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# "OLD TIME STUFF"

## Reminiscences of the Ottawa of Earlier Days. Personages, Scenes and Incidents Recalled for Evening Citizen Readers

Here is an Old Time Stuff story which fairly pulsates with action.

It includes an eye witness narration of a famous pugilistic encounter which took place at Billings Bridge during the Grant-Bell election campaign in Russell County about 1864

As far as known all the full grown men who were present on that memorable occasion are dead. The story as now told by the O. T. S., is narrated by one who was a boy of 12 at the time, and is now 72 years of age. Ask any of the elderly men of Russell county if they ever heard of the Holmes-Hackett fight of the sixties and their eyes will brighten, for all over Russell county the story has been so handed down from father to son, that it has become a part of the history of the county.

Then is the story of the great Joe Montferrand, who in the forties could thrash any man of any size anywhere on the Ottawa river. The father of the man who tells the story, knew the great Joe personally —sailed on timber rafts with him, and frequently saw him fight.

**Honor To Know Joe.**

In the days when John L. Sullivan was in his prime, there was a phrase "Let me shake the hand that shook with Sullivan." In the early days any man who could say he knew Joe Montferrand was looked up to with great respect. Montferrand was not merely a great fighter who "could lick his weight in wild cats", but among the French he was an institution. Even a serious minded historian like the late Benjamin Sulte has written a whole chapter about the famous Joe, who is about to be introduced intimately to O. T. S. readers.

Also there is the interesting bit of information that an Ottawa man, the warrior of today's feature story, claims descent from the famous royalist dukes of Orleans of France, and that one of his ancestors was among the first of the small band of white men who first stood on the site of Montreal with the great Maisonneuve.

### RECOLLECTIONS OF ALBERT LECOMTE

And with the above preface we roll up the curtain and introduce Mr. Albert Lecomte of 183 Glen avenue, son of Paul Lecomte, who came to Billings Bridge in 1844 and farmed there. Mr. Lecomte's mother's family came to the Bridge in 1830 from below Montreal and also farmed. From these statements it will be clear that Mr. Lecomte comes from fairly old time stock. Mr. Lecomte is himself a bit of a pioneer as his clear personal recollections go back as far as 1860. At that time he was nine years of age.

**One Great Event.**

"I remember quite a lot of things which happened in the early sixties," he told the Old Time Stuff. "But there is one thing which stands out very clearly in fry mind and was a celebrated fight which took place at the Bridge about the year 1864, during polling day in the election between the late Sir James Grant and the late Robt. Bell. In those days elections were real live affairs, entirely unlike the present. It was considered a poor election which did not produce several free-for-all fights and numerous individual fights. The candidates always tried to draw to themselves the best fighters in the county, for at the polls in those days it was often a case of the man with the biggest set of personal followers and the best scrappers winning, as the voters of one side would often be intimidated at the polls by the scrappers of the other side. Many is the big fight at the polls I have seen in the days of open voting.

**Boss Fighters Met.**

In the particular election a man named Harkinson Hackett and another man named Robert Holmes were the boss fighters on either side. I do not remember which candidates they worked for. But in any event, they were both celebrated as scrappers, and to be celebrated as a fighter at a time when might was still right, meant something.

"In the course of election day in this particular campaign there two election leaders got into a fight. It is one story I never since the time happened, and I was only 12 at the time, but the encounter was such a furious one that I remember it, as if it were yesterday.

**Constable Routed.**

Both men were about 30 years of age and very powerful, but Holmes was the most wicked fighter. After the fight had gone on viciously for some time Constable Brouse, who was then an elderly man, tried to interfere. I remember that Holmes turned on him and with one blow knocked him into the ditch. Mr. Brouse had been wearing a stove pipe hat in honor of election day. The hat followed him into the water.

"Then the crowd got two planks and tried to jam the fighters between them. But Holmes kicked first one plank and then the other away and sent the men holding them rolling on the ground. Then Holmes turned his attention again to Hackett. By this time the fight, we had crowded onto the bridge.

**Into the River.**

"Holmes grabbed Hackett around the waist and forced him against the railing. Both men fell fighting into the water, which being near shore was shallow. The old wooden bridge was low and therefore close to the water at that time. When the men got to shore, they would have continued the fighting, but friends induced Hackett to go away, and thus the fight ended.

