IF YOU’RE STRONGHEARTED

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND IN THE 20TH CENTURY

G. Edward MacDonald
For

Michael Joseph MacDonald (born 1920)
farmer, fisherman, carpenter, soldier, father, Islander

and

Marguerite (Sharkey) MacDonald (born 1918)
teacher, war worker, farm wife, mother, Islander
If You’re Stronghearted

*after Auden*

If you’re stronghearted look at this Island;
red gouges of creeks at low tide and
the stronger red which spreads behind plows.
Don’t hold your tongue too long, it’ll swell
with so much good and so much bad to say.

If you’re stronghearted look at the clouds
growing and raising heads to look themselves,
opening mouths to say what should be said.

If you’re stronghearted ripple your way
up and down over low green-patched hills.
You can look from twenty feet and be unobserved
except for the fire of your eyes.
Strong eyes . . . they’ve seen such beauty
that a nerve runs from each to the heart.

If you’re stronghearted put your ear to the ground
to hear the lilt and cut of soft voices
discussing enemy moves without fear.

Milton Acorn
What is the difference between 1900 and 2000? I am writing this on a personal computer that is hot-wired to the world through the Internet. A century ago, the very words “computer” and “Internet” did not exist. To say that is to state the overwhelmingly obvious. But consider this. I am an historian. I work for a museum. I live well out in the country, but travel to work in the city each day. None of those statements could be true in the Prince Edward Island of 1900.

Now consider this.

The four ancestries represented in my marriage, my own (Scots and Irish) and my wife’s (English and Acadian), cover the ethnic origins of something like 95% of the Island’s current population, only a couple of percentage points less than in the Island population at the turn of the last century. When I look out my window, I see a countryside that strongly resembles the landscape of a hundred years ago. There are more houses and the styles are often different, but they are still made largely of wood. Built up, flattened down, and paved, the road outside my door does not have to work as hard as it did in 1900 to climb the tumbled hills of central Queen’s County, but it is essentially the same road, in the same place. The hills look much the same, too. In summer, cattle still graze in the geometric grid of pasture on the other side of our lane. Across our brook, potato fields slope up toward a ridge crowned with barns. They are bigger fields than in 1900, and bigger barns, but the potatoes taste much the same. The weather is still changeable enough to be worth talking about, and it still has something to do with our economy as well as our convenience.

In 1900, our provincial government was so dependent on federal funding that it was almost a ward of the state. We considered ourselves overtaxed. We were obsessed with a fixed link to the Mainland. We worried about the lack of work and about the outmigration of our young. We were proud and at the same time vulnerable. We were rooted in red soil. Does any of this sound familiar?

So, nothing has changed.

No. Everything.
It is easy to play this game of change and continuity. And it is too easy simply to exclaim that, beneath the surface, Prince Edward Island has been utterly transformed over the last century. It has. But it had also been transformed in the century before that, and the century before that. And besides, change is relative. Prince Edward Island carries more of its past with it into the 21st century than perhaps any other province in Canada.

What is the difference, then, between the Prince Edward Island of 1900 and the Prince Edward Island of 2000? That’s what this book sets out to discover. In the process, it has a story to tell.

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An enterprise of this nature piles up debts like snow in a spruce hedge. It is time to give thanks.

Without the vision and persistence of Rick Coles, Fred Hyndman, and Alan Buchanan, this project would simply never have been, and would never have succeeded. They paid me the enormous compliment of inviting my involvement, and then ensured my intellectual freedom to write what I thought best.

Without the encouragement of my wife, Sheila Lund, I would never have sought to take on the task of authorship. And without her love and forbearance, I could never have spent three years on this project in the span of only two. She believes in me.

Without the editorial guidance of the superlative Michael Bliss, Islander by adoption, this book would probably still be wandering somewhere in the creative limbo to which good intentions are often consigned. Besides his great practical gifts as an editor, he is a constant reminder to me that history is a craft and not some assembly line of factoids and arguments.

Without my two research assistants, Kathy Anne Ling and Andrew Cousins, we could never have covered a century’s worth of ground so quickly. Instead of treating their work as just an extended summer job, both of them considered that we were doing something “important.” Their unselfish commitment quickly turned “my” project into “our” project. I am proud to have worked with them.

LOOKING THROUGH THE WINDOW
Without the generous understanding of my long-time employer, the Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation, my involvement in this project would have been impossible. By freeing me from other duties, the organization gave me the gift of time; this book is, in a sense, my gift to them. Over the course of many years, the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island has broadened my perspective, nourished my intellect, and suffered my bad puns; over the course of this project, it also shared its office supplies.

But the thanks only begin there. Laurie Brinklow’s superb copy-editing brought consistency to my erratic style (when I would allow it). Boyde Beck, my long-time friend and historical comrade-at-arms, has kept my brain nimble with his gift for ideas, and has happily served as the sounding board that every writer requires. Folklore’s best-kept secret, John Cousins of Bloomfield, shared a car with me on the road to Bangor, Maine, and freighted it with West Prince lore that has notably informed this book. He has also shared the Great War letters of his ancestor, Robert Warren. The open-handed Blair MacKinnon provided me with many years’ worth of research into the ill-fated HMCS Charloittetown and the other RCN vessels with Island names. Michael Hennessey, writer and man of many parts, was unwise enough to leave his office door open, and ended up kindly answering many questions about naval matters and life in Charlottetown. Archivist John Kendall made a convincing case for the importance of 1920s road-building -- and even gave me a map of it. Railway buff Pat Crawford made maps for me as well. Meanwhile, my supposedly retired father-in-law, Charles Lund, set aside his golf clubs and went fishing for lobster statistics for me; and while he filled me up with stories of a boisterous childhood on Charlottetown’s rough-and-tumble streets, his wife, Olive, advised me of the very proper parameters of life for the city’s “good young Catholic girls.” Reg “Dutch” Thompson, who put his hundreds of hours of oral interviews about “The Bygone Days” at my disposal, must surely be the most generous researcher on Prince Edward Island. And yet, there have been many, many others just as prepared to share their knowledge with me. I regret that time and technique have not allowed me to follow up with everyone, for such visits were invariably rewarding. I will not soon forget my hours with Spitfire pilot H. Charles Trainor of Stratford.

It is some people’s job to help, but they do it exceedingly well. Harry Holman, Marilyn Bell, and the staff of the Public Archives and Records Office have been unfailing guides to 20th-
century materials. As in my graduate school days, the Robertson Library at UPEI provided me with a place to work, putting me in the midst of the largest book collection in the province and the best assemblage of “Islandia” anywhere. To Simon Lloyd, Sharon Clark, and the staff at Special Collections, many thanks for putting up with my always wanting something but seldom knowing exactly what it was.

A number of poets and songwriters have enriched this book by allowing their work to be quoted in it. Among them, I must mention the literary executors of the late, great Milton Acorn, Islanders-in-exile Tom O’Grady and Anne Compton, Islander-in-residence Frank Ledwell, Norman Campbell and Don Harron, Stompin’ Tom Connors, and two exceptional singer/songwriters, Lennie Gallant and Allan Rankin. Full acknowledgements appear elsewhere.

At the opposite end of the creative process, various colleagues have been good enough to read and comment on various parts of the manuscript. Their criticisms have invariably improved what was there and saved me from many errors of commission and omission. My thanks to the wise and persistent Harry Baglole, historian and Island visionary, who has suffered through the whole thing, gently tugging all the while at my intellectual sleeve; to Alan MacEachern, who tried patiently to improve my tourism passages and who tracked down a number of National Archives leads for me; to David Weale of UPEI’s Department of History, who has written so eloquently about the texture of Island life and critiqued the texture of my opening chapter; to folklorist John Cousins, who is so much a product of the oral culture that he has helped me discuss; to Sasha Mullally, whose encouragement has been tempered with insightful advice on women’s history, medicine, and automobiles; to Doug Morton and Greg Gallant of the PEI Regimental Museum, who vetted my military intelligence and gave me illustrations as well; to Wayne MacKinnon, the trail-blazer for 20th-century Island political history, Doug Boylan, historian and public servant, and Andrew Wells, political advisor and philosophe, each of whom commented helpfully on chapters dealing with recent decades; to David MacSwain of Agriculture Canada and David Younker of the Provincial Department of Fisheries; to Bill Glen and Dan McAskill in Forestry; to biologist and conservationist Ian MacQuarrie, that man for all seasons; to the multi-talented ex-forester J. P. Arsenault; to Donna Giberson, biologist and graph-maker; to CFAs Anne McCallum, Nancy Murphy, and Morley Pinsent. I wish I could blame the book’s shortcomings on these people, but
they share only in its virtues.

Finally, I wish to thank the dozens of people — too many to list here — who have answered questions, shared memories and insights, provided research leads, and furnished materials.

There are many stories left to tell.
Chapter One
The Doorstep of the Century

In the rolling waves of ocean,
Lying silent in thy bed,
Mantled deep in dark-green verdue;
Soil, and rock, and sea-shore red;
Hills of grain and grove abounding
Ever charming to the eye,
Ever fairest
Always rarest
Little garden of the sea.
Ever my land
Tiny Island
Fare thee well! and God bless thee.

From J. H. Fletcher, “Ode to Prince Edward Island”¹

An hour before midnight on New Year’s Eve 1899, a meteor flashed across the night sky above Prince Edward Island. It came to earth near Souris, “a short distance in the rear of the town, exploding as it fell with a report that equalled the loudest thunder.”² The 20th century had arrived.

Well, not quite.

The new century did not fall from the sky; it turned slowly on its hinges like a great wooden gate. Technically, the heavenly portent was a whole year early. As F. W. Hyndman reminded readers in the Prince Edward Island Magazine, the last century of the millennium would not actually begin until midnight on 31 December 1900. And so, when Dr. Gordon Alley rose to address Charlottetown’s newly resurrected Historical and Literary Society on 7 March 1901, he had not missed the century’s turn by very much.

Alley’s subject was “P. E. Island One Hundred Years Ago.” It was a recycled lecture, actually, based on notes gathered by Alley’s late father, that indefatigable antiquarian, Judge George Alley. The audience did not seem to mind. The Principal’s room at the new Prince of Wales College proved too small to contain the crowd, and the lecture had to be hastily relocated to Convocation Hall. “That it was intensely interesting throughout goes without saying,” the Daily Patriot reported.

¹Prince Edward Island Magazine 2(January 1901)11: 357.
²Morning Guardian, 2 January 1900.
afterward. For nearly two hours, Alley held his listeners spellbound with his heroic tale of lonely cabins amid the “dense and gloomy forest,” and the pioneer mother “with but a few roots to allay the hunger of her children, spending sleepless nights in the lonely vigil looking and longing for the father’s return.” Modern challenges seemed small in comparison to such adversity.³

For Dr. Alley, the theme of progress in Island history was crushingly self-evident. As the Daily Patriot had observed a few weeks earlier, “At the beginning of the century the Island was forest primeval while to-day, city, towns and villages flourish, and the ‘million acre farm’ is thickly dotted with substantial homesteads, well tilled fields and bursting barns.” Himself bursting with millennial optimism, the editorial writer leaped from past triumphs to future glories. “We have great hope and unbounded faith in the future for Canada, for Prince Edward Island,” he proclaimed, ending as a good Grit should with the federal Liberals’ recent election slogan: “This is the growing time.”⁴

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What face did the province turn toward the new century? In many ways, the Prince Edward Island of 1900 was the antithesis of the popular image of Canada. The young Dominion sprawled across the North American continent, boundless and wild and empty; Prince Edward Island was a tiny garden fenced in by the sea. Canada gloried in its physical and human diversity; Prince Edward Island was remarkable in its apparent homogeneity. Canada, the young giant, flexed its muscles in the bright morning of the century; Prince Edward Island husbanded its strength. Canada’s gaze was fixed firmly on the far horizon; Prince Edward Island glanced back wistfully over its shoulder at a past that seemed considerably more golden than it probably was.

Physically, the Island of 1900 would have seemed familiar to us. On the maps that ornamented all too few of its schools, it resembled a badly corroded sickle moon, tipped on its back. Of course, no one in 1900 could view the Island as the maps showed it, not even during the “gratuitous balloon

³Daily Patriot, 8 March 1901.

⁴Daily Patriot, 31 December 1900.
ascensions” that were sometimes offered by visiting circuses. Islanders had a worm’s-eye view. From the North Shore they could look off across the Gulf of St. Lawrence into infinity. Then, as now, the dark blur of the Mainland bounded every other horizon. It was near, yet far, for the Island kept its distance still. It was as if the intervening Northumberland Strait were some sort of force field that held the two places — “here” and “there”— together yet apart. The Strait, quite literally, defined the Island, made it “a body surrounded by water.”

In contrast to the geography around it, the Island’s landscape was surpassingly gentle. In a nation much given to muskeg, mountain, and prairie, it undulated softly from shore to shore. No place in the rolling landscape was much higher than four hundred feet above sea level. No place was more than ten miles from saltwater. From tip to tip, the Island was barely 120 miles long. At its narrowest point, pinched by Malpeque and Bedeque Bays, it was little more than three miles wide. From certain vantage points, it was said, you could see from shore to shore. And wherever you scratched the smooth green skin of the land, from North Cape to East Point, Cape Bear to Cape Wolfe, it bled red, the iron-oxidized soil that had been the Island’s signature since humans had first wandered into the region some ten thousand years before.

The great god Glooscap may have created the Island, as some Native legends claimed, but humans had fashioned the landscape of 1900. No part of the province had escaped their transforming touch. Size helps account for that shaping, but so does the nature of the land itself. The Island’s acidic red soil might be more forgiving than fertile (rated by agronomists as little better than average), but virtually all of it could be farmed. In 1901, 1.2 million of the Island’s 1.4 million acres were given over to agriculture; 13,749 farms crowded into the Island’s 2,184 square miles like pieces in a vast jigsaw puzzle. Here and there, where there was a bridge, or a crossroads, or a good harbour, houses clustered into villages. Sometimes they grew into larger centres, places like Tignish or Montague or Souris, but even there the populations rarely exceeded a thousand people. Besides these, there was one city, Charlottetown, and one large town, Summerside. Otherwise, it was a country of farms: little wooden houses, whitewashed or weathered grey, anchoring a clutch of farm buildings. And all around them stretched the rolling farmland, small fields stitched together with hedgerows, with here and there a woodlot, stunted offspring of the great Acadian forest that had once covered the entire province.

THE DOORSTEP OF THE CENTURY 10
Fourteen thousand farms. Physically, symbolically, and psychologically, they were the very stuff of which the province was made: in 1901, 85.5% of the Island’s population was classified as rural. By virtue of an 1875 law intended to root out the last large-scale proprietors, no one in the province could own an estate of more than five hundred acres. But there was a sort of natural equilibrium at work as well. The average farm size in 1901 was eighty-seven acres, which represented, more or less, the smallest acreage that could comfortably support a family. There were smaller farms, but they did not prosper.

The sea-skirted landscape of farm, field, and woodlot suggested the image of a patchwork quilt, a metaphor so fitting that it would soon be worn into a cliché. The whole effect was pretty rather than grandiose. Already, nicknames were being bandied about: “the Garden of the Gulf,” the “Million Acre Farm.”

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It was an intimate place, this Prince Edward Island. In the great lone land of Canada, it had far and away the highest population density of any province, its fifty-six people per square mile nearly two-and-a-half times the next highest figure. No Islander was more than a half-mile from a road. The nearest neighbour was no more than a few hundred yards away — in strict Presbyterian homes, you needed only to cock a disapproving ear to hear whether or not the farmer across the field was cutting kindling on the Sabbath.5

The communities themselves rubbed shoulders across the landscape. For the outsider, it was often impossible to tell where one began and another ended. Yet the lines of division were there just the same, as clear as lines on a map. Commercial travellers had their own trick for finding out where they were. In the absence of road signs, they looked for the country schoolhouses, with their telltale signs above the door. The schools were a sort of geographic index. In 1900, there were 468 of them

strewn across the Island’s topography. The vast majority had only one room. Imagine a circle, centred on the rural schoolhouse, with a radius of 2.5 miles, the maximum distance that children were expected to walk to school. Within its compass, you could almost invariably find a church, a general store, a blacksmith shop. Here the lines of people’s lives intersected. Here was community. If you enlarged that circle to a diameter of, say, fourteen miles, the distance a horse and buggy could conveniently travel, away and home again, in a day, you defined the essential boundaries of rural life. Here most Islanders lived out the quiet dramas that spanned the empty space between this world and the next: birth, marriage, work, play (a little play), death.

The Island’s two major settlements, Charlottetown and Summerside, provided a counterpoint to the pastoral landscape. They were more socially stratified, more ethnically mixed, and more economically diverse than rural Prince Edward Island. Neither was large, but inevitably, they were self-important: “People shouldn’t put on airs,” sneered satirist “Tom Trim” in 1891, “— but in Charlottetown they do to a frightful extent.” Between them the two “urban” centres had less than 15% of the Island’s population, but the number was growing.

Charlottetown had once been a busy seaport. As the Island’s export trade dwindled after the mid-1870s, the business quarter had migrated up the slope from the waterfront to the streets that bounded Queen Square. Here, within a coin’s throw of “official” Charlottetown — the Legislature, the Law Courts, the Dominion Building, the Anglican church, the Market — the hum of business could still be heard. After all, though Charlottetown might no longer make her living from the sea, it remained the seat of government and an important market town. It had its small circle of leading families, old families for the most part, and its fine buildings, both public and private. In 1900, Charlottetown considered itself quite modern. Its 12,000 citizens could point with pride to their brand new sewage system (which emptied directly into the harbour) and a modern waterworks. No less than three electric companies vied for the privilege of replacing the flickering gaslights along the City’s streets and in its homes. In the next decade, over-optimistic promoters would even incorporate a

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7 The construction of Charlottetown’s utilities are chronicled in Douglas Baldwin and Thomas Spira, eds. *Gaslights, Epidemics and Vagabond Cows: Charlottetown in the Victorian Era* (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1988); Irene Rogers covers human and architectural history
stillborn streetcar company.

Of course, to see only the progress, you needed to close one eye. Some public edifices had a less prosperous complexion. For example, the neo-classical exterior of Province House, home to the provincial legislature, had grown noticeably shabby over the years. As for Government House, the official residence of the Island’s lieutenant-governor, it had “stamped upon it all the appearances of architectural decrepitude”; there were rumours in 1900 that it was to be torn down. Curiously, no one seemed to see any symbolism in the seediness of these symbols of Island government.

Summerside was smaller, younger, and, to the travel writers, less sedate than its big sister. Perhaps that was because it had been founded entirely on business. The town had coalesced out of the surrounding countryside in the early 1860s during the heyday of the shipbuilding industry. Some shrewd re-routing had brought the Prince Edward Island Railway straight along Summerside’s waterfront in the early 1870s, confirming and consolidating the town’s importance. By the time that it incorporated in 1875, it had usurped the place of neighbouring St. Eleanors as the capital of Prince County. Shipbuilding was long dead by 1900, but Summerside had survived, filling for western Prince Edward Island much the same role as administrative centre and market town that Charlottetown provided for the central and eastern part of the province.

Although its population, roughly 2,900 people at the turn of the century, was only a quarter of Charlottetown’s, Summerside self-consciously bustled, and already it envied the capital’s pre-eminence. Sports provided the perfect outlet for their growing rivalry and for urban dwellers’ leisure time. By 1900, multi-sport clubs were coming into their own in both places. That summer, Charlottetown’s Abegweits-Crescents Athletic Club would run, leap, vault, cycle, and heave its way to the first of its many Maritime Track and Field Championships. But it was hockey that in less than a decade had become “the noblest Roman of them all” among Island sporting endeavours. Since the first local match was played in 1890, the game had spread like wildfire across the province. It was fast and exciting. It was also played in winter, when even rural Islanders had free time.


The 1900 Island Senior Hockey Championship was a case in point. It pitted the Abegweits-Crescents of Charlottetown, defending league champions, against the Crystals Hockey Club from Summerside. Playing in the enemy’s stronghold before an “immense attendance,” which included 150 fans brought up on a special train from Summerside, the Crystals rallied from a 3–2 deficit to vanquish the Abegweits-Crescents 5–3 and win their first Island senior title. A month later, the Crystals were still trying to get the losers to surrender the handsome trophy that went with the championship.  

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The rapid growth of hockey was made possible by the railway. Running the length of the province like an iron spine, it enabled teams from different communities — and their fans — to reach one another despite the elements. As with hockey so it was with a hundred other activities. By the turn of the century, the railway wound its way across the Island’s physical, economic, and social landscape.

It was just as well for the province that it had turned over the Prince Edward Island Railway to the federal government as one of the terms of Confederation. Not only was its construction beyond the Island’s means, but its operation as well. From the time the line straggled into existence in May 1875 until the turn of the century, it had run at a loss. The $46,193 deficit in 1900, the lowest in the history of the railway, brought the grand total to over $1.79 million.  

Of course, this did not include the $3.8 million spent over the years on capital construction.

In financial terms, the PEIR had too little freight, too few passengers, and too many stops. It was one of the crookedest railways in North America, diplomatically meandering across the

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9Summerside Journal, 2 February, 7, 21 March 1900.

10These numbers are taken from tables published yearly in the Canada Year Book. The figure is probably higher, since no figures are supplied for the period 1875-1877.

11In 1900, the PEIR carried 147,000 passengers and 83,627 tons of freight.
countryside, looping its coils around as many Island communities as possible.\textsuperscript{12} An even greater handicap resided in the province’s islandness; its narrow-gauge tracks ended at the high tide mark. That made the Prince Edward Island Railway a closed system, unable to link up with the spiderweb of steel that was spreading across the rest of the continent. Luckily, the federal government continued to maintain in 1900 that the PEIR was not expected to make money. Like its Mainland sister, the Intercolonial Railway, it was, as the \textit{Canada Year Book} habitually put it, a “developmental” railway that was not expected to turn a profit in the foreseeable future.

By 1900, various small extensions had nudged the line’s total length up to 211 miles. That year the federal government signed contracts for the most ambitious addition yet to the railway, a branch line that would leapfrog across the Hillsborough River at Charlottetown and push through the only large tract of Prince Edward Island still not served by the railway, southeastern Queen’s and southern King’s Counties. By the time the Murray Harbour Branch Line officially opened in 1906, Ottawa’s capital investment in the Prince Edward Island Railway would top $6.7 million. Compared to the federal government’s heedless hubris in underwriting not one but two new transcontinental railways during the same period, the expenditure on the PEIR was small potatoes. Taken in scale, it represented an appreciable investment in the Island.

No one has yet measured the PEIR’s importance to the province. Clearly, though, it was immense. The railway linked Island communities together like beads on a string. Some communities, such as O’Leary and Kensington, owed their very existence to its coming. It was the single greatest employer in the province in 1900, providing a coveted living to its hundreds of permanent employees, and cash wages to seasonal workers such as the “snow fighters” hired to clear the tracks in winter. All year round, repairs and maintenance and new construction shovelled new money into the local economy.

\textsuperscript{12}One of the staple myths of Island history is that the ruinous expense in constructing the railway can be traced to unscrupulous contractors, who built a crooked railway because they were being paid by the mile. Alas, while political corruption did dog the project, a commission of inquiry absolved the contractors of any malfeasance. The corruption was mostly local, it seems. That being said, the contractors were guilty of taking the easiest route across the Island landscape, since their contract contained a strict cost-per-mile ceiling. Even this admission ignores another reality, the political and economic imperatives of bringing the rails to as many Island communities as possible.
The railway’s impact on Island life went well beyond economics. By the turn of the century, it had threaded its way into the very fabric of Island life. In places such as the east end of Charlottetown, working on the railway ran in families like a genetic trait. Party faithful schemed to get positions on the iron road, even as politicians exploited the opportunities for patronage that it offered. Farmers planned their infrequent trips to Charlottetown or Summerside around the train schedule: into town by the early train, then a few hours to sort out their business before catching the afternoon train back home. Special trains were put on to shuttle mourners from funerals to cemeteries; to carry hockey teams and their raucous supporters to critical matches; to take chattering excursionists, complete with brass bands, to any one of the Island’s yearly crop of tea parties. School children were made to memorize the stations along their stretch of line. Fares and timetables were part of the everyday lexicon. Housewives and field workers timed their day by the train whistle. More often than not, it was the train that freighted Islanders’ produce to market, and the train that carried their emigrant sons and daughters away to distant places. The train stood for what had been on Prince Edward Island and what still might be. What matter if it ran a deficit?

Islanders prized their railroad and were ambitious for it. The same could not be said for their roads. There were some 3,500 miles’ worth of them in 1900. And there were always more being built. Indeed, it was deceptively easy to gouge roads out of the Island’s soft red clay. But if they were easy to make, Island roads were just as easily unmade. Maintained largely by statute labour, they tended to be poorly conceived, poorly ditched, poorly graded, and poorly regarded. On a fine summer day, when it was not too wet and not too dry and not too windy, they were strikingly picturesque. At all other times, they were, variously, smothered by dust, cut to the quick by axle-deep ruts, bogged by a sucking mud as thick as chocolate pudding, choked with snow — in short, purgatorial. No wonder that the Island government spent thousands of dollars each year to maintain a fleet of poky little ferries to transport goods and people across waterways that the clay roads must crawl around. No wonder it subsidized river steamers such as the Harland, the Electra, and the Alameda to make regular round-trip passages to tiny ports in a wide arc along the Island’s southern coastline.

In wintertime, the rivers and bays continued their traditional role as Nature’s highways. The bone-chilling northerlies that choked the tree-lined Island roads with snow, filling them in again as
fast as they could be broken by farmers with teams of horses, swept unhindered across the river ice, making the travel much easier. The job of “bushing” the ice with evergreen saplings to mark the safest route was for decades a much prized patronage appointment. Inland, Islanders simply abandoned the roads and took to the fields with their sleighs.

Winter roads had their own vocabulary. There were roller-coaster rides up and down “pitches,” the steep little dips on winter roads where the snow had been packed down from the passage of innumerable sleighs. And where the roads canted to one side or another into “slews,” fast-moving sleighs might slide sideways onto one runner or topple over: “Another old fellow, he was coming out with a team of horses and a wood sleigh — just a box sitting on a wood-sleigh. And he upset the sleigh and he was under it and he had a bottle of whiskey with him and said he’d never get caught again without a corkscrew.”

Although travel was always a struggle, early spring and early winter were the worst times. The infamous Island mud, the same that had given the village of Wellington its early name of “Quagmire,” made travelling by road an epic struggle, while the ice, either making or rotting, as the season dictated, could be treacherous. Local lore teems with close calls and tragedies of the sort reported in the Summerside Journal on 7 February 1900. Sylvain Arsenault of Lot 6 was crossing Cascumpec Bay with a load of wood when his sleigh broke through the ice. Arsenault slid from the back of the load into the freezing water. There he might have stayed until spring, but his horse, still on solid ice, was able to haul both sleigh and driver to safety.

The trouble in getting around helped to insulate Island communities from one another. Trouble in getting on and off the Island helped insulate it from the rest of the world. One of Islanders’ long-standing grievances against the Dominion Government was its failure to provide “continuous steamship communication with the Mainland,” one of the key terms of Confederation. Just as the PEIR’s steam locomotives buried themselves in Island snowdrifts, so the winter steamers provided by the federal government had proven woefully unequal to the ice pack in the Northumberland Strait. Too often, the old iceboat service had to be resurrected, like a relic from another age, to maintain a fragile connection with the Mainland. A series of mild winters during the 1890s had calmed

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13See, for example, David and Deborah Stewart, “Winter Travel,” The Island Magazine 7(Fall/Winter 1979).
Islanders’ discontent with the winter service. Some observers even felt the region’s climate was moderating. They were, of course, wrong.

Communication with the Mainland was Ottawa’s responsibility. Island roads were a provincial concern. While constituents pressed for more new routes, the Island government embarked on a modest programme of bridge-building and highway improvement. Transportation was the second-largest item of expenditure in the provincial budget in 1900, totalling $60,000. The cost of steel bridges and the performance of newfangled “road machines” were hot topics of political debate.

On 27 April 1900, The Guardian reported on a new fad that in time would totally reverse the relative importance of roads and railways in the province, and more than any other single factor, transform Island life. “It is understood,” The Guardian reported, “that during the coming summer an automobile will be seen on the streets of Charlottetown.”

This was the visible Prince Edward Island: a pastoral landscape, bisected by its railway, crisscrossed with roads, and crosshatched with farms. There was another Island. If you could hold the province up to the light, like a dirty mirror, you might see other thumbprints. For Prince Edward Island, after all, was a conjunction of land and people. And the marks made by Islanders’ complex and often conflicting loyalties largely defined the nature of the province.

In terms of population, Prince Edward Island was deceptively uniform. As a great polyglot wave of immigration swung the imaginative focus of Canada westward in the early years of the new century, Prince Edward Island remained the most ethnically homogeneous province in Confederation. Long before the great tide of emigration to North America commenced to diversify, it had begun to pass by little Prince Edward Island. By the mid-19th century, when the last large tracts of empty land had been taken up, the Island’s frontier had effectively closed, and its pioneer era came to an abrupt end. In 1901, over 97% of the population was native-born. But within the common origin resided a paradox. Islanders’ sense of identity in 1900 was closely bound up with ethnic loyalties, which
imposed a psychological — and sometimes physical — segregation.

There were 103,300 people living on Prince Edward Island in 1901. Close to 97% of that population could trace their ancestry to one of the four ethnic groups that had dominated early emigration to Canada. The most numerous were the Scots, who comprised nearly 45% of the total in 1900. They were Highlanders, mostly, and the lion’s share of them had come either from the Isle of Skye or the Clanranald estates of the Western Highlands and the Hebrides. Although spread across the province, they were especially concentrated in King’s County and eastern Queen’s. According to one well-travelled salesman, there were 145 “John MacDonals” — all over the age of 21 — in King’s County alone!14

Divided by religious differences and the fading memory of ancient clan feuds, the Island Scots’ numbers did not translate into cultural dominance, unless one counted the influence of the Highland fiddling tradition. The most distinctive badge of Highland identity, the Gaelic language, was slipping rapidly toward extinction, many Scots having convinced themselves of its irrelevance in a society ruled by English. For all that, Island Scots remained intensely proud of their heritage, even if a handful of symbols, partly real and partly invented, increasingly substituted for the real thing: ceremonial kilts with spurious clan associations, the haggis, Highland dancing, the bagpipes, Bonnie Prince Charlie. By the turn of the century, this “tartanization” of Island Scots culture was well under way.

Next in prominence, although their numbers were beginning to slide by 1900, came the Island’s Irish, with 23% of the population. The earliest Irish immigration to Prince Edward Island had been notable for its diversity, but, gradually, the Irish community in the province had acquired an overwhelmingly Catholic and notably north-of-Ireland character. The bulk of the Irish had been relative latecomers among the colony’s pioneers, arriving by the boatload in the 1830s and 1840s, and had ended up where circumstance dictated: in urban centres such as Charlottetown and in the more sparsely settled interior. The emigrant wind had since blown many on to other lands, but by 1900 a distinctive Irish-Island community had matured and become a force to be reckoned with in the life of the province.

Although claiming only about a fifth of the population, Islanders of English descent, including American Loyalists, cast the longest shadow across the province, having long dominated the ruling elite and the merchant class, as well as what passed for official culture. Whatever its Celtic colouring, Prince Edward Island had been, from its inception, an unmistakably “British” colony. As with the Irish, many of the English immigrants had not arrived on the Island until the 1830s and 1840s; the Westcountry supplied the bulk of them, something like 42% of the total. Unlike the impoverished Irish, the English settlers generally arrived with a greater share of the world’s goods — as well as a more scientific approach to agriculture. In social terms, since it was a British colony, they also had the advantage of religion, being overwhelmingly Protestants, mostly Anglicans and Methodists. Given those relative advantages, the English settlers usually lodged higher up the social and economic ladder than Highlander or Irish, and usually stayed there.

At the opposite end of that ladder were the Acadians, the smallest and least powerful of the province’s four main ethnic groups. The earliest of the Island’s European settlers, the Acadians of 1900 had a long-practised knack for survival. Their peasant ancestors had endured the agony of the “Expulsion” of 1758, slipping quietly back from foreign exile or temporary refuge in other parts of Atlantic Canada to join the handful of compatriots who had escaped deportation. Stripped of their original holdings, this demoralized residue of the “le grand dérangement” had taken up residence on the social and economic fringe of the British colony. From the perspective of the ruling culture, the Acadians came from the wrong racial stock, spoke the wrong language (French), and followed the wrong religion (Catholicism). Accordingly, they were generally tolerated, occasionally oppressed, but seldom respected. Swallowing their resentment and seeking no integration into the larger polity, the Acadians’ traditional strategy had been to withdraw into themselves. The two bastions of Island Acadianism, the far west and the Evangeline region of southwestern Prince County, had been founded by Acadian settlers who were bent on getting as far away from “official” Prince Edward Island as possible.

While the Acadians’ half-chosen, half-imposed isolation allowed a certain protection for their

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way of life, it was no guarantee of cultural survival. In the end, the province was truly too small to get away from anyone. Only in the last half of the 19th century, with their little world beginning to buckle under the pressure of assimilation, did Maritime Acadians begin to shed their inferiority complex. The “Acadian Renaissance” that resulted was a potent compound of religion, language, and culture. Spearheaded by nationalistic clergy and devout lay leaders, it urged protection for language and culture, and pressed for equal rights for Acadians. At the Miscouche Convention in 1884, Maritime Acadians had adopted symbols of their resurgent nationalism: a distinctive flag and anthem. While the rank and file continued to shelter behind a wall of parochialism, politicians such as Joseph Octave Arsenault and Stanislaus Perry gave Island Acadians a voice in the wider community.

Ironically, Perry, who had been educated in an Anglophone environment, could not even write in French. This shortcoming was convenient fodder for his opponents in the Acadian community. It also highlighted the fundamental tensions that marred the Acadian Renaissance by century’s end. Taking one’s rightful place in the larger society meant abandoning cultural isolation, but that increased the risk of assimilation. Perry’s “election-time” nationalisme was repeatedly questioned right up until his death in 1898.16

The fiercest champion of Acadianism on Prince Edward Island was not a politician at all, but a newspaper. In 1891, Gilbert Buote and his son François-Joseph founded the province’s first French-language newspaper, L’Impartial, in the Irish-Acadian community of Tignish. As the century turned, the steadfast little weekly was poised to begin a crusade for an Acadian college.

The province’s Acadians might be outsiders, but their numbers made them partners of a sort in the half-conscious task of creating an Island identity. The same could not be said for the tiny fraction of the population who did not fall within one of the four main ethnic groups. They found themselves absent, for all practical purposes, from Island history. They may have stood apart in their obvious “different-ness,” but in terms of an Island identity, they were invisible.

Like all sweeping generalizations, this one must immediately be modified. The poets and historians of 1900 were prone to romanticizing the “noble savage” who had ruled over the Island’s

prehistory. They just did not know what to do with the three hundred Mi’kmaq who inhabited the present. In the early 19th century, it had been fashionable to believe that the Mi’kmaq were doomed to extinction, like some exotic animal whose habitat was being destroyed. But Progress had not extinguished the Mi’kmaq after all, and by the turn of the century they were more often seen as degraded rather than doomed. Paternalistic sympathizers felt the Natives were a people in transition, still trapped between “savagery” and “civilization.” Other Islanders were openly racist in their attitudes. Most fell somewhere in between. Mi’kmaq views on the subject are not recorded.

The Mi’kmaq held a curious fascination for Islanders. Sometimes they were seen as a living link with a past that was slipping rapidly out of sight. The Mi’kmaq encampment at Rocky Point, just a picnic basket and a ferry ride away from Charlottetown, was a popular subject for amateur photographers. Official visitors were more likely to be taken to the main reservation at Lennox Island. Other small reserves had been established at Scotchfort and in Morell Rear. But most Islanders found little business in these places. Their contact was chiefly with Mi’kmaq who roamed the countryside selling their handicrafts, particularly the handwoven baskets so popular with potato-pickers.

The Canadian government’s Indian policy helped to segregate Island Mi’kmaq from the rest of society. For the province’s black population and its Lebanese immigrants, the segregation was less formal, if almost as rigid. The blacks were almost exclusively the descendants of slaves brought to Prince Edward Island by Loyalist settlers in the aftermath of the American Revolution. Labouring under a heavy yoke of intolerance, they occupied the outer margins of Island society and the bottom reaches of its economy. For almost a century, the heart of the black community had been “the Bog,” a swampy slum on the shores of Government Pond in Charlottetown’s West End. At its peak, perhaps a hundred African-Islanders had inhabited that close-knit, if impoverished, community. But, by 1900, the Bog’s black community was disintegrating under the combined pressures of outmigration, intermarriage with other ethnic groups, and re-development for middle-class housing. Soon it would vanish, scattering the remaining black population to other parts of the city.

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18Much more detail about the history of Prince Edward Island’s black community can be found in Jim Hornby, *Black Islanders* (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1991).
Compared to the Mi’kmaq and the blacks, the Lebanese were newcomers to Prince Edward Island at the turn of the century. The earliest Lebanese immigrants had arrived only as recently as 1888. Fleeing persecution by their Muslim Turk overlords, Lebanese Christians had begun pouring out of Lebanon in the late 1800s. By 1900, about 15,000 a year were leaving. Prince Edward Island caught and held a fragment of that diaspora, mostly through a labourious process of chain-migration from two particular villages, Kfeir and Deir Mimas. The Lebanese transplanted their ancient mercantile tradition to Prince Edward Island. While they generally settled in Charlottetown, the Lebanese, like the Mi’kmaq, became a familiar sight in rural Prince Edward Island, for many of them began as pack pedlars, using that humble beginning as a stepping stone to store ownership and other enterprises.

Islanders did not know what to make of the dark-skinned pedlars with their harsh accents. Though Christians, the Lebanese were frequently labelled “Jews” or “Syrians.” Exhibiting a thick skin toward local prejudice, the Lebanese single-mindedly set about making a living. Soon they had burrowed into the grudging soil of Island life.19

Pride of ancestry was a solace to Islanders whose present conditions seemed considerably less romantic than their remembered past. Of course, pride and prejudice went hand in hand. The same was true when it came to religious belief. Like race, religion provided a powerful source of identity on Prince Edward Island. Plotted together they became reference points that helped to determine the pecking order in Island society, which, while it might be short on economic classes, was elaborately stratified nevertheless.

The mathematics of religion were simple enough. For decades, 45% of the Island’s population had been Roman Catholic, 55% Protestant. In 1900, that percentage translated as 45,796 Island

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Catholics, all under the spiritual leadership of the Bishop of Charlottetown. Presbyterians formed the next largest denomination, with 30,750 adherents. About 13% of Islanders, 13,400 people, were Methodists. Though the numbers of Baptists (mostly Scottish in origin) and Anglicans were roughly equal, at about 6,000, the Church of England retained the social prestige of having been the Established Church. There were other minor sects, but these five essentially defined the religious landscape. Within it, there was little space for atheists or agnostics.

Although there were many shades of Island Protestantism, it was convenient to lump Protestants together, especially when drawing comparisons with Island Catholics. As one modern observer noted, “It takes a Catholic to make a Protestant!” Commercial traveller W. S. Louson was impressed with the way the two groups got along. In a turn-of-the-century edition of the *Prince Edward Island Magazine*, he commented:

> Allow me to remark here, that the people of Prince Edward Island are to be congratulated on the happy manner in which all denominations pull together. I have attended Catholic entertainments at which one half, at least, of those taking part in the programme were Protestants and vice versa. I have been to teas, concerts, bazaars, etc. where all gave a helping hand. I have seen Protestant ministers conversing pleasantly with Catholic clergymen on various occasions — a sight seldom seen in other provinces.  

Relative to other provinces, Protestants and Catholics did get along on Prince Edward Island — but it was a constant battle.

Theological differences alone would have been enough to cause tension between the various denominations. But belief was also bound up with long-standing ethnic rivalries and the bitter memory of past persecutions.

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20Quoted by John Eldon Green, personal communication, 12 April 1999.

21Quoted by John Eldon Green, personal communication, 12 April 1999.
Perception was as important as reality — at times, perception was its own reality. Ignoring the ethnic rivalries between Acadians, Irish, and Scots, Protestants insisted on regarding Island Catholics as a flock of sheep, their opinions herded along by an aggressive clergy who, in turn, took their direction from Rome. For their part, Catholics tended to ignore the many divisions among and within the Protestant denominations. They saw a Protestant monolith intent on keeping Catholics down; Protestants felt they were merely protecting against Catholic supremacy. Such attitudes were as much borrowed as learned, since tensions between Catholics and Protestants were hardly unique in British North America — or Great Britain. What was different on Prince Edward Island were the proportions. Prince Edward Island was the second most Catholic province in Canada (after Quebec). That fact greatly influenced how the Catholic community behaved and was treated on Prince Edward Island.

In common with the rest of Canada, religion on Prince Edward Island had also got tangled up with politics. During the tumultuous era between 1856 and 1877, Conservative politicians had cynically manipulated fears of “papal aggression” to persuade the Protestant majority to set aside their own quarrels — at election time, anyway — and vote as an anti-Catholic bloc. The pretexts varied, but the recurring issue involved the role of religion in education. The struggle was finally resolved when a “Free Schools” coalition of Liberal and Conservative Protestants swept to victory in the provincial election of 1877. Subsequent legislation confirmed that the public education system in the province would be non-denominational.

Hardly had the election haze cleared when a gentlemen’s agreement between the government and the Catholic hierarchy quietly created de facto Catholic and Protestant schools within denominationally mixed communities such as Charlottetown, while in wholly Catholic areas, catechism was taught discreetly but openly during school hours. Apparently, as long as the principle of non-denominational schools — and Protestant hegemony? — was accepted, exceptions could be allowed.

By the turn of the century, parallel societies had emerged. There was a Catholic hospital, the Charlottetown, and a Protestant one, the Prince Edward Island. In addition to the informal sectarianism of the public school system, there was a Catholic college, St. Dunstan’s, and (mainly because Catholics stubbornly treated it as such) a Protestant college, government-run Prince of Wales.
Within a generation, there would be a Catholic orphanage, and a Protestant one; a Catholic nursing school, and a Protestant one. And so it went.

It is one of the wonderful paradoxes of Island history, that for more than a century, politicians would make religion a paramount consideration in order to keep it from becoming a political issue. There were two sides to every question, Protestant and Catholic. “Henceforth,” observes political scientist Wayne MacKinnon, “no one was nominated, ran for Parliament, or was appointed to the courts, the cabinet, the civil service, or even Government House itself, without reference to their religious affiliation. It became as important as party itself.” The clearest expression of this strategy of “accommodation” was in the matter of nominating candidates. Lest religious allegiance cloud party loyalties, only Protestants were nominated to run against Protestants and only Catholics against Catholics. This delicate balancing act was performed, informally and unofficially, in the backrooms. Shakespeare would have been delighted by the discrepancy between appearance and reality.

That the concessions were usually being made to the Catholics has been interpreted as evidence that the Catholic tail wagged the Island dog. To Catholics it was a mark of their inferior status. The difference between a Catholic plurality and a Protestant majority had been hammered home to them during the struggles of the mid-19th century. The century would be eighty-two years old before a Catholic premier was elected on Prince Edward Island. Catholics might aspire to wag the dog, but, in their eyes, it was a Protestant dog.

Cap in hand on the doorstep of the century, Island Roman Catholics continued to labour under a sense of grievance, and they continued to be jealous of their “rights.” In December 1900, the Charlottetown Daily Examiner reported soberly on a pamphlet that was making the rounds. The pamphlet claimed discrimination against Catholics in the hiring of federal government officials, citing

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22Wayne MacKinnon, *The Life of the Party: A History of the Liberal Party in Prince Edward Island* (Summerside: Williams and Crue, 1973), p. 60. The balancing act ran all the way up the scale of prestige – and all the way down. “I was not to[o] well pleased to see that position fil[led] by [an] Iresman [sic] and [a] Frenchman,” wrote an applicant for the position of door-keeper for the 1916 session of the Legislature. “It is time that more Protestants get some of [the] patronage.” (J. M. Dalziel to Premier J. A. Mathieson, 15 February 1915, PARO RG 25.23.)

23This is the central thesis of Frank MacKinnon, *Church Politics and Education: The P.E.I. Experience* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1995).
the disproportionate number of Protestants (139 of 168) among Islanders in the tiny bureaucracy. “We are not of the opinion that religious denomination ought to govern the selection of officials in the public service,” the *Daily Examiner* piously intoned. “‘Fitness’ ought to be the rule and practice in such cases.” But, the paper continued, if the rule were applied in a population that was 45% Roman Catholic, then the number of Catholic appointments should naturally approximate that percentage.24 Although it took a different route, the *Examiner* had arrived at the same destination.

It would be easy to exaggerate. Catholic and Protestant did not live at each others’ throats. Nor did they live in splendid isolation from one another. The Island was too small for that. General prejudice was often tempered by personal experience, and there are plentiful examples of Protestant and Catholic neighbours helping one another. When liquor, politics, and intermarriage could be kept out of it, Protestant and Catholic got along well enough. Indeed, the West Prince community of Harmony got its name from how well the various nationalities there got on together. But the naming itself suggested that such harmony was exceptional. Prejudice and resentment simmered under the brittle crust of accommodation on Prince Edward Island. Only as time went on would the crust begin to thicken into something approaching tolerance.

There was a much-travelled story about Father Patrick Doyle, for many years the Roman Catholic pastor in Summerside. He was approached by some Protestant citizens for a donation toward the construction of a new church for their congregation. “Well,” he said, “I cannot give you any money to build a new church — but here’s $10 to tear down the old one.” At least Island Christians had a sense of humour.

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Or else a little Conservative!

While it was a local production of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance* that delighted early 20th-century audiences at Charlottetown’s handsome Masonic Opera House, Islanders with aspirations to “culture” were undoubtedly familiar with the foregoing verse from the duo’s *Iolanthe*. Gilbert and Sullivan were describing 19th-century British politics, but their verse captured perfectly the political culture on Prince Edward Island. For the vast majority of Islanders, party loyalty was another touchstone of identity, like religion and ancestry. As late as the 1970s, political scientist Frank MacKinnon could write, “Being a Liberal or Conservative is of almost religious significance; anyone who is not with them is a political heathen.”25 For such voters, except in extraordinary circumstances, “issues” tended to be more rhetorical flourish than a point of persuasion. As one woman observed scornfully of her political rivals many years later, “They’d vote for a stick if it ran for their party!”

By the 1880s, the shifting factions of the century’s middle decades had calcified into two major political parties, Liberal and Conservative, of almost identical texture and roughly equal followings. There was little room for anyone else, and when the Patrons of Industry — despite their moniker, an agrarian reform party — tried to recruit support in the province in 1895 and 1896, their gospel fell on stony ground. They contested one by-election, in Fourth Prince, in September 1896, running a distant if respectable third.26 Afterward, the Island Patrons faded away, leaving the field once more to the two old-line parties.

Politics was far more than a way to define oneself. It was also a blood sport. Power was the goal, patronage its local expression. By the turn of the century, electoral violence had been reduced from riots to the occasional fist-fight at boisterous joint party meetings. For all that, electioneering had lost none of its intensity. Constituencies were small and the margins of victory were generally tiny. Since politicians were mostly preaching to the converted, the strategy during elections


concentrated on getting the vote out. “I find a great deal of indifference prevails among the people,” Premier Farquharson wrote a party worker in Tignish before a key by-election in 1899, “and if we lose the Election, it will be by our friends staying at home. You will find it necessary to provide teams to go into these Protestant sections among the English and Scotch people, in order to induce them to turn out.”

With the scales of support for each party so finely balanced, the fierce energy of electioneering was apt to focus on that slippery, unreliable slice of the electorate that “might be persuaded.” Swinging the votes that might be swung became a highly developed art on Prince Edward Island. The form of persuasion varied: money, alcohol, the lure of employment. In the lead-up to the federal election of 1896, Senator Donald Ferguson briefed Richard Hunt, who was the Conservative candidate in East Prince, on the provisions of the new Controverted Elections Act. His words were innocent, but his tone was conspiratorial, the letter marked “Private and Confidential.” “Remember that every word in this letter is weighed and that it is most important that you should follow it explicitly,” he warned. Having admonished Hunt that his official representatives “must be as pure as the flowers of May,” Ferguson finished with a wink and a nudge: “Get some man who is not to be your financial agent, or one of your personal central committee . . . to meet me at the Steamer on my arrival home, and I will have a word with him on another subject. This man must be the safest and most reliable man in East Prince amongst your friends.”

The “other subject” was an open secret, and in less discreet letters the language of politicking is blunt. “I would like very much for you to send me a couple of bottles of liquor,” Bruno Arsenault, secretary of a local Conservative club, wrote Hunt, “for I am pretty sure I could canvass a good few

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27Donald Farquharson to A. J. McFadyen, Tignish, 22 July 1899, Farquharson Papers, PARO RG 25.19. The letter also suggests where Farquharson expected to find his support.

28Political corruption was made considerably easier by the arcane complexity of the Island’s electoral system, with its dual franchise (where property qualifications were simply declared on oath by voters) and contempt for such niceties as voters’ lists. Marlene-Russell Clark describes the permutations in some detail in “The Franchise in Prince Edward Island and its Relation to Island Politics and Other Political Institutions,” (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1968).

