

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Island Ghost Yarns, 'Forerunners' Told

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Provincial - Farm Editor

I DIDN'T see the particular Gazette program, but Bill Ledwell tells me that Lloyd MacInnis interviewed recently a former Cumberland County, N.S. woman who has seen several things before they had happened. The old Scots used to call them "forerunners", and I have heard many of these tales. I've used several of them in this column already, but Richard (Dick) Dougan, Charlottetown told me recently of an unusual forerunner he saw in Georgetown when he was still a young boy.

Dick - now a retired locomotive engineer - and a companion, Joe Fairchild, went one evening to visit a Mrs. Donovan, whose widowed mother, Mrs. Sherry, was then living with her daughter Kate Sherry.

When they reached the house they saw to their surprise that all of the doors were opened, though nobody appeared to be home. But they saw when they looked through the rooms, a tall, slight man about six feet, two inches tall, and the boys immediately recognized that he was a complete stranger to them.

THE BOYS left and they met Mrs. Donovan on their way home. "Your doors are all open, Mrs. Donovan", Dick told the woman who retorted, "That cannot be right, I locked them when I left." And sure enough the doors were all locked when they arrived back at the house.

It was then that Dick told the lady about seeing the tall man with the dark suit, a black bow tie and old fashioned carpet slippers. Immediately Mrs. Donovan replied "that's my father, I'm sure he is the man you are describing, but he died 24 years ago."

The boys went to their homes that night and it was only natural if their sleep was disturbed by dreams, after the unusual experience.

But early next morning, about four o'clock, the Dougan's were awakened by sharp knocking on their door. It was Kate Sherry who asked "will some one please go for the priest right away, mother is very sick."

The old lady died some 15 minutes after the priest arrived, and this unusual forerunner tale ends rather dramatically with the revelation that the place where the boys saw the ghost of Mr. Sherry that night "was the exact spot" where his widow dropped to the floor as she was suddenly stricken with her fatal illness.

This Comes From Caledonia

CHESTER MARTIN, Caledonia told me recently that he had seen a forerunner when he was a young boy back in the days of the First Great War. His father was overseas at the time - it was in February 1917 if my memory serves me correctly - and Chester, his mother and her other children were upstairs at night when suddenly they became aware

of a light of unearthly brightness coming through the floor register - they were used in many homes to allow the heat from the kitchen to reach the upstairs area.

That's almost fifty years ago but Chester recalls vividly that they could see the kitchen ablaze with the white light, when they peered down through the narrow openings from above. There was also crackling, as though heavy paper was being handled.

The grandfather slept in a room off the kitchen and when the young boy went downstairs and asked him if he had seen this unusual light, the old man said "Don't you worry about that son, that's for me." Grandfather Martin apparently recognized the light as a forerunner of his own death, and he did die some weeks later. The crackling of wrapping paper was heard again as the paper covering was being stripped from the coffin, my friend told me.

Hartsville Ghost Story Is Colorful

THIS COLORFUL yarn falls into the category of ghost stories and it was told by my cousin Neil Nicholson, Hartsville who died only a few years ago.

It concerns a Hartsville man who was driving along the road one evening and found that he was being pursued closely by a pig. The man had a fast driving horse but he couldn't go fast enough to shake the pig, an animal not normally associated with speed of movement.

Losing his patience, the man stopped the horse, got out of the wagon and struck the pig on the head with his cane. Imagine his complete amazement when the pig suddenly changed into a woman before his very eyes. The surprise was even greater when he found she was a woman whom he recognized. That was on a Friday night and the man saw the woman in the church at Hartsville on the following Sabbath morning. And clearly evident on her forehead, was the mark of the blow inflicted by his cane in the roadside rendezvous.

MR. NICHOLSON never told who the people were but he said "you could see the smoke from the chimney of the house where the woman lived, if you stood on the high hill on which the church stands."

I told this story to a dinner meeting of the Maritime Angus cattle breeders association at Halifax last November, and a young Island woman whose home was in that general area told Mrs. Matheson "next time I go to Hartsville I am going to look around and see what house chimneys are visible from the top of that hill."

Though I knew Mr. Nicholson well during the later years of his life, I had not heard the story before he died, so I had no chance to discuss it with him. I don't know, of course, but I like to think that he would have trusted me enough to tell me the names, even though I would have been unable to reveal them.

Ghost Story Tips Are Sought

I HAVE many other similar yarns that I picked up around the province, but they'll come in later columns. I would appreciate hearing about any good ghost or forerunner stories, though. I have enough in my files for possibly three or four more columns, but generally speaking this type of story is the most difficult to get.

There are enough general stories in my files to keep me going for at least six months, though there is a great deal of research still to be done on most of them, but I have found that so many of the people who told really good ghost stories in the past, have died - I am told that in many communities - and I am anxious to get as many of the old tales as possible.

Many people appear to like this type of story and I regard them as a valuable part of the Island's rich folk lore that should be preserved.

Century Farms Competition

REPLYING TO queries from readers, the closing date for the Century Farms Competition entries is March 1, and the entry should be sent to the Century Farms Committee, P.O. Box 546. The farm must be in active operation, have been in the same name for at least 100 years, farms in the name of a widow will qualify.

Required are the name of the present owner-operator, the previous owner-operators, the approximate date on which the farm came into the possession of the family, the location of the farm and the mailing address, the size of farm and type of farming operation carried on, such as mixed farming, potato farming, dairying etc.