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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Fantastic Story Entirely Untrue

By NEIL A. MATHESON

IT WAS on June 10, 1965, that I dealt in this column with the fantastic story told about one Charles Coghlan. At that time there were magazine stories in the United States – I received some several dozen copies – and now the old story is cropping up again.

I said the story is fantastic and that is right. But it's also completely untrue.

A half-dozen people, or more, have written, or called recently about the story, and several others, one from Montreal, have written our managing editor seeking information.

One version of the story said that Charles Coghlan, a man born in Prince Edward Island in 1841, was a brilliant child but of poor parents. When he was of age, admiring neighbors raised a fund to send the youngster to England for a good education.

Charles graduated with high honors but he horrified his parents, and his friends when he wanted to become an actor. This story – it came from John P. Doucette of Nail Pond, through Edie Eldershaw, our capable Tignish correspondent – says Coughlan's parents, dismayed by his actor ambitions, tearfully told him he must leave home and never return to the Island again.

The same story says Goghlan became a celebrated actor and was known in Europe as well as in the United States, and Canada.

Would Return To P.E.I.

ONCE HE visited a Gypsy fortune teller who told him, among other things, that he would die at the peak of his fame. He would not die on his beloved P.E.I., but that he would know no peace or rest until he returned to the place of his birth, Prince Edward Island. The prophecy disturbed the actor and he often talked about it with his friends, and wondered if it would come true.

The story says Coghlan did die in Galveston, Texas in 1898, at the height of his fame, as the Gypsy predicted.

Two years later a hurricane swept across the Gulf of Mexico. The storm struck savagely in the low ground area of Galveston and the floods of water washed away the cemetery in which Coghlan was buried. Ebbing tide dragged the debris out to sea, and this included Coghlan's casket.

No word was heard of Coghlan and his coffin but in 1908, some 10 years after the storm demolished the cemetery, a group of fishermen in the Souris-Fortune area noticed in the shallows, near the shore a large box covered with seaweed. When they pulled the box to shore, they found it was indeed the Coughlan coffin and his body, or his skeleton was still inside. The coffin was recognized by an engraved plate on the side.

"True to the Gypsy's prediction, Coghlan had come home", this story suggests.

## Fantastic, Completely Untrue

THERE WERE numerous versions, but this one will do to illustrate the fantastic but completely untrue story that developed about this man. I am told the story was in Ripley's "Believe It Or Not", though that is not from personal knowledge.

I first heard this story more than 35 years ago, when the late W.A. Gaudet told it to me. Then a young man, I thought the story was true. But in 1965 I went to Fortune and Souris to get the story from the people who lived in the area.

Dr. A.A (Gus) MacDonald first told me the story was false. He remembered seeing Coghlan. The doctor's uncle, Father Donald MacDonald, had visited Coghlan at times.

You see Coghlan was a member of the so-called "Actors' Colony" that summered at Fortune for a number of years. Beatrice Johnston termed it "a fairy tale", as she directed me to Harry Burke who then owned the Fortune Bridge farm which Coghlan had owned when he summered there.

Then a very young man, Burke had been requested to be Coghlan's coachman, for Coghlan had had an attractive scan of horses.

The only thing that was true about this unusual story, so far as I can learn in June 1965, was that a flood actually had washed away the cemetery at Galveston and, apparently, Coghlan had been buried there.

Coghlan was not born on Prince Edward Island, he was born in Ireland. He was not baptized in this province, as some stories said, and his body did not come back to Prince Edward Island as the main part of the story stated.

## "The Lion And The Mouse"

HARRY BURKE was cutting sets when I visited him four years ago. He told me that Coghlan had written a play "The Lion and the Mouse" in this very room. That part of the house would be 150 years old, Mr. Burke told me.

He said also that the play had been a success and that Coghlan's sister, Gertrude Coghlan, had played in it.

But Coghlan was not born on P.E.I., he was not baptized on P.E.I. and the story that his coffin returned here is pure fiction. There's not a word of truth in it.

## Store Hours in The Long Ago

WHILE I was writing this column I heard a rumor that the K mart people and the Charlottetown merchants were about ready to reach a compromise on the store hours argument. And that reminds me that Jessie Larter, 53 Villa Avenue, Charlottetown sent me the following lines which she suggested might be appropriate at this time.

Store must be open 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. the year round  
Store must be swept; counters, base shelves, and  
showcases dusted. Lamps trimmed, filled, and  
chimneys cleaned; pens made, doors and windows  
opened; a pail of water, also a bucket of coal brought  
in before breakfast (if there is time to do so) and

attend to customers who call.

Store must not be opened on the Sabbath unless necessary, and then only for a few minutes.

The employee who is in the habit of smoking Spanish cigars, being shaved at the barber's, going to dances and other places of amusement will surely give his employer reason to be suspicious of his integrity and honesty.

Men employees are given one evening a week for courting and two if they go to prayer meeting.

It was printed originally about 100 years ago.