

A BIT OF HISTORY AND OTHER THINGS

The New Haven – Riverdale – Bonshaw area of P.E.I. is not only one of the most scenic areas of P.E.I. but one of the most historical as well. The scenic qualities are self evident to any passer-by but the historical aspects should be explored in greater detail to be fully appreciated.

At the end of the Seven Years War in 1763 the Treaty of Paris ceded most of North East North America to Great Britain from France. Shortly after this, King George III of England had Captain Samuel Holland survey P.E.I. dividing it into 67 Lots of approximately 20,000 acres each and three Counties, Prince, Queens and Kings. Sixty-seven members of the aristocracy, good buddies of George, were given the opportunity to own one of these lots by being permitted to participate in a “lottery” of these 67 lots, thus the name, ”Lot” which endures to the present. The only obligation of the winners was a promise to pay a few shillings quitrent per acre beginning in five years time and to settle their property with European emigrants, one for each 200 acres, within ten years. Only very few had any intention of doing this seeing themselves as absentee landlords continuing the landlord and vassal relationship versus freehold tenure, which had stifled social progress in Europe for hundreds of years and was only then being replaced with a more socially responsible economic system and which hampered settlement and growth in P.E.I. until 1873 when P.E.I. joined Confederation

Lot 30 lies in the centre of the above area beginning at Riverdale Road and continuing Westward. The name of the original recipient of Lot 30 is obscure but in 1809 David Stewart of Loch Katrine, Scotland, began purchasing land in P.E.I. including Lot 30 until his land holdings amounted to over 67,000 acres. David Stewart never lived there but his son, Robert Bruce Stewart, born in 1813 and moved here in 1846 to manage the family’s estate in P.E.I. He first lived in Charlottetown later moving about 16 miles Westward in 1863 where he built an attractive and substantial residence which exists until the present time, Because of his pride in his Scots ancestry he named this Strathgartney

Robert Bruce Stewart Sr. did not have a happy life in P.E.I. because he was not able to accept the changes that were sweeping over P.E.I. relative to land ownership and tenant/landlord relationships, to say nothing of those whom he regarded as squatters on his land. He continually sent off dissenting letters to the Colonial Office in the U.K. complaining of what he regarded as grave injustices that were forced on him. He was a rigid Traditionalist in an age of Reform. Robert Harris, the famed Island artist and brother of William Critchlow Harris, the architect who designed the well-known Harris churches, tells of an incident that he observed as a young man while working as a surveyor for Robert Bruce Stewart Sr. at Strathgartney. After Stewart had eaten his breakfast, during which he had his piper play while he ate, the survey party consisting of Stewart Sr. and Stewart Jr. Harris and six other men, started off for the Green Road where he wanted to settle some land dispute with his disgruntled tenants, or maybe squatters. The angry tenants resisted vigorously and Stewart’s group was forced to make a bitter retreat. After they returned home Stewart said, “We’ll get that line through there yet if we have to bring in fifty

men and half a dozen pipers to do it” This comment typifies Stewart’s inability to understand the inequity of leasehold tenure which delayed land settlement until the passage of the Land Purchase Act in 1875.

This went on until after P.E.I. joined Confederation in 1873. One of the terms of that Agreement was that the Federal Government would provide an \$800,000 loan to P.E.I. to settle the Land Question. The Land Purchase Act made it compulsory that each land owner must sell all his land in excess of 500 acres to the Government in 1875. The Island Government tried to purchase as cheaply as possible so that the tenants in turn could buy their own land at a fair price. Robert Bruce Stewart Sr. was forced to do this in 1875. In 1876 Robert Bruce Stewart Sr. split with his family, moved to Charlottetown and never saw Strathgartney again. His son, Robert Bruce Stewart Jr. continued to live and farm on the estate. His descendent, William Fitz-Alan Stewart, 1885-1956 served as Lieutenant in the 105th Regiment during World War 1 and as a MLA from 1935 to 1956, holding several Ministerial positions during this time. He lived and farmed at Strathgartney,

Like some families of that time the Stewarts had their own family Cemetery. The Stewart Cemetery is located North of where the CBC-TV transmitter tower stands and there are many of the Stewarts interred there. This Cemetery location made it necessary for the TCH –Plan B route to be located North of where it ordinarily would be. Alan Stewart died on February 5, 1956 and it is ironic that his burial could not take place there because a serious snow storm covered the Island following that date to the extent that snow moving machinery of that time was not able to clear a path to that Cemetery. This was before the time when it was considered acceptable to delay a burial until the spring so eventually the snow plow was able to clear the Highway to Crapaud and St. John’s Anglican Church where Alan Stewart was parishioner so he was interred there.

