

Sir John A. Macdonald Returns to Picton

July 1, 2015

Speech by Brian Porter

My, my, such eloquence! I always said about young Laurier, from Arthabaska, that he was “a nice chap”, a fine fellow and if I was 20 years younger I could have brought him over.

What a splendid eulogy! I am deeply moved and greatly flattered and as I have always said about flattery, “almost anybody will take any amount of it.”

It is always a great pleasure for me to return to the County. I still recall that June day back in 1861, when we sailed from Kingston on board the steamer *St. Lawrence* for a sumptuous dinner at the Agricultural Hall, a fine performance by the Kingston Rifle Band, much speechifying and many toasts – too many toasts!

Long before that, I was no stranger to Prince Edward County. All those years ago my father and mother operated the gristmill at Stone Mills and in 1833 I came out here to Hallowell to assist my cousin Lowther Macpherson with his law practice. It was then that I held my first public office, as Secretary of the Prince Edward District School Board, at the advanced age of eighteen years.

Indeed, there are many happy boyhood memories, “long before I thought I should occupy my present position, when I was an idle sort of boy, liking everybody, and a good many people liking me.”

It was in those years that my friends and I produced much merriment, with *La Societe de Vache Rouge*, the Red Cow Society, performing our satirical tableaux.

“ My early associations are connected with Prince Edward – some of the happiest days of my life were spent here – I here obtained my earliest professional education, and here, in this good old town of Picton, I earned my first fee and made my first speech to a jury in this very Court House, at the first Quarter Sessions that were held in it.”

For many years now I have been absent from Prince Edward, but have not forgotten “the good old county.”

“ I have had a long life of politics, a long life of official duties. I have committed many mistakes. Looking back with the light of experience there are many things I have done wrongly and many things I have neglected that I should have done.

In every act of legislation and administration I have tried, according to the best of my judgement, to do what I could for the well-being of good government and the future prosperity of this my beloved country.”

“Let me thank you for this crowning proof of your kindness and confidence. On the downward hill of life, which I am slow descending, it is gratifying to know that I have that which Shakespeare speaks of, ‘Honour, respect and troops of friends’....”

“ My heart is full when I think of your kindness and the honour that you have conferred upon me” with this bronze likeness from those “days of auld land syne.”

“ If I have been successful, and if my efforts in any way added towards the great advancement of our great country, I owe it to the brave men, the stout-hearted and loyal and true, who have stood by me through good reports and evil reports, since I entered public life.”

“ They (will) have here (in this bronze) such striking evidence of the high esteem of those men whose approbation is worth seeking.”

“ I am proud to feel and to know that in my advancing years, I am surrounded by such fine and generous supporters.”

Thank you so much Miss Abernethy, Mr. Warrick and his committee, and the people of Prince Edward, for this wonderful tribute to my younger self.

(Speech by Brian Porter, an historical re-enactor from Brockville Ontario, portraying Sir John A. Macdonald, at the unveiling of the bronze statue of the young Macdonald by sculptor Ruth Abernethy, at Picton on July1, 2015.)