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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Godfrey Story Stirs Interest

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I WANT to talk today about Rupert Godfrey, The Marshfield farmer who I rate as one of the most unusual and most successful men. I'm basing the rating on the initiative and skill he has shown in acquiring and improving the Photofinish equipment which services a dozen Maritime race tracks, but more particularly for the "Godfrey Teletote" equipment which uses the marvels of electronic development, to keep racing fans up to the minute with the information they need, as they jockey for position on pari-mutuel betting before each race.

The Godfrey Teletote will be in action at the Charlottetown track here this year and race fans can see how it displays up-to-the-minute information. Jimmy Ferguson used it at Sydney in 1961.

A complete board would cost \$12,000, Mr. Godfrey told me, but a basic board shows the most needed statistics such as odds, race number, when betting is final, whether there is an enquiry (a photo of the finish) and when the race result is official.

THE OPERATOR of the "Console" has an attractive control panel in front of him where he can wipe out the entire information on the board by pressing a button, put on new information, including odds which are most important prior to the race, and flash the complete list of new information on the board across the track with fingertip control by pressing another button.

I'm trying to avoid technical explanations because they would only confuse you - they confuse me too - but I can't over emphasize the tremendous amount of technical detail that goes into one of these boards with the intricate wiring on the board itself, and also the wiring that links the operator's Console with the board across the track on which the information is displayed.

Godfrey Designed The Equipment

I SAID it's highly technical, and it is, but it's simple to the Marshfield man, for he's the person who designed it. He has had no technical academic training, but he has designed and developed the equipment for these new electronic masterpieces as the need arose, just as he has been designing and working out improvements to the Photofinish Cameras and other equipment since he started to use them 15 years ago.

A battery of 28 light bulbs, four rows of seven each, is needed, for example, for every number on the indicators which give the numbers of the horses in the race, and each box will flash 10 numbers. And the wiring is arranged so that any combination of those bulbs can be flashed on to give the desired number, and give it rapidly, by selecting a single switch or button.

RUPERT EVEN built an adding machine back in 1952, when regulations demanded more information be posted than they do now. But the equipment was never used, although he still has the computer in his Marshfield home.

It would have been too costly, he told me, for it would cost \$36,000 to equip a track with the computing equipment it would have needed at that time.

MARITIME RIGHTS for the Photofinish equipment used on a dozen Maritime tracks last year were purchased almost 16 years ago. "I could have purchased the Canadian rights just as easily for the holder W.E. Crowley, didn't think they would amount to much up North," Mr. Godfrey told me.

"It was in November 1946 that Marguerite (Mrs. Godfrey, who was the former Marguerite Terrell) and I went down to Boston and New York to see about the Photofinish," recalls the man who has "made a number of improvements," which he owns. He's even improved the cameras

The original camera was invented by Paramount in Hollywood. A high speed movie camera was used the first year, but that has been changed and a horse is only photographed once now.

Montague Had A Canadian First

THE PHOTOFINISH business has grown rapidly since George MacIntyre used it the first time in Canada, at a race in Montague July 9, 1947. He had 19 races the first year. Last year the equipment was used for 408 racing days with some of the meets running as high as 10 races.

Moncton, Saint John, Fredericton, Woodstock, Chatham are N.B tracks using it. There are Sydney, Inverness, Sackville Downs. Truro and Halifax Commons in Nova Scotia, and Summerside and Charlottetown in this province.

Upwards of 30 people work for Mr. Godfrey through the summer season, many of them from the centers where the races are held. Four worked through the winter building new equipment. They included Aden Clow, Dunstaffnage, his top technician who can build any of the equipment; Kenneth Thompson, Charlottetown; Gene Clark, a Truro boy who now lives in Charlottetown; and John Campbell, Sydney.

THE HALIFAX Commons Track operated through the winter - it started in early October - and Mr. Godfrey will be taking out his equipment tomorrow. He installed Photofinish equipment at Truro yesterday and he's putting equipment in at Sackville Downs today.

They have very little trouble in winter as the camera house is completely insulated, and in heavy frost they cover the camera lens with Thermopane, a two-ply glass with dead air space inside. Air flows on to the lens from a fan, and anti-fog cloths are also used.

They Wouldn't Believe Him

THE MARSHFIELD man has been interested in electronics since his youth. He fooled around with electric gadgets "when he was a school boy and he sold radios for Keith Rogers, the man who was responsible for CFCY, when he was only 12.

“Selling radios was tough sledding”, Mr. Godfrey told me. “Many people just wouldn’t believe at first that they could bring in music and other sounds from the air. “If you heard that, it’s only your imagination”, they’d tell him as he tried to interest them in a purchase.

My mind went back, as I talked with him, to a night early in the 1920s when I sat in Zion Church Hall, at a Young People’s meeting, and waited for several hours while a couple of radio men tried without success to bring us the radio concert they had promised for the night.

ONE OF them was Angus MacMaster, who stayed in radio and became highly skilled in it, but it must have been a bad night for reception, because all we heard was the odd squawk, or other sounds of interference. It’s difficult to realize now, that such a thing could have happened.

Mr. Godfrey also recalls experience with a bank, and as an accountant with a firm of stock brokers who went broke in the stock market crash of 1930, before he started to develop his own business.

There is 660,000 candle power to the battery of lights you see immediately above the finish line, I was told. They are high intensity bulbs and would burn out quickly if left turned on long.

Unusual Events Recalled

RECALLING SOME unusual events over the years, Mr. Godfrey told me they took a photo of a driver finishing without the horse once on a Moncton track. The horse had fallen several yards from the wire, and did not get into the picture, but the driver was thrown over his head and was photographed as he was thrown under the wire.

He recalls an exhibition at North Sydney when they had not installed any “intercom” system, because it was only a one-day show and they did not think the expense warranted it.

The wrong horse was posted as a winner and Godfrey opened the camera house, high atop the grandstand, and started to wave frantically to the judges stand to get their attention. The photo confirmed Godfrey was right and the judges wrong, and the announcement was corrected.

THE MAN in charge of the pari mutuel betting sensed something was wrong as soon as he saw Mr. Godfrey open the camera house window, and held up payment, so there was no trouble that way.

During our talk it was recalled that Northam in this province held the first night racing in Canada. He thought it was 1927. They had their own steam-powered generator and, Rupert told me, “they could generate enough power with it to light a fair sized town.”

Both Stories Were Incorrect

As long as I can recall I’ve been told the Earl Grey was taken to Russia by Captain John Read and the Prince Edward Island was built on the Clyde. I’ve already corrected the Earl Grey error - it was taken by a Navy crew - and now Heath Macquarrie informs

me the grand old boat was built on the Tyne in England. The persistent information over the years was at least consistent. Both stories were wrong.