

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Thurs., Mar. 25, 1965

## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### Tales Of Yesteryear Show People Had Fun

By NEIL A. MATHESON  
Provincial-Farm Editor

I OFTEN think about the pessimists who continually charge that the young people are so much worse than previous generations, as I recall some of the stunts we used to pull in school days when I was a boy. And that reminds me that Capt. Wally Smith, 95, Pownal, recounted some interesting boyhood experiences for me that I want to tell you about.

On one occasion, he tells me, "we were set the task of writing an essay on the subject of 'love' and naturally the word didn't mean much to a boy of 12. So we were rather stumped. I pondered over the subject for quite a time but my thoughts seemed to be out on the playground, or somewhere else.

"Happening to glance at an open school book on the desk, I saw 'A Treatise On War' by John Bright, the great English writer. So I thought why not substitute the word 'love' where 'war' was prominent in the treatise, which I did. When teacher read it, the essay sounded like this:

"What is love? I believe that half of the people who talk about 'love' have not the slightest idea what it is – it is a combination and concentration of all the horrors and atrocities that are a curse to mankind, and so on"

Capt. Smith recalls "I didn't get away with it, though, as I had to stand on the dunce block for a half-hour." That "dunce block" reference is new to me. I recall that one teacher devised a dunce cap, she would make a student wear at times.

THE TEACHER didn't always win though. "Our old school had an attic", recalls Capt. Smith, "and we boys used to crawl up there and chase each other over the beams. Once one of the boys missed one of the beams and his foot went down through the plaster. Well, we thought we were surely in for a strapping. So we decided on strategy.

"We met the teacher on his way to the school after dinner, and with tears in our eyes we told him that the plaster had fallen down." "'Well, well', he said, 'if the plaster is down, crying won't put it up again, so get back to your school work.'

"Strategy worked that time", my friend recalls with a grin.

### Rose Valley Incident Is Recalled

THAT PARTICULAR story reminds me of an attic in the old school house at Rose Valley. Several of the more daring boys used to get a long pole, poke one end of it through the trap door into the attic and brace the other against the wooden trim that was around the zinc on which the big stove was placed. Then we would shinny up the pole to the attic.

I stopped several years ago to talk to an old school chum, Willie MacDonald, as I was passing through the district where I was born, and we got to recalling those

carefree boyhood days. It was Willie, I believe, who asked if I remembered when we used to climb into the school attic at the dinner hour, when teacher was away.

The long forgotten incident came back vividly to memory, and then I recalled one unfortunate day when several of us were up in the attic and somebody down below removed the pole, so we had to stay up there until the teacher returned. The recollection brought a look of unusual joy to my old school chum's face and both of us laughed heartily over the recollection.

Then I asked him "Willie, were you up there with us that day?" And quickly came the retort with another outburst of laughter "Who do you think took the pole away?"

### Lamentation On The Mountain

CAPT. SMITH told me, too, of the times when the teacher used to have recitations once a week, and the boys always hated them. One of the boys, Al Gay, who was Smith's seatmate, found the task particularly difficult as he had trouble memorizing the lines. So one week he said his recitation was headed "The Sheep's Lamentation on the Mountain." That sounded like a most interesting subject and there was a note of keen expectation as Alf stood for a few moments with a big grin on his face. Then came his drawnout outburst "B-a-a-a-a-" and everyone howled with laughter. Even the teacher could not retain the dignity which is normally demanded from a class-room instructor, as the satisfied young man took his seat.

### Bailiff's Visit Caused Consternation

I WAS looking this week at a letter which an old schoolmate, Alex Munroe, wrote to me from California away back in 1936. It reminded me that Alex and I could get into more trouble than you could imagine, when we were together, though we managed to stay out of it when we went our separate ways.

One noon hour we succeeded in arousing the anger of a man who managed a shop nearby. We thought it was fun then, though long since I have realized how completely inexcusable our actions were.

The man told us he was "going to Breadalbane to have the law on you". "The law" at that time was represented by a justice of the peace.

SURE ENOUGH the man did go to Breadalbane that afternoon. We saw him go past the school. Naturally we wondered if he had carried out his threat. That evening I was completing the barn chores, shortly before dark, when I saw a man coming in a sleigh drawn by a beautiful white horse. When the man tied his horse to a post near the house, I saw that he was a big fellow, and he was wearing a black fur coat. He disappeared inside our house and I stayed in hiding in the barn until he had left.

When I came into the house later, I asked "who was that man?" Imagine my shock when I was told "He's a Sherren man from Crapaud. He's a bailiff". The term was often used as synonymous with the word "constable" and there were a few of these people in the country then, as there were no provincial police which came much later and the RCMP which are a comparatively modern development .

### Worries Prove To Be Unfounded

NOBODY VOLUNTEERED an explanation of what the bailiff was doing at our house. Finally I got up enough courage to ask and found my worries were unfounded. There was to be a case heard in the court of Chancery within the next few days over an individual property in which my mother had a nominal claim. That was the message Mr. Sherren brought – I never did learn his first name, but people who live in the Crapaud area – it may have been Westmoreland – may know who the man was. But I can recall as though it were yesterday, the terrible feeling that was produced in my mind by the guilty conscience and the coincidence.

I told the story to Alex next day in school. After he had listened with rapt attention, I asked him “what would you have done, had a bailiff come to your house last night?”

The reply was “I’d have put for the woods”, and my chum was exaggerating only slightly. I’ve lost trace of Alex’s address. If somebody knows it, I hope they’ll send him this column, or let me know so I can get in touch with him again. We could dig up a lot of interesting reminiscences.

### Name Is Sought For Tying Weights

I REFERRED recently to Maurice Blake, retired newspaperman, and his attempt to purchase a button hook. He also suggested that I ask in this column if anyone knows the name of the weights people used in former years to tie horses which were stopped temporarily. Grocery and other stores used horse-drawn delivery wagons in those days. The driver pulled from the wagon a heavy weight with a rope and snap attached. The snap was caught in the bridle ring, or in a haltar ring, if a halter was worn.

I asked my friend Arthur King – his wife is a cousin who was May MacBeath from Forest Hill – and he believes they were commonly called ground weights. But there may be other names. Mr. Blake recalls seeing one used once in the Alps country, in the vicinity of the Matterhorn, which is a mountain on the frontier between Switzerland and Italy. And it’s his recollection that it was called a “land anchor” there.