29Donald Ferguson to Richard Hunt, 26 April 1896, PARO 2654/246m.
for a couple of drinks.” A trio of Tories from the Victoria-Crепaud area were even more explicit: “Mr. [John] Yeo [the sitting Liberal] we know is very rich and no doubt will not be stingy [in buying support]. There is four grits here no doubt can be bought. Three of them would go to the polls and vote. And one would stay at home.” Combatting the enemy’s bribery was equally important: “We hear there is some of our own men talking of voting grit. We suppose [they] have been thrown some bait. But no doubt if we had contract [work] on [the] Wharf [at Victoria] we would make them take our Hook.”

Patronage, such as the gift of jobs repairing a government wharf, was power. It was the oil that lubricated the whole system — it was even semi-respectable. But it was also a burden, for there were many mouths clamouring to be fed:

“If you will inshure my place this winter I will give you my support.”

“I write to ask you to please find out why my brother . . . has got no employment on the Railway this summer. . . . There is undoubtedly something crooked in the matter.”

“Now please haul off your coat in this case and do what you can to secure a sight for the boy and when the time comes we will work night and day to have you returned with a large majority.”

“I do mean to do something for the Party at the next Election; but this much I do say, that if John’s claims are ignored in this matter, there is just a little too much selfishness in the politicians.”

“I understand he was promised [a job] last spring, but I guess it was an election dodge. Now we are tired of such tricks here. We get promises, but others get positions.”

Dick Creed of Albion, in King’s County, pretty much covered the gamut of electoral abuses in his

30 Bruno Arsenault to Richard Hunt, 1 March 1896, PARO 2654/243k.

31 James Day, E. Boswall, and James A. Howatt to Richard Hunt, 1 April 1896, PARO 2654/246b.

32 All letters to Hunt from the Hunt Papers (in order: PARO 2654/237h; 236m; 228f; 236d)
summation of the contest in King’s County during the 1904 federal election:

John McLean [of Souris] should of had 200 of a majority onley that the prodsant Grits went and convesed [canvassed] on [J. J.] Hughes being the only Roman Catholic that was running on the island and why not vote for him and then three priests went out and canvesed for Hughes and then a lot stayed home and a lot voted for Hughes on that account and they had rum to almost no end and we lost enough votes by grit rum to put McLean in. At Sturgeon he should of had 30 of a majority but he onley had 4. A lot sold their votes for rum the night before the election.\textsuperscript{33}

It was illegal and ubiquitous and ultimately corrupting. The precious swing votes might be prized, but seldom such voters, and political leaders often resented the necessity of buying their support. “It is simply a matter now of who will buy the most votes,” Premier Donald Farquharson wrote a cabinet colleague in January 1899 after a pair of by-election defeats, “and the man who works the hardest and is prepared to use means fair or foul will get in.”\textsuperscript{34}

Forgetting who it was that first taught Maritimers the niceties of party politics, other Canadians came to regard Atlantic Canada as a sinkhole of electoral corruption.\textsuperscript{35} But in their convenient sanctimony they forgot that votes, not issues, measure victory. And when a handful of votes held the balance of power, temptation generally overcame moral rectitude. The lack of virtue was situational, not geographic.

Electoral corruption had reached perhaps its peak at the turn of the century. Controversy plagued virtually every election. “The truth is,” lamented the \textit{Prince Edward Island Magazine} in March 1899, “. . . that there are in many constituencies, between the honest men of both parties and apart from those who independently change sides according to their changing opinions and convictions, certain electors who are purchasable for a smaller or larger price, and these decide the

\textsuperscript{33} Dick Creed to Katie Creed, 9 November 1904, PARO 3098/4.

\textsuperscript{34} Donald Farquharson to Benjamin Rogers, 2 January 1899, Farquharson Papers, PARO, RG 25.19:

event of every election. . . . The whole proceeding is corrupt and corrupting — contrary to the interests of the country and utterly opposed to the ‘righteousness which exalteth a nation.’”

The political drama that turned the century on Prince Edward Island graphically illustrated much of what was wrong with Island politics. It also suggested one reason why Islanders were reluctant to change the way things were done. The political shows might be tawdry, but they were certainly entertaining.

For the Island’s new premier, Donald Farquharson, 1900 began in trial and ended in triumph. Since 1897, the job of premier had been passed around from hand to hand among the provincial Liberals like snuff at a wake. After leading his party to a 19-11 victory in the general election of 1897, Frederick Peters had stunned both electorate and colleagues by moving his law practice to British Columbia. No sooner had A. B. Warburton taken up the reins of power, when he resigned in 1898 to accept a judgeship. Farquharson thus became the third premier in less than three years.

Farquharson was sixty-four, a prosperous businessman and a shrewd if chronically nervous politician with twenty-two years experience in the legislature. He could sense support for the Liberals leaking steadily away. Resignations, defections, and a series of by-election defeats had steadily whittled down the Liberal majority. By Farquharson’s own count, there would be thirteen Liberals and thirteen Conservatives, not including the speaker, at the 1900 session. Rumours swirled around two other members. Henry Pineau, the newly elected Conservative from 1st Prince, had mysteriously disappeared, bribed by the Liberals, some said, to boycott the session. Joseph Wise, the Premier’s long-time running mate in 2nd Queen’s, was all too visible. Having fallen out with the Government, Wise had broken ranks to vote with the Conservatives during the 1899 session. At the end of February 1900, he was persuaded to resign his seat, but only, he would claim, on condition that a bye-election be called before the House sat. There had been no election, and now, it was said, Wise had withdrawn his resignation.

Farquharson was determined to hang on at all costs. As spring drew on, he played for time, hoping that Peters, who now held a seat in the British Columbia legislature as well, could be

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persuaded to make the transcontinental trek to Prince Edward Island to shore up the Liberal majority. In the end, Peters was unavailable, but by then Farquharson was ready.

The session began in acrimony on 8 May 1900, and quickly descended into chaos. The galleries overflowed with gawking spectators; the members brimmed with venom. No sooner had his resignation been announced when Joseph Wise entered the chamber and seated himself amid laughter and applause. When he attempted to vote with the Conservatives in a motion that would have defeated the Government, the Speaker refused to recognize him. When he rose to speak, the Speaker had the galleries cleared, and for the next three hours Wise’s legislative status was fought out behind closed doors.

The following afternoon, allegedly fortified with Tory liquor, Wise again tried to take his seat. This time it took fifteen minutes to clear the visitors’ gallery. Speaker of the House Cummiskey then entered Wise’s resignation into the record and asked him to withdraw. He refused. The Speaker ordered him removed. Amid cries of “Shame! Shame!” the Sergeant-at-Arms, assisted by the House messenger, dragged Wise from the chamber. Pandemonium ensued. Amid a tumult of angry voices, some members left their places, the Tories to assist Wise, the Grits to stop them. The Premier, who had ostentatiously taken out his watch to time Wise’s eviction, lost his composure and shook his fist in Conservative faces. Still struggling, the ex-member for 2nd Queen’s was locked in the Speaker’s room until the House adjourned.

When order had been restored and the public re-admitted, Henry Pineau, the missing member, made a dramatic entrance. Saul-like, he had experienced a remarkable conversion during his travels. To cheers from the Liberals and hisses from the gallery, the ex-Conservative took his seat on the Government side of the House. Farquharson had his majority.37

The rest of the session was an anticlimactic exercise in hypocrisy, sullen with charges of

37The foregoing is a composite account stitched together from the Journal of the Legislative Assembly for 1900; accounts in Charlottetown’s Daily Patriot and the Morning Guardian and in the Summerside Journal for May 1900; plus PARO, RG 25.19, Farquharson Papers: Donald Farquharson to Sir Louis Davies, 27 March 1900; Donald Farquharson to A. C. McDonald, Pictou, NS, 9 May 1900; Farquharson to Meddie Gallant, Bloomfield, 10 May 1900, (confidential); James Larkin, Alberton, to J. A. Mathieson, 10 February 1916 (J. A. Mathieson Papers, PARO RG 25.23). Wise lost the subsequent by-election by 305 votes (Morning Guardian, 7 July 1900, p. 1).
bribery, burglary, and illegality. Wise got his by-election that summer, and was trounced. Pineau, the newly minted — or bought — Liberal, disappeared from politics after his season of notoriety. Farquharson courted the temperance community with a provincial prohibition act at the very end of the session, then prepared to go to the people. Originally, he wanted to hold the provincial election on the same day as the upcoming federal one, but, in the end, he was dissuaded. The provincial contest was called for December 1900, two months after the federal vote. While he was forced to forego the dubious advantages of same-day voting, the timing did allow Farquharson’s Liberals, as The Guardian indignant observed, to “log-roll” on the momentum of Sir Wilfrid Laurier’s Liberals, who swept the country in the Dominion election and took three of the five Island seats. With the Liberals ensconced in Ottawa and local temperance forces basking in the glow of the Dominion’s first provincial prohibition legislation, the Conservatives were steamrolled, 21-9. The Liberal hegemony on Prince Edward Island was secure for another generation.

The ardour of provincial politicking contrasted sharply with the modesty of the prize at stake. Island governments at the turn of the century found themselves with few resources and little scope for imagination. At Confederation Prince Edward Island had surrendered its right to levy customs duties in exchange for federal subsidies. While they might have seemed generous back in 1873, the modest subsidies soon placed the local administration in a financial straitjacket. As the size of federal transfers fell further and further behind demands from citizens for services and assistance, the level of political debate in the province regressed to unenlightening squabbles over which government, Tory or Grit, had posted the lowest deficits and which could wring more money out of Ottawa. In 1900, 64.5% of provincial revenues came directly from federal subsidies. Though no name had yet been coined for it, the foundation of a dependent society had been laid.

The heavy dependence on federal transfers came partly by default, since Island governments had few

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38 Morning Guardian, 10 November 1900. By December the farmers had also finished their harvest, an important consideration in getting the vote out.
other sources of revenue. A flat-rate income tax of one cent on every dollar earned in excess of $350 had been introduced in 1894, but it was so riddled with exemptions that it accounted for only 2% of the provincial budget in 1900.\(^9\) In any case, the local economy generated little wealth for governments to tax.

The old shipbuilding and export economy on Prince Edward Island had looked outward to distant markets. Its rapid decline after 1873 had been masked by the onset of a global recession. Like a sort of economic chronic fatigue syndrome, its grip tightening or loosening at whiles, the recession had dragged on in the Maritimes. The shipbuilding industry collapsed. Canada’s high-tariff “National Policy” shrunk overseas markets for Island exports. Central Canadian products overwhelmed local manufacturing. It was the late 1890s before prosperity returned to Canada. Some of it trickled down to Prince Edward Island. A little of Canada’s re-discovered optimism appears to have rubbed off on Islanders as well. And so, to those who tried to look beyond the little cycles of boom and bust, the province’s economic malaise seemed neither inevitable nor incurable.

That farming would continue to be the backbone of the provincial economy was a given. The quest for prosperity in the new century was really a search for something to complement agriculture, or, to put it another way, to replace the sunken shipbuilding industry.

Opportunity proved elusive. Geological surveys in quest of mineral wealth yielded nothing. Small-scale local manufacturing could not compete with cheap Central Canadian imports. Their decline was so steady that by 1900 the exceptions stood out as praiseworthy.\(^40\) The Island’s forest had long been a key resource, but by 1900 the merchantable timber was essentially used up. In 1891, timber products had accounted for nearly a quarter of the province’s exports; in 1901, the figure was less than 1%. By that time, only 30% of the land cover remained in forest (still the all-time low).

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\(^40\)Between 1891 and 1901, the number of manufacturing establishments in Charlottetown fell from 237 to 31; Prince County, from 893 to 152; King’s County, 724 to 78.
Some observers warned of a “wood famine” if something was not done.⁴¹

While forestry was dying, a tourism industry was being born. The first summer resorts had appeared during the 1870s, offering simple pleasures and sea breezes to urban North Americans fleeing the sweltering heat of their cities. By the turn of the century, a growing number of well-to-do visitors were discovering Prince Edward Island’s attractions, and a growing number of Islanders were discovering that there was money in providing them. During the summer of 1900, The Guardian was offering a free round trip to Halifax on the Plant Line’s “palatial” steamer La Grande Duchesse for the best-written article on “P.E. Island as a summer resort.” But only a few such boosters saw tourism as much more than a hobby industry, and even fewer felt it was worth trying to capitalize on the powerful homing instincts of the swelling numbers of expatriate Islanders.⁴²

For a time, it seemed that the fishery might provide the foundation for prosperity. In the late 1870s, the spread of canning technology supplied the missing link between the Island’s abundant supply of lobsters and the burgeoning demand in distant markets.⁴³ Almost overnight, the modest fishing industry, which had long been dominated by mackerel, boomed. Outside investors came prowling. Canneries sprang up along the Island’s coastline like mushrooms after a spring rain. From a mere $250,000 a few years earlier, the total value of the fisheries soared to $1.9 million in 1881, with lobster accounting for nearly $1.2 million of the total.

But by the end of the decade, reality had set in. Over-fishing had effectively ruined the mackerel fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and very nearly destroyed the lobster industry. Having survived its own success, lobster canning reached an unsatisfactory equilibrium by 1890, with the fishing industry as a whole worth a million dollars, more or less, each year. At the turn of the century, lobster canning continued to dominate the Island’s fishery, each year accounting for about half the

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⁴¹A. E. Burke, “Forestry in Prince Edward Island,” in Canadian Forestry Association Annual Report, 1902, p. 82 (with thanks to Bill Glen for drawing my attention to it).

⁴²Alan Andrew MacEachern, “

⁴³In an unfinished memoir, written around 1909, merchant/shipbuilder Archibald J. Macdonald of Georgetown comments that for his firm, A. A. Macdonald & Bros., the lobster canning industry came along just as the money went out of shipbuilding. Much more work needs to be done on the Island’s economy during the post-Confederation period.
total value. But while the size of the pie remained more or less constant, the number of pieces cut from it continued steadily to grow. At the height of the lobster boom in 1881, 118 factories canned five million pounds of lobsters. In 1900, the number of canneries had reached its all-time peak, 246, but the lobster pack was considerably less than half the 1881 total, and now, more than 8,000 Islanders were employed in the lobster fishery.

The bigger canners, firms such as the Myricks in West Prince, Matthew and MacLean in Souris, or the Portland Packing Company, prospered mightily from their extensive fishing enterprises, operating a truck system that totally dominated local economies in parts of the province. Many other canneries were marginal operations with razor-thin profit margins. For those who promoted the industry, quality control was a pressing problem, and the culprits were usually the smaller factories, where the conditions were often unsanitary and the methods unhygienic. “I’m sorry to say your lobsters opened so poor that I would not care to buy them,” Portland Packing’s W. F. Tidmarsh wrote one part-time canner, “Better have them labelled with a nice label and ship them to the States. . . .”

The pack ice that jammed into the Gulf of St. Lawrence each winter made fishing a seasonal industry on Prince Edward Island. The lobster season was particularly short, and many lobster fishermen were actually farmers for the rest of the year, relying on the fishery as a sort of saltwater cash crop to supplement their incomes. Those who took their entire living from the sea pursued other creatures as well: oysters, cod, mackerel, herring, smelts. The value of these secondary fisheries fluctuated from year to year, depending on catches, markets, and prices, and those who fished exclusively were among the poorest Islanders. The fishery was not to be the saviour of the Island’s economy.

As other sources of income failed to develop, economic pressure mounted on the province’s major industry, agriculture. A century of bitter wrangling over land tenure had given land an enormous symbolic stature on Prince Edward Island, but its practical importance was equally great. While agricultural surpluses were marketed from the earliest days of settlement, farming was not so much a means to some end as an end in itself. Andrew Macphail of Orwell put it this way: “A man who

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lives on his own land and owes no man anything develops all the dignity inherent in his nature.\textsuperscript{44}\textsuperscript{45} Dignity aside, the self-sufficient farm was the surest passport to freedom from want, and, in the beginning at least, that was as high as most pioneers aspired.

The transition from agriculture as way of life to agriculture as industry was gradual, and the mileposts along that road were degrees of specialization. Already during the 19th century, Island farmers had impoverished the soil in some places to produce oats for export. In the 1890s, a new specialization appeared. Actually, it was promoted to Islanders by the federal government. In 1891, the Dominion Dairy Commissioner, James Robertson, was sent to Prince Edward Island to recruit interest in establishing cheese factories. A few factories had already been founded in the province, but Robertson proposed a different model based on ownership of the factories by the dairy producers themselves.\textsuperscript{46} After initial rebuffs in Kensington and Charlottetown, Robertson convinced the farmers of New Perth to set up a model factory. Their instant success sent a ripple of excitement across the farmscape, especially in Island Scots communities where there was an ancient attachment to cattle-raising. Aided by temporary subsidies from the provincial government, 47 dairy factories, consuming nearly 50 million pounds of milk, had been set up in the province by 1900 (although “factory” was a bit of a misnomer — in total, they employed only 138 people). At this point, the great majority of them concentrated on cheese production, with butter as a secondary product. Already, the dairy industry was worth $566,824, and promoters were touting Prince Edward Island as “the Denmark of Canada.” There was a milk can on the doorstep of the century.

Fired by Robertson’s example, the provincial government had decided by the turn of the century that agriculture was too important an industry to leave to its own devices. In 1901, it created a department of agriculture to go with its other two ministries, justice and public works. One of the Department’s first jobs was to encourage the spread of Farmers’ Institutes among Island farm

\textsuperscript{44}Sir Andrew Macphail, \textit{The Master’s Wife} (Montreal, 1939; facsimile re-print ed., Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1994), p. 18. Of course, Macphail had eagerly escaped farming for a career in letters and medicine.

\textsuperscript{46}These are often described as proto-cooperatives, since most of them operated as \textit{de facto} co-operatives, but in structure did not subscribe to the basic principle of one man, one vote. See Elizabeth Cran and Marian Bruce, “The Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island” (Unpublished manuscript, Institute of Island Studies, Charlottetown, 1996).
communities. The model for them had been borrowed from Canada’s most advanced agricultural province, Ontario, but it was merely grafted onto a long tradition of agricultural improvement societies in Prince Edward Island. Such self-help movements among Island farmers were cyclic in their rise and fall. The Farmers’ Institutes, with their emphasis on taking agricultural education into the community, would be no different. In 1900, however, their message was widely heeded. Most people agreed that the Island needed better, more scientific farmers. The smarter, the more scientific, that Island farmers became, the better chance they would have to manipulate costs, prices, and yields. Agricultural education would become the watchword of the new decade.

In turn-of-the-century thinking, more prosperous farms would also mean more young people staying on the land. Outmigration had been a fact of life on Prince Edward Island since at least the Panic of 1857, which had driven Island shipyard workers south to the Boston States in search of employment. But after 1870, the exodus had gathered momentum as Island farms filled up and economic prospects faltered. Between 1881 and 1891, the Island’s population had essentially stopped growing as outmigration began to outstrip its robust birth rate. The 1890s were no better. Everywhere on the Island — in the region, if Islanders had compared notes with their neighbours — people were pulling up stakes and leaving.

In November 1900, more than 1,500 people attended the annual ball of the Prince Edward Island Association in Boston’s Paul Revere Hall. The size of the gathering suggested the number of Island migrants in New England. And the number was growing. The alarming dimensions of the outmigration would not be driven home until the results of the Dominion census in 1901 revealed a net loss of six thousand people in the Island’s population, but personal experience already told Islanders what was happening. For the moment, there was a tendency to blame the exodus more on the pull of other places and Islanders’ adventurous spirit than the push of hard times, but that fiction was increasingly hard to maintain. Outmigration was a shadow that fell across the doorway to the new century.

“IT brings the instruction of the College to the door of the farm-house,” explained its chief prophet, Jeremiah S. Clark. See “Farmers’ Institutes,” in *Prince Edward Island Magazine* 3(April 1901): 40–43; see also, “Farmers’ Institutes – Or Schools for the People,” *Prince Edward Island Magazine* 3(May 1901).
Even as Islanders pondered such problems, the search for prosperity was about to take a new turn. On 7 February 1900, the *Summerside Journal* carried a short article under the headline, “A Valuable Capture.” The story described how Stanley Compton of St. Eleanors had, after a twelve-hour chase, shot “a very handsome black fox” near James Tuplin’s farm in New Annan. A mutant strain of the red fox, black foxes were rare and, as a fashion fur, much coveted. Compton later sold his fox pelt for $350, more than most farm labourers could make in a year’s work. It is now impossible to say, but the fox may not have been exactly wild. Not far away, working in great secrecy, a handful of entrepreneurs were brooding up a whole new industry. Over the next three decades, it would seize the imaginations of Islanders and inject new vitality into the provincial economy. But that was for the future.

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Politics. Religion. Ethnicity. Exodus. With so much to divide them, could one really speak in 1900 of “Islanders”? Was there sufficient glue (perhaps the mucilage invented by expatriate W. N. Lepage?) to bind together such divisive factions into a common identity?

Of course.

That was the paradox of Prince Edward Island — of any viable society — that it somehow found common purpose amid the clash of opposites. Being an “Islander” meant maintaining an equilibrium between the forces that drew people together and those that drove them apart. Already, by 1900, people had been talking about an Island identity for half a century.48 The much maligned “absentee proprietors” had given to Prince Edward Island one precious gift. Back in 1769, they had persuaded Britain to make Prince Edward Island a separate colony from Nova Scotia. If Prince Edward Island had not been a colony, it could never have become a province. And having their own government was a tremendous unifying force among Islanders, especially after they achieved self-rule in 1851. However much Islanders might squabble among themselves, they formed a common front against the outside world.

The argument that won colonial status for St. John’s Island had been grounded in its being cut off from the outside world each winter. Though writers and politicians betrayed little awareness of it in 1900, there was, in fact, an imaginative power in being an island. Nowhere but on an island is there a more elemental sense of boundaries, of “here” and “there,” of “us” and “them.” Despite the narrowness of the Northumberland Strait, the boundaries were very real, especially in the ice-packed heart of winter. Being an “islander” was the single greatest factor in being an “Islander.”

And, of course, there was the land itself. The history of clearing it and farming it was something that almost the entire population shared. The farmers of 1900 were nearly all of them the descendants of the men and women who had created the farms. There were precious few latecomers who might be accused of enjoying the fruits of the pioneers’ labour without being heir to the sweat of it as well.

“I went for a walk in Lover’s Lane yesterday. . . ,” an obscure young writer from Cavendish confided to her journal on 8 October 1899. “It is always the same way I go – down the lane under the birches and across the old school playground worn bare, and hard by many restless feet. There in the October sunshine are the old woods where the wind sweeps through the swaying spruce tops with a sound as of surf breaking on a far distant shore.”

Impulsive, gifted, emotional, L. M. Montgomery was hardly a typical Islander, but she gave voice to what other Islanders shared but seldom articulated, an intensely felt sense of place. This, too, was part of the bond that tied them together: Protestant and Catholic, Grit and Tory, Native and White, Gael and Acadian and Briton and all the others.

Having measured out their loyalties among so many claimants, Islanders had only a limited amount to give to any wider identity. At the turn of the century, there was as yet little sense of being Maritimers, although a perception of common interests was beginning to stir among the region’s premiers. The building of a national identity had made more headway, and it is clear that Islanders


saw themselves as Canadians or, at least, as members of the Dominion. There were surprisingly few reservations about that, despite a lurking sense that Prince Edward Island was becoming a victim of Confederation rather than a partner in it.

On the eve of Dominion Day in 1900, *The Guardian* commented on the growth of a national spirit in Canada. “Today, more than ever, every citizen of the Dominion is proud of his country, proud of the name Canadian, proud and loyal as a citizen of the Great British Empire.” At the turn of the century, it was still possible to be both British and Canadian at the same time. Indeed, the residual attachment to the “Mother Country” (surprising, since Island Gaels had little to thank Britain for) had more or less been transmuted into a wave of vicarious British imperialism. Few Britons might have had any idea where Prince Edward Island was, but the Empire’s glory was in some small measure Islanders’ as well.

This imperial ardour crested as the century turned, for, in 1900, Prince Edward Island was at war. More precisely, Britain was at war, with the tiny Boer republics of South Africa. Under heavy pressure from Anglo-Canadian imperialists, Canada sent a thousand volunteers to the theatre of war in the fall of 1899. Prince Edward Island contributed thirty-two adventure-hungry militiamen to the Canadian Contingent. Eventually, about 125 Island soldiers, three teachers, a nurse — and “Oak Brand” condensed milk, manufactured by the Charlottetown Condensed Milk Co. Ltd.— would serve in South Africa. It was the nurse who would achieve the most lasting fame. Georgina Fane Pope, the daughter of an Island Father of Confederation, was awarded the Royal Red Cross for her service in South Africa as head of the group of nurses that accompanied the Canadian Contingent.

From this distance, it is hard to appreciate the excitement that the Boer War inspired on Prince Edward Island. There was a romance to war in 1900 that would not survive the global conflicts soon to come. “Canada is in a state of red-hot excitement from shore to shore,” L. M. Montgomery recorded in her journal. “There is something stirring and exciting and tingling about it all even here in this quiet little Island thousands of miles from the seat of war. Everyone is intensely interested in the news.”

For a while the news was not good. Britain had a long history of losing battles before winning

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wars, and that only intensified Islanders’ anxieties. As usual in wartime, there was little tolerance for “unpatriotic” opinions, especially during the dark hours of defeat. It was one thing for the French-language weekly *L’Impartial* (which anglophones did not read) to label the war a “foolish manouevre,” but when it was reported that Charlottetown schoolteacher Joseph O. Arsenault had “reflected seriously on England’s position in connection with the South African War” to his students, the Board of Education frostily demanded an explanation.\(^{52}\)

The imperial cause was consecrated with Islanders’ blood in February 1900, when Roland Taylor and Alfred Riggs were killed in action at the Battle of Paardeberg. For their families, the glory of war was hollow, but for most Islanders the price of patriotism was not too high. By November 1900, the members of the First Transvaal Contingent had begun arriving home to heroes’ welcomes. Showing impeccable timing, seven of them landed in Charlottetown on Christmas morning, “one of the liveliest and happiest ever spent in this city and throughout this Island.” They were greatly outnumbered by the welcoming throng that met them on the waterfront and escorted them through the town. One of the soldiers sported a broken wrist, but it was not a war wound. He had slipped coming out of a Halifax hotel.\(^{53}\)

Although the Boer War would soon disintegrate into what L. M. Montgomery described as a “tedious, bushwhacking affair,” the new century found Islanders exulting over a rash of victories. Already, by February 1901, Hedley MacKinnon’s memoir of the first Island Contingent had gone into a second edition. To the editor of the *Prince Edward Island Magazine*, this was proof that the demand for tales of South Africa “cannot yet be satisfied,” but war enthusiasm was on the wane in other respects. Begun amid mild euphoria in October 1900, the fund-raising campaign to erect a memorial on Queen Square to the heroes of Paardeberg faltered badly when it ventured outside of Charlottetown. By early 1901, the press had quietly stopped publishing the latest totals. There would be a monument, though far less grand than the envisaged tableau of “Life and Death in Victory.”

\(^{52}\)President, Board of Education, to Joseph O. Arsenault, Charlottetown, 4 November 1899, Farquharson Papers, PARO RG 25.19.

\(^{53}\)Daily Examiner, 26 December 1900.
This, then, was Prince Edward Island in 1900: a stubborn optimism nagged by doubt; a backdrop of outmigration and economic decline; a sense of grievance against, yet dependence on, Ottawa. But no one spends their entire time standing back, squinting to capture the “big picture.” Content with the limited horizons of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, Islanders in 1900 busied themselves with the practical business of living. Had they known how her career would turn out, they might have sought a metaphor for their future in the fortunes of L. M. Montgomery.

The doorstep of the new century found the 26-year-old Montgomery keeping house in Cavendish for her grandmother Macneill. Following her mother’s early death, young Maud had been raised by her maternal grandparents. When Grandfather Macneill died in 1898, Montgomery had done what custom and circumstance dictated: abandoned her teaching career to care for her aged grandmother, a woman with whom she had little in common either emotionally or intellectually.

It was an anxious time. In rapid succession death had robbed her of Will Pritchard, her childhood friend; Herman Leard, with whom she had carried on a passionate but doomed affair; and Hugh John Montgomery, her absent but affectionate father. Now she felt trapped, with no one to turn to and no one to confide in. After her father’s death, Montgomery had sat down to consider her assets: “Well, I must henceforth face the world alone. Let me see what my equipment for such a struggle is. I am young; I have a scanty and superficial education. . . . I have no training for anything save teaching, which I cannot at present do; I have no influence of any kind in any quarter. Is that all? It seems a meagre list. Yes, there is something else — my knack of scribbling. Last year I made exactly ninety six dollars and eighty eight cents by my pen. That does not promise extravagantly. But we shall see. I have forgotten to mention another asset and a very valuable one — a belief in my power to succeed.”

It was a beginning.

54Rubio and Waterston, Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery, I, p. 249 (entry for 1 May 1900).
Chapter Two
Prosperity’s Echo

‘What other Island is there?’
Said one who knew it well;
If there were other islands
As good, she could not tell.
From H. E. Mathewson, “Prince Edward Island”

In the springtime of the century, Prince Edward Island set out in pursuit of the golden prosperity that had settled over the Dominion of Canada. The hunt led from the floor of the Legislature along a path worn smooth by many feet to Ottawa. It picked its way among ice floes and ferry boats and fox pens, through henhouses and cattle barns and schoolrooms, past empty liquor bottles and stalled automobiles, until at last it fetched up against the grim wall of a world war. Always, it seemed, prosperity lay just over the next hill, but, in the end, the province caught only prosperity’s echo.

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In April 1910, Island politics seemed as disappointing to The Guardian as the return of Halley’s comet, which had so far failed to impress. “Politics,” it observed on April Fool’s Day, “is a game that is played, and always to win, no matter how. What is a debate in the Legislature but a repetition of stale charges, a perversion of old records, a perpetual brainwashing and whitewashing, a threshing out of old straw in which there is no grain, little even of decent chaff, and nothing produced but dust and dirt. . . . It is funny in some ways. Also, it is deplorable.”

“Dust and dirt.” It was an apt description. The political decade that had begun in such a white heat in 1900 quickly turned tepid as Island Liberals settled into their second decade of power. The provincial election of 1904 might have been a carbon copy of 1900. Each was called for early December; each was full of the usual sound and fury; each ended with the same result – big Liberal victories.2

1The Maple Leaf 7(August 1913)8: 3.

2The final tallies were almost identical: 21-9 for the Liberals in 1900 and 22-8 in 1904.
It did not seem to matter whose hand was at the helm, so long as it was Liberal. Already in command, the local Party also had the advantage of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier’s capacious coattails. With Prince Edward Island ever more dependent on federal largesse, it made sense to Island voters to elect provincially the same party that was in power in Ottawa. The local Liberals’ campaign slogan in 1904 was “Vote for the Liberals and an increase in our subsidy.”3 A few weeks earlier, Premier Peters had written, “I have not yet positive information as to when the Dominion [election] will take place, but, as far as my information goes it will be very shortly, probably in October. We are of course going to hold the Local immediately after the Dominion...”4 And they did, in 1904 as in 1900 and again in 1908, each time riding a Laurier victory to the provincial polls. The contests came as regularly as the Olympics, and the results were considerably more predictable.

Only the faces, it seemed, changed. Daniel Gordon of Georgetown, an erudite merchant with a penchant for literary allusions, was 82 when he stepped down as Tory leader in 1903. His successor was a pugnacious young lawyer named John A. Mathieson. For the Liberals, the premierslal merry-go-round creaked to a temporary halt in 1902, when Donald Farquharson took his magnificent beard and his nervous disposition to Ottawa as the new MP for the federal riding of Queen’s West. Like so many Atlantic salmon, the leading Liberals in the province were struggling up the political fish ladder. Farquharson replaced ex-premier Louis Davies in the House of Commons (and hoped to replace him in Laurier’s cabinet as well). Davies ascended to the Supreme Court of Canada, where he would eventually become Chief Justice. To replace Farquharson as premier, the Liberal caucus chose their diminutive attorney general, Arthur Peters, the younger brother of ex-premier Fred Peters. For the next six years, his eye on a judicial appointment, Peters undertook the task of governance.

Made comfortable by big majorities, the provincial Liberals grew increasingly casual about the business of the House. For much of the decade, there was more excitement across the square in “Wonderland,” where the Island’s first moving pictures were being shown. The proceedings of the Legislature were like solar flares, occasionally spectacular, but of doubtful impact on the lives of

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4Peters to Peter A. McIntyre, 14 September 1904, Peters Papers, PARO RG 25.20.
electors. *The Guardian* had caught the drift of events early on. “The caucus system was much in evidence [during the last Legislative session],” it observed in 1902, “and seems to have obtained a greater prominence here than in any other Province of Canada. In fact, the public business is so fully shaped in caucus as to leave but little for the House to do as a deliberative body.” The trend had arguably begun long before, when party lines first began to calcify, but it had now become a matter of course.

The critical battles of the era were not fought in the Legislature, but with the federal government. As the decade advanced, the quarrels with Ottawa, despite being fraternal, grew more frequent, more fierce, and more public. The catalytic factor was, of all things, the weather.

On 1 December 1904, the Island rugby season ended in bleak futility. The championship match between the Abegweits and St. Dunstan’s College was played in a blinding snowstorm that left the two sides floundering in ankle-deep mud. In the end, neither team could score and the Prince Edward Island Football Union’s Bartlett Trophy was not awarded. The real winner had been the weather, and its victory was a harbinger for the season that followed.

The winter of 1904–05 was “the worst in living memory.” It set in early and quickly used up its welcome. A turning point of sorts was reached in late January. On the twenty-third there was a heavy snowstorm. On the twenty-fifth, as heavy ice hemmed the winter steamers in port at Pictou and Georgetown, respectively, the iceboat service was revived between the Capes. Early that morning, for the second straight day, the temperature plunged to -19º Fahrenheit. A few hours later, a monstrous blizzard howled in. The storm raged for two days. In Charlottetown, snowdrifts “towered towards the roofs of the buildings reaching in many cases to the second storeys.” Out in Cavendish, Maud Montgomery wrote behind a wall of snow. “I would say [it was] the worst storm we ever had if I didn’t know that every bad storm seems the worst by reason of the contrast its present badness

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offers to the badness of past ones grown dim. But I am quite within the margin in saying that the drifts are the worst we have ever had. They are as high as the house, hemming us in on all sides — ‘Alp upon Alp.’ The rooms on the ground floor are as dark as twilight.”

In the following weeks, storm after storm descended on the Island. At Park Corner there was no mail for ten days during one stretch of February. In Charlottetown, the Legislature could not meet. The rail lines were hopelessly blocked — it took forty days for one double-engined train to get from West Prince to Charlottetown. On 25 February, the Daily Examiner reported that John P. Morris of Donaldston had been forced to dig a tunnel seventy feet long to reach the livestock trapped in his barn.

After the first great blizzard, Maud Montgomery railed in her journal, “The drifts are certainly very beautiful; but one does not care greatly for architectural beauty in a prison. When I look out on those huge white barriers I feel like screaming.” The whole province was storm-stayed.

During the summer months, as many as fifteen steamships shuttled back and forth on regular runs across the Northumberland Strait. In the winter there were two. Both were owned and operated by the federal government as part of its commitment to maintain continuous communications between Prince Edward Island and the Mainland. For eight weeks in 1905, from 25 January until 22 March, a ridge of rafted pack ice blockaded the Minto in the harbour at Pictou. Her sister ship, the Stanley, spent her time barricaded inside Georgetown or butting her prow uselessly against the implacable ice barrier at Pictou.¹

Modern Islanders take a perverse pride in the province’s winter isolation. “The Mainland is cut off again,” the old saw goes. But in 1905, no one was laughing. It was the second time in two years that Prince Edward Island had been stranded. In 1902–03, the Stanley had spent seventy days drifting helplessly up and down the Northumberland Strait in an infamous ice pan, much of that time in company with the Minto. But the great ice blockade of 1904–05 was critically different, once again

¹Rubio and Waterston, Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery, I, p. 303 [entry for 27 January 1905].

⁷Interruptions in the winter steamer service are concisely documented in a memorandum drawn up by the Agency of Marine and Fisheries for Premier F. L. Haszard in February 1908 (PARO RG.25.21).
because of weather. A severe drought during 1904 had ruined the Island hay crop, and the Peters Government had been forced to import hay from Quebec to avert a fodder shortage during the upcoming winter. The ice blockade left much of that hay rotting at rail-side in Pictou. By springtime, according to Conservative critics, Island livestock were “on the lift,” too weak to stand in their stalls. The “Famine Winter” turned a point of friction between Prince Edward Island and Ottawa into a smoulder of open discontent.

As recently as 1901, with the winter steamers gliding easily through a mild winter, the provincial government had conceded that Ottawa had “actually and practically” fulfilled its continuous communication obligation.¹ Now the countryside was roused to anger. While the winter steamers began carrying two months’ worth of provisions every time they left port — just in case — the slumbering vision of a tunnel to the Mainland stirred again like a great sea serpent from the depths of the ice-choked Strait.

The agitation for a fixed link with the Mainland was already two decades old by 1905, and had waxed and waned over time in proportion to the severity of the winter and the imminence of a federal election. In the beginning, its advocates had envisioned an iron subway tube laid across the floor of the Strait. That idea was later set aside in favour of tunneling beneath the seabed. The experts thought it could be done, but no one could say for sure how much it would cost. Clearly, its construction would be a remarkable feat of engineering. Over the years, there had been surveys and estimates and bold ambiguities from Ottawa, but no tunnel. Instead, as a less costly remedy for Islanders’ discontent, the federal government periodically supplied new, more powerful steamships. None proved equal to the winter ice-pack. Each time the steamer service broke down, the cry for a fixed link was renewed.

The tunnel’s chief promoter, ex-Senator George Howlan, died in 1901, but he left a worthy successor in Father Alfred E. Burke, Roman Catholic priest and apostle of progress. Burke was a man of many parts, and no one thought more of them than he did. The parish of Alberton — and, ultimately, the province of Prince Edward Island — was far too small to contain his restless energies,

¹Quoted in Mary K. Cullen, “The Transportation Issue, 1873-1973,” in Canada’s Smallest Province, p. 246.
and he invested much of the excess in the campaign for a Northumberland Strait tunnel.

It was not hard to stir up the populace. There was, the *Canadian Annual Review* reported, “great discontent and pronounced agitation” across the province. At a mass meeting in Charlottetown on 10 March, Burke was chosen to lead a delegation to Ottawa to place the people’s demands before the Dominion. Accompanied by Island senators and MPs, they made their case to Prime Minister Laurier and his Maritime lieutenant, W. S. Fielding, on 1 April 1905. A tunnel, they prophesied, “would very soon double or treble both the population and prosperity of the Island.”⁹ A month later, armed with a joint resolution from both parties in the Legislature, a delegation from the provincial government reiterated the Island’s position: a tunnel and a third, more powerful winter steamer while it was being built. A blizzard of resolutions from Boards of Trade across the Maritimes and beyond echoed their arguments.

When it was not trolling for votes, the federal government generally responded — if it responded — to such demands by shrugging its shoulders and conceding that Nature was more powerful than Man. To the delegations of 1905, Laurier’s government “emphatically denied” an obligation to provide either a tunnel or a new steamer, but offered to examine the Island’s claims in the context of improving connections among the various regions of Canada.

To refuse demands on principle but promise consideration was a time-honoured federal strategy in Ottawa’s dealings with Prince Edward Island. It allowed the federal government to steer a course between conciliation of estranged Island electors and accusations of “special privilege” from other parts of Canada. Special privileges, Islanders might have argued, were evidently saved for provinces with more seats in the House of Commons, and Ottawa’s notion of “fair play” seemed to be governed by its cost. Even when it made sympathetic overtures, the federal government lacked Islanders’ sense of urgency about the communications issue. After all, the Prime Minister had little cause to cross the Northumberland Strait in winter.

The Island’s tunnel vision intensified as the decade progressed. In 1907, winter again played

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⁹As reported in the *Canadian Annual Review*, 1905, p. 342. It would also ease the freight rate handicap to Island shippers of the infamous “three short hauls”: along the PEIR to port, across the strait by steamer, then along the spur lines to the trunk line of the Intercolonial Railway.
havoc with the steamer service. The first of March found the Stanley trapped in an ice field off Pictou Island. Around 1 P.M. the ice began to run with the ebbing tide, splintering against the iron hull of the steamer. Jagged slabs of ice rafted up onto the ship’s deck. On and on the ice came, snapping the ship’s railings, shearing off iron stanchions like they were made of cardboard, smashing deckhouse doors to kindling. The Stanley heeled over onto her beam ends under the enormous pressure. The passengers, ten women and forty men, abandoned ship, as the crew began desperately hacking ice off the decks. Finally, at 5 P.M., the ship came upright. She was, of course, still imprisoned.

The campaign for a tunnel drew strength and emotion from such incidents. Eighty years later, the concept of a fixed link would badly divide Islanders, but in 1908 consensus reigned. “As to the Tunnel,” the Canadian Annual Review observed in its summary of the year, “there was no controversy — everybody on the Island wanted it and both parties urged it.” “We must have it!” cried the promotional buttons and stamps. “Or else,” added the Charlottetown Guardian, which had begun a campaign in 1907 for “settlement or separation.” “Who would be free must strike the blow,” it trumpeted histrionically that January, confusing winter communications with the French Revolution. In March, it was still fuming: “Our relations with Canada must be mended or ended.” Much of the energy that Islanders usually devoted to partisan electioneering now went into the great crusade to obtain the Island’s “rights” from Ottawa.

When Island MPs forced tunnel talk onto the House of Commons agenda in 1907, Laurier’s Government offered little encouragement. In 1908 (an election year) Sir Wilfrid’s pious opinion that “we should provide tunnel communication with Prince Edward Island if it can be done with anything like a reasonable expenditure” satisfied few Islanders. They knew the language of prevarication. By now the projected tunnel had become in Islanders’ minds a sort of cure-all for all of its problems. Instead, Laurier provided a pre-election pacifier by commissioning a third winter steamer in March 1908. Almost three times more powerful than the old Stanley, the Earl Grey was easily the most beautiful of the Island’s long line of ferries. When she began service at the end of 1909, she proved

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10 Memorandum, Agency of Marine and Fisheries Department, Charlottetown, to Premier F. L. Haszard, 18 February 1908, PARO RG.25.21.

equal to all but the worst Strait conditions. Her launching would help to defuse the tunnel agitation, although the departure of the chief agitator, Father A. E. Burke, for Toronto to head up the Canadian Church Extension Society may have been just as important a factor.

Weighed down by conflicting considerations, the provincial Liberals trailed in the wake of public opinion. Unlike The Guardian, they could not afford an open rupture with their Liberal counterparts in Ottawa. Their position involved a calculated blend of public posturing and private lobbying. Premier Peters pointedly stayed away from a mass meeting to discuss the Island’s grievances in Kensington on 1 February 1907, and he privately condemned The Guardian’s secession campaign as “a childish and ridiculous proposition,”¹² but his own frustration was deepening. He could not ignore the popular agitation, nor could he control it. It simply complicated an already delicate situation. The inadequacy of winter communications aroused the deepest emotions among Islanders and attracted the most public attention, but it had gradually become entangled with other festering issues. By 1908, Prince Edward Island had not one but several major bones of contention with Ottawa, and public pressure had knit them together into the skeleton of a monster.

Ottawa had achieved the paradoxical status of being for Islanders both demon and angel. The federal government was damned for causing the Island’s troubles, yet prayed to for their remedy. Hence the provincial government’s caution in dealing with its political friends in Ottawa. In pursuing its grievances, Prince Edward Island also discovered a certain amount of common ground with the other Maritime Provinces. Lamed by partisanship and self-interest, they stumbled together toward what would a generation later become the Maritime Rights Movement.

Those without it generally think there are few problems that money might not solve. Many of Prince Edward Island’s claims against the federal government involved increases in revenue, and

¹²Peters to Joseph Read, Summerside, 20 January 1907, Premier Arthur Peters Papers, PARO RG 25.20. Read felt Peters’ refusal to attend the Kensington meeting was a tactical error.
its lawyer-politicians tortured the wording of the relevant contracts and agreements to make them bleed dollars into Island hands. As W. S. Fielding, the federal Finance Minister, ruefully observed in 1905, “I must do these gentlemen the justice of saying that they are claiming everything in sight.”

The most straightforward case, though still complicated, was the Island’s demand for a share of the Halifax Fisheries Award, compensation paid by the United States to Canada under the Treaty of Washington in exchange for access to its inshore fishery. Because it was an independent colony at the time it ratified the treaty in 1872, Prince Edward Island argued that it was entitled to a portion of the $4.5 million awarded to Canada in 1877. Ottawa and, on appeal, London did not agree.

In 1902, Premier Peters resurrected the claim, acting in concert with the governments of Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Privately, Peters put the Island’s long-denied share at “at least a million” — plus interest! At one point, Peters actually convinced federal authorities to submit the provinces’ fisheries claims to arbitration, but, in the end, the federal government managed to deflect the award question until the issue died quietly of discouragement.

Prince Edward Island met with considerably more success in its campaign for increased subsidies from Ottawa. The common theme underlying its demands was compensation: through taxes and duties, Islanders shared in the burden of nation-building, but did not enjoy corresponding benefits. In other words, what might well be good for Canada was often bad for Prince Edward Island. The specific pretexts for the requested increases varied as opportunity dictated. But behind them all was a half-articulated belief that accommodation of special needs should be a basic principle of Confederation.

Between 1900 and 1914, one might be pardoned for thinking the capital of Prince Edward

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14Premier Peters summarized the Island’s case in a series of guest editorials in the Daily Patriot on 16, 17, 19, and 20 January 1903; the prior history of the issue is dealt with in MacKinnon, The Government of Prince Edward Island, pp. 307-8. Peters argued that by requiring the Island Legislature to ratify the Treaty of Washington, Britain had conceded that Prince Edward Island’s boundaries extended to the three-mile limit; if the Island owned the in-shore, it was entitled to its share of the Halifax Award.

Island was Ottawa, so often did Island premiers make the pilgrimage there in search of concessions. In 1898, 1899, and 1901, Island governments had pressed for an increase in subsidies (the first since 1887). To silence the squeaking wheel, the Laurier Government produced a dab of grease in 1901. As “compensation in full” for its past failures to maintain continuous communications with the Mainland, it bumped up the Island’s annual subsidy by $30,000, to $152,000.

The Island’s persistence — like a child tugging at its parent’s sleeve — was only one reason for its success, and probably not the major one. By 1905, the size of their subsidies was becoming a sore point between all of the provinces and Ottawa. The premiers’ correspondence shows that Prince Edward Island plotted strategy with Quebec, Ontario, and the other Maritime Provinces over the issue. At an interprovincial conference in 1902, they agreed on a formula and a rationale for increases in everyone’s subsidy. As a confidential memorandum argued, the financial provisions on Confederation had been made “without adequately anticipating the growth of population and the urgent demands which modern conditions imposed upon the Provinces in the way of education, hospitals and charities, the administration of justice and other expenditures of a local and necessary character. The small household with its moderate wants, on the basis of 1861, is very different to the larger household of 1901 with its many wants. . . .” As early as 1904, Peters began to press for “one arbitration to decide all the questions between the Maritime provinces and the Dominion.” Two years later, he got it.

The Dominion-Provincial Conference of October 1906 was one of those landmark events that make Canadian history insufferably boring for many Canadians. There is little enough drama in middle-aged men sitting around a table. And yet, the Conference had its moments. “I trust you will let nothing stand in the way of your being there,” Peters wrote J. J. Hughes, the Island’s only Liberal MP, “as you know the immense importance of the settlement of all those questions, to this Province. You are also aware that at all Conferences the actual work is not done at the Conference but it is done by lobbying and interviews with the different members of the Conference and the Members of the


Government at Ottawa.”

Peters took his own advice, but was adroitly out-maneouvred by the Prime Minister and Premier Gouin of Quebec, who convinced him to set aside the Island’s other grievances for the time being so that the Conference could focus on the paramount issue of subsidies.

The Island Premier was not unhappy with the results. Following the draft formula worked out in 1902, any province with a population of less than 150,000 (that is, Prince Edward Island) would receive an additional annual subsidy of $100,000. The actual increase for Prince Edward Island was $70,000, since the $30,000 granted in 1901 was now regarded as a sort of “advance” on the new arrangement. Peters was conscious of the realpolitik at work in Ottawa that October week. The agreement on the subsidy increase, he said afterward, “was given us by the other Provinces, not out of charity, but they were at the same time looking to their own interests.” By using the allowance for Prince Edward Island as the baseline, “their subsidies would be large in proportion to ours.” Indeed, Maritime historians have noted that the region’s subsidy increases remained proportionately much smaller than those given the other provinces.

Peters’ satisfaction with the subsidy settlement was soon soured by politically costly delays in actually getting his hands on it. It was too little, too late, the Conservatives charged. In at least one sense they were right. Even with an extra $70,000 per year, the provincial government could not or would not balance its books. In any event, Islanders’ sense of grievance had by now swelled far beyond a mere question of subsidies. The inadequacy of winter communications across the Strait remained a sore point, and another perceived injustice had become its rival in inspiring public outrage. It might have little real impact on Islanders’ everyday lives or their livelihoods, but it touched the sorest point of all, their pride.

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18 Peters to J. J. Hughes, 24 September 1906, Arthur Peters Papers, PARO RG.25.20.


20 Ibid.

21 Colin Howell, for example, in Forbes and Muise, The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation, p. 161.
On a cold, clear evening in February 1910, there was a surprise party for Donald MacPherson and his family at their home in Darlington. Friends and neighbours had gathered to say farewell before the family left to make a new home in western Canada. Fitting speeches were made and acknowledged, gifts given, gossip traded one last time. In due course, as custom dictated, the wives put out the lunch they had brought. At the end of the evening, everyone stood together to sing “God Be With You Till We Meet Again.” Then it was time to go. The men fetched the horses from the barn and hitched them to the sleighs in the little circle of lantern light. The horses snorted and stamped in the cold as families bundled up in caps and capes and buffalo robes. There was a last round of goodbyes, less ornate than the speeches made inside, and the visitors were gone, sleigh bells jangling faintly in the darkness.

