

# THE CAPITAL

Vol. 1

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No. 1

## THE CAPITAL

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SATURDAY, JUNE 5TH, 1897

MR. CROPLEY THROWS SOME LIGHT ON A DARK SUBJECT

In again appearing before the public, and more especially the people of Fredericton, as the publisher of a public journal in this city, I have concluded that in justice to myself, I should make as brief an explanation as possible of the causes which culminated in my relinquishing and retiring from THE CAPITAL on the 28th day of October 1889. My convictions are strengthened in this respect when the remembrance is forced on me that I was at that time harshly deprived of the opportunity to thank my subscribers and patrons, to even bid a journalistic good-bye to them, or make any explanation whatever as to the reason why I ceased being the editor and publisher of a paper which I had personally brought into existence, which had attained more influence in some important respects than any other paper previously published in this city, and in the establishing of which I had consecrated the best ten years of my life. In presenting these facts I am conscious that I have no desire to retaliate on those who then compassed my abandonment of THE CAPITAL, but that a sense of duty impels me to do so, and that to omit doing so would display, on my part, a want of manhood and backbone. I am further induced to make these explanations, by the belief that the people of Fredericton, among whom I have lived for nearly half a century, and with whom I have been so closely identified in so many ways ever since my boyhood, take a reasonable amount of interest in my fortunes.

The first number of THE CAPITAL, as a tri-weekly, was issued on the 11th September, 1880. At that time I owned a large Hoe cylinder press, and the largest printing office in the city, all paid for. Previous to this at least two attempts had been made to establish tri-weekly or semi-weekly newspapers in this city. In each case, gifted, energetic men were the founders; but notwithstanding this, after brief periods, Fredericton again relapsed into the disgraceful position of publishing only weekly newspapers. In 1880, when I started THE CAPITAL (tri-weekly), this city and suburbs, with a population of about 12,000, mainly devoted to mercantile and manufacturing pursuits; the seat of government and the very heart of the Province, and likewise the centre of a large and prosperous farming population, had three weekly newspapers; viz., the *Reporter*, the *Head Quarters*, and the *Maritime Farmer*. Very little local news ever appeared in them; and the St. John dailies jostled them from a local standpoint, through the medium of local correspondence, with the effect of curtailing their circulation, influence, and prosperity.

With a full knowledge of the newspaper history of this city, and undismayed by the failure in this arena of other clever, enterprising men, I believed that Fredericton could and would support a tri-weekly newspaper if of the right sort; and as I had breathed the air of printing offices ever since my boyhood, and having a love for literature, I had full confidence that I possessed the requisite ability to give Fredericton a paper of the right sort, and one that would wield an influence and be popular. From the very first,

THE CAPITAL commanded success, its local circulation, among all classes, being unrivalled. If it had a hobby, it was in trying to persuade our people and outsiders into putting their money into factories and wholesale mercantile houses here, and in advocating local improvements. In Dominion politics, the paper was Conservative; and in local politics, it supported the Fraser-Hanington-Wetmore Governments, and was in opposition to that led by the Hon. Andrew G. Blair.

For some years THE CAPITAL had the tri-weekly field all to itself, there being no other competitors than the weekly papers already alluded to. In the light of subsequent events, it is necessary that I should state that from the time I started the paper until I retired from it, I was financially unaided; although on more than one occasion I was offered what amounted to a yearly cash subsidy by a prominent individual in this county. Of this fact I have preserved the evidence in writing. I refused the proposition, being determined on maintaining the paper in independence; stating that I expected the people of Fredericton would sustain the paper handsomely, and if they failed to do so, I would discontinue it. My own means and my own labor alone carried it along. A few years after its start, the Liberals of York having no organ here except a weekly paper (Mr. Lugin's), which soon afterwards ceased to exist, some of the leaders of that party started *The Herald*, with Mr. Chas. H. Lugin as editor. This paper, after struggling for some time in various editions, finally as a daily collapsed. [This *Herald* should not be confounded with the present *Herald*, THE CAPITAL having been succeeded by it and re-christened with this title.] After the demise of the Liberal organ, and backed by Mr. Alex. Gibson, Mr. John Pickard, Hon. A. G. Blair, and Mr. George F. Gregory, Mr. James H. Crocket launched the *Gleaner* as a tri-weekly. It is specially significant and suggestive that although three unoccupied days in the week were open for its publication; viz., Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, which, if adopted, would give to Fredericton a newspaper every day except Sunday, nevertheless, the very same days on which THE CAPITAL was published—Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, were selected for the *Grit* tri-weekly. In order to comprehend this phase of the newspaper, and, indeed, of the political history of the town, and its subsequent far-reaching results, the reader should understand that when Mr. Blair's Government came into power, that gentleman, accompanied by the Hon. James Mitchell, went from office to office in the Provincial Departmental building, and ordered all the officials to call in my bills, and to give the patronage of their departments to the publisher of the *Gleaner* and other Liberal supporters.

