

## Excerpt from G. Fred : The Story Of G. Fred McNally - 1964.

In June the legislature was dissolved and the

70 G. FRED

election date set for September 21, 1935. Mr. Baker, the Minister, left the office for the campaign trail and I was left to carry on without advice from anyone. I did not see him again until the day after the election when the cabinet came together to survey the ruins. The United Farmers of Alberta had been wiped out by a bunch of upstarts led by William Aberhart, a Calgary school principal, professing a strange new doctrine called Social Credit.

There was much speculation as to who would be the new Minister of Education. There were in the new House many teachers and veteran school trustees. One of these had announced that if Social Credit won he would be the Minister of Education. This caused some alarm in educational circles. A few days later I met Mr. Aberhart on his way to lunch in the Macdonald Hotel with a number of his colleagues. After congratulating him I said, "When you are selecting your Minister of Education, don't overlook yourself." He looked me in the eye and said, "Do you mean that?" To which I replied, "I was never more sincere in my life." After a minute's delay he said, "I believe I could work with you." When the cabinet was announced a week later I was thrilled to see that he had done as I suggested.

Now I had known Mr. Aberhart for more than twenty years, had been entertained in his home, and had found him an effective ally in helping me launch the new high-school course of studies. I had visited Crescent Heights High School more than once and admired the precision with which his organization functioned. I knew something of what he would demand of his associates.

Within a week of his taking over the Department he sent for me. His opening remark was, "I want you to tell me what in your opinion most needs doing to improve education in this province." This was quite a large order to fill without any time for reflection. However, I said, "First, a reorganization of the rural school districts into large units of administration. Second, more money for teachers' salaries and some formula for the distribution of grants that would result in equalization of opportunity. Third, some plan to bring all teacher education under the jurisdiction of the university and so increase the prestige of the teaching profession." I threw the last in because I thought it would appeal to him. He said, "You know there isn't any money, so let's concentrate on the first". He then had me describe in detail Mr. Baker's attempt of a few years before, the changes advisable to make it more

acceptable, and the desirable results one might expect from such a reorganization. I had given much thought to this as a consequence of both my inspection experience and my years of battling with rural school boards who were asking for authority to pay salaries lower than the minimum. I became more and more enthusiastic as I went along and talked for almost an hour. He listened with an occasional question for more detail and at the end said, "I like that. I'll talk to you about it again."

The next day he said to me, "The caucus of Social Credit members is to be held on Thursday and Friday of this week. I'd like you to tell the caucus your vision of what might happen in rural education if your plan were adopted." I protested that it was my settled policy to keep completely clear of politics, that if it became known that I had attended a meeting of any political party my position would be compromised. He said he would try to get along at the meeting without me. On Thursday night about nine o'clock his chauffeur appeared at my door with the message, "The Minister would like you to come to the Parliament Buildings." I was on a spot but hoped that the summons merely portended a conference in his office. When I reached the door I was escorted to the Caucus

Chamber and introduced by the Minister's remark, "The Deputy has a story he'd like to tell you." I launched into what I called "What Might Be in Rural Education". This recital took about an hour. At its conclusion I was bombarded with questions from all corners of the room. Remember, many of these members had given years of service on rural school boards. I had sought to mollify them by pointing out that large-unit organization would give them greater scope for school board service and that I hoped if and when the new scheme came into being we could count on them for the same devotion to education that they had shown before.

On the following Monday I had instructions from the Minister to proceed at once with the drafting of the necessary legislation. He said he proposed to introduce an appropriate bill at the forthcoming session of the legislature. In doing this we had the advantage of the so-called Baker Bill, which had been introduced in the 1933 session but not proceeded with, and the advice and assistance of Vernon Shaw of the Department of Education and Andrew Smith, Legislative Counsel. It was generally known that the reorganization had become government policy, and draft copies of the bill were sought as soon as it was introduced into the House.

Leaders of the Roman Catholic church were fearful that the large-unit organization might prejudice their rights in separate schools. They were particularly concerned lest the divisional boards might not respect the desire of predominantly Roman Catholic communities to employ teachers of their own faith. A large and important delegation came down to the Parliament Buildings to discuss this. They asked specifically that districts desiring to do so might stay out of the divisions. The Minister said this was a concession he could not grant: districts everywhere, for one reason or another, would be voting to stay out and so the whole purpose would be defeated. He said that rather than incorporate that proviso he would withdraw the bill; and this he did not propose to do. With that ultimatum he asked me to take over the chair and left the room. I suggested that we adjourn for a time and that the delegation name two people to confer with me in the hope that we might reach a compromise that would in no way affect the principle of the bill but would protect separate school interests. In the delegation was a lawyer, Mr. P. E. Poirier. We were able to agree on the addition of a couple of sections applicable to all districts, and this proved to be acceptable to the

delegation. The Minister agreed to the inclusion, and so we had no more difficulty with the church authorities.

