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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Dalvay Hotel Story Is Interesting One

By NEIL A. MATHESON

THIS STORY of Dalvay Hotel, or Dalvay –By-The-Sea as it was originally called, has become available to this column through the kindness of Mrs. Wilfred MacDonald. The former Covehead lady lives now in Sherwood.

Donald MacDonald, a man born in Scotland came to the United States and settled in Cincinnati where he became a very rich man. At one time, Mrs. MacDonald's interesting story says he was President of Standard Oil.

Donald MacDonald travelled extensively and he was visiting the Bras d'Or Lakes in Cape Breton when he studied a folder distributed by Hubert Hall who managed the Acadian Hotel at Tracadie at the time.

As a result MacDonald spent a summer on the North Side and was so attracted by the beautiful location that he arranged to have a large summer home built there for him. The result was Dalvay-By-The-Sea. Rhodes and Currie built the place in 1896 and M.F. Schurman Company constructed the wing in 1909.

Big Logs In Fireplace

SANDY ARBING built the huge fireplace, using Island sandstone. Hardwood logs were brought from Peakes Station by the carload and were burned in the fireplace. The logs were so heavy it took two men to carry them, the story relates.

Everywhere the Cincinnati man and his family travelled they purchased furniture and many other things they desired for their beautiful summer home on the Island.

Many and varied were the beautiful furnishings and ornaments the colorful summer home contained. There was furniture, beautiful pottery, draperies and other items purchased in England, on the continent of Europe and in many other places. Some very fine items were purchased from English families in Charlottetown.

Some of the furniture was Oak, other pieces were Mahogany. Mr. MacDonald had some of the oak pieces enameled so that they were white in color so as to produce an atmosphere of coolness in the warm summer period, Mrs. MacDonald writes. She talked with people who had worked with Mr. MacDonald and gathered much authentic information in this way.

Attractive Hand-hooked Rug

ONE PARTICULARLY attractive hand-hooked rug was made by a Mrs. Bryenton of Brackley Point – the first name is not given. The rug featured an unusually attractive scroll. It was so large that it had to be made in sections, Mrs. Wilfred MacDonald relates.

Mrs. MacDonald's historical sketch recalls in some detail the carriages that the MacDonalds had at Dalvay-by-the-Sea at the time they used it as a summer home. They had jaunting carts, double seated carriages and coaches.

One big carriage called a Four-in-Hand, or Brake, was purchased at the rate of one dollar per pound. It weighed 1,600 pounds and thus cost \$1,600. I recall that in the early days of the National Park, this interesting old rig was on exhibition. It may still be there for all I know. I have not been around Dalvay as a sight-seer in recent years, though I have been there as a guest, or a visitor on several occasions.

Basket-Phaeton Rig

MRS. MACDONALD in her sketch recalls the Basket-Phaeton the MacDonalds had at Dalvay-by-the-Sea. It had two seats facing each other along the sides. She recalls it in these words:

“I shall never forget this small carriage; my brother and I used to watch the road every Sunday morning hoping to catch a glimpse of Mr. MacDonald’s little reed wagon and pony drive by on the way to church. Our day was spoiled if we missed seeing it.

“The little reed carriage and the pony at that time were one of the greatest wonders of our day.”

“It was said in those days”, the historical sketch continues, “that it cost \$10,000 to operate Dalvay even in those early days.” And of course expenses then would not begin to compare with expenses in this day and age, when the value of the dollar has shrunken so greatly.

Employees Treated Well

MRS. MacDONALD’S sketch says that the man who owned Dalvay-by-the-Sea treated his help more like friends than as employees. He was interested in their welfare and would give a dance each summer for his employees and for some of the people of the countryside.

I can well believe that part about him being good to those who worked with him. William Smith was one of the people who looked after Dalvay for Donald MacDonald. He told me about the man’s kindness in a chat I had with Mr. Smith several years ago.

Indeed Mr. Smith owned Dalvay-by-the-Sea for a short time once. It was after poor health and a stroke of ill fortune in finances had severed the MacDonald family’s connection with, and interest in the lavish summer home.

It was because of this that the property passed into Mr. Smith’s ownership. But Mr. Smith during his lifetime would never let me print that part of the story, so great was his liking for and admiration of the man who had built and maintained Dalvay-by-the-Sea in his brighter years.

From Mr. Smith’s ownership the Dalvay spot was sold to a Mr. O’Leary of Montreal whose brother, the Most Reverend Louis O’Leary, was at one time Bishop of the Charlottetown diocese.

It was during this period, the sketch reveals, that much of the fine articles of furniture and furnishings were taken from Dalvay. Presumably they were shipped to Montreal.

Later the place was owned by Captain Edward Dicks, later by George DeBlois, a former Lieutenant-Governor of the province.

Then it was sold to the federal government as it became a part of the National Park.

Jim MacFayden of the North Shore Hotel managed it for a time, later it was managed by Wendall Worth – both men died some years ago.

Mr. and Mrs. Raoul Raymond are the tourist hostesses at Dalvay-by-the-Sea at present.

Tried To Sell Dalvay

I RECALL that in the middle 1950's the federal government wanted to sell Dalvay. I sat in one time on a conference between Hon. Jean LeSage, then the minister in the federal government in the department which administered the national parks. I listened to him try to sell the place to Mr. Worth. It was quite clear that the government wanted to get rid of it – at least Mr. LeSage did, but no deal was made.

The failure was to agree on what the place was worth as a tourist resort.

This was the same LeSage who later became premier of Quebec and later resigned as leader of the Liberal party in Quebec to pave the way for the Liberal convention which chose successor Robert Bourassa who is now engaged in an election battle with the Union Nationale which holds the reins of government.