**Re Joe Montferrand.**

"Talking about fights," said Mr. Lecomte, "my father knew the great Joe Montferrand, and several times sailed down the Ottawa on rafts with him in the forties. Such a man as Joe Montferrand (pronounced Mofero) there never was since. There wasn't a man between Montreal and the Tenbroeckhouse who could beat him fighting. Joe Montferrand was about the only man the Shiners were afraid of. He had the Shiners where he would do when he met Joe. That was in the thirties when Joe was in his prime. The fight ended by Montferrand throwing Collins into the big fire place of the bar room.

**Human Club.**

"On one occasion also in the thirties Joe got surrounded by a crowd of enemies on the Hull side of the Chaudiere bridge. When he could not fight with his fists any more, he grabbed one of his enemies and used him as a club to fight his way out.

"It is said," continued Mr. Lecomte, "that Joe always fought fairly, unless he was crowded. In such cases he never hesitated to use his feet, and it is told that they were a terrible weapon with him.

"Joe died in 1844. He was born in 1802, and as he fought well into the forties, it will be seen that he was over 40 years of age when he stopped scrapping."

**Saw the Prince.**

Mr. Lecomte's first definite recollection was of the year 1860 when the late King Edward—then Prince was as Prince of Wales and like the corner stone of the parliament buildings. Mr. Lecomte lived at Billings Bridge then, and walked to the city every day, as the only road then available—the old river road along what is now Riverside avenue and through Ottawa East.

"It was a mighty poor road" he says, even for walking. Bay-like, he was then in power). I venture to write you on the subject of the coming election in Carleton. It is generally conceded that it would be impossible to find a candidate as a prominent supporter of the government as I am.

"Carleton is not yet educated up to that, though we are glad to say no doubt being made in the public opinion of the county.

"Mr. May being in the field and having intimated his intention to give the government fair play, I have decided to support him. I give him their support.

"I would feel obliged if you could take some interest in securing his election. Yours truly,

(Sgd.) "R. W. SCOTT."

A statement which had been issued to the electors on about 25 Mr. May had said:

"I need not weary you by allusions to my political sentiments, as I have long been known as a Conservative man in Carleton. I may briefly state that I am a warm friend to British connection, and am as I have always been, a CONSERVATIVE."

The election resulted:

| | |
|---|---|
| Rochester | 1282 |
| May | 1196 |
| Sparks | 1185 |

**Sir John To Rescue.**

In the 1878 election Sir John Macdonald was swept into power on the National policy cry with a majority of 78 seats.

Between 1878 and the election which came in 1882, a strong reaction began to set in against the policy. So strongly did things work his way that the Conservative party leaders asked Sir John Macdonald to contest the constituency.

Mr. May, in a circular issued on May 16, 1882, wrote:

"Despite your honorable and manly support in '78—thanks to the pitiable blundering of my friends, opponents—I was beaten by a small majority. "Beaten, but did I say? Numerically worsted, virtually triumphant in the intelligence and manliness which barely failed to give me a seat in Parliament. Will you support me once more? Will you afford me one more chance to wipe out forever the disgrace which, in the Party's ments, has brooded like a cloud over this noble country in the form of a miserable and most imbecile misrepresentation? Again, I ask you will."

For some time it looked as though Mr. May was sure to win, but the personality of the "big chieftain" who personally stumped the county, was too much for the forces of the May's Conservative friends, who had been in the field for some months.

At a late hour the Liberals entered the fight and Mr. Scott's son (later Hon. E. R. Bronson) was put into the party could produce and withal the game was played. Mr. Bronson's supporters gives went bodily almost to the polls. The fight resulted:

| | |
|---|---|
| Scott | 617 |
| Sir John | 1185 |
| May | 1196 |

**The Last Outsider.**

Sir John was returned for Carleton for several terms. Then the sentiment for a native Canadian man, a farmer, which had been steadily growing, became too great for the late outsider to represent the county.

The 1882 election gave Sir John's government a big majority.