The scene in Darlington was repeated over and over again in communities across the province in the early years of the century. For every community farewell recorded in the newspapers, there were a hundred more that went unremarked. The outmigration from Prince Edward Island that had gathered momentum during the 1880s and 1890s was accelerating. The census numbers were stark and unambiguous. Between 1891 and 1901 the Island’s population had fallen by 6,000 people. Between 1901 and 1911, it fell by another 9%, 10,000 people, to 93,728. For the second straight decade, net migration in the province (the number of births and immigrants minus the number of deaths and emigrants) was -17,000. In time, all parts of the Island were affected. In extreme cases, as with Lauretta, a farming district near Alberton, outmigration would slowly kill the community until only the name and a scatter of empty grey farmhouses remained.

Outmigration was a regional phenomenon. Between 1880 and 1920, about 100,000 Maritimers emigrated per decade. By 1921, there would be an estimated 325,000 Maritimers living elsewhere. But the outward tide of migration had set in earliest on Prince Edward Island and it flowed

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23 Thanks to Carter Jeffrey, some of whose family once lived there, for telling me about the “lost” community of Lauretta.
perhaps most strongly here. The mechanics of the exodus varied from place to place, family to family, time to time. Still, a few generalizations can be risked. Where the Island’s early settlers had arrived by the shipload across a waste of ocean with little hope of return, their descendants tended to leave by degrees. In the Maritimes generally, and to a certain extent on Prince Edward Island, a move out of the province was often preceded by a drift from farm to city. While the Island countryside was losing population during the early decades of the century, Charlottetown and Summerside actually grew.

Emigration off-Island frequently began with seasonal migrations in search of work. Of these tentative expeditions, two kinds stand out: the harvest excursions and working in the woods. Beginning in the 1880s, a pulp-and-paper boom created steady employment each winter in the lumberwoods of New Brunswick and Maine for hundreds of Islanders. Among them was songmaker Larry Gorman of Trout River, whose penchant for biting satire is said to have gotten him run out of Prince Edward Island, but whose songs would be sung all through the lumber country of Eastern North America:

Now the boys on the Island on the farms are not happy,
They say, “Let us go; we are doing no good!”
Their minds are uneasy, continually crazy,
For to get o’er to Bangor and work in the woods. 24

It was brutally hard work: cutting down trees, twitching logs, piling them into the yards, driving them downriver in the spring. But it was work.

There was a whole history in the Islanders’ experiences in the lumberwoods. To the locals in Bangor, one newspaper account claimed in 1912, the hard-drinking Islanders seemed to be all Scots (not true), all rowdy (doubtful), and all named either “Angus” or “Rory”: “It is related, and not as a joke, that a woods boss once went into a crowded camp and called out, ‘Is there a mechanic in

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this crowd?’ and the answer came immediately: ‘No, but there’s six McLeods!’”

The “harvest excursions” were the brainchild of Canada’s national railways, which saw the potential profits in linking Maritimers in search of work with Prairie wheat farmers in dire need of workers. “The excursioners,” writes one historian, “were mostly male, mostly single, mostly young, mostly of rural stock, and all free of pressing responsibilities for the next few months.” Each August during the decades of the great wheat boom, hundreds of Islanders boarded special trains offering fixed excursion rates for the two-thousand-mile journey from the shores of the Atlantic to the seas of Western wheat. Between 1899 and 1929, somewhere between 18,000 and 20,000 Islanders made the trek:

Molly dear, I greatly fear from you I’ll soon be gone,  
I’m going away on the harvest train to the far Saskatchewan  
To reap the grain on the western plain where the buffalo used to roam,  
And leave you here, my Molly dear, in our little Island home.

From Prince Edward Island and other places across the region, branch lines fed the herds of excursionists into central depots such as Saint John, New Brunswick, where the huge harvest trains boarded. There, as John J. Somers of St. Georges remembered years later, “The boys stocked up on liquor, and it was a wild and wooly trip after that.” In fact, the train ride West was often more eventful than the sojourn there. From Winnipeg, the workers fanned out across the Prairies in search of a place on one of the harvest crews. By late fall, most of them were back home. Always, though, a few stayed on.


That was the way of it. At some point, the pendulum of back and forth stopped. Either the Islander settled at home or made a permanent move elsewhere. Many others had no need to practise leaving. They simply pulled up stakes and headed out where Opportunity beckoned. Opportunity was somewhat peripatetic, and, by the First World War, expatriate Islanders could be found in every corner of North America. The Prairie Provinces were the most popular destination after 1900, and in this Islanders were no different from the millions of European emigrants that were pouring into the Canadian West during the same period. The pull of New England remained strong as well. Compared to the rest of the Maritimes, a disproportionate number of Islanders settled in “the Boston States,” as the region was popularly known. It was nearby; its economy was booming; it was culturally familiar; and it had cheap sea and rail links, as well as a long history of traffic, with the Island.

The experience of the Creed family of Albion, near Montague, encompasses much of the outmigration phenomenon. Kate, the eldest girl, was living in Brooklyn, New York, when her widowed mother sent her the news from home in January 1904. “William Poole has gone out of business. He will go West. . . . Maria gets as much work as she can do. . . . She wants to get to Boston again.” Instead of Boston, Maria moved to Charlottetown, where she found work as a seamstress. By 1907, she was in Saskatoon, working as a domestic, but feeling a new sense of freedom. “I like it out her[e],” she wrote Kate, “but I cannot tell why. I think one reason was I was so glad to get away from around home. If the rest of the family was out her[e] I would not want to go back at al[l].”

Like many other expatriates, Kate seems to have sent money regularly home — the family was in debt to local merchants — where her brother Dick chafed restlessly at the boundaries of his life. In 1906, he talked of going West on the harvest excursion and taking a homestead there. But at the end of 1909, he was still on the Island. “I was expecting to go away but I could not get a job this side of Alberta. And I did not like the idea of that. Every job has been taken before I got my application inn. Their seems to be a lot of people looking for work.”

29 The letters quoted in the following passage are all addressed to Kate Creed, PARO 3098/25.
Everyone seemed to be either moving or thinking of it. “Jim Youngs leave tomorrow for Brewer, Maine,” Dick reported to Kate in October 1912. “They did not sell the place but some of their things . . . They intend staying away 2 or 3 years. Jim came home with the intention of selling the place and everything but Viney has persuaded him not to sell off.” In the end, Dick enrolled at Macdonald College in Quebec to study agriculture. Soon he was back in Albion to try his hand as a scientific farmer. By 1919, after sojourns in New England and the Prairies, Kate herself had moved back to Prince Edward Island.

By 1907, there were enough Maritimers abroad to warrant a monthly magazine that catered expressly to them. It was The Maple Leaf, published in Oakland, California, by Michael A. McInnis, a forty-three-year-old expatriate printer from Summerside. In its pages, Maritimers could read the news from back home and find out what other expatriates were doing. By 1920, the magazine had subscribers in every state of the Union and every province of Canada. The Maple Leaf became McInnis’ lifework, and it ceased publication only on his death in 1947.30

The popularity of The Maple Leaf reflected the divided loyalties of many expatriates. For a generation or two, they continued to be “virtual Islanders,” emotionally tied to their former homes by strands of affection thickened by nostalgia into longing:

*To old Prince Edward’s sand-stone shore,*  
*To old Prince Edward’s hills of green,*  
*My memory turns with fond regrets*  
*Though years and oceans roll between.*31

“My parents came from Downhome,” recalled the son of Islanders who had emigrated to New England. “It was a place far away. I would never get there. It was a place like heaven or the garden

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behind the moon.”

Of course, many expatriates did get there, every summer in some cases. Their annual arrival caused great excitement in Island families. “As for the children,” Anne Creed wrote her sister-in-law, Kate, in August 1907, “they are playing ‘Aunt Kate coming home’ almost everyday.” In 1904, Summerside turned the phenomenon into a tourist promotion, staging an “Old Home Week.” It was successful enough for Charlottetown to imitate the idea the following year. The event eventually grew into a tradition that highlighted the importance of expatriates — and their money — to the provincial economy. There was affection, but also an occasional undertone of envy, in the homecomers’ reception. In 1902, the Daily Examiner scolded, “While a great many people who leave this Island come back with their heads on right side up, quite a few come back seemingly with their brains topsy-turvy to everything but bright coloured dresses and slang grammar.”

This constant traffic back and forth between “Home” and “Away” provides a needful corrective to the popular image of Prince Edward Island as an isolated society heedless of the world across the Strait. Clearly, the local dominated, but there was also in every community a stream of news, fashions, attitudes, and ideas from urban North America — filtered through the perceptions of those Islanders who, for a time at least, straddled both worlds. Because of their influence, “away” might be foreign, but it was not entirely strange.

Regardless of whether outmigration was cause or consequence of economic decline, the impact on Islanders, both materially and psychologically, was devastating. It could not be shrugged off or argued

32Joe McKenna, The Sign of the Stag, quoted in Edward D. Ives, Drive Dull Care Away: Folksongs from Prince Edward Island (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1999).

33Anne Creed to Kate Creed, 11 August 1907, PARO 3098/16.


35As one example, of the twenty-seven elders interviewed for the community history Belfast People, the standard-bearers of local tradition, eighteen had spent an appreciable time working off-Island and/or had served in the Great War.
away. The numbers alone were damaging enough, but popular tradition has always maintained that youth, brains, and enterprise — in other words, potential — dominated the outmigration from the Maritimes. The full implications can only be guessed at. It has been argued, for example, that outmigration contributed to the conservatism of Island society and the preservation of its traditional culture, for the loss of the young left the older tradition-bearers to give local community its standards and its texture.\textsuperscript{36}

It is dangerous to try to characterize a whole society, but, more than any other factor during the era, the remorseless attrition of its population shook Islanders’ self-confidence. There was an underlying desperation in the constant blazoning in the press of the exploits of expatriate Islanders, as if their success was proof that the Island’s fading prospects were not the fault of its people. Given a chance, the subtext of the stories implied, Islanders inevitably rose to prominence: in other places they became bankers and businessmen, politicians, police chiefs, clerics, academics, writers.\textsuperscript{37}

The most famous expatriate of all was destined to be Maud Montgomery. In April 1908, after four publishers had already rejected it, L. C. Page Co. of Boston published her first novel, \textit{Anne of Green Gables}. It was an instant bestseller. By 1911, she was “L. M. Montgomery,” famous author, with three books already under her belt. That summer, she became Mrs. Ewan Macdonald, “the minister’s wife,” and when her husband accepted a call to Leaskdale, Ontario, she left Prince Edward Island for good, returning only for vacations. But, like the host of ordinary expatriates, she took the Island with her. Over the course of her career, Montgomery would write twenty-two novels, all but one of them set in an idealized version of her native province.

The leakage of the region’s population presented a compelling contrast to the situation in the rest of the Dominion. In fact, people were leaving the land in every long-settled part of Canada. Farms were consolidating and marginal land was being abandoned. But urban growth and immigration obscured

\textsuperscript{36}Folklorist John Cousins makes this argument in his “Horses in the Folklife of Western Prince Edward Island: Custom, Belief and Oral Tradition” (M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John’s, Newfoundland, 1990), p. 64.

\textsuperscript{37}See, for example, a modern compilation by J. Wilmer Blanchard, \textit{Islanders Away} (Charlottetown: J. W. Blanchard, 1992).
that trend in places such as Quebec and Ontario. Maritimers saw only other places’ spectacular growth, and it confirmed for them that something was palpably wrong with the way the country was being run. To their credit, they did not simply stand back and wring their hands; they pressed Ottawa to do something about it.

The immigration apparatus created for the Dominion by its Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, in the early years of the century resembled a huge funnel, with its mouth placed against Europe and its spout emptying into the Canadian West. A great river of humanity flowed into Canada through it in the years before the Great War. Scarcely a drop reached the Maritimes. Shipping lanes, rail connections, promotional literature: all were designed with the Canadian West in mind. Beginning in 1903, Premier Peters and the Island’s MPs pressed federal authorities to divert at least a dribble of that immigration to Prince Edward Island. It was a cheap concession in 1906 for Ottawa to appoint emigration agents overseas for each Maritime Province.

Prince Edward Island was stubborn about the sort of immigrant it wished to attract. It also betrayed its latent prejudices. Not for the Island the “huddled masses” of Europe’s “teeming shore.” It wanted United Kingdom farmers with capital. To get them, Ottawa hired Anthony McLaughlin, ex-MLA for 2nd King’s and former member of Farquharson’s provincial cabinet. Armed with a registry of Island farms for sale, he haunted the emigration offices of Great Britain and Ireland, competing for potential immigrants. By 1908, he had recruited a grand total of two. One stayed less than a year; the other failed to turn up at all.

When the Island’s Premier criticized his lack of success, McLaughlan bristled about a province that was too cheap even to supply him with a map — which, in fact, was not spending a cent of its own money on recruiting immigrants; a place whose newspapers preached only disaster, and

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38To be fair, Prince Edward Island needed immigrants that could pay their own way, since the government couldn’t afford to. In 1906, the Executive Council did subsidize the Salvation Army’s recruitment of sixty-one “labor immigrants” from England. Six months later, only 40% of them had remained in the province, and Cabinet refused to support the program’s continuance — or pay the expense incurred by the Salvation Army’s representative. (See Executive Council Minutes, 1 February 1906 and 27 June 1907.)

which offered prospective immigrants nothing except “old, cultivated farms,” a phrase that translated to Europeans as “old, worn out farms.” McLaughlan gave way to Rev. J. A. Winfield, formerly minister at St. Mark’s Anglican Church in Kensington. Winfield’s collar evidently proved more persuasive than McLaughlan’s blandishments. In the spring of 1910, he shepherded a group of fifty English emigrants, “a superior class of men and women,” to Prince Edward Island, the first significant body of settlers to reach the Island in fifty-two years. Their arrival aboard the SS *Northumberland* on 13 May was a great curiosity and a crowd of people lined the Navigation Wharf in Charlottetown to get a glimpse of the newcomers as they disembarked. The next day some of them were officially welcomed by the Premier and Lieutenant-Governor at Province House.42

In interviews with the press, Reverend Winfield talked confidently of more emigrants still to come, but they did not materialize. Indeed, it is difficult to say how many even of the new arrivals stayed in the province.43 The truth be said, P. T. Barnum himself could not have competed with the powerful attraction — 160 acres of free land for homesteaders — and massive promotion of the Canadian West. Nor could the dribble of immigrants to the Island counter the rising tide of outmigration. With the arrival of Winfield’s group, the tally for the decade stood at immigrants, 50; net migration, minus17,000.

The most tangible repercussion of Canada’s growth measured against Prince Edward Island’s decline was a loss of representation in the federal House of Commons. At the very outset, Confederation had compromised the principle of “representation by population” by allowing Prince Edward Island’s demand for six members in the elected house, just as it had given Manitoba four seats on entry instead of the one that its population warranted, and as it had guaranteed Quebec a minimum of sixty-five.

42 For more detail, see “Against the Grain: A Passenger List from 1910,” *The Island Magazine* 46(Fall/Winter 1999): 13-16.

43 Although one of them, the scholarly Blythe Hurst, would become a well known newspaper columnist and the province’s leading naturalist.
As with the other provinces, the number of seats was to be adjusted after each census. In 1892, even though the 1891 census showed the Island population had reached an all-time high, the number of seats was cut to five. In a tactical error, the Island government grumbled, but did not formally protest. After the 1901 census, the Island’s representation was cut again, to four members. This time the alarm bells sounded. Over the next six years, the representation question became a cause celebre.

Six seats. Four seats. What was the difference in a parliament of over two hundred members? First of all, the loss of seats had practical implications. The Island had always tried to make up in influence what it lacked in numbers. Sir Louis Davies, who joined Laurier’s “ministry of all talents” in 1896, was not just a Liberal cabinet member, he was the Island’s cabinet member, and local politicians argued that a cabinet seat was the province’s right. There was considerable chagrin when Donald Farquharson, like Davies a former premier, was not offered a portfolio. In response, Prime Minister Laurier claimed that he chose his ministers on the basis of proven ability, not geography. But Islanders knew how specious such arguments were, and that Laurier, the master of compromise, needed room at the cabinet table to placate Western Canada. “I know perfectly well that the West claims a port-folio,” Premier Peters groused to Sir Wilfrid, “but still I do not see why this Province should be ignored for the sake of the West.”

The province would have to get used to it. Decades would pass before another Islander occupied any meaningful federal cabinet position. Young, brash, and self-absorbed, the West only deepened the Island’s resentment by a shocking want of sympathy for the smallest province’s professed rights.

The loss of seats in the House of Commons simply compounded the power shortage. The fewer its seats, the less claim Prince Edward Island had to a place in cabinet. The fewer its MPs, the less ability to influence policy or protect the Island’s interests. How would the province get “its share”? Redistricting also had a profound symbolic dimension. The inexorable workings of “representation by population” — and Ottawa’s new-found devotion to the principle — threatened to strip away what little dignity the Island retained in Parliament. Given present trends, it was entirely

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conceivable that Prince Edward Island, a full-fledged province of Canada and supposedly an equal partner in Confederation, might end up with one — or even fewer — representatives in Ottawa. Islanders were deeply insulted. Here was something worth fighting over.45

The Island government’s position was that, as Premier Peters put it, the Island had entered Confederation “on the implied contract” of a minimum of six seats.46 The Prime Minister’s response was that redistribution was a legal and constitutional issue, not a political one.47 When the other Maritime Provinces began losing seats to redistribution after 1901, Prince Edward Island gained allies in its battle. Working together, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island fought redistribution all the way to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London — and lost. But the province was damned if it would give up, and the representation issue joined the growing agenda of unfinished business with Ottawa. The list was circular. The Dominion’s neglect of the Island’s transportation needs hurt the Island economy, making larger federal subsidies necessary, driving Islanders out of the province in search of work. The decline in population cost the province seats in Parliament, which hamstrung its ability to convince Ottawa of the need to revise the very policies that were hurting the Island. Meanwhile, Canada grew, and Prince Edward Island shrank. The numbers from the 1911 census dictated that the Island should have only three seats in the House of Commons.

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Given the festering sense of grievance against Ottawa among Islanders, the provincial Liberals’ alliance with their federal counterparts had become almost a liability by election time in 1908. That circumstance gave an ironic twist to the Dominion party’s campaign slogan, “Let Laurier finish his


46Peters to Farquharson, 10 March 1902, Peters Papers, PARO RG.25.20.

work.” Just the same, the Liberals took three out of four seats on Prince Edward Island, reversing the results of 1904. As usual, the local election followed hard on the heels of the Dominion contest. Two Liberal members were elected by acclamation, and as the Canadian Annual Review observed, “it was not thought the Government would have a very close run.”

But the Government no longer ran well. In January 1908, the nimble Peters had succumbed to kidney disease, his lifework unfinished and the judgeship he had coveted as its reward still unwon. Two days later, the Liberal caucus turned the premiership over to Francis L. Haszard, another Charlottetown lawyer from another patrician Island family. Already fifty-nine years old, Haszard was a long-time Liberal though a freshman member, elected for the first time in 1904. He was a new face, but his Government was old and no longer sure of its balance. The Liberals came within a whisker of defeat. “As usual,” one wit quipped, “the majority won out.”

When all the recounts and protests were done with, Haszard’s initial four-seat margin had shrivelled to two — to one once he had appointed a speaker. The Liberals’ precarious majority manufactured some bellicose rhetoric. With another census looming ominously, Haszard vowed in 1910 to fight the representation issue to the point of “rebellion.” In the legislature that spring, the Government passed a resolution calling for the amendment to the BNA Act that would fix the minimum representation for each province in the House of Commons at the number of seats it had been awarded on entry into Confederation. That December, he floated the idea at an interprovincial conference. It sank.

By that time, the Liberal government itself had grown unseaworthy. Worn out by two decades in power, it slowly capsized during 1911. The captain was not around to go down with his ship of state. Frank Haszard had navigated his narrow majority with some skill since 1908, but his sights had long been set on a sinecure of some sort. In May 1911, he got it, snatching an eleventh-hour judicial

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48 “Bimmelbeck” (Watson F. Clark) to The Maple Leaf 2(December 1908)12: 6.

49 As quoted in the Canadian Annual Review, 1910, p. 474.

50 Donald Farquharson had noted Haszard’s interest in Davies’ vacant Commons seat in 1901; in 1902, he was campaigning for a senatorship. (Peters to Sir Wilfrid Laurier (private), 27 January 1902, Arthur Peters Papers, PARO RG 25.20.
Wayne MacKinnon recounts the story of Haszard’s appointment with great panache in *The Life of the Party*, p. zx. The official papers had already been filled out with Palmer’s name, but the Prime Minister had not yet sent them to the Governor-General. They were retrieved and Haszard’s name substituted instead.

Appointment from fellow Liberal H. James Palmer.\(^{31}\) Palmer, whose father had been premier and grandfather its colonial equivalent, astounded just about everyone by taking over the premiership. He was just in time to preside over the wreck of his party. It was more than an omen when the federal Liberals were upset by the Tories in the “Reciprocity Election” that September. Shortly afterward, a pair of by-election losses left Palmer without a seat and his party without its majority. The Premier resigned the government on 22 December without asking for a dissolution, and did not contest the election that J. A. Mathieson’s new Tory ministry immediately called.

In the middle of the brief campaign, Prime Minister Robert L. Borden publicly pledged his government to build a state-of-the-art, icebreaking (rail)car ferry, complete with permanent docking facilities on each side of the Northumberland Strait. The Liberal coffin clicked shut. “Both the Grits and Tories got the surprise of their lives,” one commentator reflected in the aftermath of the election. He meant that both parties were astonished at the size of the Conservative victory: twenty-eight seats to two.

Having silenced talk of a tunnel for a generation (two, actually), the federal Tories then did the same for the subsidy issue. With scarcely any prompting, Borden’s free-spending government boosted the Island’s annual subsidy by another $100,000. The federal rationale for the $100,000 increase was precisely the Island’s poverty, motivated by sympathy for the “Little Sister of Confederation,” which had failed to prosper in the Union. Islanders’ pride suffered, but they took the money. Over the next two years, Mathieson’s Government posted hefty budget surpluses.

To shower the province with subsidies and car ferries required only federal dollars and the desire to spend them. The representation problem was infinitely harder to resolve since it involved the self-interest of the other provinces. In October 1913, the Maritime Provinces made common cause at an interprovincial conference on the issue, advancing once again the idea of a number-of-seats-at-Confederation minimum. But the other provinces gave their motion little support. When Nova Scotia

\(^{31}\)Wayne MacKinnon recounts the story of Haszard’s appointment with great panache in *The Life of the Party*, p. zx. The official papers had already been filled out with Palmer’s name, but the Prime Minister had not yet sent them to the Governor-General. They were retrieved and Haszard’s name substituted instead.
and New Brunswick subsequently acquiesced in their loss of seats, the ground was cut out from underneath Prince Edward Island’s position. For a while the Island brazened it out. “I may say here,” Mathieson assured the Legislature in 1914 after yet another pilgrimage to Ottawa, “that our case was always six and nothing but six; and any press reports that you may have that we were making claim or giving consideration to anything less are absolutely wrong.” Shortly afterward, he settled for a guarantee of the four seats the Island already had. Gropping for some principle to clothe what was essentially a political compromise, Sir Robert Borden came up with the “Senate floor” resolution, which stipulated that no province should have fewer members in the House of Commons than it had in the Senate.\textsuperscript{52} The British North America Act was duly amended the next year.

By the time Mathieson came down from his high horse of six members, most Islanders had conceded defeat on the question. Their bountiful political energies had already turned to another quarrel, this time among themselves.

“Do you know I was nearly run over by an \textit{automobile} last night!” Maud Montgomery wrote her friend Ephraim Weber in September 1906. “Automobiles in Cavendish! There is no such thing as solitude left on earth!”\textsuperscript{53} Automobiles! Islanders’ attitudes toward the defining innovation of modern Western culture would make them history’s laughingstock. Gazing back through the rear window of the century, it is difficult to appreciate how logical and principled their stand against the motorcar really was.

By 1905, there were five modern — that is, gasoline-powered — automobiles owned in the

\textsuperscript{52}Mathieson initially rejected this suggestion, communicated by secret telegram by Island MPs on 20 April 1914, attributing it to a Nova Scotian delegate name MacGregor at the 1913 conference. (See Executive Council Minutes, 21 and 22 April 1914.)

province. They were poky and slow. They were prone to flat tires and mechanical breakdowns. They were unaffordable for any but the well-to-do. Given the state of Island roads they could only run in summer. They were, in a word, impractical. They were also preternaturally loud, and they scared the dickens out of Island horses.

It was not just loud noise on narrow roads that so terrified Island horses. Automobiles seemed . . . unnatural, like trains without rails, or, yes, carriages without horses. Making an admirable attempt to put himself in the horse’s shoes (so to speak), future premier W. M. Lea compared the sight of a motorcar to a man seeing “an empty pair of pants running along the road.” Whatever the reason, the effect on horses could be catastrophic. One example of dozens was given by Willie Macdonald of West Point: “My brother was on a dry [drag] sleigh going home. A car came by and his horses got scared and ran away on him. One ran right into the back of the car. She was a big horse. You know, she got up and took the harness right off the other horse, passed over the car, and took off down to West Point wharf. . . . She never was anymore good after that.”

There was the rub. In 1911, Islanders arguably owned more horses, one for every three people, than any other jurisdiction in North America. Overwhelmingly rural, Prince Edward Island was a horse-drawn society at almost every level, courtship included. As the saying went, “You need a good horse to catch a good girl.” At least one scholar traces the fierceness of Islanders’ anti-car stance to their jealous regard for their horses.

The mechanical dragon brought out the chivalry (or chauvinism) in Island farmers, who complained that car-spooked carriage horses put women and children at risk. As rumour multiplied such incidents, a growing public outcry drowned out the clatter of car engines. Premier Arthur Peters

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56The quote and the theory can be found in John Cousins, “Horses in the Folklife of Western Prince Edward Island: Custom, Belief and Oral Tradition” (M.A. Thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John’s, Newfoundland, 1990), p. 124.
had been inclined to regulate the use of automobiles “as is done elsewhere.”⁵⁷ His successor, Frank Haszard was, in the words of a pro-auto contemporary, “in deathly fear of motor cars.”⁵⁸ In March of 1908 (the year that Henry Ford introduced his Model T and revolutionized car-making), Haszard introduced a bill to ban the automobile outright from Island roads. The motorcar had a small, if influential, cadre of supporters, but they were crushed under the weight of public opinion. The bill passed without a hitch, and the Island’s cars — all seven of them — were effectively grounded.

On the evening that the Legislature was prorogued, having announced his intention in a front-page newspaper ad, businessman W. K. Rogers defiantly drove his automobile out the St. Peter’s Road and then around Charlottetown. He was determined to get arrested, so that the pro-automobile forces could test the new legislation in court, but despite his best efforts, he evaded apprehension. In the end, his supporters had to coax someone to lay a complaint. Rogers was fined $500 or six months in jail.⁵⁹

Rogers’ conviction was the first blow in a decade-long battle to re-open Island roads to the automobile. This clash between “benzene and bridle” began, according to one scholar, as a struggle between opposing classes, pitting urban, upper-middle-class professionals or merchants, for whom the car was both a hobby and symbol of their progressive attitudes, against rural Islanders who saw the automobile as a frivolous and expensive luxury. “They fill no public need,” Liberal D. P. Irving had preached in seconding the anti-auto resolution. “There will be no hardships inflicted by suppressing them. They are owned by men of wealth and leisure who force the public off the roads. . . These machines are a menace to life and property. We have a right to our roads.”⁶⁰

Some scholars have cast Islanders’ resistance to the automobile as a struggle between

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⁵⁷Peters to Dr. Gordon T. Alley, 5 March 1907, Arthur Peters Papers, PARO RG.25.20. Alley, the lecturer on “P. E. Island One Hundred Years Ago” back in Chapter One, was one of the province’s handful of well heeled car owners.

⁵⁸As remembered in print by A. E. Arsenault (A. E. Arsenault Fonds, PARO 4135/14).

⁵⁹The account is from Rogers’ own reminiscence in “Good Roads Rogers,” Charlottetown Guardian, 9 May 1934.

⁶⁰The quote and analysis are from Mullally, “Fad of Millionaires and Fools.”
traditional culture and modernity. Yet during the same period that anti-automobile agitation peaked, the Island’s lobster fleet was busy mechanizing. Within five years, between 1910 and 1915, the number of gasoline-powered boats soared from less than a tenth of the total to more than half, and Bruce Stewart & Co. of Charlottetown became one of the Maritimes’ leading manufacturers of marine engines.\(^{61}\) In Islanders’ opinions, gasoline engines were obviously superior to oars and sails. They were not yet convinced they were better than horses.

W. K. Rogers had his day in court, where both his conviction and the government’s legislation were upheld. His real object had been to keep the issue before the public, and in this he succeeded, partly because the press was generally sympathetic to his cause. As automobiles proliferated across North America, a feeling that Islanders were rejecting the future rather than a passing fad began slowly to take root. The turning point came in 1913. Under pressure from lobbyists who claimed the auto ban was costing the province $90,000 annually in lost revenue from motoring tourists, Premier Mathieson introduced a new Automobile Act. In 1908 he had supported the total ban on automobiles. Now he proposed allowing cars to operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This left Tuesdays and Thursdays (market days), Saturdays (shopping day), and Sundays (church-going) free from autos. Mathieson’s decision raised a storm of protest, and split the Conservative caucus. One of his cabinet ministers, Murdoch Kennedy, resigned in protest; and the talented John A. Dewar, already miffed at being left out of Mathieson’s cabinet, became the automobile’s most vociferous opponent.\(^{62}\) Mathieson backed water, promising to test public opinion before the bill was proclaimed. No community would have cars, he said, if it did not want them. The Premier’s pledge notwithstanding, five Conservatives voted against their government’s bill.

The government measured the public mood in a plebiscite held at the district school meetings in the summer of 1913. At a meeting in Bedeque, Horace Wright, farmer and president of the local Anti-Automobile Association, thundered, “We’re going to keep them cars out if we have to take a

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\(^{61}\)Not surprisingly, Bruce Stewart was one of the province’s chief automobile enthusiasts.

\(^{62}\)Dewar’s obstinate opposition is detailed in Dewar, “John A. Dewar, Principled Maverick.”
pitchfork and drive it through them!” Although the government suppressed the official results, it was clear that rural communities had overwhelmingly rejected the motorcar. Some estimates put the “no” vote at 90%. On the other hand, urban Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown and Summerside, opened its streets to the motorcar. According to an angry letter in the Summerside Journal, the first “victim” of the new Automobile Act was a dog, run over and killed on the Brighton Road in Charlottetown.64

While automobile enthusiasts carried on a strenuous public relations campaign, the Government fell back on another stratagem: it would open any stretch of road to car traffic by Order-in-Council upon receiving a petition signed by 75% of the voters in the school district through which it passed. One of the first roads to open was a major route leading to the tourist resorts along the North Shore.65 Year by year, thereafter, rural Prince Edward Island relented. The restrictions gradually eased, until in August 1919, the government of the day would quietly sweep the remnants away.66

What had happened? Contrary to later opinions, progress had not vanquished superstition. Nor had the hardy independence of farmers been seduced by glib ad-men. The automobile had simply proven itself. By 1919, it was no longer a rich man’s unreliable toy, but a useful, affordable acquisition: mass production had lowered the price of cars even as a boom in farm prices put money into farmers’ hands.67 The car had not won. Islanders had just changed their minds.

But not all at once. Heber Myers of Seven Mile Bay remembered introducing his father to the motorcar:

I told him, “Get in this car and drive it.”
“No, I won’t.”
I said again, “Get in this car and drive it.”

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62 Quoted in Stewart, “The Island Meets the Auto,” p. 11.
64 Quoted in Mullally, “Fad of Millionaires and Fools.”
65 See Executive Council Minutes, 22 July 1913.
66 See Executive Council Minutes, 28 August 1919.
67 A point argued in Mullally, “Fad of Millionaires and Fools.”
He got in and sat down and said, “Giddyap.”

In mid-August 1917, Ned Wyatt, a Conservative member from Summerside, reported to his daughter, “The roads are being opened one at a time and it will only be a short while before they are all opened. There are a great number of cars from the main land coming across and when the car ferry is running (which will be next fall) there will be more and our feeling of isolation will be obliterated.” Wyatt’s prediction would prove true in more ways than he imagined. But until there was a dramatic improvement in Island roads, the transportation revolution that it represented would remain incomplete.

“At one time,” wrote Walter Shaw in his memoirs, “there was a great movement to organize Temperance Societies.” In West River, a local merchant named Hugh MacMillan headed the campaign. In his store one evening he approached a neighbour about joining. “‘And what is it for?’ said Jack. ‘Well, to put down the demon rum,’ said Hugh. ‘Well now,’ said Jack, ‘I’m the best temperance worker in this part of the country, for I’ve put down more rum than the whole membership of your group combined.’” To judge from that story it would be hard to guess that Prince Edward Island lived under Prohibition for the first half of the 20th century.

Alcohol had been the great lubricant of colonial Island society, but its abuse was also the author of much evil. Reformers linked drunkenness to poverty, immorality, domestic violence, broken homes, accident and injury, crime. There was a sliding scale of anti-liquor sentiment. “Temperance” urged moderation in the use of alcohol. “Total abstinence” abjured the use of intoxicants, but it was

voluntary and not necessarily permanent. “Prohibition” would make the sale of alcohol illegal. During the 19th century, the anti-liquor crusade in North America had grown more militant, progressing from temperance through total abstinence to prohibition. It shed supporters in the process — for example, while Roman Catholics and Anglicans promoted temperance, they generally balked at prohibition — but it steadily grew in strength. In one jaw-breaking phrase, the historian of Maritime prohibition describes it as “primarily a mass movement, middle-class led, male dominated, [which] drew the bulk of its support from males and females of white, English-speaking Anglo-Saxon, non-conformist Protestant, rural and small town stock who acted on religious, economic, political, and social convictions.”

On Prince Edward Island this translated as Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians who by 1900 had imbibed the Social Gospel movement’s shift in emphasis from individual sin and salvation to the necessity of reforming the society where sin flourished. To them, liquor was the devil’s sweat, and much of the reformist energy on Prince Edward Island was poured into the battle against it.

There were a welter of temperance societies in the province, both secular and religious, Catholic and Protestant, most of them offshoots of national or international organizations. History has winnowed them, so that in popular memory two major ones stand out. The venerable Sons of Temperance was among the pioneers of prohibition. Founded in New York, it had spread to Prince Edward Island in 1848. By 1900, it was the senior temperance society, with forty-nine branches across the province. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union opened its first Island branch in Charlottetown on 14 January 1890. What it lacked in numbers — it had ten local branches in 1895 — the WCTU made up in stridency (“Wagging and Critical Tongues United,” male mockers called

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72Davis, “I’ll Drink to That,” p. 55.
it). Its symbol was a white ribbon; its motto: “Organize, Educate, Agitate.” As its name suggests, the WCTU was one temperance society where women were able to penetrate the leadership. After the Prince Edward Island Temperance Alliance was formed around the turn of the century, it tended to draw membership away from the older organizations and became the major voice for the anti-liquor lobby in the province.

In 1878 the federal government passed the Canada Temperance Act, the Scott Act, as it was generally called. It provided “local option” for counties and municipalities across the country. Upon petition and after a plebiscite, individual jurisdictions could prohibit the sale of alcohol. Before the year was out, Prince County had gone “dry.” Within two years, Queen’s and King’s County had followed suit. As in the rest of the Maritimes, urban areas were strongholds of anti-prohibition sentiment. While an exact measure of Summerside’s resistance was concealed within the general Prince County vote, the Scott Act was contested five times in Charlottetown before the turn of the century. There the climate of opinion more closely resembled Island weather: changeable. The provincial capital was “dry” from 1879–91; “wet,” 1891-94; “dry,” 1894–97; “wet” again, 1897–1900. In 1898, according to Premier Donald Farquharson, there were 142 legal drinking establishments in the provincial capital, one for every 77 citizens.

For temperance advocates, the Scott Act was only a partway measure, and liquor poured through its many loopholes. They pressed for more prohibitive federal legislation. The Island government was even persuaded to hold a provincial plebiscite in 1893 to demonstrate the depth of anti-liquor sentiment. In 1898, Islanders voted again when the Laurier government called a national referendum on prohibition. Both votes resulted in huge pro-prohibition majorities. At the same time, they revealed a hidden ambivalence among many Islanders. By Island standards the turnouts for the plebiscites were remarkably low. The silent majority of Island electors simply stayed home. They were not willing to say so in public, it seems, but they did not see anything wrong in having a drink.

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73Veer, “Feminist Forebears,” p. 16.

74Farquharson to David Arbing, Freetown, 1 August 1899, Farquharson Papers, PARO RG.25.19.
Rather than antagonize Quebec, the only province to vote against prohibition in the 1898 plebiscite, the federal government retreated to the trusty Scott Act. Frustrated by its many shortcomings, local prohibitionists turned to the Island government in their crusade to dry out the province.

The Prohibition Act of 1900 was the greatest achievement of Donald Farquharson’s brief premiership. It was inspired by equal parts conviction and expediency. Farquharson’s first strategy was to tax the liquor sellers out of existence, but the temperance forces blasted his License Act of 1899 as nothing more than a cynical tax grab. Farquharson was hurt. “My reasons for advocating Temperance are perhaps greater and more personal than yours,” he wrote one of his critics, “and if I can do anything to drive this demon out, I will do it at all hazard.”

He was also desperate for support, his majority in the House razor-thin. At Farquharson’s invitation, temperance “friends” helped frame the Prohibition Act that he introduced in the Legislature in June 1900 on the eve of a provincial election. The Opposition lost several amendments to its wording before making its passage unanimous.

The Prohibition Act was the first of its kind in post-Confederation Canada, a similar act in Manitoba having been ruled unconstitutional. The Island legislation banned the retail or wholesale of all alcohol except for medicinal, mechanical, or sacramental uses. Authorized sales would be handled by a government “vendor”(a term that would still be in use in the 1960s, long after Prohibition had been repealed). One or more liquor inspectors, as needed, would enforce the law. To allow time to confirm its constitutionality, the Act would not come into force until June 1901, and it would operate only in those areas where the Scott Act was not already in effect (that is, Charlottetown). Beer could be sold so long as its alcohol content was no more than 2.75%. Rum, Islanders’ drink of choice, and other hard liquors were entirely beyond the pale. Punishment for the first offence was $100 or two months.

The Prohibition Act was generally regarded as being stricter than the Scott Act, and by 1906, all three counties had repealed the federal legislation so as to fall under the provincial one. Already

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Ibid. The genesis of the Prohibition Bill can be traced through Farquharson’s correspondence. The Liberal caucus initially opposed Farquharson’s plan to introduce a prohibition bill in a session where his majority was so small.
by then, the provincial government had discovered the difficulty in legislating morality. Island premiers were plagued by complaints about lax enforcement, and Island legislators spent considerable time over the years trying to plug leaks in the legislation. They never succeeded. Try as they might, prohibitionists could never convince many Islanders that drinking — as opposed to drunkenness — was a crime and that prohibition was not just a species of intolerance. The fact was, anyone on Prince Edward Island who wanted a drink could get one. Free-thinking business magnate R. T. Holman of Summerside might well have been right when he commented, “These acts will result in less drinking but more drunkards.”\(^{76}\) Holman was brave to voice his criticisms so openly. Public morality was on the side of prohibition. Woe betide the government that tampered with it.

The WCTU was among the temperance groups to congratulate Premier Farquharson on his temperance legislation in 1900. Its members had reason to congratulate themselves as well since they had fought as hard as anyone to exorcize the “demon rum” from Island life. In the process, they had become the thin edge of another wedge, women’s rights.

Women were the silent partners in the life of the Island. The convoluted rationalizations of Victorian thought had placed Woman high on a pedestal, conveniently far from the levers of social, political, or economic power. The widely accepted notion of “separate spheres” argued that in the manner of their making Nature had suited men and women for different but complementary roles. The sexes were not just physically different, but intellectually and temperamentally as well. Men were masterful; women were nurturers; Men went out into the world; women presided over the family in the refuge of the home. Men were active; women passive. Men relied on intellect; women on emotion. And so it went. Only in marriage did the separate spheres fuse, and not to women’s advantage. As historians have pointed out, English civil law considered husband and wife to be one

\(^{76}\)W. S. Louson, “In A Conversational Way,” *Prince Edward Island Magazine* 3(October 1901)8: 301.
person — and the husband was that person. As a result, women had few legal rights. Only in 1896 did Prince Edward Island give married women the right to acquire, hold, and dispose of property, to enter into contracts, and to sue and be sued. Divorce was social suicide almost everywhere, and on Prince Edward Island it was essentially unobtainable. Here the Executive Council, of all things, was authorized to constitute itself a Divorce Court. It was not disposed to do so. By 1900, there had not been an Island divorce for nearly half a century.\(^77\)

To its proponents, the doctrine of separate spheres was obvious from biology, established by history, and sanctioned by law. Anyone who challenged the rightness of this dispensation was undermining the natural order. Few Island women did. In 1898, Mrs. W. W. Rodd not only defined separate spheres, she made them rhyme. In a delicious irony, she called her poem “Women’s Rights.” It began:

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\begin{align*}
\text{The right to be a happy wife,} \\
\text{To live and pray and sing,} \\
\text{The right to nurse sweet little ones,} \\
\text{Whose arms around her cling.} \\
\text{The right to teach those loving ones} \\
\text{In virtue’s path to tread,} \\
\text{The right to cheer the suffering} \\
\text{And watch beside the bed.} \\
\text{The blessed right to serve and wait,} \\
\text{To minister to man.} \\
\text{The right to cheer up lonely hearts} \\
\text{As only women can. . . .} \quad 78
\end{align*}
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In the end, the concept of separate spheres was like the whalebone corsets still fashionable at the turn of the century: it gave structure to women’s lives, but it was terribly confining. What it failed to provide was the freedom to choose. Gazing through the prism of the present, the repression in women’s lives stands out in high relief, but at the time it was of a piece with the strict conformity

\(^77\)This remarkable system is analyzed in Wendy and J. M. Bumsted, [Acadiensis article]

that Island society expected of all its members.

There was a gap between theory and practice. The majority of Island women were more than mere ornaments in an Edwardian ideal of family life. Farm women, for instance, worked, and worked hard. Their labour contributed significantly to the economic welfare of the farm and gave them status. Seasonal migrations in search of work meant that many families lacked the “man of the house” for weeks or months at a time. In their husbands’ absence, Island wives customarily managed the household.

Island women were edging out into the work world, too, though their numbers remained modest. Barely a tenth of the 33,500 people in the Island work force of 1901 were women. As might be expected, their jobs were extensions of women’s traditional roles within the home. They became teachers. They worked at food preparation in lobster canneries. They trained as nurses. They entered the religious life. A few were becoming secretaries, where women’s presumed manual dexterity suited them for shorthand and typing. But more than anything else, they became domestics, performing for hire the tasks assigned to women in the home. Many of the Island’s outmigrants were young women in search of such jobs.

Even within these small fields of endeavour, women’s ambitions were hobbled. While it was accepted that women might work, they were not expected to have careers. Employment outside the home was for widows and single women only; upon marrying, females were expected to leave the work force. Women’s work was also less valued. Female teachers on Prince Edward Island were paid less than three-quarters of what their male counterparts received.\(^\text{79}\) The justification was that women’s maternal instincts gave them a natural aptitude for teaching young children. Since the ability was not scientific or acquired, women need not be rewarded so highly as men, who were favoured for the more intellectual challenge of instructing the higher grades. For those who scorned such theorizing, there was a much more practical consideration. Women could be paid less because they would work for less. It was not skill but affordability that made women teachers increasingly popular. In 1902, for the first time ever, they outnumbered men in Island schools.

\(^\text{79}\)The average in 1903 was 72%, but the discrepancy could be much higher. That year, the highest paid male teacher with a first class license was paid $680; the highest paid female at that level received $380 [check year and numbers on file].
Confining as it was, the theory of separate spheres did allow room for reformers. Women activists argued that the evils of modern society were invading their appointed domain. To protect the home, they must venture out into the public sphere. These “maternal feminists” denied that they were social revolutionaries. As one historian puts it, “they were merely mothering society.”

As with women’s jobs, the objects of the women reformers were extensions of their traditional concerns: poverty, disease, the evils of intemperance, protection of children, proper education, moral purity. In addition to church groups, there was for a time a local branch of the National Council of Women in the province and, of course, the WCTU. There was no mass movement. Like their counterparts elsewhere, Island women had multiple loyalties, of which gender was only one. The female reformers tended to be middle-class women, usually Protestants, who possessed leisure, education, social conscience, and moral certainty.

The most conspicuous disability under which Island women laboured was political. As the poetical Mrs. Rodd expressed it, women had “The right to shun the noise and din/ Of politics and strife.” Although Charlottetown and Summerside had granted women with property the right to vote in municipal elections in 1888 and 1892, respectively, the bulk of Island women were denied the franchise. During the 1890s, the WCTU backed three separate attempts to have the Island legislature grant women’s suffrage. The first came the closest. After half-hearted debate, a motion to extend the franchise to unmarried women and spinsters in 1893 was lost by a vote of 12 to 10. Similar petitions were presented but not pursued in 1894 and 1895. The Women’s Council had better success in persuading the government to allow women with school-aged children in Charlottetown and Summerside to serve on school boards. That right was granted in 1899. It would be 1917 before rural women received the same privilege. The time lag suggests a gap in sensibility between town and country, but it probably had more to do with the suffrage movement’s loss of momentum.

For many of its advocates, women’s suffrage was regarded as a lever to force through prohibition legislation. Paradoxically, the easy success of provincial prohibition in 1900 probably hurt
the suffrage movement on Prince Edward Island. Island suffragists seemed also to draw strength from their allies in the other Maritime Provinces, and opposition to suffrage there rose faster than the support for it. After humiliating setbacks in the Nova Scotia legislature in 1897 and New Brunswick in 1899, the movement in the region stalled. In 1897, the Island branch of the WCTU advised the Dominion association that, since petitions had failed, it would concentrate instead on educating public opinion about women’s suffrage. But education, too, gradually faded. By 1910, the local Women’s Council was, in The Guardian’s phrase, “inert,” while the WCTU was increasingly subsumed within the Provincial Temperance Alliance.

Progress was slow on the suffrage issue in part because women as well as men needed to be convinced. Like other women of her generation, L. M. Montgomery was torn between tradition, common sense, and her own refusal to have her opinions herded. In 1909, with suffrage agitation on the rise nationally, she wrote her friend Ephraim Weber:

As for the woman suffrage question, I feel very little interest in it. But I do believe that a woman with property of her own should have a voice in making the laws. Am I not as intelligent and capable of voting for my country’s good as the Frenchman who chops my wood for me, and who may be able to tell his right hand from his left hand, but cannot read or write? . . . . The majority of women are happiest in the home, just as the majority of men are in the world. But there are exceptions to both . . . . And each has a right to fulfill the purpose of their birth. Sex seems to me to enter very little into the question.

The climate of opinion in the province was better reflected in the formal organization in 1913 of the Women’s Institute. Founded in 1897 in Ontario, the WI had spread in 1911 to York, Prince Edward Island, where it was sponsored by the Excelsior Farmers’ Institute. In fact, when the

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81 The foregoing efforts at suffrage legislation are summarized in Veer, “Feminist Forebears,” pp. 206-222.

82 For the decline in WCTU activity, see Davis, “I’ll Drink to That”; for the Council of Women’s fate, see Guardian, 7 July 1910.

provincial Department of Agriculture began actively promoting the establishment of WI in rural communities in 1913, it was as a sort of female counterpart to Farmers’ Institutes. Within two years, there were thirty-one Women’s Institutes with seven hundred and fifty members in the province. The goals of the Women’s Institute did not threaten the social order and they fell solidly within the “woman’s sphere,” centring on the better education of women for motherhood and household management.

On Prince Edward Island, care for local schools rapidly became a major concern for most Women’s Institutes. The choice was entirely logical. By the early 1900s, the quality, cost, and efficacy of education had become a major preoccupation for Islanders.

Ever since the Free Education Act of 1852, the first of its kind in British North America, the Prince Edward Island government had shouldered virtually alone the burden of education in the province. Although it had been tinkered with from time to time, the educational system at the turn of the century remained essentially the one established fifty years earlier. That was both its glory and its great handicap.

The Act’s key principle was that students should not have to pay tuition to attend school. To ensure universal access for children and a minimum standard of education, the Province underwrote the major expenses, set the curriculum, inspected the schools, licensed the teachers, and established basic rates of pay. Individual school districts could tax themselves to supplement their statutory grants. In a significant expression of local democracy, each of the nearly five hundred schools was administered by three elected school trustees.

From the beginning, the Island government had found the burden of its educational system exhausting. It spent far more per capita on education than either Nova Scotia or New Brunswick, yet
its citizens paid far less. At the turn of the century, local supplements accounted for only 30% of education spending on Prince Edward Island. In a sense, the Free Education Act had worked too well. Why should communities tax themselves for their schools when they were already taxed by government for the same purpose?

