

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Fri., Oct. 19, 1962

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Premier Visited At Strathnairn

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FOR TODAY'S column I went to the Strathnairn home of Premier Walter Shaw, who is just getting back to work after a several months' absence that followed two major operations. Doctors assure him he is making a splendid recovery, though it may be several months yet before he can attack his problems with all of his usual vigor.

He disposed of retirement rumors, a normal thing when illness strikes a man in public life, when he said he'll lead his party in the next election, then will consider retirement sometime later. There was no suggestion that he'd run the election and then quit. I didn't embarrass him by asking just when he may retire, but I'd imagine the "Squire of Strathnairn" would like to be in charge when P.E.I. observes its own version of the Confederation centennial in 1964, and he would be, unless of course the Liberals install their own leader when the election comes, "likely in 1963," a possibility raised in our talk, and something any political leader must always keep in mind.

HIS CHIEF ambition now is to get small industries, perhaps family industries, established in the province. The "tremendous response" to the idea of handcraft training, for example, "was most encouraging."

I was interested to find the premier had turned to painting in oils, to occupy some time during his forced idleness. "I'm emulating Churchill," he said with a grin as he showed me several canvases.

Incidentally, I suggest you keep Andrew MacPhail in mind when the party does select a new leader. His farm background in this agricultural province, the fact he was chosen for the acting premier's role during the past three months or more, and now has the acting role in the difficult highways post are some of my reasons.

1950 Convention Is Recalled

REMINISCING for a few minutes I recalled the Liberal government had sent Mr. Shaw, then deputy minister of agriculture, to Europe on an international agriculture federation tour in 1950, so he would not be available for the Conservative leadership convention that summer. It was never admitted openly but it was common gossip among top party men at the time

Mr. Shaw had not been aware of it at the time though he "did think they were most enthusiastic" over getting him away. Also not generally known is that a cablegram from the Conservatives went to his London hotel asking if he would accept nomination for leadership. Mr. Shaw was out of town for a few days on a part of the tour itinerary, and the convention was over before he saw the invitation.

But there were no regrets. Accepting would have meant loss of his civil service job several years before normal retiring age. It would mean immediate loss of salary and a sizeable reduction in superannuation. "I just couldn't afford it," he told me frankly.

First PC Winner In 28 Years

MR. SHAW admitted that he had gotten a terrific thrill on election night in 1959. That's understandable, for he was the first man to lead his party to victory in 28 years. Hon J. D. Stewart had scored the last previous win in 1931. But his answer to "How long had you been thinking of party leadership and the premier's office?" surprised me.

"I had not been thinking of it at all", he said. "The first decision to enter politics actively came when a very strong delegation from the Cardigan district (3rd Kings) came to me in 1955". It had been a mistake, he emphasized, to go so far from his own district of 2nd Queens. He would naturally have liked to run at home in 1955 but there was no opening, as veteran campaigners R.R. Bell, now on the Supreme Court bench, and J. Philip Matheson, now highways minister, were running. So he accepted the invitation in neighbouring 1st Queens instead.

THE PREMIER "enjoys political life" he told me. He likes particularly the personal tours he has made through the province. They get the politician out where he can meet the people in their homes and their places of business. "It helps to break down barriers, to abolish the feeling the politician doesn't care once he is elected", he commented.

But an almost constant stream of visitors to the premier's office is difficult. "Sometimes I don't get anything done all day but talk to people", he told me. There's a great deal of important mail crosses a premier's desk, correspondence that is vital to some phase of the economy. It doesn't seem practical to keep him from attending to it.

Office Visits No Problem Elsewhere

THE SAME thing happened to Alex Matheson when he was premier and to Walter Jones before him, though it's probably worse now. But it doesn't happen to premiers in other provinces. Nova Scotia's Stanfield told me at Halifax last year that he has no visitor problem. Quebec's Jean Lesage said the same thing when he was here two years ago.

There's a feeling the premier is all powerful, that he can and will do things his ministers have refused. But Mr. Shaw explained a premier can only act in accordance with policies that have been approved by the legislature or by the cabinet as a whole. And that's as it should be. Anything else would be chaos.

"DID PUBLIC speaking always come easy to you?" I asked the man whose platform performances I've admired for many years, even when I wasn't always in agreement

with what he was saying. "Constructive public speaking never comes easy to anyone Neil", he replied. A lot of thought must go into the selection of words and the construction of phrases, he told me, then added that he owes a great deal to the teaching and example of Dr. Malcolm Cummings of Nova Scotia Agricultural College, Truro where Walter Shaw headed the public speaking class. And he "had a marvelous English teacher" at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, Ontario. A couple of years as writer with a Grain Growers Journal at Gardenvale, Quebec, also helped him.

Strathnairn Story Is Interesting

I WAS interested in the story of "Strathnairn". It was just a wheat field, the premier told me, when they came to it some forty years ago. Walter Shaw was "a young man and as strong as a horse". There was understandable pride in his voice when he said "I cut every stick of timber that went into the house and rafted them down the river to the mill". He dug the cellar with a pick and shovel and possibly a grubbing hoe which was popular in those times.

The landscaping, including the planting of many beautiful trees, was also a personal effort, and today the premier and his guest can look through a "picture window" in the office he has had built on to the house in the past year, at a picture that is really attractive. "I planted some of the trees", he told me "before I left in the morning to teach vocational training in the Rena MacLean Memorial Hospital."

THERE'S A solid, old-fashioned type welcome for the visitor at Strathnairn. The premier and I talked in his office but Mrs. Shaw, the charming hostess of Strathnairn - the former Margaret MacKenzie was born in Victoria West, her father came from Rose Valley - came in for a brief visit and chat before I left. And the time-honored custom of the countryside, as pleasing now as it was when the first people settled here, seemed a natural part of the picture as we sipped a cup of tea, and nibbled a tasty sandwich before the "au revours".

I thought as I came away of the contented feeling of accomplishment the Shaws must share in their beautiful home and comfortable surroundings. It's easy to see why thoughts of retirement are tempting.

Another Ghost Yarn Column Asked

I HAVE space, I hope, for a reference to last week's ghost story column, and a word of appreciation to the many people who expressed their interest and suggested new yarns. The suggestions range from Murray River to Tignish and already I have a couple of "real hair curlers", to use one reader's expression. Because of your requests another ghost yarn column will follow later, but there are a lot of other things I want to tell you about first.