### IMMIGRATION IN THE SEVENTIES

In the years between 1870 and 1875 there was considerable immigration from the Ottawa Valley—Ottawa being the neck of the funnel. Many people left the valley and the immigration societies were formed in this district, the object being to encourage and financially assist immigration, especially farm laborers. Generally speaking, the plan of operations was to get settlers into the whole or part of the passage money of the immigrant, and then have it repaid through the employer on the instalment plan. A big sale property had been arranged for the immigrants when they were landed, and the agents of the societies in England.

Mr. W. J. Wills, Dominion Immigration agent at Ottawa, was the leading spirit. He had an office in a circular letter written in October, 1871, he says:

"My suggestion is simple, practical and safe. To the farmers and others who want hands to form an association amongst themselves for bringing out laborers. There would be no difficulty in forming such an association, if the proper parties would take it up. The City of Ottawa Agricultural Society, which is intended to be the agricultural society for Central Canada, is built from the base of it. I do not mean that they should act as an immigration agency, but a number of the members being now organized for the purpose, further resolve themselves into an association for importing laborers.

**A Practical Plan.**

"The plan of operations would be something as follows: Any person or 100 or 50 farmers and other employers of labor, have the power to bring out one or more laborers, as they might require, and this power could either be sent home to our Government agency, or they might send home an agent of their own, for the purpose and send out the 500, 100 or 50 men or women wanted, whichever plan was considered best. It would, of course, be necessary for the agent to make an agreement with the people sent, whereby they would bind themselves, I oserve their employers here for a term of years, the wages advanced for their passages, deducted from their monthly wages.

On November 2, 1871, a meeting was held in Ottawa to carry out the ideas advanced in Mr. Wills' circular. It was largely attended both by the Protestant farmers and Ottawa business men. A society was organized, to be known as "The Farmers' Immigration Society." J. M. Currier, M.P., occupied the chair.

Before the meeting closed the following persons agreed to advance money and bring out immigrants, as follows:

R. W. Smoott, M.P.P., two families, James Shead (lumber) 10 families, Capt. A. Fraser, 10 families, David Moore, two men.

TELLS OF EARLY DAYS AT BILLINGS BRIDGE

MR. ALBERT LECOMTE, who gives Old Time Stuff his recollections of pioneering conditions in the early 60's.

W. McKay Wright, two men and two girls.

J. M. Cornell, two men.

Ruggles Wright, four men and two girls.

Mr. Eaton, two men.

J. W. Thompson, four men and two girls.

Hamilton Brox, 20 men.

Alexander Pongers, M.P.P., two men.

A number of Carleton and Wright county farmers also subscribed for a score or more of men and girls.

The total was then less than 4,711 immigrants of all kinds passed through or stopped at Ottawa.

They were classified as follows:

Farm laborers, 1,010; ordinary laborers, 1,385, servant maids, 1,145; Sir John A. brickmakers 171.

The remainder of the total were made up of tailors, tanners, wagon makers, coopers, cabinet makers, waiters, pulpers, and born.

**A Counter Force.**

The Ottawa Valley newspapers of the seventies devoted much editorial space to the subject of immigration. Parenthetically it might be remarked that they also devoted much attention to the subject of the annexation of Canadians to the United States.

At this period Canada was suffering a period of financial depression and thousands of Canadians were leaving for the United States.

In the House of Commons in the year 1871 Hon. Mr. Dorion stated that between 20,000 and 40,000 were leaving Canada yearly, mostly from Quebec. It was asserted by United States newspapers about this time that there were 200,000 French-Canadians, mostly from Quebec, in the New England states.

In view of the issues of population which the country was suffering from, Canadian statesmen were sure did all they could to foster immigration from the mother countries, and the people of Ottawa and the Ottawa Valley did their full share.

### POLITICAL RESPECTS OF THE EIGHTIES

Whatever is the case, superior virtue or simulated considerateness, the politicians of today are in a different category from those who flourished in the early eighties. There may be occasional vigor displayed in condemning parties the personal equation is treated with the utmost courtesy. Not so in the days when Sir Richard Cartwright and Sir John A. Macdonald led the leagues mixed it on the platform. Then the fame was not the one fought so much about was made to ring through the land as a result of their efforts. The epithets were so pronounced as to leave no room for doubt as to the tenor of the game was played. Each party could produce and withal the game was played. Each party could produce and withal the game was played. Each party could produce and withal