

THEN AND NOW (1849-1949)

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THE celebration of the Centenary of Halifax, 8 June, 1849, was not all beer and skittles as some would have us believe.

It followed, as a matter of fact, the general election of 1847, as a result of which followers of Hon. Joseph Howe, enjoying a clear majority in the House of Assembly, were able to bring about the reforms they had advocated, in and out of season. Responsible government had been achieved. Reform was in the air. Public affairs in Nova Scotia were dominated by one man, the eloquent newspaperman who had earlier won for the English speaking world freedom of the press.

The Centenary celebration was indeed his picnic, and Howe made good use of the opportunity. Specifically he related the celebration to the future, while extolling the past. His ode, "All Hail to the Day when the Britons Came Over," was printed and distributed from a hand press that was hauled about the streets by four horses, in a monster parade that also included a live moose and, for good measure, a band of Miqmaq Indians. But after being formed at approximately noon, opposite the National School, by a small group of City Police, arrayed in tall beaver hats, and traversing the down town streets, the parade broke up near the corner of Robie and Cunard Streets. Here a huge electric telegraph pole, so called, had been hurriedly erected for the occasion. Beneath this pole, Joseph Howe again read his famous ode. Here too were given three cheers and a tiger for Sir John Harvey, Governor of Nova Scotia, much to the disgust of Howe's political opponents, who held Harvey should be recalled because he was carrying out the wishes of the Government's majority in the House. Beamish Murdock, the historian, had previously delivered his oration. It was now about two o'clock.

A glorious June day had been ushered in with a general salute from the Citadel, followed by the ringing of innumerable church bells. The Halifax of 1849 had a population of 20,000 but there were many churches, all of which, it seems, were equipped with bells. Then too, as now, there was the Town Clock, topping George Street on Citadel Hill. *The Times and Courier*, reporting this feature of the celebration, had the following to say:

1. Formerly with the Canadian Press; now resident in Lower Granville, N. S.

The old Town Clock itself fears that it may never see another birthday of a hundred years and joined in right good will with the tongues, which seemed to say:

Oh ring ring away cheerily,
Rejoice while you may,
Leave care for the morrow,
BE MERRY today.

The celebration officially ended during the evening, when the British fleet in the harbour, headed by the flagship H. M. S. *Wellesley*, was illuminated and boomed out another salute.

But to return to the telegraph pole erected on the North Common, within sight of the flood-lit baseball diamond, that the present mayor, J. E. Ahern, was instrumental in providing for the general public. (Curiously enough, the *NOVA SCOTIAN*, of Wednesday, 13 June, 1848, suggests that to mark the Centenary "an united effort be made to convert a portion of the Commons into a Public Park or Pleasure Ground.") The Halifax newspapers of June, 1849, also contain advertisements calling for tenders for completion of the electrical telegraph line, Halifax to the New Brunswick border. Here the New Brunswick Government had agreed to take over and to construct a line to Saint John, already connected by telegraph with Boston and the United States hinterland.

Improved communications, then as now, occupied the waking thoughts of most forward looking men. Howe, of course, was roundly criticized for such a fol-de-rol as the electrical telegraph. Had not the Duke of Kent come to grief, at the turn of the Century, with his extravagant system of telegraph by semaphore? Howe's enterprise, however, never paid less than 5 per cent on the capital invested in stringing the wire to the New Brunswick border.

Already much had been done in Nova Scotia in speeding communications, thanks to Samuel Cunard and Joseph Howe. A railway from Halifax to Windsor was about to be launched; the Shubenacadie Canal, connecting the Bay of Fundy with the Atlantic Ocean, was still under construction; and much thought had been given to Lord Durham's suggestion of connecting the Atlantic Provinces by rail with the Canadas, Upper and Lower. The Cunard Steamship line, which had the British Government's contract for the carriage of the trans-Atlantic mails, made regular calls at Halifax. *Britannia*, *Sirius* and the rest put into Halifax regularly, en route to Boston, with the latest English newspapers.

To combat the fabulous James Gordon Bennet, who had taught school near Halifax before going on to New York to found the *Herald* and to set up a news service of his own, The Associated Press was formed in New York, as a co-operative undertaking, for the express purpose of putting a man in Halifax to meet the incoming Cunarders, skim the news, and get it to the United States as quickly as possible.

