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ACROSS THE ISLAND

'Tell Me Wanderer' Philip Sellick Story

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POMEROY MURRAY, Breadalbane has a voice recording made 49 years ago of a man who must have earned the distinction of being one of this province's greatest naturalists. In a few days time his nephew Lester Sellick of Halifax has a book coming out "Tell Me Wanderer" which tells the fascinating story of Philip Sellick

Philip Sellick was born in Fredericton, P.E.I. away back in 1830. Keenly interested in animals from the time he was a small boy, he started raising a litter of mice he had tamed. He was heart-broken, his nephew tells me when the family cat made short work of the pets.

Lester paid me a most interesting visit back in late summer, and we spent several hours as I plied him with questions about the man who became one of the best known wild-animal trappers and trainers of his time.

Though he was a son of P.E.I., he spent most of his adult life in New Brunswick, apparently. And he was a familiar figure at exhibitions and smaller fairs and circuses with his menageries of wild animals which he took from the province's forest.

As a young lad Philip entered the blacksmith shop of Paul Mabey, Charlottetown and later set up a blacksmith shop at Pleasant Valley.

Could Temper Metals Skillfully

EARLY HE earned a reputation for his outstanding ability to temper metals. It was so good that he fashioned and tempered his own tuning forks which he used to "get the pitch" for singing, his favorite hobby. He made wild animal traps, and various devices for controlling those animals.

His singing classes were conducted at Charlottetown and in Pleasant Valley. I was interested in the tone quality of the recording he made for Pomeroy Murray at Breadalbane on an old Edison cylinder in 1917. What I heard was a tape recording taken from Mr. Murray's recording, but the tone quality still impressed me. I hadn't dreamed that they could do voice recording a half century ago.

First Man To Breed Moose?

SELLICK CLAIMED to have been the first man in the world to breed moose in captivity. Once Philip caught a moose many miles in the woods and built a raft to float the animal down a stream to civilization.

How he got the huge animal on to the raft is a part of the fascinating story of Philip Sellick. Nobody knows the details, so far as I have been able to learn, but he did work out a plan of using heavy ropes which he tied to stout trees, and gradually worked the

big animal towards the goal he had in mind. I'm paraphrasing now what his nephew, Lester Sellick, told me during his visit to my home.

I'm looking forward to reading the book "Tell Me Wanderer" for Lester had done a tremendous amount of research. During our visit, he played for me excerpts of tape recordings he had made of talks with elderly residents of Irishtown, New Brunswick where Philip Sellick established his headquarters for his wild animals.

Complete Lack Of Fear

LACK OF fear is the key to handling wild animals, many animal authorities claim. Philip Sellick had that key. Here are a few excerpts from a manuscript Lester Sellick left with me. The words are Lester's own:

"Bears could be ugly as one of Philip's hired men found out when he persisted in teasing the animal. Cousin Florence Sellick (Now Mrs. Persinger of Kelowna, B.C.) describes the incident: "It was a Sunday morning and Uncle Philip had gone to care for his moose in the park a quarter-mile distant. His man was feeding the animals and made the fatal mistake of turning his back on the bear, who broke his chain and attacked the man. Aunt Agnes, hearing his screams for help, let loose the bulldog, who went to the rescue.

Uncle Philip heard the screams for help and the roaring of the bear and lost no time in getting there. The dog had fought off the bear but was lying on the ground bleeding and dying. Uncle quietly approached the bear, talking to him and staring him in the eyes. He finally led him back to the den and turned his attention to the badly lacerated man. With his homemade liniment and aunt's good cooking they restored him to health. Someone wrote verses about the incident in the Moncton paper.

This was seventy years ago; we lived a quarter mile from Uncle's home at Irishtown." Philip was so annoyed over the loss of his best dog that he grabbed his Winchester rifle and dispatched the bear on the spot.

Sellick Led A Charmed Life

ONE DAY he himself was nearly the victim of a cross bear which he was showing to some tourists. Suddenly the bear lashed out and sank his claws in his master's trousers. Warning the onlookers to be silent he "outstared" the bear, and one by one, released the claws until only one remained in position. Sensing that he was about to lose his prize, the angry beast began to tug on the one remaining claw, but luckily the fabric gave way and once again Philip's charmed life was saved.

He had another close call one day when setting a trap. Hearing a rustle behind him, he turned round to see a black bear almost breathing down his neck. On this occasion he shuffled his feet in addition to his staring technique. The bear backed away and Philip scurried away rather than trust his luck too far. "A bear likes to box" he used to say, "but give me a good hardwood stake and I can feint a blow, get him to miss, and then give it to him on the nose!"

PHILIP'S GREATEST achievements were with moose. So great was the control over even a bull moose that he, time and time again, demonstrated how one of these powerful beasts could be trained to draw a specially-built sulky. Newspapers of the day

carried pictures of "Sellick and His Moose". The sulky was a large one, sturdily built with strong shafts and special harness. Mrs. Persinger remembers it well. "It was out in the yard under some trees; Myrtle and I used to play horse with it."

Philip Sellick loved the out of doors. He liked the forests in particular. He had always said he would like to die in the forest, when that time came.

Lester tells me that Philip did die in the forest. He was found under a tree. He was still in the posture of leaning back against the tree when searchers found the veteran to whom the great-out-of-doors had meant so much in his lifetime.

I'm looking forward to reading "Tell Me Wanderer". If Lester Sellick can write a story as well as he can tell it, the book should be really interesting.