

# ROBERT T. OULTON, THE FOUNDER OF CANADA'S BLACK FOX INDUSTRY

**The Man who First Bred these Animals Successfully in Captivity.**

**The Story of Cherry Island Ranch and the Foxes which Made a World's Record at the London Fur Sales—Million Dollar Company Buys Oulton Foxes.**

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To come into personal touch with a man who was in at the birth of a new industry, or the discovery of a new source of wealth, and who saw it developed to proportions far beyond his wildest dreams, is a very interesting and noteworthy experience. If Robert T. Oulton had not lived, the problem of breeding black foxes in captivity, and indeed the problem of the world's fur supply might still have been unsolved. His success with Black Foxes placed that great industry on its feet, directed public attention to the possibilities of fur farming, and led to successful experiments in breeding other fur-bearing animals in captivity. It gave the Province of Prince Edward Island its greatest present and prospective source of wealth, and has added and is adding millions to the wealth of the other provinces.

Up to the present time Mr. Oulton has not received due recognition for the work he has accomplished. He was the man who built on his own farm the first scientific black fox ranch, and fed and cared for the foxes, and demonstrated the possibility not only of breeding these animals in captivity year after year, but of improving the stock and making the venture financially a very profitable one. It is true that he was not alone, and that he was not the first to make the experiment; but it was his constant study and his constant care night and day at the ranch that won success for him and his partner, Mr. Charles Dalton, and blazed the way for all who followed.

Honor to Whom Honor is Due.

Let me insert just here an extract from a letter written last year by Mr. Oulton to Mr. D. H. MacGowan, now of New Westminster, B. C.; but formerly a well-known resident of Prince Edward Island, and a warm personal friend of the pioneer fox farmer. Mr. MacGowan wrote as follows:—

"The first chapter in the black fox industry has never been written and appears to be forgotten. Many years ago—I have no means of recalling the exact date—I was fishing from a stream below the waste-water at Ben Haywood's dam at Tignish, when a man came along with a horse and cart. He stopped and told me he had a young black fox he wanted to sell me. I inquired the price, which was the modest sum of \$10. I told him I would buy it, and he told me he would keep the fox there; and advised him to go to Haywood's, for I knew he had a kind of stockade behind his barn where he had kept some red foxes, but they had died and the stockade was empty. The man told me his pup was a male, but the man from whom he got him, over near the light house at North Cape, had a female also. I told him to be sure and tell me about it, for if he knew he could get the pair he would be more likely to buy the pup. He turned around and drove to Haywood's, and in about five minutes came back with a calf in his cart and a cow following the pig. He had got the cow and calf from Haywood in exchange for the pup. Haywood went to North Cape and had to pay \$25.00 for the female pup. He kept them for some years and then sold them to two young ones, the skins of which he sold to Harry Leslie at Kensington for \$75. and \$125. respectively. The old mother fox died, and before he got one to take her place the dog died from excess of fat. Charlie Dalton skinned him and took a ball of fat the size of a coconut off the inside of the skin. This ended Haywood's experiment, but it would never have been a success, because he was not a breeder, and he was not small and the surroundings too unnatural; but if he had possessed your knowledge and resourcefulness, he would have built a wire enclosure a bush, not very far from his home, and would not doubt have succeeded in breeding them. Still, I question whether he would have bestowed the attention and care upon them that you did, and that is what made a splendid success of a doubtful experiment. You and I know that the business would have been if you had not been doing the lion's share of the work, planning and experimenting, making failures at times and profiting by the experience gained, until you finally made a success of it. I trust that, so far as the financial part of the business is concerned, you have no cause for complaint; but certainly, as far as the honor of founding a great new industry that has made Prince Edward Island famous is concerned, you appear to me not to have received the credit and praise that are justly yours."

The Cherry Island Ranch.

