

Historic Sites

mentary vehicle for airing grievances about the operations of the parks division of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I am fortunate enough to have in my constituency one of the most historic sites of Canada and certainly one of the most scenic and commanding sites of this country, Signal Hill national historic park. The park was established by the government of Canada in 1957, as one of the first acts of the Diefenbaker government, which adopted the recommendations of its predecessor, the St. Laurent government. Following the establishment of the park as a national historic site, development has lagged considerably, which is the point of the grievance I wish to put forward today in my representation to the minister.

Briefly, by way of historical background, Signal Hill national historic park is the site of the last armed conflict in North America between the forces of France and Britain which fought for a foothold on the North American continent. The site has long been recognized as an historic one. During the colonial administration of Newfoundland, prior to confederation, it was recognized as an historic site by the dominion government of Newfoundland. The most commanding feature of the site is Cabot Tower, which was completed in 1897 during Queen Victoria's jubilee to mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the founding of Newfoundland by John Cabot.

In addition to the early historic significance of the park in relation to colonial wars for the possession of that part of North America, the park is significant in that later, more contemporary historic events took place within its confines. For example, in that park was received the first wireless message sent across the Atlantic by Marconi in 1901. It has been associated with many other historical events to do with development of modern telecommunications, by virtue of the fact that it is the nearest point of land in North America to Europe. The distance between the west coast of Ireland and Cabot Tower, which is located near Cape Spear, is relatively short, shorter than the distance between Winnipeg and St. John's. For that reason the park has lent itself to the development of telecommunications and wireless communications in Canada. Apart from the erection of the Cabot Tower which was the site of a wireless station that was operated until a short time ago, very little took place until the establishment of the park in 1957. Following that, development, paradoxically, lagged considerably.

● (1550)

I remember one event that took place in the late fifties during the administration of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). One of the oldest existing buildings left intact at the site was a barrack building which was part of the fortification known as the Queen's Battery. It commanded a very strategic view of the entrance to St. John's harbour. I believe the building was a couple of hundred years old. I am speaking from memory. I am not sure of its precise age, but it can easily be verified. It was occupied by a man and his family who had been living there for a considerable time. The circumstances surrounding their use of the building are rather vague to me at this time. However, what is important is that as long

[Mr. McGrath.]

as they were there, they provided the building with a caretaker and maintenance: the building was a living building; it was lived in and looked after by this family.

The bureaucrats in Ottawa, without advantage of having been there, decided that this would not do. They decided these people could not stay there. Without having one alternate plan of their own as to the development and restoration of these old buildings, and that building in particular and the fortifications surrounding it, they decided, against my protests, that these people would have to be evicted and they were. A short time after, the building was burned to the ground. That was a great tragedy. We lost that building, and to date—over 15 years later—it has not been restored. The building still has not been rebuilt notwithstanding the fact, in my estimation, it was because of the negligence of the department that the building was destroyed in the first place.

It is interesting to note that the St. John's *Daily News* of Friday, December 17, carried an advertisement over the signature of the area superintendent of historic parks and sites. The ad asked people to come forward with old photographs of this very building. Apparently they do not even have a photograph of the building, let alone any part of it which survived that fire. That is the kind of thing which has irritated the people of St. John's and the many hundreds of thousands of Canadians and other North Americans who had the pleasure and thrill of visiting this site.

Last year the number of visitors to the site reached the one million mark. In fact, there were over one million visitors to the site last year. I am told that this year they will also surpass the million mark. Next year, because of the Canada summer games which will take place in St. John's, a very sharp increase in the number of visitors to that park is anticipated. However, the total expenditure on the site for 1975-76, covering capital construction, maintenance and operating costs, was less than \$300,000—\$278,000. By comparison, for the same year, 1975-76, the fortress at Louisburg, an equally historic site that is visited by many tourists, the total expenditure was almost \$4 million. The total for the same year for the Halifax Citadel was \$582,000. That site is equally prominent in historic importance.

A decision has been made and an announcement released that it is the intention of the government to spend \$20 million on the restoration of Citadel Hill in Halifax. I applaud that decision. It is a very progressive and wise move on the part of the government because Citadel Hill is a beautiful historic park, one that commends itself to restoration. However, what is wrong with historic Signal Hill in St. John's? Why can we not get some of that development capital for restoration to at least put that park back in the position it was before one of the lone surviving historic building, dating back to colonial days, was destroyed by fire because of the negligence of bureaucrats in Ottawa who did not see fit to provide a caretaker for that building? It has caused us to wonder.

I believe the importance of the park can be measured by the number of visitors, over one million last year. That compares