

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Thurs., May 19, 1966

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Old Anglican Diary Proves Interesting

By NEIL A. MATHESON
Provincial-Farm Editor

MRS. J.W. WAUGH, Alberton loaned me a manuscript "Extracts From Diary of Rev. Robert Dyer", an Anglican clergyman; he was her great grandfather.

Rev. Dyer was sent from England under the Colonial and Continental Church Society in 1839, to teach school at Greenspond, Newfoundland, also to perform the offices of a lay reader. He was later ordained, a foreward to the diary reveals.

This first reference is to his work in Newfoundland but it's so unusual I thought readers would be interested.

"One little boy, his mother told us, had never had a shoe on his feet: when we put the shoes and stockings on he could not walk. "They led him up and down the kitchen until he got a little used to such strange garments." He now comes to school warm and comfortable. Gifts like these – they were supplied by church women's organizations – have hid from our eyes cold, blood-red legs, with dirty and bloody feet." Rev. Dyer wrote more than 100 years ago.

"It is no novelty," he explained at the time, "to see children (when it is frigidly cold and the snow as deep as the children, almost) without shoes and stockings on. At one of the schools (in Newfoundland) "out of 67 children present, 34 had neither shoes nor stockings."

Came To P.E.I. In 1859

IT WAS in 1859 that Robert Dyer came to Prince Edward Island and the journey required three weeks. They left St. John's Newfoundland on June 7. They arrived in Charlottetown at 11 o'clock in the night of June 27.

The next day they dined with the Rector of St. Paul's, Rev. Mr. Fitzgerald.

This part of the story is told, apparently, by Mrs. W.T. Hallam, B.A. Toronto.

Mr. Dyer soon went to his mission (In Cascumpeque) leaving Mrs. Dyer and the children with Mrs. Palmer, the wife of the Chief Justice, who came for them in her fine carriage.

He first stopped at Crapaud where the missionary, Mr. Pointher, is in charge. Mr. Dyer travelled in Mr. Pointher's chaise to St. Eleanor's where he was welcomed by Rev. Dr. Read, the Bishop's ecclesiastical commissary.

Dr. Read drove Mr. Dyer to Cascumpeque, distance 48 miles. The only part of Mr. Dyer's mission at which there was even the beginning of a church was at Kildare Capes, where the framework was up, 30 feet by 22 feet, the chancel nine feet by six feet. The building was situated on two acres of land given by the Misses Travers.

The first organ was presented by one of the sisters. She died very suddenly and the organ was played for the first time at her funeral, the old story states.

Storm Changed Church Direction

“THERE IS an interesting story about this church,” the document states later on – the reference, apparently, is to the church at Kildare Capes, though I am not sure – “It is very prettily situated on a high cape overlooking the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

“Rev. S. Weston-Jones, who was archdeacon of P.E.I. in 1891 wrote in the register:

“This church was originally built East South East and West North West, parallel with the road. A terrific gale of wind moved it one night bodily to its present site, the west end moved as much as 30 feet. It now stands exactly East and West.”

There’s an interesting paragraph about the “Omnibus Church” that was built by Episcopalians, Baptists, Presbyterians and Methodists. Mr. Dyer had the pleasure of opening the new church and he called it “The Omnibus”.

Martyred Gordons’ Parents Visited

THERE’S A sadly stirring reference to the murder of the Gordons of Alberton who were missionaries to Erromanga. Mr. Dyer wrote:

“Went today, October 2, 1861, in company with Mrs. Dyer, to sympathize with old Mr. and Mrs. Gordon on the murder of their son, George, on the Island of Erromanga by the natives.”

The reference contains the often told story that on the day of George Gordon’s death, his wife stood in the doorway, watching the natives coming up the path to her house. She called to them, to ask the whereabouts of her husband, then they set upon her and murdered her too.

George’s brother, Rev. James Gordon, went to Erromanga, when he heard of his brother’s death, and he, too, was murdered on the Island.

First Passenger Train Arrives

ONE OF the more interesting historic notes is the report that “Today, May 8, 1875, a passenger train came into Alberton for the first time.” Later Mr. Dyer wrote “Went to town in the railway cars, left about one o’clock, arrived at 10 o’clock in the evening.

“I like the cars,” he wrote. “It is all so comfortable. We seem to be more and more civilized.” Rev. Mr. Dyer could well appreciate the comfort of the mode of travel. He had made his first trip to Alberton by horse and wagon.

Rev. Robert Dyer died in February 1887 and was laid to rest in the churchyard near his old home.

“Throughout his 20 years of ministry”, Mrs. Hallam wrote:

“Mr. Dyer was a constant visitor among his people, travelling on foot, on snow-shoe, by boat, by sleigh and on horseback (as much as 30 miles a trip). He held prayer meetings and Sunday Schools in houses, school houses, halls, wherever there was an opportunity of giving the gospel message.”

Of Mrs. Dyer, who died eight years after her husband, a man writing about her later said:

“We looked up to her as we would to Queen Victoria, she was so noble and good.”

Alborton, the old manuscript says was formerly called Cascumpeque. Frank Weeks tells me prior to that it was called "The Cross Roads".