I have the story from the lips of Mr. Oulton himself. Years ago he moved from the old homestead at Little Shemogue, New Brunswick, to a new home in Prince Edward Island. Some years later he purchased Cherry Island, in Alberton Bay, and set himself to the task of converting its hundred and seventy acres of wildness into a home for himself and family. Both before and after he moved to Cherry Island he and Charles Dalton went together hunting every year. They kept hounds and hunted foxes. Though they killed many red ones, they never had any good fortune to shoot a black fox. They talked about them, however, and when on their expeditions and at many other times speculated upon the possibility of breeding black foxes in captivity. At last, when they had about made up their minds that the experiment should be tried, Mr. Oulton heard of a man named Gibbs who had a black

fox for sale. He sent for Mr. Dalton and together they went after the fox. Mr. Oulton did the bargaining and bought the fox; but it was paid for with Mr. Dalton's money, as Mr. Oulton was not then so small a consideration with Mr. Dalton as it became in later years. Mr. Dalton took the fox to his house, his first black fox. Some time later, Mr. Oulton learned through a friend, Mr. Arthur Ritchie, who was engaged in lumbering operations in Gaspé, that a light-keeper on Anticosti was advertising two black foxes for sale. He at once notified Mr. Dalton, and suggested that if he desired to purchase the foxes it could be done through Mr. Ritchie. Mr. Dalton did so and the foxes arrived in due time by schooner in Summerside, and were taken to Mr. Dalton's home. This was in 1887.

Mr. Dalton's efforts to breed black foxes in captivity were, however, unsuccessful, and in 1894 he entered into a partnership with Mr. Oulton. The latter built the ranch on his farm on Cherry Island, in a cove of spruce and hardwood. It was about a hundred feet square, and often as he labored in the trench into which the wire must be sunk, to prevent the foxes from digging their way out, he asked himself if it were really worth while. The days were hot, the mosquitos very troublesome, the work hard, and the outcome problematical. But it was not in his nature to take the back trail, when once he had set out to accomplish a task; and so on his little island he toiled till the work was done. It was necessary to send to Montreal to get the kind of wire needed, and after it had been placed there, Dalton made for the foxes, Mr. Dalton, who had of course visited the place for the two never took any steps without consultation, and never had a dispute in their eighteen years of partnership) took down from his home to the ranch two pairs of black foxes, one of which he had secured in Morrell, and the other from Louis Spence of Beauce. Up to this time no one had been successful in breeding the animals in captivity.

The Oulton-Dalton Partnership.

Since Mr. Dalton owned the two pairs of foxes with which the ranch was started, it was agreed that the first litter Mr. Dalton was to receive two more of the little foxes than Mr. Oulton, and the latter would live in Charlottetown and could not keep foxes there; and advised him to go to Haywood's, for I knew he had a kind of stockade behind his barn where he had kept some red foxes, but they had died and the stockade was empty. The man told me his pup was a male, but the man from whom he got him, over near the light house at North Cape, had a female also. I told him to be sure and tell me about it, for if he knew he could get the pair he would be more likely to buy the pup. He turned around and drove to Haywood's, and in about five minutes came back with a calf in his cart and a cow following the pig. He had got the cow and calf from Haywood in exchange for the pup. Haywood went to North Cape and had to pay \$25.00 for the female pup. He kept them for some years and then sold them to two young ones, the skins of which he sold to Harry Leslie at Kensington for \$75. and \$125. respectively. The old mother fox died, and before he got one to take her place the dog died from excess of fat. Charlie Dalton skinned him and took a ball of fat the size of a coconut off the inside of the skin. This ended Haywood's experiment, but it would never have been a success, because he was not a breeder, and he was not small and the surroundings too unnatural; but if he had possessed your knowledge and resourcefulness, he would have built a wire enclosure a bush, not very far from his home, and would not doubt have succeeded in breeding them. Still, I question whether he would have bestowed the attention and care upon them that you did, and that is what made a splendid success of a doubtful experiment. You and I know that the business would have been if you had not been doing the lion's share of the work, planning and experimenting, making failures at times and profiting by the experience gained, until you finally made a success of it. I trust that, so far as the financial part of the business is concerned, you have no cause for complaint; but certainly, as far as the honor of founding a great new industry that has made Prince Edward Island famous is concerned, you appear to me not to have received the credit and praise that are justly yours."

