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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Horse Racing Seems Very Popular Topic

By NEIL A. MATHESON

HORSE RACING continues to be one of the most popular topics I have ever discussed, and that's saying a great deal, because I have had some terrific reaction from many subjects in "Across The Island".

Late last week Hilbert MacNevin, Charlottetown – he lived in Southport for some years back around 1949 – told me a track had operated in "The Brae" which was where he was born. That's not far from Coleman where the Leard family have operated a flour "rolling mill" – they still do – for many years.

He recalls that A.J. Mathieson, who operated a drug store, and one other man from that general area had automobiles and used to take passengers around the track twice for five cents.

Joseph Acorn, who lives now in Charlottetown dropped in this week to tell me of several tracks. One was operated at Hermitage by George Gay. It would be around 1890, he said, and that's approximately correct. A track on the Pisquid Road was operated by Joseph Fraser, and Mr. Acorn thinks it was called the "Prairie Track" at the time, though he is not sure of that.

And there was a track operated on the hill on the Charlottetown side of Acorn's Mills at Pownal, once, he added.

Horse racing tracks were as thick then as dance halls are today, Mr. Acorn observed.

A LETTER this week from Frank H. Callbeck, 289 Church Street, Summerside brought a whole group of tracks. At Tignish, he recalls, Dr. Christopher's brother ran a track. I had this one in an earlier column.

There were two other tracks in the Tignish area, Mr. Callbeck tells me; one was operated by H. Dawson and another was run by Dougald MacCarthy.

"This year" Mr. Callbeck told me, "Boyd Bernard and Johnny Doyle got the measurements from me to build a track, which I think they did."

Three Tracks At Elmsdale

AT ELMSDALE, Mr. Callbeck continues, "John H. Coughlin had one, Henry Matthews had another. Harry O'Brien also had a track there before he moved to Alberton, if I am not mistaken," Mr. Callbeck added. If there are any veteran residents in Elmsdale, perhaps they would let me know if that indeed is correct.

Leo Praught had one at Riverside, Vernon – I believe I have had that one. Charlie Crossman had one at Cape Traverse, that one also may have been listed in a previous column, for I remember a letter from Col. Ulric Dawson, and several others near that area.

I mentioned in my first horse racing track column a track at Kensington, but Mr. Callbeck tells me there were three tracks there. Tyndall Semple owned one, Myron MacArthur had another and a third was owned by George Brookins. Mr. Callbeck observes that it "was a good one".

There never was any race held on the latter track, but “Robert Humphrey does all his training on it, as do some others around Kensington.”

Christy Budlong Recalled

I BELIEVE that Mr. Brookins owned “Christy Budlong” when she was one of the best trotting mares in the Maritimes. She was bred by the late Jim Shaw, Brudenell – at least she was foaled in his barn. I recall visiting the Shaw’s – this was back in late August of 1939 – and seeing the cute little baby foal in the big kitchen, behind the range where she was kept warm.

I’ve told this story, but I’m going to repeat it here.

Mr. Shaw’s wife, Christine, was a nurse and she kept applying mustard plasters, the good old remedy for many things, on the chest of the pretty little filly. Finally Christie came around and she lived to become one of the best known trotting mares of her time in these parts. As you’ve probably guessed, the mare was called after Christine.

Many’s the mustard plaster my mother applied to my chest. The only disagreeable thing I remember about them was the clammy feeling they produced.

Allie Cutcliffe, a man I first met in Fredericton where he grew up, now of Charlottetown told me of a track “Mount Tom” or “Mount Thom”, I’m not sure which. It was on the road between New Glasgow and Wheatley River, and operated a very long time ago.

I’m wondering if anyone can tell me more about this one.

I’m hoping to put the names of all of the old tracks together in some future column. My guess, and it is only a guess, is that I must have 50 or more of them to date. I have a feeling that there are quite a few more, and I am hoping for some from further letters

First ‘Stock Farm’ Herd

A FEW days ago I was talking to the man who brought the first Holstein herd to Falconwood Farm, and he told me that Mr. Justice R. R. Bell’s grandfather had brought a herd of Milking Shorthorns to the farm there from England many years previously.

I talked this week to my long-time friend, Judge Bell, and found his grandfather, Francis Bell, came out from Plymouth, England in 1825 and lived here until his death in 1907.

I don’t know when the farm there was started, but Meecham’s Atlas indicates that Mr. Bell was manager, or superintendent of the farm in 1880.

It was known then as the “Stock Farm” and I recall my father’s first cousin, John D. Matheson, had worked on the “Stock Farm” as I often heard it called in my youth. This man was the father of William Matheson, Rose Valley and Mrs. Katie Court and Mrs. Dena Doucette of Charlottetown.

JUDGE BELL tells me that his grandfather used to make trips back to the Old Country, that he brought out pure bred cattle, and Clydesdale horses among other things, for farmers in the province.

In the early days of the Stock Farm the progeny of the cattle were sold to the farmers of the province. An auction was held annually in each of the three counties, Judge Bell told me, so the people of the province generally would have an opportunity to purchase

good stock. This information came from Judge Bell who also has one of the best bred Scotch (Beef) Shorthorn herds in the Maritimes.

I'd like to know what prices were paid then for pure bred cattle. I don't know that, but I do have prices on the Holsteins that were brought from Ontario in 1920 to stock the Falconwood Farm as it was called then. I'll be writing about it in the Farm Column soon.

I did find, though, that the man "J.F.L." about whom I asked, was the late J. Frank Lafferty. To the men who called to tell me of errors in some of the railway-building dates, I'll tell the readers about them when I return to the interesting subject of the old railway days.