

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Thurs., June 20, 1968

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Former Politician Recalls Experiences

By NEIL A. MATHESON

SOMETIME NEXT Tuesday night we shall know the results of all the arguments, some of them good, some of them bad, some of them simply childish, we have been hearing in the past weeks. I thought this week I'd try to recall some of my own experiences during the years I was at Ottawa, but more particularly some of the experiences at home.

I never could take seriously the almost complete feeling of dislike for opposing parties. I recall two examples and both of them concern just about the finest, most friendly people you could find in a day's travel.

One night late in 1952, my colleague, Cecil Miller, and I were on our way to attend a committee meeting in a rural riding. We picked up the poll chairman and were perhaps a mile from the meeting place, a school house, when the chairman said "Oh, I forgot my lantern. Just in case there might not be another lantern, I'd better get one."

This was before the days of rural electrification. Then he said to me "You see that mail box, on the right hand side of the road, just at the end of your headlight beam, turn in there. That man will give us a lantern, he's a good Liberal."

Just for fun I asked "Wouldn't a Conservative give you a lantern?" The reply came quickly, but the man was intensely serious as he said with emphasis:

"I wouldn't give one the satisfaction of asking him."

Different, At Election Time

ANOTHER MEMORY is of a canvassing trip with one of the most kindly, hospitable, most neighbourly type of man it would be possible to meet. The warmth of his welcome could be felt as soon as you entered his home, he was a completely delightful man; at least he was except in the heat of an election campaign.

This man was still friendly, generous and kind even in an election campaign, he was kind to the Liberals. But he found it impossible I gathered, to see anything good in a Conservative.

Driving by the home of a man who lived on a hill, some distance from the highway, I asked "Who lives in there Mr. Blank?" – of course I cannot use his name. And the reply came swiftly and with emphasis "Oh, a rotten Tory Bas---d."

That, I learned was the standard answer from this man when the election heat was really on. After the election, the Tories resumed their normal qualities and rated the normally friendly treatment this man could so readily bestow.

'Have You Lost Your Mind?'

A FRIEND of mine, John Bruce, Heatherdale was telling me recently of some of the things that happened back in the days of open voting.

The returning officer gives ballots now, but then he asked the man how he was going to vote. This time the man who was approaching the returning officer had been a lifelong Liberal and a staunch one at that.

To the question "Who are you going to vote for?" the man replied, "I am going to vote Conservative."

Quickly the stunned returning officer who was a Liberal, replied in Gaelic "Have you lost your mind?"

Back in the 1953 election campaign we were canvassing in the Belfast district. Often when we drove into the yard someone in the home would recognize one of us, and there would be some friendly exchanges.

On this occasion it was getting late in the afternoon as we drove into a yard. A lady was getting water from a pump not far from the kitchen door.

Miller approached her with the salutation "Good afternoon lady, this is McLure and MacLean looking for votes." At first I thought he knew the lady, but suddenly I noticed the look of almost anger in her face or was it contempt. Then she turned abruptly and said "Come in".

Miller offered to carry the kettle of water, but she wanted none of that.

Inside the house she placed the kettle on the stove then turned toward us once more.

"Meet Neil Matheson, and I am Miller", he said.

With that the lady almost threw her arms around us in welcome.

"You and your McLure and MacLean", she chided. "If this kettle had been full of hot water I would have thrown it on the two of you." There was little doubt of how she was going to vote that time.

### Favored The Tories

I BELIEVE it was the same lady that told of a political incident in her own family. The father, the man of the house, was an ardent Liberal, he just couldn't see politics in any other way.

There's a requirement that if a person has been out of the province he must be back within a certain period of time before he is eligible to vote. In this case the son of the staunch Liberal father had not been home quite long enough to qualify.

The son decided on strategy and became a 'Conservative', he figured the Tories would not oppose his vote if it was going to be for them. The father, a solid Grit, was sorely aggrieved about the development. But the son remained a Tory. Finally election day came and the father and son drove to the poll together, except that the son got out as they neared the poll and walked the rest of the way.

It was on the way home that the boy told his dad the real story, after the strategy had worked. "You didn't think I could vote against you, Dad" he observed as the unbending old Grit chuckled his relief.

I'm running out of space, but here's the story I like best concerning my own participation in politics. I was elected an MP in the general election of 1953.

### This One Close To Home

MY SISTER, Margaret, Mrs. Simon Blonden, was confined to bed at the home of her son-in-law and daughter Mr. and Mrs. Keir Warren, North River. Most people knew, apparently, that she was not going to recover. For her the aim, of course, was not to vote for a party, so much as to vote for her brother.

So what happened? A ballot was taken to her bed where she was able to do what she wanted to. It was carried by a Liberal and a Conservative poll worker. One was Mr. Warren and the other, as I recall the incident of almost 15 years ago, was Andy MacEachern, both of the North River poll.

### Election May Be Exciting

I HAVE kept Partisan political references out of this, as I do in this column. But I wouldn't be surprised to find that next Tuesday's results in P.E.I. are unusually interesting. Four weeks ago, for example, I wouldn't even have discussed the possibilities in Hillsboro. It was a foregone conclusion for the Tories. I wouldn't bet anything on it, now, that I couldn't afford to lose, but I get the impression that anything could happen on election day. Charlottetown is definitely the dominating factor in this riding, and for years I have heard Liberal politicians wail about the completely dominant Tory trend in the City. Yes, this election could be interesting.