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The Inverness County By-Election 1868.

The Election in Eatonswill has had its historian. The author of the life of that "lovely" Giant Mc Askill has attempted to rival his own fame as a biographer by writing in verse, not Homeric, of "The Great Election" in Inverness County.

"Didst thou hear these verses?

O, yes I heard them all and more, too: for some of them had in them more feet than the verses would bear".

Some old letters and papers of a by-election in that fine County recently fell into my hands -- a by-election that was critical in the history not only of that County but of Nova Scotia. Let it be mine drab prose to tell of it.

The British North America Act passed its final reading in the Imperial Parliament on March 29th, 1867. (1) Howe and his colleagues, Annand (2) and MacDonald (3), who had been in London opposing the passing of the Act returned home in April to organize the "party of punishment". So well did they, or more correctly did Howe, organize that party that at the general elections on Sept. 18th the Anti-Confederates swept the Province. Eighteen out of nineteen seats in the House of Commons and thirty-six out of thirty-eight in the House of Assembly were carried by them. The three who escaped from under the avalanche were Tupper (4) in Cumberland County for the House of Commons, Pineo and Blanchard (5) in Cumberland and Inverness counties respectively for the House of Assembly. When Tupper retired from the Premiership of Nova Scotia to enter the field of Dominion politics Blanchard had been selected as his successor. He quickly formed a Government of which the Hon. P.C. Hill (6) was next to himself the outstanding member and was sworn in on July 4th 1867. Promptly after the election he and his colleagues resigned or rather tendered their resignations. But it so

happened that the term of Lieut. Governor Sir Fenwick Williams was expiring and he was awaiting the arrival of his successor, General Sir Francis Hastings Doyle. Sir Fenwick did not care to act - probably thought it would be unconstitutional for him to accept the resignations, and certainly discourteous to his successor. He asked therefore that they be withheld until Sir Francis came. This was done and it was not until early in November that Blanchard and the members of his Government were relieved from office. It was notorious that Governor Williams was strongly in favour of Confederation and had exerted his prestige and influence to bring it to pass. It was, then, perhaps not unnatural that his action now should be misconstrued but there was nothing in his conduct to justify the violent attacks made upon him by the Anti-Confederate press-- the language of the Eatonswill Gazette and Independent was mild and lady-like in comparison to that used about Nova Scotia's greatest soldier.

One would have thought the Anti-Confederates would have been content with their overwhelming victory, but No!, Blanchard was a thorn in their flesh. Single handed, for Pineo tho' a competent and successful business man, was no debater, he made a great fight during the session of 1868 and the Repeal Government was determined "to deliver", to borrow one of Tupper's expressions, the House of him. Blanchard was the legal agent of the Dominion Government and the Attorney General, Wilkins (7) introduced and secured the passing of an Act disqualifying from holding a seat in the House of Assembly any official of the Dominion Government. Blanchard countered by resigning his position before the Act had reached its final stage. Then resort was had to the deadly election petition. The petitioner was MacInnes (8) one of the defeated candidates in Inverness. The petition was heard before a

Committee of the House and the result was a foregone conclusion. Blanchard was unseated. The Nova Scotian in its issue of Sept. 28th, 1868, carries this characteristic comment:

"One more of the traitors has been cast out of the Legislature. Mr Blanchard has been unseated by a Parliamentary Committee and goes to throw himself into the arms of the Unionist Electors of Inverness. Mr. Pineo, the last rose of summer, is left blooming alone, his lovely companions being faded and gone, and still in a hopeless way he continues to address sad soliloquies to the Speaker -- like Campbell's 'last man' to the Sun."

The by-Election that necessarily followed was held on Oct. 22nd, 1868. The anti-Confederates nominated a young untried man Hugh MacDonald (9) who was then teaching school at Mabou. He had been a student at St. Francis Xavier College and had passed his preliminary law examinations, but the death of his uncle and patron the Very Reverend Alexander MacDonald, Vicar General of the Diocese of Arichat, compelled him to abandon his law studies and turn to teaching for his living. He could not make a speech himself and the local speaking talent was largely against him. It looked as if Blanchard would have a walk over. Then the Macedonia cry went out. It was in the form of a letter to the editors and proprietors of the Acadian Recorder.

"Messrs Blackadar Bros.,

Dear Sirs:

It is all very well for the Acadian Recorder and Citizen to be telling the public every issue what a glorious victory is awaiting the Anti-Party in Inverness County, but depend upon it if some one who can talk does not come down here and combat Mr. Blanchard the election will go against the Antis.

