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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Souris Doctor Visited Again

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I REVISITED recently my friend A. A. MacDonald, MD. CM.LD in Souris and learned something more about his interesting career. I also visited A. J. MacCormack, St Margaret's whose legs the doctor sewed back on 32 years ago. I was surprised to know that "A.J.", as he is called, went to Prince of Wales College with me back in the early twenties.

He was just four years old on that summer day in 1910 when he locked his little sister in the house, and went out to stroll in the field where his father was cutting hay with a horse-drawn mower. He also recalled for me there had been "just a bit of flesh at the back" holding the feet and lower parts of his legs after the mower knife had sliced through them. "Dr. Gus" believes that even the Achilles tendon had been nicked by the blade, though he cannot be sure more than half a century later.

"A.J." also recalled for me that he asked his mother "Why is everyone crying?" The child couldn't understand the extent of the disaster that had struck the McCormack home.

I ASKED Dr. Gus - that's what everyone calls him and it's a term of respect and endearment - "how in the world did you ever come to tackle that unprecedented job of surgery without anyone to help you?"

The answer, I think, is typical of this warm-hearted man who has done so many kind and human things in his 60 years of practice. "I couldn't do anything else, Neil", he told me, as he explained that the mother had met him outside, before he had seen the boy, and "she made me promise I wouldn't take them (the legs) off". Having made the promise, he just had to try, though he came back two days later, thinking he would have to take them off. "But there was heat in them, the blood was circulating" he recalled for me as we chatted in his living room beside the big television set fellow townsmen, and other admirers gave him earlier this year, as they helped him celebrate the diamond jubilee of his practice.

Splints From Rain Barrel Staves

DR. GUS recalls that he smashed a barrel that was under the eave of the roof to catch rain water - the soft water was used on wash days as there were no fancy detergents or soap powders then - sawed several stakes in two, and used them for splints to hold the bones straight, after he had completed a surgery job that required several hours.

Catgut was used to sew the tendons and most other stitching was done with silk thread he had bought from a Souris store. The job wasn't perfect as Mr. MacCormack

was always lame, but I submit it was a miracle of surgery in those far off days, considering the job was performed alone. Modern hospital experts talk in glowing terms of limbs that are attached - it has been done several times, I believe - with teams of surgeons, nurses and many specialists in the most completely equipped hospitals.

BUT "A. J." told me that he walked one and one-half miles to school each day through the ten grades. Then he taught for more than 20 years, 1926-49, after his normal training at PWC before a cold in the legs added so much to the discomfort that had been developing, that he finally decided he could no longer be on his feet as much as the teaching job demanded.

That was the highlight of the doctor's career - he was 36 at the time - but there have been many other unusual performances. A neighbour, Roy MacLean, cut off his thumb in his basement workshop. It was "down in the shavings" when Dr. Gus arrived but it was also "put back on".

My friend was at an afternoon wedding reception when I called recently and he told me a lady there had asked him if he remembered the time he had put her thumb back on. I'm not sure, but I think she was the one whose thumb had been bitten off by a horse, for there were several of those replaced thumb incidents.

#### Paling Fence, Soft Grass Used

IN THE early days of cars he found an accident victim at Rollo Bay, several miles away, with a broken arm. The doctor pulled several boards from a paling fence for splints, pulled "soft natural grass" to cushion the bones, tied it with string and sent the man to a Charlottetown hospital for a complete examination.

There's one other thing I didn't tell you before. Dr. Gus was almost equally famous for his skill in confinement cases. "I never lost a mother", he told me and many mothers were dying in the early years of his practice.

I hope my friend will forgive me, for he insisted that I should not say too much about his work, if I ever wrote about him again. But his story is so unusual I just couldn't keep it to myself.

DR. GUS has many souvenirs, but I believe the most highly prized is a Lustre pitcher the MacCormacks gave him after the 1910 operation. It was more than one hundred years old then and had been an heirloom in the family. "I'm not a rich man", Dr. MacDonald told me. "But there isn't enough money in the bank downtown to buy that now".

But there are many others. An old table from St Andrew's College - it preceded St. Dunstan's University - graces his dining room. It's probably more than 150 years old. Bill Ledwell has just told me that part of Rochford Square School was formerly a part of St. Andrew's College that was close to Mt. Stewart. And listen to this.

#### 300 Horses Hauled Old Building

"PEOPLE FROM many miles around gathered together 300 horses, with the necessary chains and equipment and towed the building to Charlottetown. It went

through the ice at Apple Tree wharf,” Bill tells me. And you can imagine the job those people must have had to get the huge building moving again.

Staff Photographer Bill Taylor tells me that Dr. Gus was born on the property where the old St. Andrew’s College was located.

A heavy bronze mortar and pestle, a tiny lancet - it was used to bleed people in ancient medicine and is still almost indescribably sharp - and a pair of tiny eye glasses are souvenirs of his great grand uncle, Dr. Roderick J. MacDonald who came from Scotland in 1772 to be the first English speaking doctor on the Island.

A heavy gold watch was owned by Bishop Andrew MacDonald, another forbear, who was the province’s second Roman Catholic Bishop. There’s a candle stick holder and snuffer, another family heirloom, and many others.

#### Handkerchief From Sir John A.

ONE OF the most unusual , perhaps, is a fine handkerchief used by Sir John A. MacDonald, the man who led Canada into Confederation and one of its most colorful figures. It has Sir John’s signature embroidered on it. This souvenir, came to Dr. Gus through the family of Hon. J. C. Pope who was prominent in the Island’s entry into Confederation, and was a one-time minister of marine and fisheries in Sir John A’s cabinet.

I want to tell you of one more souvenir. It’s a small secretary’s table or desk which he bought from a man who had been a patient and friend for many years. Liking the design of the little piece of furniture, Dr. Gus found the man asked only one dollar. He had bought it for around 70 cents - I forget the exact amount - at sale. Knowing it was worth much more, Dr. Gus paid the dollar and told his friend “you keep it, but leave it to me in your will”, then added, “in the meantime if you or your wife ever need medical attention, call on me and neither one of you will ever get a bill.”

WHEN HE got the table he had a man clean it and found it is made of beautiful mahogany. That too is a souvenir he regards as precious. “There are things that are worth much more than money”, he said as he told me of several attempts that have been made to buy the ? item for big prices.

There are many other stories about his career - he told me some of them - but they are for his memoirs which he is writing. They should make most interesting reading.