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ACROSS THE ISLAND

High Price Fox Days Recalled

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I HAD an interesting chat sometime ago with Harold Betts, Fortune Cove - that's close to Alberton - on foxes and other fur bearing animals. He laughed at first when he told me the name of the district, then reconsidered and suggested perhaps the "Fortune Cove" name suited the place.

"Lobsters, oysters, eels and smelts can all be found right here, just below my house. I get all my winter's mackerel and sell some too," he told me.

One man can average \$30 a day on oysters in a good season. He got \$100 worth once in a two-day span. There are clams there too, but they bring three dollars a basket, and a man can't make a day's pay at that price.

HIS RECOLLECTIONS of the fox boom were interesting. He told me that Harry Lewis sold two foxes back around 1917 for \$17,000 apiece. They were male foxes, but the average for a pair of breeding foxes at the time ran around \$15,000 he stated, and they were hard to get, he added. He also told me that Mr. Lewis acquired a red fox out of black parents once, and got six black pups from her.

Black pelts brought \$500 to \$800 each, and even red pelts were worth \$30 at the peak. There were few black foxes caught in traps, he said and Mr. Betts did a great deal of trapping in his younger days. The year of the big snow - he was referring to 1923 - he caught 25 foxes that had escaped because the snow piled so high in their pens they walked out over the top of the guard fences. Ranchers paid him \$50 reward per animal on the average, one or two made it \$100. And there were some cases where more than one rancher claimed the same fox.

Mr. Betts spent the entire winter of 1923 in the bush with a partner, Andrew Gallant. Asked what they used for food. He said, "There were hundreds of partridges and rabbits, food was no problem." Wild mink brought \$12 to \$14 a pelt, racoons \$4 to \$7 each and red foxes \$8 to \$10 each, that year, he recalled. He "cleared \$1,000 that winter, and that was a lot of money at that time."

High Fox Prices Recalled

BEFORE I forget it, Frank Weeks sent me recently a list of fox prices Mr. Betts brought him that appeared in an advertisement dated December 15, 1913. One pair of Dalton pups for \$17,000, another from the same ranch had an asking price of \$16,000.

A pair of Gordon pups were listed at \$16,000, a Dalton female, a proven breeder, at \$10,200, a male fox at \$6,000 and a Samuel Tuplin male at \$6,000. There was gold wrapped up in these black pelts in those far off days.

And they were black animals. Mr. Betts told Frank Weeks and me that a black pelt would go free in a shipment of pelts to London in the long ago. If a person found a few white hairs in a black pelt then, they would be pulled out, he said.

The "Dalton" referred to was Sir Charles Dalton, one of the real pioneers of the industry. He was later knighted by the Pope, was a member of the P.E.I. Legislature, donated the money for the Dalton Sanitarium to which I referred several months ago, and was Lieutenant-Governor of this province when he died in the latter part of 1933.

A MAN named "Chopie" Perry was the first credited with catching a black fox, legend relates, and that was about 100 years ago, he estimated.

I liked particularly the story about the chap who found three foxes in a hollow log when he was on his way to see his girl, one Sunday evening. The chap was too religious to catch the foxes on Sunday, so he blocked the holes, came back Monday and dug them out. One was black and he received \$100 for it.

White Fox Was Shot In Trap

BETTS AND his partner saw a white fox in a trap at Black Banks about 40 years ago, he told us. Mr. Gallant shot the animal, thinking it was a white dog. Later, Jim Tuplin told them he would have given a lot of money for the fox. He would have crossed him with a black fox, and the black offspring would have been blacker and the white one whiter, than their respective parents, Mr. Tuplin had said. I don't know how that appeals to the experts on genetics today, but that was the belief held then by the veteran Alberton rancher, apparently.

Mr. Betts recalls getting 30 rabbits a day one winter on an average. He and his partner got 42 one day. They were worth about 20 cents each.. One man sent 100 rabbit skins to an overseas market once, but he didn't try it again. The return was 92 cents.

He caught as many as seven coons in one tree once. He would cut a hole in the bottom of a hollow tree and smoke them out.

Salute To Lieutenant Governor

I saw my first football coach appear this week at an important public function in the role of Lieutenant Governor. I refer, of course, to Lieut.-Colonel W. J. MacDonald. It reminded me that I had neglected to refer earlier to this gentleman who has gained such deserved distinction. I have often thought of the days he taught many of us the rudiments of football as played then and laid a groundwork of sportsmanlike acceptance of what the game means.

Putting it simply, I never had to forget anything that my first coach taught me about the game. I have never had to forget, either, anything he taught about how the game should be played. Looking back on 10 years or more of association with that sport, I recall that I later played under one man who was rated once as one of the top English Rugby coaches in this country. I talked with other top football men in the Maritime area at the time, played against most of their teams, and had many associations with the game.

But the man who taught me at PWC in class as well as on the football field - we later played on the same teams for a number of years - stood with the best. He rated above most of them in the matter of teaching sportsmanship. "Billie Archie" as most of us knew him in those days, always expected a player to give everything he had in a game, to strive to win with every ounce of energy he possessed, and he really could "lower the boom" on you if he thought you were not doing just that. But I never heard him suggest anyone take an unfair advantage, nor did I see him do anything on the field that smacked of unsportsmanlike conduct.

It's a pleasure, my long-time friend, to salute you in your high office. To you and Mrs. MacDonald, "all the best".

THAT GHOST story column is coming, which reminds me that I have never heard that there was anything evil associated with homes or people with which these old tales were associated. In my youth I have heard these interesting tales told entirely without malice, about some homes that were considered to be among the finest in the countryside. I make this explanation now because I have found that some people, apparently, feel there is a bad or an evil association. But so far as I am concerned, that is simply not the case.