

ERNEST C. MANNING

"The Father of Modern Alberta"

A Biographical Sketch



By

TONY CASHMAN

"EDMONTONIAN OF THE CENTURY"

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Cover Sketch of Ernest C. Manning by Garry LaRue

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FORWARD

Tony Cashman was the Edmonton broadcast journalist for CJCA Radio from 1951 to 1960. He covered the Alberta Legislature during part of E. C. Manning's time as Premier of Alberta. He grew to greatly respect the Premier and was subsequently asked by the Social Credit League in 1958 to produce a biographical portrait of E. C. Manning. This would be the first in depth expose of the man who had already been in power as Premier for fifteen years, and prior to that a Cabinet Minister for eight years during the Aberhart administration. Mr. Cashman considered it a pity that Albertans never got to know the elusive Premier in an up-close-and personal way, because he was so busy with legislative duties and his Bible Institute work. This booklet was published 10 years before the Premier retired from Alberta politics. It was intended to show to the public the character and persona of the man that had led their province to a place of eminence in the Canadian federation and whose administration was considered an economic and moral example for other leaders to follow. Cashman's biography was the first expose of this gifted and private man who many consider to be the most successful and widely respected provincial politician in Canadian history.

Mr. Manning's life was given to serving the citizens of Alberta and Canada over a period of 46 years. He was an Alberta Cabinet Minister for 8 years (1935-1943), Alberta Premier for 25 years (1943-1968) and a Canadian Senator for 13 years (1970-1983). It would be difficult to find anyone who had devoted his whole working life to public service, and at the same time publicly served Jesus Christ preaching the Gospel message.

ERNEST C. MANNING, "THE FATHER OF MODERN ALBERTA"

The work of copying Mr. Cashman's booklet was done in order to preserve E. C. Manning's legacy in Canadian politics during the peak of his career as Premier of the Province of Alberta. Not until 2008 was a comprehensive biography written on Ernest C. Manning by former Calgary Herald reporter, Brian Brennan. His excellent book titled, *The Good Steward: The Ernest C. Manning Story*, is a must-read for those interested in the Manning-Aberhart years. It was written 40 years after Mr. Manning retired as Alberta's Premier and twelve years after he died in 1996 at the age of 87.

Ernest C. Manning was remarkable in that he came from a farm boy background to become what Mr. Brennan called the Rocky Marciano of Canadian politics, winning seven consecutive elections as Premier of the Province of Alberta. He did this while maintaining a strong fundamentalist Christian testimony, and unashamedly preaching on Canada's National Back to the Bible Hour while leading his province to unparalleled prosperity and success. It is within this consideration of the secular and spiritual needs and well-being of the people under his leadership that Mr. Manning devoted his entire life – and sought no recognition in return. He was indeed "The Good Steward" of Alberta and Albertans as Brian Brennan so aptly named him...and Mr. Cashman so clearly portrayed him in the following pages.

An admirer described the quality of Mr. Cashman's work as an author, journalist and reporter: "he has breathed life into the dusty stuff of history." His Biographical Sketch of E. C. Manning has this quality about it. The Reader is encouraged to follow on and learn about the man called "the Father of modern Alberta" by Ted Byfield, himself called by the Hon. Peter Lougheed, "one

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of the most knowledgeable observers of Western Canada, and (whose) views are always given significant weight by those involved in public policy decision making." (The Book of Ted, 1998, inside cover)

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SECTION 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST

"Who's this fellow Manning, anyway?" That's what Peter Elliott wanted to know in 1948 when the Alberta government hired him to be executive secretary to the Premier. Few people were in a better position to know the answer than Pete. He had been reporting the government beat for the Edmonton Journal for years, and had seen and talked with the Premier almost daily.

However, beyond the facts that Ernest Charles Manning had the best-known face, and the best-known voice in the province; and had been a cabinet minister since 1935, and in 1943 had become the second youngest premier in the history of British parliaments, Pete had no idea what kind of man he was being asked to work for.

That's the problem of E. C. Manning: How can a warm, likeable, straightforward personality, who has been high in the public eye for half of his fifty years, be an unknown?

There are two obvious reasons: At the age of 26 he came directly into the cabinet and into the level of government where a man is sealed off by secretaries. That way, he missed the dozen years at the grassroots when most public figures become known. Secondly, his spare time is so completely taken up with his Bible extension work that he hasn't time for the social life in which most people get acquainted. Those are two obvious reasons, but there is still another, so much more obvious that it has escaped notice. If you, too, have ever wondered: "Who's this fellow Manning?", kindly turn the page.

