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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Wild Bill Cody Born In P.E.I.?

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BUFFALO BILL Cody was born in this province on a farm owned at the time by Dick Creed of Sturgeon. Apparently the date was 1846, for that is the birth date attributed by American publications to the man who became a famous U.S. frontiersman.

The U.S. publications report that William Frederick Cody, as he was christened, was born on a Scott County farm in Iowa. They give the date as February 26, 1846.

The bold statement in my first paragraph comes as the result of information I have gleaned from a number of reliable sources. I think immediately of George Leard, Souris, who has long been a devoted student of Island history. Another man just as well known is James (Big Jim) Pendergast of Charlottetown, formerly of Kensington. And one of the most convincing bits of proof comes from John Cairns, Dunstaffnage who is also interested in digging up unusual happenings from the Island's past.

MR. LEARD told me he talked in 1949 with Hector MacKay, Desable who told him Buffalo Bill Cody was born on the farm owned at the time by Dick Creed at Sturgeon.

Mr. MacKay has said that the boy left P.E.I. with his parents, when he was 18 months. He said his birth was registered in New York State, that's why there was no proof of Cody's Island birth, Mr. MacKay told Mr. Leard.

Mr. MacKay said also that he had talked to Murdock MacLeod of Bonshaw who once talked to Will Cody, and Cody had told Mr. MacLeod that he had been born on Prince Edward Island. Both Mr. MacKay and Mr. Stewart (?) have died since the time referred to here.

Mr. Pendergast talked some 12 years ago with a man called "Twitter" Johnson who had worked in a circus at Boston with Buffalo Bill. Cody had told Johnson, "I was born on Prince Edward Island."

From Weekly Examiner Files

MR. LEARD also showed me an extract from "The Weekly Examiner" of Friday, June 3, 1887 which said:

"Will Cody was born at Hope River, P.E.I., a son of Patrick Cody who went to Ohio."

Well that's quite the assortment of statements on Cody's birthplace, but here's the one John Cairns gave me and it is, perhaps, the most sensational of them all; certainly it has more of the ring of truth than most of the others. Indeed John has two documents, both of them interesting. He loaned them to me for this column.

The most interesting came from Rev. R.J. Westaway, DD and his letter was dated from Calgary, Alberta on August 31, 1959. I'm giving you the excerpts from Rev. Dr. Westaway's letter as he wrote it to Mr. Cairns seven years ago. Here it is:

"This is the story I heard from the lips of the late James Creed of Albion Bay, Kings County, P.E.I. Mr. Creed took me over an indentation on his father's farm, located some

500 yards north of the old dwelling place of his father's house. His father's name also was James Creed. The Creed family settled in P.E.I. just after the American revolutionary war – they were United Empire Loyalists.

“James Creed, Jr. pointed to the indentation as the cellar of the house in which William Cody was born. He also told me that two weeks after his birth, young Cody's parents moved to Ohio. They borrowed the price of the tickets from James Creed, Sr.”

If I may depart from the direct quotation for a minute, Dr. Westaway said that a road that led off the Montague and Sturgeon road was known as ‘The Cody Road, or lane’. The Cody family was Scotch, he added.

But listen to this from Rev. Dr. Westaway in his own words:

“Mr. Creed told me that Buffalo Bill wrote about his own life and mentioned that he was born in P.E.I. The Americans did not care for his autobiography, so this book may be hard to find.”

Before I leave Dr. Westaway, it's interesting to note he explained in his letter “My grandfather, Richard Westaway, and his brother John were shipbuilders. They built square riggers and traded on the Seven Seas. The last ship they built, ‘The Westaway’, was launched in 1883 at Albion Bay. It was owned and sailed by a giant of a man, Captain James Westaway.”

Continuing about the Cody tale, Rev. Dr. Westaway told Mr. Cairns “there is a Richard Westaway (Creed?) who lives at Albion Bay. He may be able to give you some history, etc.”

Earlier Settlers Told Cody Story

MR CAIRNS went to see this Richard Creed who died only a few years ago, and received from him a written note which Mr. Cairns kindly passed on to me.

Mr. Creed said in part “I have every reason to believe that William Cody (Wild Bill) was born at Albion, P.E.I. about 1840, and his family migrated to the United States when he was still a young child.”

There's a spot known as “Cody's swamp” and there are many tales told of strange things being seen at night as pedestrians pass that way.

All of the earlier settlers often told about the Cody family living in Albion. “When they used to hear of William's wild exploits, they would at once recall about his family having lived in this part of the country” concluded Mr. Creed who was writing his letter in Albion.

With that I leave, temporarily at least, the saga of Wild Bill Cody being born in this province.

I have talked to many, many people about this tale. Many have helped me get the story I have told here. Only yesterday I talked to Rev. F.P. Mullaly, who retired from the Priesthood only last week, after a pastorate of many years in Sturgeon parish, close to the area of which I've been talking. The records of the Sturgeon Roman Catholic church only go back to 1867, Father Mullaly told me. Earlier records were destroyed by fire, I understand.

I want to thank all of those who have helped me on this interesting story, but a special “thank-you” goes to John Cairns. He's the man who first told me about the idea of Cody being born in this province.

Message From 'Rebe' Scantlebury

MRS. WALLIE SCANTLEBURY, or 'Rebe' as I know her, has sent a message through a member of her family saying her reading of "Across The Island" does help her as she is recuperating in Scotland from an accident which fractured her pelvis, among other things.

Mrs. Scantlebury, I understand, is in hospital at the following address: "Victoria Infirmary, Ward 4, Langside, Glasgow, Scotland". I don't know how long Rebe has to stay there, but how about some of you friends of her sending along a card or an air mail letter.

The Scantleburys were on another of their world trips when the unfortunate accident occurred.