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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Entertainment Need Led To Tall Tales

By NEIL A. MATHESON

BACK IN the days before radio and television people had to make their own fun. When a bunch would gather at a neighbor's house for a visit, good story tellers were naturally in demand. This factor, I suggest, was responsible for many of the tall tales people of earlier generations used to tell.

The so called "tall tales" were blasted lies, if you want to be perfectly frank, but another view is that they were told by amateur entertainers who were trying to top some other story already told.

Remember the story Fred Acorn, Bridgetown told me in hospital about the man who rode from Souris to the Dundas area with a horse and cart. The rain was so heavy that the man's dog swam all the way home, yet his horse was travelling so fast, he didn't get a drop on him, sitting on the front of the cart, though he had to dump the cart box several times to get the water out of it.

The man's nickname was "Crowbene", at least that's the phonetic spelling, and his right name was MacDonald. Fred told me that, and Reg MacDonald, Souris told me the same thing when he dropped in for a chat recently.

Tale Is Told In Holland

CORNELIUS ATEN of Springfield is one of the many good farm people who have come here from the Netherlands. He met me at Monday night's farm meeting and told me they used to tell the same story in Holland, only the Dutch talked of a man and his wife in a row boat.

As Aten tells it, the story said the man and his wife were rowing one day when he noticed the rain storm approaching them rapidly from the rear. His wife was sitting at the rear of the boat, but her husband told her to move to the front.

We talk here of fast horses in such an instance. The Netherlands story says the husband was a powerful man on the oars. Well he rowed so fast that not a drop of rain ever did fall on the man, or on his wife. But the rain had hit the rear of the boat so hard that the wife was bailing furiously in front of her husband to keep the boat from swamping.

This column has several tall stories. Reg MacDonald told me another tall tale that "Crowbene" used to tell. It seems he lived close to the shore and often went down to fish eels through the ice, when they wanted a change of diet at home.

This Eel Was Really Long

ONE DAY Crowbene – that was the man's nickname – went down to fish some eels through the ice. Using a sort of "gaff" he speared an eel and started to haul him up. Soon, though, the man found the eel was most unusually long. So he took what he

thought would keep the family eating for a few days, with the idea of coming back for the rest of the eel later.

This eel was really long, though and the man kept pulling up pieces of it until the ice finally disappeared in the spring.

Here's another tall tale, told by a man who apparently would have been an asset at any gathering in the days that are gone.

Long Snake Crossing Road

GEORGE GUNN, French Village – that's perhaps nine miles from Mt. Stewart - was driving to the village one morning, with the idea of catching the train to Charlottetown.

The man was in the area of the swamp on the Anderson Road when a big snake started to cross the road. Mr. Gunn naturally had to wait until the snake had crossed the road, he didn't want to drive his vehicle across the reptile.

But the snake was terribly long, so he took a long time to get across. When the man was finally able to drive along he didn't reach Mount Stewart until late afternoon.

I was telling the story this week to a man in the Rehab Centre – it's in the Provincial Sanatorium building – and he said "that reminds me of the man who was cutting in the woods one day and he sat down to rest.

The man sat on a log, or he thought it was a log. He changed his mind quickly though when "the log" started to move. He had sat down on a huge snake.

Women's Editors Like Long Skirts

BOBBY SUTHERLAND, City brought me a couple of copies of "The CBC Recorder of 1907. It carried pictures of students and the ladies had long skirts which swept the floor, and their necks were covered almost to their ears.

I showed the pictures to our women's editors, Gail Slade and Barbara MacAndrew, and both told me they thought they'd like to wear "such colorful costumes".

The CBC, incidentally, is not the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It was the Charlottetown Business College. When I was a young newspaperman, it was run by L.B. Miller who always took a kind and fatherly interest in me. For a few years after Mr. Miller's death, I believe the college was run by Reta (Mrs. Bobby) Sutherland.

Basketball Team Unbeaten

I'LL BE COMING back to items from the CBC Recorder later, but one interesting item is the fact that the 1907-08 basketball team was never defeated.

Fred Rice was centre, Hammond Steele and Fred Howatt were guards; A.W. (Art) Gaudet and Ernest Rice were guards – Rice was also team captain. Parker Hooper who later held the Maritime record for the 440-yard run for many years was spare forward.

W.C. Louson was president of the YMCA at that time and L.W. Archibald was secretary.

One issue of the Recorder said that stenography had been taught as far back as the year 155 A.D., and that was 1,813 years ago.

Speaking of old College magazines, I have one of the P.W.C. Observer of 1896.