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"OLD TIME STUFF"

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

"Story Monday"—September 14, 1842—is one of the red-letter events of Ottawa's history.

But for the presence in barracks of a couple of companies of regulars of the British army, the happenings of that day might have been much more grim than they were—though they were quite bad enough as it was. The Packet newspaper described them as "degrading," "outrageous" and "deplorable." There are a few people still living who were born or died in the period and who remember in a hazy way the stirring events of that day—how young David Bostwick was killed, and how the town was stirred to its very foundations. If you ask these people about "Story Monday" they will tell you of a few scattered incidents, but none of them can give a connected story of what actually happened—or why.

Story is Preserved.

But fortunately the written page still remains. While nearly all the files of the newspapers of that day have been burned or otherwise destroyed, clippings from the various newspapers have been carefully kept in scrapbooks and these are now kindly loaned to the Old Time Stuff. It is from a clipping from the Packet newspaper that the material for this story has been secured.

Lasted All Week.

Before proceeding further it should be pointed out that references to "Story Monday" as an isolated day do not give any proper conception of what took place at that stormy period, as the political disturbances which began on the Monday continued practically all the week, and both the town and the country roundabout were in a ferment.

Background of Story.

And now as to the background of the story. So that what happened may be properly understood, let us reconstruct the general events which led up to the Bytown outbreak. The start of the whole trouble was the Rebellion of 1837. Years rolled by, and then came the proposal to pay compensation to those who had suffered losses to their property because of the rebellion. Some of those had been rebels, other claimed to be loyal. But most of those concerned lived in Lower Canada, and the proposal caused a furore among the Loyalists of both provinces. At that time the peregrinations provincial parliament was being held in Montreal and Lord Elgin was the Governor-General. Public meetings were held in Lower Canada, despite the entreaties of the Loyalists, who wanted him to refer the bill to Bytown.

Buildings Burned.

Lord Elgin, however, took the ground that the provinces had no committee machinery, and signed the bill. There were riots all over the province, and they culminated in the burning of the Parliament Buildings on April 25, 1849. Lord Elgin was insulted in the streets of Montreal by the Loyalists, or Tories as they were called.

At that period there were two chief parties, the Tories or ultra-Loyalists, and the Reformers. The Reformers were, however, divided into two camps, one of which was known as the Radicals. Later many of the Reformers joined forces with the Tories and the combination became the basis of the present Liberal-Conservative party.

The Bytown Trouble.

In the fall of 1849 Lord Elgin made a tour of the Canadas. On the whole his reception was anything but cordial. The Loyalists at some places were quite hostile. At Brockville wheat a party of men met his boat carrying a black flag.

When it was learned that His Excellency would take in Bytown as part of his itinerary, a movement was started by the Radical element to tender him a public reception on the market square. It was claimed, however, that the reception would be strictly non-political, and on the strength of this promise several prominent Tories signed the petition for the meeting.

When the news of the proposed gathering got out the Loyalists got up in arms and began to prepare a counter-demonstration. They said the Radicals intended to congratulate Lord Elgin on his stand on the Rebellion Losses Bill. The fiery cross was carried out into the hotbeds of loyalty in Carleton county and trouble began to settle.

The things that started the trouble was the Bytonian article, which appeared about September 10 on the town fences and public notice boards of the town:

"PUBLIC MEETING!

"TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN OF BYTOWN AND ALL OTHERS HER MAJESTY'S SUBJECTS, WHOM IT DOTH OR MAY IN ANY WISE CONCERN.

