

Reminiscences of Old St. Andrews

Beacon

Sept. 26, 1912

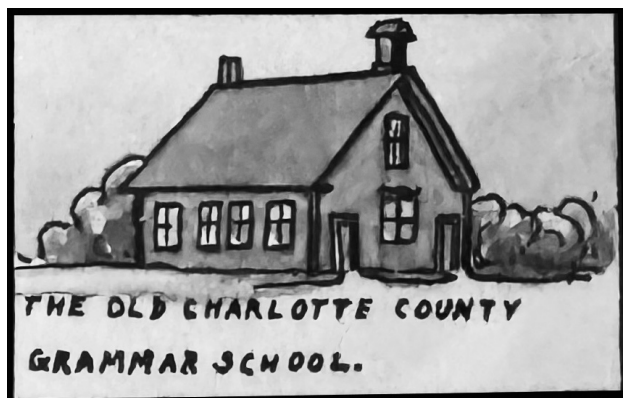
(Written by the late R. Melville Jack and Read Before the Canadian Literature Club, St. Andrews)

These sketches I will have to give you just as scattered reminiscences and you can classify them as you see fit.

One of my first memories is my father telling me that he had seen a hundred vessels loading pine timber here at one time. That was before the duty was taken off the Baltic lumber in England. [1820] My father came from the West Indies, where he had been manager on a plantation and had the management of the slaves. When he landed in St. Andrews, he had only a half dollar (a silver dollar cut in halves). Mr. Rait was then the principal merchant here, and as his office was at the head of the wharf, he carried his trunk there and asked Mr. Rait if he could leave it until he found a job. The answer was that he could, and an office of the lowest clerkship, which was accepted at once, was made him. The result was that eventually he became one of the partners in the business.

I heard him tell a pretty good story of his early days. He and an old man, Nathan Niblock, slept in the store. Along the upper shelf of the room in which they slept were some 20 or 30 clocks. One evening my father wound all these clocks up and set the alarms so that commencing at midnight the first one would go off and be followed by the others in rotation. You can imagine the infernal din. Poor old Niblock was almost frightened out of his wits.

There were some rather funny occurrences at the old Grammar School. Of course we of the Grammar school considered ourselves as the autocrats and many fights we had with other schools to uphold our supremacy, and I presume, owing to the "esprit de corps" we used to come out on top. There was a large school opposite ours with which we were continually at war and many pretty bloody battles were fought but the Grammar school kept its supremacy.



Detail from
Frances Wren's
pictorial
history of St.
Andrews, c.
1937

One of the characters of the town was a young man usually called "crazy Kelly" who went dancing about the streets and though generally harmless would when angered be very vicious. Another was Frank Lynn. William Henan, constable, was appointed to take him to the lunatic asylum at St. John. Henan got a horse and wagon and called for Frank and they started on their way. Frank seemed delighted at the idea of the trip and a stop at a grand hotel. On the way Henan showed Frank the warrant telling him that was the order from the government for their trip, and as it was not immediately returned Henan forgot it or delayed to regain possession of it. On their arrival at the asylum, while Henan was putting up the horse, Frank proceeded to the building, saw the doctor, showing him the warrant and told him that the man who was looking after the horse was the patient and that he was laboring under the delusion that he was an officer bringing him to the asylum, with the result that Henan in spite of all his protests was detained and Frank returned to St. Andrews. Of course Henan was released afterward and Frank took his place.

Kempt Boyd, a son of the old member, James Boyd, was generally up to some mischief. My brother Edward and Levi Handy having shot a large loon, Kempt suggested that they should make it a present to the new lighthouse keeper. Now the loon is about the toughest bird that swims or flies. So they took the bird to the lighthouse and made the keeper, who was not acquainted with aquatic birds, a present of it, telling him that it was a splendid kind of duck and very rare. The man was delighted and invited them to supper when the

delicacy would be served. The supper took place, and I doubt if a fork could be inserted into the bird, but they finished the side dishes and the drinkables.

Another character was McBeath, an old Highlander who used to turn out in full highland costume and parade the streets on the Queen's birthday playing the bagpipes and followed by the usual crowd of street urchins.

One of the oldest persons I can recollect was Mr. Ker, originally of the firm of Ker, Douglass and Campbell, who did a large business in St. Andrews in the old days. I remember him at 90 years of age with long, thick, black hair and not a gray hair in his head. Squire Wilson, who lived at Chamcook, is another of the old stock that I can remember well. He had a beautiful brick cottage about where Mr. Grimmer's house now stands and a fine park in which were several deer. He built many ships, both at Chamcook and St. Andrews. There were two brothers, Edward and Joseph Wilson, who lived in the brick cottage now occupied by Mr. Everett. Among others I recall were Dimock and Wilson, who did quite a large business; Mr. Turner, the founder of the Odell business; Mr. Trenholm, who had quite a large orchard where we used to steal apples; old Joe, a negro who lived in an old ship's cabin at the head of the town and made splendid spruce beer; the Pottery on the brook that crosses the Joe's Point Road just above the town. Flower pots were their principal product but they made clay marbles and we could get a lot for a copper (no cents in those days). Then there was a broom factory, where Joe Handy's place is, opposite Kennedy's hotel and aback of that a racquet court. In those days the Market Wharf had shops and stores its entire length, but a great fire carried them off. [1873 - see p. 250]