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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Hall Thresher Story Is Told

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A RECENT chat with Summerside businessman George Key brought some interesting facts on the history of the Hall Manufacturing and Cold Storage Company which he owns and operates with his son George A. Key Jr. The Hall thresher was a household word in our community when I was a boy, and I was interested to learn something of its history, which dates back more than 100 years, I found, to the time Thomas Hall founded the business in 1861.

They made up to 150 machines a year and shipped them by carload to Western Canada in the period 1914-25, when they were able to get in on the business that developed for this type of thresher as the western grain farmer turned away from the old caboose-type steam thresher to something more in keeping with the current need. Lincoln Dewar told me last year he saw a Hall thresher in a museum on the Prairies, so they came to be known there, apparently, almost as well as here at home.

EARLY MACHINES handled 40 bushels per hour and the basic design never changed much although they were enlarged to handle 125 bushels per hour, as self feeders were added, and blowers were built for the machines after the First Great War ended in 1918.

Mr. Key couldn't give me detail on prices over the years but recalls that the farmers Raised H- - - once when the price was hiked to \$105 from the previous tag of \$90. Nobody ever did have a complaint about the Hall Thresher, he told me, until some operators started using heavy tractors for power and feeding the machines too heavily for them to handle the grain efficiently.

He travelled over Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia servicing the machines - he went as far as Grand Falls in New Brunswick later on selling missions - and recalls one unusual incident at York. A farmer complained his three-and-one-half horse power stationary engine would not handle the thresher. Mr. Key visited the farm, adjusted the engine, started the engine and found the thresher handled the grain perfectly as he fed it into the drum. He found the owner had been throwing the sheaves into the thresher from the edge of the platform. Apparently he had seen spike teeth being thrown out of an old-type wooden drum, and feared the Hall machine might do the same thing.

The Hall people also built horse-power engines and they sold for about \$60, I was told.

Apprentice Paid Six Cents Per Hour

MR. KEY was 16 when he came to Hall's in 1916 to take charge of their wood working shop after serving an apprenticeship at Schurman's where he started at six

cents per hour. He bought the business in 1949 and they stopped making threshers in 1951 "just in time". They sold every one of the 61 machines they made that year, "but we couldn't have sold five the following year" he recalled as combine harvesters came into use.

"We made every part of the thresher in the shop", he said although in later years the teeth for the thresher drum were made in a foundry, though the company had its own dies. A blacksmith made them in the shop in earlier years.

Men worked long hours in those years that are gone. "We worked all day assembling machines, loaded them on the boat at night and a couple of men went with them to load them into standard gauge railway cars at Point du Chene." The Island had only narrow gauge railway service at the time.

THE BUILDING was remodelled last year - they sell a popular line of farm machinery now, in addition to their cold storage business - and many of the old souvenirs are gone. But the genial businessman had a few to show me.

A sharp pointed instrument had been fashioned from a round file to pick wooden splinters from the hands of a man in the wood working shop. An old pair of wooden-stock skates were used on the Boston Common before a rink was built in that city. A long screwnail was twisted into the heel of a boot and the front portion was held by leather straps. A very old home-made crutch is a relic of a former employee who had used it to get around the shop.

#### No Train 61 days - Flour Ran Short

A NATIVE of Freeland, Mr. Key recalled the year that there wasn't a through train from Charlottetown to Tignish for 61 days - it would be January-February of 1904-05 he believes - and his mother had been able to supply many neighbours with enough flour to see them through. A businessman had given the family five barrels of flour after a cheque of his bounced.

The Keys had flour from their home grown wheat, but the extra supply was a lifesaver for many. Mrs. Key came to the rescue as one neighbour after the other kept running out of flour. She divided the last 25 pounds among a few of them the day before the train finally broke through. But her kindly act must have been appreciated, for every pound was returned, he told me.

His grandfather, Thomas Key, who had come from England, taught school and wrote out deeds and other documents. He tramped the 75 miles to Charlottetown twice a year - it would be 150 miles round trip - to record documents.

School teaching didn't pay much in those days. People just didn't have the cash, so they gave the teacher a piece of beef, or some other food produced on the farm. Each home would board the teacher for a couple of weeks to help fill it's share of the expenses of getting their children educated, according to stories that have been handed down.

#### Skunk Ranching Is Recalled

ONE STORY recalled the boom days of the fox industry when the firm sold fox feed by the carload. He also remembered that Hubert Ramsay, who had been a foreman with Hall's for a time, started to ranch skunks on the Agnew farm in Wilmot Valley. Pelts never were worth much, perhaps two or three dollars he suggested, but the animals were fed cheaply, bad eggs and bodies of dead birds were two of the unusual things recalled.

The independent little animals were brought to the Island to ranch, I have been told, and then turned loose when ranching was found unprofitable. And we have had the pests ever since.

#### Triple National Win Acclaimed

HOW ABOUT the triple win by the George Boswall family of Frenchfort in the All Canadian Ayrshire competition. Norman 12, and Kathleen 10 came through with perfect scores to top the national competition in the 4-H club class and their dad scored a perfect 80, to tie with several others for first place in the open class. I cannot recall that three members of one family ever made such a sweep of top places before in national competition, though my memory could be wrong.

#### Lantz Angus Herd Is Pictured

THAT INTERESTING picture of an Aberdeen Angus herd you saw on the front page of our farm edition this week, is a shot of a portion of the large pure-bred herd of Dr. J. P. Lantz who is my Southport neighbour.

Informed late last summer that I should do a story for Canadian Markets, published by the Canadian Daily Newspapers Association, on the potential of the beef and tobacco developments here, I was keeping a sharp eye peeled for a colorful picture that the magazine could use on its cover that would be in keeping with the story, as I travelled over many parts of the province. It was close to mid-November, I believe, when I came out of our gate at home one beautiful sunny afternoon and suddenly saw the picture I'd been seeking.

I HAD in mind a shot of the beautiful, black animals against the rich green background of the gently sloping pasture where they were feeding. But I called staff photographer Bill Taylor, whose artist's eye saw even greater possibilities in a shot of the herd overlooking the Charlottetown harbour, with some beautiful trees and the tops of some shore-front summer cottages also in the picture. It made an excellent cover picture for the magazine, one of the best it has had since I've been watching it, and of course the picture was a must for our farm edition as Managing Editor Gus Flynn used his artistry and layout skill in arranging the pages to the best possible advantage.