"Whereas we, J. B. Tourgeon and Charles Sparrow, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace in and for the Town of Bytown, resident within the said town, having received a requisition, signed by John Scott, John Pretty, Joseph Aumond, H. J. Friel, Isaac Smith, Thos. Corcoran, R. Lyon, A. Gray, Wm. Torrance, J. Bedard, John McDonald, E. E. Lyman, C. W. Fraser, J. E. Bangs, Nathan Mason, Gerald Kennedy, Robert Bell, James Scanlan, Geo. T. Duncan, Daniel McLachlin, H. McLachlin, John O'Meara, Edward Darcey, Chas. Rowan, Thomas Hanly, John Wright, Wm. Bing, Peter R. Red, Duncan Stewart, N. Burwash, A. Boulton, J. Berichon, M. Fitzgerald, P. A. Egleson, Charles Laperle, John Grant, Thomas Burns, Robert Lynn, Neil Robertson, Milo Burke, Pierce Grace, M. Tracey, M. Slavin, D. Bourgeois, L. Grison, J. M. Currie and Horace Merrill, none of whom are freeholders of the said town, having a right to vote for Members to serve in the Provincial Parliament in respect of the property held by them within the said town, requesting us to call a public meeting of the freeholders and householders of the said town of Bytown, to be held at the Market Square, York Street, on Monday, the seventeenth day of September, instant, at two o'clock in the afternoon, for the purpose of adopting an Address to His Excellency the Governor-General, who may be received with the respect due to him as the representative of our Most Gracious Sovereign, and that the future and flattering prospects of Bytown may be promoted by the unanimity of its citizens in the reception of the representative of the Queen.

"And whereas we have determined to comply with the requisition; now therefore we do hereby appoint the said meeting to be held at the Market Square, York Street, in the said town of Bytown, on Monday, the seventeenth day of September, instant, at two o'clock in the afternoon, of which all persons are hereby required to take notice.

"And whereas the said meeting hath been so called by us in conformity with the provisions of the Act of Parliament, 7th Victoria, Chapter 7—intituled, an act to provide for the calling and orderly holding of public meetings in this province, and for the better preservation of the public peace therein. And the said meetings, and all persons who may attend the same, will therefore be within the protection of the said act; of all which premises all manner of persons are hereby in Her Majesty's name most strictly charged and commanded at their peril to take especial notice, and govern themselves accordingly.

"Witness our hands at Bytown this thirteenth day of September, 1849.

"J. B. TURGEON, J.P.
"CHAS. SPARROW, J.P."

Things Happened.

Then things happened.

Let the balance of the story be told by the editor of the Packet. It is evident from what follows that the editor of the Packet believed that those who organized the reception for Lord Elgin did not have any political motives. The Packet was a weekly paper and the story that follows was published on the Saturday at the end of the stirring week. Here is the story of the events of the week as recorded at the time by the Packet editor:

THE PACKET'S STORY OF STIRRING SEVEN DAYS

"Bytown for the past week has been in a state of siege—has been disgraced by the most degrading outrages, and deplorably unfortunate occurrences have cast a gloom over its inhabitants, which is yet far from being dispelled. The facts are simply these:

MONDAY.

"On Monday last a meeting of the inhabitants of Bytown was to have been held for the purpose of adopting an address to the Governor-General in the event of his visiting Bytown. The negotiations were principally Reformers, and the more violent Tories had refused to have anything to do with the meeting. The resolutions determined upon proposing a non-political address, in which all parties might unite. According to request, we explained those matters in our issue of Saturday last, giving the fullest guarantee that nothing else was intended. The following are the resolutions which the reception committee submitted for the approval of the meeting:

No. 1.

"That as it is expected His Excellency the Governor-General is about to visit Bytown on his route through Upper Canada, this meeting is of opinion some steps should be taken by the citizens of Bytown to prepare for his reception.

No. 2.

"That although party differences are happily permit to a great extent in this province at the present time, nevertheless while this country remains a part of the glorious British Empire it is the duty of all loyal men to unite in paying proper respect to the honored representative of our most Gracious Sovereign.

No. 3.

"That apart from the ties which bind us to our Queen, our country, and the British institutions, all of which teach us to honor the delegated representative of the Sovereign, we should remember there are other reasons why we ought to hail the arrival of His Excellency among us. Amongst our noble rivers—the beautiful scenery and extensive manufacturing power in this neighborhood—the position of Bytown, and its claims to be the future seat of government, the necessity of opening up the Ottawa country for settlement, and the improvement of our highways, etc., etc., etc., is all of which every citizen of Bytown is deeply interested.

