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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Unusual Story Told From Murray River

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I WAS telling a most unusual story Tuesday afternoon to a group of people in the "Special Care" unit, in the Provincial Sanatorium building as I visited with Mrs. Matheson. I was told the story by the wife of a minister who had preached some years ago in the Murray River area where he had learned of the unusual happening.

When I was a youngster, and probably long before that, merchants purchased their molasses in huge barrels, or puncheons as many called them. When the molasses had all been sold, the merchant sold the empty barrel to a farmer who did one of two things with it. He either sawed it in half and used the resulting two large tubs for watering his cattle, or he knocked in the head at one end, and used the big barrel for collecting rainwater from the roof. The soft rainwater was desirable for wash days – there were no detergents in those days.

This story says a Murray River merchant sold an empty cask of molasses to a man who knocked in one end of the barrel – he was going to collect rainwater. But the man was shocked to find at the bottom of the barrel the body of a small negro boy. The story I got was the little chap would perhaps be eight to 10 years old.

THE SUGGESTION is that this little negro lad had climbed up to the top of the barrel, perhaps to get a lick or two of the sweet molasses, had lost his balance and had fallen into the heavy fluid. I was told that the boy's body had been buried somewhere in the area, but I have been unable to find where the grave is located. The molasses would have come from the West Indies or wherever else molasses was purchased in those earlier days.

I cannot recall when I had a piece of bread with molasses on it, but I regarded that combination as a great treat in my boyhood days. Molasses and warm milk – we called it "new milk" was particularly desirable.

'Stew' Contained Human Bones

ONE OF THE most grisly stories I have heard in my search for stories "Across the Island", is not an Island story except that it was told to me by the same lady who related the one about the boy in the puncheon of molasses.

The lady couldn't be sure this story is correct, but she believed the women involved were reliable. The two ladies were having lamb stew one day in a restaurant in a well known New Brunswick city. One of them noticed two bones that somehow took her attention. She placed them on the side plate, then wrapped them in a paper napkin and put them into her coat pocket.

A few days later a policeman came to the lady's door. He asked her if she had sent any clothing to the dry cleaners recently. At first she said "No", then she recalled that she had sent the top coat.

Asked if there had been anything in the pockets, the lady again said "No". Then the policeman asked if there had been any bones in a pocket, the lady recalled that incident

and told how she and her friend had been eating the lamb stew and she had picked out two bones “that were a bit different”, wrapped them in paper, and had taken them home, then forgotten about them.

“But”, the policeman told her, “they are not lamb bones” – he had them in his pocket – “they are human bones”. After he had learned where the restaurant was located, the policeman investigated farther and found that a man working in the kitchen of the restaurant had leprosy. On checking farther, the policeman explained, he found that two of the man’s finger joints had fallen off and had gotten into the soup.

As I have said, it’s a grisly story, but the lady from the Island was told it was the truth. I leave it at that.

Balloons Drop In Mt. Buchannan

SUMNER MACKINNON, Mt. Buchannan told me an interesting story when I met him some weeks ago. He was (missing line?) perhaps 10 small balloons drifting toward the ground. A tag attached said they had been launched in Baltimore, Maryland by a junior high school.

A letter he received from the student organization in Baltimore – Parkville Junior High School – explained that each year the school has this project to collect money for the Parent-Teacher-Student Association. They use “the Balloon Ascension” stunt to raise money.

Students are given one week to sell tickets, then the ticket tags are attached to the helium-filled balloons and launched.

“This year our PTS association launched 15,500 balloons at 7:45 pm on October 12” – Mr. MacKinnon found the balloons in his area about 24 hours later. The letter added “We have had our balloon tags returned from many places, including New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York and even one from Newfoundland, Canada, today one was returned from Ireland.”

The High School spokesman added:

“In past years we have had them go as far as Spain, South Africa, Venezuela and one was picked up by an American submarine in the mid-Atlantic.”

Mr. MacKinnon told me the balloons were the usual size, similar to the ones used for celebrations, dances, etc. here.

Fire Engine Subscriptions

FROM NOTES I have taken from perusal of old newspapers and other publications I list this story.

The Island newspaper reported on April 5, 1867 that the subscriptions amounting to 1,695 pounds, nine shillings and three pence had been received for the purchase of a steam fire engine. My recollection is that the pound Island currency was worth three dollars, though I am not sure. I recall that in our school days we were taught the pound Sterling was worth \$4.86 and two-thirds cents.

HERE’S A test of wits I found this week when I dropped into the dining room of the Kingsway Motel at Roseneath.

Nine Pigs In Four Pens

“PLACE NINE pigs in four pens, so there will be an uneven number of pigs in each pen.” I took it back to this office and had the newsroom staff, and some of the composing room staff going slowly nuts in an effort to get the right answer.

Finally I called the manager of the motel and asked if there is an answer. The lady told me there is and I have it.

I thought I would stick this in my column this week, and see if any reader can come up with the correct answer. I'll warn you that there is a trick in it, so perhaps that will help you to solve it.

I shall wait for two weeks before giving the answer, and I hope somebody will write in, or call me with the right answer before that. Hope you have fun working this one out.