Glenn McPherson Fords

Draft manuscripts, correspondence, newspaper clippings, photocopies, 1987-1998

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It seemed fool-proof and should have worked like a charm, but the news about Pearl Harbor changed everything. As soon as he heard the pilot's announcement McPherson knew what he'd have to do the minute the plane landed in Montreal - phone Stephenson in New York.

"I knew you'd call, Glenn," came the familiar voice at the other end of the line. "And you're right. This does change our plans. I've already been in touch with Ottawa and we've switched your assignment. You're to go immediately to Vancouver. There's a large population of Japanese living on Canada's West Coast and we have to know what danger, if any, they represent in view of this new development. One of our agents will meet you there and fill you in on the situation."

As for the British agent, Stephenson had further instructions. Glenn was to make no mention of his own change in plans except to say that they were to go to Room 613 in the Windsor Hotel in downtown Montreal. There they'd be met by someone who'd take over Glenn's escort duties.

As always, McPherson followed Stephenson's instructions to the letter. He and the Commander took a cab to the Windsor, rode the elevator to the sixth floor, knocked on the door of Room 613 and were admitted by a man in civilian clothes who, Glenn surmised, was from the intelligence department of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They talked for a few minutes. Then Glenn excused himself, shook hands with his erstwhile companion, and left.

"I never heard whether or not the Commander made it safely back to England but I assume he did," McPherson says. "In any case, he was no longer my responsibility. I had other duties."

Back at the airport he caught the next flight to Ottawa where he phoned his old friend and mentor, Dr. E. H. Coleman, former dean of the Manitoba Law School, now Under Secretary of State in Mackenzie King's Liberal government. It was Dr. Coleman who had loaned Glenn to Stephenson's New York office. Because of that, Stephenson agreed to their continued close contact. When McPherson briefed him on the Vancouver assignment, Dr. Coleman was immediately interested. The "Japanese problem" was becoming a political hot potato in Ottawa, he told Glenn. He'd welcome a first-hand assessment of the situation.

McPherson flew to Vancouver December 8, 1941, and booked himself into the new Hotel Vancouver. Completed only to the ninth floor - except for the Panorama Roof restaurant on the 18th - the hotel had been enjoying almost full occupancy until the day before. Then news of Pearl Harbor hit the city and most of the guests departed, perhaps because they feared a Japanese invasion of the West Coast and didn't want to get caught in it.

CHIEF JUSTICE EWEN McPHERSON

Chief Justice McPherson was born in Worth Country County, Missouri, on Jan. 27th, 1879, and came to Portage at an early age with his parents, Peter and Ellen McPherson. He received his elementary and high school education here and earned his law degree at the Manitoba Law School.

Chief Justice Ewen A. McPherson.

After getting his law degree he went into partnership with E. G. (Gus) Porter from 1917 to 1937 under the firm name of "McPherson and Porter." During this period he served as a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1914 to 1921, and as a member of the House of Commons from 1926 to 1930. In the election of 1926 he achieved the distinction of defeating Arthur Meighen at the polls.

In 1932 he was appointed Provincial Treasurer after he was elected member for Rupert's Land in the deferred election of that year.

Ewen A. McPherson was a Bencher of the Manitoba Law Society from 1915 to 1937, and was chairman of the Portage la Prairie Hospital Board from 1917 to 1936.

In 1937 he was appointed Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench, and in 1944 was elevated to the Court of Appeal where he served as Chief Justice until the time of his death in 1954.

EDWARD ANDERSON, K.C.

Mr. Anderson came to Manitoba as a boy in 1879 and was one of the first to pass the examinations of the law society, when that organization was in its infancy.

For several years he practised his profession in Portage la Prairie and for a time acted as crown prosecutor for the judicial district. He went to Winnipeg in 1906.

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But we weren't what I'd call a close family. Oh, Don, Wallace and Peggy got on well enough with each other but for some reason I felt like an outsider, as far as they were concerned. Dad and Mother were important to me, though. Actually we were all very protective of Mother. She was delicate, very feminine and tiny - under five feet tall, and weighing less than a hundred pounds - but sprightly. We'd be sitting around the dining room table, arguing loudly over some political problem Dad had brought up, and suddenly we'd be aware of our little Mother, standing on her chair and yelling "Will somebody please pass the salt?"

Dad and I did a lot of things together. Of the three boys, I was the only one who went shooting prairie chickens with him, and the only one he played chess with. Some of the best advice I've ever had in my life came over those chess games, and that went on until long after I had kids of my own.