In 1996 Strathgartney Homestead was designated a National Historical Site of Canada and a monument was erected with an information Plaque attached to memorialize the importance of this designation. Sometime later this monument was removed at the request of a new property owner but the Plaque is being held in storage by National Historic Sites. There is a possibility that it could be restored to the area if a suitable site is available..

The above hopefully gives a small insight into the historical background of our communities which perhaps makes them unique having being exposed to a form of Government going back to European Feudal landed proprietorship of the 1700’s and progressing to a much enlightened modern Democratic form of Government.

These Rural communities of ours have always been noted for their citizens being sound, upstanding, publically aware individuals, mostly farmers with those of other abilities who supplied the additional skills and services required. For instance: Two General stores; two Blacksmiths; a Butcher; two Sawmills; one Undertaker, who also doubled as the local Barber, (no electric clippers then, just the hand powered ones – 25 cents); several Carpenters and at least one M.L.A. There was also a Doctor in each of the adjacent communities of Clyde River and

Bonshaw. Perhaps others may have been overlooked, but in all proving these communities to be self-contained and self-sufficient unto themselves.

The citizens in general were a versatile, adaptable group with a genuine concern for and a willingness to help each other. For instance, threshing the grain sheaves each fall required more man/woman power than one family could provide, so two farmers would combine their family work forces to do this. The same applied later in winter when the stove wood had to be cut and blocked.

Not all farm activity was based on manpower. For instance, a reliable supply of water was always a concern if there was no spring or brook nearby. If one had the physical strength to dig a well about three feet in diameter and as deep as necessary to reach water, perhaps 60 feet into the earth, this could be the solution. Many years ago, perhaps in the 1930's, one farmer who lived on the South side of the road noticed a strongly running spring on the North side, but at a much lower elevation, near where the "S" shaped road connecting the new TCH to the old TCH is located. Being more progressive and farsighted than one might have anticipated, he procured a simple device known as a Hydraulic Ram which used the water flowing through it to pump enough to serve the farm-stead through a pipe that he buried under the road and this continued to supply water until the existing TCH was built in 1952 when a well was drilled in the farmyard for his use.

Another resident was also ahead of his time. In the early 1940's before electric power was available, he erected a steel tower, mounted a windmill on the top and generated his own electric power until the power lines were built in 1947 thus initiating a practice that has been emulated world wide in recent times.

If a family encountered any significant disaster such as losing a house or farm building by fire, the community would organize to help and shortly after a substantial collection of many dollars would be presented to the unfortunate family to mitigate the loss. The same generous response would be prompted by any serious accident or sickness. It is notable that the usual divisive factors that afflict some communities, Politics and Religion would be absent from any good works that those communities undertook.

Sometimes great sensitivity and tact was demonstrated by individuals of good will. For instance, another resident of great talent was one of those hired by the Province to teach music in the then existing one room schools of this area. The culmination of the school year was the Annual Music Festival Competition in Charlottetown where all schools vied for the top standing. Many of these Teachers would concentrate on selecting only the "brightest and the best" to compete and the remainder stayed home. This particular Teacher's philosophy was "Everyone should have a chance." Not surprisingly, her schools won more than their share of the prizes.

Another form of sensitivity was demonstrated by a farmer who used horses in his farming even as tractors began to appear. This was in the time when fox ranching was a profitable enterprise. Foxes required quantities of meat in their diet some of which came from farm horses that had outlived their usefulness. This farmer had a horse named "Bill" who was visibly near that point of his life. A neighbour suggested that the owner should sell him for fox meat. The

response was quick and emphatic. "No, I won't". "No damn fox is ever going to sink a tooth into "Old Bill!" When "Old Bill" later died of natural causes the owner went to great physical effort to dig a grave under a shady tree where he interred "Old Bill".