Although the government devoted 40% of its annual budget to education, it was never enough. In his report for 1901, Alexander Anderson was shocked at the state of the Island’s one-room schoolhouses: “The classrooms are never ventilated but by opening the windows; they are generally cheerless, cold and uninteresting; frequently their walls and ceilings are begrimed with the smoke of many years; their floors are broken or worn into holes in many places and the furniture is as unsuited as possible to meet the necessities of the present day.” So much for the buildings.

“As the teacher is, such is the school,” Anderson lectured Government in 1906. That year, 109 of 570 teachers got no supplement at all from their school district. Island teachers were the worst paid in Canada. Some females made as little as $120 per annum, less than half what a farm labourer could earn. School districts got what they paid for. Teachers were often younger than their eldest pupils — and scarcely better educated. The average teaching career at the turn of the century was four years: “as soon as teachers can see their way clear to ‘law, medicine or husbands,’” they left the profession. Many others left the province. The scarcity of qualified teachers was a common complaint.

As for the students, government control may have placed education within reach of the masses, but their grasp on it was uncertain. Too many children did not attend school regularly — absenteeism touched 40% — and too many of them dropped out before finishing. Turn-of-the-century commentators thought they knew why. Children were being taught things that most of them did not need to know. The Commissioner of Agriculture was only blunter than most. In 1906 he wrote, “The

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84“Education in the Maritime Provinces, 1909,” Haszard Papers, PARO RG.25.21. According to this memorandum, the Island government paid more than twice as much per capita: $1.33 compared to Nova Scotia’s 67¢. But Islanders paid directly only 58¢ per capita, compared to New Brunswick’s $1.77.

85Quoted in Canadian Annual Review, 1906.

86Quoted in Canadian Annual Review, 1901.
dairy industry, the most important branch of agriculture in this Province, might flourish even if our boys should not be able to translate a line of Cicero or even conjugate a Latin verb, but it is doomed unless they are taught how to feed and care for the cows.”

In fact, critics argued, the schools’ emphasis on the traditional classical curriculum merely stoked the furnace of outmigration, since there were few job opportunities for Latin and Greek scholars in a province of farmers.

There was a growing consensus that something needed to be done about Island schools. Public debate revealed two strands to educational reform in the province: agricultural education and rural school consolidation. Both came together in the Macdonald Consolidated School.

Former premier A. B. Warburton was among the first to promote school consolidation in the province. In a series of provocative essays in the *Prince Edward Island Magazine* during 1900–01, he argued that by combining schools and resources, rural communities could improve the quality of education and save money at the same time. If milk could be hauled to dairy factories, he wrote, surely children could be carried to a central school. Arthur Peters’ government endorsed the principle of consolidation, but did little about it. It was left up to an Island expatriate to jump-start an experiment in school consolidation.

As the founder of Macdonald Tobacco, Sir William C. Macdonald had amassed a great fortune in 19th-century Montreal. Macdonald was the grandson of a Highland laird who had colonized the Tracadie area of Prince Edward Island. He was irascible, eccentric, wilful, and implacably proud, but he was also one of Canada’s leading philanthropists. Macdonald was already well on his way to becoming the most generous benefactor in the history of McGill University when he became intrigued by the concept of “manual training” being promoted by Dr. James W. Robertson, the man who had inspired the dairy movement on Prince Edward Island during the early 1890s.

“Manual training” meant both a way of teaching and a program of study. It emphasized learning by doing and leaned heavily toward practical subjects. The practical aspect was what

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87 Quoted in *Canadian Annual Review*, 1906.

appealed to Macdonald, who had left his native province without the benefit of much formal education. Acting on the conviction that most Canadians would earn their living with their hands, not their heads, he funded pilot projects in manual training in selected schools across the Dominion in 1900. At Prince Edward Island’s three test sites, the natural emphasis was on the rural economy. From this “Macdonald Movement” emerged the concept of the Macdonald Consolidated Schools, which sought to spread manual training and encourage curricula more compatible with agrarian life, while at the same time demonstrating the advantages of rural school consolidation.

Backed by Macdonald’s money, Dr. Robertson approached the Peters Government in 1902 with an irresistible proposal. Sir William would build a consolidated school on Prince Edward Island. To give it a fair trial, he would also contribute $1,200 annually toward the cost of operations and pay all salaries for a period of three years, after which the costs would devolve entirely on the local ratepayers and the Province. In the aftermath of its acceptance, the Peters Government was deluged with proposals from communities eager to host the pilot school. At length, Dr. Robertson and Dr. Anderson, the Chief Superintendent of Education, settled on six school districts on the south side of the Hillsborough River near Charlottetown. Mount Herbert, Bethel, Fullerton’s Marsh, Bunbury, Hazelbrook, and Cross Roads would unite to form Canada’s third Macdonald Consolidated School. Even as construction began on a state-of-the-art wooden school building at Mt. Herbert in the summer of 1904, the districts of Tryon, Tryon West, and Lady Fane decided to combine their one-room schools in one facility.\(^9\) Consolidation seemed to be catching on.

Macdonald Consolidated officially opened amid much hoopla in August 1905, and it remained in the public eye for the next seven years.\(^9\) The school was a remarkable success in almost every way. Its five-member staff was outstanding — among its principals was a future premier, Principal J. Walter Jones, and H. B. MacLean, best remembered today for developing the “MacLean Method of Writing,” a penmanship primer once used throughout the Commonwealth. The classroom work was just as impressive. During the five years before its opening, Macdonald Consolidated’s

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member schools had matriculated only one student to Prince of Wales College; during its first five years, the new school sent twenty. As both pedagogical tool and practical benefit, the school’s manual training program earned glowing testimonials. Boys learned carpentry and agriculture. Girls – separate spheres once again – took household science and floriculture.

There was one problem, but it was fatal. The school cost too much. During the three-year pilot program, operating expenses ran at around $5,500 per year. To that total, the Island government contributed only the statutory grant, $1,190. At best, local assessments raised barely $200. Sir William paid the rest. In fact, he continued to provide an annual subsidy for four years after the formal end of the trial period. By then, the consolidation experiment was down to three participants, half the school districts having balked at the prospect of greatly increased local assessments. Instead of inspiring Island school districts to consolidate, the Macdonald School was alienating them with its intimidating costs.

The school consolidation wave crested in 1910, when a Royal Commission on Education recommended that the number of school districts in the province be reduced from nearly 500 to 214. Unfortunately, it had no suggestions for how to finance its proposal, and the Liberal government had no means, and no intention, of pursuing the recommendation. The government was willing, Premier Haszard declared in his budget speech in 1910, but the people were not: “I know this, that it is very difficult to get a new idea, such as this, into the minds of the people. Most of them are wrapped up in their own little school, because it happens to be near them, and there are very few districts of the country so far as I know, that would be willing to give way at present. . . . In order to get better instruction for their children; in order to get better schools and teachers, the people will have to put their hands in their pockets and pay for it.”

But Islanders’ pockets were practically empty. And so, the consolidation buck was passed from government to community and on to Sir William C. Macdonald. It stopped there. After 1912, he ended his annual subsidy to Macdonald Consolidated. He had by now invested nearly $40,000 in his Island school, and the idea, after all, was for consolidation to pay for itself. That summer, school

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let out for good at the seven-year-old building in Mt. Herbert. There would not be another serious attempt at school consolidation for fifty years.

The sticky residue from the failed consolidation movement was the government’s “practical education” agenda. Its grand theories about the nature of learning had dwindled down by 1912 to a faint-hearted commitment to agricultural education at Prince of Wales College. One suspects that Prince of Wales’ principal, S. N. Robertson, a stern classicist, felt that, while agriculture and manual training were all well and good for country schools, they had no real place in his college. By 1914, with the provincial government using federal subsidies to create what it confidently predicted would be “a complete system of Agricultural Education, co-related with the general system,” the tension between elitist classical learning and plebeian local needs remained unresolved.

The consolidation movement did not show the Island’s government at its best: willing to countenance change only so long as someone else was going to pay. As one political scientist puts it, “the government concentrated on balancing the budget and blaming the rest on Confederation.” It “made few demands and imposed few obligations; but in return it performed few services and gave little leadership.” As with many generalizations, this one obscures a telling countercurrent. Within the limits of its resources, the Island government was selectively progressive during the early years of the century.

Obedient to accepted practice, Island governments did not consider it their duty to steer the economy, but they saw nothing wrong with giving it a helpful nudge. During the 1890s, the provincial government had subsidized the first generation of cheese and butter factories. A few years

92 Speech from the Throne, March 1914. The federal funds were provided under the Agricultural Instruction Act of 1913. It raised the federal contribution towards agricultural education from $6,000 to around $26,000 annually.

93 MacKinnon, The Life of the Party, p. 82.
later, it actively organized Farmers’ Institutes as part of its scientific agriculture campaign, rewarding new branches with small start-up grants to buy breeding stock. By 1913, there were forty-five of them in the province with about two thousand members. Similar encouragement was given the crop of buying, shipping, and marketing co-operatives that sprang up in the early years of the century. The most successful of these, like the dairy movement twenty years earlier, actually began as a federal initiative.

In 1908, after years of wooing by the Island government, the federal Department of Agriculture established a Dominion Experimental Farm on the outskirts of Charlottetown. The federal Department’s bolstered presence in the province provided the context, if not the pretext, for a campaign to establish co-operative egg circles in the province. Every Island farm kept poultry, and most farm women sold eggs to supplement their family’s incomes, but prices and quality fluctuated wildly. T. B. Benson, an egg expert with the poultry division of the federal Department of Agriculture, was sent to the Island in 1912 to investigate the matter. Using a model pioneered in Ontario, he urged local farmers to co-operate in grading and marketing their eggs. The combination of guaranteed quality and economies of scale, he reasoned, would lead to a dramatic increase in prices. He was right. The first egg circle was organized in Brooklyn, south of Montague in 1913, and New London farmers made the first co-operative egg shipment that May. Within a year there were fifty egg circles with almost four thousand members grading and marketing their eggs through the Prince Edward Island Co-operative Egg and Poultry Association. By the end of 1915, the numbers were eighty-five and six thousand. During their first year of group marketing, the circles raised the price of eggs by 23%. As word of their success spread, the Island egg circles would be widely praised, and the “Egg Man’s” horse-drawn, covered wagon quickly became a fixture in Island communities as it trundled along from farm to farm to collect each week’s offering of eggs.

The provincial government’s chief contribution to hatching the egg circles movement had been to

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*95* *Ibid.*, pp. 50-53.
make it illegal to sell ungraded eggs. It had a great deal more to do with an extraordinary attempt to develop an aquaculture industry in the province.

By 1900 the Island oyster industry was in serious trouble. Malpeque oysters were a world-famous delicacy, but overfishing during the 1880s and 1890s had decimated the stocks even as quahog harvesting and mussel-mud digging were damaging oyster beds. Regulation and research — a federal biological station was set up at Malpeque Bay — had failed to turn the tide.96 Now, the provincial government took a hand. Rather than simply restore damaged beds, why not plant more oysters? After a tedious squabble with the federal government over jurisdiction, the Province began surveying “barren bottom,” tracts of seabed in rivers and bays that were deemed suitable for oyster culture.97 With Ottawa’s reluctant acquiescence, it then set about leasing plots to prospective oyster farmers for seeding. Terms were for twenty years at progressively higher rates, beginning at $1 per acre for the first five years. By the end of 1913, 5,000 acres had been leased.

The Island’s governments had always complained of their lack of Crown land. Now they had access to thousands of acres, albeit under water. From terminal decline, the Mathieson government boasted in its 1914 Throne Speech, the oyster fisheries “now promise to become a great source of provincial wealth.”

All of the effort and optimism that the government expended on the fisheries, agriculture, and education in the early years of the century yielded only modest results. There were success stories to polish, but no dramatic turnaround in the Island’s fortunes. When the breakthrough came, government had nothing to do with it. It emerged seemingly overnight from a totally unexpected quarter, from something that had not even been considered an industry.

96See Kennedy Wells, The Fishery of Prince Edward Island (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1986), p. 158, for a synopsis of the industry’s decline. In 1882, 57,000 barrels of oysters were harvested. By 1910, the number was down to about 11,300.

97See 6 Edw. VII, c.2 (amended in 1912), and 3 Geo V, c.6). The areas involved included Malpeque Bay, Cascumpec Bay, North River, Bedeque Bay, New London Bay, Pownal Bay, St. Peters Bay, Tryon River, St. Mary’s Bay, Orwell Bay, and the Hillsborough River.
Frank Tuplin remembered watching them come in:

In the little old shack at the ranch it was strange to see old farmers with trembling hands, counting over thousands of dollars. Almost every time it would come out differently in figures and I thought many times, “well, I’m getting more than the animals were worth,” so I’ve often let it go rather than take the trouble to count it over again. So many others were waiting with great rolls of bills in their hands, . . . . What hectic days! When a suitcase or grip was filled with bills it was immediately thrown under the bed in the old shack and another brought in and filled; and when suitcases and grips were getting scarce to hold all of the currency being paid in, I have seen men holding the grips open while old farmers were tramping down the bills with their big hobnail boots, like so much hay at home in their barns.98

The men were paying for foxes. Black foxes. The animals might as well have been spun from gold.

The origins of the black or “silver” fox industry are wrapped up in a great deal of mythology, and the flamboyant Frank Tuplin was one of the chief myth-makers. But even the bare, unvarnished truth was incredible enough. For starters, the whole industry was founded on the fickle whims of high fashion. Black fox fur, lent a silver sheen by the paleness of its outer guard hairs, was both beautiful and rare, hence expensive, hence desirable. On Prince Edward Island, the black fox was an uncommon mutation or “sport” of the very common red fox. The hunter who bagged a black, like Stanley Compton in 1900, was a lucky man.

But what if foxes could be made to breed in captivity? And what if selective breeding could consistently produce quality black pelts? Choosing among several claimants, history has settled on Charles Dalton, a druggist from Tignish, and Robert T. Oulton, a New Brunswick-born farmer, as


The pioneers of the silver fox industry. The business that they incubated was part fur trade and part livestock farming. Sometime in the early 1890s, the two hunting companions combined their fumbling efforts to domesticate black foxes, working in great secrecy in a wooded corner of Oulton’s farm on Savage Island, near Alberton. An energetic, affable man, Dalton managed the business side of the partnership. The older, more private Oulton perfected the breeding operations. When Dalton quietly began feeding their pelts into the international marketplace in London, he pretended they were from wild foxes, but the number and quality of the pelts made the pretence hard to sustain. The heavy dark lustre of the Dalton-Oulton foxes quickly set the industry standard. At the London fur sale in January 1900, a single pelt brought $1,807.

Although the fact of the silver fox industry could not be kept secret, just about everything else about it could. During the 1890s, other Islanders had been experimenting with silver foxes, some of them with stock provided by Dalton and Oulton. By the turn of the century, the pioneer breeders had formed a verbal pact known as the “Big Six Combine.” Their goal was to preserve high fur prices by limiting entry into the industry. The Big Six were Dalton and Oulton; their friend Robert Tuplin and his partner Captain James Gordon; and B. I. Rayner and his father Silas. For a decade the monopoly held, and fur prices climbed steadily upwards. The climax came in 1910, when Dalton sold twenty-five pelts on the London fur market for $34,649. That year, the average annual wage for an Island farm labourer was $319.20.

At this point, the silver fox industry abruptly moved into an extravagant new phase. In October 1905, Frank Tuplin had pestered his uncle Robert and Captain Gordon into selling him a pair of silver foxes. Pressed for cash and with little to show for his early breeding efforts, Tuplin began selling live foxes. At first he hedged the sales around with conditions that would protect the Combine’s monopoly. Then, in the fall of 1910, he sold two pairs of breeding foxes to a fox-ranching syndicate formed by Harry and Roy Holman, heirs to the R. T. Holman department store chain, and

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Despite losing their monopoly, the pioneer foxmen prospered mightily during the next few years. Oulton, now 76, sold out in 1911 and moved back to New Brunswick. A year later, a Charlottetown-based syndicate bought out Dalton for nearly three-quarters of a million dollars. Ever the public man, he dabbled in provincial politics, serving in Mathieson’s Conservative cabinet, and shared his fortune in a series of handsome benefactions. His Christian charity earned him a papal knighthood, and he would end his life as Sir Charles Dalton, Lieutenant-Governor of Prince Edward Island. No one rode the fox boom more grandly than Frank Tuplin. He moved from New Annan to Summerside, which quickly emerged as the capital of the new industry, traded two foxes for a fine mansion on fashionable Beaver Street, spread money around like butter, and bought himself a huge Pierce-Arrow touring car.

As the months passed, the fox bubble grew bigger and bigger, the numbers more and more fantastical. In 1912, it was said, at least $50,000 was needed to build, equip, and stock a fox farm. By 1913, the same amount of money would hardly buy three pairs of breeding stock.101 That winter there was a wild scramble for stock options and the money to finance them. “The rage is as high as ever and apparently soaring,” Ned Wyatt wrote his daughter Cecelia in April 1913.102 By then, a single fox could fetch as much as $20,000. When the supply of actual animals gave out, there was a brisk trade in fox futures. Seeking to repeat the black fox miracle, investors diversified into raccoon, mink, beaver, Karakule sheep — even skunks, the poor man’s black fur (although it was marketed as “sable”). Anxious for a share of the windfall, the Province placed a tax on foxes.

The new industry shimmered in a golden haze of stock promotion and hucksterism. It was as

100 Rankin, Down at the Shore, p. 130-33.


102 Kessler, A Century on Spring Street, p. 141.
easy to lose money as to make it. Yet there was substance as well as seduction. Companies that were well-managed and possessed quality breeding stock paid spectacular dividends during the 1910–14 boom. Rumour and reality fused into a mood of reckless extravagance. Drawn by the dizzying profits, capital poured in from out of province. Normally cautious Islanders ransacked their savings accounts and mortgaged properties in the stampede to get in on the bonanza. Up in Ontario, L. M. Montgomery loaned some of her literary earnings to relatives anxious to “get into foxes.” And lean old farmers lined up at Frank Tuplin’s door with trembling hands and rolls of bills.

In 1913, a group of foxmen threw an anchor over into the sea of speculation, forming the Silver Black Fox Breeders Association of Prince Edward Island in a bid to ensure the industry’s future stability. Worried about the towering speculation, Canadian financial papers began to warn off investors during the early months of 1914, but for a little while more the fever held. In 1901, the Canada Year Book had put the value of furs on Prince Edward Island at $517. By August 1914, 312 ranches, with a total stock of 4,587 foxes, had been incorporated in the province, and the industry was valued at $26 million. For some Islanders, at least, prosperity had arrived draped in fox fur.

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Prince Edward Island in the early 1900s was like a rattling, huffing engine. It was a 19th-century engine, perhaps, patterned on essentially 19th-century assumptions, but it hummed and whirred and clattered purposefully. Its vibrations can still be felt across the years. What we sense, perhaps, is the distant sound of abundant hope.

By the end of 1913 Canada had slipped into the trough of another economic depression, but on Prince Edward Island optimism ruled. Not even a sodden fall, which rotted the grain in its stooks

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103 According to the Canadian Annual Review for 1913, Island farmers withdrew $4.5 million from savings’ banks, “the people became restless and dissatisfied to some extent, farms were mortgaged and crops hypothecated.”
and the potatoes in the ground, could dampen the spirit of the times. Increased subsidies from Ottawa had put fresh funds in provincial coffers. At Carleton Point a massive public works project was creating a new ferry terminal and a town to go with it, Port Borden. In Great Britain, the vessel that would dock there, the SS *Prince Edward Island*, the most modern ice-breaking car ferry in the world, was nearing completion. Some sort of equilibrium had been reached with respect to automobiles. Egg circles were taking off. The oyster industry was coming around. And the bright aura of the fox industry cast a golden glow over everything.

The shower of good news put Islanders in a buoyant mood. In the previous decade, it had acquired more of the trappings of provincehood. Grumbling at the cost, Premier Peters had secured armorial bearings for the province in 1905. In 1908, composer Lawrence Watson and lyricist L. M. Montgomery had created an unofficial provincial anthem, “Fair Island of the Sea.” Now, the province lay claim to a symbolic share in Canada’s creation. Orchestrated by Executive Council, a grand celebration was planned for the summer of 1914 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference. Prince Edward Island had suddenly discovered that it was Confederation’s birthplace. The Confederation Jubilee was set for August 1914. And then...
Chapter Three
“Weary with the world’s woe”

Try as I will, dear one, ’tis hard to write
Kind words of greeting, tender love, this day:
Such thoughts are so very far away
As I would fain recall, for your delight!
The war has wrapped me in its own black night. . . .

From Frank Walker, “The Soldier’s Letter”

On 24 April 1916, Robert Warren pressed a sheet of paper flat against a makeshift table to write his sister Minnie back home in the West Prince community of Brockton. Their neighbours, the Shaws, had sold out and were leaving Bloomfield. “Once things like that seemed strange,” Warren mused, “but somehow nothing is strange now for everything seems so unreal and uncertain. In fact, I often find myself wondering if the old life wasn’t a dream, and this present nightmare the only reality.” Warren was serving with the 26th (New Brunswick) Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on the Western Front in the midst of a conflict so monumental it was called simply “the Great War.” He was a long way from home.

For Warren and thousands of other Island soldiers, the distance was mental as well as physical. August 1914 marks the real divide between the 19th century and the 20th. That summer, entangled in a web of secret alliances and made militant by generations of peace, the empires of Europe blundered into a colossal war that everyone had prepared for but no one had expected. The sprawling conflict

1The poems by Walker and notes from his journal that are used in this chapter are taken from Mary F. Gaudet, From a Stretcher-Handle: The World War I Journal and Poems of Pte. Frank Walker (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 2000). The chapter title is taken from his poem, “From the Somme.”

2This excerpt and others used in this chapter are from a collection of Warren’s letters preserved by folklorist John Cousins of Bloomfield and provided through his kindness.
pitted “the Allies,” including Britain and her Dominions, against the “Central Powers,” an alliance dominated by Imperial Germany. Everyone was confident that the war would be over by Christmas. It lasted over four years.

Canada’s part in the Great War was mainly fought in Flanders, a small corner of Northern France and southwestern Belgium. It was the northern segment of a bloody arc called the Western Front, which stretched across northern Europe from the English Channel to the Alps. Here, after Germany’s opening thrust at Paris was parried, and after its race to outflank the Allied armies failed, the initial “war of movement” settled into a static, savage, dehumanizing “war of attrition” that slowly bled white the combatant nations. Military technology had seemingly perfected the ability to kill without providing the means to conquer. Millions of lives were spent in discovering the truth of that epigram.

The Western Front was a killing ground. Innocent of war and ignorant of this War, Island soldiers could not wait to get there.

Like many horror stories, the Great War began as a rattling good adventure. On Prince Edward Island, “Big Donald,” Charlottetown’s huge brass fire bell, announced the war’s outbreak at 8:30 on the evening of Tuesday, 4 August 1914. The next afternoon, the first Island soldiers, artillerymen from the 4th Regiment Canadian Garrison Artillery, marched down to the docks and sailed off to war in a commandeered potato boat. They got only as far as Cape Breton, where for the next few months they performed unheroic guard duty.3

More volunteers soon followed into service as an “epidemic of patriotism” swept the Island.4 “All I hear now is war, war, and some more war,” Watson F. Clark wrote The Maple Leaf from Summerside, “and everybody is chuck full of patriotism. . . .”5 The province was awash in patriotic meetings, patriotic committees, patriotic excitement. And from every patriotic mouth the message was

3“War Is Declared,” Island Patriot, 5 August 1914, p. 4; Guardian, 5 August 1914; Summerside Journal, 5 August 1914.

4The Charlottetown Guardian, 6 August 1914.

5“A P. E. Island Letter,” The Maple Leaf, 8(August 1914)8: 7.
the same: the Empire was in danger! Her sons and daughters must rally to the flag.

Shortly after Britain’s declaration of war, Canada pledged to send a small expeditionary force to Europe. Twenty-year-old Frank Walker, a machinist at Bruce Stewart & Co. of Charlottetown, was desperate to be one of these “Death or Glory boys”: “It’s maddening to think of those thirty thousand ‘chosen ones’ marching away to Glory and Adventure — leaving me to drudge my life out in this sordid old machine-shop.” To Walker’s joy, he was accepted for service. “Recruiting is going on steadily throughout the Island,” he reported in his journal on 10 August. “Parading troops are an every day sight. Victoria Park is resplendent with red and blue and gold-laced uniforms. Crowds of spectators watch our daily drills. This unusual solicitude has gone to our heads, quite a bit. We strut around, for the most part, as if the destiny of the Empire hung on our every step. Ridiculous, of course, but there is something grand about it.” A week later, Walker entrained for Valcartier, Quebec, to join the First Canadian Contingent as a member of the Army Medical Corps. He would spend the war as a stretcher-bearer.

In Souris a few days later, most of the town turned out at the train station to say goodbye to their first six volunteers. “Banish all selfish interests,” Mayor Brennan admonished the soldiers. “Do your best for the Mother Country and carry yourselves so that you might be a credit first to your country, Canada, and next to your own town, Souris.” The crowd gave three cheers and the band played “God Save the King” as the train pulled slowly out of the station, bound for glory.

And so it went. By early November, when recruiters from New Brunswick’s 26th Battalion began a swing through the province, 16 officers and 219 men had already left to join the Canadian forces abroad. The 26th enlisted 60 more. Among them was Robert Warren of Brockton, a former social worker with the Salvation Army in various parts of Canada. Steeped in the Christian reformism of the Social Gospel movement, Warren hated war, but was willing to fight to win peace. At a rally in Charlottetown on the night before the recruits’ departure, he added his own earnest words to the

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6Gaudet, From a Stretcher-Handle, p. 23 (entry for 8 August). The “Death or Glory Boys” quote was used in the Guardian’s account of the send-off given a contingent of Island volunteers on 20 August 1914.

7Charlottetown Guardian, 24 August 1914, p.7.
armoury of patriotic orations.  

By then, the Island had already suffered a casualty. On 23 September 1914, the Summerside Journal reported that Bombardier Adolphus Gallant of Rustico had been killed by a kick from a horse at Valcartier. It was a poor omen for glory seekers.

By the time that Warren went soldiering, leaving his brother John and sister Minnie to manage the family’s struggling little farm, the province was on a war footing. Even before the official declaration of war, the organizing committee had cancelled the Confederation Jubilee scheduled for mid-August. Many of the same organizers now turned to war work. Although the Island government took the lead by pledging 100,000 bushels of oats to Canada’s war effort on behalf of its citizens, it was not the primary vehicle for mobilizing the province’s resources. That was done mostly by civilian volunteers. A bewilderment of organizations were involved, but there were three basic sorts of appeal: for soldiers and supplies, for material comforts to give the men at the front, and for money to support their dependants and finance the war effort. Encouraged by a rolling barrage of rhetoric from newspapers and politicians, Islanders set to work on all three at once.

On 18 August 1914, the Canadian Patriotic Fund was launched to provide monthly allowances for the wives, children and dependent relatives of Canadian soldiers. A Prince Edward Island branch was set up later that fall. The Fund was intended to supplement the Separation Allowance available from Ottawa, and whatever portion of their pay (up to one-half) soldiers might assign their families. Over the course of the War, the Patriotic Fund collected $128,638 from

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8“Great Send-off to Volunteers,” Charlottetown Guardian, 14 November 1914.

9Farmers donated the oats; the Government collected them and chartered the S. S. Morwenna to ship the gift-in-kind to LeHavre, France.
Islanders and distributed $98,940 in benefits. Women and children were meant to receive the money, but perhaps some of the remittances went to people like Daniel McNulty. His appeal for assistance, written in an uncertain hand, was addressed to the Premier. “Sir I am taking the liberty to right to you to let you no that all my help that is my three suns has joined the volunteers. I am old an not in good health so I want to [k]now if there is eny thing alowed to [a] parson in this case. . . . Please let me no. If I had three more I would willing[ly] let them go for the Cause.”

At war’s end, the province could jot up an impressive tally of war-giving. Besides the $130,000 in the Patriotic Fund, Islanders had subscribed $2.9 million in Victory Bonds (116% of the objective), given $48,862 to the Red Cross, raised $17,000 through the YMCA, and made a host of lesser donations. For a chronically cash-poor economy, it was a very creditable showing.

Hard cash was only one way to contribute to the war, and perhaps not the most significant. “Say,” Robert Warren wrote his sister Minnie from France in October 1915,

could you get some of the Brockton or Campbellton girls interested in knitting gloves or socks at once, lots of them . . . . We need them badly — many [are] worse off than I am. I’ll tell you what we want — heavy woolen socks and heavy gloves with fingers in them. Mitts are also acceptable but we cannot use our rifles with mitts. . . . Speak to Mr. Lockhart and get him to try and start the women working and those who cannot knit can buy. The men of Canada who are cheerfully facing a winter’s privations in the trenches have I feel a just claim upon the women of Canada to make them as comfortable as possible. . . . I am not scolding anybody. I only say if they are not busy they should get busy.

Island women already were. One of the most notable aspects of the war effort at home was the prominent role that Island women quickly assumed, particularly in the provision of “comforts” for the men at war. While prominent men such as Judge (and ex-premier) Frank Haszard helped give the Island Red Cross its formidable wartime profile, women filled the rank and file in branches across the province. They even formed a Women’s Patriotic Association to aid its work. And it was a

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10 *Canadian Annual Review*, 1918, p. 593. Compared to national figures, Prince Edward Island received roughly in proportion to what it gave, trailing the national average by about 1.5%.

11 Daniel McNulty to Mathieson, [n.d.], Mathieson Papers, PARO RG 25.23.
network of women’s groups that the Red Cross habitually allied itself with, organizations such as the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire and, especially, the newly ascendant Women’s Institute, which quickly shifted its focus from community to combatants.

On 9 September 1914, the Red Cross published a list of the items and services it intended to provide: money, personal comforts, hospital supplies, and food. Such nurturing fell squarely within the “woman’s sphere,” and all over the province women took up the challenge. They sewed and knitted an army of socks and other clothing. They prepared thousands of food parcels. They fundraised heroically. They rolled miles of bandages. They paid for medicines and machine guns and hospital equipment. They sent care packages to “adopted” Prisoners of War. And to loved ones and total strangers, they penned messages of caring and simple, unselfconscious sanity.

There is no real way to calculate the value of such giving, but letters and diary entries convey some sense of how deeply soldiers appreciated the distant caress of home. Each gave biblically — according to their means — and who is to say the forty pairs of socks that Miss Emma White of York Point had knit by 1916 were any less valuable than the $2,100 Red Cross field ambulance donated that year by the Island’s Fox King, Charles Dalton?\(^\text{12}\)

In the end, of course, the war could not be won with socks and sentiment. It needed troops. Back in the fall of 1914, when people still expected the war to be brief, bloody, and glorious, The Guardian had estimated that three hundred Island soldiers would be all that was needed.\(^\text{13}\) Canada, after all, was sending only 25,000. But as the struggle deepened, recruiting efforts intensified: 1914’s eager rally to Britain’s defence became 1915’s moral crusade to preserve “democracy” from “Prussian militarism,” which fed 1916’s heavy-handed canvass for volunteers to sustain Canada’s armies and her honour. By then, prospective recruits were no longer just keeping faith with Britain, or Liberty,


\(^\text{13}\)Charlottetown Guardian, 13 November 1914, p.4.
but with their comrades’ blood sacrifice.

The recruiters’ perspective is easier to chart than the recruits’. There was no universal formula behind enlistments. For the first volunteers, clearly, the war offered a chance for adventure and glory. Victorian culture had ennobled war, or, at least, its storybook image of gallantry and gold braid. In the latter Laurier period, a wave of militarism had swept over Canada, and some Islanders rode its crest right into the war.

Love of country was another motivation. Our more cynical generation casts patriotism to beer commercials, but it was a powerful emotion in 1914 and beyond — at least, it was powerfully promoted. From beginning to end, a hobnailed jingoism tramped through the province’s newspaper columns. So bellicose was the Canadian press in general that it hardly needed to be censored for much of the war. Martial imagery was everywhere in the press, in headlines and editorials, in “local notes,” in letters from the front, even in advertising, where the effect could be somewhat unusual. “Treacherous as a submarine is constipation,” warned the makers of Abbey’s Effervescent Salt. “It strikes when and where you least expect it.” At the other end of the digestive tract, Sterling Gum was waging, “The War Within Your Mouth” (“The hottest fighting is after meal times”), Fashion was affected, too. In a November 1915 ad, Charlottetown’s Moore and McLeod boasted that they could not keep their military suits for boys in stock: “made of good firm khaki cloth, in smart regular military model, everything right even to the puttees.”

Meanwhile The Guardian made much of Miss Stella Fletcher of 1st Methodist in Charlottetown, who wore khaki instead of white to marry her soldier fiancé in 1916.

There was no mistaking the breadth of patriotism on Prince Edward Island, but one wonders at its depth among Islanders who were a half-century and more removed from the land of their ancestry. As one newspaper reluctantly admitted, Islanders were an undemonstrative people. They may have felt patriotic, but they apparently did not flaunt it. One is tempted to believe that “duty,” patriotism’s less glamorous sister, was a more potent persuader. But that, too, is hard to gauge. Less lofty inspirations, such as the seduction of steady pay — even a private made $1.10 a day, more than

\[14\] From the Charlottetown Guardian, 19 April, 31 May, 26 November 1915.

many rural Islanders could ordinarily earn — were probably equally important, particularly as the war dragged on. And for every zealot who stormed a recruiting office, desperate to serve his country, there was another who joined up because everyone expected him to. Harry MacTavish of Iona covered pretty much the whole range of motivations in a few terse words: “When I went to school I read a lot in history about war and I decided, I’ll see it for myself. What it’s like. . . . I didn’t have to be drafted or anything. They weren’t going to call me a yellow-back.”\footnote{16}

And there were many who did not volunteer at all. It was hard for the recruiters to tell those who could not from those who would not. All were subjected to the same pressures. Women were told to “do your duty. Send your men today to join our glorious Army,” and encouraged to withhold their favours from able-bodied men who did not join up:

\begin{verbatim}
On each bubbling Island beauty
Lies the patriotic duty
When the male who isn’t khaki-clad she sees;
If he’s young and strong and healthy,
Be he poor or be he wealthy,
Of arousing him from lethargy and ease.
Let her snub him if she meet him,
Though she know him, fail to greet him;
Be contemptuous, as pretty woman can;
Till at length, in shame and anger,
He casts off his slothful langour
And acquits him like a soldier and a man.\footnote{17}
\end{verbatim}

Paradoxically, while the Island press habitually berated its readers for their lukewarm patriotism, it bristled angrily when central Canadian jingoists questioned the Island’s commitment to the war.

Enlistment rates in the Maritimes lagged behind the rest of the country. Official statistics show that only 19.3\% of Island males in the 18–45 year-old age bracket, enlisted during the conflict, the lowest


\footnote{17}“The Slacker,” \textit{Summerside Journal}, 6 October 1915, p. 2. The poem goes on to interpret the slacker’s failure to enlist on lack of understanding rather than lack of courage.
rate in the country outside of Quebec. Yet Island journalists were right to rebut the critics. Recruitment on Prince Edward Island trailed the national average partly because Prince Edward Island’s eligible recruits did not fit the national profile. The bulk of Canada’s volunteers were unemployed single men and recent British immigrants with strong emotional ties to the Old Country. Prince Edward Island had few of either. The Island’s population was 97% native-born, and outmigration regularly skimmed off the province’s surplus population. Lapsing into hyperbole, The Guardian argued in November 1914, “our population has been almost ruinously depleted during the last ten or fifteen years, and it is doubtful if, today, we could, without serious detriment, take a hundred men from our farms to serve in any capacity outside the province. Our urban population is in practically the same condition.”

Outmigration also had disproportionately claimed the personality types most likely to enlist: the restless, the enterprising, the adventurous, the idealistic. Many of them joined up, but they did so in the province where they were residing at the time. Official records do not count these as Prince Edward Island recruits, but Islanders did, and wartime newspapers are filled with news of these expatriate Island soldiers. Many others escaped public notice. Who, for instance, would have published the exploits of Edwin O. Brown, who escaped from Falconwood Insane Asylum and enlisted under an assumed name in Kingston, Ontario? As Sgt. Edward O. Browne, he was killed in action in hand-to-hand fighting during the storming of Hill 70.

For Prince Edward Island, a much more relevant breakdown of Canadian enlistments is by place of birth. While only 3,696 people enlisted on Prince Edward Island, according to federal records, 7,168 Canadians born on Prince Edward Island served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. How many of these had been brought up on Prince Edward Island will never be known, and, at some

18 A. F. Duguid, Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-18 (King’s Printer, 1938), pp. 50-51. Manitoba led with 47.6%. Neighbouring Nova Scotia was 32% and New Brunswick 34.8%.

19 Charlottetown Guardian, 9 November 1914.

point, the debate over enlistments loses its point.

[Boxed essay: Women at War] Hidden away among the enlistment statistics were a number of Island women. The First World War was the first real test for the Nursing Branch of the Army Medical Corps. The chief matron of the nursing service since its inception in 1906 had been “the Island’s Florence Nightingale,” Georgina Fane Pope, the Boer War veteran who had practically founded the profession of military nursing in Canada. Pope was bent on leading her nursing sisters to France, but she was passed over for active service because of her age — she was 52 in 1914 — and her administrative skills, which were deemed more valuable at home. Inwardly fuming, she spent the first three years of the war training nurses for overseas duty.

There were at least sixty-two Islanders among the 3,100 Canadian Army nurses sent to the Western Front, if one includes expatriates such as Charlottetown’s McLeod sisters, Winnifred and Claire, who enlisted in Vancouver and Montreal, respectively. Annie Claire MacDougall of Nine Mile Creek, whose enlistment in Calgary had been arranged by a young patient named R. B. Bennett, would duplicate Pope’s feat of winning the Royal Red Cross.

Although nursing sisters did not engage in combat, active duty brought them face to face with danger. Rena MacLean of Souris was one of fourteen nursing sisters killed when a German U-boat torpedoed the Red Cross hospital ship Llandovery Castle on 27 June 1918, then machine-gunned the helpless survivors. Other nurses were bombed and shelled at hospitals near the front lines. And as part of their everyday duties, each Island nurse witnessed first-hand the horrors of modern warfare.

As for Pope, after three years of relentless lobbying, she was finally given a field posting on the Western Front in December 1917. Seven months later, utterly exhausted and suffering from arteriosclerosis and shellshock, she was invalided back to England, another casualty of the Great War.21

Numbers and percentages aside, the province’s recruitment record actually paralleled Canada’s in most respects. The push for volunteers really only gathered strength nationally during the course of

21 For a precis of Pope’s career, see Boyde Beck and Adele Townshend, “‘The Island’s Florence Nightingale,’” The Island Magazine 34(Fall/Winter 1993).
1915. That November, as bodies piled up on the Western Front, Prime Minister Borden rashly promised to raise 500,000 men for the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

In the beginning, it was Nova Scotia and New Brunswick units, such as the 26th Battalion, that harvested the Island’s crop of volunteers. Rather than set up government recruiting offices, Canada’s megalomaniac Minister of Militia, Sir Sam Hughes, saved money — and expressed his contempt for military professionals — by letting the country’s citizen soldiers, its militia, provide the recruiting infrastructure. The 26th, for example, did its recruiting through the 82nd Regiment of Prince Edward Island militia.

Provincial pride soon demanded that the Island be represented at the front by its own distinctive units. After months of editorial agitation, the first of these was authorized in June 1915. Ultimately designated the 2nd Canadian Siege Battery, the four-gun battery was recruited largely from the pre-war militia’s Prince Edward Island Heavy Artillery Brigade. Of its 220 members, 177 gave Prince Edward Island addresses. A year later, on 5 June 1916, the 2nd Siege began six months of continuous action on the Western Front. Even before it crossed to France, another Island artillery unit had gone into training. Authorized in March 1916, the 8th Canadian Siege Battery unlimbered its guns on the Western Front a week after the capture of Vimy Ridge in April 1917. The Island’s artillerymen would take part in virtually every major action involving the Canadian Corps during the rest of the war.

The third wholly “Island” military unit dwarfed the two artillery batteries in size and publicity. During the summer of 1915, an Island infantry battalion was talked into existence. “Can We Raise A Highland Regiment in P.E. Island?” a Guardian headline asked on 12 June 1915: “Two Highland units are to be mobilized in the Maritime Provinces. Could we not in this island raise one or two or three companies not of kilted Englishmen or Irishmen or Welshmen but every man with a Highland name?” The Infantry Reinforcements Company that was raised that fall through the 82nd Regiment (Abegweit Light Infantry) became the nucleus for the battalion-strength unit authorized in December 1915.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\]

Recruiting propaganda grew progressively more frenzied over the next few months. “It is better to wear khaki and fight for Britain,” cried the Summerside Journal, “than to wear shackles and slave for the Kaiser.” A typical recruiting ad asked, “Are you holding down a job that a woman could do when your King wants you to work for him?”23 By 15 March 1916, the very peak of the volunteer movement in Canada, the 105th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Prince Edward Island Highlanders) had recruited its full complement of 1,266 men.

Six weeks later, most of the raw recruits were back home on furlough to help put in the 1916 crop. As farmer H. G. Lowther of Carleton had reminded Premier Mathieson that April, “our need is urgent and you know the empire has to be fed.”24 But when August came, it was Island farm women that had to lend a hand with the hay.25 A few weeks earlier, the 105th had sailed for England. The Island’s heroes were ready to take on the “beastly Hun.”

Fed on tales of heroism and thirsty for glory, the unblooded rank and file of the 105th, their commander, the Island’s government, its press, and its patriotic organizations were all fiercely determined that the battalion should go into battle as a unit. “What I wish you to arrange is, this,” its commander, Lt. Col. A. E. Ings, imperiously wrote Premier Mathieson on 29 March 1916:

Get an understanding in writing from the Minister of Militia, that the 105th shall be kept intact and not be broken up and used as reinforcements for other Regiments at the front. I want to take the Battalion right to France identically the same as it leaves P.E.I. Ours is the only Province not represented by a Regiment at the front. Considering the scarcity of young men in the Province the raising of the 105th has been a splendid feat and this should be recognized. . . . You will, I think agree with me that it is only fair and right for the sake of the honor and credit of our province that it should be properly represented at the front. . . . I am not willing to take over a splendid Regiment to England from my own Province, and there be ordered to remain behind with all my senior officers and N.C.O.’s and see my men drafted off one or

23 The editorial exhortation is taken from the Summerside Journal, 29 December 1915, p. 4; the ad appeared in the Charlottetown Guardian, 19 January 1916.


two hundred in a batch into other Regiments from other parts of Canada.26

For a time it looked as if the shrewd campaign of petitions and government lobbying might succeed in keeping the 105th together, but, before the year was out, military authorities had begun to raid the Battalion for reinforcements. In January 1917, down to half its original strength, it was amalgamated with a New Brunswick battalion, the 104th. Even that hybrid unit was used only to provide reinforcements to front-line battalions. The soldiers of the 105th would fight and fight well, but not as part of an “Island” battalion.

In breaking up the province’s only infantry battalion, it might appear that Canada’s generals were considerably seeking to avoid the morale-shattering example of territorial units such as the Newfoundland Regiment, which was practically wiped out at Beaumont Hamel during the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The truth of the matter was more practical than humanitarian. In the rush to raise his 500,000 volunteers, Sir Sam Hughes had not given any real thought to how the avalanche of new battalions would be kept up to strength. Obviously, some units would have to be used as reinforcements. In this context, the General Staff cared less about Prince Edward Island’s military honour than how so small a province might replace its battalion’s casualties. The dissolution of the 105th was clearly a snub to the Little Sister of Confederation — but it almost certainly saved a great many Island lives.

After the scrapping of the 105th, it becomes more difficult to track the experience of Islanders in combat. They turn up in a confusing number of units, including, implausibly enough, the 1st Tank Battalion, whose “C” Company included “a large number” of Islanders. The Company commander even offered to let the Island government name some of their tanks — in exchange for a donation toward the company fund.27 It is not known whether any Canadian tanks went into action bearing Island names.

26Ings to Mathieson, 29 May 1916, Mathieson Papers, PARO RG 25.23. The fate of the 105th can be traced in a series of letters from Ings to Mathieson during 1916.

“Are we at war?” a Guardian headline wondered in March 1915 above an editorial castigating Islanders for their complacency. “A few short months ago, we were agitated over the war, now we are mildly interested.” A few months later, the Summerside Journal observed disapprovingly, “There is very little evidence any place on the Island, that a fearful war is raging in Europe, in which the destinies of the Island are so closely allied.”28 The comments were something more than prologues to recruiting sermons. Although the war permeated Islanders’ everyday existence, there was an air of unreality about it. It was vast and terrible, but it was far away, and could be glimpsed only through the telescope of a propagandizing press. There were no shells falling on Breadalbane, no armies trampling the wheat fields of Belfast. In the beginning, at least, the war was also impersonal. Before 1916, few Island soldiers had shed blood, and thanks to decades of outmigration, their kin at home had grown used to the absence of the young. For the first two years of the fighting, the war was as ubiquitous a topic as the weather, but no more tragic. Life went on amid a creeping anxiety.

That is not to say that the war had no impact on domestic affairs. According to a vacationing Weldon L. Crosman, “because of the war a way has been opened whereby the automobile law can be evaded. Some of the machines bear the placard ‘On Military Service.’ That permits them to run anywhere on any day in quest of fighting men. But more often the trip is only a joy ride.”29 Though it would not have described the process in quite the same tone, the pro-car lobby would always claim that the necessities of war smoothed the path for the Island’s acceptance of the automobile.

While motorcars raced on, the fur industry stumbled. The best market for black fox had always been the royal houses of Europe, especially Russia and Austria.30 Although at first Island breeders thought they would benefit from the removal of Russian competition, they soon discovered

28 Charlottetown Guardian, 2 March 1915; Summerside Journal, 18 August 1915.

29 “Notes of a Vacationist in the Provinces,” The Maple Leaf 8(September 1914)9: 7.

30 Evidence given before the Royal Trade Commission in Charlottetown, 17 August 1914. See Guardian, 29 August 1914, p. 9. Among the Commissioners was H. Rider Haggard, agricultural expert and hugely popular novelist.
that the war had also removed the market. Without a demand for pelts, there was soon no demand for breeding pairs. Over the winter of 1914–15, the great fox bubble softly deflated. The hucksters packed up and went home, and the “$26-million industry,” bloated by speculation, shrank to about an eighth of its pre-war paper value. Over the next three years, aided by government, Island breeders found new markets in the United States, and the trade in fox furs slowly shifted from London to New York. Henceforth, fox farming would constitute a stable cash crop, not an Eldorado.

Island fishermen also suffered from the dislocation of traditional European markets: France and Germany had been two of Island lobster canners’ biggest customers before the war. Lobster prices plummeted, and in 1915 the value of the Island fishery sagged to $933,682, the third-lowest figure since the rise of lobster canning in 1879. Then, like an elastic band, the industry rebounded. In 1917, buoyed by new markets, the fishery reached its highest value in thirty-five years, $1.78 million. Even allowing for wartime inflation, it was a remarkable statistic, especially considering the total collapse of the oyster fishery.

In their rush to develop the “barren beds” leased from the Province, a group of local oyster companies transplanted millions of pounds of seed oysters from Chesapeake Bay to Prince Edward Island in 1913 and 1915. Something else came with them, and by the end of 1916 it had killed 90% of the oysters in Malpeque Bay. Islanders called it “Malpeque Disease.” It was harmless to humans, but lethal to Island oysters. Helpless to prevent or cure it, oystermen could only watch as the contagion methodically moved from bay to bay, destroying their fishery. The few oysters that survived the mysterious plague passed on their resistance to their spat, making recovery possible. But the whole industry essentially had to be rebuilt from scratch. It was an unfortunate end to the provincial government’s bold experiment in aquaculture.

31 Again belying its historical reputation for laissez-faire-ism, the Island government voted $1,500 in July 1915 to cover expenses for a fox industry organizer investigating how best to cope with the conditions imposed by the war.

32 See, for example, “Lobsters and the War,” Charlottetown Guardian, 28 October 1914, p. 4.

As for the backbone of the Island’s economy, agriculture, at least until 1916, the weather was more relevant than the war. Low crop yields in 1915 were partly offset by a gradual upswing in prices for farm produce. Only as the war dragged on would shortages start to drive prices skyward.

War and loyalty pushed other once-pressing issues into the background. Although the vaunted new railcar ferry *Prince Edward Island* had slipped down the ways at Newcastle-on-Tyne in December 1914, it was another year before she arrived in Maritime waters, and two more years after that before the terminals at Borden and Cape Tormentine, plagued by bad weather and wartime shortages of labour and materials, could be completed.\(^{34}\) Until then she carried on a makeshift service between Charlottetown and Pictou. The ferry’s imminence had persuaded the federal government that it could afford to sell the existing winter steamers, the *Earl Grey* and then the *Minto*, to the Imperial Government of Russia for service as icebreakers in the White Sea.\(^{35}\) Only the *Stanley*, the venerable grandmother of the Northumberland Strait run, remained to help maintain winter communications with the Mainland. Yesterday’s technology had to be called back into service, and during the war winters of 1915–17, the iceboats made their final runs. On 11 February 1917, as his crew were dragging their boat across a shifting field of broken ice, a lead opened directly beneath the feet of Lemuel Dawson of Albany. Before his companions could reach out or react, the tide swept him away beneath the rafting ice. In a moment he was gone, the first fatality on the iceboat service since 1855 and the last in its 152-year history. Six months later, on 16 October 1917, the *Prince Edward Island* quietly began service at Port Borden.

