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ACROSS THE ISLAND

West Point Boat Stirs Interest

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PEOPLE IN Western Prince County are deadly in earnest, I gather, in their effort to revive the West Point - Buctouche ferry proposal. People I talked to last week from Montrose and Alberton to West Point itself, made that absolutely clear.

Our Frank Weeks suggested I look into the development when I made a two-day visit there last week, and Frank had the right idea as usual.

The West Point Ferry company was incorporated back in 1946 and at one time, one man told me, they had two boats in mind that would fill the bill. The provincial government had okayed the proposal, his memory told him. The late Sandford Phillips, O'Leary, was the first president. An Ellerslie man, Peter MacCaull, is president now.

THERE'S A definite feeling in the area that they are the forgotten part of the province so far as tourist travel and revenue are concerned. People elsewhere have suggested to me that lack of tourist accommodation is at least partly at fault, but the West Prince reaction is two-pronged.

"We have tourist accommodation here now, they say" - a fine new 12-unit motel is nearing completion at Alberton and there is talk of another going up - "several fine parks are being developed." The other prong of the reply is "why add accommodations when we haven't got the transportation to direct the tourists our way?"

Present ferry services take the visitors in at Borden and out at Wood Islands, or vice versa, depending on which way they enter the province. "If our proposed ferry was operating." those people told me, "it would channel visitors from parts of Quebec and New Brunswick, and some from much farther away, through West Prince and on through Summerside as well."

Don Campbell Lends Support

I BUMPED into genial Don Campbell, MLA 1st Prince, in an Alberton restaurant last Friday as Frank and I were grabbing a bite to eat. One of the original shareholders, and a director of the ferry company, Mr. Campbell is solidly behind the idea. Here are some of his reasons.

It should bring good N.B. markets much closer to farmers in his area. It would assist Irish Moss fishermen and shippers - the industry is really important there - in cutting at least 100 miles from the truck hauls to markets in Maine.

Other trucks carry lobsters and other fisheries products in season to markets on the mainland and in Boston. Instead of a 135-mile haul to Moncton, for example, the haul from Buctouche would be more like 35 miles, via the West Prince ferry route, he stated.

THE PROPOSED ferry service “would give our tourist industry a tremendous boost,” and with four parks developing in the area, “several as good as the National Park”, Mr. Campbell sees West Point as “the logical terminal of a ferry service that would give many parts of the province improved communication with mainland areas.”

These are Green Park at Port Hill, Jacques Cartier park at Kildare, one at Linkletter Beach and one at Bloomfield. Another is going to be located in the Tignish area, I’m told.

Still plugging for his favorite Island area, Mr. Campbell said “this part of the province has the largest fishing industry and one-third of the Island’s potatoes are grown in this area.”

MR. CAMPBELL has put his case strongly. There’s just one thing I want to add. Several West Prince people told me they felt Summerside was not with them when they made their big play for the ferry service some years ago. They feel Summerside would be with them now, they added.

Seems to me the simple thing would be to get together with the Summerside chaps and talk it over. I agree with the man who told me “we’ll never get anywhere unless we have all the people of Prince behind us” but someone has to take the initiative in getting the various sections together. I think, for instance, of the West Prince board of trade and the Summerside board.

If the Prince County people are serious about reviving their demands, this would seem to be as good a time as any. With a federal election coming up soon, the climate should be more favorable for such requests. Some of the politicians already seem to be hit by the “promise” fever.

“First Automobile” Stories

A GUARDIAN story Wednesday saying George F. Ross, Montreal, built Canada’s first automobile in 1896 brought sharp retorts from numerous Islanders who recalled stories that Rev. L’Abbe George A. Belcourt, had built and demonstrated the world’s first automobile in his Rustico parish in 1866.

Wilf McCluskey who must have an amazingly complete scrapbook of general news as well as of boxing - I think he’s the best informed man on boxing developments in the Maritimes - brought me in a story from a Halifax paper which documents the claim. It even has affidavits, and Island papers ran the same story some years ago.

But Professor J.H. Blanchard who once taught me Botany and French, exploded the “world’s first” claim when he directed me to the Encyclopaedia Britannica which reveals the first steam powered vehicle was built by Nicolet Cugat, France in 1769, almost 100 years earlier, and a better one he built in 1770 is preserved in a Paris museum.

MR. BLANCHARD also told me Belcourt brought the steam powered vehicle here by boat from the United States, possibly Philadelphia.

Moses Gallant was sent with a team of horses to haul the heavy vehicle to Rustico but the horses played out at Milton, and a fresh team completed the haul.

The valuable clipping Mr. McCluskey brought me terms Father Belcourt “an inventive genius”, and I’m assured that he was, and says he baptized Louis Riel who led Western Canada half breeds in the Riel Rebellion.

THE BELCOURT vehicle made several exhibition runs at Rustico picnics but was hard to handle, wouldn't turn, and was made into a stationary power plant to run a wood saw, Mr. Blanchard tells me. There was nothing unusual about that, though, for a reliable Encyclopaedia records that until the period 1909-12 manufacturers were chiefly concerned with getting a machine that would just run.

Belcourt established the first Farmers' Bank in Canada in the 1860's that thrived for almost thirty years, and also established an unusual school. I may do a column on this man sometime later.

MacKay Looks Like Choice

PRINCE COUNTY Liberals meet Monday to pick a federal candidate. Former MP J. Watson MacNaught of Summerside and J. George MacKay, MLA, Albany, seem to be the only candidates. If this one goes the way I see it, the cod will go to MacKay. The opinion is based on what I have been told by a cross section of Liberals to whom I talked in the County.

Maybe I'm pushing my luck, but I was right when I said two weeks ago I'd put my dollar on MacKay allowing his name to go up, when most people regarded that as most uncertain. I could be right this time too.

In case anyone wants to bet, though, I'd urge caution. There is nothing more uncertain than an election, and a nominating convention can sometimes be just as deceiving.

Irish Wit As Whiskey Rolls

BEST STORY I heard this week concerns Rustico's Tom Doyle, Conservative, who was running against Donald Farquharson, Liberal, back before the turn of the century.

Doyle was debating a hotly contested point in a joint meeting at New Haven, when he suddenly walked across the platform to get a paper from his briefcase. A bottle of Roderick Dhu whiskey rolled out on the floor.

But it didn't phase the quick thinking Irishman who hurried over to his opponent and apologized in easily heard tones, for opening Farquharson's briefcase.

Most people knew the difference, but they appreciated the quick thinking and gave him an ovation for the demonstration of his Irish wit