

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Thurs., April 7, 1966

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Police Register Theft Recalled

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I WAS particularly interested in Earl Taylor's suggestion last week – Douglas Boylan backed it strongly – that the Provincial Building here should be turned over to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada so that it could be preserved as a national shrine. It was made at the most recent meeting of the P.E.I. Historical Society.

I would be naturally interested because I am interested in preserving our items of historic value, and this must rank among the top Canadian historic items. But I have another reason.

It was back in 1955, or 1956, I believe, that I proposed the same thing in the House of Commons. I was pleased to find several days later that the report of my speech in Hansard had stirred considerable interest in Ottawa among people who are interested in Canadian history.

Senator J. J. Connolly, an Ottawa man, is one of those I remember who was most interested. He told me that the proposal was all the more praiseworthy because the Quebec building in which the Quebec conference had been held, where Confederation had actually been achieved, had been destroyed by fire.

SO OUR Province Building is the only remaining physical link with the historic conferences back in 1864, when Canada was born. I should say for readers who are not familiar with the story, that the original Confederation conference was held here in Charlottetown in September 1864, in what we know now as Confederation Chamber.

I don't know just what will come of the Historical Society's suggestion. But some exceptionally strong feelings were expressed at the society meeting last week. Mr. Taylor suggested for example, that "it is a disgrace" the way this historic building has been neglected. The reference was to the fact that it is not being properly recognized as a national shrine, I believe.

Before I leave this subject, I should add that I discussed the idea first with Alex Matheson, who was premier at the time, and with Robert Winters who was the minister in the cabinet at the time who spoke for Prince Edward Island. We had no Island minister then, just as we haven't now. Both men were agreed to the historic shrine idea at the time. It was understood, of course, that the Legislative Chamber would be retained for our legislature.

Police Register Stolen In 1882

EDGAR MacNUTT, noted Island historian, brought a humorous note into the meeting when he read an excerpt from a letter mailed to the original Historical Society back in 1882 by one who signed the fictitious name "Simon Mitchell, Mic-Mac".

The letter was with a volume that had been mailed to Charles Palmer of the society. It said in part: "It possesses no intrinsic value, and but little antiquarian interest,

nevertheless it is historical in character and may hereafter supply a fund of information not obtained elsewhere. It contains a faithful record of the doings of our police authorities, and with a single eye to the claims of veracity it registers the hours of duty of the police hours, their walking and sleeping movements, the hours they are on duty, off duty, and unfit for duty.

“How it came into my possession it is not necessary to enquire. During the silent watches of the night between the hours when the God of day sinks beneath the Western horizon and the stilly calm of that supreme moment when he again appears in the east to enlighten our planet with the resplendent rays of his countenance, a lonely traveller strayed into the precincts of the police station. All was quiet and serene, and the stillness of the night was only broken by the snoring of the officers, who wrapped in the arms of Morpheus made the night hideous with their deep sepulchral grunting. I have kept the precious volume ever since that midnight adventure transferred it to my custody.

“I now hand it over to the society (historical) for whose welfare I have the very best wishes.”

MR. MacNUTT copied the paragraphs from the Daily Examiner of March 6, 1882.

Told in a few words the story is that some chap with an unusual sense of humor strayed into the police station one night, after midnight apparently, and found that the policemen on duty were asleep. He stole the police register off the desk and this is the book which he mailed to the society.

Apparently the chap who stole the register had kept it in his possession for some time before he sent it to the historical society. Understandably there was a great fuss raised over the embarrassing fact that somebody had stolen from the police station the most important document in the building. It got into the City Council and into the press. Imagine the embarrassment of the policemen of the day.

Historical Society Started in 1882

THE ORIGINAL historical society was organized early in 1882 an old Examiner story tells me. If I understand Mr. MacNutt correctly, the organization wound up its affairs that same year. The present version of the P.E.I. Historical Society was organized in 1953. It's still going strongly some 13 years later.

But it's still fighting for a place in which to display the province's historical items. A meeting with the government is expected soon after the present session of the legislature closes. The problem of a building to house a museum will be discussed.

“Coffee Break” Ralph Cameron in his Evening Patriot column notes that it costs \$4,268,132 to service the province's debt now – that's the interest cost of one year. “Not too long ago,” he suggests “that would have been more than the entire budget.”

Total Budget Was \$2.1 Million

A FEW days ago my old friend Alex Matheson told me that when he sat in the Legislature for the first time some 25 years ago, the entire budget was \$2,100,000. So the debt servicing charge today is slightly more than twice the entire Island budget of 25 years ago.

And still we go on increasing the debt by large amounts each year – I don't buy the idea of selling the new Provincial Building that cost approximately \$5.1 million to a newly created company for the same amount, and suggesting that takes \$5.1 million from our debt or our liabilities, whatever name modern accounting methods gave to it.

I'm not playing party politics either. Our debt has been increasing rapidly under Liberal and Conservatives governments. The increases become greater with the passing years. And still so far as the most of our people are concerned, the cry is for ever increased spending. Where it will end, or should I say "when will it end" is something on which I wouldn't like to speculate.