

JOSEPH HOWE AND THE ANTI-CONFEDERATION LEAGUE

THE HON. JUDGE PATTERSON

UNDER the above title Mr. Laurence J. Burpee¹ has edited and published² a series of letters written by Howe while in England in 1866-7, opposing the passage of the British North America Act, to William J. Stairs,³ one of the Vice Presidents of the League. Howe was himself the President, and its Constitution which Mr. Burpee gives in an Appendix is unmistakably his work. In expressing his thought in crisp sentences, where every word tells, there was in Nova Scotia no one *aut similis aut secundus* to the great Tribune. Recently there came into my hands the papers of the Treasurer of the League, then known as Robert Boak Jr., but whom later generations of Nova Scotians knew as Sir Robert Boak, President of the Legislative Council 1871-1901. Among these papers are a number of letters from Howe, most of them it is true being little more than receipts for moneys remitted, but there are some in which he does not confine himself to mere acknowledgment. From these I have selected three, which I give in chronological order. A letter from Howe, even of the most informal kind, is of more interest to Nova Scotians than the reasoned political deliverance of any other man.

25 Saville Row,
Nov. 23, 1866.

My Dear Boak:

I have not written you before, for I have had so much to write since I came over here that I do not care to multiply correspondents. You will find all the news in my official letters to Stairs, and in the papers I send. Of course we can yet express no confident opinion as to ultimate success or failure. One thing is clear, that the Antis occupy a position which they had not when we came over here, and that the public mind is working up to the question of Colonial Government and Defence in a manner that is most encouraging.

You will be glad to know that by being on the spot, and having

(1) Secretary, Canadian Section Joint International Commission. Well known as a writer on Canadian historical subjects.

(2) *Transactions*, Royal Society of Canada (Section II.) Vol. X, page 409.

(3) Hon. William J. Stairs, Member Legislative Council 1868-71. One of the merchant princes of Halifax. From 1843 a devoted follower of Howe. Offered a Senatorship in 1869, but declined. Died 1906.

friends to aid him, we have been enabled to shorten Garvie's⁴ term of service here by six months. Of four or five men examined at the same time he passed the best examination, and in two and a half years will be called to the Bar.

The separation from my family is very wearisome, and at times makes me sad. But I cannot turn back till the fight is over.

Pray, give my kind regards to Mrs. Boak, and believe me,
Sincerely yours,

JOSEPH HOWE.

* * * * *

London, 25 Saville Row,
Jan. 5, 1867.

My Dear Boak:

Your favor covering bill for £100 sterling came safe to hand. We are sorry to have to tax the liberality of the League so far, but I hope to be able yet to make the province repay the money they have expended.

You will find all the news in a long letter which I have written to Stairs, and in the papers and magazines forwarded with it.

With kind regards to Mrs. Boak, believe me,
Sincerely yours,

JOSEPH HOWE.

Pasted on the third page of this letter, without comment of any kind, is the following newspaper clipping. Evidently Howe was leaving no stone unturned to make a good impression, and create a sympathy for his cause:

Royal London Yacht Club. The annual dinner of this still thriving club took place on Tuesday evening last at Willis's Rooms. . . . E. W. Edwards Esq., Vice Commodore, filled the chair most efficiently, and was supported on his right by Mr. Alderman and Sheriff Waterlow. . . . and on his left by the Hon. Joseph Howe, late President of the Assembly of Nova Scotia, Mr. MacDonald of Nova Scotia, etc. After the various appropriate toasts had been disposed of, the Hon. Mr. Howe, who is in England with two or three other gentlemen deputed to advocate the continuation of alliance with Nova Scotia, delivered an address in such eloquent terms and so effectively as to delight the company whose approval was manifested by repeated rounds of enthusiastic applause.

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(4) William, afterwards Hon. William Garvie, one of the Secretaries of the League. Born in Edinburgh and educated there. Came to Halifax 1855. In 1863, along with E. M. McDonald, founded the *Citizen* newspaper in Halifax. Edited it till 1866, when he sold out to his partner and went to London to study law. Returned to Halifax in 1869, and at once attained a leading position at the Bar. M. P. P. Halifax 1871. Commissioner of Works and Mines 1871-2. Died 1872. A gifted writer and a brilliant orator. His contribution to Confederation literature was "Barney Rooney's Letters on Confederation, Botheration and Transmogrification."