The Great War and governance would prove a combustible mixture nationally, but provincial politics was little affected by the conflagration in Europe. After all, the local government had no real say in the conduct of Canada’s war, and much of the carping in the Island’s Liberal press was directed at Prime Minister Borden’s alleged bungling and his Conservative government’s evident boodling.

\(^{34}\) *Guardian* 13 December 1915, p. 4.

Aside from an inconclusive inquiry into profiteering in the matter of a military contract for purchasing horses in Summerside, the broad smear of corruption scarcely reached to a province with no conspicuous war industries. The war did provide a new lease on life to the Tryon Woollen Mills, which re-opened under new management on the strength of war contracts for knitting exceedingly itchy underwear for soldiers.36

When J. A. Mathieson’s Tories went confidently to the polls in September 1915, the war was not an issue. The Mathieson Government ran on its record of increased revenues. The Liberals ran on the Government’s record of increased taxes, chief among them a notorious levy on . . . dogs. Like the Government’s balance sheet, the two sides just about broke even. In the first election since the reintroduction of the secret ballot in 1913, the Liberals rallied from two seats at dissolution to thirteen.37 Their victory was a moral one. The Conservatives were returned to power, though not by much. Their four-seat majority became three once they had elected a speaker, and two once it became obvious that maverick Tory John A. Dewar could not be depended upon to vote with his party.

In one of those strange inversions that delight constitutional historians, the Liberals were led into the election by 78-year-old Benjamin Rogers of Alberton, who had in six months gone from being lieutenant-governor to leader of the Opposition. There were raised eyebrows about the propriety of this reversal of the normal career path for Island politicians, and when Rogers suffered personal defeat in the provincial contest, he stepped down in favour of a younger man, 69-year-old John Howatt Bell.

Observers were at a loss to account for Mathieson’s near defeat. Dog tax aside, it seems probable the Conservatives were paying the price for their unpopular pro-automobile policy. They

36“The Horse Contract Inquiry,” Charlottetown Guardian, 30 July 1915, pp. 1, 3. The war did give a new lease on life for the Tryon Woollen Mills, which re-opened under new management on the strength of war contracts for knitting exceedingly itchy woollen underwear for soldiers. (See Kate MacQuarrie, “The Tryon Woollen Mills,” The Island Magazine 36(Fall/Winter 1994). B. I. Raynor, one of the co-owners, did solicit Premier Mathieson’s assistance in obtaining war work for the mill. (See Raynor to Mathieson, 6 January 1916, J. A. Mathieson Papers, PARO RG 25.23.)

37The Sullivan Government had abolished the secret ballot as a cost-cutting measure after winning power in 1879.
also suffered from a sneaking suspicion among temperance advocates that the party was soft on prohibition, despite the fact that the entire cabinet and twenty-four of the Legislature’s twenty-eight Tory members had patriotically taken a total abstinence pledge for the duration of the war.

The Conservatives got the message about temperance. In 1917, the government appointed a commission of inquiry, and in 1918 it hefted into the legislature an enormous new prohibition bill that plugged as many holes in the temperance levee as could be found. As the Government’s apologist, The Guardian, proudly proclaimed, “The Act, while possibly complicated as most Acts are [it had 186 clauses and 15 schedules], is extremely simple in its clearness that no intoxicating liquor can legally be purchased, owned or drunk.” The renewed commitment was in line with the national consensus. In March 1918, federal Prohibition had been introduced as a war measure. For the first, and last, time, Prince Edward Island was practically dry.

Premier Mathieson was not around to draft the new legislation, though he would help enforce it. When the Island’s Chief Justice, Sir W. W. Sullivan, resigned in June 1917, Ottawa named Mathieson to replace him. As his political successor, Mathieson chose Summerside lawyer A. E. Arsenault. Arsenault was part of an impressive political dynasty — his family had held Prince for thirty-eight of the previous forty-four years. He was personally impressive as well. Urbane, handsome, dignified, he mixed easily in the English-speaking world of lawyers and politicians. At the same time, his feet were firmly planted in the province’s traditional francophone community. His father, Joseph Octave Arsenault, had been the Island’s first Acadian senator. Now the son became the Island’s first Acadian premier. He took office just as the war entered its darkest phase.

Despite the mountain of literature published about it, the nature of the Great War still defies the imagination. The Western Front was five hundred miles long but less than twenty miles wide, and

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38Charlottetown Guardian, 17 July 1918.
it barely moved for four years. On either side was a green and pastoral countryside. Within it, Nature had been eradicated. In its place, constant shellfire, sporadic bombing, raking machine-gun fire, a tangle of barbed wire, and rotting corpses had spawned a nightmare landscape. Its boundaries were a parallel maze of trenches that zigzagged raggedly from the sea to the mountains. In most places, a few hundred yards of shell-shattered No Man’s Land were all that separated ally from enemy. Within this desolation, among rats and lice and mud and the pervasive, charnel house smell of death, human beings contrived to live — and to kill one another. They led a crouching existence of boredom and privation, punctuated by episodes of intense terror. It was not war as any Islander had imagined it.

While the first Island-raised units trained for combat, the first Island soldiers were tasting battle. Spurgeon Jenkins of Mt. Albion was with the 1st Division Ammunition Column at the Second Battle of Ypres in the spring of 1915. His subsequent letter home seems to have slipped past the regimental censors: “In places my horse’s feet splashed in great pools of blood. Everywhere you looked you could see limbers smashed to pieces and men and horses lying in the gutters. Above the screams of the shells you could hear the groans of the dying. It was enough to turn a man’s hair gray, and I sincerely hope I will never pass through the like again.”

For Frank Walker, the journey from innocence to experience had only just begun. In his journal, he described a memorial service held at St. Paul’s, London, on 10 May for the Canadians killed at Ypres: “What a noble thing to die in a blaze of glory like this! Many of these boys might have lived on to mean and sordid old age. But now they are forever young.” Already, people were beginning to quote from a poem, “For the Fallen,” by Lawrence Binyon: “They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old. . . .”

Thirteen months later, Walker was at Ypres:

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39 Perhaps the best general history of Canada’s involvement in the Great War is Desmond Morton and J. L. Granatstein, Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914-1919 (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989); J. Clinton Morrison has explored Island soldiers’ experience of war in considerable detail in his Hell Upon Earth: A Personal Account of Prince Edward Island Soldiers in the Great War, 1914-1918 (Summerside: J. Clinton Morrison, 1995).

40 The letter, dated 9 May 1915, is quoted in Morrison, Hell Upon Earth, p. 70.

41 Gaudet, From A Stretcher Handle, p. 69 (entry for 11 May 1915).
For forty-eight hours we have been working without a stop, and still the fighting is going on, and the wounded are falling faster than we can pick them up. It has rained all week. The trenches are knee-deep, — in some places waist-deep, with mud and water. The dead and wounded lie everywhere: in trenches, and shell pits, and along the sodden roads. Two thousand wounded have passed through our hands since the attack. Hundreds more are dying of exposure a mile away, and we cannot reach them. The wounded who are already here must lie outside the Dressing Station, in the open, under the rain, until their turn comes.\\footnote{Gaudet, \textit{From A Stretcher Handle}, p. 93 (entry for 14 June.1916).}

By that time, the first provincial unit, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Siege Battery, had also seen action. The journal kept by Gunner Percy MacNevin captures the moment when his war lost its glamour. “12 July 1916: Just got into battery position and heard that Walter Lantz was killed at five minutes past twelve. . . . Oh! The shock we all received. It is terrible. Poor old chap. I went over, had a last sorrowful look at him. I can’t say much about it. When a chap loses his bed-mate he can’t have much to say.”\\footnote{Diary of Percy MacNevin, PARO 4633.}

Month by month, the experience of combat created a chasm between those at the Front and those at home that letters and headlines could not bridge. Island soldiers had no language to describe the grotesque reality of trench warfare, even if the censors had not suppressed, and the press not omitted, even if many soldiers had not practiced their own censorship, hiding behind small talk and trivia to spare their loved ones, and themselves.

There was no language for it, but some Islanders made the attempt. “The battlefield of the Somme is some awful looking place,” James Kirk of Summerside wrote his father on 20 September 1916. “Dead men and broken shells and shell holes, barbed wire, wagons, guns, horses, are strewn around. The stink would turn a skunk sick. In some places it is beyond imagining and can’t be believed until it is seen by your own eyes. They speak of a place called Hell. If they can beat this they have to show me.”

If the front was hell, its inhabitants were the demons. “I think this war puts the very devil in a man,” wrote Walter Crockett of Pleasant Grove in 1916. “It is kill, kill, kill from morning to night over there. You get so used to it that you can’t sleep away from the guns.”

But you did not really get used to it. You simply buried the things that could not be coped
with. Afterward, like unexploded shells, they continually worked their way to the surface. Sixty-two years later, Ben Conrad of the 2nd Siege Battery recalled the moments just before the Canadian assault on Vimy Ridge in April 1917. “I bent down to pick up the telephone and just then there was an explosion overhead, and there was a s-s-suck in the trench beside me. And I was going to say, ‘My goodness, that was close!’ and when I turned around to this chap he was sagging down in the trench. There was nothing left but his lower jaw! His whole head had been carried off.”44 That was the sort of emotional freight that Island war veterans would carry forward into peace.

Robert Warren, the ex-Salvation Army officer, clung to his belief in a nobler purpose. On 21 July 1916, during the holocaust of the Somme offensive, he envisioned a better world for his sister Minnie. A century of painful disillusion falls between the modern reader and his earnest naivety: “Our pain and loss may seem very real now, but if we remember that from such pain and loss there will grow a freedom greater than the world ever knew because it will be born of a Peace that never again shall be shadowed by mighty armies and haunted by ambitious thrones. The day of conquest and disregard for Right and Justice is passing.”

Warren believed deeply in what he wrote, but in the very next paragraph he retreated to a wry account of horseplay in his dugout. Even amid the squalour of this warfare, there was space — and need — for laughter. As Warren explained, “We are deprived from so much that was once pleasure that we can take fun out of any childish thing at all.”45

Back home in Minnie’s world, the Honour Roll in the Island newspapers was beginning to lengthen. Each death was glorious — in the abstract at least — and true glimpses of the war continued to be rare. On 16 October 1915, the first “wounded hero” had returned home to Charlottetown. Stephen McKinnon’s arm had been shattered when a German artillery shell struck his gun crew’s 18-pounder. A noisy crowd serenaded his incoming train with “We’ll Never Let the Old Flag Fall,” and hoisted him on its shoulders to carry him into the station. “Don’t forget the old red sod, boys! We’ll all do

44The last three quotes are taken from Morrison, Hell Upon Earth, pp. 94-95, 237, and 112, respectively.

our little bit,” The Guardian report had McKinnon say before he was escorted to a waiting carriage, drawn by a span of white horses, for the short ride home to King Street and life with one good arm.

It was harder to put a golden gloss on the homecoming of Thadeus Knockwood and Leonard Chaisson in December 1916. “Through some misunderstanding,” there was no band or official party waiting as the wounded men made their way slowly down the gangway from the SS Prince Edward Island. Chaisson had been shot through the groin. Knockwood, who had once starred with the Lennox Island rugby team, was visibly disfigured: “A piece of shrapnel struck him on the head, knocking out one eye, winding him terribly on the top of the head, shattering his teeth, on one side, and leaving him paralyzed on one side of the face down to the shoulder so that he is unable to raise one arm. Both his memory and hearing are also affected.”

“Some friends here have urged me to try and get my son brought back to Canada in connection with recruiting,” a distraught father wrote his old colleague, the Premier, in November 1916. “He has been continuously in and out of the trenches since August of 1915 and since early in September of this year has been in the Somme offensive. . . . I am taking this course without any hint from the lad himself, who indeed may not thank me for my pains. But I am beginning to be afraid John. I have already lost one and every telegram that comes to me sets my heart jumping.” The war had become real.

 Islanders in the trenches already suffered from an excess of reality, what poet Frank Walker called the war’s “own black night.” In their minds soldiers escaped into the past or the future. Robert Warren tried not to look ahead, but he could not help himself. In March 1916, he confided to his brother John, “I have had dreams of us getting the half of Mr. O’Halloran’s farm if I get back in good repair. Of course it was only a dream. Somehow I cannot get any particular line of thought as to the

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46Charlottetown Guardian, 11 December 1916. On 1 May 1918, the Summerside Journal scolded, “It is regrettable to say the least, that during the last several months no official welcome has been giving [sic] khaki clad heroes returning to Summerside, after risking their life and limbs in France for us. . . . a severely [sic] crippled soldier arrived in Summerside on Saturday – and not a soul met him at the railway station. Surely this should not be.”

future, but things will adjust themselves to the conditions of Peace when it comes.”

Frank Walker was out again with the stretcher-bearers at Courcelette in the fall of 1916 as the futile British offensive on the Somme finally drowned in its own blood. Robert Warren was there, too. On 25 September, the 26th Battalion was caught in a German artillery barrage while advancing over open ground. Warren’s body was never identified. Walker, who never knew him, wrote a poem there that might serve as Warren’s epitaph. It ended:

\[\text{Death came savagely here, swift in the night} \\
\text{Leaving a Song unsung, a Tale untold —} \\
\text{Leaving only this in the blanket-fold,} \\
\text{To be buried darkly away, where rats won’t bite —} \\
\text{Leaving only a Cross scratched with a stone} \\
\text{To carry all Life’s Poem and History; —} \\
\text{“Number and name and Regiment, unknown;} \\
\text{Fell on the field of Battle. R.I.P.”} \]

A few months later, after the bloody Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge, Walker gave up keeping his journal. He was tired, he wrote, of “making notes on every trivial occasion, and the novelty of writing about Active Service can no longer inspire my efforts.” It was those things he could not bear to record, perhaps, that had stopped his pen. From the soul-sucking mud of Passchendaele, he was invalided back to England in the fall of 1917. For him, the Great War was essentially over.

For the others, it went on. “Starting another month of this crazy slaughter,” Percy MacNevin of the 2nd Siege wrote on 1 August 1917. “There seems no chance of the end coming this year. In fact, owing to the Russian disaster we may be heavily attacked by German troops released from the east. However we are here, so let them pass the men along. It is just as well to kill them here as 20 miles...

\[48\text{Warren to Minnie Warren, 27 March 1916.} \\
49\text{From Walker’s poem “From the Somme.” See Gaudet, From A Stretcher Handle, p. 102.} \\
50\text{Gaudet, From A Stretcher Handle, p. 127.}\]
For Prince Edward Island, as for Canada, 1916 was the pivotal year of the Great War. At home, the war’s substance began slowly to overtake its gigantic shadow, while at the Front significant numbers of Islanders were fed into the meat-grinder of battle. Canada suffered about 75% of its casualties after August 1916. At the same time, the flow of enlistments, which had swelled to a torrent early in the year, shrivelled to a trickle. The resulting manpower shortage would set the stage for the conscription crisis of 1917, and the desperate months that preceded victory.

The pain inflicted by war was accompanied by a rush of prosperity on Prince Edward Island. As an agricultural society, Prince Edward Island reaped the benefit of the war’s monstrous hunger for matériel. The Canadian Annual Review’s review of provincial affairs had termed 1915 “fairly prosperous”; 1916 was “a most prosperous year”; 1917 promised to be even better. Not even inflation could keep up with the soaring price of foodstuffs. “Prices for farm produce are very high,” James Pendergast of Kensington reported to The Maple Leaf in the spring of 1917. By his estimation, the purchasing power of oats had doubled over the previous year; that of potatoes had tripled. While farmers reaped the profits from food shortages, Island wage-earners found that, especially after 1916, the cost of living was climbing much faster than their incomes. In February 1918, the married attendants at Falconwood Insane Asylum petitioned the Trustees of the hospital for an increase in wages “until such time, at least, as the cost of living again falls to its normal level.” Out in Tignish, C. F. Morrissey was moved to enter the extraordinary prices in his diary, “Hard on poor people,” he

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51 MacNevin, PARO 4633.


53 Petition to Medical Superintendent and Trustees of Falconwood Hospital, 14 February 1918.
Behind the burgeoning demand that drove up produce prices lay a growing food shortage. Food production had been devastated in warring Europe, while in North America crop yields were down, in part because so many experienced farmhands had enlisted. On Prince Edward Island, women increasingly stepped in to help fill the farm labour vacuum. “E. Vesey” captured the figurative truth of the situation in the course of a satirical account of affairs in the farm community of York. “I am reading a Food Pledge Card. One hand is tipping a load of turnips into the cellar, the other is cooking the dinner. I am writing this with my brain. One foot is carrying a screen door up into the loft, the other is out somewhere attending a Red Cross meeting. My left ear is listening to someone shouting, ‘Head off that horse there.’ The rest of me is ruminating on different matters, the war, menu, and things in general.” The boundaries of the woman’s sphere remained intact, but like a huge soap bubble, they were bulging and expanding in response to the “peculiar conditions arising from the war.”

Vesey’s reference to food pledge cards was an allusion to the federal government’s concern about the food supply. But Island potato growers did not take kindly to suggestions that a ceiling be placed on potato prices just when they were starting to make money. In the end, no price was fixed for potatoes, but that November, a galling shortage of rolling stock on the Intercolonial Railway held up export of the province’s three-million-bushel surplus for several costly weeks. Waiting impotently while their harvest deteriorated, farmers certainly did not feel like war profiteers.

Nor was the voluntary food rationing intended by the pledge cards a popular success. Finding many of the recommended substitutes for essential foodstuffs either unavailable or unpalatable,

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54 C. F.’s Diary, 1913-1952 (Summerside: Judge Enterprises, 1977), p. 50, entry for 30 April 1917.


56a Occupations for Girls,” Charlottetown Guardian, 10 January 1916.

57 See, for example, “Re Potato Production,” 5 October 1917 and “Another Letter Re Potatoes,” 16 October 1917, both in Island Patriot.
Islanders evidently ignored them. After visiting the Howatts of Long River in the summer of 1918, L. M. Montgomery confessed to her journal, “We had one of those wonderful ‘spreads’ which only Island people can — or do — get up, and which they still continue to get up despite the howls of the Food Board. In my own house [in Ontario] we haven’t had cake for a year, but since I’ve been on the Island I’ve seen heaps of it — and eaten heaps of it, too, I must admit.”

Boxed Essay: Ships Off the Old Block

High produce prices, combined with the heavy toll on Allied shipping from German submarines, even provided a curtain call for the Island’s once mighty wooden shipbuilding industry. As every available iron steamship was drawn to the War’s magnet, a shipping shortage developed, driving up freight rates and profit margins for the Maritimes’ fleet of wooden sailing vessels. Across the region and in New England, there was a flurry of new ship construction to exploit the business opportunity that the war had presented.

On Prince Edward Island, the old shipbuilding tradition had lingered on in the area around Cardigan Bay long after the industry had essentially died elsewhere in the province. Georgetown, Cardigan, and Montague each launched wooden sailing vessels in the early years of the century. It had only been a decade since the last vessel slipped down the ways, when an ambitious Cardigan merchant named John A. Macdonald formed the Cardigan Shipbuilding Company and salvaged a crew to build him a three-masted tern schooner. Launched at war’s end, she was christened the Victory Chimes. Encouraged by her initial success, Macdonald built two more vessels: the ill-starred Barbara Macdonald, wrecked on her maiden voyage in 1919, and the Anna Macdonald, launched in 1920. Shipwreck and the sagging freight rates that followed the Armistice discouraged Macdonald from further new construction, and by 1924 he had sold off his two surviving vessels. Although coasting schooners continued to be a common sight in Island waters until after the next great war, Macdonald’s three vessels remain the last large wooden sailing ships to be launched on Prince Edward Island.

While other Canadians were exercising their zeal by rioting against recent German and Austrian immigrants, Islanders fell back on traditional prejudices. The flip side of patriotism, after

[58]Rubio and Waterston, Selected Journals I, pp. 258-59 (entry for 8 July 1918). The campaign for voluntary rationing received considerable press in Island newspapers.

all, is intolerance. “Several parties talked to me about the way John Quinn and his brother Joe were talking, giving expression to what was anti-British,” a Scots Islander complained to the Premier. “People say that the talk was disgraceful for any one living under the British flag and enjoying its privileges. John Quinn is a blacksmith and has a chance to get a lot of this talk off. . . . I certainly think the matter should be investigated & probed to the very bottom.”

There were other fears. “In Summerside,” the Journal remarked in July 1915, “there has been more or less talk of German spies. Travellers who use a notebook are always spies in the opinion of some nervous people. . . . In their opinion every stranger is a spy, and all his actions convict him. He should be hanged to the nearest telegraph pole.” The “nervous people” included persons in authority. In 1916, there was a flurry of high-level telegrams about a supposed Austrian spy employed at Charlottetown’s Victoria Hotel, and, in August 1918, “suspicious visitors” to St. Peter’s Island out in Charlottetown Harbour turned out to be a young farmer and his wife stranded by rough weather on a boating excursion. The closest Island civilians got to an actual enemy were the hundred or so enemy aliens brought over that summer from the internment camp in Amherst to work on the railway approaches to Port Borden.

Nation-making and nation-breaking dominate histories of Canada in the Great War. Our share in

60 Letter to Premier J. A. Mathieson, 5 January 1917, Premier Mathieson Papers, PARO RG 25.23.


62 The telegrams, dated February 1916, can be found in the Premier Mathieson Papers (PARO RG 25.23); the mystery of the suspicious strangers on St. Peter’s Island is explained in “Mystery Solved,” Charlottetown Guardian, 27 August 1918, p. 5.

63 Summerside Journal, 2 October 1918. Locals mistook the internees as German prisoners of war, a tradition that persists. See interview with Helen Herring by Reg Thompson, re-played on “The By-Gone Days,” CBC Mainstreet (taped copy courtesy of Reg Thompson).
winning the war has been touted as a giant step toward nationhood. At the same time, the conscription crisis of 1917 fractured the Dominion’s fragile unity. In the national histories, conscription is cast as a struggle between French and English Canada. On Prince Edward Island, where Acadians were, if anything, over-represented in the armed forces, there was controversy as well, but it had nothing to do with language or ethnicity. Silent and sullen in the manner of Island disagreements, it was about the pull of political loyalties, the power of coercion, and the demands of the soil.

Voluntarism had created Canada’s army, but, by 1917, it had become painfully obvious that voluntarism could not sustain it. Losses steadily outstripped enlistments, and with every casualty the stakes in the war were raised. Reluctantly, Borden’s Conservative government introduced conscription in the summer of 1917. Its sober intent was to keep faith with the war and to distribute its burden more evenly among Canadians. But there was no way to sugarcoat the Military Service Act. Despite its exemptions and provisions for appeal, it was coercion, plain and simple, and the coercion was aimed directly at Quebec, which the super patriots felt had signally failed to “do its bit.” In October, Borden welded pro-conscription Conservatives and Liberals into a “Union” Government. On 17 December he led it to the polls in one of the bitterest election campaigns ever fought in Canada.

On Prince Edward Island, the heat of Unionism had trouble dissolving the glue of old party loyalties. Defensively brandishing its patriotism, the Liberal press rallied behind Laurier, though its faith was more in him than in the letter of his platform, which called for a national referendum on conscription.\textsuperscript{64} It was safer strategy for “Win-the-War Liberals” simply to attack the Unionists as poorly disguised Conservatives who were taking refuge in conscription to distract voters from the spectacle of their incompetence and corruption. The Union campaign rhetoric was even less subtle: a vote for the “Laurierites” was a vote for the Kaiser and a betrayal of Canada’s fighting men.

Both sides competed feverishly for a new category of voters: women. To improve their

\textsuperscript{64}As a \textit{Patriot} editorial on 6 July 1917 stated, “The Patriot has always been in favor of conscription and has stated so publicly. This, however, does not imply any violation of our allegiance to Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the principles of Liberalism as well understood in our country.”

\textit{Weary with the World’s Woe} 72
chances in the upcoming election, the Conservatives had passed a Wartime Elections Act in August 1917. It was Solicitor General Arthur Meighan’s idea to enfranchise women in uniform and the wives, mothers, sisters, and grown daughters of CEF members. They were likely to support conscription. Recent immigrants from enemy countries were not, and the act disenfranchised them. If soldiers, who were overwhelmingly pro-conscription, had no clear constituency, they were allowed to choose where their votes would be counted. If they did not care, their party could choose for them. Such provisions for soldiers were as temporary as they were opportunistic, but the vote for women, even if it was only for some women, was an irrevocable step. As if recognizing that, Borden made women’s suffrage part of his election platform.

The Unionists won the war of words on Prince Edward Island, but the Liberals won the election. The initial results gave Laurier’s candidates all four Island seats. Only when the soldiers’ votes were counted — 2,775 for the Unionists, 434 Liberal — did Borden’s coalition squeak out a pair of victories. Even then, Prince Edward Island remained the only province outside Quebec not to give a clear majority to the Union Government.

In a morning-after editorial on 18 December, The Guardian admitted that Island Conservatives had “lost considerably” by supporting conscription. Islanders were already defensive about criticism of their enlistment record, and Island farmers, in particular, had bridled at the implication that they were profiting from the war. Now they were desperately short of labour, and conscription threatened to take away what few hands were left to work the land. That meant more than potential lost profits; most Island farms were first and foremost subsistence operations. If there was no one left to do the farm work, how would families get enough to eat? Many Islanders seem to have agreed with Robert L. Cotton. After touring England and France back in 1915, he had come home “absolutely satisfied that the average Prince Edward Island business man just as well as the average Prince Edward Island farmer can serve his empire more effectively and quite as patriotically here in Prince Edward Island as he could hope to do in the trenches of France. . . .”

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Having voiced their ambivalence toward conscription at the polls, Islanders quietly went about abiding by its provisions. On 17 November 1917, The Guardian had reported that 4,389 men had registered for the draft, the highest percentage of any province. Of that total, 263 offered to enlist; 4,126 applied for an exemption. By 3 December, 2,935 of them had got one. Those who were refused had the right to appeal, and about 350 of them did, but very few of the appeals were granted.

The appeal process created an informative paper trail. As might be expected, the great majority of the appellants protested that they were needed on their parents’ farm. The comments filed with the appeals tribunal are equally revealing:

“. . . his work is of no importance as his position can easily be filled by a girl.”

“It is in the national interest that this man be engaged in military service rather than continue his comparatively unproductive employ of lobster fishery.”

“It appears to me to be the common case of scattering the ineligible members of the family in order to secure exemption for those qualified for military service.”

“This man is not a farmer but he is one of a family of sons of whom six are of military age, with not one in military service.”

“The services of this man are in my opinion more urgently needed in the military forces than upon his father’s farm.”

When all was said and done, Islanders proved remarkably obedient. By November 1918, only 39 of 1,121 conscripts called up for duty had failed to report.

But the rancour persisted. While visiting the Island in July 1918, L. M. Montgomery, a red-hot

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67“The Exemption Tribunals,” Guardian, 4 December 1917, p. 1. The Canadian Annual Review for 1918 (p. 475) put the total registrations under the Military Service Act for Prince Edward Island at 5,713, of whom 2,659 received exemptions

68The comments from the appeals process are taken from PARO RG 6, Military Service Act, 1917-18.

69This statistic was tabled in the Canadian Annual Review for 1918 (p. 475).
As the war dragged on toward its fifth year, there was little sense that victory might be imminent. During the first half of 1918, defeat actually seemed far more likely. In March, with Russia overwhelmed by internal revolution and military disaster, Germany shifted masses of troops to the Western Front and launched an all-out offensive that battered the Allies to the breaking point.

For soldier and civilian alike, the war had become a grim endurance test. “The war is terrible,” Ned Wyatt wrote his daughter Wanda on 1 May 1918: “All the boys from [age groups] 20, 21, & 22 are called up without exception. No exemptions allowed. It will be hard on the farmers to lose their sons in this way, but they say they are going to conscript all who are not employed in some useful occupation and make them work on farms. This will help out but I like to see it done first. It is a terrible war, and not too bright now, but the right will win in the long run and we must trust in God and do the best we can.”

Farmers struggled to cope. That June, desperately shorthanded, the Dominion Experimental Farm in Charlottetown employed a contingent of ten teenaged “farmerettes.” By that time over five hundred city boys were employed on Island farms. When fall came, conscripted soldiers were given furloughs to help harvest the crops.

The government’s resort to a national registration of every person over the age of sixteen during the summer of 1918 demonstrated the gravity of the war situation. Somewhat to its own dismay, Ottawa had been taking on more and more responsibility for conscripting the country’s conscriptionist, got into “a foolish wrangle” over the issue with her Aunt Emily: “We all got rather excited and some bitter things were said.”


72“Farm Help,” *Charlottetown Guardian*, 7 June 1918. According to Mary B. Bourdon, *Charlottetown Research Station, 1909-1984* (Ottawa: Research Branch, Agricultural Canada, 1984), farmerettes were required in 1917 as well.
On 1 April 1918, a federal income tax went into effect, tagged at 3% of personal incomes over $1,500 or family incomes over $3,000. Few Islanders earned enough yet to have to pay either it or its long-standing provincial equivalent. The new tax was described as a temporary war measure.

The provincial government had grown more interventionist, too, though less dramatically. A special War and Health Tax, passed at a single sitting in 1916, had to be renewed in 1917 when it became obvious the war would drag on. That same year the Conservative government empowered itself to expropriate vacant farms for the use of returning soldiers. In the ensuing debate, the Tories were branded as "socialistic."  

In June, with the Germans driving everything before them and the supreme crisis of the war at hand, the Prince Edward Theatre was showing *The Kaiser, Beast of Berlin*, “a seven-reel history of Germany’s game to enslave us.” Victory seemed far away. Then, just like in the movies, the tide of war turned suddenly. In July, having bent but not broken, the Allies launched a trip-hammer series of counterattacks on the Western Front. The Germans reeled back under the relentless pressure, contesting every mile. The Canadian Corps was now the spearhead of British assaults, and it suffered heavy casualties during the “Hundred Days” campaign that decided the war.

There was savage fighting almost to the last, and by the time a prostrate Germany sued for peace, the victors themselves were staggering. Percy MacNevin’s journal entry for 11 November 1918 is remarkable in its understatement, “Cold, bleak day. Our troops advanced until 11 a.m. when hostilities ceased.” A great silence descended on the Western Front. It was over.

Back home, Islanders had already spent their emotions on a false alarm. A premature peace rumour had sent most Canadians into the streets to celebrate on 8 November. Across the Island, church bells pealed out in exultation. In Charlottetown, people poured into the streets. “The city went wild with ecstasies of joy and all work ceased by common consent. . . . The scene was indescribable.” That evening a torchlight procession wound through the City to the Market Square

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73 *Canadian Annual Review*, 1917.

74 MacNevin Diary, PARO 4633.

where the Kaiser burned in effigy and patriotic orations rose like sparks up into the night sky.

On 11 November it all had to be done again. This time there was an even bigger bonfire — but no speeches.\textsuperscript{76}

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For the T. P. Cullen family out in Sherwood, Armistice Day was bleak beyond words. On 9 November, their father had marked a cheerless birthday while their mother lay desperately ill in a bed they had fixed up for her in the parlour. She died the next day. While Charlottetown danced in the streets on 11 November, her little funeral cortège, eleven people in all, wound somberly through the milling crowd, from St. Dunstan’s Basilica out along Longworth Avenue to the Roman Catholic cemetery on St. Peter’s Road.\textsuperscript{77} Mrs. Cullen had died of something that today would be treated as little more than an irksome nuisance. Influenza.

The world-wide influenza pandemic of 1918–19 forms a tragic postscript to the Great War. It had taken four years for a brutal war of attrition to destroy 21 million people; a microscopic virus killed at least twice as many in a little over six months. Because neutral Spain was the first to publicize its appearance, it was dubbed the Spanish Flu, but the latest evidence suggests it may actually have originated in the United States in the spring of 1918. Within four months, a first, mild wave of the influenza had circled the globe. But somewhere in its travels, the virus mutated. By August 1918, a second, infinitely more lethal phase had begun.

Seemingly healthy people suddenly began to shiver and sneeze. Headaches and back pains came next, followed by a hacking cough and high fever. Such symptoms were like any other flu. But this flu had a tendency to develop into pneumonia, and in an era before sulfa drugs or penicillin,-------------------

\textsuperscript{76}“Charlottetown Celebrates Glorious News of Victory,” \textit{Guardian}, 12 November 1918, p. 1..

\textsuperscript{77}Mrs. Cecelia (Cullen) Delorie, interview with Kathy Anne Ling, Charlottetown, 28 May 1999. Four of Mrs. Cullen’s twelve children were also stricken, but recovered.
pneumonia killed. Many flu sufferers were dead before they had even been diagnosed. The demographics of the virus was another frightening characteristic. Like the war, it devoured the young: the mortality rate was abnormally high among society’s strongest members, people between the ages of twenty and forty. There was no real prevention, no effective treatment, no known cure.

The influenza arrived on Prince Edward Island in late September, just in time to steal what little sweetness the approach of victory proffered.\textsuperscript{78} Mary Herrell was one of the first to succumb. She fell ill while coming home from a vacation in Boston and brought the virus back with her to Charlottetown. By the time she died, after an eight-day illness, on 2 October, the influenza was already spreading.\textsuperscript{79} By 12 October, 617 cases had been reported in Charlottetown alone. A hundred more were added the following day. The hospitals overflowed. Doctors and nurses were overwhelmed. Exhausted by overwork, they were easy prey for the enemy they were treating. On Monday the fourteenth, the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. W. J. P. Macmillan, closed the province’s schools, cancelled church services, and banned all public gatherings. Then he, too, fell ill.\textsuperscript{80}

Determined that Prince Edward Island not be diverted from its war effort, \textit{The Guardian} pooh-poohed the epidemic, as if ignoring it would make it go away. “Here today we have an undue prevalence of bad cold, in some cases with pneumonia supervening. . . ,” an editorial complained. “But the name given this bad cold is malignant in itself, \textit{viz:} Spanish Influenza and we immediately take fright and refuse to ‘carry on.’” Fear, not the flu, was the real enemy: “Remove fear and Spanish Influenza will vanish as quickly as she came.”\textsuperscript{81}

Disbelief was no defence. On 23 October, as the epidemic peaked in the capital, the local


\textsuperscript{79} “Miss Mary Herrell,” \textit{Charlottetown Guardian}, 3 October 1918, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{80} See “Public Notice,” \textit{Guardian}, 14 October 1918, p. 1 and \textit{Guardian}, 11 November 1918, p. 5.

Board of Health banned public funerals and ordered that all persons that had died of flu or pneumonia be buried within twenty-four hours. By the first week of November the ban on public gatherings had been lifted in Charlottetown, and the city returned to a pallid normalcy. For Charlottetonians the euphoric scenes of 8 and 11 November marked a deliverance from pestilence as well as war. But the epidemic was not gone. It had only moved from the city into the rural districts, and there was little to celebrate in many places come the Armistice or after.

All that fall, the killer stalked the Island countryside. “The country is aflame with influenza,” Clarence Morrissey of Tignish recorded in his diary on 19 October. That Sunday, the Catholic Church at Tignish was closed for the first time since it opened in 1860. Christmas found southern King’s County under siege: Murray River, White Sands, Guernsey Cove, Cape Bear. Through mid-January, the churches were still closed in Murray Harbour.

Everywhere across the province, the story was the same. Something close to panic prevailed. People avoided standing in open doorways, where the germs were thought to collect. They smoked and chewed tobacco, and when they could get their hands on any, they dosed themselves with liquor to ward off the contagion. Nothing really worked. Whole families were stricken. Neighbours stopped visiting. Some even quarantined themselves in an effort to escape. On the Peters Road, the Johnson family went so far as to board up the downstairs, using a ladder to come and go from an upstairs window. But boards could not keep the influenza out either. Two family members died, and years later Jim MacLean could still recall the eerie, arm’s-length wake that the community held for one of the sons. While his body lay in the Johnsons’ parlour, the neighbours gathered in a field near the house. They were too afraid to go inside.

That so many of the flu victims were young intensified the poignancy of their deaths. Horace Smith of Charlottetown would return from Overseas to find his wife dead and his five children committed to the Protestant Orphanage at Mount Herbert. In Georgetown, Daniel Martell lost his

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83 C. F.’s Diary, 1913-1952.

84 Jim MacLean, interview with Reg Thompson, as retold on “The By-Gone Days,” CBC Mainstreet (taped copy courtesy of Reg Thompson).
wife and two daughters within a week in early November. Up in East Baltic, Joseph Jarvis appeared
to recover, then suffered a relapse and died on what was to have been his wedding day.\footnote{For the story on Horace Smith, see Guardian, 16 October 1918, p. 3. For Jarvis and Martell, see Guardian, 7 November 1918, p. 5;} L. M. Montgomery, having survived her own bout with influenza, rushed down from Ontario to Park Corner to nurse her Campbell cousins. Two of them had already died by the time she got there.

By mid-February 1919, the influenza epidemic was petering out. Thousands of Islanders had
been infected, and hundreds had died. In Summerside alone, more citizens had died from the flu than
had been killed in the Great War.\footnote{Ibid. Thompson cites a report published in the Summerside Pioneer on 16 November 1918, at the height of the epidemic on Prince Edward Island. By that time, eighteen Summerside residents had died from the flu.} There are no accurate statistics for the death toll from the influenza epidemic on Prince Edward Island, but the annual Report of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths provides a rough accounting. For 1918 and 1919, it lists 375 deaths from either influenza or pneumonia.\footnote{The reports are tabled in the Journals of the Legislative Assembly for those years. The actual breakdown for 1918 is 130 flu-related deaths and 80 from pneumonia; the figures for 1919 are 47 and 80, respectively. During 1918, twice as many people died in the 21-40 age bracket as in the previous year. My thanks to Andrew Cousins for ferreting out these numbers.} Again, those totals do not include expatriates and Island soldiers, whose
deaths were grieved no less for having occurred off-Island. The death of Frede Campbell, her kindred
spirit, in Montreal in January 1919 became a defining tragedy in L. M. Montgomery’s life.

The influenza epidemic left no scars on the collective memory of Prince Edward Island. Even
though it killed almost as many Islanders, it is obscured by the long black shadow cast by the Great
War. The influenza epidemic was a brief, calamitous episode. The Great War was a turning point.

The bitter peace that the Allies imposed on Germany in 1919 had been won at a terrible price. Europe
was in ruins. Eight-and-a-half million soldiers and nearly thirteen million civilians had died.
Dynasties had fallen, empires crumbled. European civilization, which had dominated world history for four centuries, emerged from the conflict morally crippled, its faith in itself destroyed. The belief that this had been “the war to end wars” proved a chimera as well. Mankind had been neither redeemed nor reformed, and the “world wide everlasting Peace” that Robert Warren had died for would last barely twenty years.

On Prince Edward Island, four thousand miles from the devastation of the war, there was less sense that the world had shifted on its axis. Yet, unmistakably, it had. The human cost was obvious, even if strangely elusive. According to official government records, 318 Islanders had died while serving with the Canadian forces. As with the official enlistment statistics, the figure counted only those who had given their address as Prince Edward Island when joining up. Lists published in Island newspapers after the Armistice are riddled with mistakes, omissions, and duplications. The most complete of these, published in The Guardian on 23 December 1918, counted 503 Islanders killed, died of wounds, died on active service, or missing in action, and gave a total casualty figure of 1,669. A recent compilation, plumbed from a miscellany of unofficial as well as official sources, puts the number of Island war dead at 793. Whatever the true figure might be, the cold hand of statistics can never encompass the enduring pain of what historians Morton and Granatstein have termed “broken dreams, broken bodies, and broken families.”

The life of the province, too, had fundamentally changed, though not in obvious ways. For the moment, Canada’s giant steps toward nationhood and her government’s arming of itself to play a more active role in the affairs of its people were more symbolic than significant, and, for their part, postwar Island governments promised retrenchment, not revolution. At the same time, war had wrenched Islanders out of the deep furrow of their previous existence. It had cost them their complacency, and infected them with a vague discontent. In the aftermath of peace, the returning veterans and their families would find that there was no path back to the world they had known before. For them, the 20th century had at last begun.

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88 Using figures supplied by the Summerside branch of the Great War Veterans’s Association, the 19 April 1922 edition of Summerside Journal put the Prince County total at 121 deaths (83 killed in action, 34 died of wounds, and 4 died on active service).

89 Morton and Granatstein, Marching to Armageddon, p. 260.
Part Two
The Crucible of Change

In the Fall I Remember

In the fall I remember
an abundant life in a large house:
we were a crowd, a country, a state.
Done, doing and yet to do — work without end,
work named by the hour, the day the season —
a marshalled life.

My father did everything, was everything —
lord of our lives — a cursing, gentle man.
He could parse and he could scan,
line a psalm, recite a poem, build a barn.
For him we took each meal in silence —
eleven children, and always the visitors:
his rule.

Every room full and attics stowed,
halls without heat and winter stoves;
and below
in the cool dark cellar
jars of jam, red as cardinals and gold-capped.
In the well-house, pickled hams and dried fish,
and twice a week, the baking.

A life banked against winter.

Anne Compton

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Anne Compton, “In the Fall I Remember,” Queen’s Quarterly, 104(Fall 1997): 565.
Used by permission of author.
Chapter Four
Seed Potatoes and Silver Foxes (and Rum)

And what about temperance, Uncle Jim?
“It’s a bad sign of a dog if y’ gotta muzzle ’im.”
— Frank Ledwell

It is hard to know what symbol best captures the spirit of the 1920s on Prince Edward Island. Should it be the shining pelt of a silver fox? A dirty burlap bag, stamped “Garden of the Gulf,” bulging with potatoes? The makeshift mast of a radio antenna? Or a half-empty rum bottle, dark as a boot, stashed out in the barn? The 1920s was all of this, and much more besides. As in the rest of Canada, it was a profoundly unsettled time, full of unresolved contradictions and sudden reversals, of new departures grafted onto enduring traditions. This grinding together of opposites would make the 1920s perhaps the most overlooked decade in Island history. Within it, fundamental change was incubating.

After seven years in power, the provincial Conservatives went into the general election of July 1919 with a comfortable majority, a hopeful economy, and a big deficit. Up in Tignish, Tory Clarence Morrissey’s gloomy diary entry read like a newspaper headline. “Conservative Govt. busted. Liberals swept the country.” And they did, taking twenty-four of thirty seats. The Canadian Annual Review attributed Premier Aubin E. Arsenault’s defeat in part to an “Orange vote” antagonized by the Premier’s supposed favouritism toward his fellow Roman Catholics. In his Memoirs, Arsenault preferred to blame his advocacy of a uniform education tax that would have replaced the highly

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2 This untitled poem appears in Ledwell’s The North Shore of Home (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1986).

3 C. F.’s Diary, p. 79 (entry for 24 July 1919).
uneven system of local assessment. Really, though, the underlying cause for the change in government was the aimless discontent that was abroad in the land. As the Review observed, “The Province was prosperous in 1919 but the people weren’t altogether contented: high prices and unrest invaded the Garden of the Gulf as they did every part of Canada.”

One prompt for the unrest was a ruinous inflation, which undercut the superficial prosperity of the immediate postwar era. Continuing high prices for producers were more than offset by high prices for consumers. At the peak of the inflationary cycle, in 1920, prices for consumer goods in Canada, including foods, beverages and tobacco, were 225% higher than at the outbreak of the war six years earlier. A selection of foodstuffs that would have cost $7.34 in 1913 fetched $16.00 in 1920. In such an atmosphere, any talk of new taxes was anathema. Yet the government’s dollars went no further than those of its citizens. Like a pensioner on a fixed income, it watched as the purchasing power of its main source of revenue, federal subsidies, shrunk. Spending less was hardly an attractive option in the postwar era struggling to be born.

The unceremonious turfing of Arsenault’s administration set the pattern for the next fifteen years. It was as if Island society had dragged its anchor and was drifting. Between 1919 and 1935, the provincial government changed with every election. The swings were as dramatic as they were frequent. With one exception, the winning party never held less than eighteen seats in a house of thirty members. In 1919 and 1923, Islanders even broke with their customary practice of electing the same party locally as held power federally.

Third-party candidates, unknown since the 1890s, sprang up like weeds in the years after the

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4The Orange Lodge, that is. (See Canadian Annual Review, 1919, p. 726.) The Orange Sentinel had complained about the number of Roman Catholics in the administration. “It would seem that the Orange vote, which in all Canadian Provinces is largely Conservative, must have supported the Liberals.”

5Ibid., p. 722.

6Canada Year Book, 1925, p. 742. The cost of living index was slightly lower, but was still 90% higher than in 1913.
war. Although they did not organize politically for the 1919 election, dissident farmers, antagonized by Canada’s high tariffs, were one of the wild cards in the campaign. Another was the incorrigible John A. Dewar. For two terms he had sat as a Conservative but voted his own mind. When the Party denied him the nomination in 3rd King’s, Dewar ran as an Independent Farmer. The Liberals shrewdly declined to nominate a candidate, and Dewar won easily, the first independent candidate to be elected since the 1870s. Encouraged by his success, the United Farmers of Prince Edward Island formally organized in 1920, and, in the 1921 federal election, three candidates, including disaffected Liberals Walter Jones and Horace Wright, ran, unsuccessfully, for the upstart Progressive Party, an agrarian protest movement based mainly in the Canadian West. There was even a Labour candidate in the dual riding of Queen’s. Strange days, indeed.

The new Liberal premier was John Howatt Bell, a Summerside lawyer who had sandwiched a long career in the provincial legislature around a brief stint in the House of Commons. Aged 72 in 1919, he remains the oldest premier to take office in Island history. A trifle defensively, his admirers waxed hyperbolic about Bell’s keen eyesight, remarkable health, and unflagging energy (twelve-to-fourteen-hour workdays). He was said to be a tireless walker — and a tireless talker, given to marathon orations that prompted one West Prince Tory to describe him as “the long-tongued, empty-headed Bell.”

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7 In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the United Farmers won 18 seats and Labour 4 in provincial elections over the same period.


9 There is a colourful, somewhat improbable sketch of Bell in the 14 February 1924 edition of Maclean’s. A pre-election piece in the Prince Edward Island Patriot (“Premier John H. Bell’s Experience”), 30 June 1923, has the same thrust. The dismissive description comes from Dr. J. A. Stewart, Tyne Valley, to J. A. Mathieson, 2 May 1916, J. A. Mathieson Papers, PARO RG 25.23.
Bell came to office promising “economy and efficiency,” in government if not in speech, but like Arsenault he soon collided with the spirit of the age. Balancing Islanders’ desire for services with debt load was a dangerous undertaking, and political leadership during the 1920s might best be described as trying to choose between what the people demanded and what the electorate would stand for. The paradox was painful, and it is no surprise that governments trying to ride out the era’s restlessness were regularly bucked off. J. H. Bell’s government set the trend. Hardly had it taken the saddle when it rode right into the first major labour dispute in the province’s history.

There were sixteen active union locals in the province by 1902. Their members were working men: carpenters and joiners, painters and decorators, printers, ironworkers, teamsters, telegraphers, railwaymen, dock workers. They were hardly militant. Between 1901 and 1919, there was a grand total of five labour disputes on Prince Edward Island involving fewer than 350 workers. It was not a society that sympathized much with unions. The bulk of the work force were farmers, and while they had a long history of organizing for mutual advantage, most felt little solidarity with urban labourers. Even Island fishermen, many of whom were in the grip of the fish merchants, failed to make any connection between their powerlessness and that of other workers. The 1920s would see the establishment of a fishermen’s “union,” but it would be the herald of a co-operative movement, not a bridge to the labour sector.

With teachers it was different. “There is a possibility of a school teachers union being formed in Prince Edward Island,” observed the Summerside Journal on 29 May 1918. “Considering that some teachers’ salaries are about as high as the average office boy’s, the move would seem to be a commendable one.” Actually, the Prince Edward Island Teachers’ Association had been talking union for the previous two years. Still, the editorial squib did hit on two critical points: the prime motivation for the union, abysmally low salaries, and a key reason why it would succeed, public sympathy. Island teachers continued to be by far the lowest paid in the country, and the high inflation helped transform

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10 David Frank and Heidi MacDonald, “Island Federation: The Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour,” draft manuscript, February 1999 (courtesy of the authors). As the exception that proves the rule, it should be noted that in the 1921 federal election, the Progressives deliberately avoided competing against the lone Labour candidate.
their complaint into a crisis. While scores of teachers were enlisting in the armed forces during the war, even greater numbers went West, where the Prairie provinces were paying premium wages for qualified instructors. To cite an extreme example, a woman holding a third class licence in King’s County could make four times as much money teaching school any place west of Manitoba.\textsuperscript{11} By Christmas 1918, twenty-three rural Island schools had failed to find any teacher willing to accept the meagre salaries that the districts could afford — or chose — to offer. In 1919, the number of vacant schools rose toward fifty, and school trustees pressed the government to grant permits to unlicenced teachers.\textsuperscript{12} The inability of many rural school districts to raise meaningful supplements lay behind Arsenault’s abortive Education Bill. And it lay behind the Prince Edward Island Teachers’ Union, which formed officially on 26 September 1918. The next fall it presented an ultimatum to Bell’s new administration: either grant a dramatic increase in pay or Island teachers would go on strike.

The government had little choice. His hand forced by the pressing shortage of teachers, Premier Bell introduced new wage scales during the 1920 Session that raised the average salaries for the various classes of Island teachers by between 46% and 60%.\textsuperscript{13} The strike threat was withdrawn. Although the confrontation has now been largely forgotten, it seems emblematic. In the future, the backbone of the labour movement on Prince Edward Island would be the professional associations. As for the teachers, even after their hefty pay hike, they remained the lowest paid members of their profession in Canada. By the end of the decade, they were once again threatening strike action.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}These figures are taken from the \textit{Canada Year Book} for the years under consideration.

