



NOVA SCOTIA MUSEUM

HALIFAX, CANADA

1132 Waterloo St.,
Halifax,
B3H 3L4

Oct. 24, 1974

Dear Mr. Raddall;

You were kind enough to speak to me on the phone some time ago regarding the Wild Cat Hunt of the Garrison in Halifax. As you suggested, I found the story among the notes of Harry Piers, now at the Nova Scotia Museum.

My research on the horses of Nova Scotia, 1610-1900 plus, is now almost completed, having been concluded by a study of Sable Island.

In going over your notes recently at the Killam Library I note you have a sequence of photographs of the loading of the ponies for export.

I have been asked to do an article for the American 'Chronicle of the Horse' on these ponies (horses) with particular reference to the stallions taken to Sable for breeding purposes and would very much like to come by one of your photos if that is at all possible.

The method of loading, when tied, from the beach to the surf boat would be most helpful.

I shall understand perfectly should you not wish to part with any of this series, but would expect to pay for all costs for a glossy print should you be agreeable.

You may be interested to know I have found some sixteen stallions taken to the Island between 1801 and 1930. As I am particularly interested in the precise breed of any import, anything you might care to add to the matter would be of considerable assistance.

Hope you survived the recent storm without loss to your property or person.

Sincerely

(Mrs. Philip S. Christie.)

October 26, 1974

Mrs. Philip S. Christie,
1132 Waterloo Street,
Halifax, N.S.

Dear Mrs. Christie:

I regret to say that I have no negatives ^{of} other prints of the snapshots of Sable Island ponies in my old album in the Dalhousie Library. Those you saw there are the only ones in existence as far as I know.

I described the round-up of ponies on pages 163 and 164 of my novel "The Nymph and The Lamp", and on pages 176 and 177 you will find a description of the brutal method of transporting them from the corral on the island to the ship a mile offshore. This was fact, not fiction.

The ponies were rounded up in the last days of October 1921 on orders from the Dartmouth office of the Department of Marine and Fisheries. The Department's ship "Lady Laurier" arrived off the island on November 1st, but found the surf too high for boating the ponies. She returned to the mainland and awaited better conditions. Ten days later she was able to land our stores and take off 41 of the 60 captured ponies. By that time they had been milling around inside the corral, without food, for two weeks. The lifesaving crew reckoned this to the good, because the ponies would be weak and easier to handle. I don't blame the men, who were given a tough job to do, and did it the best way they could. I was (and I remain) scornful of those people on the mainland who from time to time demanded removal of the ponies from the island when they must have known, or should have been able to guess, what was involved in getting these wild creatures off the dunes and into the hold of a ship.

I am not relying on memory alone. My diaries (which will be added to the Dalhousie collection after my death) give exact dates and figures. The sequence of my snapshots showing the removal of the ponies ends on the beach, where each pony, with hoofs bound together, was rolled on to a hand-barrow and placed in a surf-boat. The usual load was three to a boat. Alongside the ship, her derrick lowered a cargo hook. This was hooked under the foot-lashings, and the poor animal was then hoisted and swung aboard, upside-down, and lowered into the hold. There the foot-lashings were removed and the pony was haltered to a rack. If the ship ran into bad weather on the way to Dartmouth the ponies were thrown about. They were in poor shape anyhow after the treatment they had got, and at the public auction in the Department's yard at Dartmouth they did not fetch much of a price. It seems to me that most of them were sold to small farmers in Preston and Dartmouth, black and white,

who used them to pull carts. I saw some of them in the so-called Green Market in Halifax. They had been tamed to this use by beatings that left hideous sores.

With regard to stallions imported to Sable Island. During my service on the island (1921-1922) I heard some traditions handed down by lifesaving crews since the first establishment in 1801. There were a few mentions of stallions sent there from time to time "to improve the breed", but it was said that the wild stallions, fierce fighters with their teeth and their sharp curved hoofs, badly injured the newcomers and kept them away from the mares.

You mentionx stallions or a stallion imported as late as 1930, eight years after I left the island. When I look at recent photographs of Sable Island ponies and compare them with my own taken more than fifty years ago I cannot see a bit of difference in size, colour, or general characteristics. This lack of difference in the size of the ponies also makes me skeptical of those theorists who say that hardship and scanty food caused the breed to dwindle in stature from the original horses landed there by the French.

Most of the French who ventured to North America in the 16th and early 17th centuries were from western France, including places like Les Sables d'Olonne on the Biscayan coast, where there are stretches of dunes and beaches. I have a hunch that the French who attempted settlement on Sable Island brought with them some small wiry ponies from those regions, and that the breed has continued very much the same. But I am no expert on horses here or anywhere.

As you know, La Roche established a small colony on Sable Island from 1598 to 1603. A sheltered place in the dunes near the main lifesaving station was still known as "Frenchmen's Gardens" when I was there. In this connection one of the island legends tends to refute my hunch about Biscayan ponies. It is the tale of "The Singing Frenchman", who reputedly has been seen and heard, always at dusk, on various occasions. He wore the costume of a very ancient time, and went over the dunes singing merrily and riding a large white horse!

I don't believe in ghosts, myself, and I still like my hunch.

Sincerely,

Thomas Raddall



1132 Waterloo St.,
Halifax,
B3H 3L4

NOVA SCOTIA MUSEUM
HALIFAX, CANADA

Nov.9.1974.

Dear Mr. Raddall;

Sincere thanks for your kind and informative letter of Oct.26.

I had been given some of your papers at the Killam Library but not your album. Have since spent an afternoon there and had a good look at the Sable pony shots.

What a sad life these animals have had. I did my very best to stop the two tiny foals being removed from their dams last year. They are, as you may know, in the Shubenacadie Wild Life Park and will spend the rest of their lives getting fat on visitor's titbits

I do feel, most strongly, that this herd of horses, now probably the only feral herd left in the world, should be left strictly alone and not drained off to every tin pot park and zoo.

The section on the ponies in your 'Nymph and The Lamp' is known to me --but I have not read it. You write much too well and the picture would haunt me.

Singing Frenchman sounds charming. Perhaps he indulged in ghostly prerogative and whistled up his mount from among the ghosts of all the lovely horses who have been lost in the wrecks around Sable. The FRANCIS had twelve belonging to the Duke of Kent when she was lost 1799.

My thanks, again,

sincerely

Barbara S. Christie
(Mrs. Philip S. Christie.)