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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Centennial Essays Recall Old Events

By NEIL A. MATHESON

FOR TODAY'S COLUMN I have some more excerpts from essays written in 1964 – that was the Centennial of the Charlottetown conference on Confederation – on Life in the province 100 years ago, or “When I was very young”. The latter were written by grandparents who were at least 70 years of age.

As I explained previously I was one of the judges, and I typed some notes which I found interesting so I could pass them on to column readers.

Ira Brown recalled a day when a neighbor came to their home on Sunday, March 31, 1895 to ask if Ira and his sister could come to pick potatoes Monday which was April 1.

They picked the spuds and found them to be in good condition. Snow had fallen early the previous fall and the snow cover remained through the winter, apparently, for the tubers were still good in early spring.

The pickers got 25 cents each. Now they get up to eight dollars a day, I was told on the potato tour with the South African mission last week.

Mr. Brown recalled geese selling at 50 cents each, beef at six to 12 cents per pound and eggs at 10 cents a dozen.

Lobsters ‘On The Rocks’

MRS. GORDON MACMILLAN, Cornwall said in 1964: “More than 100 years ago it was possible for grandfather to gather lobsters from the rocks near his farm and toss them into his cart. This was at Tryon and there were many bar clams and the smaller, darker river clams.

“I heard mother tell of the voyage from Dumfries, Scotland when she was five years old. The trip lasted 28 days and she was never sick once. Grandfather worked every daylight hour.”

Mrs. Catherine McNally, Bedford wrote that men would get \$4.00 an acre for stumping the land and piling the brush to be burned.

“Father cut logs to build his house. He made mortar and placed it between logs to keep them together.

Some people papered over the logs, but well-off people nailed boards over them. Women would walk to Charlottetown to sell produce. They would get 30 cents for a chicken, 50 cents for a goose and 18 to 21 cents for butter.

Children had to go to school through the hot summer. The holidays were in the spring and fall and they had to help with the work on the farm on those occasions.

When women would walk a long distance they would take off their shoes, and walk on their bare feet to save the shoes from wearing out so quickly.

Another lady wrote that teachers got \$40 supplement and it paid their board. In the busiest farming time the teacher would say “If it's fine tomorrow there will be no school. I have to help at the cropping,” or the harvesting, depending on whether the time of the year was spring or fall.

Mrs. McNally said in her essay in 1964 she had knit 62 pairs of mittens in the past year, a number of pairs of socks, had made six quilts, and was hooking a mat” when she wrote her essay. Mrs. McNally is still with us.

Farm Machinery Bill Was Small

I LIKE the reference to the volume of farm machinery used in former years. Mrs. J.E. Dingwell, North Lake recalled that in the early days the outlay for farm machinery was small. All that was used on the average farm was one sod plow, a set of harrows, a hay mower, a cart and a horse-drawn truck.

Floors of planed boards were kept white by use of white sand which was found in swamps.

“I never saw father in a store-bought suit”, she said, and that was general of that time. Most people wore suits made of “home spun” as the home-crafted suits, etc. were called.

I liked also the statement “No self-respecting hen would lay in winter time.” No hen would lay in winter when I was a youngster, so far as the farm territory in our Rose Valley vicinity was concerned. The hens were not fed to lay in winter then, and most of them were not warmly housed to encourage cold-weather production.

Our women folk now regard wash day as quite the chore, but back in those days it was a real chore, “the only wash tub mother ever had,” Mrs. McNally wrote, “was a round wooden tub and wooden wash board. Many a blistered wrist was earned on its surface.”

There were some particularly interesting paragraphs in the essay by Mrs. Sue M. Lowther, Carleton Siding:

“When my mother baked bread she tested the heat of the oven by putting her arm in the oven while she counted ‘Twelve’,” she said.

Stage Coach Days Recalled

HER HOME was on the old Post Road where the stage coach travelled three times per week from Summerside to Charlottetown. The stage driver was a Mr. Foy and he changed horses along the route. I don’t believe the changing place was identified.

And here’s an interesting item, particularly for those young people who are too lazy even to walk to the edge of town to try to hitch a ride:

“When sacrament was held at DeSable our next-door neighbours’ daughters got up early, helped milk the cows, then walked to DeSable to take 11 o’clock sacrament, then walked back again, a distance of 30 miles.”

The older folk went in the carts, the older men and women who were unable to walk.

Often in school, Mrs. Lowther recalled, “we would have to keep on our coats, scarves and caps until noon, before the building would get warm.”

At Carleton her father was telegraph operator for the Anglo-American Telegraph Company. “In winter when the steamers were stuck in the ice and the old ice-boats crossed from Cape Traverse to Cape Tormentine, the office was moved down to the boat house at Cape Traverse”, she wrote.