Yours in haste,

Port Hood,
Oct. 6, 1868.

(10) Joseph H. Bent."

The Messrs Blackadar evidently turned the letter over to the still powerful and active Anti-Confederation League of Halifax. Naturally MacDonald (3) of Antigonish who has formerly represented Inverness County in the Provincial Legislature should have been the man to

send but he was busy with his Court engagements, so the choice of the League fell on Edward M. MacDonald (11) M.P. for Lunenburg County, Editor of the Citizen, one of Howe's most trusted lieutenants, and second only to Howe as a platform speaker. After two days in the County Mr. Mac Donald reported to the Treasurer of the League Robert Boak, Jr. (12) as follows: -

Mabou 13th Oct. 1868.

"My Dear Sir:

I have now been two days in the County and up to this moment do not feel that I can speak confidently as to the result of the contest. Blanchard has more friends than he ought to have. On Sunday there was a Sacrament in Mr. Forbes (13) church at Plaster Cove. He had four ministers helping him - Messrs Sinclair (14) of Mabou, McKenzie (15) of Baddeck, Stewart (16) of Whycocomagh and Ross (17) of Grand River - all Blanchard men. On Monday there was about three hundred people there at church - chiefly from West Bay and River Denis and I do not believe there were ten opponents of Blanchard among the whole of them. I spent the forenoon among them but I fear not with much effect. You know how hard it is to turn a highlander when once his mind is made up thoroughly. It is very evident that Blanchard will take a heavier vote in that end of the County than he did in 1867. The Protestant cry has been raised by Blanchard and his friends, the ministers among them. The Separate schools story has been ingeniously distorted and lied about and there is no use for any person who does not speak Gaelic trying to go among them or to influence them. There are only two Presbyterians at the Strait who will vote for MacDonald. It is impossible to judge from the Election of 1867 how matters are to go now. About 300 votes were given for Blanchard and Gillis (17A), if these go for Blanchard again it will be hard to beat him and I find that there has been no regular canvas or systematic organization to ascertain how these doubtful votes will go. Another section of voters went for Blanchard and MacInnes (8) - it is not even known how these are to vote. So you see how loose and uncertain the whole thing is. The Sheriff's sons are doing everything possible against us. MacInnes brought me from the Strait to Port Hood yesterday. On the street last night the Sheriff's son David and (18) Peter Smith's son pelted him with eggs and afterwards took the wheels off his wagon. Tell Mr. Annand (2) that is all the thanks he gets for leaving Laurence (19) in office. I am trying to stir up our friends to have a good turn out on Nomination Day for much will depend on the strength we show and the impression I may be able to make on the crowd on that occasion. In haste,

R. Boak, Esq.,

E.M. MacDonald.

On Nomination Day a joint meeting was held at which Blanchard and MacDonald (E.M.) were the principal speakers. Each drank delight of battle with his peer. Mac Donald was in his best form and Blanchard was ever a bonnie fighter. There was no impartial judge or jury to choose between them and award the honours of the debate but the Anti Confederates at any rate always believed that it was Mac Donald's speech that stemmed or rather turned back the tide that had begun to run in Blanchard's favour. Howe wrote on Nov. 23rd. 1868: (20) "In the recent contest for Inverness MacDonald rendered yeoman service, and, judging by the bitterness of Mr. Blanchard's style, and by reports received from the County, it is more than probable that that gentleman's defeat, whatever other causes may have so equally divided the electors, was ensured by MacDonald's presence on Nomination Day.

When one remembers that a change of less than thirty votes (21) would have elected Blanchard he will have no difficulty in concluding that Howe was right - that it was MacDonald's presence in the county and his speeches that saved the day for his party. Loyal Confederates however always believed that it was not MacDonald nor his speeches that accomplished Blanchard's defeat. On Election day a fierce wind with snow was blowing and the votes of the free and independent electors on the south side of St. Patrick's channel and Wycocomagh Bay, who were all Blanchard men, were lost to him because they could not cross the water to their polling place at Whycocomagh.

