

## CHAPTER VIII

*The John C. Douglas Campaign*

As the summer drew to its close another Federal election loomed. Tom took me aside one day to tell me that his boss, John C. Douglas, Attorney General had set his mind on running for the constituency of Antigonish-Guysboro. This would mean that a lot of his time would be spent in repairing fences in that riding. The board of strategy told me that I would have to "lay off" our friends while the campaign was warming up. That was allright with me for I could devote my time to constable work and make some spare cash. But I had been seen going into Grit lawyers' offices and the strategy board didn't like that, figuring that the Grits would worm information out of me. But my only business was in connection with serving papers. However, I was sent for a two weeks holiday with all expenses paid to Sherbrooke in Guysboro County to keep out of harm's way and assist in the election of John C. Douglas.

During those two weeks I got an insight into the seemingly impossible accomplishments of a dynamic leader of men. It was an experience that aroused my curiosity to find out what force drove men to perform feats of resource and political valor that in ordinary course of life they would seldom or never perform.

Sherbrooke is a pretty village near the mouth of the St. Mary's one of the largest Nova Scotia rivers. It is built on a pleasant intervale at the foot of those barren rockybound hills that dot the south coast of the province. In the salmon-fishing season it is a Mecca for sportsmen. When I was there it was the nerve center of the St. Mary's municipality campaign to send John C. Douglas to Ottawa. First thing to strike me was that all the political workers were from Cape Breton. I was the only one from the mainland. Later I learned that the same held true all over. All these men were volunteers: they followed John C. as the clans of Scotland followed their chiefs. As election day drew near they kept coming and coming until John C. had to send word to Glace Bay that no more were needed. But they came, sleeping in their cars and barns just to be on hand election day to fight for John C. Losing the right to vote in their own constituency counted for nothing, party politics meant very little, what greatly mattered to them was that their chief might need help.

I have been through stormy campaigns when tempers ran high but never have I seen such loyalty to any man or to any cause as was shown by those Cape Bretoners. It seemed out of place in the twentieth century, belonging to the age of Prince Charlie, Flora MacDonald and Culloden Moor.

Hughie Dan MacLean the Warden of Cape Breton county was the spark plug and commander in chief at Sherbrooke. There was five of us under him of whom only one do I remember by name. He was John D. MacIntyre a lawyer who had been wounded overseas. Meetings had been arranged throughout the little coves and hamlets along the coast so MacIntyre took me along in the old Ford that was placed at our disposal. Finding out that I could do some speaking in a crude way he put me down as first speaker, the "burnt offering" as I was called. Then he would go at it for the effort of the evening. Sometimes Hughie Dan came along when there was any special job of fixing to be done. It was grand September weather though the nights were chilly as the fog rolled in from the Atlantic. The roads were abominable and only a Model T could have stood it.

One Grand afternoon we started for a meeting at Fisherman's Harbor. There was a ship loading pulpwood at a wharf down the river from the village. A Russian Emigree was putting through the contract and he and MacIntyre got to talking. My sparring partner went on board and came back with a quart of Bicardi Rum. That stuff had a kick like a mule and the natives thereabouts were treated to a display of oratory such as they had never heard before or since. While coming home a heavy fog rolled in and we got helplessly lost. It was sunup next morning when we got back to the hotel.

It has always been a puzzle to understand how the voters of Guysboro ever stood for a bunch of outsiders running their election. The citizens of either Pictou or Cape Breton certainly wouldn't put up with it.

Right before election, Hughie Dan came to my bedroom, handed me twenty-five dollars and told me that next day a car would take me to Indian Harbour Lake polling-booth and that I must bring back a majority for John C.

"My God, Hughie, am I a stranger going in there alone and you expect me to bring out a majority? Are there any Tories there?"

"Very few that we know about. You'll have to make them, that's the way we do for John C. in Cape Breton. Good luck, remember that majority."

Bright and early the poll opened and I confronted the presiding officer, a magistrate, a leading Grit and big man of the district. In my six months as Inspector I had picked up some law and a lot of bluff. He wasn't going to allow me to stay inside but I shook the law book in his face and stood my ground inside the polling-booth. Two cars with drivers turned up to gather in the loose votes. Two women were in the booth to act as John C's agents. One belonged to one of the few Tory families in the district, the other had a sleek look. From her line of talk I gathered that she was a grass widow who had worked in an office in the States. But she knew all

the answers and put lots of vim into that day's battle. By afternoon we had formed quite a battleline. In a contest such as that one's wits and grasp of what is going on must be on razor edge all the time. The magistrate and I had bitter words several times.

