

Hawbush Tale is Interesting

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[This is a reconstituted transcript of Matheson's article. Both Henri Gaudet and Allan MacRae have presented versions of it with extensive editing. For the time being this is what we think Matheson's original was like.]

NORTH CAPE, a bleak, lonely tip of land that thrusts out into the Gulf where it's often shrouded in storm-tossed mists, fairly reeks with interesting tales from the long ago. Frank Weeks and I could almost feel the ghostly figures of the past crowding in on us as we tramped and searched the coastline area recently with Sea Cow Pond's Pierce Morrissey on an October afternoon, and listened to strange and wonderful tales from him and others in the area.

A lighthouse keeper there for 16 years until he retired at 65, Mr. Morrissey, 72, knows the area where the colorful yarns originated.

The story of the Hawbush is one of the most fascinating, though it's rivalled by the chest of gold that many believe is still in the water after more than 200 years, close to the famous North Cape reef that broke the back of many a ship in the stormy days of the past. Mrs. Reg. Eldershaw, our capable Tignish correspondent, told me about the Hawbush, and she has done a great deal of research with me on this intriguing bit of Island history.

THE HAWBUSH – I was told it was the only one on the Island – was planted long ago, close to the Northwestern tip of P.E.I. Legend says it marked the spot where pirate gold was buried, though a few locals suggest it was French gold.

Many holes have been dug in search of the treasure over the years. We were unable to find any of them in our October search over more than a mile of rugged, tree-covered terrain, but a young man, Melvin Provost, told us he had fallen into one a few days earlier, as he roamed the same territory, which indicates some people still dig at times for the gold which they think is still there. I liked Mr. Morrissey's retort when I asked if any treasure had ever been found.

“NOBODY EVER admitted finding any but some people got rich awfully fast”, he told me.

Old Bush Has Disappeared

THE HAWBUSH “went over the bank” some years ago, Mr. Morrissey told me, as the storm-tossed waves gradually undermined the spot where it grew not far from shore. That's not surprising, for he explained that the lighthouse had to be moved back a few years ago to escape a similar fate. More than three acres had been gradually eaten away at the island's tip by the relentless approach of the sea.

William Agnew – director of trade here for many years; he lives now in Western Canada – and the late William MacLeod, father of Mrs. Eldershaw, were frightened away once as they dug for the treasure. They never went back to dig, though I haven't found out what frightened them. Mr. Agnew still has old French coins his father picked up on the shore more than 50 years ago. He also has a picture, which I saw, of his father and others digging there in the long ago.

The area was a scary place in those days and dozens of grim yarns were spun about it. A man was seen there with no head, one story said, and all manner of other spooky tales were told.

BUT PERHAPS even more interesting to some people, is the story of the steel chest filled with gold that was dropped in four to five fathoms of water just off the Cape, from a French frigate wrecked there when it was taking gold to pay the garrison at Quebec more than 250 years ago. Many fishermen have reported seeing the chest over the years – Mr. Morrissey saw it once from his boat but could not locate it when he turned back to search.

One fisherman brought the chest to the surface when it became entangled in his back lines I was told, but it slipped away before he could move to get the heavy chest aboard his boat. There is some confusion in the stories and some suggest the Hawbush also marked the location of French gold, but the pirate treasure angle seems more believable.

Interesting, Valuable Items Seen

THERE ARE many stories along the cape. Scores of ships were wrecked there in former years, and on the reef which has broken the back of many a ship in other years. There were four ships on the reef at one time, Mr. Morrissey told me, and most homes in the area have their own stories of old wrecks. There are many old articles that should interest antique collectors.

We called at Henry Hogan's – It's closest to the Cape – and found many interesting souvenirs. An old sofa came from the *Minnie Gordon* whose master, Michael Gorman, lost his ship perhaps 60 years ago. Her cabin was hauled ashore and it forms part of a woodhouse and Irish Moss shed. An old ship's bell, mounted on the roof, came from the *Helena* whose name board and anchor were salvaged.

WE SAW a “night and day” telescope that was made by Spence and Sons, London, England. It's old and battered, but it still picks up objects far out on the water when brought to eye level. There, too, is an old desk used by Veronica Perry, the wife of Angus L. MacDonald, Canada's wartime Minister of Defense for Naval Affairs and several times Nova Scotian premier, and the aunt of Joseph Bernard, Tignish, who was one of PEI's Lieutenant-Governors. She used it to teach Henry Hogan and his brothers and sisters when their father, Patrick Hogan, kept the lighthouse.

A tiny shell house was made by a Mrs. Oliver, Kildare Capes and won by Patrick Hogan once in a raffle. A model-size house, it is of wood frame and covered with tiny snail shells, with larger clam shells at either gable to represent windows.