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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Post Office In 1869 Called 'Pest House'

By NEIL A. MATHESON

FROM THE FILES of "The Islander" away back in 1869 comes a rather unusual charge about what was then one of Charlottetown's public buildings.

"The Post Office", charged "The Islander" is generally denounced as a most unhealthy place.

"If the government will send the Health Officer to examine and report on it, they will be enlightened as to one or two causes of its being a pest house", The Islander commented.

"There is under the floor of the building in which the Post Office is situated, a very few feet from it, a pit over which is a privy which was established during the administration of Colonel Ready.

"It was the only establishment of its kind attached to the building when it was the "Court House" and "Legislative Assembly" long before William Cooper and his escheat friends first described the peace of the Island," the old Islander comment observes.

On Market Square

I HAVE NO IDEA what is meant by the reference to William Cooper but my friend, Mrs. Mary Brehaut, tells me the building referred to was located on what was long noted as the Market Square, and indeed there was a Market Building there up until the time it was destroyed by fire in the 1950's.

The Islander took a very dim view of the "privy" being located under that building. Listen to this:

"From thence, until the present time – except during the interval between the opening of the Colonial Building and the establishment of the Post Office in the old Court House – this privy has been used.

"The design of removing any part of the accumulation, so far as we are aware, never entered the minds of any one of the authorities.

Alongside Public Well

"THE PUBLIC WELL, some thirty feet distant, being several feet longer than the pit, served to drain off a portion, but the greater part remains; evolving pernicious gases, which in our opinion have already ruined the health of several, and destroyed the lives of more than one of the officials of the Post Office, and which will assuredly kill them all if they remain within its influences."

That ends the reference in "The Islander" to what is called the Pest House and the presence of the thing that made it that.

Talk of our modern pollution, how about that story of a public building of just over 100 years ago.

The Islander item was dated 1869.

Water Danger Ignored

WHAT SEEMS to me unusual, and I feel many readers will agree, is the fact the presence of the privy under the floor of the building, with the ensuing gases, etc., was condemned. But the reference to the public well being so close to it, and draining off some of the accumulation, as the item put it, passed without any criticism, except what the readers might imply and charge on their own account.

This Islander item was printed on February 12, but another, 14 days later pointed to the fact that "a vacant lot opposite the Province Building would serve as a suitable site".

And that's exactly where a new building was erected, and it stood there until it was demolished, prior to the erection of the Confederation Memorial Building which covers the entire area of the old Market Building, the Library and the Post Office to which I have just referred.

Incidentally, the erection of the Confederation Centre also covered the parking spaces that were available on the old square. Their removal must have often been mourned by downtown merchants. Particularly those whose places of business front on the parking space area which has now been removed.