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neglected to remove the male before a litter was born, and was unwise enough to do it a day or two later. On the following day all the pups were dead. Mr. Oulton learned very early not to disturb the mother fox at breeding time, and also to discourage visits from strangers to the ranch at any time. Even his own sons did not know how many foxes were there, and both Mr. Oulton and Mr. Dalton discouraged all who tried to learn the nature and extent of the experiments on Cherry Island. The island was nearly half a mile from the mainland and the very strictest precautions were taken to ensure a degree of privacy for the experiment, although the situation made a good excuse for the necessary secrecy. Mr. Oulton still carried on his farming operations and his children had to go back and forth to school on the mainland. Mr. Oulton brought something like eighty acres of his surface under cultivation. The other very strict precautions were taken to ensure a degree of privacy for the experiment, although the situation made a good excuse for the necessary secrecy. Mr. Oulton still carried on his farming operations and his children had to go back and forth to school on the mainland. Mr. Oulton brought something like eighty acres of his surface under cultivation.

The man who had the most reason to be gratified with the results of that year's sales was Mr. Oulton, for the animals bred in captivity, under his care, made a world's record. When the sales were made by Mr. Dalton through Lamson and Company, twenty-two of the twenty-five skins, as already stated, were from the black foxes. The first named being the first named being the highest grade. It is stipulated that only foxes born in that Province can qualify for the real history of the first successful attempt to breed black foxes in captivity is written, the unassuming man, not a single word of his achievement made it possible, receives the scantiest recognition. Monuments have been erected in honor of men who have done great things for a community. Perhaps if Mr. Oulton had been more assertive he might have received a larger measure of justice, but when the real history of the first successful attempt to breed black foxes in captivity is written, the unassuming man, not a single word of his achievement made it possible, receives the scantiest recognition. Monuments have been erected in honor of men who have done great things for a community.

The Three-Legged Fox

The stories of escape and capture bring us to the famous three-legged fox, the skin of one of whose pups brought the highest price one year. The fox was lost on the mainland, and was recovered by accident recently is estimated by Mr. Oulton to have involved a loss of \$40,000. The fox was lost on the mainland, and was recovered by accident recently is estimated by Mr. Oulton to have involved a loss of \$40,000. The fox was lost on the mainland, and was recovered by accident recently is estimated by Mr. Oulton to have involved a loss of \$40,000.

This was not a wild fox, as has erroneously been asserted; but a fox born in captivity on the Cherry Island ranch. In March, about six years ago, the snow piled in great drifts, and as the weather was so cold, the fox was high in the ranch that it was not possible to get to the fox. He and his mate were able to leap over the fence and escape. Her mate was shot by the Chiv, and the fox was captured in a trap. Her leg was broken and amputation was necessary. She recovered and another male was got for her, and she produced fourteen pups in three years, in litters of five and six. The fox was high in the ranch that it was not possible to get to the fox. He and his mate were able to leap over the fence and escape. Her mate was shot by the Chiv, and the fox was captured in a trap. Her leg was broken and amputation was necessary. She recovered and another male was got for her, and she produced fourteen pups in three years, in litters of five and six.

A Serious Omission.

A great deal has been said and written about the high prices obtained for black fox skins from Prince Edward Island, at the London fur sales in 1910, but the fact has not been stated that Mr. Oulton was the owner of most of them. Of twenty-five skins of which the record is here given, no less than twenty-two were from the Cherry Island ranch. Mr. Oulton owned eight of them outright, and had a half interest in twelve more, which would make his share fourteen out of the twenty-five. The illustration of the fox was the famous sale which broke all records for black fox skins, and Mr.

Oulton is convinced that the one which was sold for \$450, but which was for \$200, the record price, was the skin of one of the previous year's litter of the three-legged fox. As already stated, the skin of her pup led all prices at another of the London fur sales. The important fact to remember, however, is that of the twenty-five skins in the following record-breaking list, taken from the official record of Lamson's sales in 1910, twenty-two were Cherry Island foxes and bred and raised by Robert T. Oulton. Here is the official sales record, and it can be verified by reference to J. W. Jones' book, "Fur Farming in Canada," published by the Conservation Commission of Canada: G. M. Lamson & Co., 64 Queen Street, London, E. C. 7th April, 1910.