In the meantime a Departmental committee had been busy mapping the areas which, because of roads, natural barriers, and population, would make it possible for each division to be supervised by one inspector. We then had the inspectors arrange for public meetings in the areas where there was any interest. At these meetings the plan was to be explored and discussed. As architect of the scheme I felt it my duty to be present and face the opposition head-on.

At the meeting in Holden, I was accompanied by the Chief Inspector, E. L. Fuller, and Inspector L. B. Yule, whose territory would be included in the proposed division. A large gathering of men and women assembled. Each of us dealt with the phase of the subject we had agreed upon and then the fun began. At first we were peppered with questions and, as the evening wore on, the answers were greeted with bitter complaints. At about eleven o'clock a clever young lawyer stood up and said, "I have listened to what these men have to say and, if I understand English, we are going to have this thing put over on us whether we like it

or not. From now on all I'm interested in is the shape of the confounded thing." This gave me the opening I wanted. At once I jumped to my feet and said, "Thank you, Mr. White. I neglected to say that we were not wedded to any particular shape. If you will take this map that shows our proposals for the divisions north of the Battle River and come up with counter-proposals I will promise not only that your suggestions will receive every consideration but will in all probability be adopted. Mr. Purvis, I will appoint you chairman of a small group to study this area and come to the Department with your suggestions in two weeks' time." At once the turmoil ceased. Crowds gathered around our large map pointing out where our boundaries were not feasible. Others gathered around us and were as friendly as possible. An hour before, I had thought we might be lynched.

At the end of two weeks Mr. Purvis and some responsible men from the district arrived with a new map. I called our Departmental committee to meet them, and, after hearing their reasons, was able to tell them that we were prepared to accept without argument the boundaries they suggested. They seemed to have forgotten altogether their original objections to the scheme.

Many meetings were held. Objections were vehemently expressed and always accompanied by demands for a plebiscite. The most Mr. Aberhart would promise was a review and plebiscite at the end of five years. By the end of 1936 eleven divisions had been set up, and by the end of 1938 forty-four divisions had been organized, and not more than 350 rural schools were operating as individual units. According to a recent report of the Department of Education, School Division 61 has been set up in the northland, taking in schools at such isolated points as Fort Fitzgerald, McMurray, Wabisca, Chipewyan Lakes, Calais, and Elk. It should be noted that the two special sections added to the bill at the request of the separate school people have never been used, and no plebiscite was ever asked for at the end of the five-year period. Later the municipal and divisional boundaries were made coterminus for large-area administration of both municipal and educational enterprises. It was without doubt "a famous victory" and no man less determined than Mr. Aberhart would have stood to his guns in the face of lawsuits and threats of political reprisals.

The next most important achievement during my régime as Deputy Minister was the integration of



all teacher training in the Faculty of Education of the University of Alberta. Several steps led to this.

I had proposed to the Minister the organization of a teachers' college located on the campus and affiliated with the university, but independent of the Board of Governors in much the same way that Teachers' College in New York is related to Columbia University. Indeed, legislation passed just before the war gave authority for such an establishment. During the early war years no one had time to give thought to this matter. Then a commission was set up by the government to settle the question of university operation. Of this Dr. Newland and I were members. One of the principal recommendations contained in the commission's report in 1943 was that all teacher education should be centered in the Faculty of Education. The report of the Subcommittee on Education and Vocational Training of the Post-war Reconstruction Period recommended the same procedure. The Survey Committee of the Canada and Newfoundland Education Association declared that this was an ideal to be striven for. The first positive action was taken in November 1943. A committee of twelve was convened to discuss all aspects of such a radical move. Some of the advantages envisaged

for unification of teacher education were: credit towards a university degree for all courses completed successfully, added prestige, a general feeling that all teachers should have training equivalent to the Bachelor's degree, and more time for teaching under actual school conditions in an integrated program extending over at least three years.

Finally, in 1945 an agreement was entered into between the Department of Education and the governors of the university whereby all teacher education was transferred to the university, the actual direction of the programs to be vested in the Faculty of Education.

Other achievements of my eleven years as Deputy Minister included: (1) The institution of equalization grants for the first time in Canada. This meant scaling of government assistance in inverse proportion to the ability of the local authority to pay. (2) Payment from the provincial treasury of all arrears of salary owing to teachers. I had the accountants of the Department compute from the term returns all sums reported by teachers as due them and certified as correct by the secretary-treasurers. The total was slightly more than one million dollars. I asked Mr. Aberhart to present legislation to authorize these payments from pro-

vincial monies. This was a bold proposal since we were still in the depression and money was very scarce. He considered for a moment and said, "Why wait for the session (then five or six months away)? We can do it by Order-in-Council and have it ratified later." Thus the money was provided and all arrears were paid. Of course, under the divisional organization the cause of such a situation could never arise again.

I am very much of the opinion that the School Board



*Dr. G. Fred McNally  
Alberta Deputy Minister of  
Education, 1935-46  
Chancellor of the University  
of Alberta, 1946-52*