One farm wife made a point of planting flower beds near the Highway where they were clearly visible to passing travellers. Each Sunday morning, from the first blooming to the late fall frost, carefully arranged displays of these flowers appeared in her Church. For a period of many years this same family organized (and totally provided for) a Community Corn Boil held each fall in one of their largest farm buildings, to which all residents were invited taking particular care that all new residents of the community known to them were included.

Another farm family had a natural pond very close to their house. In winter this frozen pond became the community rink where each moon-lit night the younger community members gathered to skate after having shovelled any interfering snow to the side. All of these skaters were quite welcome to change from their winter footwear to their skates in the warm farm kitchen and reversing this following the skate. Now this was in the time before plastic blade protectors existed so one could visualize the condition of the linoleum square that covered this kitchen floor at winter's end. The owners never made any complaint or tried to stop this use saying, "The kids are having such a good time and we wouldn't want to stop that!"

For many years the local Women's Institute raised funds for Queen Elizabeth Hospital by holding an Annual Ceilidh in the Legion Hall which the Legion provided at no charge. Local and visiting entertainers donated their talent and skill and the Institute provided a copious lunch for all present. There was no admission price but those present had the opportunity to make a donation to the Q.E.H. As of 2013 this has resulted in a cumulative total donation of over \$8,000.00.

In more recent times, with a more mobile population, the population mix has changed and the area has become partly a bedroom community for those employed elsewhere, rather than being a rural farming community. This has benefitted the whole community because these new residents have brought many new interests, abilities, experience and vision which they have freely shared with the existing community and through which they themselves have found satisfaction, fulfillment and community regard.

In the late 1960's the Province began to promote the formation of community organizations known as Community Improvement Committees whereby each community could have some input into governing its own affairs based on the stated wishes of the citizens. The New Haven-Riverdale C.I.C., assisted by a Provincial Planner, spent many hours in formulating a proposed Community Plan which was subsequently presented to a series of well attended meetings. Well attended, because of the controversial nature of this subject which attracted large numbers of residents some of whom sometimes tended to become voluble participants. This was no "omnibus" plan every word in every clause was perused, left intact or changed until agreement was eventually obtained in 1973. The New Haven-Riverdale C.I.C was later gratified to learn that this Plan became the bench-mark which many other Island Communities used as a

model for their own Plans. This original Plan, together with the revisions required to meet changed conditions and with the ongoing direction of Council, has served these community well.

One of the high points of Council's activities was the acquisition of the 38 acre property owned by a contractor who used it as a source of shale. Due to the generosity of this contractor, Council was able to acquire this for the same amount as was available from the Robert Cotton Memorial Trust. This now serves the communities as athletic fields, walking trails and a splendid playground and park. A large part of this wooded property is still available for future community use as required.

Now, what is the reason for the above outpouring of unasked for words which will undoubtedly bore all readers to death? I believe that it is useful for the residents of all communities to have some historical knowledge of the place where they live and some knowledge of the times which preceded the current generation. This is not to suggest that the above is the ideal vehicle to fill this perceived need but the hope is that it may create an interest such that some will be led to explore more deeply and share with all of us so that we may fully recognize what a magnificent heritage we have inherited from those who created this Canadian Democracy in which we live with its tradition of freedom, opportunity, equality and regard for each other.

by Eric P. MacPhail, a long-time Resident of New Haven, 2013

“A wise nation preserves its records, gathers up its monuments, decorates the tombs of its illustrious dead, repairs its great public buildings and fosters national pride and love of country by perpetual reference to the sacrifices of the past”

Joseph Howe.

Premier, Province of Nova Scotia 1859 - 1863

(Footnote ⁱ)

ⁱ Some of the above information is excerpted from an article entitled **Robert Bruce Stewart and the Land Question**, in the *Island Magazine*, number 21, dated November 21, 1987, by Deborah Stewart.