One of the men who attended the celebration of the Centenary of Halifax, underneath the telegraph pole that had been erected on the North Common, was D. H. Craig. Craig viewed the celebration with some misgivings. For upwards of ten years he had been concerned with the task of expediting the news arriving at Halifax. A native of New Hampshire, he had come to Halifax because of its geographical position, and first by carrier pigeon, next by pony express, he had devoted himself to the task of reducing the time consumed in the dispatch of the news. So when Joseph Howe's Government advertised for tenders in the completion of the electrical telegraph line to the New Brunswick border, Craig correctly surmising what was about to happen, betook himself to the newspapers and inserted the following advertisement:

TELEGRAPHIC DESPATCH

Those merchants and others who may wish to receive early, a complete summary of commercial and general intelligence from the United States, via telegraph to Saint John, are respectfully requested to hand in their names to Mr. C. K. Keefer, at the News Room, and in order to ascertain the amount of encouragement which may be relied upon to meet the expenses of the enterprise, they will please indicate the sum which they may be willing to pay for each despatch, for one month. The first despatch will be furnished by Express Steamer from Saint John, on Monday 23 April and will continue as often as facilities may offer to forward the same from Saint John to Halifax.

D. H. Craig.

Here is a Craig despatch, appearing in the *Times and Courier*, of Thursday, 10 May, 1849:

CRAIG'S TELEGRAPH DESPATCH

(Received at Keefer's Reading Room, on Tuesday evening.)
Boston, Monday May 7.

The Ship *Sophia Wills* arrived today in 64 days from Valparasio, with \$80,000 in California gold dust.

Market is steady with no change in prices.
20,000 immigrants arrived in New York.
No news from Montreal.

While the New York markets were given in addition, in some detail, it was evident the experiment was a failure, for we next find Craig, meeting the America bound trans-Atlantic shipping off Cape Race, picking up canisters containing the latest English newspapers and rushing to St. John's, Nfld., where he forwarded a digest by cable to New York. Eventually the Great Eastern succeeded in laying a cable across the Atlantic, and we hear nothing further of Craig. But he had a grand time, matching wits with some of the ablest men of his time, in the days when communications were spasmodic and undependable.

All through the summer of 1849 until the telegraph line was completed on November, 8 the arrival of trans-Atlantic steamers at Halifax was the signal for the start of pony expresses, bearing good and ill tidings to the waiting telegraph at Saint John. It is recorded the express was continued for nine months with remarkable regularity, only one trip being missed. The distance of 144 miles to Victoria Beach, on the Granville side of Digby Gut was covered in the average time of eight hours. The journey was performed by two riders, who changed at Kentville, and was divided into twelve stages, with a fresh horse every twelve miles. The fortnightly mail steamers arrived at Halifax, of course, at all hours, and the despatch rider had to be always on the alert, ready to start, at any hour of the day or night. The same alertness was also required in furnishing fresh horses at the various relay posts.

So in spite of the Halifax Centenary of 1849 the grandfathers and grandmothers of the present residents of the Annapolis Valley best recall the summer of 1849, when discussing the so-called pony express. How starting 8th March, two expresses were run. How on the first competitive run the opposition express reached its destination, Victoria Beach, two and one half minutes before the original express operated by the Associated Press. How the opposition's steamer *Commodore* was nowhere in sight, while the A.P. Steamer *Conqueror*, belching smoke, was in readiness to put off, as soon as Corey Odell the Saint John jockey, who had removed to Annapolis, reached the end of his long gallop from Kentville. How the rival jockeys blew shrill blasts from the horns with which they were equipped, as each neared his relay point. How Fort Anne at Annapolis

was called with a gun to warn the waiting boat at Victoria Beach to get up steam, when the first of the rival expresses was observed, streaking down Granville Street, on the opposite side of the River. How the countryside turned out at the approach of every galloping jockey, how bets were made and, generally, how the utmost excitement prevailed.

All good things, however, must come to an end. On 15th November, the *Morning Chronicle* published the following despatch:

GREAT STORM AT PORTLAND

St. John, N. B., Nov. 14, 1849—Ten buildings were blown down on Friday night. No other news per steamer.

By so inconsequential a news item was the knell of the Pony Express sounded. It never ran again.

The Spring of 1849 had followed a very severe Winter in Halifax. But May found the town agog with preparations for the Centenary. Not so the adherents of the old Council of Twelve, which had ruled with an iron hand for close to one hundred years and were even now fighting a last ditch fight. Indeed an adherent of the old regime, the Provincial Treasurer no less, had refused to resign his commission, when requested to do so. Not only had he publicly protested his removal from office, but he had induced a minority in the Legislative Council to support him. This minority had adopted a resolution that had gone forward along with the Departmental bill and a letter from Sir John Harvey, the Governor, in explanation.

