

'T WAS FIFTY YEARS AGO

S. LEONARD SHANNON

ON the 12th of February, 1880, the Parliament of Canada was formally opened by His Excellency the Governor-General, the Marquis of Lorne; and as I had been appointed to the sessional staff of extra clerks, I was duly in attendance.

Sir John A. Macdonald was the premier, and other Ministers were Sir Charles Tupper, Minister of Railways and Canals; Sir Hector Langevin, Minister of Public Works; Sir Alexander Campbell, Postmaster-General; the Hon. James McDonald, Minister of Justice; the Hon. L. G. Baby, Minister of Inland Revenue; Sir MacKenzie Bowell, Minister of Customs; Hon. L. R. Masson, Minister of Militia; Sir Leonard Tilley, Minister of Finance; Hon. J. C. Aikins, Secretary of State; Hon. J. C. Pope, Minister of Marine and Fisheries; Hon. J.H. Pope, Minister of Agriculture. Other prominent members were Hon. Alexander MacKenzie, ex-premier, Hon. Edward Blake, Hon. L. S. Huntingdon, Sir Wilfred Laurier (then plain Mr. Laurier,) Hon. William MacDougal, Hon. L. H. Holton, Hon. John Beverley Robinson, Lt. Col. James Denville, Alonzo Wright, Sir A. P. Caron, Sir Malachi Daly, M. H. Richey, (the two last mentioned afterwards became Lieutenant Governors of Nova Scotia.) All of these have passed away. There were many others prominent on both sides of the House whose names at present I cannot recall.

Shortly after the commencement of the session, a special committee was appointed to go into the question of the dispute as to the proper boundary between Ontario and Manitoba. To this committee I was appointed clerk. It was under the chairmanship of Simon J. Dawson, C. E., well known as the builder of the Dawson Route. Witnesses were heard, and documents were produced bearing upon the matter. One document, upon which great stress was laid, was the original charter granted in 1670 by Charles II to Prince Rupert and others, styled "gentlemen adventurers into the Hudson Bay," afterwards called the Hudson Bay Company, which described the eastern boundary of such lands as being a line drawn due north from the junction of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. Such a line would have passed through Isle Royale on the western shores of Lake Superior, and have placed Port Arthur and Fort William in Manitoba instead of, as now, in Ontario.

Among the members of this committee was the Hon. John Beverley Robinson, a former member of the Government of Upper Canada prior to Confederation; a son of the celebrated Sir John Beverley Robinson Bart., Chief Justice of Upper Canada. Mr. Robinson was a kindly, genial old gentleman. Shortly after the beginning of the work of the committee, he asked me if he might come into the office each day and smoke his clay pipe, of which he was very fond, but he thought it not proper for him to smoke in the smoking room. So he would come in daily and enjoy his smoke, and chat with me, and at the conclusion would hand the old clay over to me to keep for him until the next time. His talks with me were very interesting, principally relating to the old times of the "Family Compact" and the strenuous days of 1837-38.

In 1882 or 1883 Mr. Robinson was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, and in 1884 Toronto celebrated its semi-centennial. In the meantime I had been appointed a lieutenant in the Governor-General's Foot Guards, and on July 1st this regiment went to Toronto, to take part in a large military review in Queen's Park. After the review, all the officers of the regiments taking part went to the Exhibition Grounds for a grand luncheon, presided over by Lt. Col. R. A. Denison, the Deputy Adjutant General in Command of the District, and on his right was the Lieutenant-Governor. After the conclusion of the luncheon, Col. Denison asked all the officers to stand up, that the Lt. Governor might pass down and shake hands with all present. The Colonel of each stepped out, accompanied the Governor past his unit, and introduced each of the officers. When they came to me, the Colonel gave my name; and the Governor, looking at me, put out his hand and said, "Do you remember the old clay pipe?" —much to the astonishment of my brother officers who heard him.

In December, 1880, Sir Charles Tupper offered me a vacant clerkship in the Department of Railways and Canals, which I accepted, thus becoming a permanent member of the Civil Service of Canada. My work there was to last for a period of forty-two years.

Shortly after I became a member of the Department of Railways and Canals, the Secretary of the Department sent for me and told me there were two gentlemen in a certain room of the Department, and that I was to go to that room, and say I had been sent to place my services at their disposal. I accordingly knocked at the door of that room, and being told to come in, I saw two gentlemen seated at a long oak table. When I told them what I had been sent in for, they told me to sit down at the other side of the table.

They were the Hon. J. J. C. Abbott, and Mr. George Stephen. The former on the death of Sir John A. Macdonald in 1891 became Premier of Canada; the latter was afterwards Lord Mount Stephen.

Mr. Abbott was acting for the Government of Canada, and Mr. Stephen on behalf of the syndicate for the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. They were engaged upon the drafting of an agreement for the building. The Government of Canada had a few years before undertaken the construction of this road, a gigantic task when at that time the revenue was only thirty-five millions. It is over four hundred and fifty millions to-day.

