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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Horses Use Bay Ice As Late As May 24

By NEIL A. MATHESON

THE MOST unusual story of the year 1816, when there was no summer, has stirred some old memories, apparently and Mrs. Harold Laird, Lockwood Cottage, Kensington mailed me an interesting query.

"Years ago," Mrs. Laird recalls, "I was at William H. Campbell's place in Irishtown, and he told me about a very late spring. He had been shooting on the ice on Richmond Bay on May 24th, and had seen six sleighs crossing the ice on the Bay, keeping a long distance apart.

"A few days later Mrs. Johnstone told me, she crossed North River ice to Charlottetown in a wagon the same day and date. She had been visiting her sister who was the late Leslie MacEwen's mother. Both were reliable persons."

MRS. JOHNSTONE said the weather that year had changed very quickly and farmers were on the land the first part of June. This reminds me of a story Frank MacKinnon of the Guardian staff told me last week, about a year when the farmers did not get on the land until June 4. He's trying to find the year and I shall pass it on if he gets it.

In the meantime can anyone recall the year about which Mrs. Laird is writing? It might have been the same year about which Frank is talking, and it may have been a different one.

Mrs. Laird adds a humorous bit about Mrs. Johnstone going to Summerside that year of the late spring, and seeing an American who had bought a great many horses, expecting to get them across the Strait on the first boat, "and was he swearing", Mrs. Johnstone had observed.

"Others have told me", Mrs. Laird adds, "about going to vote at an election, and crossing the ice about May 20."

Mrs. Laird tells me that she has called Oliver Campbell, the son of the late William H. Campbell, and he can remember his father telling the story of the late ice, but not the year. John S. Cousins, William MacNeill and Bernard Paynter had been with his father, on the ice, apparently.

My friend, Rev. Donald Nicholson, St. John's Presbyterian church, Belfast also recalls stories of such a late spring.

Dougald MacKinnon Writes

THE MAIL is unusually interesting this week. I have a letter from my friend Dougald MacKinnon, Mt. Buchanan, who was one of the best loved members of the legislature during his term of service which started in 1935 and ended in 1959 when he retired. He would have been a member yet had he stayed in the game. Mr. MacKinnon held several portfolios in various cabinets during his latter years of service.

"I was just reading the Guardian and your historic column re things of the past, when I noted items regarding our steamship coastal navigation, etc. They brought to my mind

the old familiar scenes of my childhood, as we watched the different ships, both sail and steam, go by.

“Our home overlooked a very long stretch of ‘The Straits’ and provided us with a clear view, particularly with a good pair of ‘glasses’ to look at them.” They watched “the Pictou boats as we called them”. Mr. MacKinnon recalls and he notes particularly “The Princess, which served as a call to dinner. As she reached a certain land mark at 11:30 a.m. it was ‘drop your hoe and go to dinner’.”

Heather Bell’s Sinking Recalled

“BUT AMONG all the ones you names,” Dougald observes, “the one that stands out most clearly was the Heather Belle, which you said plied at one time between Pictou, Murray Harbor, Georgetown, Souris, etc. I was not aware that she ever had a regular route there but I remember when she was on the Orwell-Victoria route, three days, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. She went to Halliday’s, Orwell, China Point, every second week to Vernon.

“But what stays most clearly in my mind,” Mr. MacKinnon writes, “is the night in late November when she was returning to Charlottetown in a snowstorm, as she had stayed overnight in Orwell Monday and Tuesday and was returning to Charlottetown late Wednesday.

“The Heather Belle was in collision with the ‘Fastnet’, I think, of the Black Diamond line which ran to Boston via Halifax, Mr. MacKinnon believes.

“The Heather Belle was told to try to make the wharf at Charlottetown, but she went down in 13 fathoms, (96 feet) of water just opposite the block house, and her bones still lie there.”

“She was carrying two passengers. One was John MacDonald of Orwell and the other Capt. John J. Murchison of carferry fame, who lived only a stone’s throw from my home and often related the tale to me”, Mr. MacKinnon concludes his most interesting letter.

Old Pump As Tourist Attraction

ALLISON MACLEOD of Charlottetown took me a few days ago to a spot on Prince Street, opposite St. Paul’s Anglican Church where an old well served the public of this city for many years.

If you start at Grafton Street and walk the sidewalk on the West side of Prince Street you will hit the spot just by the sidewalk.

Mr. MacLeod recalls that the old well, it was about (?) feet deep, was bricked up in splendid fashion, he never did see a better job.

Interesting, too, is Mr. MacLeod’s recollection that the old well was re-opened one dry summer, it could have been in the 1920’s though he is not sure, to provide an extra source of water in case of a fire. The reservoir for Charlottetown then was so low that men could walk on the bottom of it and scarcely get their feet wet, said one story which could have been exaggerated slightly.

Mr. MacLeod’s suggestion is that the well should be reopened – it is directly under the sidewalk – and used as a tourist attraction. A protective fence could be built around

it and the sidewalk could be rerouted so that the pedestrians would walk on either side of the well.

I agree with Mr. MacLeod that the old well would be a tourist attraction. It would also recall for present and future generations the fact that people once depended on such wells for their water. It was sold, I understand, for one cent a bucket.