\textsuperscript{12}The problem can be traced in the correspondence of the School Superintendent. See, for example, H. H. Shaw to Alberton School District, 15 September 1919, PARO RG 10, Vol. 21, Superintendent’s Correspondence. See, too, \textit{Canadian Annual Review}, 1919, p. 546-47.

\textsuperscript{13}The act granting the pay raise was passed on 19 May 1920. See \textit{Assembly Journal}, 1920.

\textsuperscript{14}The 1929 dispute foreshadowed another trend. As Fred Rogers of Alberton wrote Premier A. C. Saunders on 30 March 1929, “At this distance from the centre of the dispute, there may be many things I do not know but I certainly know enough to be able to say that, by threatening to strike, the teachers have lost 90% of the sympathy that was felt for them a month earlier. . . .” The public’s attitude towards strikes would drive unions towards arbitration -- such as Royal Commissions -- as a better tool in gaining concessions from employers.
Its concessions to the teachers would cost the provincial government an additional $150,000 per annum. The only recourse was more taxation. Land taxes went up. The flat-rate provincial income tax was graduated, topping out at 10% for annual incomes of over $20,000. And, for the first time since the 1870s, a poll tax was introduced: $3 on every male resident over 21. In the fall of 1920, the wobbly, inflationary prosperity of the early postwar period stumbled into a sharp trough of depression. Bell’s political stock fell with it. The backlash from higher taxes, coupled with the economic downturn, made his government tread warily, except along paths where it was confident Islanders wanted it to go. Chief among them was highways.

It is difficult today to grasp the evangelical fervour that the “Good Roads” movement inspired three-quarters of a century ago. Since roads had hitherto been used purely for local travel, they had always been a purely local concern, but, as with so many 20th-century developments on Prince Edward Island, the impetus for highway construction came from Ottawa. Convinced that motorcars would be to the 20th century what railways had been to the 19th, Parliament passed the Canada Highways Act in 1919. It authorized the expenditure of up to $20 million “for the purpose of constructing and improving the highways of Canada.” The projects would be developed by each province in consultation with the federal Department of Railways and Canals, and Ottawa would pay 40% of the cost. According to the formula worked out, Prince Edward Island was eligible for $623,845 in federal aid. But to get it, the Province would have to spend $1.56 million dollars. The Canada Highways Act would be the first in a long, expensive line of federal-provincial highway initiatives.

With all the zeal of a “Good Roads” convert, the Island flung itself into highway construction. The building program of the 1920s dwarfed all previous efforts in that direction. By the time the federal act expired in 1928, 751 miles of highway had been improved, about a fifth of the Island’s roads, and the Island government had managed to spend most of the available federal dollars. In

15Canada Year Book, 1925, pp. 618-19.
comparison to the other provinces, Prince Edward Island submitted more but smaller projects, seventy-seven all told.\textsuperscript{16} The Island projects were unique in that they included municipal streets as well as country roads. The former had been excluded from the federal legislation, but the Island government got around that simply by designating all roads in the province as provincial!

The general approach was piecemeal rather than systematic. Back in 1919, the Industrial Promotion Committee had proposed the construction of a highway across the province as a war memorial, but there was no attempt in the road-building program of the 1920s to construct any such trunk line or even to distinguish between primary and secondary roads. The dispersed nature of rural settlement made all roads equal. Aside from the dictates of need, no obvious pattern imposed itself on the road work at all, unless, perhaps, one consulted the invisible map of local politics.

The provincial government had discovered the hidden benefits of federally subsidized road-building. It was a patronage bonanza, a rare opportunity to reward political friends while providing a real benefit for all electors. After statute labour was abolished in 1928, “working on the roads” became one of the spoils of victory for party supporters. It had its own peculiar ethic. Historian and storyteller David Weale recounts the experience a generation later of a newcomer to government road work: “After he had slaved away for several days, an old guy, a veteran of the roadcrew, sidled up with some strange advice, delivered out of the corner of his mouth. ‘This is the roads, boy,’ he said. ‘Ya don’t hafta work that hard.’”\textsuperscript{17}

Of course, patronage came at a price. In 1920, the Bell Government arranged to borrow $250,000 to help fund its share of construction costs. It 1922, it empowered itself to borrow $450,000 more. With shrewd ingenuity, it argued that the cost of borrowing would be borne entirely by those who used the improved roads most, that is, car owners. According to its convenient calculations, gasoline taxes, licenses, and motor vehicle registration fees would cover the interest payments on the

\textsuperscript{16}The Island projects were unique in that they included municipal streets as well as country roads. The former had been excluded from the federal legislation, but the Island government got around that simply by designating all roads in the province as provincial. See MacKinnon, \textit{The Life of the Party}, p. 85.

borrowed money. The Opposition scoffed — and when in power did the same thing. By the late 1920s, the Province had borrowed nearly a million dollars to help fund the road to Progress.

Opinions differed about what the Island had gotten for its money. As yet, there was virtually no paving associated with the ambitious roads program, and only about fifty miles’ worth of expensive, imported gravel, most of it on the heavily travelled approaches to Charlottetown and Summerside. The vast bulk of the money was spent on rebuilding the Island’s notoriously wretched clay roads. These were widened, cambered, built up, bridged, drained, and ditched into a semblance of modernity. According to James Pendergast, reporting to *The Maple Leaf*, the new system of “gravity ditches” was so efficient in carrying away spring run-off that it was not an uncommon sight to see trout in them. But Island clay being what it is, the rehabilitated dirt roads soon showed an unfortunate tendency to backslide. Each spring they had to be closed to automobile traffic during mud season by order of Executive Council, and, by the mid-1920s, the Superintendent of Public Works was warning that it would take considerable resources just to maintain the new roads.

Despite the heavy expenditures by government, the improved highways remained high-maintenance, one-season roads. Something more permanent was needed, and both Charlottetown and Summerside experimented during the 1920s with various kinds of street surfacing. In 1930, using federal money from a different program, the Liberal government laid down 1.8 miles of experimental asphalt on a stretch of the Malpeque Road leading north from St. Dunstan’s College. It was dubbed “the McIntyre Highway,” after the flamboyant Minister of Public Works, J. P. “Big Jim Bill” McIntyre. Within a year, much to the Liberals’ embarrassment, the much ballyhooed blacktop began cracking. Gleeful Tories condemned the failed technology and used the Liberals’ “cracked highway policy” as a cat’s-paw to pry loose the government’s grip on power. Both parties had mastered the politics of road-building, but, obviously, they had much to learn about the limitations of Island asphalt.

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18 Letter from James Pendergast, *The Maple Leaf*, 16(July 1922)7: 147.


20 As recounted by Wayne MacKinnon in *The Life of the Party*, pp. 95-96.
Premier Bell’s strategy for financing the Island’s share of highway construction was not as far-fetched as the Conservatives pretended. By 1930, the annual revenue from a combination of gasoline taxes, registration fees, and licences had risen to $274,360. Aside from federal subsidies, the once-outlawed automobile had become the single largest source of government income. The burgeoning revenue reflected the explosive growth in the number of motorcars in use on the Island: from 639 cars in 1918 to 2,583 in 1925. By 1928, the figure had doubled again.21

Despite the impressive growth in ownership, the Island continued to have the fewest cars per capita in Canada. In the mid-1920s, there was only one automobile for every thirty-five Islanders. By contrast, one in fourteen Canadians had a car, and one in six Americans. There were sufficiently few automobiles on Prince Edward Island to allow zealous youngsters on dusty summer days to identify local cars by sound alone. A modern Island poet, Thomas O’Grady, meshes that forgotten art with the lost intimacy of Island communities:

The way one ground its gears  
making the grade below the school.  
Or another shook the bridge.

My uncles had by ear the tune  
of every vehicle for miles around,  
& knew each driver’s business too.22

It was the sight of strange “rigs” that sent avid car-watchers scurrying for the “Car Book.” Most often these vehicles belonged to tourists. “Good Roads” were meant for them, too.

21These figures are taken from the editions of the Canada Year Book for the period.

If the Canada Highways Act had invisible fine print, it was the perceived connection between roads and tourism. By the 1920s, the upper class summer visitor of the turn of the century was just beginning to give way to the middle-class motorist on holiday with his family. Each year hundreds of thousands of American vacationers puttered into Canada, littering local economies with their spending. There was thought to be great potential in the motoring tourist, and the Good Roads movement played to their needs as much as to locals’.23

It is no surprise, then, to find that the Prince Edward Island Tourist and Publicity Association, established in 1923 with Judge A. E. Arsenault as its first chair, became a champion of highway improvement. By 1921, an estimated 325,000 native-born Maritimers were living elsewhere, three-quarters of them in the United States. It is hard to separate their journeys home from the wanderings of bona fide tourists, but both brands of visitor were much sought after. It was for their peace of mind that Prince Edward Island switched over to right-hand driving in 1924 after a century of keeping to the left. It was for their use that the Prince Edward Island Motor League published its first *Official Motoring Guide of Prince Edward Island* in 1928. And it was mostly their convenience that locals were thinking about when they complained of the SS *Prince Edward Island* that it had been designed only with railcars, and not motorcars, in mind. Until a makeshift car deck was constructed, automobiles had to be laboriously loaded onto railway flatbeds and piggybacked aboard the ferry. Two decades earlier, Islanders had struggled simply to get people across the Strait.

So much trouble did make it easier to count the incoming motorists. Each year their numbers climbed: 800 cars in 1924, 2,171 in 1926, 3,083 in 1928. In 1929, 4,151 automobiles crossed over to the Island. Local parlance preserved Islanders’ unconscious sense of otherness. Quebec and Ontario cars were said to have “foreign” plates; those from Massachusetts were “Boston” cars.24 Not all of the vehicles represented vacationers, of course. Of the 47,000 people ferried to Prince Edward Island in 1925, about 11,000 were reckoned to be tourists. Fast and loose estimates put their spending

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23The point is made by Donald F. Davis, “Dependent Motorization: Canada and the Automobile to the 1930s,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21(Fall 1986): 121-127. During the late 1920s, two to four million American cars entered Canada per year. By 1930, according to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 72% of American tourists came to Canada by car.

in the province at about $825,000.\textsuperscript{25}

The promotional efforts of the Tourist and Publicity Association notwithstanding, tourism remained largely an ad hoc affair in the 1920s. Without anyone realizing it, however, the industry was beginning to acquire a focus. “You ask in your letter if ‘Cavendish has become a place of pilgrimage for my admirers?’” L. M. Montgomery wrote her Scottish friend G. B. MacMillan in February 1928. “Alas, yes. And the chagrin expressed in that alas is not an affectation at all but a genuine regret and annoyance. Cavendish is being over-run and exploited and spoiled by mobs of tourists . . . .”\textsuperscript{26}

The cult of literary celebrity had invaded the North Shore. In September 1929, Montgomery made another of her own pilgrimages to Cavendish. There she found signboards erected by the provincial government pointing the way to “Avonlea Beach” and “Green Gables.” “It seems of no use,” she reflected, “to protest that it is not ‘Green Gables’ — that Green Gables was a purely imaginary place.”\textsuperscript{27} There was even talk of building a replica of the house in which Montgomery had grown up. Her Uncle John had torn down the derelict building without realizing its potential. While book lovers roamed Cavendish seeking shrines, he built a fox ranch in the front orchard.

Her admirers had come to Cavendish to find the comforting world of Montgomery’s novels. But it wasn’t just \textit{Anne of Green Gables} or \textit{Emily of New Moon} that shaped the popular image of Prince Edward Island as a place embedded in the past.\textsuperscript{28} Across the Maritimes, the nostalgic image of the “Home Place” was taking root. During the early days of \textit{The Maple Leaf}, expatriate correspondents had returned from visits home with tales of progress and prosperity. By the 1920s, the general analysis of the tourism industry in the 1920s draws heavily on Alan Andrew MacEachern, “No Island Is An Island: A History of Tourism on Prince Edward Island, 1870-1939” (M. A. Thesis, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, 1991). The 1925 estimates about tourism come from the \textit{Charlottetown Guardian}, 31 December 1925. MacEachern adopts the figures as a rough average for the decade, though the numbers for the late 1920s were undoubtedly higher.

\textsuperscript{25}Bolger and Epperly, eds., \textit{My Dear Mr. M.}, p. 130.


\textsuperscript{28}The image of Prince Edward Island that resonates through MacEachern’s “No Island Is An Island.”
with the Maritime economy slipping further and further behind the rest of Canada, the expats returned from visits “down home” reporting fondly that nothing had changed there. The shift was partly a function of human aging, and the longing that it engenders, and partly a stubborn insistence on making a virtue of the region’s spreading poverty.

The idea of the “Home Place” crept unbidden into the literature of the period, Montgomery’s books included. Authors generally balanced its saccharine sweetness with table spoons of cynicism, realism, or irony.29 But the emerging tourism industry was not given to cynicism or irony — or realism for that matter. Such qualities did not attract vacationers. Nostalgia clearly did, and playing to it became a staple of tourism promotion for the next half century. On Prince Edward Island, the image was intensified by the literary convention of the island as refuge from the world. The 1928 edition of the Official Motor Guide was typical. Prince Edward Island, it explained, “is emphatically a Land of Rest, appealing to the jaded in spirit — the wearied in body. There is no rush or bustle here, no jarring sounds, no traffic noises. Though in daily communication with the outside world, we are singularly apart from it.” While in a way flattering, such visions were at odds with the province’s struggle to keep up with the rest of the country. This tension between “nostalgia” and “progress” would deepen as the century went on. In the 1920s, there was just room enough for the two to meet on the Island’s new clay roads.

J. H. Bell’s “Pay-As-You-Go” Liberals hoped to ride their highways program to victory in the 1923 provincial election, but the political capital that derived from road-building could not balance the government’s liabilities. The self-proclaimed authors of “Good Roads” were also the authors of the unpopular poll tax, which had inspired indignation meetings in various communities. The continuing economic recession did not improve the tempers of Island voters. Nor did the $197,359 deficit that

the Liberals recorded in 1922–23 despite their new tax revenues.

By then, the Bell Government was also bleeding from self-inflicted wounds. The unconventional Premier might delight colleagues with his skills as a ventriloquist and mimic, but his imitation of a statesman needed work. During the 1922 session, the Opposition watched in delight as he quarrelled openly in the House with his headstrong Attorney General, J. J. Johnston, who had introduced a “government measure” behind the Premier’s back. By the time the Liberals went back to the polls in 1923, four years to the day after their smashing victory, members of the Cabinet weren’t on speaking terms with one another. In the end, the 1923 campaign turned on the Liberals’ poll tax. As a post-mortem in the Halifax Chronicle put it, “increased local taxation has always been a bugaboo of the Island electors.” J. D. Stewart’s Conservatives promised to rescind the levy. They won twenty-four seats. Bell retired.

Although it was not clear on election day, the third party wave crested in 1923. Seven third-party candidates, including Independent Progressive John A. Dewar, went down to defeat. Disappointment, dissension, and the advent of better times soon drained the movement of its righteous anger. Able dissidents such as Horace Wright and J. Walter Jones drifted back to the Liberal fold, where their fling with the Progressives was eventually pardoned — a sure sign in this most partisan of provinces that the early 1920s were considered an aberration. As one revolt subsided, a quieter but more fundamental revolution passed a symbolic milestone. In the election of 1923, Island women voted for the first time to elect a provincial government.

Blaming the Island’s innate conservatism, the pioneer historian of the suffrage movement in Canada once described Prince Edward Island as the “apex” of indifference to women’s political rights: “one searches almost in vain through the press and legislative records for any sign of interest or activity

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in the subject.” The indifference is hard to deny (although recent historians have tried), but easy to exaggerate. Women’s suffrage wasn’t a grassroots movement anywhere in Canada. On Prince Edward Island as elsewhere, the franchise issue was prodded along by a handful of educated, influential, and well-to-do women. By their account, most of the campaigning took place, in true Island fashion, behind the scenes, where it is hard for historians to see it.

True to its election promise, Prime Minister Borden’s Union government gave the franchise in federal elections to all Canadian women over the age of 21 in May 1918. In the Island legislature that April, John A. Dewar moved that women be given the vote provincially as well in recognition of their enormous contributions to the war effort.\textsuperscript{32} The motion passed unanimously, but no bill resulted. In his memoirs, Premier A. E. Arsenault, no friend of suffrage (or John Dewar), blamed Liberal leader J. H. Bell for pushing the issue. Bell, he claimed, “said there was a strong sentiment in the Province in favour of the enfranchisement of women and that he had been asked to bring the matter to the attention of the Legislature. Upon close questioning by me and other members of the Government, he was forced to admit that the representations made to him were made by one woman only who represented no one but herself.”

Bell made “Votes for Women” a Liberal election promise in 1919. He had some claim to consistency on the issue, having sponsored resolutions in favour of women’s suffrage back in the mid-1890s. Once in power, Bell hesitated, waiting for Island women to give the issue a push. A handful of them were trying.

The tiny suffrage “movement” on the Island was a little like the proverbial duck, gliding serenely on the surface of the pond while paddling like fury underneath. In 1916, Margaret Rogers Stewart, daughter of ex-Liberal leader Benjamin Rogers, and Elsie Inman, wife of Liberal member G. S. Inman, had formed the Women’s Liberal Club, which soon boasted eighty-eight members. Deciding to pursue votes for women, they sought advice from prominent Canadian suffragettes such as Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy. The strategy they eventually adopted was to overcome the

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Journal of the Legislative Assembly}, 1918, pp. 80-81. For the only precis of the debate, see “Votes for Women,” \textit{Island Patriot}, 25 April 1918, p. 5.
men’s indifference before tackling the women’s.\textsuperscript{33} It was their backroom lobbying, it seems, that convinced Bell to make suffrage a Liberal policy.

Having primed the government pump, the suffragettes now urged Island women to grasp its handle. “A great deal of lobbying was done in a quiet way,” Inman recounted. “We all put in a word to any women with whom we [came in] contact and meetings were held in various parts of the Island.”\textsuperscript{34} By 1921, references to suffrage begin to crop up in the Premier’s correspondence. In March, he urged Mrs. H. L. B. McArthur to “undertake some sort of propaganda through your country — something to demonstrate to the Government that women actually desire the vote. The Government is anxious to give women the vote if they so desire, but do not want to appear to thrust it upon them.”\textsuperscript{35}

It was 1922 before Bell got the evidence he sought about Island women wanting the franchise. During the session Liberal members presented three different petitions in favour of suffrage from Island women. One came from the Women’s Liberal Club, and one from an unaffiliated group of women. The addresses on these were mostly from Charlottetown and Summerside. The third petition was probably the most telling. It was submitted by the Women’s Institute, and its three hundred signers came from communities across the province.

Still, Bell delayed, waiting now, it appears, on public opinion. Public opinion did not declare itself, although the Conservative press spread rumours of opposition to suffrage. At last, only a week before the end of the session, Bell introduced a new Election Act. Its chief provision gave women over the age of 21 the same rights as men to vote and hold public office.

The result was, for historians, immensely anticlimactic. The Conservative Opposition
contented themselves with attacking details, not principles. Since they could not meet the property qualification required to vote for Legislative Councillors, the Tories argued, many women were really getting only half a franchise. Only two members, Liberal Stephen Hessian and Conservative Murdoch Kennedy, grumbled openly against the propriety of giving women the vote, yet both joined in making passage of the bill unanimous. Content to follow the lead of its national government and seven other provinces, acting almost as an afterthought, Prince Edward Island enfranchised the other half of its population on 3 May 1922.

While winning the franchise no doubt entailed a great deal of quiet satisfaction in certain quarters, the overnight doubling of the Island electorate engendered little public comment until election time. Sceptics had always argued that women would never use the ballot, but the political parties could not afford to take any chances. The Guardian offered the first bouquet to women voters in an editorial on 11 January 1923 titled “Instructing the Ladies.” In it, the Tory organ accused Liberal MP John Sinclair of patronizing the Liberal Women’s Club in an address about federal spending policies: “he obviously thought he was addressing a kindergarten the members of which had not yet cut their political eye teeth. . . . Mr. Sinclair obviously makes a serious mistake when he imagines the women of this province know nothing of politics. . . .” During the lead-up to the provincial election that summer, The Guardian and its Liberal rival, the Patriot, duelled over who deserved the most credit for enfranchising women. The new electorate had become another variable in the uncertain politics of the decade.

In the absence of provincial voters’ lists, it is impossible to be exact about the turnout for the 1923 election, but it seems that somewhere between 50 and 55% of eligible women cast ballots in the contest.\(^\text{36}\) Although considerably lower than the male turnout, the number of women voters in that

\(^{36}\) An approximate idea of how many women voted can be gleaned by subtracting the number of votes cast in 1919, when only men could vote, from the number of votes cast in 1923. This method makes two assumptions: that since the Island population fell only slightly during this period, the size of the male electorate changed little between 1919 and 1923; and that, given the Island’s reputation for consistently high voter turnouts, the number of “male” votes cast did not vary significantly between the two elections. Finding out how many women were eligible to vote is another matter entirely. We know the number of Island women in 1921 and the number of Islanders (men and women) over the age of 20, but not the number of women who were of voting age (that is, 21 years or older). A rough approximation was made by extrapolating to Prince
first election is impressive. Their trip to the polls was made against the heavy weight of inertia and the unsubtle opposition of many husbands who were either opposed in principle or worried that a spouse with differing political loyalties would “cancel their vote.”

The Liberal Women’s Club made it their business to get Island women to exercise their franchise. Elsie Inman recalled one incident in particular:

Well, I remember taking a woman — she said she’d vote, but she was scared to vote because her husband threatened her if he saw her at a poll. She was anxious to vote and I said, “Would he know you if you were dressed up in other clothes?” Well, she didn’t think he would, so I went home and she was about my size. We wore veils in those days, so I took my clothes and coat and put the veil on her and took her to vote.

Not all Island men were so near-sighted. Where husbands were confident their wives would “vote the right way,” they often took great pains to ensure that the womenfolk made it out to the polls.

Female electors took more interest as time went on. The total number of votes cast in provincial elections continued to rise with every contest until 1935, by which time it had more than doubled. The significance that Island women attached to the franchise varied as widely as the women themselves. To some of them, at least, it mattered deeply. Interviewed in the late 1970s, Janette MacDonald of Kilmuir remembered the suppressed excitement in her household in those early days as they watched their dour, Presbyterian mother dressing up in her Sunday best in preparation for the trip to the polling station.

Gaining the franchise had been a big step, but it was only a step, not the whole race. Elsie

Edward Island the percentage of women aged 20 or better in the Canadian population.


38The numbers were 21,103 votes in 1919, compared to 45,908 in 1935. During that time span, the Island’s total population rose only slightly.

39The story is told by MacDonald’s daughter, Edith Daly, in “Women and the Franchise,” a history term paper dated 28 March 1979. My thanks to her professor, David Weale, for sharing the essay with me.
Inman remained a maternal feminist to the end. When her husband was appointed a judge in 1928, she felt obliged to withdraw from active politics. No women candidates sought nomination in the 1923 election, nor for twenty-eight years thereafter. By that time it had become apparent that the female vote had not fundamentally changed the nature of Canadian politics.

Female voters may have disappeared into the anonymous maw of politics, but one didn’t have to look very far to discover women’s impact on public affairs. During the 1920s, they were a major force in the emerging field of public health.

It was in the provision of health care that Prince Edward Island’s limited means were most evident. The province’s chronic lack of financial resources was of less consequence during the 19th century, when government was not expected to do very much for its citizens and rural self-sufficiency tempered the paucity of government services. But as the 20th century progressed, and the trend in North America swung strongly toward greater provision of services by the state, cash-strapped Prince Edward Island simply could not keep pace.

Medical care remained almost entirely a private enterprise on Prince Edward Island at the beginning of the 1920s. When government did get involved, as in outbreaks of smallpox or diphtheria or during the great influenza pandemic, it coped on a more or less ad hoc basis. Aside from the considerable cost of operating the aging Falconwood Insane Asylum, the Island government customarily spent less than $1,000 per year on public health. There was no full-time medical health officer, no department of health, and no modern medical laboratory. For financial reasons, the government felt it could spend no more, but that was because, politically, it could afford to spend so

little. Most voters saw little need for more government intervention to safeguard the health of its citizens. As far as they knew, Islanders were the healthiest people in Canada.

A half-century of Confederation had stripped Prince Edward Island of many pretensions, but the healthfulness of the province remained an article of faith in the early 1920s. Since the beginning of European settlement, descriptive accounts, travel literature, and promotional tracts had emphasized the Island’s bracing climate and the hardiness of its inhabitants. It came as a considerable shock to many Islanders, therefore, to be told that they really were not very healthy at all.

The lightning rod for health reform in the 1920s was tuberculosis. Contagious and in that era incurable, the “white plague” cast a shadow across many Island families. Although various anti-tuberculosis organizations had for years been decrying the high incidence of TB in the province, the first real dent in Islanders’ complacency was the high percentage of local recruits during the Great War who were rejected on medical grounds. This was followed by the revelation in 1921 that Prince Edward Island had the highest mortality rate from tuberculosis in the country. From ignorance, the population regressed into denial. The Island began the decade by shutting down its only tuberculosis sanatorium.

The Dalton Sanatorium in North Wiltshire had been a gift to the people of Prince Edward Island from fox magnate Charles Dalton in 1913. In accepting the gift, the Island’s Conservative government, of which Dalton was a member, agreed to pay for its operation and maintenance. Inspired by the expense, the Province soon persuaded the War Hospitals Commission to take over the hospital and to expand it from twenty-seven to seventy-two beds. By the time the federal government was ready to give it back in 1921, the sanatorium had become a white elephant. Its reluctant keeper would be the new premier, J. H. Bell, a long-time critic of the hospital’s cost and effectiveness.

Bell deliberately exaggerated the expense of operation and maintenance at the North Wiltshire site, and adamantly refused to consider cheaper alternatives. When they could not convince the federal Conservatives to keep the sanatorium, his Liberals refused to take it back. Over Dalton’s furious protests, the sprawling, now-empty building was dumped back on his lap in the spring of
The bottom line about the Dalton Sanatorium, as Bell pointed out in the House, was that Islanders “were not prepared to pay the price, no matter how great the benefits derived from it.” Bell’s blunt statement located the real battleground for health reformers. Not government, but the people that elected it had to be convinced. As with road-building and women’s suffrage, the Island’s political leaders were content to follow. While a bitter Dalton was having the orphaned sanatorium dismantled, public health advocates were already making the opening moves in a decade-long campaign of persuasion.

The local spearhead in the public health movement was the Prince Edward Island branch of the Red Cross. The Great War had made it a force to be reckoned with, and in the issue of public health, the society found a new crusade. Under the leadership of Dr. Ira Yeo and Judge F. L. Haszard, the provincial Red Cross established a Child Welfare and Public Health Branch late in 1920. When the Province declined the national Society’s offer of $8,000 to launch medical inspections of Island schools, the local branch took on the task itself, and in 1921 hired Amy MacMahon as the Island’s first public health nurse. MacMahon’s gift for public relations served the cause well, and her travels around the province gave her plenty of statistics to work with. Between 1921 and 1923, she and her two assistants visited 139 Island schools, examined 5,800 students, and visited 2,500 homes. According to their findings, 95% of schoolchildren examined had at least one significant health defect. Even more dismaying, fully a quarter of them showed signs of malnutrition. As The Guardian editorialized, some Islanders were evidently more concerned with combatting defects in

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41 In the fall and winter of 1921, Dalton had an acrimonious exchange of letters with Bell, and he was even allowed to plead his case before the legislature, but to no avail.

42 Quoted in Baldwin, “Volunteers in Action,” p. 130.

Grinding poverty was sometimes the reason, but it was often not a question of how much but what children got to eat. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some cases children were victims of both traditional diets and farm priorities. They habitually drank tea instead of milk because milk was sold to the dairy factories or fed to the precious animals. They ate few eggs because eggs were coveted for sale to the egg circles. They had few vegetables because vegetables were not a traditional part of many diets. One observer claimed, perhaps unfairly, that he could identify the children of fanatical dairy farmers by their pinched faces. On very small farms, especially those owned by fishermen, children were even less likely to eat properly. Islanders do not like to be told this.

Worn out by her exertions, MacMahon resigned as Chief Public Health Nurse in 1923, but not before helping to train her successor, Mona Gordon Wilson. In Wilson, the public health movement found its charismatic exemplar. The daughter of a well-to-do Toronto store owner, she had been educated in the ideals of “duty, discipline and service” at Havergal Ladies College and at the Johns Hopkins Hospital School of Nursing in Baltimore before launching her Red Cross nursing career in a series of stirring adventures in revolutionary Russia and the war-torn Balkans. She would find Prince Edward Island less dangerous but just as challenging. Her biographer credits Wilson with “bringing Prince Edward Island into the mainstream of the public health movement in Canada.”

Destiny was not immediately evident. When she drove into one early schoolyard, the school windows were plastered with faces. As she got out of her car, “the door flew open and all the pupils took to the woods.”

“This is no place for me,” Wilson concluded shortly after her arrival. Experience revised her opinion. She would make Prince Edward Island her home and public health her focus for the rest of her life. In that critical first decade, Wilson would orchestrate medical inspections in schools, arrange dental clinics, organize Junior Red Cross clubs, set up tuberculosis chest clinics, establish camps for crippled children, and head up major diphtheria and smallpox vaccination campaigns. To many Islanders, Mona Wilson was the public health movement. During the Canadian Centennial in 1967, Prince Edward Island would name Wilson its Woman of the Century.

Charming, stubborn, tireless, demanding, and above all, supremely competent, Wilson gave

44Grinding poverty was sometimes the reason, but it was often not a question of how much but what children got to eat. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some cases children were victims of both traditional diets and farm priorities. They habitually drank tea instead of milk because milk was sold to the dairy factories or fed to the precious animals. They ate few eggs because eggs were coveted for sale to the egg circles. They had few vegetables because vegetables were not a traditional part of many diets. One observer claimed, perhaps unfairly, that he could identify the children of fanatical dairy farmers by their pinched faces. On very small farms, especially those owned by fishermen, children were even less likely to eat properly. Islanders do not like to be told this.

45The sketch of Wilson’s career is a gloss of Baldwin’s biography, She Answered Every Call. The quotes in this paragraph can be found on pp. 273 and xviii, respectively.
the public health movement the inspiration it needed out in the community. Dr. W. J. P. MacMillan
gave it a champion in government. A staunchly partisan Conservative, he entered politics in 1923 to
forward the cause of public health. When the Conservatives formed the government, he became
political lieutenant to his friend and patient, Premier J. D. Stewart. At his urging, the new
administration inaugurated a $2,500 annual grant to the Red Cross in 1924.

Late in 1925, the Canadian Tuberculosis Association renewed and improved a 1922 offer to
make Prince Edward Island an anti-tuberculosis demonstration site. As before, the proposal was
contingent on the Province agreeing to continue the services within a new Department of Health once
the pilot project had run its course. As before, negotiations fell through.

By the time of its third overture to the Island government in 1926, the Canadian Tuberculosis
Association had recruited a financial patron, the Canadian Life Insurance Officers Association
(CLIOA). Its members’ concern for health facilities in the province had an openly fiscal dimension;
Islanders’ poor health was costing them money. Amid alphabetical confusion, the CTA and the
CLIOA joined forces to found and fund the MTEC, Maritime Tuberculosis Educational Committee.
Flush with CLIOA funds, it promised to spend $15,000 per year for five years in anti-tuberculosis
field work in the province. The Stewart administration’s acceptance of the MTEC’s offer entailed
only a pledge to double its $2,500 annual grant to the provincial Red Cross, but, really, it was a tacit
admission that government had responsibilities in the realm of health care. An important precedent
had been set. In 1928, with financial assistance from the Red Cross and the MTEC, the government
hired a Chief Medical Officer, Dr. P. A. Creelman. He immediately began to push for a provincial
tuberculosis sanatorium.

Like a Ford car moving through its gears, the public health movement gathered momentum
slowly on Prince Edward Island, where the going was mostly uphill. But by the late 1920s, it was
visibly gaining speed. It got a big push from a key ally in the community, the Women’s Institutes,
which had been spreading like wildfire across the province all through the 1920s. In 1928, there were
183 branches. By 1934, there would be 261, with upwards of four thousand members. During the
Great War, the WI and the Red Cross had formed a natural partnership. The alliance carried over into
peacetime, and the branches’ gradual adoption of the public health agenda became a critical part of
the health reform equation. It was one thing for the Chief Medical Officer to press for a provincial
sanatorium, but when he could get 178 of 183 Women’s Institutes to pass resolutions in favour of it, and shower the government with thousands of signatures requesting it, government was far more likely to listen. If the private sector would contribute $60,000, Premier A. C. Saunders announced in 1929, the Province would build and maintain a 33-bed sanatorium.

The resulting fundraising campaign generated so much enthusiasm that even the Great Depression could not kill it. In June 1931, nine years after the Dalton Sanatorium fiasco, the Provincial Sanatorium opened on McGill Avenue in Charlottetown. The end of the beginning came in July, when the new Conservative government, with more financial assistance from the Canadian Life Insurance Officers Association, established a Department of Health and Education. Dr. W. J. P. MacMillan, who had entered politics to wage the war for public health, became the Department’s first minister. Mona Wilson, whose leadership had helped turn indifference into a groundswell of support, became Provincial Supervisor of Public Health Nursing. Almost her first experience as a civil servant was to have her salary reduced. Battered by economic disaster, the government was already seeking to lighten the obligation it had taken on.

The road to public health had been made smooth by the return of good times. The economic depression that fueled the unrest and retrenchment of the early 1920s gave way after 1924 to a hectic prosperity that helped loosen government’s purse strings.

Abetted by hindsight and concentrating on the region as a whole, historians have painted a gloomy picture of a Maritime economy that was gradually crumbling during the 1920s. Although

46Summarized by Baldwin in “Volunteers in Action,” pp. 144-45. Within a year, it had to be expanded to fifty beds.

47There was a deputy minister for each division of the dual department. The CLIO pledged $75,000 over five years, after which the province took over the whole cost of running the new department.

48Baldwin, She Answered Every Call, p. 190.
Prince Edward Island, too, was imprisoned within that larger paradigm of decline and dependency, its economy rallied during the second half of the decade. While the 1920s have been touted as the peak of outmigration from the region, the Island’s population actually bottomed out by mid-decade at an estimated 86,000 people. Afterwards, it slowly began to climb again, for the first time in thirty-five years, until, by 1931, it had almost regained the 1921 census total.\textsuperscript{49} Two highly publicized new industries keyed the fleeting recovery. By the end of the decade, their perceived importance had twinned them on Island license plates: “P.E.I. — Seed Potatoes, Foxes.”

The strange odour was what struck Mona Wilson as she made her initial forays into Prince County in 1923. Nearly every breeze, she noted, carried the skunk-like scent of silver foxes.\textsuperscript{50} It was the smell of success.

Having survived its growing pains during the war, the silver fox industry settled down in the early 1920s as a respectable and valuable branch of Island agriculture. In a symbolic manifestation of the industry’s growing maturity, the Prince Edward Island Silver Fox Breeders’ Association gave way in 1920 to the \textit{Canadian National} Silver Fox Breeders’ Association. Of course, its membership continued to be dominated by Islanders, and the new Association’s first president was J. W. Callbeck of Summerside. Soon, registered silver foxes boasted pedigrees as elaborate as any thoroughbred horse or purebred Holstein. The federal Department of Agriculture even dignified the new industry by establishing a Dominion Experimental Fox Ranch at Summerside in 1925 under the direction of Dr. J. A. Allen. His \textit{Theory and Practice of Fox Ranching}, co-authored with W. Chester McLure, became a standard reference.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49}Another factor in staunching the flow of out-migration was the tightening of American immigration laws in the early ‘20s, which made it considerably harder for Island emigrants to reach their favourite destination, the “Boston States.” Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that many Islanders happily ignored the new restrictions, blithely lying at the border about their purpose in entering the States and the expected duration of their stay.

\textsuperscript{50}Baldwin, \textit{She Answered Every Call}, p. 130.

\textsuperscript{51}The most detailed treatment of the fox industry during the 1920s can be found in Joseph E. Forester and Anne D. Forester official history of the industry, \textit{Silver Fox Odyssey}: 30-53.
Not even punitive American tariffs on foxes and fox pelts could slow the industry’s steady growth. Between 1919 and 1923, the number of registered fox farms in the province increased by 77%, to 448. But if one counted the hundreds of farmers who kept two or three breeding pairs, the actual number was probably over 1,000. The two sorts of fox ranchers demonstrated two different levels of prosperity. The micro-ranchers had really just integrated foxes into the mixed farming that still defined Island agriculture. For them, foxes were an income supplement. The 448 registered ranchers took fox-breeding far more seriously. Of these, about 142 operations represented major investments, with a minimum stock of eight to ten foxes.

Boxed Essay: The Fur Aristocracy

“Fox ranching,” exclaimed geographer F. A. Stilgenbauer in the mid-1920s, “has added immense wealth and an independent class of people who are able to live the more luxurious life.” These provided the industry’s aristocracy. There were ranchers such as ex-salesman W. Chester McLure, leading member of a syndicate that had once paid Frank Tuplin $250,000 for twelve breeding pairs, and his partner; “Colonel Dan” MacKinnon, drugstore owner, harness-racing enthusiast, and war hero, who named his fox ranch “Vimy.” There was Peter G. Clark of Summerside, with his famous “Canuck” strain of foxes, and George W. Callbeck, who would devote his whole life to the industry. And Raoul Reymond, the Swiss immigrant whose sprawling farm in Southport once sported 950 breeding pairs, second only to insurance broker W. K. Rogers, “the [J. P.] Morgan of the Fur Farming Interests,” who began with five pairs of foxes and by the mid-1920s had became the largest individual rancher of silver foxes in the world. There was even a female fox rancher, Alice Hunter of Alberton, who owned a large establishment on the Mill Road.

And then there were J. Edgar Milligan and George Morrison, who met in the Yukon and by 1927 were running a continent-wide chain of fifty-two fox ranches from their headquarters in Milligan’s home community of Northam. When they opened their new barn there on 15 July 1925 (“the biggest in the Maritimes,” the papers claimed), it was one of the social events of the season. The program included a cattle show, a track and field meet, a baseball game, and, of course, a barn dance. By the time they died in an automobile accident on

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53 Ibid., p. 112.
the way to a fox convention in 1933, Milligan and Morrison had franchised over eighty fox ranches.54

Although there were fifty-two ranches skirting Charlottetown by the mid-1920s, some of them huge affairs, as well as a small arc of farms around Murray Harbour in southern King’s County, the Island fox industry was heavily tilted toward its birthplace, Prince County. Summerside, with sixty-three ranches of its own, quickly emerged as the administrative and financial capital of the entire international fur trade. The role lent the little town both stature and confidence, and during the silver fox era it grew faster than any other community in the province, almost doubling in population between 1911 and 1941.

One key to the fox trade’s success on Prince Edward Island during the 1920s was the continuing demand for breeding foxes. Throughout the decade, Island ranchers made more money by exporting live foxes to off-Island ranches than by selling pelts to the high-fashion couturiers in New York or London. As long as the demand for foxes continued, pyramid-fashion, there was less pressure on breeders to market more pelts, and low production figures during the 1920s helped prop up fur prices.

But there was more to it even than that. As the industrious Stilgenbauer noted during his research visit, the Island’s peripheral location and high transportation costs were not a handicap when shipping high-value items such as foxes. High value, in turn, was encouraged by high quality. Stilgenbauer attributed this to the Island’s ideal climate and plentiful food supply, but it had more to do with the province’s head start in the industry and the accumulated lore of its fox breeders.

In 1929, with supply, demand, quality, and production all in synch, the fox industry reached its zenith. There were 727 registered fur farms in the province, with a physical plant valued at $1.44 million, and 23,472 animals worth $3.8 million. The 6,703 foxes exported that year earned farmers $1,096,863. Combined with the $643,789 from 6,824 pelts, the fur trade injected approximately $1.74 million into the provincial economy.55 With such rewards from their foxes, ranchers had little

54 These brief profiles are largely drawn from Silver Fox Odyssey.

55 Virtually all of the pelts were from foxes. Granting that not all shareholders were Island residents, not all of the proceeds flowed into the province.
problem putting up with the odour.

In his classic historical geography of Prince Edward Island, A. H. Clark dismisses the silver fox industry out of hand. The Island might be the birthplace of fur-farming, he allows, but “that was not a world-shaking development.” It would be “remembered in the same way that the birthplace of a third-rate German composer would be, by its own people and no one else.” Writing after the collapse of the industry and at the end of a difficult decade for Island farmers, Clark argued that the net revenue from fox-farming was low and had only diverted investment from farming and the fisheries. But this ignores the basic motivation for Islanders’ continued involvement in raising foxes during the 1920s and 1930s: it offered a better, more stable return than land or sea. And as the industry’s official historians note, fox-farming didn’t merely redistribute wealth within the province, it brought in significant amounts of money from outside in terms of capital investment and sales of pelts, foxes, and fox products.

Like the fellow townsman of third-rate German composers, Islanders might be pardoned a little bit of hubris. They were the dominant players in a luxury industry that was worth millions of dollars worldwide. As local historian Allan Rankin would wryly observe of Summerside, “Probably never again could a small town anywhere boast of having an international industry headquartered on its main street — with a branch office in London, England.”

There was always much potato talk among the farmers who waited, sometimes all day, at the country

56 Clark, _Three Centuries and the Island_, p. 205.

57 Clark is right in at least one respect. Like the dairy factories, fox ranches did not provide employment for very many people. The _Canada Year Book_ listed only 247 employees on the Island’s 458 fox ranches in 1924.

58 Forester and Forester, _Silver Fox Odyssey_, p. 58.

59 Rankin, _Down at the Shore_, p. 158.
wharves to shift their potatoes into the little coasting schooners that called each fall. Lean men in dusty overalls, they chewed and smoked, sharpening their stories on the whetstone of the wait. Their two-wheeled carts piled high with “Island blues” — some of them almost a foot long — stretched in a long file back down the wooden wharves and up the red clay roads, while their horses shifted from foot to foot, tails twitching, between the shafts. Such scenes were recent history in 1923, when a writer in the *Summerside Journal* remembered “one enthusiastic grower, who stirred by the remarkable yields recounted by his fellows and not to be outdone by their prowess stated ‘that his potatoes were so large that a bushel would fill a barrel.’”

The dimensions of the joke are lost in a society long since divorced from the world of pecks and bushels, quintals and barrels, but the sense of it is plain enough. Prince Edward Island soil had been yielding superb crops of potatoes for half a century even before William Cobbett’s infamous remark in 1830 about that “rascally heap of sand, rock and swamp” that “bears nothing but potatoes.” The plentiful tuber was such an essential foodstuff on subsistence farms, especially in winter, that a diet of “salt herring and blue potatoes” was almost proverbial. The surplus yield was always marketed, and after 1850 potatoes had grown to be a major export. But production slumped badly in the 1890s, hurt by farm abandonment, the arrival of the Colorado potato beetle, and shrinking markets. The long, creeping lines of carts at Island wharves shortened and the fleet of coasting schooners dwindled. As one commentator put it, “low prices and high costs hobnobbed together, and for a time it appeared as if the farmers’ economic backbone would need the treatment of an expert chiropractor to replace its somewhat disjointed condition.”

Back in 1909, Liberal member Joseph Read had predicted that “the Island was destined to be

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60 P.E. Island Seed Potatoes,” *Summerside Journal*, Special Edition, 20 June 1923, p. 21. Just for the record, a bushel is unit of measurement that is by definition one-quarter to one-fifth the volume of a barrel.

61 Quoted in Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island*, p. 65.

62 A. H. Clark blames the decline in potato acreage on farm abandonment because of out-migration and the switch to dairy farming, but it is difficult to separate cause and effect.

the great potato country of the world.”64 But to do that exporters would have to break out of their regional markets in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the lumberwoods of New Brunswick. The larger markets were far away, and to penetrate them required somehow adding value that would compensate for the high cost of transporting a bulk product over long distances. Solving that dilemma proved the genesis of the seed potato industry.

Early accounts of the seed potato industry credited John B. McFadyen of Augustine Cove for his work in developing potato varieties that combined high yields with the smooth skins and white flesh favoured by Mainland consumers. And when M. J. McIlvor returned home to Kinkora from Aroostook County, Maine, to specialize in potato production for the American market, “little potato thrills began to chase each other up and down the spine of the Island farmer.”65 Individual enterprise soon shifted toward collective action. In April 1920, 140 farmers paid $2.00 each to form a producer co-operative, the Prince Edward Island Potato Growers’ Association. The Association’s first president was A. E. Dewar, who ran a prosperous farm on the outskirts of Charlottetown. The provincial Department of Agriculture was a major player as well. It had encouraged the establishment of the new organization, assigned its Director of Crops and Horticulture, J. Wilfrid Boulter, to be Secretary-Treasurer, and allowed him to conduct its business out of the Department’s offices. The Potato Growers’ Association was concerned to promote better production and marketing conditions, but its primary objective was to market certified seed potatoes.66

Although the number of varieties was infinite, when it came to marketing there were really only two sorts of potato in the 1920s: table stock and seed. One was eaten, the other was cut up into sets and planted to produce next year’s crop. Good seed commanded premium prices. To certify his potatoes free of disease was the grower’s guarantee of their potency. Prince Edward Island’s northern climate and potato-friendly soil, coupled with the insulation against contagion provided by its saltwater walls, gave it tremendous potential as a supplier of seed stock. The presence of a federally

64 Quoted in Canadian Annual Review, 1909. In Read’s opinion, destiny was waiting only for a Northumberland Strait Tunnel.


66 A short history of the Potato Growers’ Association appeared in the annual report of the provincial Department of Agriculture in 1929.
administered Plant Pathology Lab conducting on-site research into crop diseases was an additional advantage. The federal representatives also carried out the three inspections that were necessary before a grower’s crop could be certified. The Island had a better mousetrap, but the world had not beaten a path to its door. “We must resort to other ways of marketing than sitting in our offices and setting a price for our potatoes,” the Association warned its members in the fall of 1920.⁶⁷

But the world was coming. Island seed potatoes soon caught the attention of American growers in the mid-Atlantic and southern states. For climatic reasons, potatoes grown there were susceptible to disease and reproduced poorly, making it necessary to import seed stock each year. In 1920, the Association made its first shipment of certified No. 1 seed, five railcar loads to growers in Long Island, New York. Two years later, the Association shipped 130,000 bushels under its “Garden of the Gulf” label. As the Association reported, “The price received, while disappointing, was on an average double that received on the local market for table stock.” Island farmers were watching closely. They planted 3,000 acres of seed potatoes in 1923. Next year the acreage tripled, and more than a thousand farmers were paying membership dues to the Potato Growers’ Association. By mid-decade, F. A. Stilgenbauer would exclaim, “The seed potato industry of Prince Edward Island has reached mammoth proportions.”⁶⁸

Local growers’ sudden enthusiasm for seed potatoes is more easily understood within the broader context of Island agriculture. Behind the hopeful language of annual departmental reports, one can glimpse a long, slow decline. Foxes provided glamour, but, as it always had, farming carried the Island’s economy on its back, accounting for $80.4 million out of an estimated provincial wealth of $119.9 million in 1923–24. Each year, field crops accounted for about half the value of all

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⁶⁸Stilgenbauer, “The Geography of Prince Edward Island,” p. 122. The statistics cited in this section have been culled from the annual reports of the Potato Growers’ Association during the 1920s and the Canada Year Book. There are occasional minor discrepancies. The estimate of seed potato acreage was cited in the Canadian Annual Review for 1924-25, p. 377.
The significance of that figure depended on what it was compared to. Since the early 1900s, Island farmers had been losing ground economically. Except for an interlude during the Great War, inflation had been rising faster than the value of their sector, so that their actual buying power shrank. They coped in two ways: either by farming more, or less. There were three thousand fewer people employed in agriculture in 1921 than there had been in 1900, but the amount of land devoted to field crops had reached an all-time high, 552,184 acres.

Such statistics were merely numbers on a page, paper values arrived at by multiplying estimated yields by market prices. In reality, much of what Island farms produced they used themselves. It was what farmers sent to market that put money in their pockets and gave them the means to buy the things they couldn’t grow or raise or make. And in a century increasingly addicted to consumer goods, expectations were rising even as farmers’ reach shortened.

Hence the importance attached to cash crops. Over the years, they had withered one by one. The export of table stock potatoes. Oats, which could not compete with the boundless ocean of western grain. Commercial dairying, the “revolutionary trend” of the 1890s, had also soured. After its rapid early growth, the dairy industry had levelled off. The Island’s omnipresent small farms could provide forage for only a limited number of cows, which placed a natural cap on production. The census of 1941 would find that only 173 out of 12,230 Island farms specialized in dairying. Meanwhile, dairy producers had been unable to hold major off-Island markets. By the 1920s, production was turning more and more from cheese to butter, most of it consumed within the province. No one called Prince Edward Island “the Denmark of Canada” anymore.

The recession of the early 1920s illuminated the marks of decay like sheet lightning on a hot summer evening. “One thing depressed me very much,” L. M. Montgomery wrote after a trip home in July 1924, “Cavendish is getting so shabby. Almost all the houses are unpainted and dowdy. Times are hard, of course, but I fear there are other reasons — indifference, the dying out of the old families.” In part, Montgomery was conflating economics with the aging person’s gripe that “things

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69 When animals and animal products were included, the proportion rose to three-quarters.

