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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Dog Team Delivery Of Mail Is Recalled

By NEIL A. MATHESON

IT'S BEEN several years now since we had a winter that brought enough snow banks to bother us, but people who are older recall winters where storms lasted six days – it would snow three days, and drift three days.

An item from Brian Dunning of our Summerside bureau brings to mind the winter of 1923, a period of weather I recall clearly, when trains were stuck for a week, people were stormstayed at places where they had intended only a short visit and nature really had her way and treated many badly.

There's a bit of whimsical humor, I suggest, in a newspaper clipping from that year, but there is a lot of truth in it also. It came to me from Mr. Dunning.

Tunnels Through Snowbanks

THE ITEM runs like this:

A Miscouche correspondent writes: "On Saturday after the big storm a number of us were digging tunnels through the banks of a road, and incidentally shoveling snow off the telephone lines, so they wouldn't break when the banks settled when suddenly in the distance we were surprised to see what ultimately proved to be a dog team coming at a lively rate.

"We remembered reading of Scott's and Shackleton's wonderful dash to the South Pole, and of the dash toward the North Pole by Peary, Greeley, Franklyn and others, and were wondering if another expedition was getting underway. The idea was that possibly this small portion had strayed during the heavy wintry storms.

"By the way this portion was dashing here and there, we wondered whether he was dashing for any one of the "North, South, East or West poles."

"However he dashed to where we were working, dashed past us, dashed over a snowbank and stopped in the near vicinity of where a small mail box had been seen a few days before. Then he stood for a moment looking down over where the orchard had been and towards the kitchen door, waving a newspaper and a letter.

"This was the long awaited mail driver, Rooney, for our genial and obliging mail driver was sorely troubled about getting the mail to his large clientele (the roads were impossible for a horse) and he, knowing that many girls were expecting letters from their best fellows, and vice versa, consulted his friend Joe who suggested the dog-sled method.

"But Rooney demurred because of his overweight, then Joe who was young, active and fleet of foot, volunteered to do the job. So the mail on this long route was all delivered by dark that same day.

Ask 'Jo Jerry'

ASKED IF HE was tired that evening, Joe replied "No, I am ready for another trip tomorrow if it is needed."

"As there are quite a number of mail carriers in the province who have the same troubles we have here, I suggest that when the thermometer registers away below zero, and the winds blow 50 miles an hour and the banks are so high that you will never be able to get over them with a horse, just bring your troubles to "Jo Jerry" at Miscouche and ask him how it's done."

"Jo Jerry" was apparently Joseph J. Gaudet, if that is incorrect please let me know.

I well remember those 1923 wintry storms; indeed it was a column I wrote on that winter that started the appearance of this column in its present form.

Walnuts At Stanley Bridge

I WAS HANDED a couple of walnuts at the Birch Court meeting of the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture recently, and was told they grew on the Island.

The walnut tree was planted in 1937 – it was Coronation year for King George VI, and tree planting was encouraged. And now it is producing several baskets of walnuts a year for John Thomas Reid, a man who lives in the Stanley Bridge area.

The walnuts are large, apparently as large as the ones we purchase commercially, and their successful growth here makes me wonder just what potential our soil, and climate may have for growing products which we do not now have.

I have several instances of Island people growing unusual fruit items. I'll write about them as soon as I can get the facts together.

A letter from A.D. Smith, Sudbury, Mass, paints a vivid picture of some of our life here in other years.

Writing me earlier this year, he saw a reference to the old Market Building here on Market Square, and that caused him to examine a journal by a Mr. Jones who visited here in July 1870. And here are some of the Jones comments:

Market At Charlottetown

"MARKET AT Charlottetown is neat and clean, women attending with baskets, especially butter, that is covered with snow white napkins. Butter is 13 cents a pound in pints. Veal hindquarters are four cents a pound; the forequarters are two and one half cents.

Raspberries are nine cents a quart

No showy dresses are worn by women.

A remarkable hat is worn by a gentleman, a large sombrero worn over another hat, like the pictures of Santa Anna.

Jones wrote of "two policemen turning away a cow that was trespassing on the Provincial Building grounds".

JONES WROTE also of girls of Charlottetown coming down to the wharf to see the steamer St. Laurence arrive.

Writing apparently of abundance of fish stocks, Jones said in part:

“June 1886 W. Churchill of Rustico, P.E.I. caught 10,000 mackerel in two days.”
Speaking of oysters, Jones wrote “At the mouths of rivers on P.E.I. there are beds of oysters, decayed, 16 feet in depth, 300 rods in length and 100 rods wide.”

In 1865 Jones wrote, the legislature of the province passed laws to regulate the oyster industries.

Mr. Smith steps in here to recall how farmers would haul “mussel mud”, as it was called, over long distances.

Hay And Potato Crops

“SAM ACORN, Primrose,” he said, “hailed many loads of the stuff and he used to have wonderful crops of hay and potatoes. Sam was actively engaged in farming until after his 90th birthday.”

Mr. Smith adds “Some early Island notes which were taken from a book published in London in 1758 appear in the pages of Mr. Jones’s journal:

“The Island of St. John (that’s us) is said to be visited every seven years by swarms of locusts, or field mice alternatively, never together; after they ravage the land they precipitate themselves into the sea.”

The story calls for two observations on my part. The first is the story of plagues of locusts or mice every seven years, seems farfetched, though there is one apparently authentic story of a plague of mice.