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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Powerful Bear Killed His Owner

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THIS STORY goes back 92 years and it was told to me by Cairns MacCallum of Brackley Beach, as it was told to him by his mother.

"My mother was the daughter of John MacCallum and his wife, Mary Cairns. She would be 98 were she alive today. She was born in the old stone house, as it is called, that was built from Island sandstone 140 years ago."

:As a little girl of six, my mother was surprised one evening to see a man coming up the lane leading a large bear.

"As he came closer to the house he could be heard saying "Ten cents to see this bear dance."

"The animal had a muzzle on him, so my father told the keeper to let the creature dance", Cairns' mother told him.

"The man played a mouth organ as the bear sort of kept time to the music, then as the dance ended, the keeper asked for something to feed the bear.

Mr. MacCallum – this would be Cairns' grandfather, "went to the pork barrel and produced a piece of the meat, and the keeper and his dancing bear departed," the story said.

Man Found Crushed To Death

NEXT MORNING as John MacCallum was on his way to his mill, he was walking along the Mill Road, he was horrified to find the keeper of the bear lying lifeless on the ground. He was scarcely marked, John MacCallum related later, but "he was quite dead."

On examination by a doctor it was found that the man's ribs had been crushed by the powerful animal.

A part of the chain that had been used to lead the big bear was found tied to a tree, the other part went with the bear, as the powerful brute broke it before killing his keeper.

The bear was found on "the McLure farm" known later as Gregor's – many people know it today as Gregor's Hotel is on the property.

When a number of people came upon the bear the animal became fierce, and had to be killed. Charles Gregor fired the shot, and he was the grandfather of Charles Gregor who lives now at Cornwall, Cairn MacCallum tells me.

The keeper's body was taken to Gregor's home and every effort was made to learn the identity, or where the man had come from. But all were unsuccessful. So the man was laid to rest in the little cemetery at Brackley Beach.

Young Lad Delivered Twins

A NEWS story a few days ago told of two policemen in a Detroit suburb delivering a baby in the middle of the street – it was during a snow storm and they couldn't get transportation to the young mother quickly enough to get her to the hospital. The story reminded me of a story told to me by my friend Daniel McLean when I visited him at DeGros Marsh last summer.

Father Francis MacDonald who was born at East Point was parish priest at St. Georges for some years. Gregory McLean – he was Dan's uncle, was a youngster of 17 years. Father MacDonald had a medical book and the reverend clergyman often helped at a sick bed when a doctor was not available.

Gregory stayed for a time with the priest at St. Georges and the Reverend Father saw that the youngster often was studying the medical book very seriously.

When a call came to the priest to help at a confinement case, in Georgetown, he sent the young lad instead. The youngster was understandably reluctant to do so. But finally he heeded the priest's urgent request, and he helped to deliver a set of twins.

Gregory McLean died at the age of 97 years, and that was about 20 years ago, Dan told me. But never again did he preside at a birthing, as some of the older folks called it.

Once in a lifetime was enough for him, even in such an unusually long lifetime.

Ghosts Reported In Stanchel Woods

MY FRIEND Charles MacDonald who lives now in Lower Montague should enjoy this story, for it happened just across the road, almost, from the farm on which he was born in Stanchel.

It was John Willie MacKenzie, as I used to know him as a boy, who told me the yarn. For Mr. MacDonald's benefit, this man is a son of the Malcolm MacKenzie who was a trustee, along with my father, John A. Matheson, when Mr. MacDonald taught once in Rose Valley. He lives on the old Rose Valley homestead on the road going to Breadalbane.

There had been stories told during the summer of the most unnatural sounds being heard fairly deep in the woods that are just East of Stanchel church. As the summer progressed the ghostly association grew by leaps and bounds. As late summer approached many a young boy, or girl, yes and some people older too, were afraid to pass the "haunted" woods at night.

I've forgotten the exact details but about a half dozen young lads, perhaps in the middle teens, were coming home one night from a religious service which was held either in Springton, or Hartsville. Any way they would have to pass the haunted woods on their way to Rose Valley.

With the young lads on this occasion, though, was a mature man, Donald Bethune, who lived, I believe, where Murdock MacKinnon lives now.

Mr. Bethune was a fearless no-nonsense type of man. When he and the lads came close to the wood, the youngsters started to talk about the ghostly noises. As they came opposite the wood, they said "There it is, listen" and sure enough there were some of the most unusual noises coming from the wooded area.

Sharp Shrieks – Awful Roars

THERE WERE sharp pitched shrieks or squeals, there were deep throated roars as though they came from the fiery mouth of a dragon. Understand the imagination and the terror which struck the youngster' hearts added to the idea of the awful sounds they heard coming from the wood.

But Mr. Bethune wanted to get to the source of the sounds. He listened closely at the edge of the woods, then said "I'm going in there, to see what this is all about."

The young lads – one was Malcolm MacKenzie, his son told me – were really scared. They didn't know whether it would take more courage to go into the woods with this fearless man who must have inspired a measure of confidence in them, or to wait outside on the road.

THEY CHOSE to stay outside and as the minutes passed they wondered what had become of the man. It seemed like hours to the lads on the road, and they began to think they would have to enter the woods and find the man. After all they just couldn't go home and tell their families they had left this man by himself to deal with the unknown terror.

They were just about to enter when Mr. Bethune returned, and he had the answer. It was an old sow and her litter of little pigs. Pigs, I am told, used to feed on beechnuts in the woods in former years during a certain period of the year. The high-pitched sounds came from the little pigs, the deep throated dragon roars, were merely the snorts and grunts of the old sow.