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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Bristol Store 100 years Old

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I WAS travelling in the Bristol area recently with Walter O'Brien when I discovered my gasoline tank was almost empty and I drove to the nearest place with a pump. That, I found, was the rural store operated by Sterling MacEwen of Bristol, and a most interesting chat ensued.

The building and the business must be more than 100 years old, Sterling told me. He has been running it 20 years. His father Walter MacEwen, and his uncle H.D. (Harvey) MacEwen, a one-time MLA, ran the business once. Will Picketts had a share in the business once, I was told.

But a man called "Bungy" MacDonald, ran it a long time ago, and he may have been the original owner, Sterling was told by the late John T. O'Brien who was Walter's father.

The store is much as it must have been 50 years ago or more. And that sent my thoughts, and my questions back over the years.

Molasses Sold In Big Puncheons

"DID YOU ever sell molasses in the big wooden barrels?" And he did sell molasses that way when he started to keep store 20 years ago.

I was surprised to learn that cake flour hasn't sold well in upwards of 10 years. He gave the last bag away about five years ago. The cake mixes became popular and the cake flour went out of style. The mixes have been enjoying an increasingly large sale in recent years. It's not difficult to recall when neither cake flour, nor cake mixes were sold. The ladies bought the regular flour, and they made their own cakes.

Go back a few more years and most people had their own flour from home-grown wheat. They still have that kind of flour in one part of the Island, at least. I'm thinking now of the Coleman mills and the people I know who grow their own wheat in the Western Prince area.

There is also a flour mill in Bedeque. The name of the operators in both places is Leard. That family name was associated with many milling operations in earlier days. When I was a boy I remember that there were mills at Westmoreland, and at Crapaud too, I believe, run by people of that name.

There are a few people in this area who grow their own wheat and get their flour ground for home use. I had a feed a few days ago of home-made bread, from flour ground from home-grown wheat. That was at the home of friends in Hazelbrook.

Sterling still sells some kerosene oil, though there are practically no lamps left, since rural electricity has been extended so extensively.

Warehouses Filled Each Autumn

“MY FATHER used to put in six to eight puncheons of molasses each autumn to supply his customers through the winter,” Sterling told me. And that reminds me of what Louis MacPherson told me at North Wiltshire last year.

We had been talking about the extensive business the MacLean Brothers people had been running in the period of 40 to 60 years ago. And Mr. MacPherson observed how they would fill their warehouse up with supplies in the fall that would last through the winter.

Now with powerful ice-breaking car ferries able to transport freight of all kinds across the Northumberland Strait any month in the year, it's difficult to realize what the situation was before the Borden-Tormentine service was started back in 1917.

There were some exceptions. The winter boats which docked at Georgetown did bring some freight. But for the most part, old timers tell me the coming of the ice barrier each winter shut the Island off from freight supplies. The stores at that time stocked up in the fall for the long winter ahead.

The puncheons of molasses were just a part of the bulky materials that choked warehouses of mercantile establishments all across the province, as the merchant's prepared for the winter's business.

Election – Anything Can Happen

THE ELECTION which will be held next Monday could prove to be one of the most interesting in many years. When Premier Walter Shaw announced the election late in April, I thought there would be no change.

So many leading Liberals in various parts of the province had the “we can't beat Shaw” idea that I could see nothing but defeat for the Liberals. After all, how can you win when you're convinced from the start that you'll be defeated?

In the last few days, however, I've talked to a number of veteran Conservative supporters and was amazed by their strong criticism – at times it was bitter – of their own party.

If the opinion voiced to me by the Conservatives to whom I talked are at all general, then there could indeed be a change. Anything can happen on Monday, I'm not sure what it may be.

Two features of this election campaign are unusual. More than ever before I find supporters of both parties are highly critical of the elaborate promises made by their respective leaders. On both sides of the political fence I find people who are angry because they feel party leaders “are trying to bribe them with completely impossible promises”. The words are not mine. They were used by people who talked to me in various localities.

Many people used considerably stronger language.

Never have I seen an election in which so many people on both sides think their party will be defeated.

“Legends Of Prince Edward Island”

“LEGENDS OF Prince Edward Island” is the title of an interesting little book written by F.H. (Frank) MacArthur of Charlottetown.

There are 28 stories in all and they range from Frank's version of the oft-told tale of the Ghostly bell ringing at St. James Presbyterian Church here more than 100 years ago, to The House Of Death.

They range from the folk lore of the Island, as illustrated by the St. James bell ringing, to the fanciful and completely fictional tales like "The House of Death", which is set at Cape Wolfe. The house, as Frank tells it, was built by a wealthy Frenchman, Perry Martill, and occupied for a time by his wife and their six children. But in the space of one year the family was tragically reduced to one person, Perry himself.

Finally a great storm destroyed the house, says the fictional story MacArthur writes. An old legend says that General James Wolfe came ashore at the cove which later bore his name, and in this book he visited the house of death before he sailed to Quebec where he won a deciding victory for the English, but lost his own life in the battle of the Plains of Abraham.

THERE'S A yarn about a Ghost that operated a mill near the home of Ellen (Mrs. George Dixon) who is known to Guardian readers as the lady who writes Ellen's Diary.

The Fairy Marriage at Cape Wolfe is another of the interesting stories. And there's a "Sleepy Hollow" yarn which is located near Malpeque, instead of Sleepy Hollow where Rip Van Winkle slept for 20 years in the story our old school books carried.

Many older readers heard stories of people who have been buried alive in the days that are gone. Frank has one of these in his collection. There's even a "Fairy Marriage" at Cape Wolfe which seems to be a favorite spot with the man who wrote "Legends of Prince Edward Island".

Joe Petrie Looked On Bright Side

ON MANY occasions I've successfully resisted the desire to say something about a friend, or an acquaintance who has died. Since my last column we've lost at this office a man I met first when I went to The Patriot as Sports Editor back in November, 1932. His name is Joe Petrie.

I've talked with Joe many times in our 32 years together and I never heard him complain. My long-time friend often came to my desk in recent years to talk about stories in this column. He was particularly fond of ghost stories, and we had many interesting chats about how some of the interesting old tales originated, or how they came first to my attention.

Our talks were always cheerful, because Joe always looked on the bright side. Indeed it wasn't until after his death that I knew this kindly man had real troubles of his own. One of his fellow workmen in the Job Printing Shop tells me that for two years Joe's asthma did not allow him to lay down to sleep, like the rest of us do. No, he had to sit in a chair through the long hours of the night.

There were other problems, but Joe Petrie kept them to himself. He was a man who liked to spread cheer, to talk about the humorous, or the pleasant things, to keep his own problems far in the background. What finer tribute could one pay to any person. It's the tribute Joe Petrie earned during the many times he came to talk with me. The world would be a much happier place if there were more Joe Petries in it.