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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Higher Prices Recall Fantastic Fox Years

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IT'S A far cry from the glamorous days of a half century ago when there was a feeling of financial magic in even the thought of a black fox, but foxes are paying their way again. The price last year ran \$50 to \$60 for top pelts and the average ran around \$45, I'm told by Lloyd Lockerby, Hamilton, who is fur marketing manager for the Canadian National Silver Fox Breeders Association.

The only trouble is that there are scarcely any foxes left to cash in on the improved prices. Mr. Lockerbie is the only man west of Charlottetown who has any foxes registered – and Prince County was the home of the fox in the glamorous days of old. Mr. Lockerbie has 45 animals.

There are 54 foxes in a ranch in Sherwood where animals are owned by my longtime friend Bill Brown and by Foster Pickard – both of Charlottetown and Irving Thompson, Dunstaffnage and Charlie Swan, Mt. Edward Road.

B. B. (Bus) Jones, Bunbury has a male and a pair of females. That makes 102 foxes registered in the province. These few people kept their faith in the industry long enough to see the dream of profitable prices realized.

I WORKED last weekend in Prince County from Miscouche to Tignish seeking background information on this industry that once attracted world wide attention to Prince Edward Island. One reason for the renewed interest is that the CBC is planning a television program which will portray the rise and fall, and now the – shall I call it a comeback?- of the industry.

I'll let you know when the show will run, for many will be interested in seeing it.

I want to express my deep appreciation to the many people who made my weekend trip so worthwhile. For the most part I was researching the fascinating story of the province's most glamorous industry, and from the time I dropped into the Canadian National Silver Fox Breeder's Association's office in Summerside where I chatted with Lloyd Lockerby and George Callbeck until I finally said goodbye to Jack Lewis, Alberton, Sunday afternoon, I received consistently helpful co-operation.

I expect to review the story of the industry at length in a future column, but here are one or two highlights I picked up.

Highlights Are Interesting

CHARLES DALTON – he came from Norway, west of Tignish and Robert Oulton who came from Little Shermogue, N.B. are the names most closely associated with the founding. I'll tell you about two others, James Gordon and Robert Tuplin, in a future column.

When Dalton and Oulton dissolved partnership, and the former sold his ranch to a Charlottetown company in 1912, he received \$400,000 in cash and \$100,000 in stock

shares in the new ranch for 20 pairs of foxes – the one condition noted was that they should have not less than 40 pups that would be raised to maturity the following season.

Mr. Callbeck, who was fur marketing manager of the CNSFBA for many years managed the Willow Hill Fur Farm in Summerside for several years – he later was a prominent fox and mink breeder. One female from this ranch whelped foxes that brought close to \$300,000 for the company, according to the late Lt.-Col. Dan MacKinnon.

The Royalty Company with mostly outside capital paid dividends to shareholders of 600 per cent in 1913. Dividends of as high as 1,000 per cent were paid in some instances, Col. MacKinnon wrote.

A Tignish lady told me that Dalton sold a fox in Europe once for \$25,000 – I don't have the details – and Jack Lewis told me an American buyer paid \$30,000 for a female once if she produced pups the following year, which she did.

I have at least one really good story of honesty in fox dealings, but it is natural that there were some shady stories too. More than 30 foxes were registered in one year from a female that had acquired good publicity in transmitting desirable qualities to her offspring. Eight pups was unusually high, I am told. Litters of 20 or more – there never was anything of that nature.

High Priced Fox Deals Recalled

HELEN GORDON RAMSAY (Mrs. George), Montrose told me she remembers hearing her father, the late Hudson Gordon, buying a pair of foxes on the telephone for \$20,000 one morning, and selling them that afternoon for \$25,000.

George Callbeck told me that when the Willow Hill ranch sold out, they sold their good breeding stock to B. Graham Rogers who lives now in Charlottetown. But the foxes not good enough to sell to Mr. Rogers were pelted and sold to the late Chester McLure for an average of more than \$500 apiece.

There is more, much more. I'll review it in a future column, or columns. I don't think I can possibly do justice to it in one column.

Alberton Lady Impresses

THE MATHESON family worshipped in Montrose church Sunday morning. Mrs. Matheson's grandfather, Rev. James Murray, was the second minister there, and there was also the fact that Frank Pridham, who was born about two stone throws across the valley, had his Capital City Four quartette from Fredericton, N.B. We enjoyed their numbers greatly, but there was an extra bonus for us.

Mrs. Alice Green of Alberton who writes many good stories for this paper, brought the message at the "Thank Offering" service. This talented lady impressed me so deeply I brought a copy of her talk back with me, as I wanted to refer to several parts of it.

A REALISTIC sense of history pervaded the well-filled church as Mrs. Green talked of some of the people who had gone from that area with the missionary message in the years that are gone.

This was particularly true as she talked of the martyred Gordons of Erromanga. The sense of history was the more real in that the monument to those Gordons stands by

the roadside not far away. And to me the impression was even stronger, for a relative of those Gordons, Gordon Barbour, was sitting by my side. Indeed we were weekend guests at this Barbour home which always welcomes us so warmly.

“Rev. George Nicol Gordon, from the neighbouring district of South Kildare went “to give his life a sacrifice for Christ’s cause on Erromanga, in the New Hebrides ...A few years later his brother, Rev James Douglas Gordon went to take his brother’s place ... and he too suffered a martyr’s death.”

Pioneer Hardships In Klondike

THERE WAS fitting reference “to Island-born John F. Pringle...that great stalwart with a heart of gold” who was sent to the Klondike mining camps in the gold rush of 1898 “where pioneer life, hard work and illness were playing havoc with the lives of 1,200 men”

Two young women responded to a call for nurses “and the government gave them a cabin for a hospital. It had a floor of sawdust, a roof of mud, and two small panes of glass for windows.

“It held four cots, the pillows were made of sacking that had come around the cots, and they were filled with hay in which the dishes had been packed. When the hospital became overcrowded they pitched a tent beside it and with this primitive equipment these two nurses courageously carried on their mission of practical Christianity until a hospital was built two years later,” Mrs. Green recalled.

There was reference to an Alberton boy, Dr. George Arthur who was responsible for the first School Home for new Canadians when the West started to open up at the turn of the century. Dr. Arthur’s missionary effort was in Saskatchewan and it was a valiant one. “He and his wife took into their own home 20 boys who among them spoke five languages.”

I have only space for these few excerpts. But I have never seen an audience follow a speaker with more rapt attention. I hope Alice Green will pardon me if I suggest that any group looking for a speaker at a Thank Offering service would be well advised to talk with this Alberton lady.

There was a deep feeling once again that few of us ever stop to realize what sacrifices and what great efforts were made by courageous and devoted men and women of the past. And, as I said several weeks ago when I referred to a message from Rev. Donald Nicholson, these efforts were shared by people of all the faiths who settled this part of the country.