



Businessman and sportsman

Hugh McMongale

A Sussex Corner leader

An outstanding character of the late 1800s was Hugh McMongale. He was born of Irish parents, and first saw the light of day in the home now occupied by Lloyd Hunt in Dutch Valley. He became the proprietor of the well-known McMongale Inn, which still stands at the cross-roads and is now used as a residence. At the Inn, accommodation for travelers by stage coach and horseback was supplied. Liquor also flowed freely at a 30-foot bar served by four bartenders at times. McMongale also managed a racetrack of one-half mile, at that time the fastest in North America, and to which horses came from as far as Kentucky.

Hugh McMongale, a colourful figure who influenced the history of our province in the field of sport, especially in horse racing. He came from a family of strong Irish heritage, and perhaps it was the Irish love of thoroughbred horses that first aroused his interest. He was born in Hillsborough, Albert County, and later moved to Sussex Corner. He was married twice – to twin sisters, Margaret and Mary Roach. His family to both wives were William, James, Hugh, Jr., Walter and a daughter.

About 1850, he chartered a ship to carry pure-bred stallions from Ireland, but the ship was wrecked and the horses were lost. New Brunswick government's interest was aroused, and Hugh McMongale was reimbursed for buying new stock wherever he could find it. Later another ship containing four stallions purchased from Ireland, was in danger of sinking unless the deck cargo was placed overboard. Hugh protested but could do nothing.

One of the most prominent horses was "Ida Grey" foaled in 1876. She was successful in horse-racing for three years and in 1882 she successfully overcame many of her own offspring.

His interests also included breeding very good farm animals, as cattle and work horses.

Hugh also served as a member of the Legislative Assembly during 1856-57 and was almost responsible for the overthrow of the Government on the issue of prohibition. It was saved only by the Governor proroguing the house.

Beginning in the 1860s Hugh McMongale ran the "Posting house" at Sussex Corner for more than a quarter-century. Some reports called Sussex Corner "the most sporting little town to be found on the map." Its character has been compared to a transplanted Kentucky. Tales were told of merry gatherings of gentlemen-farmers at McMongale's posting house with many pleasant hours spent with "good old Jamaica" and the "Cognac". While they kept the "Grog shops" busy, even busier were the tailors. Needle Street, a small lane, (now well settled with many attractive homes), is said to have supported no less than seven tailors and three taverns. Such was the existence!

Those men had no use for a man who couldn't judge horseflesh, nor the man who wouldn't back his judgement with his money. On one occasion, Hugh wagered 1000 pounds (about \$5000 on one of his thoroughbreds named "Livingstone" against George Gilbert's stallion, "Retriever". The race was run one April morning on the Courtenay Bay Flats, Saint John. The stake was the largest ever wagered on a race up to that time. People came from all over the Province to see it. One story is told of young John Robinson who walked the sixty miles from Waterford to Saint John to see the race, but he didn't walk quite fast enough and arrived a half-hour too late. We are told that he was so disappointed he sat down and cried.

The McMongale clan went home very pleased because "Livingstone" was triumphant. The Saint Johners were disgusted as they heavily favoured "Retriever".

The story of Hugh McMongale and his friends is part of our New Brunswick heritage, a part that for too long has been forgotten.

(Information supplied by Mayor Richard Doncaster, Sussex Corner).

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