

Historic Sites

One member who used to represent part of my constituency was the Hon. George Drew, the former leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and the former premier of Ontario.

Another is the Hon. Earl Rowe, a former lieutenant-governor of Ontario and a national figure of great consequence. He once represented the Dufferin county portion of my constituency. The Hon. Walter Harris was minister of immigration and minister of finance in the St. Laurent administration. He once represented portions of Grey county of my constituency. He was another great Canadian who made a tremendous contribution to our national heritage. His successor, Mr. Eric Winkler, was the chief government whip in the days of the Diefenbaker administration. He was also once the government House leader in the province of Ontario, and he represented portions of my constituency. Of course, there was Mr. Farquhar Oliver, who was the youngest person ever elected to the Ontario legislature, and he holds the record for political longevity in the Ontario legislature. He represented the Grey county portion of my constituency.

There are two other names I want to mention because they should be dealt with, particularly today. These are the names of distinguished Canadians whose contributions to Canada are recognized by people from all parts of this great country, but their contribution to my area has not been properly recognized by the federal government. The first is the late Agnes Macphail, who was the first woman ever elected to the Parliament of Canada. Anyone who has read Canadian history must be aware of the tremendous pioneering work which was done by the late Agnes Macphail. She was elected from the Grey county portion of my constituency. She lived there most of her life. The reason I mention her today is that earlier this year I was contacted by citizens in my area who are concerned that the Agnes Macphail home in Ceylon, Ontario, may very well be lost if action is not taken immediately to purchase it and maintain it as an historic site.

A tremendous amount of credit is due to Mr. Ivan McWilliam of Deep River, Ontario, who wrote as follows to a number of members of parliament and also to a number of government officials in May of this year:

I am writing to request that federal money be made available to buy and restore the house and grounds, the whole to become an historic site. A great deal of the Macphail memorabilia is still to be found within a short distance of Ceylon, so that with some effort the site could be restored to its 1930-1940 period, even perhaps to the presence of a green 1941 Chevrolet in the garage!

Since the letter from Mr. McWilliam there has been a series of correspondence between myself and a number of officials in the federal government, and I have been urging the federal government to take action to purchase this historic site which is up for sale at the present time because the previous owner of the house died recently. I was a bit disquieted when I received a letter in reply from the former minister of Indian affairs and northern development, dated June 25, 1976, saying:

Before we can become involved in the purchase or preservation of any property, I must first have declared it to be of national historic or architectural significance. I would consider doing so only if my advisers on these matters, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, were to recommend this. According to the criteria set by the Board, a building must have been closely

[Mr. Beatty.]

associated with events which, or persons who, have contributed significantly to Canada's history.

What surprises me about the minister's reply—although I was pleased he was asking the Historic Sites and Monuments Board to take a look at this and to make a recommendation—is that the recommendation should even be necessary because surely it should be self-evident to anyone who has ever sat in parliament that few Canadians have made a greater contribution to their country than the late Agnes Macphail. She was a pioneer when it came to social reform; she was a pioneer when it came to prison reform, and a pioneer in recognition of the rights of women in Canada. That should not require that the minister send a request to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board that it determine whether she was a figure of national historical significance. Surely that should be self-evident.

Since that time I have been informed by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Allmand) that in November of this year the Historic Sites and Monuments Board considered the possibility of acquiring this property, that the minister has not yet been informed of its decision and that he probably will not be able to report back to me as to what action the government intends to take until early in the new year. One of the things which concerns me about the present operations of the board and of the government department responsible for the preservation of national historic sites is that because of the tardiness involved, and because it will be more than six months between the time this matter was brought to the attention of the government and the time we will finally get an answer, it is quite possible that this house could have been lost to the public of Canada. I hope the house will still be available when the government makes its decision, but surely action should have been taken before now.

It is self-evident that this house is an important national historic site. The artifacts are available, the house is available, and I think the suggestion made by Mr. McWilliam, which has been echoed by the Grey County Historical Society in representations it has made to the federal government, deserves to be acted upon.

There is one other historic site in Grey country which was the home of another very distinguished Canadian, and I believe it also should be preserved. I bring this matter to the attention of the parliamentary secretary so that he can bring it to the attention of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board. The speaker who spoke before me, the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn) is very proud of the history of Saskatchewan, and one of the Canadians from Saskatchewan who made the greatest contribution to our national history is the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), a former prime minister of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: The people in my area are proud of the fact that they can lay claim to the birthplace of the right hon. member for Prince Albert. Although he is now generally looked upon as coming from western Canada, like every other prime minister of Canada he came from east of the Lakehead.