Account of Silver Foxes received on consignment for account of C. Dalton, Esq., Tignish, Prince Edward Island.

Lot	Skins	Price
2118	1	310
2119	1	330
2120	1	210
2121	1	160
2122	1	140
2123	1	280
2124	1	540
2125	2 at 220	440
2126	1	420
2127	2 at 125	250
2128	1	340
2129	1	340
2130	1	370
2131	1	370
2132	1	500
2133	1	370
2134	1	370
2135	1	280
2136	1	280
2137	1	280
2138	2 at 210	420

An Ungrateful Province.

It has been said that republicans are ungrateful, but what shall be said of the Province of Prince Edward Island? They have organized a Fox Breeders' Association on the island, and classified foxes into Grades A, B, and C, the first named being the highest grade. It is stipulated that only foxes born in that Province can qualify for the real history of the first successful attempt to breed black foxes in captivity is written, the unassuming man, not a single word of his achievement made it possible, receives the scantiest recognition. Monuments have been erected in honor of men who have done great things for a community.

An Oulton from Jolice, a century or more ago, went into the wilderness to find a place to found a home. He thrust into the soil a willow wand he had carried in his hand. Today it is a grand old tree, and the old homestead remind his descendants of the incident. His son, Robert T. Oulton, sought a home in Prince Edward Island, and the only enriched that province, but brought back to Shemogue a source of wealth and the means of placing every one of his eleven children above the reach of want. To each of these he gave one or two foxes, and to these others have been bred in captivity. The foxes of the incomparable stock which made the Cherry Island ranch of world-wide fame. Two of his sons are still on Prince Edward Island. One of them remained on Cherry Island, but has since sold it and removed to the mainland.

Mr. Oulton had divided his foxes among his children, he could not be content, and when he heard of some black foxes brought to Montreal from the far northwest, he purchased a fine young pair, and placed them in a large pen constructed in his barn. He said to his wife that he had no plans yet regarding them, but just felt that he had to have something akin to the old life to keep him engaged.

Some Interesting Facts.

Mr. Oulton said that during all his experience in breeding black foxes, he never saw a red half on a ranch fox, nor a single pair of skins differed in value, but they were all silver-black. In this connection the story of an Oulton fox that died of old age on the ranch of Mr. Oulton and J. R. Taylor, on October 20, 1912, is of especial interest. Of course the skin would not be in so good condition as the usual killing time, and the fox was old, but at the London fur sales in March, 1913, it brought \$1,060 for only six black fox skins offered at those sales brought a higher price. And it is worth noting that the criticism of this skin was made by Mr. Oulton and J. R. Taylor, through Lamson & Company.

The largest single litter of black foxes Mr. Oulton ever raised was six. One female had seven, but only raised five of them. On one occasion he had two mothers in one pen, and with five and the other with four little ones. Mr. Oulton one day chanced to get a view of the pen without disturbing the animals, and to his great surprise saw the whole nine little foxes taking nourishment from one

mother; while the other was some distance away from them. It was a remarkable sight, and the fact is of interest and value to fox breeders. There was never any disease among the Oulton foxes. Despite whatever mortality may have occurred during the early period of experiment in breeding, there was always a good financial return. One female, for example raised fifteen pups in three years.

One very cold afternoon, near dusk, Mr. Oulton saw a litter of seven little ones huddled together near the fence outside the nest. He was a little anxious, and went back later to find that the mother had taken all but two of them into the nest. Thinking she would take the others also, he went away; but when he came back in the morning only five pups remained, nor did he ever see hide or hair of the other two. They probably perished and the mother buried them.

The killing time at the Cherry Island ranch was between Christmas and New Year's, and more but Mr. Oulton and Mr. Dalton were permitted to be present. In the early days Mr. Oulton removed the female after mating to a building, but learned later that the pair could be left together until just before the litter was made, when the female was removed to another part of the pen.

