

FILE HOAX

Oak Island treasure hunt branded "human folly" by early magazine chronicler

By BERT WETMORE

"It does seem incredible that persons possessed of common sense could be so deluded," were words written about the supposed presence of rich treasure deep within Mahone Bay's Oak Island. Coupled with that statement it was added, "The fact remains, nevertheless, that many business men in the city of Halifax and elsewhere—men known to have means, and reputed to be shrewd and sagacious—did venture very considerable sums in this wild undertaking," making reference to various projects undertaken to wrest rich rewards from the island.

These words are reprinted from an article on "Mahone Bay" authored by J. A. Bell, Halifax. They appeared in a magazine entitled "The New Dominion Monthly," produced by John Dougall and Son, Montreal publishers, and it was the July issue in 1870.

Mr. Bell wrote further, "The whole history of the affair, now extending at intervals over a period of a century or more, forms an exceedingly interesting episode in our local annals, and will, no doubt, be referred to in future times as a remarkable chapter in the voluminous records of human folly."

QUEST STILL ON

Now, nearly a century after Mr. Bell's magazine article was published, the quest is still being actively pressed. Many have spent large sums and years of effort in belief that rich reward would be theirs.

Nova Scotia government offices still receive communications almost monthly from people in various parts of the world seeking information on possibilities of undertaking digging for cached treasure at Oak Island. One recent letter sought data on Customs regulations bearing on shipping in of heavy machinery.

Oak Island is the property of M. R. Chappell, Sydney, who holds the required permissive licence for the search there. It expires this year but is open to renewal, it is said at Province House.

Currently, as he has for the past few years, Robert Restall and his family, who took up

residence on the island, is engaged in a carefully planned project. Mainland residents on the coast report that Mr. Restall, on visits to shore for supplies, says his quest is continuing unabated, and has affirmed his intention of remaining in residence on Oak.

In the summer season three individuals continue to operate boats conveying interested tourist visitors, who are lured to the island by the stories that have long received international attention.

The issue of the magazine which contains Mr. Bell's article, along with others of the same publication printed some many decades ago, recently was secured by The Citadel Branch of the Nova Scotia Museum.

HUMAN FOLLY

After branding the Oak Island hunt as a chapter in "human folly," Mr. Bell added, "It may be some consolation to the parties who have followed up this enterprise with so much of commendable, though ill-bestowed patience and perseverance, to know that others have been similarly deluded."

If deluded they have been, the succeeding generations have not failed to find intriguing the legends of a deep-buried treasure trove at Mahone Bay. In 1870 the Halifax writer commented, "Upon the whole, sufficient interest attaches to Oak Island to make it one of the lions of Mahone Bay, which tourists must not fail to visit and examine."

However, times are greatly changed. The tourist of today finds much less difficulty should he, or she, be intent on seeing the island so rich in treasure legend—even if not in treasure, as the skeptical may stress.

Mr. Bell wrote, "There is no difficulty in reaching Mahone Bay from Halifax, either by land or by water. Should the day be fine and the sea smooth, you may run down by steamer in seven or eight hours, enjoying the sea breeze and getting pretty views, as you coast along, of the fishing coves with their white cottages nestling under the bold headlands which shelter them from the gales of the Atlantic.

Those who prefer land travel will find a well-appointed stage-coach, a good postroad, and a comfortable highway inn, which is always a thing to be prized in travelling by coach." The article also points out many of the beauties of the main road and other side excursions possible.

Of the town which is the subject of his article he says, "There are no monster hotels as yet in Mahone Bay, such as are to be found in Saratoga and Newport; no gambling saloons, no race courses, very few fast horses, and not many fast men or women. All at present is very simple and primitive; but there is no lack of respectable accommodation, and quite enough of creature comforts, in variety and variety, to make a sojourn eminently enjoyable."

Later he adds, "When the railroads now in the course of construction come to be completed, the bright hazard a prospect that Mahone Bay and its vicinity will become a favorite and profitable resort. At the time of the late summer could hardly have had vision of the ease of access by the motor car over the new South Shore highway."

LURE NOT OVERLOOKED

While the Bell article is mainly devoted to a wide variety of description of Mahone and other sections of the coast in all phrases, he felt that lure of pirate gold could not be overlooked, and he devoted some pages to tracing the Oak Island quest up to his time of writing, and indicating reasons why the undertakings might be considered "foolish." In 1870 paper have not been quashed, as evidenced by presence of determining leaders on hand and the continuing inquiries directed to provincial authorities.

Contrary to the reference so often made that Kidd's treasure is the "secret" of Oak Island, Robert Restall, who came from Hamilton in 1862 to engage in his planned search, believes that of other privateersmen than Kidd will be the ultimate reward of the quest shared by his wife and two sons in their temporary, lonely island home.

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