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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Story Of St. Peter's Really Well Done

By NEIL A. MATHESON

"It is no time for mirth and laughter,
In the cold grey dawn of the morning after"

I found the lines in Chester Pratt's booklet he has written in such interesting fashion on his favorite village of St. Peter's Bay.

Anyone who has ever imbibed too freely and unwisely on a festive weekend will understand those lines with devastating clarity. Indeed several have assured me of that since I received Mr. Pratt's booklet some time ago

I have often thought of boyhood days when the "Basket Social" – some called them "Pie Socials" – were an interesting and intimate part of rural community life.

Chester writes in more flowery language than I do in this column, but I think my St. Peter's friend catches the spirit of those far away days with some of the same nostalgic memories that are shared by myself, and indeed by many who remember that era.

Home-Spun Entertainment Recalled

MR. PRATT also recalls the home-made entertainment of those days which were before the advent of radio, not to mention the comparative new comer Television.

Here is Mr. Pratt on the entertainment:

"About 1895 a building was erected by Lestock Anderson, which served as a theatre upstairs, and a sample room below where travelling agents could open their trunks and display their wares.

"Here in the little playhouse which seated about 300 people, the churches put on plays with sometimes as many as three acts.

"The intermissions offered such entertainment as songs, step dancing and fiddling."

And here's the reference I like best of all. Perhaps it is because I cannot recall any plays in Rose Valley in my young days, but I do remember well the next Pratt reference"

'Basket Socials' Are Recalled

FOLLOWING THE entertainment at those early times when "it was customary to consider leisure as an emolument of a hard day's work, a basket social was standard."

"It was the custom for practically all ladies of the village, old and young, married or single, irrespective of church affiliation, to bring a basket bedecked with tissue paper of all colors of the rainbow, and cut into flowers and other patterns, filled with sweets and goodies of many kinds; sometimes a chicken or a big slice of ham."

Mr. Pratt writes "there were no sandwiches; these were an innovation of a much later era."

The swain, married or single, watched for his girl's, or his wife's basket. Or perhaps, and not too seldom, quips this interesting writer, "the man may have watched for someone else's basket."

If the swain was “too keen on the basket, the rest of the men recognizing his anxiety would club together to bid the particular basket up to the then astronomical sum of \$10, or even more.

Got Lady’s Company Too

THE SWAIN’S concern arose from the fact that it was arranged for the buyer of the basket to sit with the lady donor, and together eat the contents, with tea or coffee served by the church.

After discussing the legendary Father Gillis of St. Peter’s and his successful efforts to stage good plays and get the very most out of the actors on the stage, the St. Peter’s veteran observes:

“These players of the past have long since left the stage in life’s sometimes grim struggle and now rest from their labor in the ‘Isles of the blessed’.

“May we say here, that in acting ability and portrayal of a character, it is our opinion that those players of the long ago, in the little village of St. Peter’s, masterminded and directed by the most energetic priest we have ever known, far surpassed in realism the efforts of the much vaunted Toronto Canadian cast, that we of late are asked to endure on television.”

A Really Good Story

CHESTER PRATT is a really good story teller. How about this one:

Dr. Roddy MacDonald was the “beloved Dr. Roddy” to thousands when he devoted 70 years, or more, to practice in his own community. He was knighted by the Pope, and was in his 103rd year when he died. He was practicing medicine after he was 100. It’s of this grand old man that Mr. Pratt writes in the following lines.

“Perhaps an amusing event in the career of this remarkable man will bear telling. He never did refuse a call no matter what the roads or weather conditions, if it were at all possible. This rule of his life was, like all others, subject to exception. The one exception that we have ever known him to allow was in the case of a lady customer, shall we say.

“This woman had a phenomenal susceptibility to pregnancy, but with little or no pecuniary reciprocation. The doctor had already delivered a large family for this prolific lady and was getting pretty tired of being called out in the middle of the night, perhaps in the middle of a winter blizzard, with no remuneration, so he decided that when the next call came . . . he would pass it over to Dr. R. D. McLaughlan who had taken up practice in the village shortly after Dr. Roddy started.

Call From Well-To-Do Farmer

“ONE DAY he reached a call from the home of a well-to-do farmer in Rollo Bay, about 14 miles distant.

“Hurry up Colin dear’, he said to his eldest son, Colin, then about 12 years old, ‘Hitch the mare quickly, I have to go to Rollo Bay on a call, a new, and well-off patient.’ Colin dutifully and quickly complied.

“The doctor arrived at the fine homestead in genial humor. When he had washed and warmed his hands he asked the housewife ‘Where is the patient?’ He was shown into a bedroom off the kitchen, and there curled up on the bed was our little female, whose redundant capacity for reproduction had never contributed one cent to the devoted obstetrician, and who had chosen to visit a well off relative in anticipation of this annual event.

“How in H—I did you get here?’ said the exasperated doctor just before he went to work and delivered yet another child to the non-paying patient.”

There are other stories, almost equally good in Chester Pratt’s booklet “A Brief History of St. Peter’s Bay”. I am sure many readers would enjoy reading it at first hand. Indeed I am tempted to use at least one more of his stories in this column at a future date.

Permissiveness Is ‘Old Hat’

THE RULES for rearing children are changing. Permissiveness is old hat. Discipline, that once dirty word, has come back into style.

What started out as a good idea – Permissiveness – got carried to a ridiculous extreme. The child has to learn to contain impulses and feelings.

I like that last sentence. I know that grown-ups have to learn to contain their feelings. How are they going to do it unless they got at least a bit of it when they were young.

This column is starting differently. That last paragraph is mine, the rest comes from The Sunday Bulletin of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from the “Women Today” section of all things.

The paper came to the Matheson home when it was used to provide padding in a gift box that came from Jack and Betty Crelling – Betty being my daughter.

I’ll not pursue the subject farther. I just note that the short reference makes an interesting note.