

The House met at 4:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Fitzgerald): Order, please!

This afternoon marks a very special event in the history of the Parliament of Newfoundland and Labrador, the unveiling today of the portrait of former Speaker Thomas Bennett, who served the Newfoundland Parliament as Speaker from 1834-1837. This event today marks the long-awaited completion of a chapter in the history of our Legislature.

The collection of portraits of all former Speakers encircling the floor of the House of Assembly has remained incomplete, due to the long-standing unavailability of a likeness of former Speaker Thomas Bennett. By acquiring his photograph and hanging a portrait, we can now take pride in filling a glaring gap in our legislative history.

I would like to welcome some special people who are witnessing this event here today; three former Speakers: Mr. Harvey Hodder, Mr. Tom Lush, and Mr. Leonard Simms.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Lush is accompanied by his wife Lillie.

In the Speaker's Gallery today we also welcome a former Clerk, Mr. John Noel, accompanied by his wife Ruth.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: Also, another former Clerk, Ms Bettie Duff.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: We welcome the President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Historical Society, Ms Melanie Martin.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: And, the Vice-President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Historical Society, Mr. Larry Coady.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: Also, a representative from the Wessex Society, their President, Mr. Arthur Cleal.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: We also wish to acknowledge Mr. Gerry Squires, who is unable to be present for the ceremony here today. Mr. Squires is the distinguished artist who was commissioned to paint the portrait of Speaker Thomas Bennett.

The Speaker would also like to take this opportunity to welcome other members, and employees of the House of Assembly in the gallery.

Welcome.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: I will now call on the Clerk of the House of Assembly, Mr. William MacKenzie, who will provide the background on Speaker Thomas Bennett.

Mr. MacKenzie.

CLERK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This Legislature is encircled by a collection of portraits of former Speakers of the House of Assembly. Until today, this collection has been incomplete, due to the absence of a likeness of the second Speaker of the House of Assembly, Thomas Bennett, elected Speaker in 1834. Members may note, if they have looked at some of these portraits, that there was another Speaker named Thomas R. Bennett, who became Speaker in 1870, a different individual; we had two.

This collection of portraits was commissioned, or begun in 1949 when Premier Smallwood commissioned Richard Steiger to paint portraits of all pre-Confederation Speakers. He was paid a sum of \$6,000 to deliver the twenty-six framed portraits to the House. At that time, no likeness of Thomas Bennett could be found, so his portrait was never completed.

Just as a matter of interest, that is about \$260 per portrait for Mr. Steiger. The price has gone up these days, as Mr. Hodder knows.

What do we know about Thomas Bennett? He was born in Shaftesbury, in Dorset England, in 1788. He moved to St. John's in the early 1820s to join his brother, Charles Fox Bennett, who later became Newfoundland's fifth Prime Minister. These brothers were also business partners and had interests in the Tilt Cove copper mine and the Riverhead Brewery, which was only later called the Bennett Brewery, when taken over by an unrelated Bennett named Edward W.

Thomas Bennett was elected to the House in the first General Election in 1832 as the Member for the District of Twillingate and Fogo. In 1834, when John Bingley Garland, first Speaker of the House, was appointed to the council, a contest ensued for speakership between the Liberal Dr. William Carson and the Conservative Thomas Bennett. Upon being elected as Speaker, Thomas Bennett addressed the House as follows:

“Gentlemen, I beg to offer you my most sincere thanks for the honor you have conferred upon me by placing me in the highest elective situation in this Colony; and I assure you it shall be my unceasing duty to merit the confidence you have reposed in me, by a strict attention to the many duties of the important Office with which you have been pleased to invest me. I shall most anxiously guard the privileges of the House on all occasions, and I trust, by your assistance and support, those privileges will

be at all times exercised, consistent with the prerogatives of the Crown, and the rights of the other Branches of the Legislature.”

The three years that Thomas Bennett was Speaker, in the early days of Responsible Government, must have been interesting and a great challenge. In 1836, for instance, the Speaker cast the deciding vote in the Assembly no less than fourteen times.

In 1848, Thomas Bennett was appointed as magistrate in St. John's. He also served as a director of both the St. John's Hospital and the St. John's Academy. He was appointed to investigate the election disturbances in Harbour Grace in 1859. In 1870, he retired to Shaftesbury, England where he died in 1872.

