

PARLIAMENTARIANS

-by Mrs. Angus McKenzie-

In compiling this history, we would like to mention a few of our number who have served us in both Federal and Provincial parliaments.

Andrew A. Brower is one of the first to come to mind. Many older folk will recall the battle between Andrew and Daniel McIntyre as to who would carry the standard. Brower had seventeen more votes than McIntyre, so Daniel protested the election. Next time the count showed thirty-six majority for Brower. He served the electors for twenty years as member of the Provincial house. At this time David Marshall of Canadian Cannery of Aylmer was member for the Federal house.

Everyone will remember Wilson H. Mills, a young Sparta boy and apple king, for the years he spent at Ottawa. Wilson gave much of himself to his work, both in municipal and Federal affairs. His death was a distinct loss to the community and to the federation.

Another name that stands out in this field, is that of Captain (Doc) Davis, M.L.A., although a son of Malahide, he spent his later years as a resident of No. 4 highway. A splendid representative, a good veterinarian and a man that was everybody's friend. The grounds at his late home where his widow and son Dr. Robert Davis now reside, are a monument to his memory.

Then there was Mitchell F. Hepburn, "the boy from South Yarmouth", the lad who was to become Elgin's youngest member in

the House of Commons and still later Premier of Ontario.

"Mitch" was just a high school kid when he sat in a tree in Alex Anderson's barnyard and watched the hydro demonstration in October 1912. A story told by himself, relates an incident that caused some humiliation. Mitch threw an apple, hit Sir Adam Beck's derby and landed it on the ground.

Another humorous incident, occurred when Mitch was just cutting his political teeth on one of the back benches on Parliament Hill, but already destined for greatness. High Constable John Hopkins operated a very effective speed trap on the Port Stanley highway and one day in summer, young Mitch speeding back to his farm from the city, was clocked and summoned to court. Mitch appeared with other offenders before Squire Hunt. The Squire was scratching out penalties in his original way. He levied fines according to speed, woe to the man travelling 40 miles an hour. Mitch was called, the Squire hard of hearing and busy with the previous case failed to look up. He looked at Constable Hopkins and cupped his right ear to hear the damning evidence, let out a blast about speed demons and looked up into Mitch's smiling face. "Why, hello Mitch, you here for a witness?" "No," replied Mitch, "I'm charged with driving over 30 miles an hour."

"You what! You charged with speeding?", then the Squire turned to the Constable, gave him a bawling out "What do you mean by accusing this man? The charge is dismissed." The Squire was a Grit too. It was said Frank Hunt was just,

informal and used common sense. So much for the humor.

Born in St. Thomas on August 12, 1896, Mitchell F. Hepburn was elected to the House of Commons in the general election of 1926, running as an Independent Liberal. At the age of 38 he was Premier of Ontario being elected June 12, 1934, holding the portfolio of provincial treasurer. The following is an newspaper article which appeared in the St. Thomas Times-Journal--VOTE RESULTS CAUSED STIR--Without doubt the gathering held in Pinafore Park, St. Thomas on July 19, 1934 was the largest political event of its kind ever in the history of Elgin County. The occasion marked the victory at the polls a month earlier of the Liberal party, led by Elgin's Mitchell F. Hepburn, in the provincial general election. Nothing more than an estimate can be made of the number who attended, but it is certain that it ran well into five figures. It was preceded by a giant parade, the units of which came from all parts of the county, converged in St. Thomas and then headed for the park. The new premier and all his Cabinet ministers were present, with "Mitch" giving the principal speech.

It can also be conceded that the greatest spontaneous demonstration in Elgin's history was the one that followed the announcement of the Hepburn victory the night of polling day, June 12, 1934. That was an outburst, the likes of which St. Thomas had never before witnessed--nor heard, because there was an abundance of noise. Electing a member and a premier all in one day was something to cheer about.

Mr. Hepburn gave Ontario what he called his "sunshine budget". He introduced a number of reforms and changes, openly defied the C.I.O., when their organizers and leaders first invaded the automotive industry, from United States. Openly criticized the King government at Ottawa, for its Second World War policy and generally exercised that independence of spirit, and political action which won him the name of "stormy petrel".

But Mitchell Hepburn was a man of courage in his convictions. Perhaps that courage was displayed to the highest degree when he came out openly for the compulsory pasteurization of milk, and battled the bill through the Legislature. In that one act alone the boy from South Yarmouth made himself a benefactor of the human race.

His defeat came in 1944 at the hand of a friend of several years standing. F.S. "Tommy" Thomas, the present Minister of Agriculture, who gave up his position as representative of agriculture for Elgin to run on the Conservative ticket.

As a useful memorial to Mitch Hepburn and the interest he took in his native Elgin, stands the Ontario Hospital, two miles south of the city of St. Thomas--the largest institution of its kind in Ontario. Built in 1937-38 at a cost in excess of ^{SEVEN} one million dollars.

