

Balakrishnan Dies Of Blood Infection At East River

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Staff Writer

Balakrishnan, the bull elephant housed at the Anil Canada Limited hardboard plant was cremated yesterday at East River.

He dropped dead in his shackles at 5 a.m. Wednesday after an illness of seven days. He was 26 years old.

For a week, he shivered in a fever and ate no solid food. He was attended by a Bridge-water veterinarian surgeon last Saturday and given antibiotics. It was believed he had a virus infection of the blood stream.

The veterinarian was able to treat him only for symptoms as he was unable to diagnose the complaint mainly due to the animal's great bulk. But his fatal malady appeared to fit a blood infection described in a book about elephants.

CHAINED BY LEGS

At the time of his death, Balakrishnan was chained by three legs and he had not laid down for three months.

The vet said yesterday he believed the animal had some pain in his joints which accounted for his not lying down to rest.

Before being brought to Canada as an advertising gimmick, Balakrishnan worked in South India. When he was selected for emigration to Canada, his mahout, Sankunni had to go with him. They trained and worked together for five years, and traditionally, an elephant and his keeper stay together until death separates them.

So, Sankunni, speaking the little known dialect of Malayalam, left his family behind and brought Balakrishnan to a life of leisure in Nova Scotia.

To embark on board ship for the trip to Canada, the

team of giant animal and small, lion-hearted man walked 110 miles across the hot India countryside. They took five days to travel the distance to the Bombay dock-side.

TO EAST RIVER

After being moved from Halifax, his port of entry, to East River, Lunenburg County, Balakrishnan lived in idleness. He did no work and he walked little more than a few paces. He was first chained to a great spruce tree at the edge of the woods near a railway crossing where the trains whistled their approach.

People were able to visit him and feed him bananas, which he relished during the summer of 1967. A neighbor Mrs. Raymond Meisner, used to warm his drinking water for him until he was moved away into a shanty near the plant's main entrance (which was quieter) and where he was still accessible to an admiring public during the fall.

Towards the end of October, the public expressed a great concern about the animal's living conditions — tethered to trees, shivering in freezing temperatures behind breeched walls and a broken roof.

He was moved to a shed Oct. 30, specially built for him, at the rear of the factory and removed from public view. The dark, windowless house was not insulated and did not have a promised tank with running water. It was considered temporary as the company was making constant efforts to sell the animal or ship it away.

Frederick Cordwell of the Society of Prevention for Cruelty made regular visits to the animal.

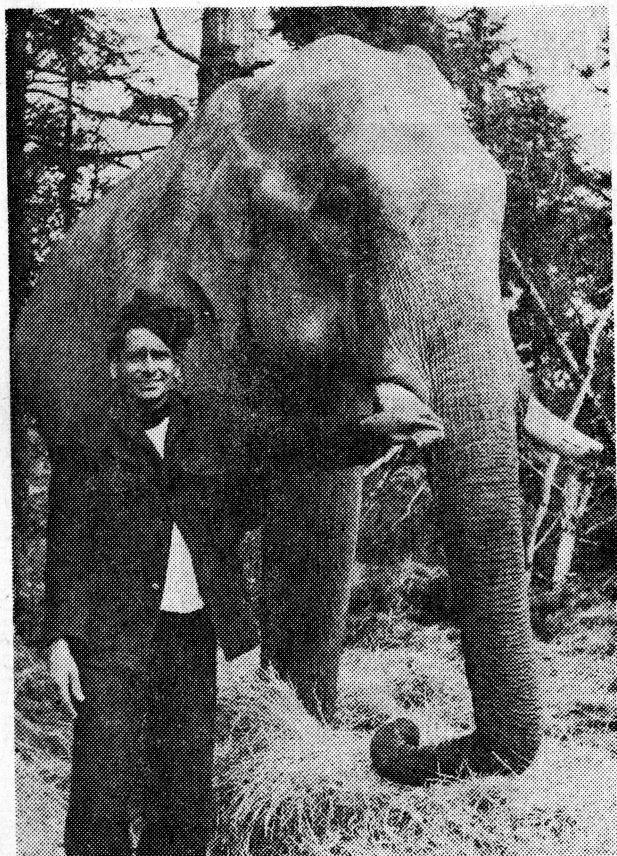
An attempt to send Bal-

akrishnan back to India was thwarted in mid-January when the captain of the City of Poona sailing from Saint John refused to risk carrying the elephant on board in winter weather.

The elephant became more restless in his solitary confinement. He was still in his shackles when he dropped dead yesterday morning.

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BALAKRISHNAN, the three-ton working Indian elephant, and his mahout, Sankunni are shown shortly after their arrival last July. The elephant failed to survive a life of leisure in Canada. He died yesterday after eight months in Nova Scotia. (Hinds Photo)

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