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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Old Bear Story Is Investigated

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I visited Belle River last week to probe the story of the bear that "Sandy Ronald" Stewart saw 60 years ago, and learned old bruin had never been found by a hunt that was organized. Naturally I found some skepticism that one had ever been seen, although Lizzie MacIntosh's "The Hunter and The Bear" poem of February 1902 said Sandy Ronald was a man who knew bears, and should know one when he saw it.

Simon Stuart recalls a story it was Willie MacLaren's Newfoundland dog that had been seen on a wooded road, "a monstrous animal, and the biggest dog I ever saw."

Sandy Ronald's Grandson, Dr. Stewart MacDonald, DVA here, directed me to his aunt, Flora Stewart, daughter of the man who "saw the bear". I enjoyed my interesting conversation with this charming Belle River lady, who told me the bear had never actually been found. But I sensed that, understandably, she had enough faith in her father to feel that the bear had been there, if her father said he saw one.

MOST INTERESTING thing to me, more than a half-century later, was to find the colorful lines which caught the atmosphere, and the excitement, of the quiet countryside that had suddenly become filled with excitement at the unusual event, were penned by a blind girl, who caught the spirit of the event from what others told her, and caught the atmosphere too with that unusual sensitivity which the sightless people so often develop.

I think some of the lines are particularly good, and I'm going to give you a few of them to show you what I mean. I hope, incidentally, that some of you will be kind enough to read them to any blind people in your home or community.

Here Are A Few Of The Verses

"THE WINTER set in quietly along Belle River shore,
And everything was silent, except the loud wind's roar,
From many a cozy dwelling were smoke-wreaths curling high,
And heavy snow clouds drifted against a frowning sky.
"The girls were hooking, quilting and casting many a gaze
Out o'er the bleak, bare landscape and longed for warmer days,
The farmers smoked and chatted, the women knit and spun
The boys were growing restless for want of sport and fun.
"One night in cold December excitement filled the air
For back of Allan Matheson's Sandy Ronald saw a bear.
The news went flying widespread, as only news can do,
And many a skeptic whispered "do you suppose it's true?"

But the old men answered quickly "Sandy Ronald ought to know,
For he has met with many bears in New Brunswick long ago."

SEVERAL VERSES later, reference was made to "Stewart, Bill and Hector and many a curious chap" and I find Stewart was Lizzie's brother. Bill and Hector were Stewarts, the latter Simon's brother.

I think you'll agree that Miss MacIntosh caught the spirit of the excitement which broke into the calm of a quiet wintry countryside, though I'm particularly impressed with her impressions of the things only a sighted person would be expected to see. She went to Western Canada, I was told, and died there of TB, which was a terrible scourge in those far off days.

The poem was sent to me by my friend Gordon Waddell, Kellys' Cross, as I've acknowledged previously, and I'm sure Gordon will be happy to know I'm sending it to Flora Stewart who told me she'd love to have it.

No Hay For Horses, Imagine That?

CLAUDE MURPHY told me this week about a new horse ration that is a complete feed for the animal. Made in pelleted form, it contains everything the horse needs, according to the firm that manufactures and sells it. And that will start some tongue wagging among men who know horses.

The pelleted ration "contains oats, corn and barley, protein supplement, salt, vitamins and minerals with chopped alfalfa hay - everything a horse requires for top health and condition." The quote is from the company's pamphlet which tells about the stuff. It recommends one and one-half pounds to 100 pounds of horse per day. It weighs about five pounds to the gallon and sells for around four dollars for a 100-pound bag.

I can't give the trade name, of course, but thought this was interesting enough to include in this column. Some local horsemen are trying it on their riding horses, and Claude is giving just a little of it to his race horses at the exhibition grounds here.

Rollo Bay Playwright Visited

A LADY staff writer is doing a story, I understand, on Mrs. Clifford Townsend, the Rollo Bay lady who recently won second prize in a nation-wide play writing contest. I don't want to intrude on a lady's domain but I was visiting Mrs. Townsend's neighbour, Edwin Reid, Wednesday, on my way to the testimonial dinner for the incomparable "Dr. Gus" MacDonald, and I couldn't resist the temptation to drop over and have a chat

The former Cora Adele MacLean of Souris - Mr. Speaker John R. MacLean is a first cousin - had never done any previous play writing, except "The Lady's Slipper" which had won the top national award in the Tweedsmuir Women's Institute competition in 1961. Can you imagine writing only two plays and winning national awards for both of them?

I'M KEEPING this brief because I don't want to spoil our lady reporter's story - and I think it should be most interesting - but I just can't refrain from telling you what

Adjudicator Dora Mavor Moore said about Mrs. Townsend's effort, "For the Love of a Horse":

"This reminds me of Irish folk literature. It's beautiful in its simplicity. Characters are well and warmly drawn. They are real human beings. Development of the plot is simple and true."

Mrs. Moore added "The climax of the sound of hooves going away is heart breaking in its impact" then concluded "neat in its construction, in dialogue, in characterization, in locale, Total impression is one of rightness."

Any of you who have heard the average adjudicator's comments should appreciate the warmth of the praise which this play has won.

Story Of The Stolen House

WHAT WOULD you say if you came home one day and found your house had been stolen? It happened some years ago to Robert Duncan, retired railwayman who lives now at 217 Grafton Street here. The former North Wiltshire man who had been a builder and contractor in Calgary, Alberta, boarded up the doors and windows of his seven-room bungalow when he returned to the Island in 1914. He went back a year later, but found the lot empty. There were no ashes or cinders, merely a vacant lot.

The building had been sold to Bert Tyler, a young chap, by the realty company that sold the lot to Duncan in the first place. Tyler, who moved it three-quarters of a mile up the street after buying the building and getting a receipt for his money, had built a piece on to the back of it, after purchasing it in good faith. Apparently the company that sold it to him had given him a deed for a lot next door which had an old shack on it.

THERE WAS litigation and Mr. Duncan ended up with \$1,500 clear after paying expenses, for a house he estimated was worth \$3,500. But there was a slump there at the time, and that apparently affected the award.

Mr. Duncan, who came home soon afterwards and worked until 1950 with the railway here where he was assistant car shop foreman, fared better on another deal. He had sold a small house to a man for \$600. The fellow who had paid \$300 in cash abandoned the building. Mr. Duncan bought it in for taxes which amounted to only \$18 and sold it again for \$600 which helped to make up for the stolen house episode.