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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Cactus Blooms Past 60 Years

By NEIL A. MATHESON

MRS. ARTHUR MacDonald, New Dominion has an interesting Christmas Cactus which has been blooming for 60 years with the number of blooms running past 500 in several seasons.

Mrs. MacDonald has a complete record of the number of blooms each year since 1945-46. There were 240 blooms that year, there were 285 the following year and 451 in the winter of 1948-49.

There were 522 blooms in 1950-51, there were 510 in 1953-54, there were 500 even in 1957-58.

"The plant is of tremendous sentimental value to me, and it must be 60 years old, Mrs. MacDonald told me. She and her sister put it into the pot. Her sister, Edna MacEwen, died 49 years ago while she was on a visit to Alberton. The plant has been 51 years in its present container.

Back in 1962-63 Mrs. MacDonald spent the winter with her son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Blake Wood, Cross Woods. The plant did not thrive, apparently due to fumes from a propane gas stove and an oil furnace.

"The blooms all fell off prematurely and we were afraid the plant was going to die", Mrs. MacDonald recalled. But it revived as soon as it was moved back to her home in New Dominion.

The plant blooms through Christmas and it will be February before all of the blooms will be gone, she told me.

Picture Of Plant Is Carried

ELSEWHERE IN this edition of The Guardian will be found a picture of the plant when it was in full bloom. Mrs. MacDonald kindly loaned me the negative.

Earlier this year the congregation of New Dominion United Church paid tribute to Mrs. MacDonald who has been their organist and choir director for upwards of 50 years.

I suggest that the spokesman, Walter Shaw, MLA, was paying tributes to the women who have served so faithfully in other congregations, as well as Mrs. MacDonald in hers, when he said, for example:

"We are gathered . . . to give recognition in some small degree for a very exceptional and dedicated contribution that has been provided to the congregation of New Dominion church for many years.

"This lady over a span of 45 years or more has graciously, and with a great sense of musical ability presided at the church organ and directed the church music for this long period of time."

Are They Really Appreciated?

MR. SHAW challenged the people of the church, and of other churches as well, when he asked:

“Have we all fully recognized and appreciated the fine service this good citizen has rendered in the worship of this church and the universal demands it has made on her undoubted musical talents, and the time expended from week to week in order to guarantee that the worship in the church might be in keeping with the spiritual atmosphere of the occasion.”

The address noted that there is much more called for in the service of such a lady as Mrs. MacDonald. There are special gatherings such as memorial services, weddings, funerals. Sunday School rallies, church concerts and many other additional calls, all of which has been graciously and gratuitously provided.

Our words, observed the address, “are entirely inadequate” to express “our very sincere and deep appreciation of the fine benefits so freely provided these many years.”

The former Bessie MacEwen, Mrs. MacDonald had a natural talent for music. She’d hear a piece played and she would play it by ear when she came home. But she did not take any lessons until at 20 she took some from Mrs. Ethel Norton, Charlottetown.

Later lessons were taken at Notre Dame Convent.

Daughter’s Solos Outstanding

AT MRS. MacDONALD’S HOME I saw the adjudicators’ sheets from the 1955 Music Festival when her daughter Shirley made 95 in vocal solos on two consecutive nights.

The first test piece was Stephen Foster’s “Gentle Annie”. Two adjudicators listened and agreed on the 95 mark.

The adjudicator’s sheets are normally fairly well filled with comment. This time there was no comment except this:

“Her interpretation is simple and moving there is no comment my fellow adjudicator and I can make.”

On the second night when she sang “O Waly, Waly” two different adjudicators listened and the spokesman for the two, F. Wharram, said “I doubt whether you will ever hear this folk song sung like this again.”

The adjudicator’s sheet that night said:

“There is nothing we can say, it was such a beautiful performance.”

As I have indicated, the marks of 95 were given each night.

Shirley is now Mrs. Blake Wood, Jr., of Cross Roads which is the next district to Southport. Their daughter Carolyn Wood, made 97 last spring in the Music Festival at nine years of age.

Giant MacAskill Story Coming

WHEN I WAS at the Atlantic Winter Fair last month I saw the life-size likeness of Cape Breton’s Giant MacAskill. I tried to get a picture for you of myself standing alongside of him. But I did not have my camera and none was immediately available.

I stand six feet, four inches in my shoes, MacAskill stood seven feet, nine inches. I’ll tell you something about him in a future column.

Meanwhile measure seven feet, nine inches on your kitchen or living-room wall, and you'll get an idea of how tall the man really was.

Honorary President??

JOHN McNEILL, Sports Columnist for the Journal Pioneer suggests that I am the Honorary President, as he puts it, of the Sports Writers Fraternity Club of P.E.I.

The reference apparently is to the fact that I am the oldest working newspaperman on the Island who was formerly a sports writer. That I believe is correct. But the man who goes back the longest time as a sports writer is J.B. 'Buller' Murley, who was sports writer for the Patriot before I got into the game. Mr. Murley left our profession and is now retired after his stint as head of the Unemployment Insurance office here as it was known at the time.

In case anyone is interested, John, I started with The Patriot in November of 1932. Long time ago, eh?