25 Saville Row, Feb. 15, 1867.

My Dear Boak:

Thanks for your letter and very timely remittance of £100 sterling which came safe to hand. Annand⁵ goes out by this mail, and will explain to you the state of the finances and the public affairs generally. MacDonal⁶d will go by the next boat. I will not leave while there is a chance of obstructing the measure in either House. I regret very much that our friends have been put to so heavy an expense, but trust the next House will repay it, Confederation or no Confederation. There are many inevitable expenses attending a public mission to which a private gentleman is not subject, in having to contend with sixteen scamps⁷ with the Treasuries of three provinces in their hands. We have done our work as cheaply as we could, ever mindful that we were spending private funds and not public moneys.

With kind regards to Mrs. Boak, believe me,

Truly yours,

JOSEPH HOWE.

There are among these papers some, other than letters, that are of profound interest to the student of the Confederation period in our history. There is, for example, the list of the subscribers to the "Delegation Fund," i.e., the Fund raised to pay the expenses of Howe, Annand and MacDonal⁶d, the "People's Delegates" as they were called, to England. Here is the list, and the amount each subscribed:—

W. J. Stairs.....	\$600.00	Bridgetown.....	22.00
P. Power.....	500.00	J. Northup & Sons....	600.00
N. L. & J. T. West....	500.00	Duffus & Co.....	500.00
Robert Boak Jr.....	300.00	W. P. West.....	300.00
T. C. Kinnear & Co....	300.00	E. K. Brown.....	300.00
Esson & Co.....	100.00	James Donaldson.....	100.00
John Gibson.....	200.00	R. Morrow.....	100.00
James Weir.....	100.00	James Cochran.....	200.00
R. I. Hart.....	100.00	Geo. McKensie,.....	100.00
George Esson.....	50.00	(New Glasgow)	
James Butler.....	40.00	F. Curry.....	50.00
Young & Hart.....	60.00	John Taylor.....	60.00
R. Malcolm.....	40.00	J. & R. B. Seeton....	50.00
D. Cronan.....	60.00	A. Stephen.....	10.00
P. Ross.....	20.00	J. Silver.....	50.00
John Naylor.....	20.00	J. Cronan.....	50.00
William Hare.....	30.00	R. Taylor.....	20.00
William Grant.....	20.00	Friends.....	109.00
Yarmouth.....	557.00	Ragged Island, Shelburne	215.00
Antigonish.....	200.00	Horton.....	75.00

(5) Hon. William Annand. Owner of *Morning Chronicle*, for years Howe's 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 Legislative Council. Refused to follow Howe in accepting "Better Terms". Appointed Immigration Agent for Nova Scotia in London in 1875. Died there, 1892.

(6) Hugh MacDonal⁶d, M.P. for Antigonish Co. 1867-73. Previously had been M. P. P. for Inverness Co. President of Council and Minister of Militia 1873. Appointed Judge of Supreme Court of Nova Scotia 1873, the first Catholic to hold that appointment. Resigned after twenty years' splendid service, 1893. Died 1899.

(7) The reference is, of course, to the Delegates from Canada, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia then gathered in London to draft and secure the passing of the British North America Act.

There was a small balance of \$2.94 from another fund, which was added on, making a total of \$6,710.94. This fund was expended as follows:

To paid and remitted Mr. Howe from 5th July, 1866 to Feb. 28/67, as delegate to British Government	\$3,712.21
To paid Mr. MacDonald, do.....	1,003.55
To paid Mr. Annand, do.....	1,001.77
To paid Mr. Garvie, do.....	250.00
To paid Mr. Howe expenses to western part of Nova Scotia.....	160.00
To paid printing petitions and sundry other charges..	553.41
To paid telegraphs.....	50.00
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	\$6,710.94

In one of his letters to Sir John A. MacDonald written from London on April 9th, 1868, Tupper, reporting an interview he had with Howe then in London with Annand, Smith⁸ and Troop,⁹ seeking the repeal of the Confederation Act, writes:—¹⁰ "I told him (Howe) that between us we could rally to his support three-fourths of the wealth, education, and influence of the country." From the names on the foregoing list it can easily be judged how much, or better how little, Tupper's contribution to the partnership would be.