The whole had drawn from Earl Grey approval in principle of the bill together with an expression that was regarded in Halifax as treating the Provincial Treasurer with a degree of consideration to which Joseph Howe and his majority in the House did not feel he was entitled. The Government thereupon took their collective pen in hand and wrote the Colonial Secretary, in Howe's best style, and the Colonial Secretary immediately withdrew his personal objections to the bill, which on his recommendation secured the signature of Queen Victoria. It must have been an adherent of the Provincial Treasurer who penned the following leading editorial article, appearing in the *British Colonist*, of 5th May, 1849:

THE CENTENARY: Great talk is made about this wonderful affair, and great preparations are being made to celebrate it. Verily the time for rejoicing is well chosen. With one half the population starving and the other half running away, with bankruptcy, famine and disease rife among us, it is a time to rejoice. People of course will subscribe handsomely; considering property has fallen about thirty per cent without the slightest hope of rising for a long time, it is probable that large subscriptions will be raised. The monied men who see an iniquitous law introduced this year of the Centenary, for the express purposes of arbitrarily and unjustly taxing them will of course come down handsomely. We think that a grand FAST DAY would be more appropriate.

As it turned out, however, 8th June, 1848 was a FEAST DAY and adequately commemorated the founding of the town a century before. Subsequently the Government was advised that 21st June was regarded as marking the date of the founding of Halifax, by the Lords of Trade and Plantation. T. B. Aitkins is authority for the statement.

On the 21st June, 1749, old style, the Sloop of War "Sphinx," arrived in the harbour of Chebucto, having on board the Honourable Edward Cornwallis, Captain General and Governor in Chief of the Province of Nova Scotia and his suite.

Indeed, it was not until 2nd September 1752 that the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750, affecting public and legal transactions had come into effect. The difference of the two styles, Julian and Gregorian, both founded on the erroneous supposition the year contained 365½ days, then amounted to 11 days. This was removed by ordering the day following the 2nd September of the year 1752 to be accounted the 14th day of the month. Thus was added to all the other miseries to which the infant colony was subjected that of calendar reform. The Bicentenary Committee do well to devote the entire Summer to this year's celebration.

Back in 1849 the world was pretty much convulsed as it is today. The uprising in France had spread to Italy, Germany and Hungary. There was even a European Alliance formed to combat the inroads of Russia towards the Mediterranean. In this Bicentenary year of the founding of Halifax, we on this side of the Iron Curtain of Communism, are sometimes inclined to think there is no way out short of war. In the fifties of the last Century, it is true, France combined with Britain to fight the Crimean War, and some time later there was civil war on

this Continent. But the people of Howe's day were on the eve of great expansion, and it is not too much to hope the same prospect actually faces us.

Certainly the Halifax of 1849 was a very drab place as compared with the Halifax of today. The town in 1849 had been incorporated only eight years, following a long fight with the hereditary and reactionary powers that sought to perpetuate their sway at all costs. Moreover, its citizens were getting their first experience of a water supply brought in from the lakes. Previously the town pumps had been much in demand, and there was no thought of a sewage system. The streets of the town, too, had just been illuminated with new fangled gas jets that sputtered from eighty poles, scattered throughout the town. So proud indeed were the Haligonians of 1848 of their public services that they combined these in two illuminated fountains, which played throughout the celebration, at either end of Province House.

Joseph Howe succeeded in relating the celebration of the Centenary to improved communications. It is unfortunate in a way that this year's celebration has not been so related. Halifax played a proud role in the development of the telegraph, the cable and steamship communications with the other side. So, too, she played her full part in the early development of aviation. It was at Halifax that Dr. Alexander Graham Bell formed his Aerial Experimental Association, over the objections of the great Lord Kelvin. The present Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, Hon. J. A. D. McCurdy, is the last of that original company. The others have all gone. Dr. Bell, of course, died some years ago, as did W. F. Bedwin; Lieut. Thomas Selfridge, U. S. A., was killed with one of the Wrights at Washington, and W. F. (Casey) Baldwin died last year. Glen Curtiss is still alive, but he was not an original member of the Aerial Experimental Association, despite the fact that he acquired all their assets when the Company was wound up. Halifax was in, too, on the early attempts to span the Atlantic following the First World War. Cornwallis required six weeks to make the crossing of the Atlantic. Samuel Cunard cut this to eleven days. Today the time has been cut to a single day. We are on the eve of still greater developments, for the jet propelled passenger plane will reduce the time required to cross the Atlantic to a matter of hours. Very soon it will be possible to breakfast in Halifax and dine (the same day) in London.

Certainly if we had a Joseph Howe today, plans for the year's celebration would not have featured a discussion of the respective merits of a Boston Pops Orchestra Concert and dancing in the streets, for Howe dominated his scene. "Even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer." Let us not forget, too, that the Nova Scotia Power Company are presenting the citizens of Halifax with a brand new tramway system. This means, of course, that to many Haligonians the Bicentenary year will be chiefly associated with improved communications.
