

BIOGRAPHY OF ISAAC PITBLADO

ISAAC PITBLADO, Q.C., LL.D. 1867-1964

At the time of Isaac Pitblado's death, the Hon. Richard S. Bowles, the President of the Law Society of Manitoba, said about him:

The Law Society has lost its most respected and beloved member. Canada has lost one of its most able and distinguished sons.

When he died at the age of 97 in 1964, Isaac Pitblado had been 74 years at the Bar.

The man who for so many years had been acknowledged as the Dean of the legal profession in Canada was born in 1867 at Glenelg in Nova Scotia. When his father, the Rev. Charles Bruce Pitblado, accepted a position at St. Andrew's Church in Winnipeg, young Isaac was forced to interrupt his studies at Dalhousie University and move with his parents to Winnipeg.

He resumed his studies at Manitoba College, graduating with a B.A. (Hons.) in classics in 1886. That same year he entered the law office of Aikins, Culver and Company and became articled to J.A.M. Aikins in 1887. In 1889, Isaac Pitblado received his LL.B. from the University of Manitoba and the following year he was called to the Manitoba Bar and admitted to practice as a solicitor. It was in 1903 that he joined forces with Colin H. Campbell, Henry Platt Grundy and A.E. Hoskin to form a partnership under the firm name Pitblado and Hoskin.

Isaac Pitblado's reputation as a great legal mind grew partly from his deep involvement with the important issues of freight rates and grain marketing. He was first retained on a freight rates matter by the City of Winnipeg in 1912. Thirty-five years later, Mr. Pitblado appeared as senior counsel for the C.N.R. and the C.P.R., who were applying to the Board of Railway Commissioners for a freight rate increase. He was 80 years old at the time. Grand as his performance was in that hearing, it was by no means his last hurrah. In 1951, at the age of 84, he represented the Winnipeg Electric Company at legislative hearings to fight the Company's planned takeover by the Manitoba Government. Despite an eloquent and impassioned four and one half-hour submission by Mr. Pitblado, the takeover was ultimately enacted.

Among some of his other cases, he acted as counsel for the Presbyterian Church in the formation of the United Church of Canada and he successfully defended the Hon. John Bracken, Premier of Manitoba, before a Royal Commission created to investigate charges that Mr. Bracken had accepted bribes in the development of a hydro-electric project in Manitoba.

Isaac Pitblado was first elected a Bencher of the Law Society of Manitoba in 1901 and was a Life Bencher when he died in 1964. He was the second Manitoba lawyer ever to be President of the Canadian Bar Association and he also served as President of the Commission for Uniformity of Laws for seven years. As well, he was Chairman of the Board of Governors of the University of Manitoba from 1917 until 1924.

In 1960, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of his call to the Bar, the Manitoba Bar Association, the Manitoba Law School and The Law Society of Manitoba honoured him by establishing an annual series of continuing legal education lectures to be called the Isaac Pitblado Lectures.

At the time of his death, the Benchers of the Law Society recorded the following resolution:

We, the Benchers of the Law Society of Manitoba ... representing the lawyers of Manitoba record our deep and heartfelt sorrow on the occasion of the death of Isaac Pitblado and our sense of the loss that the profession and the Province have sustained today. It is not given to every lawyer to practise his profession actively for seventy-four years and to earn a reputation as an outstanding lawyer not only in his own Province but also in Canada and abroad. During his long career he took an active and constructive part in helping to make decisions which shaped the course of Canadian history, thereby emerging as one of the greatest and most gifted of Canadians. His interest and his helpful kindness to the younger members of the profession as each generation of students embarked on the practice of their profession was never failing and earned the gratitude of all. ... He did not confine himself to the practice of law, but took an outstanding part in the political, financial and educational life of Canada. For much of his life he was an ardent sportsman excelling in baseball, tennis, football, lacrosse, curling and golf. To the last he seldom missed a duck and prairie chicken hunting season at his lodge on Lake Manitoba and for many years he was a member and supporter of the Game and Fisheries Association and Ducks Unlimited. ...

This life was gentle and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world
'This was a man.'