

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Sat., Jan. 10, 1970

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Warmth, Humor Mark Tributes

By NEIL A. MATHESON

THERE WAS warmth and humor in the ceremony Wednesday noon at which tributes were paid to the work done for potato marketing over the years by R. L. Burge.

One story told by Donald Anderson, present potato marketing board manager, concerned Mr. Burge's participation in provincial politics back in the 1940's.

True or not, the story said that Frank Burge – then a small boy, but now a Charlottetown doctor – had attended a joint meeting one night at St. Peters. The youngster became enraged by the way Donald told it, at hearing the insults hurled at his father by Big Jim MacIntyre and Harry Cox who were running for the Liberals in the second district of Kings. Mr. Burge had a Charlottetown lawyer, Mark MacKinnon, as his colleague.

After the meeting young Burge got a ride home, and still enraged by the thoughts of what he had heard the Grits say in the hall, he entered the Burge kitchen.

Imagine his surprise when he saw his father and his colleague around the kitchen table exchanging hospitality with the two Grit candidates.

What the young boy saw that night, if Donnie Anderson was really serious in his story of the past, was not unusual. What political candidates say in debate on a public platform is a very different thing to what they say and do, when they gather together after the shouting and the tumult of political debate is over.

I have heard people criticize this, sometimes severely, ever since I was a boy.

More Serious Subject

I HAD PLANNED a serious topic for this week's column, involving the activity of one of this province's most distinguished sons of his time, and a controversy that has been stirred anew recently concerning something in which he was involved.

I decided on this lighter approach, though, after listening to some of the tales that were swapped at the testimonial luncheon at the Kirkwood Motel.

Before I leave that subject I want to add my own tribute to Mr. Burge, and my thanks for the many courtesies he has shown me over the years.

The one thing I have admired about him most was his innate sense of honesty, of honor.

Over the years I have had associations with many men in public life. Invariably I have found that the man who is honest and honorable himself is slow to impute dishonesty, or lack of trustworthiness in somebody else. On the other side of the picture, I have found men who are not reliable themselves often ready to distrust another.

Lou and I talked of things pertaining to many phases of the industry which was and still is closest to his heart. Sometimes the talk was "on the record" as newspapermen

say; sometimes it was off the record and confidential. I have never found this man reluctant to talk to me, no matter how confidential the subject matter might be.

Joint Meetings Recalled

GETTING BACK to politics and the joint meetings of which I spoke – Joint meetings brought the candidates from both parties together in a series of meetings prior to the election. Sometimes a third party candidate would be running, and he would speak also.

The debate would grow heated at times, but the meetings were always interesting, as supporters of first one party, then of the other would cheer and clap if the candidate on their side made a point.

Joint meetings were the rule when I started my newspaper career in the 1930's. I have talked with many candidates and they agreed, regardless of party affiliation, that one never changed a single vote at one of those meetings. They were fun for the crowd, but seldom were they fun for the candidates.

Glad When It Was Over

THE ONE man that was known mostly as John Archie Campbell was the one in my time whom I thought must have enjoyed a political campaign. Skilful in platform debate, he was quick to grab an advantage for his side and often drew peals of laughter and loud applause for some of his sallies. He contested the Fourth District of Kings.

I talked with Mr. Campbell about it once, after my own appearance in politics in the early 1950's. I told him that I had always thought that he must have really enjoyed the campaigning.

I was surprised, though not really, perhaps, when he told me "Well, to tell you the truth I was always glad when the campaign was over."

The names of Jim MacIntyre and Harry Cox were mentioned at the testimonial. What a pair these two must have been as they campaigned together. I recall once hearing them swap some yarns about their experiences.

One story was told by Mr. MacIntyre – he was later a Senator – and naturally the joke was on his colleague.

There was a big, rawboned chap in one section of their 2nd Kings constituency who had wanted to be made foreman of a road gang. Someone else got the foreman's job, but the man was working on the job. He had made threats to beat up Mr. Cox when he saw him.

'Put Up Or Shut Up'

AS JIM told it, he and Harry one day stopped to talk to a gang of men working on the road, and who should they see first but this same lad who was threatening to beat up Harry.

Jim is still telling the story as he reports "Harry walks right up to the big fellow, put his fists up in an attitude of attack and said, 'I hear you having been doing big talk about beating me up. Now is your chance – put up or shut up.'"

As Jim told the story, the big fellow was so surprised he didn't do anything except stand and look at Mr. Cox who was a considerably smaller man.

"As we walked back to the car", Jim said, "I asked Harry what would you have done if that big fellow had started to attack you?"

Harry's reply was "I'd have headed for the car and run like hell". And that was Jim's story.

Mr. Cox had some good ones on his colleague, but right now I cannot recall one of them.