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ACROSS THE ISLAND

First Women's Vote Recalled

By NEIL A. MATHESON
Provincial - Farm Editor

A HUNTER River lady's letter suggesting that young men of 18 voted in a First Great War federal election, if they had a father or brother in the armed forces, is responsible for today's column idea. Alex Matheson had the exact election day date of December 19, 1917 for me, almost before the final words of my question had been uttered, and Harold L. Palmer, former Judge of Probate, told me it was the first time women had ever voted in this country, that persons of 18 years did not vote.

That sent me back to our own files and I found a statement from the Union Government party - they comprised all the Conservatives under Robert L. Borden and some Liberals who entered into the Union Party - had a large advertisement which said a woman could vote if she was "a British subject 21 years or more, who had resided in Canada one year and was in the constituency 30 days". And here's the interesting part: the female had to be "a mother, wife, widow, sister or half sister of any person male or female, living or dead, who is serving outside Canada in any of the military forces or within or without Canada in any of the Naval forces of Canada or Great Britain in the present, or who had been honorably discharged from such services and the date of whose enlistment was prior to September 30, 1917."

I should add that I asked Mr. Matheson how in the world he knew the exact date of the political battle of nearly 46 years ago, and his answer was easy to understand. A first cousin of his had been buried that day, so the date remained firmly fixed in his mind.

I'm sorry to disappoint the Hunter River lady, but the answer to her question is "No". Persons of 18 did not vote in that election.

Women's Appreciation Lacking

THERE ARE many interesting facts about that election. I think I'll tell you about some of them. A Charlottetown man recalled for me that his wife went out to solicit women's votes when the ladies got the franchise for the first time, and came back disgusted because some of them were asking money for the vote for which the ladies had been fighting for so long.

It was the first time, apparently, soldiers' votes had been counted in an election and there still are echos of the way the Government party allotted the votes to constituencies where they would elect Union Government candidates. That party ran on a conscription plank to send men overseas, by force if necessary, to strengthen the ranks of those who had gone voluntarily.

THE OPPOSITION, made up of what were called the “Laurier Liberals”, fought against conscription, contended that food and other things, not men, was what was needed overseas. Naturally the service vote went overwhelmingly for the Borden forces.

I couldn't find a Guardian file of that date but a Patriot of the following day proclaimed triumphantly that the Liberals had swept the Island's four seats. John E. Sinclair, Springfield had a margin of 852 votes and his colleague, A.B. Warburton, Charlottetown, led by 807 votes in Queens. Capt. Joseph Read, Borden had won in Prince by 694 votes and J.J. Hughes, Souris had taken Kings by 311. The entire front page was given over to the “triumph”, though the Liberals lost nationally.

But the soldiers' vote elected Donald Nicholson, father of Ed D. Nicholson, Charlottetown by 58 votes, and Sinclair's margin was cut to three according to the Parliamentary Guide, though local papers said four. Read held on in Prince though his margin over Lefurgey was cut to 324, but Hughes was beaten in Kings where Conservative J. McIsaac won by 52 votes.

Votes Distributed Improperly

IT HAS always been charged - I believe it was actually admitted later - that the soldier votes were distributed in seats where they would be useful to defeat Liberals. But I never could figure out why they let John Sinclair win in Queens by three or four votes, when four or five more would have upset him.

The Union Government won 153 seats in Canada, the “Laurier Liberals” 82. Quebec backed the anti-Conscription Liberals 62 to three, but Ontario favored Borden 74 to eight.

Servicemen's votes now are distributed to their own home ridings, and applied to the candidates in those areas, so the packing, or stacking of 1917 cannot happen again. Or can it? Nobody has ever explained to my satisfaction why Liberal Cashin defeated PC W.J. Browne last year in St John's West (Newfoundland), by what a court decision later indicated was a manipulation of servicemen's votes. I believe the ruling indicated that more servicemen assigned their votes to that constituency than had a right to do so. But how could that be done, if the regulations are as foolproof as we had been led to believe?

Donald Cameron - ‘Highest Integrity’

RALPH CAMERON reminded me this week that his great uncle Donald Cameron, MLA who came from Springton and represented First Queens, was chairman of the legislature committee that was considering the contentious railway bill after it had been given second reading. Unfortunately for him the committee vote was a tie, he had to cast the deciding ballot. He voted for the railway. That was in 1871.

The story that has been handed down says he was hoisted on the shoulders of railway supporters and carried aloft around the Province House square, while railway opponents tried to pelt him with all sorts of undesirable objects.

And that reminds me of what my friend Charles S. MacDonald, Wood Island told me about Mr. Cameron some time ago. His story as I recall was that the Springton man had been offered up to \$10,000 if he would support the idea of putting the railway through his own Strathalbyn area. But I'll let Mr. MacDonald's letter speak for itself:

"IT WAS hoped and expected that the railway would be laid down through the farms of Springton, and perhaps Hartsville, and I have heard that the stakes of the line were actually put through these farms. This would have placed the railway south of its position. Donald Cameron - Mrs. Percy Downe, Charlottetown is a niece - was elected on the strength of these hopes, but pressure was brought upon him by arguments which he could not refute. It was pointed out the terrain was too tough, rugged and too costly, which was true enough.

"Donald Cameron reluctantly yielded, had he held firm he could have gained a considerable amount of money, but he was incorruptible. As I told you, he was never elected again because the people thought he had betrayed them, and would not listen to reason.

"Donald Cameron was a man of the highest integrity", which is a warm compliment coming from the Wood Islands man - he also came from Strathalbyn as I do myself - who weighs his words carefully before he bestows such warm commendation.

An Agricultural Survey

Dave Rogers, agronomist with the P.E.I. department of agriculture, who is completing a special course at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. is sending out a questionnaire to a number of leading farmers in the province. It contains a varied list of questions and the replies will be of benefit to department work among farmers. They will also help Dave, who needs the information for a "Thesis" to complete his post graduate study. I believe Mr. Rogers was largely responsible for initiating the pasture competition here and know he is planning further developments that will be helpful to Island agriculture, and will appreciate as many replies as possible to his questions.