In 2004, a search for a likeness of Thomas Bennett was undertaken by Trine Schioldan, a librarian with our Legislative Library, with the strong support of the Clerk, Mr. John Noel. Trine is one of the individuals in the gallery today, and we should embarrass her by asking her to stand and be recognized in case some of you don't know Trine from the Legislative Library.

[Applause]

CLERK: Trine's goal was to locate a photograph or other likeness of Thomas Bennett, from which a portrait could be painted, thereby completing the Speakers' portrait collection, and filling a gap in our parliamentary history.

Three years of patient and determined research and detective work went into the pursuit of a likeness of Thomas Bennett. The search began within the Province but no likeness exists in the Encyclopaedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Provincial Archives, the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University, et cetera.

Resolved to cast the net far and wide, Trine continued her search at the National Library and Archives of Canada, and then in many

collections, both large and small, throughout England. There were several ups and downs throughout this process. At one point, the Parish Clerk of the Parish of Shaftesbury St. James, where Thomas Bennett was baptized and later buried, graciously agreed to look for headstones or memorials. Even though there is a memorial to Thomas Bennett on the wall of the church, no likeness could be found in that parish. This was discouraging, but Trine's research continued in England through the National Archives, the British Library, British Museum, et cetera.

A photograph was finally located three years after the search began in the private collection of Mr. James Way of England, a distant relation of Thomas Bennett. We are as certain as anyone can be that the photograph represents Speaker Thomas Bennett. The rigorously checked family tree, the dates and relative perceived ages of persons in the collection of St. John's photographs, evidence of the family face, the contemporary style of studio photography and the provenance within the family are all pieces which fit this puzzle.

Mr. Way's cousin, Mr. Robert Bayley of Surrey travelled to Newfoundland in 2007. A relative of Mr. Bayley's had married Thomas Bennett's daughter in 1870. Mr. Bayley graciously gifted the photograph of Thomas Bennett to the House of Assembly. We are especially grateful to Robert Bayley for his generosity and shared interest in our parliamentary history. Members are invited to view this photograph of Thomas Bennett in later life from which the portrait was painted at the reception following the unveiling.

It is through the generosity of Mr. Way and Mr. Bayley, the interest and assistance of many historical researchers in England, and the persistent resolve of Trine Schioldan that we can unveil this portrait today.

It has been 171 years since Thomas Bennett's tenure as Speaker, and it is with great pleasure that we welcome his return to

the House of Assembly and to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Welcome home, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. RIDEOUT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, first of all on behalf of the hon. the Premier and all of my colleagues and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I am sure on behalf of every member of the House, let me say how delighted we are to have the opportunity to take part in this little moment of history here today.

I want to begin by recognizing the presence of three former Speakers. We are delighted that you could join us this afternoon, also a couple of former Clerks and other distinguished visitors to the gallery. This is, indeed, a historic moment. You know, when we get around to - with a lot of glee - hanging another former Speaker, then our photo gallery will be complete. I will not say who that one is that remains to be hung, but I am sure that he knows who it is.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, it is certainly an historic moment that we will be able to complete, finally, having a portrait in this House of all Speakers who ever served in the Chair - Speaker of this Legislature. That is a monumental achievement, really, and I want to pay tribute to those who had the tenacity to ensure that the research was carried on, and was eventually met with some success.

I understand from the historic note that was provided, that former Premier Smallwood commissioned a photograph of the twenty-six Speakers who had served as Speaker of our House before Confederation. I believe there are twelve more will have been added since that time. So that in total, including

Your Honour, there will have been thirty-eight people who have served in office of Speaker, in the Parliaments over time, of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have had the privilege of serving with eight now. I understand, I think, as perhaps most members do, that it is an onerous task to take on to be Speaker of this House. Mr. Speaker Bennett may have had to break fourteen ties in his day. Not often we see Speakers having to do that, but Your Honour, in our Management Committee the way that it is set up now, has to look at the possibility of almost every meeting voting to break a tie. So, it is that kind of thing in terms of all of the responsibility of managing the House, making sure that the members' requirements are met, and making sure that Parliamentary privilege and tradition is carried on in the way that it should be, it really makes it - the fact that we should be doing what we are doing here today.