When the ballots were counted that evening John C had a majority of twenty-five. The grass widow eagerly took a drink of rum from a flask I had saved for the occasion, we danced a jig then I got into a taxi and back to Sherbrooke.

The gang were none too cheerful for a Captain Burns a Grit politician who knew his stuff had upset one district that had been counted on as sure for John C. He correctly worked on the theory that in Guysboro an election is an event when the voters can make five dollars apiece. He had his ammunition and then gave them the works. However the overall picture was that John C had been elected. So all bills having been paid we hurried to Antigonish to get the results. On that trip Hughie Dan told us about the plans the Federal Government had in mind for curbing smuggling.

Federal officers with new cars were to be appointed as a preventative service, armed speedboats were to be used along the coast and I was to get a real job out of it for the good work I had done during the campaign. But alas! what a sad story we learned when we arrived at Antigonish: John C. had been elected but the government had been defeated and now the Grits were in power at Ottawa. It was they who were to put the new preventative system into effect and hand out the good jobs that would ultimately break the smuggling racket.

One can look back at all that sound and fury of that election and cogitate on what it all amounted to. For me it had meant an unparalleled experience to show what a dynamic man can do with a well organized band of followers. For when it is considered that Antigonish-Guysboro was Catholic and had been consistently Grit, that John C was Protestant while his opponent MacIsaac was a fine Celtic gentleman and a Catholic, then can we see what leadership our candidate had in his makeup.

I can never forget the sight of him in his undershirt and trousers sitting on the edge of the bed in the Prince George Hotel greeting priests, ministers and workers of every shade and variety as they came along for a handshake and a word of cheer. It was the first and only time I ever saw him alive. He left for Halifax, cleaned up his affairs as Attorney General and went to Ottawa. There were bitter recriminations about his election principally from his own party. Death overtook him in Montreal the following winter and his body was brought to New Glasgow for burial as he was a native son.

The day of the funeral was bitter February weather but his followers

came by the dozen for the distance of one hundred and seventy-five miles to pay their last respects to their chief. No king or potentate could have a finer tribute at their grave than the tears shed by those hardboiled clansmen.

Nova Scotia needs men like John C. Douglas if they could be persuaded to work and fight for the good of their native province.

## Chapter IX

### *Some In-Fighting*

In Pictou County the election had been fought in peaceable gentlemanly fashion between Tory Colonel Cantley and Grit James A. Fraser editor of the Eastern Chronicle. They were personal friends and relatives and the fact that the liquor inspector had been taken out of the district had not leaked out until after election. James A. had been defeated and when that trick had been brought to his attention the next issue of the Eastern Chronicle made all our faces red. James A. Fraser could write.

Several of the bootleggers cleaned up in good style during the "holiday" and they were now ready for a campaign of raids and fines. The council again raised my salary and very foolishly I began to be puffed up.

During my period in office I had got several anonymous letters the import of which was to tell where rum could be found. I had tried several times to catch Clarence MacDermid, had searched his home, found numerous clever "hides", but could not get his rum. At that time he had working for him one Bill Robinson. Robinson's mother was a good old lady belonging to the Salvation Army. Amongst the numerous anonymous letters received was one giving in detail the hiding place in Robinson's home of MacDermid's rum.

It was written from the standpoint of someone who had a spite at MacDermid and seemed genuine. So armed with a search-warrant we ran-sacked the premises. Of course I didn't get any rum and felt heartily ashamed of myself and lost friends by being so stupid as to give heed to a letter of that nature.

Amongst the many institutions of New Glasgow's Front Street where topics of the hour were held under the searchlight of wisdom was Colonel Bob Murray's barber shop. And the greatest talker was Charlie Lorimer, a barber. It had come to my ears that Charlie was doing a lot of tongue-wagging about the Inspector's graft. One day we had to arrest him and he had on his person a bottle of rum. The N.S.T.A. provided a hundred dollar fine for that offence. I didn't want to see him soaked but the idea struck me that as J. Stanley Fraser, an enthusiastic young Tory,