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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Lot 16 Communion Set Dates Back To 1821

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I was driving last week with Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Smith of Summerside when Mr. Smith happened to mention a silver communion set which his grandfather, Robert Milligan, brought out from Scotland in 1821. Of course I asked further questions and we went directly to the Central Lot 16 United Church where the historic and beautiful set of silverware is kept and treasured. It is the United Church now but it was a Presbyterian Church in the time of Mr. Smith's grandfather.

I took a picture of the set with Mr. Smith in it, to represent the historic association that dates back to his grandfather. The picture will be found on this page.

First Presbytery In Province

The card on the set says that the "communion set was purchased in Scotland by Robert Milligan and presented to the Richmond Bay parish, which at that time extended from Traveller's Rest to Freeland Lot 11. That's in the Portage area, if you think of the Western Road, though Freeland is close to the Northern coast. I point this out to indicate how great an area the Richmond Bay parish covered.

THE CARD notes also that "Robert Milligan built the first Presbyterian Church in Lot 16, on the site of the present church.

"He was one of the elders inducted when the first Presbytery in Prince Edward Island was constituted and held in Lot 16 on October 11, 1821."

My friend, Mr. Smith, tells me that the old communion set is considered to be of such historic value that the United Church museum in Toronto wanted it. But the Tyne Valley people understandably refused to give it up.

The initials "R.B." are engraved on the old set. It consists of the large "decanter" – I believe that's the right name – the two goblets, or chalices from which the communion wine was drunk, and the silver tray for the bread.

Edgar Milligan Was Grandson

I KNOW that there are many descendants of Robert Milligan in the province. You'll understand if I do not try to identify them. I mention Mr. Smith because it was through his kindness that I found the old set; and many Islanders knew Edgar Milligan, another grandson, who was a well known sportsman and agriculturist at Northam prior to his untimely death in a highway accident some years ago in the United States.

I think perhaps Edgar Smith may have only been half serious when he told me the way the Milligan family got their name. Edgar said that one of the family got lost once in the woods in the Old Country in the long ago, and every effort he made to find his own

area only resulted in his arriving back at the same mill. So it was “mill again” so far as his efforts were concerned “so they called them ‘Milligans’”, the genial Summerside man told me.

Mr. Smith is the veteran of the Klondike gold rush days I talked about in this column several years ago.

Incidentally it was in Central Lot 16 that the first Presbytery of Prince Edward Island was constituted. The date was October 11, 1821.

“Included in its membership,” the plaque on the stone states, “were Reverends John Keir, moderator; Robert Douglas, clerk; William MacGregor and Mr. Edward Ramsay, elders, men whose labors then and subsequently laid sure foundations for their church on this Island and bore rich fruit for God in distant lands.”

The stone was unveiled at a ceremony on October 11, 1936. The present church on the site was built in 1876 but the original building was believed to be of logs. It was located in Belmont Lot 16, an old note supplied to me by Mrs. Smith indicates.

The name Rev. John Keir reminds me that on a trip to the Malpeque area several weeks ago I visited an old home which housed a Presbyterian seminar “for the eastern provinces” and Rev. John Keir was the “principal professor” an old reference told me.

I’ll have more about this later.

The Master’s Wife Reprints

THIS WEEK I received a letter from Mrs. Dorothy Lindsay, Montreal who tells me she is trying to have her father’s book reprinted.

Mrs. Lindsay had heard that I was interested in receiving a copy of “The Master’s Wife”, which was written by Sir Andrew MacPhail, a distinguished Islander who wrote entertainingly, and with the knowledge of contemporary living, of the customs and ways of life which I often try to recall in this column.

I hope that Mrs. Lindsay succeeds in the effort, and I shall let you know when the book is available.

Librarian Douglas Boylan will get a kick out of this story which concerns “The Master’s Wife” and my desire to locate a copy.

I think it was about two years ago that I found two copies – they looked like new – of the book in the library here, when it was housed in the old Queen Square School building. They were stored away in a book case in an inner room to which I was given access as I was seeking information for an agricultural history I was writing for the 1964 Canadian Plowing Championship booklet.

I picked up a copy and quickly thumbed through the pages and was sorely tempted to slip it under my coat. However I managed to resist the temptation, so now Mrs. Lindsay, I’m doubly pleased that you are going to make copies of this interesting book available to the public.

Full Of Interesting Folklore

“THE MASTER’S Wife” – is full of interesting folk lore of Sir Andrew’s own time – he died in 1939, as I recall it.

He writes, for example, of the belief in witches that existed at that time. For example – this is from memory – Sir Andrew told of a certain woman in the community whose appearance coming up the lane from the road would cause “The Master’s Wife – she was Sir Andrew’s mother – to hide the churn in the cellar, and take the youngest child to a secret room.”

I’m not sure that my quotes are literally correct, but they tell what Sir Andrew was recalling for his readers.

Interesting Old Church Bell

EARLIER THIS year I examined with interest the old bell in the yard of the Sir Andrew MacPhail Park at Orwell. Mrs. Lindsay told me about it in her letter.

On its surface is the Latin inscription “Vivas Voca, Mortuos Planga” which in English says “I Call the Living, I Bewail the Dead”.

On it also are these names:

William MacPhail 1802-1852, William MacPhail 1830-1905, William MacPhail 1859-1893.

The bell was cast in Nova Scotia, Mrs. Lindsay writes, “and was given to the church in Valleyfield by my father and his brothers, in memory of their grandfather, the original settler; their father and their oldest brother.

“When it was hung in the steeple and rung for the first time, it was found to be cracked. So it was taken down and replaced by an identical one which still hangs in the Valleyfield Church steeple and rings over the lovely countryside and the graveyard where so many of the family are buried. I am told that its tone is still true and clear.

So the old bell, which I saw earlier this summer in the old MacPhail home yard, was the one that hung for a short time in the Valleyfield church. It was cast probably around 1906 or 1908, Mrs. Lindsay tells me.