The White Cloud Island Tragedy of 1869*

By ROY F. FLEMING

IT IS PROBABLE that many residents of Wiarton and the shores of Colpoy's Bay when viewing the fair island at its entrance known as White Cloud, are unaware that the sinister shadow of tragedy and unsolved mystery hangs over this lonely place.

Long ago in 1869 four men journeying in a sail-boat from Owen Sound to Wiarton made a call at this island, and strange to relate, none of them was ever seen alive again. One of them was found on the island dead, apparently murdered; there was also evidence that a robbery had been committed; but though extended searches were made on the island and on the neighboring islands and mainland, no clue of the missing ones was unearthed. Many were the conjectures of what happened to the men, Was the villain of the melodrama one of the party, or did others do the evil deeds? How could they escape without leaving any trace of their whereabouts?

The following version of the White Cloud tragedy has been taken largely from the story published years ago in the Huronia magazine *Mer Douce,* and gives some of the interesting details as known at the time,

'In the fall of 1869 there occurred a mysterious tragedy on Georgian Bay that sent the whole of Owen Sound and neighboring communities into great excitement.

"In the summer of that year it seems that Captain Charles Fothergill sold his farm in the township of Derby, receiving for it a considerable sum of money, which he deposited in an Owen Sound bank. With a view to settling in Bruce Peninsula, he purchased a large farm west of Wiarton, and at once put a gang of men on the place to clear and improve it.

"Early in September of the same year Captain Fothergill left for Owen Sound in a sail-boat for the purpose of buying some seed-grain and provisions for the winter, and also to obtain some money with which to pay his hired help.

"After drawing some $2000 of his money in cash and loading his boat with the supplies, he made ready to start home to Colpoy's Bay. As the season was pleasant and his vessel commodious and staunch, he invited three men at Owen Sound to accompany him on a camping jaunt. One was his good friend, George Brown, Post Master of Owen Sound, also Charles Kennedy, a sailor recuperating from illness, and one John Robinson, a recent arrival in the town hailing from the Southern States who had been in the American Civil War.

"The boat left Owen Sound in the afternoon in a gentle breeze with everything apparently favorable for a pleasant voyage. But not one of them was seen alive after that day. As Captain Fothergill did not return home at the time appointed, friends made inquiry as to his doings; soon a search party was sent out to look for the lost men.

"At Big Bay a Mrs. Ogilvie told of having seen the sail-boat pass by near the shore that afternoon; further that she recognized Mr. Brown, the Post Master, as one in the craft. She said too that she noticed another boat pass along the same way not long after,

'When the searchers came to White Cloud Island they found Fothergill's boat on the beach unharmed and with the grain and supplies untouched. Nearby they saw the dead body of the sailor, Kennedy. (The account does not tell the apparent manner of his death.) A little dog owned by Post Master Brown watched over the boat and barked and whined piteously for his missing master. The investigators searched a large area roundabout for the others of the party

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