

Through the Looking Glass Brightly

The Honorable Allan Williams, Q.C.

On Thursday, August 4, 1983 Louis Allan Williams, Q.C. was dealing with the routine of filling out an application to the Secretary of State for External Affairs for a new passport. Accompanying his application would be the green passport issued to him as a provincial Cabinet Minister and Provincial Attorney General. He was thus giving up one of the last perks which came to him as the 33rd Attorney General of British Columbia.

In surrendering his green passport for the traditional blue passport he made the point that he and Marjorie had very much enjoyed travelling on his green passport. He mentioned that there was a red passport. This passport is issued to Federal Cabinet Ministers and their equivalents. In any event it is back to the routine of citizenship.

Until the Honourable Alex MacDonald, Q.C. was Attorney General it was usual for the Attorneys to have other Cabinet responsibilities. Neither the Honourable Garde Gardom, Q.C. nor the Honourable Brian R. D. Smith, Q.C. have followed this tradition. Save for retaining the responsibility for Indian affairs, which came to him while he was the Minister of Labour, Williams did not have any other Cabinet responsibilities apart from being the legal advisor on matters civil and criminal to the Provincial Crown, the Law Officer of the Province and the Leader of the Bar.

It is arguable that it is not now practical to expect the Attorney to have additional responsibilities. The present responsibilities are, in the opinion of most, too consuming.

Williams was appointed Attorney General on November 23, 1979. He was not relieved until the new Cabinet was formed on May 26, 1983 following the general election on May 5, 1983. In serving three years and six months he has served just over the average term of his predecessors which is three years and one month.

There are now six living Attorneys General: The Hon. Norman William Whittaker, K.C. the Hon. Robert William Bonner, Q.C. the Honourable Leslie Raymond Peterson, Q.C., the Hon. the Hon. Alexander Barrett Macdonald, Q.C., the Honourable Garde Gardom, Q.C., the Honourable Louis Allan Williams, Q.C., and the Honourable Brian R. D. Smith, Q.C.

It is fair to say that no Attorney General of the Province of British Columbia has had more difficult issues in his term than has Allan Williams. He served during a time when there was constitutional strife between the central government and the provinces; he had a number of pressing problems come to his office, some involving colleagues; he presided over the Ministry at a time when it was going through the greatest period of change in the history of its office. Throughout this period public expectations, sometimes represented by press comment, kept up a steady barrage of advice. No one who has not lived through the daily grind of dealing with internal, political and administrative issues piled upon the demands of Question Period each day the House sits, can appreciate the strains which will develop during a tenure in this difficult office. The more so when this responsibility rests upon a person who both understands the role of an Attorney General and by training and nature chooses not to avoid responding to its demand. All of us have difficulties dealing with our own conscience. It is

much more demanding to deal with the duties of an Attorney General when one carries the constitutional responsibility of discharging the conscience of a government.

Williams' personal work habits are demanding. It can be said that he is not good at returning phone calls, making press statements, and chatting. It can also be said that he is very good at analyzing issues, taking the time to prepare responses, and satisfactorily preparing himself to give the advice his office demands of him.

Whether or not it is his Celtic nature, his seeming habitual pessimism, or the final product of a finely-tuned, highly-trained and experienced legal mind, he insists on worrying a problem to death. His meetings consistently take not less than two hours or until such later time as is required to solve the problem. While he never takes notes and rarely takes paper home he consistently takes home his problems in his head.

He is a man who will insist upon looking for a black cat in a dark room. Through the consistent demonstration of these qualities, he won the enduring respect, admiration and ultimately the affection of the lawyers with whom he worked while he was in office. He was imaginative and courageous in proposing solutions. Once he had satisfied himself on the form of a solution nothing except the demonstration of error would change his mind. This is well illustrated in the cartoon presented to him on his departure by the B.C. Government Lawyers Association which forms a part of this comment.

What of the background of this man? He was born in Glenavon, Saskatchewan, the only son of Louis P. and Belle (McPherson) Williams. His father was the local agent for Imperial Oil. They very shortly moved to Assiniboia. When he was 14 his family moved to Vancouver. He matriculated at St. Patrick's High School and prior to joining the RCAF attended both King Edward High School and Vancouver Technical School.

In 1941 he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force where he trained as a pilot. He took his elementary training at High River and qualified for his wings at Claresholm in December, 1942. He graduated 2nd in a class of 85. This doomed him to life as a flying instructor. He then went to Arnprior, Ontario and subsequently to Davidson, Saskatchewan, where in March of 1943 he opened the first RCAF Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS). (Prior to the opening of this school at Davidson all RCAF schools were run by private industry.)

He went overseas to training command, was posted to Greenock, Scotland, for a short period but again was involved in instructional work at various stations in England until he crewed up in November of 1944 in bomber command (Lancasters). While he and his crew volunteered for the Pacific, their duties were not required.

He was discharged early in 1946 with the rank of Flight Lieutenant and immediately enrolled, in January, 1946, at UBC. He went to school continuously at UBC, until he joined the law class admitted to UBC in the Fall of 1947.

As was the practice for veterans in those days he was then invited by G. L. (Pat) Fraser, Q.C. to commence articling. In accepting this offer he joined a firm with which he was to remain until he was obliged to resign to become the Minister of Labour on December 22, 1975. Present members of the Bar will remember Paul B. Paine, Q.C. recently retired as Chairman, Montreal Trust, as a senior partner in this firm and a continuing partner, W. H. Kemp Edmonds, Q.C. as Williams' long term partners.

It is his contribution to public life that will be long remembered. In 1958 Williams was appointed a member of the West Vancouver Parks and Recreation Commission. He served on that Commission until 1963 when he became its Chairman. In the municipal election of December, 1965 he was elected as a member of the West Vancouver Council and served in that capacity through 1966-67.

In 1966 Williams stood for election as candidate for the Liberal Party in the newly created constituency of West Vancouver/Howe Sound. He was consecutively re-

elected as a Member of the Legislature in the elections of 1969, 1972. In 1975, and 1979 he was re-elected as a member of the Social Credit Party. Shortly before the election in the Spring of 1983 he announced that he would not stand again for re-election.

As a cerebral man he was not given to small talk. One of the more astute members of his Attorney General's Ministry recognized that there were three subject matters which never failed not only to bring forth talk in some volume but now and again smiles; the first was wood cutting. He is very fond of cutting wood for his fireplace. The second was his compost heap. He is very proud of the work that he has done over the years in the maintenance of his compost heap. The third is his family, and particularly his grandchildren.

Allan Williams met Marjorie Ruth Lake and married her while at UBC on June 25, 1948. They have three children; Louis, a member of the Vancouver Police Department; two daughters Leslie and Jane, each of whom are married with their own families. It is within this group of now five and one half grandchildren that the former Attorney General and Marjorie dote.

In bringing to a close 25 years of public service Williams has made many friends, influenced events much beyond his recognition and left a record of public service in his community which will live and be remembered for many years. All wish him well as he takes up the responsibilities and challenges of his new life.

R.H.V.

