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ACROSS THE ISLAND

London Men Praise 'Astounding Island'

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LONDON NEWSMAN George Murray wrote in 1943 "The government is to set up a Royal Commission to investigate the birth rate. These experts may find the answer to many problems by visiting 'the healthiest Island in the world' and he was referring to Prince Edward Island.

I'll give you a few paragraphs to indicate some of the reasons he quoted from writers whom he had read, but first a word about how it came to Charlottetown.

John Richard, Charlottetown, dropped into a London library when he was overseas with the Canadian Army Dental Corps. The story caught his attention and he brought it home with him when he came back to Canada. Mr. Richard was kind enough to dig it out of his files and pass it along to this column.

ONE OF THE most interesting angles to the story is that Murray wrote then that Prince Edward Island was "the only known white community outside of Russia which has been more than reproducing itself steadily for the last 50 years."

The secret Murray suggested then, "is hidden somewhere in the life and records of this astounding Island."

And how about this sentence, in the light of present day developments:

"For the last generation or so the birthrates of every Western country have been decreasing, and the decline in fertility is becoming more rapid."

'Children Grow Bigger On P.E.I.'

"THE ISLAND'S reputation is of long standing", wrote Murray. "A traveller writing about it in 1820 said The settlers generally live long and are exceedingly healthy. The children here thrive uncommonly in infancy, and in general are as big and stout at 12 months of age as those in Scotland at 15 and 18 months."

Murray also quoted Sir Andrew MacPhail - he came from Orwell in this province - "There is only one place in the world that I know of where positive health exists - Prince Edward Island."

Lord Geddes had referred in the House of Lords to a Dr. Enid Charles who had lived two months in this province "in an attempt to solve the mystery". She found that "there was no incentive to restrict the size of families in order to attain a higher standard of living."

DR. CHARLES suggested "fertility remained stable because its people were sure of adequate food and housing, and because the Island approximates to a classless society, isolated from disrupting influences."

Lord Geddes suggested "the soil is naturally fertilized, and the health of the soil is passed on to the human beings who live from it. . .

"The farming is mixed and has always been carried out in the traditional manner, not using large quantities of artificial fertilizers, but using muck and the products of the sea."

MURRAY ADDED that Island soil fertility had dropped, owing to too many corn crops near the end of the nineteenth century. "But the Islanders at once took steps to put back this lost heart by natural means. They dredged mussel mud from their bays and channels and applied it to the earth."

Adding that this development came about the time the decline in fertility was being noticed elsewhere, Murray suggested the coincidence was interesting and concluded:

"For Prince Edward Island holds some formula which the rest of us must obtain if man is not to face extinction among dying species."

Before I leave this interesting item, I want to note that the "too many corn crops" is the first time I ever heard that explanation for a drop in Island soil fertility. Murray must have got his crops mixed. It was oats that caused land fertility depreciation here in the period of which he was speaking.

Man On Headstone Tied With Chain

RAMSAY HARDY who came to Charlottetown from the Montrose area 12 years ago, told me a yarn about a Montrose man who was visiting a friend in the same district one stormy night and had to pass the old Presbyterian church on the way home.

There were heavy bursts of thunder and brilliant flashes of lightening, and the man was always afraid in such a storm. But his fear increased suddenly when he was passing the old cemetery and in the blaze of a lightening flash saw a man sitting on a headstone with a heavy chain tied around his waist.

Whipping his horse - it was long before the days of automobiles - the man fled for home just as fast as the horse would take him. The terror was so violent when he reached his own home that he jumped from the wagon, ran upstairs and scrambled into bed as quickly as possible.

The horse who was left hitched wandered into the field, where he enjoyed a good feed that must have helped to compensate for the fact he had been in harness for so long a period.

The "man with the chain" had stolen it and was taking it home. When he heard the sound of the horse and wagon approaching, he had been opposite the cemetery so he naturally bolted from the road to escape detection, even though he had to enter the cemetery.

Next day the Montrose man who had been so scared the night before, met the man he had seen in the cemetery, recognized him and the chain was recovered, Mr. Hardy recalled for me.

Windsor Bell Tells Old Car Story

OLD CAR stories are always popular, I have found, and J. Windsor Bell, Melville brought in an old car registration numbered 218 recently that was on the second car

bought by his father Malcolm Bell. The first car, he told me, carried registration No. 84 and that also included trucks. So there were few motor vehicles on the Island at that time.

The first Bell car was a Ford bought from Sam Kennedy, Charlottetown and “we had to get a petition signed by the neighbours to get the car home.” Price of the car was \$533.

Veteran mail courier, Fred Wotton had received permission through a similar petition to operate a car between Breadalbane and Victoria the previous year, so the Bells only had to get the petition signed by people between Crapaud and Melville, a comparatively short distance.

THERE WERE certain restrictions on days on which cars could operate. For a time cars could not operate on market days, for example. And they couldn't operate, Windsor tells me, on Sunday during church hours. Sunday evening hours from six to nine o'clock constituted one of the restricted periods, so that people with horse-drawn vehicles could get to church and home again without having to meet an automobile.

Those early Fords had the gasoline tank under the front seat, and there was space at the end of the tank for a gallon can that held cylinder oil.

They've always had horses on the Bell farm. They still have a pair of Clydesdale mares on the farm though they are used but little. One mare works on the turnip land at seeding and harrows them out in fall. She's idle the rest of the time.

Clydesdales For Few Generations

BREEDING OF good horses was an important phase of farm livestock work in the past and the Bells had their share. They have had the same breed of Clydesdales on the farm for two and possibly three generations.

Malcolm Bell sold a pair of 4-year old geldings once for \$400 and they sold a Goldfinder horse once to Imperial Oil at five or six years of age for \$300. And that was tops for a horse in those days. Indeed it would correspond to \$1,000 or more of present currency in purchasing value.

Getting back to the old car days for a minute, Windsor told me he met a woman once who drove the horse up a steep bank, tied the reins to a post and fled into a nearby field. “But I didn't blame her”, he said, “there were so many wild stories told about automobiles in those days”.

Centennial Essay Competition

SOME 70 entries were received in the Centennial Essay competitions and the hope is that winners will be announced by the end of this month, Committee Chairman Mrs. Eric Kipping tells me.