No. 4.

"That this meeting takes the opportunity of expressing its approval of the second report of the committee of the House of assembly on the timber trade relating to the reduction of duties and alterations in the system of collecting the revenue, and that this is a favorable opportunity of bringing the subject under the consideration of the Governor-General.

No. 5.

"That in justice to ourselves and the people resident on the banks of the Ottawa, we declare that there should be a unanimity of feeling among the inhabitants of Bytown upon this occasion—that differences of a present character ought to be thrown aside, and all should unite for the common good.

No. 6.

"That His Excellency the Governor-General will be received by the people of Bytown with the respect due to the representative of the Sovereign.

The Storm Brewed.

"On Sunday it was reported that the Tories of Hull, Gloubleu, Pitawa, North Gloucester, Gatineau, Nepean and Gloucester were coming in fully armed, for the purpose of seizing the meeting, forcing positive transgressed, however, before Sunday night and Monday morning Tories loads of Reformers were in the town, and about ten o'clock the Tories created a disturbance, one hundred men, headed by leaders from the town, arrived, armed with fowling pieces, pitchforks, hoes, hatchets, etc., and proceeded to the place of meeting, for the purpose of forcing it to assemble, and at two o'clock there could not be less than five or fifteen hundred men upon the spot. It was composed of Tories, of course, however, of marching towards the spot, they were sent through two streets, contrary to the desire of one or two of the magistrates. In some, fifteen arrests were made, chiefly of the inhabitants. The grossest partiality was displayed by those who controlled the movements of the troops. The Tories, under guard of the troops, placed Dr. Hill in the chair, and passed an address, which of itself explains the indelicacy of the Tory leaders.

TUESDAY.

"Next day (Tuesday) was spent by the Tories in the town in active preparations for the meeting of the following day, and by the Reformers in preparation for defence, should they be attacked, as, from the threats held out, the greatest uncertainty lay over the face of the town should the riot be renewed, as if renewed it would have been done by organization and preparation on both sides.

WEDNESDAY.

"Early on Wednesday the friends of the Liberals poured into the town from the surrounding settlements all sides. On the other hand, the Tories from the settlements of March, Huntley, Goulbourn, Nepean, Fitzroy, Mechanics' Institute, flocked in wagons, all armed, in great numbers. Indeed, the parties were so completely armed as if the country were in a state of civil war. Fortunate indeed was it, on this occasion, that the Tories did not come into parts, at some distance from each other—for, had they, it was the mayor issued a proclamation to disperse, he would have had to improperly invited occasion to call, and made it much more hazardous to any man, but one unfit for civilized society.

Like Civil War.

"As it was, the day ended so that the day will be marked as an event than even by which the Tories remembered that with such an inflammable population, and a party surrounding us no political meeting can possibly be held with safety in Bytown) the day was spent by both parties in hostile array, the one (the Tory party) drawn up in a line on the street, the other (Reformers) still overlooking the canal locks; the other, the Liberals, drawn up in the Market Square of Lower Town, well armed with guns and fowling pieces, and, we are told, with two pieces of cannon. Thus, the two political parties of our population, perhaps the most numerous and powerful within sight, and almost within firing distance, were, for a time, the greater part of a summer's day, in a hostile attitude to each other. Can this be true?

In Enlightened Canada.

"Is this the mere painting of a poetic imagination? Is it possible that such a scene have occurred in the middle of the 19th century, in enlightened Canada? Alas! the true, and pity too, the only true, is that such a scene did occur.

Told All the Truth.

We would be guilty of suppressing the facts, feeling that envious reports will go forth, and we would be guilty of what we deem it our duty to describe it if we omitted to do so, and we would be also accused of suppressing truth if we omitted to do so, and we would be also accused of suppressing truth if we omitted to do so, and we would be also accused of suppressing truth