Although the longest established printer, bookbinder, and stationer in the city, and having expended thousands of dollars in fitting up my establishment with special plant for doing the printing, ruling, and binding of the public departments, I was thus guillotined by this hermaphrodite government, and from that time until the present have been deprived of local government patronage.

The intelligent reader will comprehend from this, that under such circumstances, my financial resources must inevitably have become a source of anxiety to me. In the light of my present knowledge, I am convinced I could have retained THE CAPITAL and printing office, if I had, at this juncture, availed myself of the proceeds of the sale of my book and stationery store and bindery, and concentrated my time and means on my paper and printing office. But the capitulation of any part of my business was repugnant to me; so I struggled on and on, confident of an early change in the Local Government and of more prosperous times. In order to tide over my difficulties,—the idea of seeking relief by a compromise never having entered my head,—as security for a loan from the defunct Maritime Bank, in an

evil hour I gave a lien on my establishment. Not long afterwards this fatal bank failed, and I was called on for an early repayment of the loan. With the view of raising the requisite funds to do this, and also to obtain my freedom and the discharge of the lien, I first sacrificed my bookbindery, the only one in the city; then followed the sacrifice of my book and stationery store, the longest established and finest business of the kind in the city; the sale of these properties having failed to realize sufficient funds, although there should have been a surplus, this was succeeded in a few months afterwards by the final act in the drama,—the surrender of THE CAPITAL and my printing establishment.

I have all along entertained the idea that there was a hidden hand which plotted and consummated all this, in order to acquire a personal organ for the Hon. A. G. Blair; and this belief is strengthened by the rumour that sometime previous to this overtures had been made by one of the inner circle for the purchase of the *Reporter* for this special purpose. Time will reveal whether my conjectures are well-founded, or not; but this narrative would be incomplete were I to omit mentioning the suggestive fact that Mr. Blair's personal organ, *The Herald*, as well as *The Royal Gazette*, are both printed now from my old printing plant, and that this office draws, in addition, thousands of dollars every year for local Government printing.

It will thus be seen that for years, unaided, I fought this powerful combination, as well as those other leading Liberals in the County already named. I considered conscientious consistency a virtue, and the reverse to be despicable, ignoble, and ungentlemanly. I was a Conservative from conviction, and having opposed Mr. Blair in local politics, I believed that I could not consistently or honourably support his Government or himself. It is true that the entertaining of these principles has cost me the loss of many thousands of dollars; but it has gained me my self-respect. When I consider the stupendous influences which were arrayed against me during so long a period, and the additional fact that I was entirely unaided financially, I am amazed with the tenacity of purpose displayed and the strength of will which characterized the personal conducting of my business. Surely the fact that I maintained THE CAPITAL as a tri-weekly for nearly ten years, despite the mighty influences arrayed against me, and when gifted men, under much more favourable circumstances, had failed in similar undertakings in less than quarter of that time, is an achievement to be proud of, and entitles me to an honourable position among the journalists of Fredericton; and it must be borne in mind that when I retired from THE CAPITAL, it was a good paying property, and I looked forward into converting it into a daily at no distant day; in fact my retirement in the early part of 1889 from the bookbinding and stationery branches of my business was done with a view to this.

When THE CAPITAL was started, York, Carleton, Sunbury, Queen's—in fact the river counties—were represented at Ottawa by Liberals. I then, as now, believed fully in the National Policy; and having implicit faith in the loyalty and principles of the Conservative party, I gave my best abilities as a journalist and otherwise to the support of that party. When, in consequence of the death of Mr. John Pickard, York's seat in the House of Commons became vacant, I threw myself heart and soul into the contest in support of Mr. Temple, the conservative candidate. I do not hesitate to affirm, that largely as a sequence, York was won from the Liberals; and before many years, all the river counties followed York's most excellent example.

It is an important and unique part of the recent history of York, and worthy of being placed on record, that there were in those days in the Liberal ranks in this County, and opposed to me politically, certain prominent individuals,—notably Mr. Alex. Gibson and Mr. Crocket of the *Gleaner*,—who are now full-fledged Tories and opponents of the present Minister of Railways;