So, we welcome the addition of former Speaker Bennett to the portrait gallery in the walls of our Legislature. From a personal perspective, I did note as well in the historic note that was provided, that his brother, Charles Fox Bennett, who we know was Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador at one point, and former Speaker Bennett, were involved in the mining interests in Tilt Cove - and Tilt Cove, of course, is located in the historic District of Baie Verte-Springdale, which I am proud to represent.

So we are delighted to have the opportunity to do this here today, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

MS JONES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly a pleasure for us to join with the government members and all members in the House of Assembly, including

yourself, to mark this important occasion. I think that Mr. Bennett is very deserving of taking his place in history and his place in our Chamber in the House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the pillars of this House are founded on the British Parliament. As we know, the British Parliament is shrouded in tradition, and the tradition has always been in this House that Speakers be hung, as the Government House Leader likes to refer to it, but certainly that their portraits be placed in this House in a position of prominence to mark the occasion of their service. Mr. Speaker, as tradition would have it, today it is important to point out and acknowledge the former Speakers who are here with us, joining us in this event and the former Clerks and others who have served the House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, we realize, probably more so than anyone, the important task and role that you play in this Chamber and in this Assembly. Quite often your task is challenged by the issues that are currently in debate on the floor of this House at any particular given time, but we understand that you are the person who carries the knowledge of how this House should be legislated. Also, Mr. Speaker, you are the face and the representative of all of us, as you represent our Parliament throughout the country and throughout the Commonwealth of which we are a very proud member and a proud part of. These things deserve to be honoured and to be recognized in the noblest way and I think it is important that we are recognizing Mr. Bennett today.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that we have already had the Government House Leader acknowledge that there have been thirty-eight Speakers of this Legislature. May I recommend that, to this noble cause after you, Sir, have been hung and your portrait is placed on the wall that maybe this Chamber would see fit to make history again and select a woman to be the Speaker of our Chamber for the very first time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Signal Hill-Quidi Vidi.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It really is an honour to stand here today and to recognize the former Speaker, Thomas Bennett. I welcome the former Speakers, former Clerks and our guests.

One of the things one has to put up with being the third party in the House is that the Official Opposition gets to say something ahead of you that you were going to say. I want to start where the Leader of the Official Opposition ended because I, too, wanted to make that point, that as venerable as you gentlemen are and you are, sir, and as these men were, it is going to be wonderful when after you, I hope, we have the first woman up on this wall also. The thing is, historically that would be good because it will start reflecting who we are becoming in this House. Obviously, these men were part of a time when there were no women in the House for a lot of that time. It will be wonderful when that moment comes.

The role of Speaker is a special role, it is a very important role, and I am sure at times it is also a thankless role. I can imagine the many times that the Speaker, Thomas Bennett, had to come in and break a vote with his vote, was thankless, on many, many occasions, but it takes a lot of wisdom to know how to play the role of Speaker, to be part of one of the parties that is sitting in the House, or being part of the government, and yet to know that you are there to represent the common good of the whole House. Four of you gentlemen sitting in this room today have been through that, and you know how difficult it is.

All of us in different ways in our lives, I am sure, have played arbitration roles and we know that it is not an easy way to go. I think it really is important that we do recognize that role in a special way, by having the portraits of Speakers of the House on our walls. Since we have them, then it is very important that we make sure everybody is represented from an historical perspective.

History, I think, is something that we should honour as well. The documenting of who we are as a people, who we are as a Legislature, who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – and while I do not have the commitment, as the representatives from the Historic Society, in terms of working on this issue on a daily basis, I am a person who really does value documentation of all the moments of who we are as a people. From that perspective, it is really an honour then, to be here today as part of the event in which we finally do have the last Speaker who was not represented in the House, now going to be represented.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: I now call on the Government House Leader and the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to come forward and participate in the official unveiling.

[Unveiling of the portrait]

[Applause]

MR. SPEAKER: I thank all members for participating. I thank the former Speakers for making an effort to be here and our invited guests. Members and invited guests and people in the gallery are now invited to a brief reception in the Opposition Caucus room which is right down to my right here in this corridor behind the Chamber. I ask all members to now come forward and enjoy a brief reception.

Thank you.