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ACROSS THE ISLAND

New Data Is Supplied On Old Race Tracks

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I'VE HAD one of the most interesting weeks since I first started this column seven years ago. Dozens of people called, wrote or talked to me as I met them at various places. I think I must have close to a dozen tracks in addition to those listed here last week.

From Tom Ledwell, St. Peter's and Roy White, Souris came word of the track which flourished at Souris River, about one mile outside Souris "a long, long time ago".

Horse racing "was really racing at this track, particularly in the 1920's, with all the arguments and argumentative brawls of the time" observes Mr. White.

Another short-lived track of a few years ago was at Gowan Brae, on or near the farm of Henry Mallard, Mr. White adds.

MANY PEOPLE wrote or phoned about the track at North Tryon on the farm owned at the time by Newton Dawson, also about the track at Cape Traverse on a farm owned by Jack Irving, but now owned by Mrs. Harold Cutcliffe, L.A. MacDonald of North Tryon tells me.

Dr. Gordon Lea was one of the first to tell me about those two tracks. The farm at North Tryon was later purchased by Russel Thompson. His widow still lives there on the farm that is operated by her sons Raymond and Charlie. It's at the foot of Max Lefurgey's hill, Dr. Lea told me. Charlie Rogerson, City also told me about these two tracks.

Mr. Irving gave land from his large farm for the Church of Scotland and for the church cemetery, I was told.

Harry Keating, Charlottetown is another who called about these two tracks, also about the track at Hamilton, on the farm of Edgar Bryenton, and several others.

Stewart Vickerson, Guardian advertising manager, told me of the "Strawberry track" and I found on a visit to Elbert Hill's forge at New Glasgow that it is located at St. Mary's between New Glasgow and Hope River.

The track was owner by John Peters and was named, apparently, because Mr. Peters grew strawberries on the farm. The track provided colorful racing and drew tremendous crowds, Mr. Hill told me as did several others who were in his shop when I was there.

Tyndall Semple Liked It

HARRY KEATING tells me that the veteran racing driver Tyndall Semple, Kensington had said he would rather race at the Strawberry track than at Charlottetown. There was a hill in the middle of the track, I was told, and there was one terrifically sharp turn. But it provided some great racing and lots of fun. The track is still in existence, incidentally, though it's used only for training now.

Mr. Hill and his friends told me, too, about the Hope River track that was located on a farm owned by John T. Cosgrove. The land is owned now by Johnny Redmond.

There was a track at Elmsdale, as I suggested last week. Frank Weeks, Alberton was with me when I talked to Harry O'Brien about it. There is also a track at Miscouche, I am told, and there probably was one at Tignish as well, though I did not get that one confirmed.

Walter O'Brien, Charlottetown tells me about the track at Bristol "which was right across from MacEwen's store". The track was built in 1890, was "one of the finest", says Walter. Racing there ended in 1909 when the property changed ownership. John J. McAdam and James A. O'Brien, both now dead, were two of the partners in the company that operated it.

Racing At Oyster Bed Bridge

RACING THERE was with the old high-wheel sulkies and there was all kinds of action, in addition to the racing. The track area was a battle ground for bare-knuckle fighting, stirred apparently by the ready availability of hard liquor at \$1.25 a bottle and imported ale at 20 cents a quart.

The high-wheel sulkies were used at all of the old tracks, of course.

The arguments and fights lasted far into the night, Mr. O'Brien informs me. And it was to stop the fighting and uproar, he suggests, that Walter MacEwen, Bristol, general merchant, purchased the track and ended the racing.

Many of the people who told me about some of these tracks emphasized that there was often a great deal of fighting at them. "More than one man got a severe beating at this track", several people told me.

One man had an ear bitten off at one of these tracks many years ago, Mr. O'Brien adds.

Indeed most people who talked of horse racing activity in the earlier years talked of rows and fist fights developing fairly often.

Here's a note from a Charlottetown lady who asks me not to use her name. Horse racing was fun in those years, she recalls as she tells me about "MacMillan's track at Oyster Bed Bridge. Reg Sterns and T. Gordon Ives were owners of race horses that gave them a lot of pleasure, though it always ended in empty pockets", the lady recalls.

The reference to the MacMillan track confuses me a bit, for I've been told the track at Oyster Bed Bridge was on the farm owned by Paige Nunn, and that is just west of the bridge. Possibly it was owned previously by a MacMillan.

Allison Carr, Harrington; Emmet Austin, Guardian sports writer; John MacLeod, North River Road; Walter White, City and Bobby Sutherland, Charlottetown are among the many others who telephoned me. Mrs. Ted Praught, Charlottetown also called with interesting information. Angus Nicholson, Mt. Buchannan is still another.

I forgot the current track at Pinette where matinee racing is popular, also the one that was operated by Lawson Wood at Hazelbrook for a number of years recently. I'm told a track at Orwell was operated by a Mr. Wood but have no details on it.

A number of my informants told me about the race track at Cymbria, including Mr. Carr.

Walter O'Brien tells me that John O'Brien operated a blacksmith forge across from the Bristol raceway and horses were shod for 30 cents. The high wheel sulkies had steel tires on them and Mr. O'Brien replaced them also when such action was needed.

“John R.” Is Recalled

CHARLIE ROGERSON recalls that his father had a race horse “John R.” that was one of the top competitors in the 1920’s. I recall that Dr. Calkins at Sackville used to talk about this horse when I was a student at Mt. Allison University in the latter 1920’s. This doctor was a lover of horse racing but he didn’t like football. He thought it was a rough, cruel game, he told me.

For those who may have missed last week’s column, I’ll repeat the tracks listed then. They included Summerfield, Marie, Montague, St. Peter’s, Alberton, New Annan, Kinkora, Kensington, Summerside, Northam, Riverside, Covehead, Upton Farm Track, Garfield, Springfield, Georgetown, and Charlottetown. There was also a race track at MacNeill’s Mills, I was told and I think it was Harry Keating who told me.

I make that some 33 tracks in all. If we’re still missing some I’ll appreciate a call or letter at your convenience.

Many thanks for your splendid response to my request last week for assistance. I never fail to get a thrill out of your reactions to this column. But your response this time was one of the highlights thus far.

My apologies to those names I have forgotten. Many people spoke to me at the Rural Youth Fair, and at other places where people gathered together. I imagine I have forgotten several of them.

A letter from Ulric Dawson, Yarmouth arrived after I had written the above. Naturally he told me about Jack Irving’s track at Cape Traverse and Newton Dawson’s track at North River. The Irving track operated between 1908 and 1925, he tells me. The other track featured good racing between 1900 and 1920.

Running through several of the letters was the statement that drinking to excess accompanied by fighting and brawling were common at a number of the tracks.

The tracks were identified but I don’t want to cast aspersions on any descendants who are living. One reliable man for example said of one track, “frequently the racing meet ended in a drunken brawl”.

Mr. Dawson and his good wife are coming back to P.E.I. in April he tells me. They’ll be living in the new house just opposite the entry to the Belvedere Golf Club.