Dad was a Liberal all of his life. (Mother said she was lying in her hospital bed after my birth, nursing me, when Dad walked in. "Give me the boy, Winnie," he said, "there's a Liberal meeting tonight." So I've always been Liberal, too.) He was always involved in politics, first on the local level as a member of the town's Council, later as City Solicitor. In 1910 he ran for the Provincial House but was defeated. (One thing came out of that, though - he became a Canadian citizen, having applied for citizenship before filing his nomination papers. He didn't want his birth in the U.S.A. to become an election issue.)

In 1914 Dad ran again for the provincial Liberal party and was elected. A year later, if you remember, there was that infamous scandal in Manitoba, when Premier Rodmond Roblin's Conservative government had to answer for a huge overrun in expenses incurred in the building of the provincial legislative buildings. A Royal Commission was appointed to look into it.

The Roblin government, desperate to prevent the Commission's findings from being tabled, tried to have the House adjourned but the Liberal opposition staged a filibuster, non-stop from mid-afternoon March 30 to 1.00 a.m. April 1st. Now, ordinarily, Dad preferred not to spout off in public but he evidently decided this was no time to hold back. According to newspaper stories of that time, he stood up in the House, first convinced the Speaker that what he was about to say was totally relevant, then stayed on his feet for hours, comparing Manitoba's political situation to the story of Alice in Wonderland, and quoting liberally from his copy of the book in his hand. I still have that copy.

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Once the Commission's report was tabled the Conservatives fell and a Liberal government led by Toby Norris took over, and Dad was part of that government. Then, in 1917, when conscription became an issue that each party found too hot to handle, the Conservatives and the Liberals joined forces as a Union Government. That situation continued for five years, during which there was a lot of unrest that culminated in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919.

By this time The United Farmers of Manitoba had formed their own party and had taken over much of the popularity and power previously held by the Liberals and Conservatives. Norris was still premier but in name only. Decisions were actually made by "group government", since the electorate had given no one party a majority in the election of 1920.

This group government, however, didn't work too well, either. It was dissolved in 1922 and in the ensuing election the United Farmers were victorious. Having lost his seat, Dad returned to his law practice in Portage la Prairie.

In 1926 he ran again, federally this time, against a most formidable opponent, the Right Honorable Arthur Meighen, Prime Minister of Canada who'd been representing Portage la Prairie in Ottawa since 1908. Years before, Dad and Meighen had been law partners and they were still friends, so Dad wasn't anxious to challenge him at the polls. But apparently Mackenzie King insisted that no one else was strong enough. Even so, it looked for all the world like another David and Goliath combat. Well, to the amazement of everyone, Dad was the victor.

According to newspaper stories in my scrapbooks, the next four years were among the happiest of Dad's political career. He and C.G. (Chubby) Power "became inseparable companions and the most brilliant debaters on the Liberal benches." Well, that may have been so. All I know is, while he was a Member of Parliament, living in Ottawa, the McPherson family stayed on in Portage and had to do without him. He came home as often as he could, partly to keep in touch with us and his constituents, partly in an attempt to keep his law practice alive. But it was a long, exhausting and time-consuming trip by train, so we didn't see much of him during those four years. In 1930 he retired again, this time sure it would be for good.

No matter what the newspapers said, he told me privately that life as a backbencher was not his cup of tea. For one thing, the pay wasn't nearly what he could make as a lawyer. And for another, he didn't like being told by the party whip when to say yea or nay.

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("He was a man of principles", said the Winnipeg Free Press when he died, "and he stood by those principles, not hesitating to differ from others when necessary, and to openly express his independent views." This was certainly true while he dispensed decisions as Manitoba's Chief Justice. But in actual fact it was his life-time creed. In all the years I knew him he was never less than totally honest.)

During the Depression lawyers, like everybody else, had to scramble to make ends meet. Dad's firm did as well as any, although I happen to know that the most money he ever made out of the practice in one year was seven thousand dollars. In the '30s people didn't have money so they bartered. For instance, Mr. Hutchinson, who owned the book store, let me charge pencils, pens and paper, and the amount was credited against what he owed Dad for legal services. And some of the farmers who dealt with Dad bartered eggs, butter and potatoes in return for his advice. But that's the way it was. Everybody had to scramble, just to make ends meet.

In 1931 John Bracken, who'd taken on the leadership of Manitoba's new Progressive government, was a worried man. And no wonder. Unemployment, the soaring costs of relief, an embattled agricultural economy, all were reasons for unrest among the electorate. Bracken felt that a non-partisan government might better be able to ride out the crisis, and approached the Liberals with the idea of a Liberal-Progressive alliance. The Liberals, in turn, put the pressure on Dad to run provincially. He finally agreed to do this, on one condition: That, if elected, he'd be given the post of Provincial Treasurer, with complete control of the financial policies of the government. His proviso was accepted by Bracken. So, after his election, Dad served as Manitoba's Provincial Treasurer from 1932-6. It was the worst financial period in Manitoba's history.

