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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### 'Romantic Story' Seems Cruel Hoax

By NEIL A. MATHESON

THE WEEKLY Patriot called it a "romantic story" but to me it looks like a cruel hoax played on a Island man who was led to believe he had a fortune awaiting him in France only to be completely disillusioned after spending all that he had on a hunt that proved useless.

My thanks to Edward Easton, Georgetown for the interesting old story which he brought to my desk. The story starts at Granville, France with the birth of Francis Gaste – in Georgetown he was known as Gotell in 1837.

Gotell – I'll call him that for the rest of this story – was three when his father was drowned at sea and his widowed mother was evicted by the mayor of Granville. Gotell came to St. Pierre in 1853, and came to Georgetown later by way of Arichat, Cape Breton where he had been married.

Georgetown knew him as an industrious, reliable man who was a fisherman and boat builder. His close friends heard him talk at times about property in France to which he was entitled. The story grew and the property soon became a fortune, then dwindled almost into the realm of forgotten things.

But the story came alive in March 1899 when a man called Lecoq came from France asking if a man called Gaste lived in the town. Someone sent him to the man they knew as Gotell.

Lecoq questioned Gotell at length, then said "You are the very man I am looking for."

"I am an agent of the French and English government which have sent me to find the missing heirs," he said.

### Story Of Valuable Property

"THERE IS property and very valuable real estate in Granville which has been willed to you", Lecoq told Gotell.

Lecoq asked Gotell to sign an application as claimant to the Granville property; a hospital had been built on it. Lecoq said the mayor of Granville was mixed up in the property deal and he would be instrumental in seeing that Gotell got its worth. Gotell's cousin, the widow Deroux, had much real estate in Granville including a valuable milling property.

All of her heirs were dead, except Gotell, so he would most certainly get that property too. These possessions were worth a very large sum, Lecoq assured the Georgetown man.

Lecoq took the signed document with him, promising to write Gotell at intervals and come back next year with his wife to revel in the luxuries of yatching in Georgetown's harbor and partake of other enjoyments which the town afforded as a summer resort.

But spring, summer and autumn came and went with no word from or sign of Lecoq. Neither was there any word from the mayor of Granville, France as his supposed emissary had promised.

The man, Lecoq, had intended to visit England, then the Isle of Jersey and then to cross the channel on return to France. At about the time Lecoq might have been making the cross-channel leg of his trip, a channel steamer was wrecked and some thought Lecoq might have been among the passengers who were drowned.

### Search In Person

GOTELL DID not know but he decided that Lecoq had either drowned or had been faithless to his trust. So the Georgetown man made plans to go himself in search of his fortune.

Now 62, Gotell got letters from prominent men in Georgetown and took out naturalization papers in the hope of obtaining assistance from the British consul at Granville. Friends at home thought his action unwise but he sailed on October 25 on the "Lake Winnipeg" which he boarded at Charlottetown.

Three weeks later Gotell reached his native town and called on his sister. He called on the Mayor but the mayor had never heard of Gotell, much less have received an application as claimant to the property.

The town mayor told him about the unclaimed land and asked him if he knew a family by the name of de Fanxceaux that had lived alongside Gotell's parents. Gotell replied "yes" and with that the mayor closed up, refused further conversation concerning the property and told the Georgetown man "go and find out for yourself".

After remaining in Granville long enough to find things were much as Lecoq had represented them to be, Gotell sought out the British consul who advised him to go to Cherbourg, and gave him a letter to the British Consul there.

Gotell made further searches – a lawyer had been engaged through the co-operation of the Consul at Cherbourg to look further into the case, but the Georgetown man fell ill in Cherbourg and was for months in hospital there.

His bills were paid, and he was provided with money for the homeward journey through the good office of the Consul. Gotell's own funds had long since been exhausted.

### A Welcome Home

GOTELL'S FAMILY was glad to welcome him back after a year's search of a fortune that had proven elusive beyond his means of recovery.

The story from which I am quoting appeared in the Weekly Patriot of Thursday, May 19, 1904 and it said in part:

"Up to the present time no further tidings of the application (claiming the fortune) has been received and the whereabouts of the interesting heir hunter (this must have been a reference to Lecoq) is still a mystery.

"It seems that the excitement and the vicissitudes of the trip have so told on Gotell that his health has broken down."

So ended another of the many stories of treasure hunting in the days that are gone. The hunts made much better stories then, when entertainment and conversation pieces were scarce, than they would today when there are so many things to take up the attention of people in general.