Mitchell Hepburn's paternal grandsire "Old Mitch Hepburn"

as he came to be called to distinguish him from the politician and statesman, was a pioneer in every sense of the word. He came to South Yarmouth with little more than an axe, a strong heart and a stronger arm. He died one of the largest landowners in the district. ^{Young} ^{MITE HIS} ~~His~~ mother belonged to the Fulton family, early settlers in Southwold, and her pioneer lineage went directly back to the Wallacetown Campbells.

All of us who knew "Mitch" as a boy, a man and a statesman, regardless of our political background, admired him for having the courage of his convictions, he was no "yes" man. A sincere friend, a helpful neighbour, a kind man, that could call every school child by name, was sadly missed and sincerely mourned by this community, county and province.

The Honorable Fletcher S. Thomas, Minister of Agriculture for Ontario was for 18 years our Agricultural Representative, coming to Elgin County from Port Arthur and taking up residence on the Port Stanley highway in Concession 7. He is also a farmer at heart, owning a fine farm on the Union road, which he planted to apple orchards. The trees have been bearing for some years now, and it is not an unusual gesture on Tommy's part to supply Delicious and McIntosh apples of his best quality for all the banquet tables from fall to spring.

In the general election of 1945, he opposed Mitchell F. Hepburn for provincial member and was victorious. He was given the portfolio of Minister of Public Works on October 2, 1951 holding that office until January 20, 1953 when he was appointed

to take the Hon. T. L. Kennedy's place as Minister of Agriculture. The post which he most capably fills at time of writing.

Although James McBain, our Federal member does not come from our vicinity, he is still a Yarmouth farmer of whom we are all very proud and no sketch would be complete without his mention. Owing to the death in January of the late Charles Coyle, our Federal member, a by-election was called for March 22, 1954. James McBain opposed Rev. Harry S. Rodney. James McBain winning by a large majority.

The Yarmouth farmer still carries the Conservative banner for Elgin County at Ottawa.

Breathes there a man with soul so dead,

Who never to himself hath said,

"This is my own, my native land."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LIFE OF ONE OF YARMOUTH'S OLDER PIONEERS

MITCHELL HEPBURN

Mitchell Hepburn was born in Neuburg, a town on the river Tay in Fifeshire on July 21, 1833 of highland parentage. He was a descendant of the famed Sir William Wallace.

At the age of 10 years, with fourteen relatives, he sailed from Dundee and landed in Quebec, after a long and hazardous journey.

From Quebec, the pioneers made their way by portage and boat on Lakes Ontario and Erie reaching Port Stanley in October 1843.

Port Stanley, at this time was a thriving town of international fame, while St. Thomas was but a hamlet--a few log homes, a general store and a tavern in a wooded area near Kettle Creek.

These Scotsmen unused to making a living in a land less adapted to agriculture must have revelled in the rich virgin soil of South Yarmouth.

The families purchased land and erected homes, cleared and farmed the land with diligence known to these sturdy Scotch pioneers.

Andrew Hepburn, the father of the clan, with his sons, Robert John, James Andrew and Randolph Johnson, were among the earliest road builders and at one time owned and operated the old London and Port Stanley gravel road, as a toll road.

Later the Caughell family acquired a half interest along

with Mrs. Robert Hepburn then widowed, the mother of ten children. Andrew Hepburn was the second person to be buried in the St. Thomas cemetery.

Mitchell Hepburn was a man of commanding appearance and tireless energy, being six feet, 3 inches in height with broad shoulders and erect carriage. He was endowed with a clear mind. He took as his bride Eliza Johnson, niece of the famed F. M. Johnson who gained honor by enlisting with Wm. Lyon McKenzie in the rebellion of 1837.

Brought up in that staunch Scottish tradition, it is little wonder, when he secured his own holdings he became a most successful farmer, acquiring a large acreage, erecting fine buildings and breeding livestock of high quality.

Four children were born to his first marriage and all passed away in childhood. His wife Eliza also passed to her reward at the age of 62 years.

Twenty-one years later he married a native of South Yarmouth, Miss Elva Waite whose kindness comforted his old age.

Farming, however, did not exhaust all his activities. He had the racial bent to politics and in those days most Fife families were Liberals to the backbone.

Mr. Hepburn however, had no personal ambition leading him to Parliament or the Legislature, contenting himself with support of the party campaigns. Possessed of a marked public spirit, he aided all worthy causes and was among the earliest

subscribers to the "Elgin Patriotic Fund", donating the splendid sum of \$1000. Although not affiliated with any religious body he gave liberal support to the church and all worthy causes.

After a short illness death came on Sunday, October 1922, in his 90th year. His son, William F. Hepburn of St. Paul Minnesota reached his bedside about two hours before his death. Surviving also beside his wife are two grandchildren, ex-Premier Mitchell F. Hepburn of the old homestead, fourth concession, Yarmouth (deceased) also Irene Copeland Sinclair, London.

Thank God for our pioneer fathers,
Who sailed from the land of their birth
To conquer the virgin forest--
And make this the best land on earth.

.....written by Mrs. Russell Axford (1967)