As already stated, in addition to his share in the partnership foxes, Mr. Oulton after a few years started his own pens for foxes of his own, having at one time five pairs. He took four pairs with him to Shemogue in 1911, and when the partnership was dissolved he received another pair, including the famous three-legged fox, Mr. Dalton at the time being the owner of his own at Tignish. Mr. Oulton's son, W. R. Oulton, remained at Cherry Island, with the pens and several pairs of foxes, after his father moved away, but later sold the island and removed his ranch, as already stated, and now lives at Alberton.

Ninety per cent. of the Oulton foxes breed when one year old. Out of eight pairs in 1912 only one pair mated, and last year every pair produced a litter. A black fox will breed for ten years and in some cases twelve. At the sales in London one year, more than half of the black fox skins which brought £100 or over were from the Cherry Island ranch. The first skins from this ranch were marketed in 1898.

The Oulton Family.

While the black fox made a fortune for Robert T. Oulton, and was made by breeding and selling skins before the present universal interest in breeding foxes and paying enormous prices for the skins, his children also gained wealth in the business.

In the fall of 1910, John M. Oulton and J. R. Taylor started a ranch at Shemogue with one pair, and raised five. They had two more litters this spring.

In September, 1913, Thomas A. Oulton, another son, living at Alberton, Prince Edward Island, was also engaged in the business, and had a success. Of W. R. Oulton at Cherry Island the story has already been told.

To C. M. Oulton and the other members of the family, these pairs of breeding foxes were given, and they set up a ranch at Shemogue last year, and have two litters this spring. On the 20th of the month, the father had three litters of fisher and nine of mink this spring. The father have from two to six in a litter, and the mother to ten. The father has a tame and can be fed out of the hand. The skins are worth \$30 to \$40, and the mink skins \$8 to \$10.

Sold the Foxes for \$224,000.00

This story would not be complete without the announcement of the sale of the Oulton foxes at Shemogue to Kierstead & Mersereau, of St. John, for \$224,000, thus placing in the hands of the Kierstead & Mersereau Fox and Fur Company, limited, which will be capitalized at \$1,000,000, the finest group of breeding foxes in the world. The price paid per pair for the foxes was \$225,000 and for one pair of pups \$14,000. Four pairs of foxes and one pair of pups were purchased from John M. Oulton and J. R. Taylor, the total amount paid being \$120,000. One pair was purchased from Mrs. G. P. Spalding for \$26,000. Three pairs were purchased from C. M. Oulton and other members of the family for \$73,000, making a total of \$224,000. The writer saw the agreements of sale stipulating the prices as above. This gives the new company eight pairs of matured foxes and one pair of pups of the famous Oulton stock from Cherry Island ranch. The skins of these will be added eighteen pairs selected from the best stock of the best ranches now engaged in breeding stock in Canada, and therefore, breeding stock is concerned therefore, no company has ever been in a more fortunate position; and Mr. Oulton, who was the pioneer successful fox breeder in Canada, has the satisfaction of knowing that his foxes have not only enriched himself and his family, but have formed the basis of a great corporation which will conduct fur-farming on a colossal scale.

## THE Kierstead & Mersereau FOX AND FUR CO. LIMITED.

Owners of the Celebrated Robert T. Oulton Silver Black Foxes, and successors to Robert T. Oulton, Pioneer Silver Fox Rancher of the World.

Capitalization: \$1,000,000. Present Stock Issue: \$700,000

Treasury Stock: \$300,000, to be sold only for the purchase of additional animals.

Options on 28 pairs highest grade Silver Black Foxes, including 8 pairs of the famous Oulton breeders and 5 pairs breeders of other standard strains; also 15 pairs young all of standard strains. 3 pairs of above breeders include this year's young making a dividend probable this year.

We have a long lease of the Oulton ranch at Little Shemogue, N. B., and are negotiating for its purchase with large farm attached.

In addition to foxes we have purchased 40 pairs Mink, 4 pairs Fisher, 3 pairs Martin, and shall add large numbers of other fur animals as they are available.

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