Both parties affected to be pleased with the result. The Antis rejoiced at Blanchard's defeat; the Confederates at the smallness of the majority against him. The Confederates seem to have had the better reason for rejoicing. Dr. Cameron (22) the year before had been elected to the House of Commons as an Anti by a majority of 567 over Samuel MacDonnell (23) and the Antis had always maintained that the

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true voice of Inverness on the question of Confederation had spoken then. At any rate when the next general election for the House of Assembly was held three years later, Blanchard had no difficulty in regaining his seat. For three years he led the Opposition. Ill health obliged him to decline a nomination in 1874 and he died on December 17th 1874, while the battle of the ballots was going on. His opponent in the by-election after three times experiencing the pangs of defeat fell on the cushion of the Shrievalty and for many years filled the office with distinction.

The date of the by-election was Oct. 22nd 1868. By that time Howe had abandoned all hope of Repeal and the negotiations between him and the Dominion Government for better terms for Nova Scotia begun with the visit of Sir John A. Mac Donald and three of his ministers in August were well under way. On Oct. 6th (24) Howe had received from Sir John a semi-official letter containing his propositions for settlement and so informed his supporters in Parliament (25). On November 6th he writes that he had shown the correspondence to twenty of his friends. (26) An interesting question arises. Was MacDonald when he went to Inverness and rallied the Anti-Confederate party by the old arguments against Confederation and by the hope of Repeal from its bonds, aware of these negotiations and their probably, nay inevitable, outcome. Conservatives said so and Liberals of the baser sort as well. He was unquestionably one of the first to accept the better terms Howe secured and abandon the struggle for Repeal. On November 19th in a carefully prepared editorial that gave great offence to the discards of his party he stated he was willing to lay down his arms. But I like to believe and from all I can learn of MacDonald I feel justified in believing that when he fought the battle in Inverness County he fought as a true knight should

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fight with no doubt as to the righteousness of his cause. I am confirmed in this opinion by what Howe wrote to the Morning Chronicle on November 23rd. (27): "Knowing well, that for months in the city and this county and elsewhere great pains had been taken ever since his appointment (i.e. as Queen's Printer) I was determined that he should not be responsible for anything that I said or did. My letters have not been shown to him, nor did I urge him to express any opinions. His own review of the controversy (i.e. in the editorial referred to) I never saw until it came to me in the Citizen. It has been written carefully, with certainly no desire to defend the Local Government but with a very proper estimation of the yet higher obligations which he owes truth and to the country at large." But MacDonald was not for long kept in the dark. On November 24th. Sir John A. Mac Donald (28) writes to Howe enclosing the memorandum of his Finance Minister on the financial position and asking that until it had been submitted to his colleagues "its examination may be confined to yourself (29) McLelan and E.M. MacDonald."

Howe concludes one of his letters to Sir John by saying, (30) "the skirmish between Blanchard and Mac Donald will do no harm. He is evidently referring to the then recent brush in Inverness County but what does the statement mean? My distinguished friend (31) Sir Nicholas Meagher has, I think, given the true explanation. He suggests (32) that Sir John deplored the contest fearing that if Blanchard were elected he would continue the acrimonious discussions and revive and intensify the bitter feelings of the year before and make the settlement Sir John was striving for difficult. In proof he points out that Tupper, who never turned his back on a fight, was in Halifax at the time but did not go to the assistance of his friend and successor. If this suggestion be correct, and it seems very probable, then Howe who had been informed of Sir John's apprehensions was allaying them.

(2) Hon. William Annand. Owner of Morning Chronicle. For years Howes intimate friend and colleague. Editor of his Letters and Speeches. Became leader of government opposed to Confederation and seeking Repeal in 1867, with seat in the Legislative Council. Refused to follow Howe in accepting "better terms". Appointed Immigration Agent for Province of Nova Scotia in London in 1875. Died there 1892:

(5) Hon. Hiram Blanchard, first premier of N. S. after Confederation. Born at Pictou, 1820. Barrister 1943. Practised his profession at Port Hood for 15 years. Then removed to Halifax where he soon became a leader of the Bar. M.P. Inverness County 1857-67 and 1871-4.

(11) Born at Durham, Pictou County. Trained in printing business and newspaper work on Eastern Chronicle of which paper he eventually became editor and proprietor. With Garvie (afterwards Hon. William) founded The Citizen, a daily newspaper published in Halifax. When Garvie went to London in 1867 to study law MacDonald became editor and sole proprietor. M.P. for Lunenburg County 1867-'71. Appointed Collector of Customs Halifax 1874. See Howe's Letters and Speeches.

(21) The late Judge Longley in "Joseph Howe" in the Makers of Canada series says at p 202 Blanchard was defeated "by an immense majority". The British Colonist, the Confederate organ, states that the official majority was 24. The Nova Scotian gives the figures and makes the majority 58.