recipe book, if memory serves me right.

A six-year-old girl was ill and had been given up to die by doctors in New York. The child constantly called for beans, so her mother cooked some for her, not stopping to parboil them. The mother put the beans, pork and potatoes in the same pot and gave them to her daughter when they were ready.

The sick child went to sleep immediately and she began to improve.

"She is now the mother of two healthy children", the old item said.

As I've said several times in this column, good story tellers were in demand in former days. And that's a pretty good story.

