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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Sir John A.'s Brother Lived Near Ch'town?

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I'VE HEARD of a man writing a story with "tongue in cheek" but my tongue is almost through my cheek, as I tell you the story of Hugh MacDonald, whose father John MacDonald, "was a brother of the famous Sir John A. MacDonald," and lived "outside of Charlottetown in Prince Edward Island".

A reader of this column from far-away Kamloops, British Columbia sent me a clipping from the Vancouver Province and forgot to sign his name. The sender was good enough, though, to type this kind message: "Enjoy your column – share it with other former Islanders". I suggest it may have come from Mrs. Nina Ross who called on me several times last summer when she was doing research in the archives here, and anywhere else she could find reliable information on her subject. Readers will recall that a column last June told about her and said her father W. N. Waldron had ranched mink in Tyne Valley more than 50 years ago.

But let's get to the story of Sir John A. and his brother John, who lived "outside Charlottetown" as the Vancouver story said. A similar story came to this paper from the Vancouver Sun, and it also reached my desk.

HUGH MACDONALD said he was born in 1876, and remembers his famous uncle. "There was quite a party at home" when the uncle arrived, he said. A Vancouver Province writer asked Hugh MacDonald about the drinking parties, history rates John A. quite the liquor drinker.

This part of the story is corny to me, but here is Hugh's reported reply:

Five-Gallon Keg – 45 Cents A Gallon

"I ONLY know I and my brothers were sent into town every two weeks with an empty five-gallon jimmy-john in the wagon, and came home with a full one. It cost 45 cents a gallon", said Hugh who "ran away from home at the age of 14, railroaded all his working life in the West and lives now in White Rock, with his home facing the Great Northern railway tracks to the sea."

Hugh who is 91 says an older brother died at the age of 104 and two others were killed in the First Great War, 1914-18.

He said they raised Percheron horses on his father's farm here, "never had less than 100 of them". Oh well, it's a good story anyway.

Hugh MacDonald says his uncle's name was Alexander John, but that the man changed it to John A. because he didn't like the name "Alexander". Hugh also said the name was MacDonald, not spelled with the small "d" the way Sir John A. used it.

My thanks to my Kamloops friend for sending the clipping along to me. It makes interesting reading. Just possibly it could be true.

Recently I did a story on Frank Howatt's recollection of the days when automobiles drove on to flat cars and then were shunted on to the car ferry.

Crowded out was the fact that his father, Cook Howatt, worked on the ice boat crews that carried the mail and some passengers, across the strait in winter.

Ice-breaking Idea Brought Laughs

Frank recalled hearing travelers from Montreal and other Canadian centers discussing the idea of any boat being able to maintain a winter service across the ice-choked strait.

The “Prince Edward Island” was being built in England at the time – it was built on the Tyne, Heath Macquarrie MP tells me – but the Montreal men completely ridiculed the suggestion that any boat could possibly smash its way through the kind of ice they had seen in the Northumberland Strait during their years of travelling, Mr. Howatt told me, his home is in Cape Traverse.

I recall that in 1928 I came across the strait with some mainland fellow-students from Mount Allison University and they spent practically all of their time out on deck as they watched the car ferry smashing its way through the ice.

I wonder what those travelers of more than 50 years ago would have said had they been told a causeway- bridge-tunnel structure would someday span that stretch of water.

McCulloch’s Causeway Plan

HERE’S AN observation on O. J. McCulloch’s suggestion the tunnel part of the structure is improperly designed. When I proposed the causeway crossing in the House of Commons back in January 1956, I had with me a plan – the first plan – of the proposed causeway and it was Mr. McCulloch who drew it for the Prince Edward Island government. It was given to me by the deputy minister of Highways, R. Gordon White, at the request of the then premier Alex W. Matheson.

I don’t know Mr. McCulloch – I never even saw him – but I could understand his taking a critical look at the plan someone else completed, particularly when it differs so much from his original “all causeway” proposal.

This is from memory but the rough cost estimate the man made at that time, I was told, was \$50 million dollars.

MRS. W. M. BREHAUT, 7 Grafton Street, Charlottetown has given me some interesting material from the wealth of historical items she has collected.

She quotes the Prince Edward Island Register of August 18, 1830 that the small steamer “Richard Smith” entered the Charlottetown harbor August 10, 1830 and this, Mrs. Brehaut suggests, was the first steamer to enter Charlottetown harbor.

The second steam vessel arrived in September 1831. She was the “Royal William” which later was the first vessel propelled entirely by steam power across the Atlantic Ocean and that was in 1833. She was of 1,370 tons and left Pictou for Gravesend, England where she arrived after “a very stormy passage”. This event, Mrs. Brehaut tells me, is commemorated by a brass tablet which was placed in the hall of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa.

In olden days the Royal Navy used the “press gang” method to recruit men for its war ships. They’d raid a saloon, a boat, or any other place they chose, take men forcibly for the Navy.

Press Gangs Operated Here

MRS. BREHAUT notes that back in July of 1807 the ship “Hope” of Bristol, Captain John Ford, was chartered by Andrew MacDonald and Sons of Three Rivers (Georgetown) to bring out a cargo of merchandise, and then load a cargo of pine timber for England. While she was preparing to load, the Hope was surprised one morning by a visit from an officer and boat’s crew from the sloop of war “Halifax” boarding the vessel and impressing, against their will and the captain’s protest, the most able seamen he had, and took them on board the warship.

“The Hope was delayed a long time, because of lack of crew, to the serious loss of all concerned.”

The master and the men who had chartered the Hope sent a strong petition to Governor DesBarres, explaining the injury the press gang raiding caused, and the damage it would cause to the export trade of the Island. They asked the Governor to use his good influence to “put a stop” to the press gang raiding and have the men returned, if possible. If not it would be impossible to charter vessels to ports in the Island where other equally qualified men could be found to navigate the vessels.

There is no word as to whether Captain Ford got his men back – he probably didn’t – “but we have found no other record of later cases,” adds Mrs. Brehaut.

I’VE HAD word that the case of the Cartier cairn has been discussed in Government here, and have been told steps are being taken to erect it anew. I talked about the Cairn in last week’s column.

MRS. BREHAUT received this week a letter asking for any information on a Rawlings family that came here via Shelburne as Loyalists to the Island.

She notes that the name originally may have been Rawleigh or Rollins, as Marjoribanks became Marchbanks, Eichorn became Acorn and Muirshed became Moreside through a process of local misspelling. Mrs. Brehaut would appreciate hearing from anyone who could give her any information on the Rawlings family who were United Empire Loyalists.