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ACROSS THE ISLAND

People's Theatre Days Recalled By Singer

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I TALKED here recently to Ralph Bragg, who operates a general insurance business in Milo, Me., who sang here for The People's Theatre 56 and 57 years ago.

An old newspaper clipping says:

"The People's Theatre has always been fortunate in securing first class vocalists, many of them coming back for return engagements, but we think the reception accorded Ralph Bragg last night eclipsed anything in the history of this popular house.

When he sang the old song "When You and I were young Maggie" the applause was loud and long and he had to reappear and sing the chorus over and over again, the old paper said.

His specialty "Gee but it's great to meet your friends in old Charlottetown" was equally popular, the clipping noted.

Another clipping said "He has a splendid tenor voice, clear and strong, and his enunciation is perfect. He possesses that quality of voice which fills a large hall, while maintaining a marvelous sweetness unmarred by the volume which is necessary to make words distinct in a large building like the People Theatre."

The theatre was operated then by Mrs. Robert Hogg, mother of the late W. G. Hogg and grandmother of Dr. W. G. Hogg, Charlottetown.

Board Was \$4.00 A Week

MR. BRAGG told me that he also sang in Saint John in the Keith Circuit theatres. He received \$25.00 a week and paid four dollars a week for board. He boarded with a Mrs. Larter and had a single room.

She laid a grand table and was awfully good to him. There was always a bottle of milk in his room by the window.

Friends of his here at the time included Frank Currie, Ernest Foster and Victor Coyle. It was Vernon Currie, son of Frank, who told me about Mr. Bragg.

A romantic touch to the Bragg story is that he visited here almost 10 years ago, found that Mr. Coyle had died, went to see his widow and married her a year later. Mrs. Bragg was here with her husband, though I did not see her.

It was compulsory to have some sort of stage act between the reels of film in those days, Mr. Bragg told me. The flickery films were so hard on the eyes that it was against the law to run two in succession.

Admission Was 10 Cents

PRICE OF admission here was 10 cents then, it was five cents in the Keith theatres in Saint John, Mr. Bragg told me. And the show ran steadily from three in the afternoon to 11 o'clock at night.

Dr. Hogg tells me his grandmother wrote all of her own advertising copy. She also published a magazine which appeared each year at Christmas time, he added. It was called "The Chimes".

The People's Theatre referred to in the old clipping was called The Empire in the last few years of its existence. Prior to that it had been called The Strand. Dr. Hogg believes that at one time it had been called "Wonderland", though he is not sure.

I have a vivid recollection of the old theatre that was located in the Market Building, the destruction of which paved the way for the erection of the Confederation Building Complex.

It was in the early years of the "Hungry Thirties". The P.E.I. Potato Growers' Association marketed most of the Island's seed potatoes, and some table as well, at the time.

The meeting to deal with the problem was exceedingly rough. Just as I entered the back of the theatre a disgusted grower was belaboring the officials and directors of the association with a sharp and venomous tongue. The man had a good command of the English language and he was using most of it.

I was a young newspaperman at the time, and I wondered what in the world the chairman could possibly say to this outburst of criticism which was one of the sharpest I have ever heard.

Skill And Polish

THE CHAIRMAN was J.J. Trainor, Bedford and I shall never forget the skill and polish of this man.

Calling the critic by name, Mr. Trainor exclaimed with vigor and apparent warmth of feeling "I thank you, sir, for having a strong opinion, and having the courage to express it. Are there some other speakers?"

Well that apparently took the fight out of the critics, for the storm abated noticeably at that point, and the association survived.

I believe that was the time that the association called in the provincial government to guarantee their bonds to the tune of \$100,000, a request which was granted.

Tears Down Barn At 85

STAFFER WALTER MCINTYRE has given me a note that says Nathan Bears, 85, of Brooklyn tore down this summer a barn that had been standing for 100 years. He thought the old building might blow down in a storm, as a fierce wind last winter had torn a piece off the roof.

He also thought that should anyone else take over the farm – Mr. Bear no longer farms – they would probably want to build a new barn.

Mr. Bears tore down the barn himself – it was 24 feet by 40 feet – except for some help from a neighbor with the heavy rafters.

The barn had been built by his father, Thomas Bears, and his grandfather.

Thomas Bears had operated the first saw mill in the area, Mr. McIntyre's information indicates.

See picture elsewhere in this edition.

Copper Tray Ploughed Up

GEORGE CAMPBELL, St. Peter's Road brought me last week a heavy copper tray that was ploughed out of the ground some thirty years ago on the farm of Joe Donahue of Cornwall. The property had been owned then by John Donahue, Joe's father.

The tray is some 12 inches long and nine and one-half inches wide. It has a Chinese design on it and bears the stamp "China" on the back. A ring had been uncovered at the same time.

There never has been any indication of how the tray and ring got into the ground on the Donahue farm, though.

Mammoth Feeder Sale

I FORGOT to mention it in my farm column this week, but the first sale of all feeder cattle held in this province is being held by Ralph K. Adams, O'Leary on Friday afternoon of this week. Mr. Adams is hoping for several hundred animals, or more.