

The Eureka Shirt

James K. Boyd vs. the Charlotte Gazette

THE FOLLOWING IS part of a spirited disputation between James K. Boyd and John McLachlan, editor of a short-lived weekly called the *Charlotte Gazette*. As no copies of the *Gazette* seem to survive, we have only Boyd's summary of the charges laid against him and his father, James Boyd senior, a merchant, magistrate and M. P. for Charlotte, by McLachlan, who accused Boyd senior of speculation in his office as Magistrate and M. P., and Boyd junior of a conflict of interest in his operation of the hay scales at Market Square and of threatening himself personally with violence. Boyd's defence of himself and his father against these charges were detailed in subsequent articles, but what is most interesting here, and intended to be amusing, are the various slanders and epithets aimed at McLachlan - not just as a drunkard but as one who cohabits with a black woman. As a side note, McLachlan lived on the site of the current Rossmount Inn. His house was torn down to make way for the Mountain House, built by James Townshend of the Townshend shipbuilding family of Chamcook, which later was purchased by the Ross Family and named Rossmount. This house burned in 1967 and was replaced by the current edifice. ~

Standard

Oct. 3, 1849

For the *Standard*

Mr. Editor,

Please do me the favor to insert in your paper the following statement:

The “drunken deboshed fish” who conducts that delectable hebdomadal the *Charlotte Gazette*, in his last issue asserts, that I waylaid him in the street on Wednesday evening last, for the purpose of intimidating him to the extent of preventing an *exposé* of my father, etc.

He is a liar. On the evening in question, I was walking along the street, thinking of nothing concerning him, when this arrant blackguard passed me, and as he did so, ornamented his countenance with his favorite grin. Not feeling in the mood to tolerate even an insulting look from him, my first impulse was to floor him. A second look convinced me that he was far gone in intoxication, and I refrained. I told him, however, that if in his expositions he did not confine himself to truth and respectful language, I would so handle him that a certain dingy intimate of his should find it difficult to recognize him. So saying I left him.

On the next day, Justice Hatheway set a constable to me, politely inviting me to come to his office and sign sureties of the peace toward the Editor of the *Gazette*.

This was mighty like Mrs. Bond in the old song, crying to the ducks, “Dilly, dilly, dilly, come and be killed.” So thought I, and I waited upon Mr. Hatheway to tell him that I demanded an examination before two Justices, thanking him at the same time for what I ignorantly supposed was his courtesy. He refused this, unless I would take upon me to assure him beforehand that I could controvert the statements made by Mr. McLachlan in his affidavit. He read to me the complaint, in which the Editor insinuates that I had concealed weapons, and that, being afraid to meet his prowess fairly, I would take undue advantage to injure him. I again refused to sign sureties on those terms, and on Saturday morning Mr. Hatheway came to me and asked me to go to his office. There I found the Ethiopian Editor; and Mr. Hatheway very modestly proposed to go into an examination among ourselves there. But I had heard that it was unsafe to go to a certain warm country to hold lawsuits with its ruler, and conceiving that such would be my predicament if I consented, I again refused, except I might have an examination before two Justices. Mr. Hatheway, strong in the law, issued a warrant for my apprehension. This warrant I at once obeyed,

and entered into the requisite sureties before Mr. Justice Ker, not choosing to have my liberty restrained for so long a period as Messrs. Hatheway and McLachlan would have inflicted upon me.

I think my character and conduct in the understrapping situation I hold, are too well known, both to those who appointed me and to the public I serve, to suffer much from a score of editorials in the *Gazette*.

It is rich to hear this common brawler, this foulmouthed blackguard, complain of abuse. As well might a scavenger complain that he accidentally tipped into his own cart. I admit that I stated to him in public my opinion of him, and I was not fastidiously careful of the epithets I applied to him. I did not hope to provoke him to a breach of the peace, for I knew that his pugnacity extended no further than to administer punches on the head to a defenseless boy, and thrice a week to vent his drunken valour on his poor negro wench.

The Editor has tossed the ball in a very good style. Under favour of your columns, I hold myself bound to give him a "catcher." I will endeavour to show to the good people in sections of the county where he is not so well known as here, what an impudent imposter this is who pretends to be a reformer of public abuses, and an exponent of public opinion.

