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ACROSS THE ISLAND

O'Leary Potato Story Is Heard

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Provincial - Farm Editor

I PICKED up an unusual potato story at Summerside this week, while I was talking to Alton Rayner, O'Leary, Bert McCardle, Middleton and a number of others at the closing dinner of Monday's day-long potato conference. The modest Mr. Rayner a long-time friend, asked me not to use his name, but the story is so unusual I just have to use it, because so many people in the industry know his insistence on accuracy, it will assure readers the story is true.

O'Leary businessman Claude MacNeill went some years ago to Lot 16 - Mr. Raynor was with him - looking for Kennebec potato seed. The man he saw had none left, but he gave Mr. MacNeill a jumbo-size potato which he kept on the ledge of his office window through the winter. Scores of people saw and handled the big spud and there were finger-nail incisions all over it by spring when the merchant suggested to Jean Stetson, an employee, she take it home and plant it in her garden.

ONLY FOUR of the seed eyes produced plants the first year Jean told me this week, but there were six and one-half bushels of potatoes by the third year from the original four sets. It got a bit too big for a garden plot, so additional people became involved but last year, 1962, there were 55 acres planted with seed from the original potato, and one carload of spuds was shipped.

Mr. Raynor, a potato inspector and neighbour kept close watch on the early production efforts, he told me, but he never did find anything wrong with any of the plants.

And that, I suggest, is most interesting production from the four plants that occupied a tiny place in the Stetson garden in the summer of 1956, which makes a total of only seven crop years for the huge increase.

The potato meeting was interesting and several practical potato men told me it was useful. There's a value in getting together and discussing problems they explained.

Production Costs Estimates Vary

BIGGEST DISAGREEMENT came on the cost of producing an acre or a bushel of spuds. It ranged from the \$156 and \$165 per acre estimate given by two Prince County men who were listing out-of-pocket expenses, to the considerably more than \$200 per acre several veteran producers gave me during the afternoon session.

Ira Lewis, York who is in partnership with his brother, Claude, said he'd accept the \$156 estimate but add to it the 10 per cent depreciation Income Tax people allow on their \$50,000 investment, and the six per cent interest which brings the per-acre cost to considerably more than \$200.

COL. G. E. FULL told me it costs him \$225 per acre to put the potatoes into storage. Storage, grading and other handling costs are in addition. Bert McCardle told me it costs him \$1.00 a bushel. R. L. Burge, St. Peter's said he can "break even" at about 75 cents per bushel but that's not allowing anything to live on, or for equipment depreciation.

This machinery depreciation amounts to more than most people realize. An Albany man, for example, said that it costs him \$5,000 for a new tractor and a three-bottom plow to break his land. It's only one item, but it does illustrate the high cost of cultivating equipment.

Setting Pins – Abbies Hockey Team

THE BREAK at noon provided time for a look at an interesting development. Manager Jim Hogan of the Crest Lanes bowling establishment was good enough to show me how the new automatic pin setters work. It looks simple on TV, or even from the head of the alleys where the bowlers operate. But the actual machinery is complicated and it must be expensive. Like many other modern developments, it has replaced human labor.

Setting pins was a rough job at times, what with dodging flying pins, and occasionally forgetting to duck the right way. But I have some nostalgic memories. First pin setting job for me came back in the early twenties when I set up pins at the old YMCA all afternoon - we got two cents for each game - to make enough money to see the then famous Abegweit hockey team play a Halifax team at the old Arena on Fitzroy Street, where the big automobile sales plant and garage is located now between Hillsboro and Weymouth.

I RECALL that the Abbies had gone undefeated and untied through the previous two seasons, and they were the toast of the Maritimes at the time. I'm tempted to review the names of that team some week, although that sort of thing really belongs in the sport pages where Pius Callaghan and Carmen Smith punch racy typewriters.

That team held the powerful Toronto Granites to a 4-1 score in Saint John in January 1924. The Toronto team - it swept the Olympic hockey crown with ridiculous ease - was playing the final game of its long tune-up series before leaving for Europe. The Abbies were playing their first game of the season.

Frank Acorn recalled yesterday that the Granite coach, accustomed to handling packed teams gathered from many centres, asked the Abbies how long they had been building up their team and from how many centres. When he was told the boys all went to school together in Charlottetown, he laughed and called them liars. That just couldn't be true to his way of thinking.

Wooden Shoes Used For Horses

CROWDED OUT of last week's column - there were too many ghost stories - was a reference to a chat I had with George Laird, the active and ardent historian from Souris, and a Kamloops, B. C. Woman, Mrs. S. Ross, who was formerly Nina Waldron of Tyne Valley. She is working on a history of the families who lived in the lot where she was

born, she told me.

Mr. Laird, I have found in my own travels, has been to many parts of the province in his search for historic relics and stories. I chatted recently with him and Mrs Ross in a Charlottetown restaurant, and hope to visit him later this year, have a look at some of the interesting things he has assembled and hear some of the interesting stories he has collected.

I'm going to use this one reference now to his hobby of collecting big wooden shoes they used on horses when they were working on the marshes to cut and gather marsh hay prior to the introduction of commercial fertilizers, as Scott MacMurdo explained to me last fall at Bedeque.

THE SHOES were big - they were used to stop horses from sinking into the soft marsh, much as snowshoes are used by men to walk over soft snow - and I believe they might be about 15 inches long and eight inches wide. That's only an estimate from what I've been told, and it may be inaccurate. I've yet to actually see the shoes.

Mr. Laird has two sets. He got a Bedeque type from the home of the late T. J. Inman at Central Bedeque that were made by the late Peter Barwise - Reg Barwise, Charlottetown is a son - and a "Muddy Creek Type" that were made by a Mr. Allen in St. Nicholas. He believes there is also a Tryon type. Any information on this type would be appreciated.

I have to thank Thomas Moyse, 98, Bedeque for directing me to his neighbour Mr. MacMurdo. I had never previously heard of marsh shoes for horses, and I have learned since that very few farmers across the Island have heard of them, except those who lived in areas where marsh hay was gathered.

Lights On Cow - Cars Banned Here

BILL LEDWELL just handed me an odd story which will complete today's column. A judge in Reading, England ruled that a cow "should carry warning lights front and rear" as he rejected a farmer's claim for \$429 damage from a motorist who struck and killed a cow on a highway after dark, and fined the farmer more than \$500 for damage to the car.

"Don't you ever hitch a light on your cows?" the judge asked the farmer. And that's a far cry from the days when cars were ordered off our roads altogether and motorists finally won back the right to travel on them only after a great deal of effort. That leads up to a fascinating part of our Island history on which I'm working at present, and will bring it to you at the first opportunity.