

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Fri., Oct. 12, 1962

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Ghost Stories Cover Island

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THIS COLUMN on stories of ghosts, and other things that are mostly unexplainable, is my reply to the many people who have been asking for it. Locale of the stories range pretty well across the province.

A lady who lives near Souris saw a row of car headlights in her yard one night but there was nothing there when she went to the door. She saw real lights a few nights later, though, when friends gathered to sympathize with her on the sudden death of her husband.

John A. MacDonald, Glasgow Road tells me a man from the Breadalbane area was awakened one night when something was smashing at his door. Grabbing a stick he struck at a black object with a chain on it but only hurt his hand. He kicked at it but hurt his foot. The man said it was "the devil" but neighbours said it was a black ram that had got loose with the tether chain still attached.

JOHN COLWILL, Colville Road was driving in a sleigh to a nearby district with his brother when they were youngsters. He saw his brother "picking at something near the peek of his cap," then saw it was a tiny light "about the size of a pea" that remained there despite efforts to brush it away. A man in the area died violently soon afterwards.

Two nearby millers were quietly watching an old up-and-down rip saw as it sawed a log into boards in the long ago. They were startled by a loud noise in a pile of pine logs. Next day boards from that pile made a coffin for a neighbour who died unexpectedly.

William MacDonald, West Point never did find an explanation the time he used to find his horses' manes braided each morning in their stalls and their bodies soaking wet. But this belongs in a haunted house story I'll tell you about later.

Stories From Rose Valley Area

MY COUSIN and longtime friend, William Matheson, saw a light hovering over the one of the Rose Valley hills and said immediately "John Boulter is dead," a statement that was proven correct shortly afterwards. He and Mrs. Matheson heard one night the unmistakable sound a horse and sleigh make when they are coming down off the snow bank that often drifts up around a country home. There was nobody at the door when they looked but several nights later the same sound was heard as a neighbour came for him to "lay out" Hugh Gillis, who had died about a mile away. Mrs. Gillis died at Vernon River a little more than a week ago.

Another cousin, Dan Matheson, saw a young lad 100 yards ahead of him one night as he headed for a nearby store. Try as he might, he couldn't overtake the boy, who disappeared when he came close to Beecher Graham's gate several hundred yards

away. Next night Dan was called to his neighbours, the same William Mathesons I spoke about previously, as their young son Gerald had died.

Flaming Casket Seen At Kildare

BUT I heard the most sensational forerunner story of all last Saturday evening at Alberton at the home of Joe MacDougall. The old gentleman was out picking cranberries when I called, but his niece, Mrs. Frances Larter, recalled one of his favorite yarns.

Joe and his brother Frank were sent to invite neighbours to a "fulling frolic" at their Kildare home when they were in their teens. (A large number of people used to sit on either side of a long table, and the web of cloth, made in the loom, was stretched out and passed along between them slowly. Each person grasped firmly the part of the web in front of him or her, squeezed it and "worked" it, then pushed it along to the person alongside, This "fulled" or thickened the web of cloth, and practically everything the family wore came from the loom or from the knitting needles in those days.)

Joe was nearing the gate of Charles Gavin, an old man, when he saw a flaming casket coming out of the Gavin home. Nobody was carrying it but it proceeded slowly down the lane, turned at the gate, made another turn further on, and disappeared in the direction of Alberton. Mr. Gavin died the next day. His brother Frank, who has since died - they were in their early teens - was coming out of a house further on and he ducked into the ditch as heat from the flaming coffin singed his hair as it went by.

Dr. Creighton Believes In Ghosts

I TALKED in mid-August to Dr. Helen Creighton of Nova Scotia who collects ghost stories, folk lore and such other things as gaelic songs. I find she believes in ghosts, and was not even interested when I told her several stories that have a real explanation.

Pressed for an explanation she said "because things have happened to me." I asked for a sample and got this story:

The previous week she had stopped over night in the Marshlands Inn, Sackville while on her way to a folk song festival at Newcastle, N.B. In her room that night she saw herself as a young girl of 10 or 11 coming toward her. Asked "what did you do?" she told me she made a gesture of "get away" because "that is a bad omen. It means death", she added.

NEXT DAY she was driving between Buctouche and Cocagne when she suddenly saw a deer right in front of her. Travelling at 50 m.p.h. she could do nothing about it and merely breathed "O Lord help me." The crash smashed a headlight among other things.

Miss Creighton suggests that is the incident the nighttime visitation indicated. "But", she added, "it may not have been. If you hear of my sudden death anytime later this year, you'll know it wasn't."

Lanza Like Singer Did Strange Things

THIS STORY comes from the home of the Mrs. Donald MacDonald who carried the spinning wheel and her new-born baby from Point Prim to Stanchel in the 1800's. Her granddaughter, Mrs. Flora Graham, hired Welsh-born Fred Knight, a seventh son of a seventh son who reputedly had supernatural powers. Edward White who now lives in the city, recalls Knight told a strong and vigorous looking Stanchel neighbour "You'll be dead in six months," and he was. Another time Knight walked into a neighbour's home and placed his hands on the kitchen table "which immediately began to dance around."

Knight had an unusually fine baritone voice. "He could sing like Mario Lanza, but he was possessed of the devil" an old neighbour told me recently.

Jilted Girl Returns In Pig's Body

I TOLD this story to Helen Creighton when she first visited me several years ago, and find that she used it in her book "Bluenose Ghosts" and it has since been used by a Washington, D.C. Lady who asked for special permission. The setting is the old Strathalbyn area and it was told to me by Dan Matheson many years ago.

Names have been forgotten, and I wouldn't use them anyway, but a man driving from Springton to Rose Valley with horse and wagon, noticed a pig was persistently following him with its nose just under the rear axle of the wagon. The man had a fast horse but he couldn't shake the unwanted companion.

HE WAS nearing the line between Stanchel and Rose Valley when he became exasperated, pulled the whip from the socket, jumped to the road and struck the pig sharply along the side, in an effort to chase it away.

Imagine his surprised alarm when a woman's reproachful voice came out of the pig "Why did you hit me, John?" It was the voice of a former sweetheart whom he had left, and who had died, after he had married another girl. Helen Creighton wonders "why a girl should choose the unlovely form of a pig" for her ghostly rendezvous with a former lover.

Stories Researched In West Prince

I HAVE many others but I need space to thank those who helped me during a four-day story hunt from North Cape to Portage last weekend. Special thanks are due Mrs. Reg. Eldershaw, our Tignish correspondent, for many valuable tips, and to Frank Weeks, Alberton bureau manager, who has given me so many useful tips for this column, also to Mrs. Alice Green, Alberton for valuable assistance.

Special thanks are also due Percy Morrissey, Sea Cow Pond, who spent most of Saturday afternoon with us in the North Cape area, and Keith Matheson, a long-time friend from O'Leary, who spent his entire Thanksgiving holiday afternoon helping me research stories in the Cape Wolfe and West Point areas.

Many others helped but their names will appear as I tell the stories in this column as space permits.