SECTION 2

THE BEGINNINGS

His parents were English. George Henry Manning was born at Bury St. Edmunds in 1874, but his family were florists and the combination of greenhouses and Bury St. Edmunds was too placid entirely for George Henry. When he was still a lad he attempted to get away from it all in the merchant marine, but his career at sea was cut short when the service found a contradiction between his real age and the age he had put on his application. However, at the turn of the century he was on the sea again, bound for Canada. He was not bound for any particular place in Canada, but most of the young men he fell in with were heading west, so he came to the west too. He came to Winnipeg, worked for a while on a farm near Stonewall, Manitoba, then pushed west again to set up his own farm at Carnduff, Saskatchewan.

With the farm as security he was then able to send for his hometown sweetheart, Elizabeth Dickson. Elizabeth was a frail girl with a tendency to lung trouble, but her doctors advised her to go. English doctors of that time, whose knowledge of western farming came from C.P.R. immigration folders, thought it was great for frail people. Elizabeth came out to Carnduff in 1903 and she and George Manning were married there in the Baptist church.

Their first son William was born in 1905. Ernest was born in 1908, and the next year George Henry Manning made his last move west. He had been hailed out three years in a row and even for the patient little Englishman it was three times and out. The railroad was building a new line southwest from Saskatoon. George decided to get in

SECTION 2: THE BEGINNINGS

ahead of the railroad. In the spring of 1909 he filed on a homestead four miles southwest of Rosetown. At the time, Rosetown was strictly a proposed town but George rode the new line as far as it went, rode an ox-drawn wagon twenty miles farther, found the townsite and his homestead. He broke the sod with ox teams and a walking plow, and when Mrs. Manning and the two boys came to the place in the fall, he had the beginnings of a house ready for them.

His farming luck turned for the better right from the filing of the claim. He filed sight unseen, and a neighbor from Carnduff who filed the same day in the Saskatoon land office happened to pick a quarter section of knobby sandhills that resisted every effort to make a farm out of them. But George Manning landed on rich black gumbo that produced rich, golden wheat; and with luck and good farming he managed comfortably well. He was able to buy another quarter section, and lease a half section and eventually had 640 acres to his farm.

Roy, the third and last of the young Mannings, was born there. In time, all three boys were going to the Glenpayne School, half a mile away. The school's one room was up and closed some years ago, but the initials of the Manning boys are still carved on the desks. Roy, who runs the old family farm; Bill, a high school teacher and city councilor in Saskatoon; and Ernest, of whom people ask: "Who's this fellow Manning, anyway?"

The farm life was hard, but the Mannings were English and the English serenity and sense of humor, which was equal to two world wars, was equal to homesteading in Saskatchewan. The boys were assigned their responsibilities on the farm, and as they became teen-

agers had to take turns managing the entire operation. Still, with all the work, the Mannings had fun and most of it was sparked by Ernest.

Ernest was a natural entertainer. He played the fiddle in the local dance band, and his teacher thought he might have become very good at the violin if he hadn't been interested in so many other things. The other things were mechanical. In the heyday of "Popular Mechanics" magazine there was no reader more avid than E. C. Manning of Rosetown. It was he who talked his conservative father into converting the farm from horsepower to machinery, and having talked the elder Manning into it, he then had to figure out how the things worked, and – even more important – how to get them working again when they quit. If there's one man E. C. Manning envies today it's probably Wetaskiwin implement dealer Stan Reynolds, for his collection of antique tractors. When he tours a new hospital, the Premier is likely to spend most of the time in the boiler room, peering at the gauges and asking how they work.

The prize mechanical possession of his youth was a model T Ford which he christened "The Bazoo," and later paid twenty-five dollars for another one – taking parts off it to keep the first one going. In company with teenagers all over the continent he advanced the cam gear of his jalopy a couple of notches to encourage it to greater speeds than Mr. Ford had dreamed of. Just how fast "The Bazoo" would go the Premier cannot tell exactly, because, in addition to having no windshield, no headlights and no muffler, the car had no speedometer. However, he guesses that the top speed was about sixty miles an hour on a good road. Rocketing down the trail to Rosetown, Ernest added his bit to the significance of

Mr. Tony Cashman brings to life one of Canada's most intriguing political figures, the Hon. Ernest C. Manning. This unabashedly Christian fundamentalist preacher and politician led Alberta for 25 years raising it from a debt-laden, agricultural prairie province to one of the engines of the Canadian economy. His leadership produced enduring and successful legislation in the province's oil and gas industry as well as advancements in social justice that were copied by administrations in other parts of Canada and the United States. No scandal was ever proven against his government. He retired as Alberta's Premier in 1968 with his head held high and his integrity intact. Canada needs leaders like this today.



"By and large, no provincial leader has ever earned and won more public respect, confidence and admiration than has been sustained over a remarkably long period by Premier Manning." (Brian Brennan, Calgary Herald Tribute, February 21, 1996)

Alberta "Strong and Free"



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