Your obedient servant,
J. K. Boyd

St. Andrews, 8th October 1849

Mr. Editor,

I had hoped to be able this week to commence a review of the *Charlotte Gazette's* course since its commencement. But I have tried in vain to procure a file of that credit to the Press of New Brunswick; the sheets having been, as fast as they appeared, converted to base uses; not quite so base, however, as those for which they were issued. I advertise in today's paper for a file, and the reason I don't extend the offer to the Editor, is that he would get drunk with the money; and I cannot encourage intemperance.

I have in course of preparation an account of the causes which induced this good man to retire from the magistracy; his characteristic modesty not permitting him to redeem the promise he made nearly two years ago, to publish it himself. It will be accompanied by some official correspondence. I shall also lay before your readers a narrative of facts relative to the last voyage of "our brig *Frederick*," which will prove the old saying true, whom a man injures, he never forgives.

Meantime, lest the Editor should think I have forgotten him, I beg you to publish the following episode of the Eureka Shirt. Should he have the impudence to deny the statements made, I can substantiate them by the most respectable testimony.

A Mr. Ford, of London, advertises Eureka Shirts. Whereupon the recondite *Punch* thus comments:

"What are Eureka Shirts? The word 'Eureka' signifies 'I have found.' Falstaff in *Henry IV* speaking of his ragged recruits, says, 'They'll find linen enough on every hedge.' These, we suspect, were the original 'Eureka Shirts.'"

There are Eureka Shirts in St. Andrews as well as in London. It will be fresh in the recollection of many that, no longtime since, the Editor of the *Gazette* was in the habit of going about buttoned to the chin, and his throat swathed almost to strangling, in a dirty tartan rag, evidently some superannuated duster. This was taken as an indication of a marvelous scarcity of linen, nor was the guess far from truth.

After a time however, the Editor emerged from obscurity like the Sun from the clouds. His pectoral regions rejoiced in the linen, and his cheek bones triumphed in a collar of sufficient amplitude for the Sail of a small boat. The appearance of a regiment of his Highland cousins without any breeches, would not have created the excitement that did this appearance of the Editor in a Shirt, and many were the guesses hazarded as to the cause of this sudden metamorphosis. The most available solution of the mystery seemed to be, that the beneficence of the Scotch Church penny-a-week Society had been called into requisition; and upon this hypothesis, though some doubted, most rested content. But time, who unravels all mysteries, would not permit this one to remain unexplained.

In the rear of the Editor's house is a garden, where, on summer evenings, he and his sable Dulcinea were wont to hold sweet converse. Often, however, when the respectable Editor was *Bacchi plenus*, i. e., full of Yankee rum, the spirit of discord would invade this second Eden. Not long since, at one of these *soirées*, after a good deal of mutual recrimination, and many harsh epithets, this modern Adam and Eve proceeded to end their dispute by pugilistic argument. Sundry blows and scratches having been given and taken, the combatants paused for breath. The Editor began to fear for the integrity of his apparel, and the following parley ensued:

Editor: "Let ge my shirt, you black d - l."

Phebe: "Your shirt, you wagabone! You haven't had a shirt of your own these seven years, and the one you now have on, I gave you."

Editor: "And you stole it, you b - h!"

Here was the mystery at once explained. The cause of this abundance of fine linen was at once apparent. Archimedes once cried out "Eureka" and his discovery affords a whimsical contrast to that of the Editor, or his sooty satellite. The great philosopher's "Eureka" sent him dancing shirtless home, while the Editor's "Eureka" endued him with desirable integument. And it is such a man as this who has the unblushing impudence to talk of exposing corruption and securing the independence of the Press! It is a marvel that the people of Charlotte County will suffer themselves to be duped by this vile wretch whose only passport to their favour is his brazen falsehood, and unscrupulous dishonesty.

I have to apologize for the coarse language employed in this communication. It will, however, be readily seen, that it is not mine, but the Editor's.

There are other choice *morceaux* in the history of the Editor, which I shall in due course furnish. For the present I leave him to digest the above.

Your obedient servant,
J. K. Boyd