70 The analysis is from Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island*, pp. 100-102.

ain’t what they used to be.” But there were other signs and other observers. Where outmigration had struck hardest, as in King’s County, there was a new cast to the Island landscape. “We have along the north side from East Point to St. Peters hundreds of vacant farms,” Alexis MacPhee chided Premier J. D. Stewart in June 1927. “Yes, thousands of acres going back to spruce bush.” He was exaggerating, but not much. In 1924, an investigative committee put the number of vacant farms in the province as a whole at 657. Writing of that era sixty years later, Mary Isabel Tuplin would leave a haunting image of those decimated communities: “Many of the houses were deserted, their doors hanging open and swaying to and fro in the wind.”

The seed potato industry emerged from these shadows, and it comes as no surprise to find one early promoter describing it as “the sun that is the rays of optimism among the growers.” Continuing the awkward but revealing metaphor, the writer prophesied, “The morning however is only breaking.” He was right.

Despite unstable markets, a shortage of cold storage facilities, rising tariffs, and wild price swings, the seed potato business advanced in jerks and jumps for the rest of the decade. The Potato Growers’ Association continued to command the new industry, searching out markets, handling sales, making bulk purchases of fertilizer for its members, preaching the gospel of quality.

More and more farmers turned to the new cash crop. While it was declining in the rest of the country, potato acreage rose sharply on Prince Edward Island during the 1920s. The pattern of increase was geographically uneven, however. Potatoes remained a ubiquitous crop, but in much of King’s County, which had been gutted by decades of outmigration, the acreage actually continued falling. Meanwhile, in the high farming areas of Prince and western Queen’s, more and more fields were planted in the new varieties coveted by American consumers. The era’s potato acreage peaked at 51,890 acres in 1928. A whopping 62% percent of that total, 32,000 acres, was entered for

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73 Tuplin, Try the Goose Grease!, pp. 32.

certification, only 4,000 acres less than the entire 1920 potato crop. Wages shot up amid a shortage of farm labour, and the Premier informed railway officials that fall that few Islanders were likely to join the annual harvest excursion. Before the shipping season ended, the Potato Growers’ Association had handled 1.37 million bushels of seed stock, and done $2.1 million worth of business. The next year its membership passed the 6,000 mark.\textsuperscript{75}

The ever larger armies of potato plants that drilled across Island fields shaded a number of new departures. Beneath the leafy tops, that old staple, “the Island Blue,” was slowly being displaced by the new favourites, Green Mountains and Irish Cobblers. Within a couple of generations, it would disappear into folklore. With official encouragement, the soil itself was increasingly stoked with fertilizers and the tops treated with pesticides.\textsuperscript{76} Frustrated with the shortage of railcars each fall, growers returned to shipping by sea, not in the coasting schooners of earlier times, but in big freighters, “potato boats,” that docked in the major ports of Charlottetown, Georgetown, Souris, and Summerside.

It is easy to exaggerate the changes. Potatoes were planted and picked by hand as before. As before, rural schools continued to concede the inevitable, granting a two-week “digging vacation” each fall while their pupils helped out with the harvest. And, for the most part, potato growing, like foxes and dairy cattle and poultry, remained firmly embedded in mixed farming operations. Even the record seed acreage of 1928 represented an average planting by Association members of only seven acres per farm. No one wanted to risk everything on one crop. But in the rise of seed potatoes can be seen a significant step toward specialization. And specialization, little by little, was helping to turn Island farmers into a special interest group. For now, though, “farmer” and “Islander” remained virtually synonymous.

By the end of the 1920s, driven by the high prices for seed stock, potatoes were acknowledged as the Island’s most important cash crop.\textsuperscript{77} The decade had also demonstrated the volatility of the

\textsuperscript{75}The statistics are culled from the \textit{Canada Year Book} and the \textit{Canadian Annual Review} for the period 1920-31.

\textsuperscript{76}The volume of fertilizer handled by the Association went from 1,600 tons in 1922 to 28,304 in 1928. The value of insecticides that year was $84,900, sixteen times the 1922 figure.

\textsuperscript{77}See, for example, the \textit{Charlottetown Guardian}, 31 December 1928.
potato industry. Despite assured quality and co-operative action, farmers had limited control over their yields, and even less influence on prices, which were governed in an international marketplace. Bumper crops were no guarantee of big profits. The industry’s anthem was still decades away, but a new nickname for the province had begun to crop up in the Island’s promotional tracts. They called it “Spud Island.”

In the midst of the potato boom, on 18 February 1926, police in New York City seized 138 cases of champagne that had been hidden in a rail shipment of Island potatoes. There was, it seemed, another new industry on Prince Edward Island. Rumrunning.

Prohibition came closest to working on Prince Edward Island amid the climate of self-sacrifice that characterized the close of the Great War. The sober attitude did not long survive the armistice. Early in 1919, the Labourers’ Protective Union in Charlottetown set the tone by petitioning government for “stronger beer.” Between July 1919 and March 1920 alone, obliging Island physicians issued 34,200 prescriptions for “medicinal” alcohol.

“I wish you could take a bit of the wire edge off that Prohibition Law,” a supporter wrote

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78Part of a temperance poem, recited from memory for oral historian Reg Thompson by Lorne Stevenson of New Glasgow; from “The By-Gone Days,” CBC Mainstreet (Personal Archive of Reg Thompson).

79The claims are usually based on the number of convictions for drunkenness for liquor related offenses, but this reflects more the level of enforcement than the level of consumption, two related but not identical activities.

80Davis, “I’ll Drink to That!,” p. 262. Their petition was squashed by a much larger one from prohibitionists calling for no changes.
Premier A. E. Arsenault in March 1919, “as a little would be very nice every cold morning when a fellow thinks he has the flu. . . . So far as I can learn it is a very unpopular Law.”

Arsenault, who privately opposed Prohibition, eventually announced that his government would hold a plebiscite on its continuance, but he was defeated before he could act, and when a vote was finally held, in 1923, it was instigated by the Liberals and dealt solely with whether or not it should continue to be legal to bring liquor into the province for re-export. An appreciable amount of that booze tended to leak out of warehouses before it was shipped back out.

The results provided encouragement for both “wet” and “dry” camps. The prohibitionists won handily, but the margin of victory and the voter turnout had slipped compared even to the modest turnouts for the temperance plebiscites of the 1890s. Moreover, a poll-by-poll examination of the votes suggests that, while the evangelical Protestants remained adamantly dry, support for Prohibition was steadily draining away in predominantly Roman Catholic districts.

In the rhetoric leading up to the plebiscite, Rev. H. D. Raymond of St. Paul’s Anglican Church in Charlottetown had denounced lax enforcement of Prohibition in the province’s capital. “You will find drunkenness more common here in the City of Charlottetown than you will find it in any city in the Dominion of Canada,” he thundered. If Raymond and his confederates thought they could curb drinking by outlawing the province’s four export liquor houses, they were vastly mistaken. It was no coincidence that 1923 was also the year in which Island rumrunning came into its own. That summer, three schooners, the Grace Hilda, the D. C. Mulhall, and the Mary F. Hyde, broke the trail for the liquor smuggling trade into Prince Edward Island.

Despite Maritime drinkers’ notorious capacity, the region was too small a market to have made much of an industry out of inbound rumrunning. But in 1920, the most populous nation in the Western world, the United States, legislated Prohibition, creating overnight an enormous, illicit commerce in

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83 “Conditions As They Are in City and Province,” Guardian, 13 January 1923.
alcoholic spirits. The liquor trade into Prince Edward Island can be seen as a small tributary of the great river of booze flowing south along the Atlantic seaboard. Its primary source lay in the little French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon in the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence, where liquor exporters did a booming business all through the 1920s and early 1930s. The railcar load of potatoes that had been spiked with champagne represented a failed experiment in trans-shipping liquor through Prince Edward Island. We know considerably more about the alcohol meant for local consumption.

The path to Prince Edward Island was well worn by the mid-1920s. Typically, a wooden schooner with auxiliary power, sometimes owned by Islanders but more often just doing business with them, would lay-to on the invisible rim of the three-mile limit. Cargoes varied from silks to cigarettes, but, almost invariably, the schooners were heavily laden with kegs of the cheap dark rum that Islanders favoured or cases of whiskey intended for the well-to-do. The saddle of the North Shore was a popular haunt, as were the more sheltered waters off eastern Prince Edward Island, where the Northumberland Strait was still wide enough for a vessel to stay comfortably in international waters. Playing cat and mouse with the over-matched Customs cutters, the rumrunners sometimes slipped inshore under cover of darkness to offload, but more often they hired local fishermen to ferry the contraband ashore where it could be loaded into trucks or stashed away in “hides.” On clear afternoons, locals could make out the rumrunners’ sails against the line of the horizon, and men not otherwise involved in the traffic would venture out to buy a bottle for themselves.

In American popular history, liquor smuggling is associated with murder, mayhem, and machine guns. In the Maritimes, where organized crime lurks only in the background, the rumrunning era has acquired an aura of romance. Modern attitudes toward liquor and the Maritimes’ evolving image of itself as victim have cast the rumrunner as a sort of anti-hero, thumping his nose at Authority. Historians have also argued necessity: that Maritime fishermen turned to smuggling as the employer of last resort when prices for salt fish collapsed after the First World War. This is less true in Prince Edward Island, where lobster dominated the fishery. Still, while the industry generally held its value during the 1920s, returns fluctuated widely from year to year, and it bears repeating that
Island fishermen’s incomes were on average the lowest in the province. Those that turned to rum running did so, because it offered much better pay for a lot less work.

Rum running gave the decade of the 1920s its swagger on Prince Edward Island. The nights were full of secrets. Mysterious lights. Muttered conversations and handshakes in the darkness. Small boats steering out to where the rumrunners lay at anchor, coming back loaded to the gunwales with dark Demerara rum, Triple X or Black Diamond. Fast motorboats feeling their way up the crooked little rivers in the blackness. Strange trucks raising dust down shore roads. Houses with their storm doors still on in the heat of summer, rectangular lookouts cut out at eye level. Lunch bars with speakeasies tucked, a nod away, back behind the counter. Taxi cabs running the gauntlet of the Hillsborough Bridge out to Keppoch where liquor was brazenly cached in the cellar of the abandoned Marine Hospital. Always, an ear cocked for the Customs cutter looming out of nowhere, or the Prohibition officer, banging suddenly on the door.

Of course, the adventure was mostly potential; according to the rumrunners themselves, their work was more often tedious and uneventful. In the manner of drinking stories, the romance was mostly after the fact as well. But here and there, legend and routine did overlap.

The most famous rumrunner was the notorious Captain Edward Dicks. (The “Captain” was apparently honorary — he had no master’s papers.) Born in Newfoundland but raised in Georgetown, he is the swashbuckling hero of many escapades. In his heyday, he even purchased Dalvay-by-the-Sea, a fading summer mansion on the North Shore built years before by an American oil magnate. If Dicks was the king of the rumrunners, then the pirate queen of the rum running vessels was the

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84 The fishery plummeted from $1.7 million in 1920 to $924,529, a thirty-year low, in 1921, then rebounded to $1.6 million the following year. In 1923, when rum running began in earnest, the fishery was valued at $1.75 million.

85 In “Atlantic Canada’s Rum Running Tradition,” *Acadiensis*, 14(Spring 1985)2: 149-50, Mark C. Davis compares a dollar a day land pay or $35 per month fishing wages to the $50-$150 per month available even to deckhands on rum runners. Jim MacLean, who did not crew on a rum runner but was hired to bring the liquor ashore, recalled making $2,000 at the work. (Jim MacLean, interview with Reg Thompson, as aired on “The By-Gone Days,” CBC *Mainstreet* (taped copy courtesy of Reg Thompson).

Nellie J. Banks, a Nova Scotian schooner that for twelve years was the major supplier of illegal liquor to Prince Edward Island:

There’s rum in the hold of the Nellie J. Banks,
Prince Edward Island bound;
Late on the night when the moon don’t shine
You’ll find her off Georgetown.\(^{87}\)

The careers of the two intersected in the mid-1920s, when Dicks owned the Banks for a time. In 1927, she was seized by Customs officials after unloading part of a cargo of rum near Cardigan. Dicks claimed his vessel was in international waters and fought a sensational court battle to get her back. In the preliminary skirmishing, he succeeding in winning temporary custody of the vessel. He arrived at the wharf in Charlottetown to take possession, surrounded by curious spectators. “It’s a good job I was not on the schooner when she was seized,” he blustered. “I would have pumped the cutter captain so full of lead it would have taken seven men to lift him!” But when he tried to board the Banks and sail off, there was a scuffle with Customs officers and he was hustled off to jail. After nine months of legal wrangling, Dicks had his vessel and cargo back, as well as $7,000 in damages and costs. He sailed the Nellie J. Banks out of Charlottetown Harbour flying a huge red ensign.\(^{88}\)

As one author has pointed out, bootlegging and rumrunning were “occupations that, while they might not be respectable, at least were necessary.”\(^{89}\) That was, of course, the drinker’s perspective. For those who looked upon alcohol as evil, rum running was a blight on the moral landscape, and the authorities’ inability or, as many suspected, unwillingness to stamp out the illicit traffic was regularly condemned. But even when government tried — and it often did — effective enforcement was

\(^{87}\)Lennie Gallant, “The Nellie J. Banks,” © Revenant Records SOCAN. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

\(^{88}\)Geoff and Dorothy Robinson, Duty Free: A Prohibition Special (Summerside: the Authors, 1992), p. 17. The story is also told in their book The Nellie J. Banks: A Story of Prohibition.

\(^{89}\)Robinson, Duty Free, p.1. The Robinsons have recorded a great deal of rum-running history in this and their other two books, The Nellie J. Banks and It Came by the Boatload.
impossible. For while Islanders acknowledged that drinking was illegal, a great many of them didn’t think it was wrong. A whole generation had now been raised under Prohibition, but thousands of otherwise law-abiding Islanders still imbibed. Since slaking one’s thirst almost inevitably entailed dishonesty, the law that was meant to compel virtue actually encouraged all manner of vice. For more and more people, it was only the appearance of sobriety in their society that mattered. Prohibition, the joke went, meant not allowing your neighbour to have a drink.

That respect for Prohibition was clearly waning imbued the province’s powerful temperance lobby with a sense of crisis. And that made Premier J. D. Stewart’s election strategy in 1927 an unbelievable blunder. Desperate to make ends meet, Maritime governments had been flirting since mid-decade with the idea of replacing Prohibition with controlled sale of liquor through government vendors. At one stroke, they could bring in substantial new revenues while practically eliminating the costly and increasingly futile attempts at enforcement. At a Conservative Party banquet at the Victoria Hotel in March 1927, the Premier announced that his party would make government control a major plank in the Tories’ upcoming election platform.

Stewart had badly miscalculated. prohibitionists were outraged, and they stumped the province against the Conservatives that summer, turning the election campaign into a moral crusade. Amazed at their good fortune, Opposition Leader A. C. Saunders and the Liberals piously advocated another plebiscite, then stood back and held the coats while the Tories and the Provincial Temperance Alliance went at one another.

It was an extraordinary spectacle. Both sides courted women voters, the supposed “moral antiseptic” of politics, and imported experts to denounce or defend government control. A Patriot headline pretty well summarized the prohibitionist strategy: “Government Sale of Liquor Means Liquor Control of Government.” Warming to its work, the Liberal press laid all of the evils of

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90 And sometimes not even that. Roma (Stewart) Blackburn, daughter of Premier Stewart, was part of Charlottetown’s social elite. After 1925, she remembers in her memoir “Heart and Home” (PARO 4438/1), drinking was “much more general” in her set. “People . . . were spending their time and energy in the excitement of bootleg liquor and with entertainment suitable for adolescents.”

91 Island Patriot, 2 May 1927, p. 1. Actually, bootleggers and rum-runners were strong supporters of Prohibition; government control would be bad for business.
alcohol at the Conservatives’ door: “Do you want the daughter of your home to be led to the bridal altar by a drinker of government intoxicants, and to spend her days and raise her young family in the miseries of an impoverished home, under the example of a drinking father?”\(^92\) Caught off balance by the ferocity of the attack, the Conservatives never regained the initiative. It was a rout. When the votes were counted on 24 June, the Liberals had taken twenty-four of thirty seats. “Throughout the Island,” quips Liberal Party historian Wayne MacKinnon, “members of both parties, whether they won or lost, observed the occasion in their traditional style — they got drunk.”\(^93\)

The 1927 election — its verdict narrowly confirmed in the Liberals’ promised plebiscite two years later — was the last great victory for Prohibition in Canada. The *Canadian White Ribbon Tidings* exulted:

> Cheer up Ontario — Saskatchewan take heart;  
> Alberta, vast B.C. and all the rest;  
> The warfare isn’t hopeless — though we may have lost in part,  
> Since the “tight little island” stood the test.\(^94\)

The unwitting double entendre of the last line was probably missed by most readers.

Although hailed by temperance forces across the continent, the Island’s example failed to inspire North Americans. Soon Prince Edward Island was the only dry province in Canada, and when the United States repealed the Eighteenth Amendment in 1933, the Island stood alone. Once Prohibition’s outrider, Prince Edward Island now found itself the last lonely outpost of a crumbling empire. Enforcement was impossible, but repeal unthinkable. The Conservative massacre in 1927 had ensured that no government would touch Prohibition for another two decades. The law stayed on the books, but, after 1930, as the historian of Maritime Prohibition notes, “Islanders went thirsty only by


Meanwhile, the bootleggers and the moonshiners and the rumrunners plied their trade, and Prohibition slowly drowned in a spreading puddle of hypocrisy and deceit that mocked the ideals of its founders.

It seems only fitting that the decade that spawned a new criminal industry should also beget a new religious denomination. The birth pangs were especially intense on Prince Edward Island, and perhaps some of the intensity that went into the campaign against government control of liquor was an unconscious transference of the bitterness that the creation of the United Church of Canada had sparked in the province.

Church Union was a Canadian phenomenon. The movement had developed during the first two decades of the century, drawing strength from the same religious idealism that fired much of the prohibition sentiment. Nationally, three congregations were involved: Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. The religious landscape was a little different on Prince Edward Island, where Congregationalists were few and Presbyterians many, almost 30% of the population. The Basis of Union for the creation of a great new national church began with overwhelming acceptance, but, as it sought to move from principles to particulars, it began to gather dissent, primarily among Presbyterians. Among the leading dissidents were Islanders whose traditional religious loyalties were more fierce than their fragile ecumenism.

In June 1923, despite stubborn opposition, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church moved to adopt draft legislation that could be used to effect union and to vest church properties in the new entity. Local committees then set about adapting the model act to their own jurisdictions. “An Act Respecting the Union of Certain Churches Therein Mentioned” was introduced in the Island Legislature as a private member’s bill on 25 March 1924. At that point, all hell broke loose in the

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95 Davis, “I’ll Drink to That,” p. 397.
drive toward Christian unity.\textsuperscript{96}

Although Conservative Premier J. D. Stewart was a committed anti-Unionist and the act had been prepared by Liberal leader Albert C. Saunders, the Church Union bill was not treated as a party measure. After a spirited debate, it passed with a comfortable majority on 11 April. Later that day, in a sensational turn of events, Lieutenant-Governor Murdock MacKinnon withheld Royal Assent from the bill and prorogued the Legislature.

Unionists were as outraged as constitutional historians have been bemused by MacKinnon’s defiance of Responsible Government. His objection to the legislation was that it forced unwilling Presbyterians (like himself) into joining the United Church of Canada, allowing them to withdraw from the new Church only after the fact. The federal version of Church Union legislation, which was enacted a few months later, gave local congregations a chance to opt out of Union before it became official on 10 June 1925. By the time MacKinnon’s successor signed Prince Edward Island’s second crack at a Church Union bill into law on 10 April 1925, most Island congregations had already voted on whether or not to join the new United Church. In 1912, support for Church Union among Island Presbyterians had been 81%; by 1925, the figure had slipped to 57%. While this tattered majority marched into union with Island Methodists, the defiant rump of the local Presbytery set about reconstituting their beloved church. It had lost 57% of its membership, 66% of its churches, and 79% of its ministers. But it had survived.

The bitter struggle over Church Union drastically altered the social and religious landscape in the province. About forty congregations had actually merged. The Presbyterian Church in the province had been cut in half, Methodism had ceased to exist, and the United Church had become the Island’s single largest Protestant denomination. Intent on denominational survival, Presbyterians retreated into social conservatism, leaving the United Church as heir to what was left of the Social Gospel movement on Prince Edward Island.

It took another two years to sort out the complex property disputes occasioned by the split

\textsuperscript{96}James D. Cameron has published the most authoritative account of Church Union on Prince Edward Island. This account is based largely on his “The Garden Distressed: Church Union and Dissent on Prince Edward Island,” a two-part article in \textit{The Island Magazine}, 30(Fall/Winter 1991) and 31(Spring/Summer 1992); and “The Garden Distressed: Church Union and Dissent on Prince Edward Island, 1925.” \textit{Acadiensis} 21(Spring 1992): 108-131.
The economic argument was that it would encourage more traffic, so that the railway made up in volume what it gave up in unit charges. It worked for the ICR, which occasionally made money, but the PEIR seems never to have turned a profit.

The Church Union controversy on Prince Edward Island can be explained, at least in part, as a collision between local particularism and a national issue. The same might be said with respect to the Island’s experience within the great regional protest movement of the 1920s, Maritime Rights. Although geography drew the Maritime Provinces together, history had always kept them apart. They had long possessed separate governments, separate traditions, and separate identities. In the 1920s, they were brought together by a common sense of grievance. Sensitive about their declining political and economic influence within the Dominion and stung by the sharp recession of the early 1920s, the Maritime Provinces were outraged when federal transportation policy for its consolidated Canadian National Railway system eliminated the flexible freight rates that for decades had been used to offset the Maritimes’ competitive disadvantage in being so far from many markets. The impact of the loss of preferential rates was magnified by a huge increase in overall rates. Economically and psychologically devastated, Maritimers came together in the Maritime Rights
movement. 98

Essentially a massive lobbying campaign, Maritime Rights drew much of its energy from the local boards of trade and their provincial and regional groupings, such as Prince Edward Island’s Associated Boards of Trade. The movement’s watchwords were organization and agitation, and it gathered strength and indignation with each rebuff from Ottawa. There were public meetings and presentations, delegations to Ottawa, cross-Canada speaking tours, articles and editorials. The movement’s coattails gathered a host of issues, but the major ones were transportation, tariffs, federal subsidies to the Maritime Provinces, and the development of major port facilities. The Maritimes’ grievances were set within a powerful new version of the region’s history that blamed its decline on national policy. There had always been a tendency in the Maritimes to blame its problems on Confederation itself. That now hardened into conviction. At the same time, the myth of a pre-Confederation “Golden Age” came to full flower. 99

Partly because of its size, Prince Edward Island was never more than a junior partner in the movement, and while Maritime Rights attracted a fair amount of attention, it never became the pivotal issue in either the Island’s federal or provincial politics. The half-hearted investment in the agitation was partly a question of style. Maritime Rights zealots believed they could bring about change by the force of their will if only the region maintained a common front. But overwhelming the opposition had never been an option for Prince Edward Island within Canada. Its traditional strategies of supplication, persuasion, and manipulation were better suited to a place whose motto was “the small under the great.”

There was more to it than that though. Its prickly independence inclined Prince Edward Island to be wary of Maritime “union” almost as much as Canadian Confederation. Unlike Nova Scotia or New Brunswick, it had no lingering dreams of industrial greatness, and the local businesses affected

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99See, for example, the claim submitted by the Island government to the Duncan Commission in 1926 (PARO RG 21, Series 2, Subseries 1): “Prince Edward Island has not progressed under Confederation. . . . The question will be asked, has Confederation been responsible? It is submitted that the question must be answered in the affirmative.”
by federal policy shifts were too few to cripple the Island economy by their potential collapse. The province’s boards of trade, while keen on Maritime Rights, represented only a fraction of the population. For Island farmers, the movement had little to offer, except the possibility of favourable tariffs, and there was no agreement within the movement on what those should be.

The common ground between Prince Edward Island and her neighbours was mainly the subsidy issue and transportation. The three provinces were already occasional allies in the fight for more subsidies. Soaring freight rates were also a shared problem, but on that subject the Island’s most pressing concerns were acutely specific. High transportation costs on Prince Edward Island were bound up with the infuriating bottleneck that shippers encountered at Port Borden. There the volume of freight traffic had quickly exceeded the carrying capacity of the single car ferry, the SS Prince Edward Island. Even more frustrating, her value as a floating piece of railway track connecting the Island railway to the rest of North America was completely undone by the fact that the PEIR tracks were narrow gauge and the Mainland tracks were standard width. Instead of shunting on and off the Prince Edward Island, all loads had to be transferred to cars of the proper gauge.

Urgent demands from the Island government prodded Canadian National into laying a third rail from Borden to Charlottetown and Summerside in 1919, presenting Islanders with the unusual spectacle of standard and narrow-gauge cars jostling along together in the same trains like mismatched dancers in a conga line. But Canadian National, which had its own problems, was in no hurry to finish the conversion of the Island rail line to standard gauge. By 1926, there was still fifty-two miles of narrow gauge in the province.

**Boxed Essay: The Snow-Fighters**

The 1920s was the last decade of growth for the Prince Edward Island Railway. In 1919, the year that it was swallowed up by Canadian National Railways, the iron road carried four times as many passengers and seven-and-a-half times as much freight as when it opened. Of course, it still lost money, but it had become the transport of choice for most people and cargoes that ventured beyond the orbit of the immediate community.

At 286 miles, it was one of the shortest — and slowest — railways in Canada. “Did you miss the train
at St. Peter’s?” friends teased a neighbour. “Not near as much as I missed her at Morell,” he answered. At the best of times the PEIR was plagued with stops and hampered by antiquated rolling stock, but in winter the railway’s light, narrow-gauge engines, sharp curves, and heavy grades were easy prey for the massive blizzards that came howling down on the province. One of the worst years was 1922–23. That winter the Island got 129 inches of snow and had continuous sleighing from 22 November to 1 April. The railroading wasn’t nearly so good, as storm after storm buried the line. According to C. F. Morrissey’s diary, the trains missed 53 daily trips to Tignish between 1 January and 1 April.

During March the train barely made it through at all. Newspapers called it the Great Snow Blockade. Although a rotary plough was eventually shipped over from the Mainland to fight the drifts, the bulk of the snow was cleared by hand by hundreds of “snow-fighters,” up to three thousand men and boys. One of them was Lawson MacDonald, who grew up near Summerside:

I was workin’ with my father in the barn and we heard this train keep moaning and blowing. It kept up from the same place. That was a signal the train was stuck, snowbound. I was hired right on at midnight, March 16, and stayed with the trains to May 7... We worked 16 days to get her through from Summerside to Emerald.

We got paid $2.25 for a day’s work. That was big money. We were right in our glory as young fellas, great money. We used to pray for storms then: more money. In those days most work paid only a dollar a day.

I was 19 days on a train to Tignish and back, snow-fighting all the way. It was wringing wet all the time with all the steam around the engines and down around the wheels. It was slavish work.

The engine took a run at the drifts and then we’d have to get down and dig the old train out, dig the wheels out. And she’d get backed out of that and take another shunt and hit her again and go about half a length of herself and we’d dig her out again.

We’d chuck the snow up. One fellow’d chuck it up to another fellow and that fellow’d chuck it up farther to another fella. We went as high as five throws before we got it off the track and out of the cut...

The winter of the deep snow in ’23, it was level practically right along everywhere you went with the telephone wires. Many a time we walked over the wires.

Although Maritime Rights spokesmen spent a great deal of their energy convincing other Canadians of the justice of their claims, the battle for Canadian public opinion was ultimately just a flank attack on Ottawa. The sharp end of the movement, after all, was political action. The

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movement’s supporters began confident that if the region spoke with a united voice, Ottawa must act. In 1921, Maritime voters swept the incumbent Conservatives out of the region. Although the new Liberal leader, Mackenzie King, had been parachuted into the safe Island seat of Prince in 1919 and courted Maritime votes with tea and sympathy before the election, the survival of the minority government that he formed depended on placating Parliament’s sixty-five Western Progressives. For the next four years, he ignored or belittled the Maritimes’ “rights,” and, in the election of 1925, Maritime voters largely ignored him, pinning their hopes once again on the Conservatives.102

With the Progressive Party in free fall and the Tories on the doorstep of power, it was in King’s interests now to conciliate the region. He appointed a Royal Commission, led by British lawyer Sir Andrew Rae Duncan, to investigate the Maritimes’ claims.103 While it distinguished between Maritime “rights,” which it rejected, and Maritime “claims,” with which it sympathized, the Duncan Commission recommendations offered what historian E. R. Forbes calls, “a substantive program for Maritime rehabilitation.” With the sleight of hand that made him such a successful national politician, King observed the letter of the recommendations while ignoring their spirit, diluting the concessions with so much “half-measure, delay, and ‘further study’” that the Report’s medicine lost much of its efficacy.104 It did achieve King’s intent. Having promised all, he had given just enough to derail the Maritime Rights movement.

Compared to the rest of the region, Prince Edward Island did rather well out of the settlement, perhaps because the recommendations pertaining to the province were so specific. After a great deal of foot-dragging, the federal government appropriated a million dollars to construct a new car ferry, launched in 1931 as the SS Charlottetown, and finally completed standardizing the gauge on the Island’s railway at a cost of $2.3 million. The province had gotten more money, too, though not as much as it wanted. King granted the interim increase in provincial subsidies recommended by the Duncan Commission pending further consideration of that tangled and politically sensitive issue.

102 Quoted in Canadian Annual Review, 1925-26, p. 43.
103 The three-member commission also included Island expatriate Dr. Cyrus MacMillan, a professor of English at McGill University, but Duncan clearly dominated.
104 Ibid., p. 191.
Playing on the Island’s gnawing hunger for more revenues, King used the possibility of a “final settlement” of the issue to lure the Island’s Liberal premier away from the common Maritime front that the Conservative premiers of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were trying to maintain.

For the real glue that held the Maritime Rights movement together was self-interest, not common identity. Reverting to traditional Island strategy, Saunders put his faith in his Liberal “friends” in Ottawa. In October 1929, Saunders followed the suggestion of King’s Minister of Finance J. A. Robb, in trying to arrange a meeting “alone, rather than in conjunction with the other Maritimes” to settle the final and, he trusted, higher amount of Prince Edward Island’s subsidy. By January 1930, still left dangling, Saunders was threatening to mend the Maritime Rights bloc. But the moment had passed. The country had been overtaken by economic crisis, and increased subsidies would have to wait.

When economic geographer F. A. Stilgenbauer visited Prince Edward Island in the mid-1920s, he was told that 70% of the population had never been off the Island. That piece of information fed into his subsequent portrayal of the province as an insular land of bucolic farmers (inclined to “view the visitor with suspicion until his wants are made known”) and intrepid mariners (who regularly “put to sea unmoved by the thunder of a far-off storm”). The locals may have had a little fun with Stilgenbauer, yet his naive comments are revealing. To say that islands are insular is almost a truism. It is really only the degree of Prince Edward Island’s insularity — and its virtue, perhaps — that is debatable. During the 1920s, larger issues such as Maritime Rights and Church Union intruded on

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106 In 1935, Prince Edward Island was awarded an additional $150,000 annually in subsidies.

the Island’s self-contained universe. Hidden away behind the decade’s fierce rhetoric and popular agitation, a more subtle invasion was taking place. Little by little, the boundary between “Here” and “There” was growing thinner.

The eagerly sought improvements in surface transportation, the roads, railways, and ferries that made it easier both to get off and around Prince Edward Island, were part of it. So was aviation. The postwar decade had opened with the first airmail flight in Canada, on 24 September 1919, from Truro to Charlottetown. Like the province’s first flight back in 1912, it was a publicity stunt staged in conjunction with the Provincial Exhibition. It took only forty-five minutes to make history, but the object of the promotion, an airmail service to link Prince Edward Island, the Magdalen Islands, Halifax, and Moncton, never got off the ground. Only at the end of the 1920s was an airmail service established, and, even then, it was only in winter.

Travel wasn’t the only way to communicate. Telephones had been in use on Prince Edward Island since 1884, but it was another thirty years before Islanders were able to speak directly to people outside the province. A much maligned telegraph line was the only link to the outside world until 1910, when the first of several underwater telephone cables were laid under the Northumberland Strait. A more permanent connection was established by the Telephone Company of Prince Edward Island in 1914. Premier J. A. Mathieson placed the inaugural call on 6 July to Prime Minister Robert Borden in Halifax.  

By the end of 1928, Islanders possessed 4,964 telephones, strung together by 6,000 miles of wire in a hodgepodge of local lines. Their establishment had been subsidized by the Island government. There were forty-six tiny telephone companies in the province, twenty-six of them operating as co-operatives, and one large one, Island Telephone, which, for a fee, linked the community lines to the outside through its own system. At an average of one set for every 17.5 people — the lowest ratio of any province — the telephone was far from ubiquitous. Down in

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109 The statistics are taken from the Canada Year Book, 1930, p. 694. The number of phones had actually decreased since 1924, probably as phone sets were modernized.
Alliston a few years later, an elderly neighbour was fetched to a nearby farmhouse to receive his first phone call. He pressed the heavy black receiver to his ear, laughing in puzzlement. Suddenly, he jumped up in the air, and whipped the receiver back to arm’s-length. He stared at it in astonishment. “It called me Angus!” he exclaimed.\textsuperscript{110}

Although its full potential lay in the development of machines and appliances that used its energy, electricity was another yardstick for measuring change. Prince Edward Island’s rivers were too short and too slow to allow much potential for the cheap hydro-electric power that was flooding the rest of Canada in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The Island’s eleven power plants had to work hard for the 2.3 million kilowatt hours of electricity that they generated in 1928 through a combination of mill-fed water wheels and engine-powered turbines. As a result, though the electric lights had first come on in Charlottetown in 1885, electricity was expensive and still localized in the 1920s. Most plants supplied power only on wash days (Mondays) and for a few precious hours each night. Given that rural Islanders couldn’t afford many electrically powered appliances, it may even have been all that they needed.

Although it ran faster and faster, Prince Edward Island seemed to be falling behind the rest of Canada. It trailed the nation in every engine of progress in the 1920s — except one. A handful of Islanders were actually on the cutting edge of a whole new medium.

When Canadian inventor Reginald Fessenden succeeded in transmitting human voices on radio waves in 1906, the new technology of “wireless telegraphy” took a giant step forward. By giving words wings, radio pricked the imagination of Island enthusiasts such as Walter Hyndman, Walter Burke, G. G. Houston, and Harold Gaudet. But no one was more fanatical about radio than Charlottetown’s Keith S. Rogers, son of businessman W. K. Rogers. The father had begun his career as a railroad telegrapher, and it was perhaps a natural progression for his teenaged son to fall in love with wireless telegraphy. While other radio buffs romanced the technology, Rogers also pursued its business potential. On 10 August 1925, the first commercial radio license on Prince Edward Island

\textsuperscript{110}The story was related to Boyde Beck by Edwin Beck, Montague, 5 August 1999.
was issued to Rogers and Walter Burke under the call letters CFCY, 960 on the radio dial.\textsuperscript{111}

Rogers and Burke soon fell out, having essentially divergent visions. Burke’s chief ambition in radio was to broadcast church services. Rogers, on the other hand, was gradually investing his whole life in the new medium. The two split, and after 1928 Burke’s Station CHCK competed feebly with Rogers’ CFCY for the local radio audience. A year earlier, Holman’s Department Store in Summerside had also entered the field with a small 25-watt station. Its call letters, CHGS, derived from the chain’s advertising slogan: “Call Holman’s. Guaranteed Satisfaction.”

Voices out of thin air: early radio seemed like magic. In the beginning, when Rogers was operating out of his home on Bayfield Street, he would set up a loudspeaker in the window, and spellbound neighbours would gather in the street below to listen to his broadcasts. It was the only way that many Islanders could hear them. In February 1927, there were still only 249 radio receivers in the province, many of them powered by cumbersome, short-life batteries.\textsuperscript{112}

As a necessary sideline, Rogers also sold radios, but some customers’ grasp of the new technology was willfully weak. He thought he was making headway with one farmer.

“Well, now you say I can get anything on that?” the farmer asked.

“Sure you just turn the tuner.”

“Okay then — get me, ‘Lord MacDonald’s Reel.’”

The deal fell through.

Using his insurance business to help finance his ruling passion, Rogers gradually expanded CFCY’s physical plant. Eventually, he erected two 150-foot radio towers in a field just outside Charlottetown. They gave his 500-watt station an enviable range across the region, and CFCY soon became a household word in homes across the Maritimes.

Little by little, radio insinuated itself into Islanders’ lives. CFCY carried political addresses during the great “Prohibition Election” of 1927. The same year, it broadcast the national Diamond Jubilee of Confederation ceremonies through loudspeakers to crowds of people gathered in Victoria.

\textsuperscript{111}Except where noted, the following account of CFCY is based on Betty Rogers Large, and Tom Crowthers, \textit{Out of Thin Air} (Charlottetown: Applecross, 1989), a memoir of CFCY’s early days.

\textsuperscript{112}\textit{Canadian Annual Review}, 1926-27, p. 244. By 1936, there were 2,159.
Park. Meanwhile, children grew up with “Sleepy Town Express,” hosted by Keith Rogers’ daughter Betty, “the Story Lady,” who began her career in radio as a schoolgirl. By the late 1930s, when CFCY introduced Don Messer and his Islanders to the rest of Canada, over five thousand Islanders owned radios. By then, the station had its slogan, “the Friendly Voice of the Maritimes.”

The medium was the message. Radio was a conduit by which the whole world came directly and vividly into Islanders’ lives. Local broadcasting provided a shared experience that bound Islanders more closely together. But it also introduced outside influences and new customs that elbowed the old ways aside to make room for themselves in people’s lives.

Radio’s impact on musical traditions suggests the process. In the beginning, radio clearly gave a boost to traditional or “old-time” music, allowing fiddlers to be heard far beyond their local communities and encouraging a cross-fertilization of styles between the Island and the fiddlers of Cape Breton and Antigonish County. Local players such as Lem Jay and Bob Weeks appeared regularly on early CFCY programming, and the station broadcast the “Great Fiddling Contests” of 1926. Yet radio also popularized other forms of music that played from a much different cultural background: jazz, classical, and, especially, country and western. Already by the end of the 1920s, Island radios were picking up the new music from stations such as Wheeling, West Virginia. In the mid-1930s, CFCY would import its own cowboy singer, “Tex” Cochrane, complete with cowboy hat, chaps, and spurs.

Radio had diverted the cultural mainstream so that it flowed right through Islanders’ parlours. What could be more revolutionary? When Keith Rogers created his own limited company in 1931, the Letters Patent for the Island Radio Broadcasting Company contained a clause authorizing it “to send and transmit, receive and re-transmit by radio vision or otherwise, pictures.”

Only a lack of income prevented Islanders from embracing modern technology more fully during the 1920s. It is a mark of either our pride or our innocence that there was evidently no sense that insularity also provides a measure of protection, that isolation nourishes distinctiveness. Change, the electrical impulse that pushes all societies forward, was quickening. Hairline fractures were appearing

in the bedrock of the Island’s traditional culture. As yet unnoticed, they would be infinitely more significant than the gaping cracks in the McIntyre Highway.

But not yet.
Chapter Five
“Somethin’ Desperate”

“And how was your winter, my uncle John?”
“Peace and poverty, if know y’maun.”

“And how’re father and mither, dear?”
“Of good colour but a little thin, I fear.”

“Was it potatoes and turnips kept you alive?”
“Yes, and bread and molasses, dear nephew Clive.”

Frank Ledwell, “Hungry Thirties”

In the brilliant summer sunshine of August 1929, St. Dunstan’s College staged a grand alumni reunion to mark the school’s 75th anniversary. Hundreds of former students and teachers converged in a soft haze of nostalgia on the hilltop campus just outside Charlottetown. Many of them were expatriates, including the keynote speaker, Francis C. Kelley, formerly of Vernon River but now Bishop of Oklahoma and a leading Catholic writer and theologian. Amid thunderous applause, Kelley launched a new endowment fund for the little college. Twenty thousand dollars was “entirely too small,” he declared, “one hundred thousand dollars should be subscribed.” By day’s end, he already had $30,000 in pledges. Ten years later, despite pleas, persuasion, and cajolery, a grand total of only $17,393 had been collected.² That dismal sum did not reflect any lack of loyalty among alumni. Between the word and the deed had fallen a decade of economic catastrophe.

Popular history depicts the Great Depression as a sudden earthquake, but on Prince Edward Island, at least, it came on gradually, like a change of season. The stock market collapse of 29 October 1929 was only a distant echo in a province that had few high-rolling investors. Up in Tignish, Clarence

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Morrissey’s diary entry that Halloween was “Good crop of potatoes and a good price. Times rather good.”

The shock waves from the economic earthquake still had not reached Prince Edward Island when J. A. MacDonald addressed the Associated Board of Trade the following August: “We might safely say that our own little province is at the present moment almost one exception [to the economic depression overtaking the rest of the world]. For trade conditions here are good, and our people on the whole are meeting with a reasonable degree of prosperity.”

But a month earlier, merchant H. T. Holman had sounded a warning note in his diary. Holman’s Department Store was making record sales, but, “Bank loans up to limit. Entirely too much credit. Making a big effort to collect especially town [Summerside] and Charlottetown.” A number of major construction projects lubricated the local economy that summer, but, in the fall, when Island farmers went to sell their crops, they discovered that their off-Island markets were... gone.

In a society keyed to farming, and a farming tied to export markets, the steep slide in agricultural prices in the fall of 1930 began a disastrous chain reaction that rattled the provincial economy. Like the financial experts, The Guardian was convinced that confidence was what was needed. “The 1930 slump is passing,” it declared in its year-end editorial; “the year 1931 may prove to be the brightest in our history. Let us believe so and, believing let us work and achieve.”

Island governments were equally slow to admit the scope of the developing calamity. Liberal Premier Albert C. Saunders, who later confessed to a journalist that his primary goal in entering

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5As J. E. Dingwell of the Central Farmers’ Institute put it in July 1931, “We heard a lot about it, read still more, but did not really feel it until last autumn when the season’s crops had to be sold.” (Quoted in Cusack, “The Prince Edward Island People and the Great Depression,” p. 42.)
politics had been a judgeship, saw his wish granted in the spring of 1930.\textsuperscript{4} It was left to W. M. Lea of Victoria, the first farmer ever to become premier in a province of farmers, to grapple with the onset of the Depression. His instinctive reaction was caution. While other governments were borrowing money to provide relief for their unemployed, Prince Edward Island alone among Canadian provinces reduced its bonded debt during 1931.\textsuperscript{7} Lea went into the general election that August preaching fiscal stewardship. Opposition Leader J. D. Stewart argued that, with arch-Tory R. B. Bennett installed as Prime Minister, his party could coax more money from Ottawa to steward. Sobered by their prohibition debacle in 1927, Stewart’s Tories carved out a comfortable, six-seat majority.

While thunder rumbled overhead, the Conservatives celebrated on election night at the Capitol Theatre in Charlottetown. The storm broke with a tremendous crash as W. J. P. MacMillan, Stewart’s fiery lieutenant, was addressing the victory party. MacMillan waited a moment for the thunder to fade away. “See,” he cried, “even the Heavens rejoice in the downfall of the Lea government.”\textsuperscript{8}

Winning the election of 1931 was probably the worst thing that could have happened to the Conservatives. Premier J. D. Stewart was appalled by the enormity of the economic crisis that his new administration found on taking office:

\begin{quote}
I am being waited upon daily by delegations from different parts of our rural communities who are pointing out to me that already in many sections people are unable to obtain the ordinary necessities, and the rural merchants are not in a position to give them credit. Besides there is absolutely no market for our potato crop, that is, whatever crop that we may have to market. Altogether the situation which we are now facing here is incomparably worse than anything that has ever been seen in this province in its recent history.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Canadian Annual Review}, 1932, p. 436.

\textsuperscript{8}As retold by Heath MacQuarrie in his \textit{Red Tory Blues, A Political Memoir}. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{9}Stewart to G. D. Robertson, Minister of Labour, Ottawa, 1 October 1931, PARO RG 21, Box 37, File 10.
Stewart underestimated. By the summer of 1931, the Island economy was in free fall. Between 1929 and 1932, the gross value of production plunged from $32,807,542 to $15,943,467. Personal incomes were halved. As agriculture went, so went the province. From a 1929 total of $16,940,000, the value of field crops bottomed out at $6,947,000 in 1931. Pork went from 16¢ a pound to 3¢. Wool, 23¢ to 5¢. Butterfat, 45¢ to 5¢. Eggs, which had fetched as much as 26¢ a dozen in 1929, fell to as little as 8¢.

The devastation of Mainland markets told most on seed potatoes, the star performer of the 1920s. In just two years, the potato crop lost four-fifths of its value. Island producers received $1.50 per bushel in 1929. Two years later, the price of potatoes went as low as 6¢ — when they could be sold at all. That fall, the Prince Edward Island Potato Growers’ Association was forced to find storage for a half-million bushels of its members’ potatoes for which no market could be found. As the bottom fell out of the Island’s chief cash crop, agricultural officials began urging Islanders to go back to mixed farming.¹⁰ In effect, the farm economy regressed to subsistence.

Accurate unemployment statistics were virtually unobtainable in Canada — government was not calibrated to take such measurements (let alone to provide unemployment insurance) and policy makers had to make do with vague estimates for much of the decade. In 1930, when R. B. Bennett took office promising to “blast his way” into the world’s markets, the unemployment rate in Canada was calculated at 12.9%. By early 1933, conditions had touched bottom as the rate neared 27%, then recovered to something over 18%. The percentage in the Maritimes was pegged at 19 in the summer of 1931.¹¹ Fifteen hundred Islanders were said to be unemployed, an unremarkable figure, until one takes into account the Canada Year Book’s estimate of only 2,100 workers in the province who

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¹⁰*Canada Year Book*, 1932, p. 1025. See also, the Report of the Department of Agriculture for 1935, which favoured mixed farming practices over “gambling tendencies, which brought disaster in many instances during past years.”

¹¹The national figures are cited in Donald Swainson, “A Lost Leader: R. B. Bennett,” *Horizon Canada*, 9/100: 2380; the Maritime ones are supplied in Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype*, p. 151.
ordinarily received cash wages or salaries.\textsuperscript{12} “Every mail brings dozens of letters saying, ‘Can’t pay no money,’ wrote store-owner H. T. Holman. “It’s getting somewhat depressing.”\textsuperscript{13}

The minutes of the Executive Council illustrate how steadily conditions disintegrated once the downward spiral began. In 1930, the Council authorized eighty grants under “Poor Relief.” In 1931, the number rose to 144. In 1932, it was 302. The outline of a disaster was becoming plainer. The question was, what could government do about it?

The short answer was, “not much.” As elsewhere, governments in Canada were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the Great Depression. Hindsight has condemned their rigid timidity in dealing with it, and yet, to expect more of Depression-era governments is unrealistic. There was simply no precedent for such a massive, prolonged catastrophe and so, none for how to deal with it. On Prince Edward Island, government treated only the symptoms of Depression. Its one “radical” policy was to countenance the creation of a regional potato marketing board as a way to protect prices by eliminating price-cutting. But the size of the potato market defied any attempt to regulate it, and the board failed. Ultimately, the federal legislation under which it was organized was declared unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{14}

It has been argued that “self-reliant” Islanders were philosophically opposed to government


\textsuperscript{13}Diary of Harry T. Holman, PARO 4420, Reel 2, entry for 15 January 1932.

\textsuperscript{14}A legislative committee had discovered secret price-setting among the four principal potato shippers in the province. The provincial government appointed marketing boards to try to prevent price-cutting. The attempt is outlined in Cusack, “The Prince Edward Island People and the Great Depression,” pp. 138-150. The federal trend toward collectivism is discussed by L. M. Grayson and Michael Bliss in their introduction to \textit{The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R. B. Bennett, 1930-1935} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).
intervention, and that only years of economic hardship broke down their resistance to the idea. It seems, though, that Islanders of the 1930s did not resent the idea of government intervention so much as its cost. When Island governments failed to take full advantage of federal relief or social welfare programs, they were not reflecting Islanders’ sturdy independence; they were brazening out their own poverty. Federal programs were all cost-shared, and provincial and municipal governments on Prince Edward Island were hard put to raise their portion. Their choice was either to confess that they could not afford the help, or pretend that they did not need it. Either way, their sense of fiscal responsibility was less an article of faith than a concession to a public opinion that looked on government budgets in the same way they regarded household ones. When times were tight, you spent less, not more:

Resolved that we the members of “Central Farmers’ Institute” in convention assembled view with alarm the continued borrowing of money to finance governmental expenditure, a policy which tends to waste and extravagance, having in its system the latent germ of decay and corruption. As a consequence the vicious circle of debt is expanding which in the years to come will make it difficult for the farmers to maintain the equity in their holdings, threatening the very existence of responsible government, and our priceless heritage, and we strongly urge and request the “powers that be” to inaugurate a policy of retrenchment with a view to a balanced budget.

Island farmers can hardly be blamed for failing to anticipate the Keynesian revolution in deficit financing.

Attitudes toward government spending were also tied to the measure of the hardship endured.

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15 This is the central argument in Cusack’s “The Prince Edward Island People and the Great Depression.”

16 In Challenging the Regional Stereotype, pp. 152-53, E. R. Forbes contrasts the Maritimes with Prairie governments, which borrowed their share of relief funding from the federal government, based on their confidence in their region’s future. Maritime governments lacked the faith in their future to follow suit.