The province's credit rating at that time was practically zero. Relief costs alone were enormous and provincial officials had asked Ottawa to take over half the obligation. But the federal government said no, not until Manitoba balanced its budget or, at least, brought its annual deficit below a million dollars. Prime Minister R.B. Bennett laid down a further dictum: Either Manitoba started measuring up or "a financial controller satisfactory to the Dominion Government would have to be appointed." His meaning was all too clear - if that happened, Manitoba would become the financial ward of the federal government.

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Once the Commission's report was tabled the Conservatives fell and a Liberal government led by Toby Norris took over. During World War I the issue of conscription forced Conservatives and Liberals to join forces and a Union Government was set up in 1917. Then came five years of political unrest. The "group" government was dissolved in 1922 and an election called. Dad was defeated and went back to his law practice. But in 1926 he ran again, only this time federally, against his former law partner Arthur Meighen who had represented Portage la Prairie since 1908. At that point Meighen was the Right Honorable, Prime Minister of Canada, and the confrontation appeared to be a David and Goliath competition. Amazingly, though, Dad won and it was years before Meighen forgave him.

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At this point the P:rovincial Treasurer, went into action, according to the history books: "The Hon. E. A. McPherson proceeded to make heroic reductions of expenditure, and imposed a flat 2 per cent tax on all wages and salaries above $480 for single persons." It was the first time a wage tax had been imposed in Canada, and it was far from popular with the average man. Nevertheless, it enabled Manitoba to make its bond payments, thus saving it from virtual bankruptcy, and from dependency on the federal government.

For that first year Dad worked round-the-clock, and we stayed on in Portage. In 1933, however, we moved into Winnipeg. But even then we didn't see a lot of Dad. There were many nights , for instance, when he didn't come home but slept on the chesterfield in his office. It affected his health. He had ulcers from worrying about whether or not Manitoba would weather the crisis, and eventually had to take time off to recuperate. Even Prime Minister R.B.Bennett empathized with him. In a personal letter to Dad, dated March 15, 1934, he wished Dad a speedy recovery and added: "It's a hard job we have!"

Actually, I find it surprising that Dad, Manitoba's Provincial Treasurer and a dyed-in-the-wool Liberal, should have had this close personal contact with R.B. Bennett, the Conservative leader, since John Bracken was, after all, the provincial premier and government leader. But apparently Bennett refused to have anything to do with Bracken - said he'd failed to follow through on some previous commitment or other - and insisted on conducting business only with Dad. In some of their correspondence Dad reveals a certain reluctance to be taking the premier's place but, in the interests of securing financing from Ottawa, it was any port in a storm.

In any event, whether due to their close contact or not, the Bennett government agreed to share some of the financial burden of Manitoba's unemployment, and Dad carried on until 1936 when he again retired, hoping to rescue his law firm, then in a state of disaster. His partner had misappropriated funds. Rather than allow the scandal to become public, Dad took over the debt but had to close down the practice.

Meantime, the City of Brandon had gone into receivership. Dad was hired as Brandon's Controller and was hard at work trying to straighten out its financial mess when he got word, in 1937, that he'd been appointed Chief Justice of The Court of King's Bench. There he became noted for his ethics and what the Winnipeg Free Press called his "horse-sense logic". In April, 1944, he was elevated to the position of Chief Justice of Manitoba.

This man who'd never set foot in a campus classroom was lauded, when he died, as "one of the soundest of lawyers." And that would have pleased him.

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That was enough of a black mark, in wartime, to call for internment. Because of a special order making the Custodian responsible for the assets of anyone interned, everything Sheeney owned was vested in the Custodian's office. And Sheeney's holdings were considerable - a palatial estate near Brockville complete with in-house bowling alley, stables, riding rings and prize horses, a cement plant in Montreal, and a "hotel" in a small northern mining town. McPherson assigned security guards to protect the estate, and kept the cement plant running ("though it drove me crazy"). But the hotel was something else. Frankly, his investigation revealed it to be a "place of ill repute". This posed a problem. Whenever possible, the Custodian was supposed to keep seized businesses in operation. But in this case? He decided to put the question to the Custodian himself.

"Sir," he said to his boss, Fernand Rinfret, who was both Secretary of State and Custodian: "Do you know who's running the biggest whorehouse in Northern Ontario?"