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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Provincial Museum Progress Seen Slow

By NEIL A. MATHESON
Provincial-Farm Editor

A SCRAP BOOK loaned me by Alf Egan, Charlottetown indicates that the P.E.I. Historical Society members were seeking provincial recognition, and some form of assistance back in March of 1882. I suggest that now, 78 years later, the society is still seeking a measure of co-operation, and they have made but little progress so far as that is concerned.

That statement is not completely correct, general statements of that kind seldom are. But I heard the society discuss last week – belatedly I have become a member – the problem of getting space for the Provincial Museum that will house and display the many articles they have which tell of early Island history.

There was the understanding – it was almost a conviction – that the long expected museum would be housed in the Confederation Complex on Queen Square when it was completed. Now, apparently, that will not be done.

THE GENERAL idea, I'm told, reliably, is to get away from static museum exhibits. The idea of placing old exhibits in one room, or building, and leaving them there does not comply with the modern idea of changing, or travelling exhibitions that attract visitors year after year.

I have no particular quarrel with this idea. I realize that people in charge of art galleries, of museums, or any other type of exhibit you want to name have to keep their display interesting. And modern thinking suggests exhibits that remain practically constant for year after year do not supply that continued interest.

I'll buy that idea, in so far as it applies to places where competition from other display centres warrants that attitude. But I still insist we must provide a spot to house or store the historical items of our province. So far as a place to store those items is concerned, I suggest we may be just as far away from getting it as Charles Palmer – he was the 1882 president – and his society were almost 80 years ago.

Items That Depict Island History

MY IDEA of a collection of museum pieces would include the items that were used previously in this province, but have gone out of use. I would like to think my children, and generations yet unborn would be able to walk into a provincial museum at any future date and see there examples of the tools and equipment men and women used when this province began. I'd like to have available for them examples of tools and equipment that have gone out of common usage.

R.C. (Bob) Parent has started an agricultural museum in Birch Court at the Experimental Farm. He has several items there which I didn't even know existed, and I have made a wider study of those things than most people. I'm wondering what will happen to this display when Bob retires – and that's coming soon.

In case anybody is wondering, this is not a blast against anyone connected with the Confederation Center, or anyone else for that matter. If a static exhibit of museum items is not appealing enough to most visitors, let's accept that fact. If this means that such a museum doesn't fit in the Centre, let's find a spot for it somewhere else.

I've wondered since the Confederation Complex began just how a completely provincial museum for example, could be housed in what is a national structure. The complex was built by Canada, not by us, it has national responsibilities, not provincial ones.

Rich Heritage – Historical Background

I'M RAMBLING a lot, and I don't apologize for it. I may be doing little else in spots than thinking out loud, or in print. But the one hard core of my contention is that this province definitely should have a place to store the historical items of our own rich heritage, of our pioneer background.

Unfortunately many of those items have already gone and are unavailable. Much of that can be charged to the inexcusable indifference of the people that are responsible, the people who refused to make a place available to save those items.

I've been told there is not room enough in the Confederation Complex to house the sort of exhibit I have in mind. I believe it's the type of exhibit the historical society people have in mind. But that shouldn't mean the museum idea has to die again. I'm thinking of the static museum where hundreds of items will be kept for coming generations.

I saw in the Fort Beausejour museum in New Brunswick one of the ice-boats Island people used in other years to cross the Northumberland Strait in winter and carry the mails. They were discontinued only when the Borden-Tormentine ferry service started in 1917. We don't have any of those boats here, so far as I know. I had a tip recently that there are one or two at Beach Grove Inn but a long-time friend, Gordon White, deputy minister of highways tells me this is not the case. The boats are too large, too cumbersome, he explained.

Would Recall Stage Coach Days

SOMEWHERE IN the Eastern Prince County area, I am told there is a part of an old stage coach that once ran to Charlottetown. There are scores of other items I think of. Sleigh bells were in every farm stable when I was a youngster. Generations now being born will probably never see a string of those bells. There were bells fastened to the shaft, beautifully toned, there were the sets of four bells that were carried high on the horse's back – we had a set at home. I have no idea what became of them. There was also the colorful and attractive set of chimes that were carried on the pad of the harness.

Mrs. W.M. (Mary) Brehaut, 7 Grafton Street showed me so many antiques this week that I couldn't begin to describe them. These are her own personal possessions. If she ever meets a wealthy person who appreciates antique articles – and most of them are of unusual interest – she should receive a large amount of money for them. Also in Mrs. Brehaut's possession is a list of scores of interesting items that are owned by people in

the province. They were a part of the exhibits she staged on perhaps a half dozen occasions back in the 1940's and the 1950's, I believe.

Rev. Alan MacDonald, SDU lectured last week to the Historical Society on Captain John MacDonald of Glenaladale. The muster role of the Loyal Independent Caledonia Company of Volunteers 1793 is available. Captain MacDonald was the senior officer, available information indicates.

'The Saints Rejoice And So Do I'

THERE'S A bit of humor in some of them. A piece of a broken tombstone has this inscription:

"Here lies Jemima (Blank) aged 79 years, whose body within this tomb doth rest; has joined the Army of the Blest. The Lord has taken her to the skies, the saints rejoice and so do I."

Another old item indicates there was a circulating library here in 1789.

There is a chair and step ladder, used to climb into a four-poster bed. There's a lady's Meerschaum pipe.

There's an old spinning wheel with a holder on it, to hold the lady's pipe. There's a copy of a cable that arrived on "the new Atlantic cable". I haven't the date.

There are many, many items, most of them are of unusual appeal to people interested in antiques. My personal concern is for the preservation of items with a distinctly Island flavor.

If a spot can be found in the Complex, or in the old Province Building which is now legally a part of the Complex, that's fine with me. That decision rests with the people who know more about the situation than I do at this stage.

If there is not enough room there, there should be space made available in some other place. It might be a new building created for the purpose, or in some other spot that can be made suitable.

To many people antiques represent little more than a pile of junk. To the people who appreciate the historical significance the preservation of those physical links with the past is most valuable.

If a provincial museum location is not made available I suggest it will mean there are not enough people who appreciate that value.

THERE ARE some good museums in the province. Edward Easton, Georgetown has been developing one for several years now. He has perhaps, the best collection of historical items I have seen. Mrs. William Oulton is developing an interesting one at Alberton. There is the Acadian museum at Miscouche. There's another at Cabot Park, and there's the extensive collection the active Montague museum people have in their beautiful town.

But we have no provincial museum here in the province's capital. It's time we did something about that