

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Thurs., May 18, 1967

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Unusual Spring But 1816 Worse

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I STOPPED in at Arsenault's Restaurant in O'Leary this week for a snack, and met William Fish, Cape Wolfe who told me he could not remember a spring like this in all of his years. Mr. Fish was born on May 31, 1875, so he'll be 92 the last day of the month.

His statement added punch to what Stewart MacIntyre told me at my home recently: "It's hard to remember a spring as bad as this one." Mr. MacIntyre is well known in the eastern part of the province as he was the light keeper at East Point for many years. He lives now in Sherwood, not far from the airport.

The comments make a good introduction to a story of a much worse spring – it must have been – that's been made available to me by Mrs. Agnes Jones, 7 Dunkirk Street, Charlottetown.

The story describes "The year of the Big Frost", which was 1816. The story was published in a Saint John newspaper several years ago and their informant was a Lancaster lady. I had a somewhat similar clipping several years ago, and I'm sure I had something about it in this column. But the story seems to fit into this unusually backward spring, so here goes.

"In 1816," the story says, "cold winter weather held through May, and June arrived with the hope that summer would come. But on June 4, a major snowstorm dropped at least a foot of snow in most places, and cold, cold weather followed.

"That snow had no more than melted when a blizzard struck on June 17, with wind, snow and such biting cold that several people were frozen to death. The cold went on and on, and somebody measured a quarter inch of ice on July 4.

July "was colder than June, and August was even worse, with ice forming to a half-inch thickness," the old clipping states.

Summer "almost came" in the first half of September, then the snow squalls started again, and scattered themselves through October."

December Was Warmest

THE COLD finally disappeared in December "and then the days were so mild there was talk of a reversal of the seasonal cycle. December in 1816 was the warmest month of the year", the old story relates.

After such an experience people naturally would appreciate any change for the better, and in 1817 "fine weather started in March and followed through with such a beautiful spring, summer and fall that the previous year was almost forgotten."

The Lancaster correspondent of the Saint John paper remembered hearing in 1911 a personal account of that awful year from a man who was 99 years old.

"That man had been only five years old at the time and he had been living at Smith's Cove, Nova Scotia. He remembered clearly the midsummer day in 1816 when he walked with his father across the ice to a small island, one-half mile or so from the shore at Smith's Cove", the Lancaster lady said.

This most unusual tale has been handed down through more than 150 years. At least it makes the weather we've been complaining about seem that much better by comparison.

### Early Rising On The Farm

IF I MAY come back to William Fish, the man I met at O'Leary Monday – I was there to look in on the successful cattle sale conducted by Ralph K. Adams – the man is unusually preserved for his years. I spoke to him at my normal voice level, and it is low, but he heard me as clearly as though he were a youngster. His eyes are not as good as they were, he tells me, but he doesn't wear glasses.

Our talk got around to the time a farmer rises in the morning and Mr. Fish insists the ones who want to get things done get up at five o'clock, as he did through his lifetime of farming. He and Mrs. Fish spent the last two winters on the outskirts of Charlottetown and they didn't get up until seven, he told me.

FOR A TIME he worked with a man who ran a milk route in Everett, Massachusetts, U.S.A. Then he arose at four o'clock, milked eight cows – there were no milking machines in those days – delivered the milk and got back to breakfast some four hours after his day's work had begun. On his own farm he invariably took a glass of milk, or water, did a couple of hours work and then came to the house with an appetite for a really good breakfast.

Mr. Fish was one of the several Cape Wolfe people who were helpful to me several years ago when I wrote the story of the attempted gold mine development there. My column in 1962 said the gold mine try was made 80 years previously. There was gold in the rock that was mined but not enough to make the mining job profitable, as I recall.

THE STORY about Wolfe's Cove is that he sent some men ashore there to get fresh water while he was on his way to Quebec. I've often wondered why our tourist people don't put up a sign there calling attention to that. I've seen much less interesting things noted on signs in other areas during my travels outside this province.

A copy of The Semi-Weekly Patriot of July 11, 1857 has been loaned to me by Mrs. Arthur MacKenzie, 3 Spring Street. Much of it is faded and thus difficult to read, but there are some interesting items.

### Packet Service To Cascumpec

ONE ITEM said the schooner "Josephine" was running between Charlottetown and Cascumpec as a packet. It would carry freight and passengers and would remain for forty-eight hours at each place, before sailing on the return trip. I.J. Hall was the agent for Charlottetown. Herbert Bell was the agent at Cascumpec. It "has good accommodations for passengers," an advertisement said, but there were no fares mentioned.

The Steam Navigation Company was advertising that the steamer "Princess of Wales" was sailing from Charlottetown every Tuesday and Thursday mornings at six o'clock so as to reach Pictou in time for the morning train from Halifax. It was leaving Charlottetown every Tuesday and Friday night for Summerside and Shediac. It would

leave Shediac for Summerside and Charlottetown on Wednesday and Saturday afternoon.

The same company owned the "Heather Belle" and it was leaving Charlottetown at three o'clock each Saturday morning for Pictou. It left Pictou at nine a.m. the same day for Murray Harbor, Georgetown and Souris. It would remain at Pictou or Georgetown over Sunday. It would leave Pictou each Monday after the arrival of the morning train from Halifax. F.W. Hales was the company secretary. A number of other items will be carried in a future column.