

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Mon., Oct. 4, 1971

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Joe Lawless Story One Of Achievement

By NEIL A. MATHESON

“I CAME out West in 1914 with about 400 harvesters on a special train from Saint John, N.B. to Calgary. I paid \$14.00 for a round-trip fare. When I arrived, I decided to stay.”

The quote is from an account of the life of Joseph Lawless, a deaf mute from P.E.I. who now resides in Calgary, Alberta. He is a son of the late Frank Lawless and Emma O'Connor. I understand she was a sister of Louis O'Connor, a man who has been active in farm organizations – he is past president P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture, and a long-time worker, supporter and officer with the P.E.I. Co-operative Union. He lives in Clinton.

Back to Mr. Lawless, I got this story through meeting his brother Jim Lawless in Kinkora. We met first at the Crapaud exhibition back in August. I called on Mr. Lawless at his Kinkora home during my vacation which was in mid-September.

Another brother, Vince Lawless, lives on the farm owned by John Michael Murphy when I was a Rose Valley youngster, and another brother, Ignatius, lives across the road, on the farm owned by Pat Hughes when I was a lad.

I remember Pat Hughes well, for he was the first man to pay me a whole dollar for a day's potato picking. That was top pay then, though I'm told potato pickers get ten dollars and sometimes more now. Comparatively few pickers are used now, though.

Joe Lawless was twelve when his father heard of the school for the deaf in Halifax and sent his son.

He attended the school eight years, and was supervisor “for about 50 boys for three years”.

There's a bit of early P.E.I. farming history in these lines which I am quoting directly:

Farming In Boyhood Days

“I RECALL my father worked very hard with primitive tools and methods to earn his living and raise his family. He used crude implements, such as a scythe to cut his grain at first, then a small binder that dropped loose bunches of grain, untied, to be tied later by picking up a bunch of stems and twisting the head to hold together and binding the bunches firmly and stooking them.

“In a few years he and other farmers bought binders that really tied the bundles with twine. I did the stooking. Following this he bought a horse power tread mill for threshing his grain.

“My father also planted ten acres of potatoes, and I at the age of eight, did the cultivating with one horse. Then I hilled them with a single two edged plow. I always took delight in the fact that I could do a man's work in spite of my size. All this work I did until I started going to school.”

Interesting, Varied Career

JOE LAWLESS had a most interesting and varied career, especially for a boy who was deaf and dumb and the few years in the school for the deaf was all the schooling he had been able to get.

He met a friend (deaf mute) in High River, Alberta and got a job running a binder.

One winter he had a job as bull cook for a crew of 130 men in a camp north of Edmonton. The men were cutting trees for a saw mill.

That spring he was hired as a ranch hand about five miles from the camp. "The owner of this up-to-date ranch asked me to manage the place while he toured the racing circuit in Calgary and the U.S.A. for a year with his race horses," Joe writes.

One day he attended a Sport Day carnival nearby, accepted a challenge to ride a bucking bronco, drew a horse with a wicked temper who bucked terribly but the young Island-born Lawless managed to stay aboard.

He was announced as the winner and given a prize of 50 dollars.

He left the farm when the boss returned, and was sauntering along the street one day when he saw a policeman having a hard time with a man he was trying to arrest.

Was Carrying A Gun

LAWLESS QUICKLY caught the man with a head lock. The roughed-up policeman got up and walked away, a second policeman approached and Lawless offered to give the man over to his charge but the cop said "No, no you hold him."

When the man was examined later they found he was carrying a gun. "Was I ever lucky," Lawless wrote in the account from which I am writing this column.

Joseph Lawless played hockey in High River and Vulcan, later played with the Calgary team – the manager got him a job taking care of an apartment. The team took the Alberta championship.

They got gold watches, silver medals and two trophies at banquets tendered the champs of which Lawless was an important team member.

Joe's life was never dull, apparently, for he had many and varied types of jobs.

New Eaton's Store Built

HE WORKED one year building a new Eaton's Store at Calgary. Lady Eaton came to visit the store with many people.

He carried a pistol when he got a job as night watchman. Later Lawless got a job with the Union Packing Company, just outside Calgary. His duty was to look after 500 hogs. When he quit that job the company gave him a job in the lard and stock room for 13 years until he retired.

Retirement from the one job didn't stop him working though. He got a job with the city doing lawns, looking after shrubs, etc. Later he was maintenance man for Hieland Exploration. After 12 years with them he retired because of ill health.

Ingenious Alarm System

BEING DEAF, he was often asked what kind of an alarm he used to awaken in the morning. Here is the description:

"I had a chair at the foot of the bed, to which I wired my alarm clock. I had a broom handle tied with a string, which I wrapped around the alarm lever. When the alarm went off and unwound, so did the string. The broom would then fall across my bed and awaken me."

Lawless won a mile race from 15 runners in a competition at Halifax once. He twice won prizes for winning chess tournaments. In 1920 he brought a carload of Western horses to Prince Edward Island, after travelling with them for 10 days in a freight car.

Joe married Doris Barnett who was born in England – she was also deaf. They celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary March 21, 1969. A party at their daughter's house was attended by 65 deaf people and other friends. Joe was so happy that night he "even shed a few tears of happiness".

Here are the closing paragraphs of the story written by Mr. Lawless. I have tried to give you the highlights of the earlier part:

Enjoying Retirement

"MY MOTHER never went to the hospital. All of us were born at home. My father drove a horse and buggy to pick the doctor up. He drove about eight miles and brought him to see my mother and took him back to his office.

"I am enjoying my retirement in my own house and glad to be escaping the high rent. My wife and I are leisurely active members of a club every Thursday. I am also an usher at mass just one block away from our home.

"I feel proud to say that I have always managed to be self-supporting and raise a family of five children, with good honest working jobs. Opportunities were very limited for someone with my handicap, but I was always willing to put my best into any job I had."

My thanks to Jim Lawless, Kinkora for making this interesting story of his brother available to me.