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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Pre-Confederation Pressure Is Noted

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I THOUGHT of Dr. F.W.P. Bolger and his book, "Prince Edward Island and Confederation" when I read about the British Columbia character who suggested Prince Edward Island was a costly nuisance to the rest of Canada, or words to that effect.

I recall having read how something close to blackmail was used by Canada to get the Island into Confederation.

For example Rev. Dr. Bolger's book says in part on page 236:

"Charles Palmer got into a panic in the early autumn of 1872 over the heavy holdings of Island debentures by his bank." Mr. Palmer was president of the Union Bank here – and was a brother of Edward Palmer, the Attorney-General in the Haythorne administration. (R.P. Haythorne formed a government in Prince Edward Island in 1869 which lasted only until 1870 when he was replaced by J.C. Pope, Conservative. Oddly Haythorne took over again in 1871 and was replaced by Pope in 1873. The authority is Dr. Frank MacKinnon's "The Government of Prince Edward Island").

"Charles Palmer went to London and attempted unsuccessfully to sell some of these debentures. Sir John Rose, a former Canadian minister of finance and now a private banker in England, informed Palmer that if there was an assurance that the Island would join Canada the bonds could be placed at a very good rate."

Pressures Applied

THIS IS ONE example of the pressure that was being applied – exaggerating a little bit you could call it blackmail – and was being brought to bear on this Island to get us into Confederation.

On page 237, Dr. Bolger says "Meanwhile influence was being exerted on the Island government from another source. Lieutenant-Governor Robinson, the ever zealous promoter of union, took advantage of the Island's financial embarrassment and advocated that Confederation was the only solution.

"I lose no opportunity," he wrote Kimberly, the Colonial secretary, "of impressing upon the members of my government as well as upon the leading anti-Confederates both in and out of politics, that Confederation is now inevitable."

On page 238, Dr. Bolger writes:

"And now that the 'tight little Island' was in financial difficulties" – this came from the attempt to build a railway – "Sir John MacDonald resolved that the overtures re Confederation should come from the Islanders themselves."

Dr. Bolger's book adds, "Sir John Rose wrote to Sir John MacDonald and said he believed "the present is a favorable opportunity for you to strike."

Then on page 252 of his book Dr. Bolger writes in part:

"In December 1869 John A. MacDonald wrote to Sir John Young saying he felt the British government should help to conciliate the Islanders because he believed " – and

listen to this – “the Island would become a rendezvous for smugglers and in fact become as great a nuisance to us as the Isle of Man was in days of old to England.”

I talked with my friend, Dr. Bolger, this week and he suggests that the British Government was anxious to have this Island join confederation so it would be spared the task of administering the Island as a colony, if it did not unite with Canada.

Dr. Bolger suggests too - this man has made a concentrated study of what happened back in those days – that some of the Islanders might have used that threat to those who had been trying to get them into Confederation. The Islanders were staying out until they got a better deal.

Indeed we're still trying to get that “continuous communication with the mainland of Canada” pledge lived-up to. It was not until the advent of the Prince Edward Island car ferry in 1917 – it started on the Borden-Tormentine run that year – that the pledge came close to being fulfilled. In the years before 1917 our people depended on ice boats, and the often frustrated efforts of ice-breakers to ply between here and Nova Scotia. Old stories I've read indicate they were stuck in the ice at times for a month's duration.

My friend Peter McCaull – he lived in Ellerslie at the time – will be interested in this one, so will Cyril Leard, Alberton and others who worked so hard to promote the West Point ferry service in recent years.

That West Point Ferry Idea

A COPY OF the Sackville Tribune of February 6 has come to this desk, and it carries an item from a Weekly Moncton Transcript edition of November 1893.

The old story indicated that Judge Landry of Dorchester and Senator Pascal Poirier of Shediac had been working to promote the West Point-Buctouche ferry service.

Their idea was that using this route navigation could be kept open with the Island during the winter months.

The proposal was to have a ferry that would carry eight cars of freight and some passenger cars across the Strait each day. The ferry would run summer and winter, the Landry-Poirier pair suggested.

Advocating the ice-free condition in that area they said:

“From West Point across there is nothing but local ice to contend with and this is easily navigable by suitable steamers.”

The Senator maintained that study during wintry weather had indicated the proposed route was sufficiently clear of ice to permit the passage of a good steamer.

Skillful Promotion

REFERENCE IS made to the tunnel idea that was being promoted at the time and this reminds me that Cyril Leard sent us a post card – Alma Buote, Tignish sent another through Edie Eldershaw, Tignish – that was a really smart idea.

Turn the card over and look closely at the middle of it and you could see a cross section of the tunnel as its main promoter Senator J.J. Howlan, Tignish envisioned it.

The tunnel idea was promoted skillfully for a number of years, I found from research I did on it. But it never was built. How inadequate a tunnel built at the time would be in handling today's vehicles! Ever think of that?

This item was crowded out of last week's column. Date it back a week, and here it is:

Girls Are Unbelievers

I TOLD this story to Walter MacIntyre and Lorne Yeo of this office and they suggested I use it here.

Friday, Jan. 31st, was really wet, so I picked up four young teen-age Georgetown girls just opposite the Imperial Oil office on Grafton Street East.

They were going to a house in Southport just before you enter the Keppoch Road. Seriously I asked them to roll down my right front window, and look across at the unusual mound that is close to the road near the turn. I told them, with a completely straight face that Mrs. Tom Murphy who lived in the adjacent house used to sit in the window at midnight on a moonlight night and watch the fairies dance on that "fairy mound".

Actually that story was told me by a most reliable neighbor. But as coming from one mouth, came a concerted blast "Oh, Yeahhh, tell us another one mister". Those girls do not believe in fairies.