True to its claim to represent the Maritime Provinces, the League did not limit its interests to Nova Scotia. There was an election, well do the Anti-Confederates know it, in New Brunswick in 1866. Elections then were not, any more than now, won by prayers alone. A Macedonian cry came from that province. The Finance Committee of the Anti-Confederate Association of St. John addressed a letter to its Treasurer, Charles W. Weldon,¹¹ who forwarded it with a covering letter of his own to Mr. Annand, who in turn passed it on to the League. The reply was prompt. Weldon's letter is dated May 22nd; on May 25th a meeting of "Gentlemen opposed to Confederation" was convened in Mason's Hall, Halifax, at which, after the reading of Weldon's letter, it was unanimously resolved to open a subscription list to aid the brethren in New Brunswick. Then and there, \$2,200.00 was subscribed, and on May 29th that sum was remitted to Weldon "with best wishes

(8) H. W., afterwards Hon. H. W. Smith, M. P. P. Queen's Co. 1867-74. Described by Tupper as "the ablest lawyer on the Anti side in the House of Assembly." Attorney-General 1871-74. Judge, Supreme Court 1875. Died 1890.

(9) Jared C. Troop. M.P.P. Annapolis Co., 1867. For a term Speaker.

(10) *Recollections of Sixty Years in Canada*, page 74.

(11) A prominent barrister of St. John, N. B. Founded firm of Weldon & McLean. For a number of years M. P. St. John. A cousin of Dr. R. C. Weldon, *clarum et venerabile nomen* among Dalhousians.

for your success in the good cause." The great majority of the names are the same on both lists, but there are a few, such as John G. Marshall,¹² A. James¹³ and A. G. Jones,¹⁴ which appear only on what I might call the New Brunswick list.

It will be remembered that, in two of the letters I have quoted, Howe expressed the hope that the subscribers to the Delegation Fund would be recompensed by the Provincial Government. That pious hope was in due time fulfilled, but with an altruism then rare as now they handed over the whole sum to the Treasurer of the League. At one time it was delicately proposed to Howe by one of the subscribers, speaking no doubt with authority of the others, that he be given it all, but the proposal came at a time when relations between him and the Repeal Party were becoming strained. To accept would have bound him to that Party's chariots. Though poor, without office, and in debt, he would not take the golden bait, then as always refusing to allow personal considerations to affect his public action. There is too much reason to believe that this fund was used in a vain effort to compass his defeat when, having accepted "Better Terms" and a seat in Sir John A's Cabinet, he faced a by-election in Hants, April 20, 1869.

A touch of humor of the sardonic kind lightens the closing incident in the story of the League. Among the first to accept "Better Terms" and abandon opposition to Confederation was that loyal and devoted friend of Howe's, the Hon. W. J. Stairs. He was, as already stated, one of the Vice Presidents; his name appears first on both the subscription lists to which I have referred; he was one of the merchant princes of Halifax who with his kinsman, A. G. Jones,¹⁵ prepared the ground for the fight against Confederation and fired the first gun in that campaign. In 1870 he bethought himself that he should be repaid the amount he had contributed to the Delegation Fund, so we find him writing the Treasurer:—

Halifax, Nova Scotia, March 15, 1870.

Dear Sir:

Is there any part of the \$6,710 to be returned to me as one of the subscribers to the Delegation Fund in 1866?

Yours truly,

W. J. STAIRS.

To Robt. Boak Esq.

(12) Judge Marshall. From 1811-21 M. P. P. Guysboro, then known as Sydney Co. Chief Justice, Court of Common Pleas for Cape Breton Island, 1823-41, when Court was abolished, and he pensioned. A voluminous writer on many subjects. During his last years a strenuous Temperance advocate.

(13) A prominent member of the Halifax Bar. Appointed Judge, Supreme Court, 1877. Judge in Equity, 1882. Died 1889.

(14) A leading merchant in Halifax. A Conservative and personal friend of Tupper's, but strongly opposed to Confederation. Became the leader of the Repeal Party after Howe. M. P. Halifax 1867-72, 1874-78, 1887-91. Minister of Militia, 1878. Lieut. Governor of Nova Scotia 1900 till his death in 1906.

(15) See *Family History Stairs-Morrow*, pages 63 and 64.

On the same date the reply was written:—

Halifax, Nova Scotia,
15 March, 1870.

Dear Sir:

In reply to your note respecting the Delegation Fund I beg to say that it was applied by the Committee for party purposes. A portion was at once appropriated with your approval and concurrence. The balance was afterwards handed over to the Treasurer of the party, who is at present absent from the province.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours truly,

ROBERT BOAK, JR.

W. J. Stairs, Esq.,

“A hit! A very palpable hit!”

It was the last, some would say the only, triumph of the League.