In order to comply with the provisions of the agreement regarding the entrance of British Columbia into the Confederation in 1871, that rail communication should be had between that province and the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, the Government of Canada was strenuously endeavouring to carry this out. They had already let contracts from the head of Lake Superior at Port Arthur to four hundred miles west of Winnipeg, and from the head of tide water at Burrard's Inlet on the Pacific to over the coast range of mountains, to a place called Spuzzum. The cost was tremendous; the interest charges on capital borrowings, together with the ordinary cost of carrying on with the services of the country, would consume more than the revenue. It was deemed advisable to look for outside help to complete the road.

A syndicate was formed of wealthy gentlemen headed by Mr. Stephen for this purpose, and it was for this reason that Mr. Abbott was chosen by the Government, to act for them in drafting a proper agreement with the syndicate. Mr. Abbott was one of the leading lawyers of Montreal, as well as a member of parliament.

As each clause of the proposed agreement was drafted, it would be discussed in my presence; and when all alterations were made and finally agreed upon, they would hand it over to me. Those were the days before the advent of the typewriter, and as at that time I wrote a good hand, I was chosen to be amanuensis for these gentlemen. As each section was drafted, discussed, altered and finally agreed upon, it would be handed to me to rewrite, so that at the conclusion of some four or five days the agreement was ready for submission to parliament. Thus the original agreement was in my handwriting, and therefore early in my service I had been called upon to do my part, such as it was, in making the history of Canada.

I look back upon this as one of the most interesting events I have been connected with in a long career; for without this road being built, Canada could not become the great country it is.

The cost of the original surveys and construction by the Government of all this work then under contract, together with a cash bonus of twenty-five millions of dollars, represented a free gift to the Canadian Pacific Railway of over sixty-two millions of dollars. In addition, they were granted a bonus of twenty-five million acres of land, which at a moderate price of four dollars per acre would be equal to one hundred million dollars.

Some years after the completion of the road I was travelling from Calgary to Vancouver, and one of the passengers on the train was a Chinese gentleman with whom I got into conversation, as he spoke English perfectly. Whilst the train was passing over the coast range of mountains, the Chinaman remarked to me that that portion of the railway was built by a great friend of his, Mr. Andrew Onderdonk. When I told him that I knew Mr. Onderdonk, he asked me the next time I saw him, to remember his Chinese friend to him. Mr. Onderdonk was the contractor for two sections of the road, known as Contracts 61 and 62, and was also the representative for Mr. D. O. Mills in the building of four other sections through the mountains. Both Mr. Onderdonk and Mr. Mills were Americans well known in New York. Subsequently Mr. Onderdonk had four sections in the construction of the Soulanges Canal, and it was during this period that I had a great deal of business with him, and came to know him quite well.

When I was a visitor in New York a few years afterwards, Mr. Onderdonk, who resided there, asked me to lunch with him at his club. During the luncheon I remembered about my Chinese friend, and I asked Mr. Onderdonk if he knew a Chinaman by the name of Loo Gee Wing. His reply was to ask me where had I met him, and upon hearing of my trip from Calgary to Vancouver, he told me that if it had not been for Loo Gee Wing he never could have built the sections through the mountains, as all the Chinese labour was obtained by him.

The original terminus of the railway was Port Moody, at the head of Burrard's Inlet, and it was from that point the Government had started construction operations. During this period a British Columbian politician acquired the land around Port Moody; and when the C. P. R. Co. found themselves hindered with regard to this land, they continued their rails farther on and founded what is now the city of Vancouver.

At the time I joined the Department the permanent head was one of the finest French Canadian gentlemen I have ever known, the late Toussaint Trudeau. He had previously been the Deputy Minister of Public Works; but on the formation of the Department

of Railways and Canals, he had been transferred as the permanent head. Until his retirement in December 1892 I had a great deal to do with him, and a more courteous official I have never met with. The Chief Engineer of Canals was the late John Page, whose monument to-day is the canal system of Canada. The Chief Engineer of Railways was Mr. Collingwood Schreiber, who had just succeeded Sir Sanford Fleming as such. When Mr. Page was one of the assistant engineers in charge of the construction of the Welland Canal, one day in inspecting the work being done he found fault with the way a stone mason was performing his work, and did so in rather forcible language. Years afterwards, when Mr. Page was Chief Engineer of Public Works, that same stone mason was Minister of Public Works and Premier of Canada, the late Hon. Alexander MacKenzie.

A somewhat similar experience befell me when I was Chief Accountant of the Department, and had jurisdiction over the accounts and finances of all outside officials. There was a superintendent of one of the canals, to whom I had to issue instructions, who subsequently and before I retired from the service became Minister of Railways and Canals, the late Honourable J. D. Reid.

Among the staff of the Department was Mr. Frederick A. Dixon, who was a graduate of Oxford. He was the chief of the correspondence branch under the Secretary of the Department, and prepared all the important reports to Council, which were models of the best English. Mr. Dixon, who has since passed away, was educated for the Church. His father was a well known clergyman, but instead of taking holy orders, he preferred to come out to Canada, and try his luck at journalism. He was a reporter on the *Toronto Mail* at the time Blondin made his celebrated walk on the tight rope over Niagara Falls carrying a man on his back, and Mr. Dixon was that man. He subsequently became tutor to the children of Lord Dufferin during the term of his Viceroyalty in Canada. After graduating at Oxford, he had been tutor to the late Lord Balfour and his brother Gerald. When Lord Dufferin left Canada, he secured for Mr. Dixon an appointment in the Civil Service.

(To be Continued)