17 General meeting in February 1935. Quoted in Cusack, “The Prince Edward Island People and the Great Depression,” p. 162. What is curious here is not so much the rejection of deficit financing, but the equation of the healthy farm as the basic unit of responsible government.
In recent years Maritime historians have resented the assumption that their region, not having as far to fall, was affected less by the Depression than other parts of Canada, claiming instead that Atlantic Canada suffered worse than Ontario or Quebec. Like many regional generalizations, this one is only selectively true on Prince Edward Island. While the Great Depression devastated many parts of the Maritimes, Island farmers really were able to fall back on the bounty of their land. They might not be able to sell their potatoes, but they could always eat them.

They could also share them. Beginning in 1931, Islanders donated dozens of railcar loads of relief supplies, principally food, to Western Canada, where prairie farmers faced absolute ruin. In 1934 alone, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool acknowledged sixty carloads of relief from the Island. There is a story, too good to be true, about immigrant farmers’ bewilderment over the bone-hard salt fish that Maritimers included in the shipments. Unable to figure out how to cook them, they ended up using the salt fish for shingles.

What the Depression cost Island farmers was their margin of safety. While their incomes dropped 40% during the first years of the Depression, for example, the cost of farm machinery fell only by 25%. The differential took away the things that made life comfortable rather than precarious. “Money scarce” was the constant refrain in the diary of C. F. Morrissey during the 1930s. There was no money to buy fertilizer to prop up yields. If the crop failed, as it did during 1937, there was no money to buy seed. If someone fell sick, there was no money to pay the doctor. If a note came due, there was no money to redeem it — and nearly every farmer was in debt, including the Farmer Premier, W. M. Lea. During its first year of operation, 249 Islanders would receive protection under the Farmers’ Creditors Arrangement Act of 1934.

As the hard times continued, people’s lives leaked dollar by dollar into the credit ledgers in merchants’ stores. The barter system once again became ubiquitous. There was a great deal of “doing without” and even more “making do.” It was the era of third-hand clothes and last year’s dress and

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20 PARO RG 6, Courts, Series 7, Box 1.
scratchy bloomers sewn out of flour sacks. David Weale tells one such story: “A woman from Mount Stewart said she had a neighbour who used to make underwear out of flour bags for her and her daughter and that people would say, ‘There goes Mrs. Smith, Darlene, and Robin Hood on their way to church.’” Whenever the daughter bent over, Weale’s informant recalled, you could see “98 lbs. net wt.” written on her backside.\footnote{David Weale, \textit{Them Times} (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1992), p. 71.} For many subsistence farmers, though, times were not appreciably worse than what they were used to. Decades later, some Islanders could not recall much difference between the 1930s and what had gone before.

For those who had steady work, falling prices for consumer goods helped offset a trend toward lower wages. Helen Herring’s husband “just barely kept” his job with the railway during the Depression. He made $6.16 a day, “and we saved money on it.” With her household expenses running at only $30 dollars a month for a family of six, Herring’s family lived comfortably. “If you had any cash at all coming in,” she reflected, “you did alright.”\footnote{Helen Herring, interviewed by Reg “Dutch” Thompson for “The By-Gone Days,” CBC \textit{Mainstreet} (taped copy courtesy of Reg Thompson).}

But jobs were scarce, especially for those just entering the work force. The unhappy teachers who had threatened to strike for higher salaries in 1929 now accepted a 10% wage cut in order to save their positions.\footnote{The Royal Commission on Education had recommended in 1930 that teachers be given a raise but remained vague about how that could be financed.} When they finally approached government about the raise premised in the Royal Commission on Education in 1930, the teachers’ representatives went away meekly with a stern lecture on the necessity of restraint. They had little choice. As Prince of Wales College continued to churn out new teachers, there was a tremendous competition for the available schools. There was no talk of a teacher shortage now, no exodus to be Prairie pedagogues.

In fact, outmigration from Prince Edward Island slowed to a trickle during the 1930s. There was no reason to leave when there was no work anywhere else. There is even evidence of backflow,
as expatriates straggled home from the jobless cities of Away.\textsuperscript{24} For the first time in half a century, the Island’s population grew.

The rise in numbers was no longer taken as an index of prosperity. A generation of young Islanders who once would have emigrated now cooled their heels in their parents’ homes or drifted into Charlottetown and Summerside, waiting for life to begin again. Families badly missed the money they would have sent home. David Weale has a story from Breadalbane about a family that scraped together enough funds to send their son to the Boston States, where he might find work to help support all of them. The son found a job, but was so desperately homesick that each day seemed a year. He quit after only a couple of weeks, and what little he had earned was spent to make the long trip back home. Anticipating his family’s disappointment, he sidled through the kitchen door. “Well,” he ventured to the circle of astonished faces, “I see you’ve still got the same cat.”\textsuperscript{25}

The people hit hardest by the Depression on Prince Edward Island were those that lacked the farmers’ self-sufficiency: urban labourers and fishermen. In Charlottetown, an Unemployed Workmen’s Association was formed in May 1932 to lobby for its members’ welfare. By October, six hundred men were registered with it. The fishermen were even worse off. By 1932, cod was selling at 75¢ a hundredweight. Lobster fetched 3–4¢ a pound for fishermen who owned their gear, only 2–2.5¢ for those who fished the packers’. “All through at lobster,” factory owner C. F. Morrissey told his diary on 30 June 1930. “Worst year in 15. Damn near broke. Hard times.” In fact, many packers went out of business during the next decade, as the canning industry continued to consolidate.

By 1933 the value of the fishery had sunk to its lowest levels since the 1870s, falling to

\textsuperscript{24}See, for example, Brief Regarding Unemployment Problems in P.E.I., January 1932, PARO RG 21, Box 37, File 10. Federal statistics indicate that outward migration between 1931 and 1940 was only 2,671 people: this in a province where the net migration between 1901 and 1911 was nearly 10,000. (Cited in Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” p. 79.)

\textsuperscript{25}As told to David Weale in Victoria, Prince Edward Island, in July 1999, and related to the author.
$842,000.\textsuperscript{26} In an interview in Montreal in January 1934, W. J. P. MacMillan described whole fishing villages subsisting on government relief.\textsuperscript{27} It was one such village, North Rustico (the idyllic haven of modern tourism promotion), that J. T. Croteau would describe so memorably in his account of Depression-era Prince Edward Island as “a hamlet sunken in misery,” full of unpainted shacks, unemployed men, and undernourished children, 70% of whom reacted positively to a tuberculosis test.\textsuperscript{28} That fall, according to the 	extit{Patriot}, a rumrunner hovered off the coast near Alberton for several days before leaving in disgust. No one could afford its wares.\textsuperscript{29}

Among these Islanders, there was enough hardship to satisfy modern apologists who seek primacy of suffering in the Maritimes’ Depression experience. Unable to grow or make or earn what they needed, labourers and fishermen received the bulk of the relief doled out by the various levels of government.

Alms were about all that governments had to give the Depression. Basically, they sponsored two kinds: direct relief and public works projects. Responsibility for social welfare was actually reserved to the provinces by the terms of the British North America Act, but since Ottawa held most of the resources, the availability of matching federal funds was the necessary primer for most of the relief programs.

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\textsuperscript{26}It limped along for the rest of the decade before hitting a new low in 1940, sinking to $740,000, a remarkable figure for the modern fishery.\\
\textsuperscript{27}Cited in Cusack, “The Prince Edward Island People and the Great Depression,” p. 46.\\
\textsuperscript{28}J. T. Croteau, \textit{Cradled in the Waves} (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1951), p. 3. He is citing Bertram A. Blacquiere, \textit{What Fishermen Can Do: The Story of North Rustico} ([n.p.: Adult Education League of Prince Edward Island, [c. 1940]]).\\
\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Patriot}, 30 November 1934. The story has the ring of fiction; the key is that it could be retailed as fact.
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In the beginning, local politicians used federal relief funding for public works as they would any other patronage dollars: they looked after their friends. Local songmaker Alec Shea sharpened his wit on the crew of Conservatives hired to build a new breakwater at Tignish Run:

'Twas in the summer of 1931,
When a bunch of Tories was working at the Run,
They went on the job like a damned bunch of mules,
And the first day they worked, oh, they lost all the tools,
Over the wharf in the water.

The following year, of 1932
Didn't Morrissey come back with the same old crew,
And swore to his God he would see the job through,
Working on the new breakwater.30

Federal pressure and the non-partisan nature of Islanders’ suffering gradually modified, but could not eliminate, patronage traditions.

Although construction projects like the Tignish Breakwater provided desperately needed employment during the early 1930s, road-building was easily the most attractive employment relief program on Prince Edward Island.31 The various unemployment relief acts picked up where the Canada Highways Act of 1919 had left off. All through the decade, work crews fanned out across the Island’s road network. In September 1934, fortified by promises of 50–50 federal funding, the

30 Alec Shea, “The Tignish Breakwater,” as recorded by Reginald Porter, c. 1965 (courtesy of Reginald Porter). One clue to the workers’ alleged problems might be found in the diary of the foreman, C. F. Morrissey. For 27 July 1931, he recorded, “Working at the Pile Driver at Run. Plenty liquor.” Shea’s pique — he was fond of a drink — is explained by his last verse: “‘Twas something peculiar the people all say,/ For they kept Alec Shea for only a day,/ And then they sacked him and sent him away,/ From working on the new breakwater.”

31 The formula is provided in Cusack, “The People of Prince Edward Island and the Great Depression,” p. 128. In his brief to the Rowell-Sirois Commission, Premier Campbell would complain vaguely that the federal government had reneged on its promises to fund the entire cost of highway construction, though the official agreement had stipulated only 50%.
provincial government began paving a route between Charlottetown and the ferry terminal at Borden. Few people remember that the Island stretch of the Trans Canada Highway began as a make-work project.

During the late 1920s, the Department of Public Works had boasted about its new road machines. Now, the work was done by hand wherever possible so as to provide the maximum number of jobs.³² A half-century later, Donald MacKay could still remember hauling gravel with team and truck wagon for the Trans Canada Highway as it inched its way through the hills of Fredericton: “It was supposed to be all horses to give the farmers a chance to make some money. And there’d be a whole lineup of farmers going along with a load of gravel.” It was back-breaking work. Each load was shovelled by hand at the gravel pit in Springton, and then trundled across country to the weigh station near Fredericton, where it was unloaded once again by hand. Two tons per load; two loads per day; $1.75 per load. After a month, his team of horses “were thin, but they were in great shape.”³³ So was MacKay.

As in the 1920s, their combination of employment with practical improvements made public works programs essential political capital on Prince Edward Island. The news that the federal government had earmarked no funds for relief projects in the province in 1933 was a double disaster. Acting Premier W. J. P. MacMillan headed a four-member provincial delegation to Ottawa that September to plead the Island’s case for more money. Their interview with Prime Minister R. B. Bennett did not go well. At length, according to family tradition, MacMillan abruptly announced that he would go tell Islanders just how shabbily their troubles had been treated by the federal government — and perhaps call a provincial election while he was at it. With that he stomped out of the Prime Minister’s office and hailed a cab to the railway station. Unwilling to call his bluff, Bennett dispatched someone to the depot to fetch him back.³⁴ In October The Guardian announced $113,650

³²This was, in fact, the subject of correspondence between provincial and federal officials.

³³Donald McKay, Cornwall, interviewed by Reg “Dutch” Thompson for “The By-Gone Days,” CBC Mainstreet (taped copy courtesy of Reg Thompson).

³⁴As related to Leonard Cusack back in 1971. (Personal communication to the author, 19 August 1999.) The anecdote survived with no specific date attached to it, and Cusack has
in new federal relief funding.

By 1937, $2.49 million had been spent on relief projects on Prince Edward Island, the bulk of it on road improvements. Just over 40% of that total had come from Ottawa; the Province had borrowed the rest. While it often bragged about the number of people the road work had supported, the provincial government preferred to think of the expenditure as an investment, not as poor relief. The psychological difference was immense.

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In December 1935, Lieutenant-Governor George DeBlois hosted the first of what became annual Christmas parties at Fanningbank for the poor children of Charlottetown. Over seven hundred kids attended. Each boy received a hockey stick and a puck; each girl, a doll and a box of chocolates. There was ice cream and candy and oranges, and a quarter for everyone. A member of one sprawling Charlottetown family remembers how outraged he was that only some of his playmates along the Spring Park Road had been treated so royally. He and a couple of confederates marched boldly up to the Governor’s door and demanded an invitation to the party. He is thankful that his mother never discovered the story behind the invitation that arrived shortly at her door. She might have had many mouths to feed, but her husband had a decent job. They did not need charity.

Relief work programs were popular with Islanders in part because they could be disguised as jobs. Direct relief was charity, and requesting it was a last resort for most Islanders. There was a stigma attached to relief in a small, and often small-minded, community where even pity came at a
tentatively fitted it to the circumstances of fall 1933.

35 The figure was calculated from the Public Accounts for 1930-1937. They also jibe with the numbers given in the Prince Edward Island submission to the Rowell-Sirois Commission in 1938.

36 Interview with Charles Lund, Charlottetown, 24 August 1999. DeBlois made the Christmas party a custom during his governorship.
social price. Although nearly a third of the nation were out of work during the worst of the Depression, Canadians — even the unemployed — still clung to the notion that the poor were somehow to blame for their dilemma. Such attitudes were mirrored in the mechanics of relief.

The Governor’s party, like the pioneer social services program launched by the Sisters of St. Martha in 1931, represented private charity, the traditional method of ministering to the needy. It had been unequal to the task even before the Great Depression descended like a Biblical plague. The State had little choice but to step in, and all through the 1930s governments voted dribs and drabs of funding for direct relief, hoping each allowance might be the last. By its own calculation, the Island government spent $140,000 on direct relief between 1930 and 1937, while cities and towns contributed another $101,000.

It was never enough. Not nearly enough.

Direct relief spending was shared equally among the relevant levels of government (three in urban areas, only two in the country). But the chain of relief was only as strong as its weakest link. Poor relief was considered a municipal responsibility, thus, the poorest level of government had to ante up its share before any other money was forthcoming. Municipalities also bore the expense of administering the programs within their boundaries (though in practice they relied heavily on church groups and charitable organizations). In the 1930s, there were seven municipalities in the province, of which only Summerside and Charlottetown had any appreciable resources to apply toward, or borrow against for, relief. The poorest municipalities could not afford access to relief programs at all, and even those that could quickly ran out of funds. Between 1932 and 1933, Charlottetown’s tax arrears more than doubled, and the following year its budget deficit reached $56,000. When Ottawa switched from matching relief to fixed (but lower) grants in 1934, there was even less money to go around.

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37 Their activities are summarized in Cusack, “The Prince Edward Island People and the Great Depression,” p. 52.

38 *The Case of Prince Edward Island: A Submission to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Charlottetown: [1938]), p. 31.

Unable to multiply their dollars with federal money, both the Province and municipalities cut back drastically on direct relief, especially in summer, when needy Islanders were left to fend for themselves. As relief funds petered out, the angry members of the Unemployed Workmen’s Association staged demonstrations and rioted.40 “Conditions in Charlottetown are the worst in its history,” Premier MacMillan bitterly informed the Minister of Labour in February 1935.41 The next fall, Ottawa’s new Liberal government provided a 75% increase in direct relief payments.42

One paradox of Depression-era relief was that it often turned its back on those who needed it most. As a child in Albany during the 1930s, John Eldon Green used to count the hobos by the side of the road. In feeding and sheltering them, his mother taught him a lifelong lesson in social justice.43 Official Prince Edward Island was less charitable. In 1930, Mayor Prowse of Charlottetown petitioned the Lea Government to have the Provincial Police turn out-of-province vagrants back at Borden, “as they are evidently a burden on our Province and City.”44 Home-grown hoboes were harder to shut out. To protect their meagre resources, municipalities ruthlessly imposed residency requirements for relief.

41W.J.P. MacMillan to Hon. W. A. Gordon, 19 February 1935, PARO RG 21, Box 41, File 44.
42Forbes, Challenging the Regional Stereotype, p. 168.
43John Eldon Green, “Feeding the Hungry, Clothing the Naked, and Comforting the Afflicted,” lecture given in Island Lecture Series in Charlottetown, 12 April 1999.
44Mayor T.W.L. Prowse to W. M. Lea, 11 December 1930, Lea Papers, PARO RG 25.28, File NOP. That’s exactly what happened. As Cst. W. D. Clark of the Prince Edward Island Provincial Police stated in his report for 18 April 1931: “Arrested five hoboes at 5 a.m. Took them to boat. Went out on 7 a.m. train to Kinkora. Met [Sgt.] John Platts who turned over five more hoboes, took them to boat and went as far as Cape Tormentine, N.B. with ten hoboes.” According to Cusack, “The Prince Edward Island People and the Great Depression,” pp. 56-57, forty-one hoboes were turned back at Borden by the RCMP in 1933, and twenty were ordered out of Charlottetown.
Vagrants inspired a vague fear, but they were not the only people to fall through the cracks of relief. The surviving appeals for assistance plumb the depths of the Great Depression. When multiplied by repetition, they acquire a deadening sameness, so it is perhaps best to let one letter stand for the many that might be offered. The woman wrote directly to the Prime Minister. Her case was pathetic and all too typical:

I am writing to see if you can help me a little. We have lost our house by fire and everything we were owners of and have eight children to look after. . . . [W]e had nowhere to go so we moved to Charlottetown and tried to get the City Relief and they would not give it to us and can’t give my husband any work.

Our minister had to help us till now and he said he thought the government should help us a little. But all they give us is three dollars a month and that is very small for to feed children and keep them warm. And we were always Liberals but it don’t seem to make any difference. You said in your speech no one would go cold or hungry but we have both. And I have three children of school age and can’t sent them because they have no warm clothes. . . . And I am expecting more trouble next month and I don’t know what I will do as I have not much clothes myself. Is there any way you could help me out or to try to get some relief for me as they won’t do a thing for me here. They say you have to be in town two years before you get City Relief.

I know you will try to help me out some way. I will never forget you if you do. Please write to me as soon as possible and let me know what you can do.45

The extent of such misery is impossible to gauge. Numbers are ambiguous and too easily manipulated. Just the same, in February 1935, slightly under a tenth of the province, 8,585 Islanders, were receiving relief, 6,466 of them in “rural” areas, and the rest in Charlottetown. The level of assistance provided them — an average of $1.93 per head per month — was the second lowest in Canada.46

The Province felt it could not do much more for its citizens. Social welfare programs such as

45Letter to Mackenzie King, 10 January 1938, PARO RG 21, Box 43, File 20.

46Cited in Forbes, Challenging the Regional Stereotype, p. 146n. Nationally, 12% of the population was on relief. (See Grayson and Bliss, eds., The Wretched of Canada, p. xi.)
Mothers’ Allowances were beyond its financial reach, even if cost-shared with the federal government. In 1932, a Workman’s Compensation Act was introduced in the Speech from the Throne, but allowed to die on the order book by tacit agreement of the two parties. Only in the area of old age pensions did Prince Edward Island set a dubious precedent.

When it introduced the concept of old age pensions for needy Canadians over seventy during the 1920s, the federal government offered to split their cost on a 50–50 basis with the provinces. Even after the Bennett administration upped the federal contribution to 75%, none of the Maritime Provinces could afford the scheme, least of all Prince Edward Island, where decades of outmigration had left a high proportion of seniors in the population. Despite the relatively low cost, pensions for seniors made good politics, and J. D. Stewart made them an election promise in 1931. For months, the Stewart Government fiddled with eligibility requirements and pension amounts until the numbers worked out right. On 1 June 1933, when Prince Edward Island became the first Maritime province to adopt old age pensions, only one in five people over seventy qualified for pensions that were only 75% of those paid in Ontario and Western Canada ($15 a month as opposed to $20). The actual financial burden on the province was even lighter than it appeared; the means test served to transfer the indigent elderly from relief to pension rolls, where the federal share of payments was considerably higher. In the decades to come, such manoeuvres would become standard practice with Island governments.

Ordinary Islanders were learning how to play the game, too. “No relief no vote,” one correspondent wrote the premier in 1939. In refusing to provide seed for planting directly to farmers after the disastrous harvest of 1937, Premier Thane Campbell explained to a Tignish supporter, “I am

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47 As Premier Saunders explained it, “We have in our Province, 60 persons out of every 1000 over the age of seventy years, or about 6000 persons over seventy years of age. I am sure that 30% of them would take advantage of the act, or in other words, it would take about $150,000 annually to finance the scheme. That would mean about 18% of the total revenue of the Province.” Albert Saunders to National Order of Canada, Old Age Pensions Committee, 7 January 1930, Lea Papers, PARO RG 25.28, File O.


49 Benjamin MacArthur to Thane Campbell, 9 May 1939, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32.
confident that for every one hundred people whom we should supply with seed oats this year, two hundred would see to it that they would be short of seed next year. We have already heard of a number of people who have sold their own oats in the expectation that government oats would be provided.” Campbell missed the irony in his additional justification, that Ottawa had already refused the province’s request for it to fund such a program. Citizens turned to the Province; the Province turned to Ottawa. Islanders had learned the language of dependence. Better-off Canadians would label it a regional dialect, but it really had nothing to do with genetics or geography. It was founded on need, and it flowed in the direction of power. The channel of communication was by now well established. In future, only the volume and the frequency would change.

All across the country, voters placed their leaders in an impossible situation in the early 1930s. They demanded that governments do something about the Depression, but would not allow them to mortgage the future with huge deficits or hamstring the present with tax increases. No Canadian government could have beaten the Depression anyway, but the electorate’s expectations made it impossible even to make the fight convincing. Branded with failure, they fell one by one. In 1935, it was Prince Edward Island’s turn.

Compared to other governments, Prince Edward Island had been debilitatingly cautious in how it combatted the Depression. Unlike other provinces, it did not borrow from Ottawa to finance its share of relief programs, and it made a fetish out of trying to balance ordinary receipts and expenditures. While other governments spent themselves broke, Prince Edward Island borrowed reluctantly, having no sense of a golden future to use as collateral. In 1936, after six years of Depression, the carrying charges on its public debt remained under 30% of its provincial

50 Thane Campbell to Joseph A. Bernard, 25 March 1939, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32. The provincial government preferred, Campbell said, to “provide every possible facility for the supplying of seed from the merchants.”
expenditures. The figure would have been even lower had the Conservatives not been forced to finance the replacement of two major public edifices, Falconwood Insane Asylum and Prince of Wales College, which burned to the ground within two months of each other during the winter of 1931–32.

Such comparisons were of little help during the 1935 election campaign. Rather than condemn government spending per se, the Liberals blamed the escalating debt on Conservative extravagance and mistaken priorities. In an outburst of adjectives, the Patriot charged that the MacMillan Government was “Blundering, Borrowing, and Spendthrift.” Campaigning from his sickbed, Liberal leader Walter Lea pledged a fresh round of government retrenchment. Under the circumstances, Liberal promises were hardly necessary.

The Conservatives assisted in their own destruction. The wily J. D. Stewart had died in October 1933 after a long illness. W. J. P. MacMillan, the de facto leader during Stewart’s decline, became the new premier. Although he was formidably able, MacMillan’s self-importance and partisan boasting rang hollow amid so much obvious hardship, and he too often confused scoring debating points with winning votes. Probably nothing could have prevented the Conservatives’ downfall in 1935, but the Premier’s brash style helped to elevate probable defeat into disaster. When the results were counted on 23 July 1935, the Liberals had taken every seat in the Legislature and won a whopping 59% of the popular vote. “Tories Wiped Completely Off the Map in P.E.I.” the Patriot headline gloated. “Island Votes for Liberal Dictatorship,” declared The Guardian. The clean sweep, said to be a first in the history of the British Commonwealth, astonished everybody, particularly W. J. P. MacMillan, who was defeated by his own son-in-law. But the true measure of the Grit victory would prove to be its finality. A whole generation of voters on Prince Edward Island would now grow up entirely under Liberal rule.

51Headline in the Island Patriot, 17 July 1935.

52The fact that he was a prominent Roman Catholic would not have helped MacMillan in some sectors either.

Walter Lea had been too sick to do much more than preside over the Liberal victory. In his absence, Summerside lawyer Thane Campbell handled the election campaign, and his landslide victory put him in line for the premiership when Lea died the following January. “We are,” the new Premier reflected to a disaffected Liberal, “in a certain sense, a ‘national government.’”\(^{54}\) It is doubtful Island Tories would have agreed. In lieu of an Opposition, backbenchers took on the task of criticizing their own government. For the next four years, legislative sessions were brief.

Boxed Essay: **The Birth of Bureaucracy**

The political gyrations of the 1920s had been particularly hard on the civil service, which, since it was hired largely on the basis of patronage, tended to turn over with every change of government. In 1937, Thane Campbell’s ministry introduced the Public Service Act to provide security of tenure for a specified list of senior civil servants.\(^{55}\) As Campbell disingenuously explained to a colleague in New Brunswick, “We also made the Act very simply, to suit the local circumstances and left all minor positions open to change after the next election, in order to render the Act less liable to repeal by an incoming government.”\(^{56}\) Since the Liberals had already completed their post-election ritual of hirings and firings before devising the legislation, it was easy for the party’s historian to brag, “No public servant lost his job for partisan reasons until the Conservatives were elected in 1959.”\(^{57}\)

To enact even this half-measure, Campbell had to override a certain amount of opposition within his party among those who felt that “any plum that fell from the Liberal plum tree should be picked up by true and

\(^{54}\)Campbell to Douglas Bell, 11 March 1936, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32, Box 2, File B.

\(^{55}\)Public Service Act, 1 Geo. VI, cap. 28.

\(^{56}\)Thane Campbell to Francis Bridges, Campbellton, N.B., 9 February 1939, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32, Box 2, File B.

And, to be fair, the Act was intended, as Campbell claimed, to serve “the dual purpose of insuring the engagement of efficient employees, and of protecting efficient public servants against dismissal for purely party reasons.” One of the Conservatives whose job the act preserved was Walter Shaw, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture. Two decades later, he would become premier.

The premium that Campbell placed on competence hinted that the business of governance on Prince Edward Island was growing more complicated. Some jobs, at least, required more qualifications than merely having voted the right way. The Public Service Act was a small but significant step toward the professionalization of the provincial civil service.

It is tempting to think that the Depression paralyzed Prince Edward Island. In fact, the province was only enfeebled. Some people and causes even made headway against the powerful undertow of economic hardship. Swathed in fox furs, Summerside coped better than most places with the chill of hard times. In 1934, it constructed an airport without even needing to rely on relief funds. In Charlottetown, local Protestants scraped together enough donations to build a new Prince Edward Island Hospital in 1933. Statistics buttress anecdote. Between 1932 and 1936, the amount of income assessed for federal income tax purposes actually doubled on Prince Edward Island, the only province to show an increase other than Quebec. And while the number of cars in the province barely changed during the 1930s, Islanders in 1941 had somehow acquired three-and-a-half times as many radios as they owned in 1935, a rate of increase far in advance of any other province (though still the lowest ratio per capita in the nation).

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58 C. R. Clay, President of Kings County Liberal Association, to Thane Campbell, 24 January 1938, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32, Box 2, File B.

59 Campbell to Bridges, 9 February 1939, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32, Box 2, File B.

60 Rankin, *Down at the Shore*, p. 152.
At St. Dunstan’s College, the Board of Governors grew tired of waiting for better times, and in 1939 decided to go ahead with the Science Building that the failed endowment fund had been intended to pay for. The Science Building was essential to St. Dunstan’s pretensions to university status. By the time workers broke ground on the project, the College was deeply involved in a program that pulled it in a totally different direction. Its rector and one of its faculty had gotten caught up in one of the great causes of the Depression years. Although it was known as “the Antigonish Movement,” it found part of its inspiration on Prince Edward Island in the troubled fishing industry.

_Cooperation is the only means in our day through which the masses of the people can again have a say in the economic processes._

Rev. M. M. Coady, _Masters of Our Own Destiny_ 61

In January 1913, W. F. Tidmarsh of Portland Packing Company, an American-based chain of lobster canneries, penned a confidential letter to J. H. Myrick & Co., the biggest fishing concern in western Prince Edward Island: “In view of the excessive price that the fishermen expect to receive for their lobsters next year, would it not be a good idea for us to get together and made an arrangement not to exceed $5 [per hundredweight]? Personally I cannot see how any canner can handle lobsters over that price.” 62

Though fishermen always believed as much, that brief letter is a rare piece of evidence for price-fixing in the Island fishery. The practice was compounded by the truck system that prevailed in most fishing communities. The merchant who bought the fish and set the price generally supplied the necessaries of life to the fishermen. As the historians of the Island’s co-operative movement note, selling wholesale and buying retail enmeshed many Island fishermen in a hopeless tangle of debt: “The transactions all took place on the books. No cash changed hands. The fishermen bought everything on credit, delivered their product, of necessity, to the creditor, and learned the price per

61 Quoted in Dan MacInnes, “Coady and the Movement,” _Horizon Canada_ 7/78: p. 1866.

pound for their product only after it had all been landed and the season was over. Most of the fishermen were illiterate and innumerate, while the creditors kept all the books."\(^{63}\)

In an effort to break out of the cycle of powerless dependence, about thirty Acadian and Irish fishermen from the Tignish area approached a local lawyer, Chester P. McCarthy, to help them form a union. The Tignish Fishermen’s Union was created in 1924 under provincial legislation, with provision for Island-wide expansion. More a mutual than a trade union, it pooled resources to buy supplies and market fish. The following year, the Union set up its own packing plant, Tignish Fisheries Ltd., and, under McCarthy’s efficient direction, its “Star of the Sea” brand consistently made money for Union members.

*There is no standing still, and if the people do not take the means to advance themselves, they will surely slip backwards.*

Rev. M. M. Coady, *Masters of Our Own Destiny*\(^{64}\)

Over in Antigonish County, Nova Scotia, where the plight of local fishermen had grown increasingly desperate during the 1920s, Father Moses Coady of St. Francis Xavier University was inspired by the Island union’s example. In conjunction with Father J. J. Tompkins, Coady was developing a potent new version of traditional co-operative theory that would soon be dubbed the Antigonish Movement. As defined by economist Harry C. Johnson, it was “a practical movement of social reform based on the principle of self-education by the people themselves organized in community groups.”\(^{65}\) Problem-oriented and dedicated to group action, the movement had a severely practical bent, infused with Christian moralism. Behind its grandiose rhetoric about a revolution in attitudes, it sought to work

\(^{63}\)Marian Bruce and Emily Elizabeth Cran, “The Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island” (unpublished typescript), p. 63.


\(^{65}\)Quoted by Frank Mifflen, in “Education and Development in Atlantic Canada,” proceedings from a conference held at Dalhousie University, Halifax, 28-30 April 1976, ed. by Eric Ricker, p. 164.
within the cultural and economic frameworks that it inherited, rather than to overturn them. The movement’s great innovation was to tie co-operativism to education. In the process, it practically redefined the term “adult education” in terms of study groups, co-operatives, and credit unions.

Working closely with his lieutenant, the indispensable A. B. MacDonald, Coady pursued the new approach through the Extension Department that St. F.X. established in 1929. His passionate ideas soon caught fire in the dry tinder of the Great Depression.

_For us, what the people most need to learn must be what they most want to learn._

J. J. Tompkins, _Knowledge for the People_ 56

In January 1933, after some earnest courting by education officials and Premier W. J. P. MacMillan, a giant American philanthropic foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, made two important announcements. Despite — or perhaps because of — widespread public apathy, the foundation provided $110,000 to stage a modern branch library demonstration on Prince Edward Island. In an effort to upgrade post-secondary education in the province, it donated a further $75,000 to endow a Carnegie Chair of Economics and Sociology, which would be shared between Prince of Wales and St. Dunstan’s Colleges. The three-year library demonstration gave Prince Edward Island “the best rural library coverage in Canada.” The creation of the Carnegie Chair brought to the Island a New Englander fresh from graduate school named J. T. Croteau. These proved to be the elements that allowed the Antigonish Movement to come together on Prince Edward Island, like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle.

_Ideas have hands and feet. They will work for you. Have faith. Work together. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks. But lobstermen are not dogs. They are men. And men can read and think and learn new ways as long as they live._ 57

Rev. J. J. Tompkins, _Knowledge for the People_
The Antigonish Movement arrived on Prince Edward Island just as the older generation of co-operatives was faltering. Although they differed in the degree of their commitment to co-operative practices, they had shared one overriding principle: self-interest. Producers or consumers banded together in order to get the best price. The Potato Growers’ Association might preach that “co-operative progress depends on personal loyalty,” but members’ faith was only as strong as the bottom line. During the Depression, the bottom line took a relentless pounding, and as one bad year turned over into the next, the established co-operatives, which rallied in the early days of crisis, began to collapse under the pressure of their members’ need for cash and credit. Even the Prince Edward Island Egg and Poultry Association, held up across North America as a model producer co-op, gradually disintegrated. It wound up its affairs in 1940, financially solvent but essentially discredited. The Potato Growers’ Association hung on grimly, but heavy frost damage during shipment of its 1934 crop, combined with inadequate cash reserves, created a $60,000 debt for which its members were liable. Only a $100,000 loan guarantee from the provincial government (and some official lobbying with the bank) saved it from bankruptcy. Its prospects blighted, the Association shed members steadily. Although it would last for two more decades, it never regained its prominence.

It was the futility of the existing organizations that cleared the way, in effect, for the new wave of co-operatives. The Antigonish Movement followed the established principles of co-operation: unrestricted membership; one member, one vote (regardless of how many shares held); cash trading; goods bought and sold at current market prices; profits distributed in proportion to the amount of patronage given; religious, political, and religious neutrality. What it added was a philosophical

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68 As noted by the Potato Growers’ Association in 1933. The Association was not alone among the old co-operative societies in failing to set aside a sufficient reserve to help them ride out rough spots in the economy. The Egg and Poultry Association relied on notes provided by members as its collateral to get cash advances from the banks. When members, right worried about their liability, refused to renew their notes during the Depression years, the Association had no working capital.

69 The Association’s fate is recounted in Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” pp. 251-55. He also chronicles the rise and fall of the egg circles, pp. 233-34.
underpinning. Couching his arguments in quasi-religious terms, Coady exalted co-operation far beyond the role of economic strategy. Rather, it should be a way of life, the means by which the poor could become, in his famous phrase, “masters of their own destiny.”

*If cooperation needs religion, religion also needs cooperation. It is the expression of religion in the economic order.*

Rev. M. M. Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny*70

The Catholic Church has been credited with pioneering adult education on Prince Edward Island, but the initial impetus seems to have come from Rev. J. W. A. Nicholson, a broad-minded United Church minister from North Bedeque, who invited Coady’s Protestant associate, A. B. MacDonald, to the Island to lecture on the movement in October 1934.71 Nevertheless, it was Roman Catholic St. Dunstan’s College that dispatched J. T. Croteau (as the resident expert on economics) to St. Francis Xavier in 1935 to investigate the exciting new developments there. And it was the Diocese of Charlottetown that provided cautious encouragement for his subsequent attempt to introduce the Antigonish Movement into Prince Edward Island.

Over the next ten years, Croteau became the acknowledged fulcrum of the Island co-operative movement, both in the field and at the administrative level.72 Within St. Dunstan’s College, his indispensable ally was its well-connected rector, Father James A. Murphy. On the road, it was H. Bramwell Chandler, the new regional librarian, who threw his library car, his branch library system, and his own considerable talents into the developing crusade. “We wanted to change the world,”


72In his classic memoir of the movement on Prince Edward Island, *Cradled in the Waves*, Croteau spreads the credit around, but the very memoir format places him at the centre of things in his narration.
Chandler would remember. 73

Although the co-operative movement would effectively exploit both radio and newspaper to promote its efforts, it made most of its gains on the ground. Croteau and Chandler travelled the Island at night like missionaries — which, in a sense, they were — spreading the co-operative gospel to audiences that were ripe for conversion. Their techniques followed closely the Antigonish model. The pitch came at a public meeting in the chosen community, where a speaker would explain how ordinary people had lost control over their economic lives and how that could change. Afterward, small study clubs of ten to fifteen people, the essential building blocks of the movement, were set up. These got together at weekly “kitchen meetings” in members’ homes to discuss specific topics, using the branch library service to obtain reading material. Unlike adult education programs elsewhere in North America, the Antigonish Movement was from the beginning oriented toward economic issues. The favourite topics were credit unions and co-operatives. Every month, the neighbourhood study clubs held a joint meeting in the parish or community hall to exchange ideas and problems. While it emphasized a grassroots approach, the organizational structure was calculated to engender a feeling of belonging to a vast movement.

That Chandler was also a Protestant was a useful coincidence in an Island landscape fractured along religious fault lines. Even though it worked hard to keep religion and co-operation separate, and would go to some lengths to hire a Protestant fieldman, the Antigonish Movement had an unmistakably Catholic tinge on Prince Edward Island. Catholic priests outnumbered Protestant — mostly United Church — ministers by three to one in terms of local participation, and the movement’s most visible leaders, J. T. Croteau and Father James A. Murphy, were both Catholics. 74 The membership was overwhelmingly Catholic as well; only five of the thirty-eight credit unions established by 1938 were distinctly not Catholic in composition.

It was partly for appearance’s sake, then, that the several groups dabbling in study clubs and

73 Bruce and Cran, “Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island,” p. 82.

74 Protestants’ role in the movement receive the most attention in Bruce and Cran, “Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island,” pp. 77-78, 85-86.
co-operative principles, including the Diocese of Charlottetown, Farmers’ Institutes, the United Church presbytery, and the Women’s Institute, came together as the Adult Education League in 1936. Having demonstrated their movement’s religious neutrality, the League’s founders chose Father Murphy as chair and Croteau as secretary.

By the end of 1937, Croteau and Chandler had jump-started 338 study groups with 4,300 members. Already some of them had moved from talk to action. The same hunger for credit that had driven members out of the older co-operatives made credit unions the most popular new undertaking. The leading Catholic in Thane Campbell’s cabinet, Mark R. McGuigan, piloted the Credit Union Societies Act through the Island legislature in 1936. A year later, twenty-five credit unions had been chartered. In 1938, the Prince Edward Island Credit Union League was formed to promote and co-ordinate further growth. The same year, the Co-operative Associations Act supplied a blueprint for how to set up a proper co-operative.

By 1940, forty-six credit unions and six co-operative associations had been chartered, claiming a combined membership of 6,013 members. That number represented 6.4% of the Island’s population. It was apparent that something big was happening.

In 1938, the federal Department of Fisheries instituted an annual grant to St. Francis Xavier to carry on extension work among Maritime fishermen. When St. F.X. agreed to delegate a portion of that money to St. Dunstan’s, the Island college established an Extension Department of its own, with Murphy as head. Its priorities dictated by the nature of the funding, St. Dunstan’s concentrated its efforts on organizing Island fishermen.

Taking the Maritimes as a whole, the Co-operative Movement had its greatest successes in

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76It took one false start and another six years before an equivalent association for co-operatives, the Co-operative Union of Prince Edward Island, took root. The credit union figures are provided by Bruce and Cran, “Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island,” p. 85.

the fishing industry. But the occupational group whose plight had inspired the whole movement took least advantage of it on Prince Edward Island. The double irony is that Chester McCarthy, the folk hero of the Tignish fishery, was partly to blame. In 1930, he became the reluctant first president of the Maritime Fishermen’s Union, but he was philosophically opposed to any sort of central marketing role for it. He was temperamentally unsuited to regional co-operation as well: jealous of his influence, quick to take offence, and fettered to local loyalties. Within eighteen months, he had resigned as president and led the Prince Edward Island unions out of the Maritime organization.

Under his leadership, the Island unions formed their own central, the Prince Edward Island Fishermen’s Union, in 1934. It did not market fish — in fact, it did not really do anything except organize a few new union locals. By 1941, twenty-seven fishermen’s unions had been established in the province, but only twelve were still active, and only nine of them operated in accordance with the 1924 legislation. Over McCarthy’s fierce opposition, the unions began to recast themselves as co-operatives and in 1944 formed a central marketing agency. By then, however, much of their strength had dissipated.

In the end, misery, not McCarthy, made the most persuasive argument for adopting new approaches. For that reason, the Fishermen’s Loan Act of 1936, a provincial program spending federal dollars, probably did as much harm as anything to the co-operative movement in fishing communities. Over the next three years, $215,000 worth of relief, thinly disguised as loans, was disbursed to any applicant who even vaguely resembled a fisherman. Government assistance was clearly at odds with the co-operative doctrine of self-help: the entrepreneurial fisherman was apt to regard both approaches as potential income supplements rather than competing ways of life.

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79 The reasons are best summarized in Bruce and Cran, “Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island,” pp. 94-95.

80 Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” pp. 331-22,334-36..

81 Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” pp. 39-42, outlines the vagueness, abuses, and delinquency that characterized the program. Correspondence in the Premier Thane Campbell Papers (PARO RG 25.32) confirms how loosely the money was thrown around.
The greatest work which any movement can do is to build men.
J. T. Croteau, Cradled in the Waves

J. T. Croteau left the Island in 1946. By then, the movement that he had helped introduce to Prince Edward Island was settling into a set of viable institutions. As the co-operative tide receded from the province, it also left behind a number of barachois, rich pools of co-operativism. It was in places such as Tignish, the Evangeline region, and Morell, that the vision of life lived entirely on co-operative principles came closest to reality. There, some indefinable blend of factors — initial success, able leadership, a tradition of working together, strongly defined communities — infused the local culture with co-operative principles. These were the exceptions, of course. In the end, the Antigonish Movement did not revolutionize participants’ lives, though it occasionally revolutionized their thinking. And, for those who took its message deeply to heart, it restored something that years of Depression had stripped away: hope. That was a commodity that could not be measured by statistics.

The co-operative movement succeeded in part because of the Depression. Two key Island industries coped despite it. As it turned out, each was moving in a different direction.

W. K. Rogers, “the pace-setter of the fox-producing world,” did everything with style, even bankruptcy. According to his granddaughter’s account, he waited until it was almost feeding time for the foxes:

Then taking the huge bunch of keys to the pens, he marched into the bank manager’s office and said:
‘There are five hundred hungry foxes out there. Five o’clock is feeding time — you feed them!’

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*Croteau, Cradled in the Waves, p. 6.*
And with that he dropped the huge bunch of keys with a clatter onto the desk and strolled out leaving an astounded bank manager to stare first at the keys and then at the stiff back and erect head leaving his office.\textsuperscript{83}

According to family tradition, North America’s largest individual fox rancher had been ruined when “the bottom fell out of the fox industry.” Certainly, prices stumbled during the financial chaos that ushered in the Depression. By 1932, fox farming on Prince Edward Island was worth only a quarter of its 1929 peak. Some, like Rogers, were swept away in the crash.\textsuperscript{84} But when the rubbish heap of worthless stock shares had all been swept away, those who still had money still wanted fox furs, and the market gradually stabilized.

For the rest of the decade, fox ranching provided a cushion between many Islanders and hard times. Unfortunately, the industry’s very staying power contributed to its undoing. After falling to 607 in 1932, the number of fox ranchers had doubled to 1,215 by 1937, an all-time high. One in every ten Island farmers now kept foxes. As income shrivelled from other sources, more and more people were turning to the one cash crop where there was still some money. The once lucrative trade in live foxes had crumbled with the Depression, and North American ranchers now pushed more and more pelts into the marketplace in an attempt to generate income. In 1939, Prince Edward Island ranchers marketed 76,039 pelts, \textit{eleven} times the number sold in 1929.\textsuperscript{85}

Quality inevitably suffered. So did prices. By the late 1930s, the market was glutted with fox fur. More ominously, the avalanche of pelts helped strip silver fox of its exclusivity. Taste had already moved on from the heavy dark furs of Charles Dalton’s day to ever lighter colours. Soon the shoulders of high fashion would shrug off fox in favour of more exotic furs. Inexorably, the price of pelts slid down toward the cost of production. By the time the Second World War disrupted European markets once more, the fox industry on Prince Edward Island had entered a terminal decline.

\textsuperscript{83}Large and Crothers, \textit{Out of Thin Air}, p. 84. The “pace-setter” referenced is from Stilgenbauer, “Geographic Aspects of the Prince Edward Island Fur Industry,” p. 114.

\textsuperscript{84}Other evidence suggests that Rogers was pulled down as much by his other business interests as by fox farming.

\textsuperscript{85}The statistics are provided in Clark, \textit{Three Centuries and the Island}, p. 150.
As the lustre faded from silver foxes, tourism shone like a beacon. Between 1929 and 1933, Canadian tourism revenues dropped 60%, but on Prince Edward Island there seems to have been little, if any, decline. According to the crude estimates of the Prince Edward Island Tourist Association, tourism traffic actually rose 25% between 1929 and 1931, before slumping badly in 1932. After 1933, the statistics showed healthy increases each year, culminating in 15–20% jumps during the last three years of the decade. An alliance of tourism promoters and local politicians convinced federal officials to make drastic reductions in fares at Port Borden, and, by the end of the 1930s, there was such an increase in motor traffic to the Island that private investors were seeking federal assistance to establish a second ferry crossing between Wood Islands in southeastern Prince Edward Island and Caribou, Nova Scotia.

The increased mobility of tourists was reflected in new trends in visitor accommodations. All through the 1930s, resort hotels complained that their trade was declining. At the same time, Islanders renting small cottages to travellers did a booming business. The days of well-heeled vacationers arriving by train and steamer for lengthy stays at seaside inns were clearly passing. A housekeeping cottage was a better fit for motoring tourists in modest circumstances.

The tourism industry’s resilience amid economic calamity made it stand out, and it quickly attracted official attention. It was as if the provincial government, like many travellers, was seeing the Island for the first time. Or perhaps it just saw dollar signs in the midst of a depression. In the 1920s, government contributed $1,000 per year to tourism publicity. During the dark days of the early 1930s, it doubled the grant, and, by 1938, the government spending on tourism promotion reached $10,000.87

The government’s investment in tourism went far beyond what it spent on advertising. The mental connection between roads and tourism strengthened during the 1930s, and one of the provincial government’s stated reasons for its heavy emphasis on highway construction and hard-

86 MacEachern, “No Island Is An Island,” puts the decline -- albeit tentatively -- at only 2%.

surfacing in its relief projects was tourism promotion. The collateral for the Province’s share of road-building expenditures was a whopping 10¢-per-gallon tax on gasoline, the highest in the country. Government thoughtfully provided exemptions for gas-powered farm and fishing machinery, so that the tax fell heaviest on those who were expected to use the new roads most: tourists, who might complain but had no vote, and well-to-do Islanders, who could afford to pay.

One idea behind the improved roads was to make the entire province accessible to visiting motorists. But metaphorically, at least, all paths now led toward the Island’s North Shore. It was there in the mid-1930s that the modern tourism industry was being born.

There were seventeen National Parks in Canada by 1930, not one of them east of Ontario. The Dominion Parks Branch had always envisioned national parks in terms of mountainous grandeur. Depression-wrecked provinces saw them as tourist attractions. The Campbell Government set out in pursuit of a national park in March 1936, just as the federal government decided to give them one. While the Parks Branch went about modifying its conception of park-worthiness to accommodate the picturesque as well as the sublime, Campbell innocently suggested that the federal government might want to pave the roads leading to the new park.

At this point no site had even been selected, and there was fierce competition among Island communities for the honour. With the Premier as their guide, Parks officials visited twenty-two sites before settling on the Province’s original nominee, Dalvay-by-the-Sea. From there, the envisaged park would now stretch westward along a narrow strip of coastline for twenty-five miles all the way to New London Bay. Two axes of development were envisaged: “mass” and “class.” The genteel pretensions of Dalvay House would cater to wealthy visitors; Cavendish, now celebrated as the home of “Anne of Green Gables,” would provide for middle-class families. The slash of shoreline would

88 The connection between tourism and highways was explicitly made during the 1938 session of the legislature. (See Canadian Annual Review, 1937 and 1938, p. 292.) Between 1936 and 1939, a half million dollars was spent on road construction under the Unemployment Relief and Assistance Act. The federal government contributed just over half of that total.

89 The account here is largely based on Alan MacEachern’s “No Island Is An Island,” pp. 123-77; and his “The Greening of Green Gables: Establishing the Prince Edward Island National Park,” The Island Magazine, 45(Spring/Summer 1999).
be Canada’s smallest — and tamest — national park.

As word spread about the deal Campbell had struck with the federal government, many Islanders remained confused about what sort of “park” was being created and what it might contain. A local Tory carried the news of the proposed park to an acquaintance. The resulting exchange was built around the thirty-member Liberal caucus and Islanders’ characteristically slurred pronunciation of the Premier’s surname.

“A park, eh?” the friend marveled. “What are they going to have there?”

The Tory bristled.

“Thirty jackasses and a Camel!”

The Province made a messy job of expropriating the necessary property for the park. It was slow to follow up on its enabling legislation — many residents had no idea they were living within the intended boundaries of the park — and when it did act, the Campbell Government unilaterally and somewhat arbitrarily decided the final price to be paid to property owners. There was no right of appeal. “As I write this letter,” wrote “One of the Dispossessed” to The Guardian in 1937, “I can see from my kitchen window a bountiful field of waving grain on my farm, a field which next year and all succeeding years will be barren because of the determination of the Campbell Government to establish what is now becoming known throughout the Province as ‘Expropriation Park.’”

It was 1939 before the expropriation was more or less complete. Already by then, bulldozers were scraping out a golf course in the farmlands around Green Gables, and a federally subsidized “Tourist Roads Program” had laid down blacktop on the highway leading from Hunter River to Rustico. On 19 July 1939, the Prince Edward Island National Park officially opened. That summer, over 35,000 people visited. Somewhat to the embarrassment of Parks officials, this most atypical of Canada’s national parks was soon one of the most popular in the entire system. It appeared that the

90 The joke was related to the author at Seniors’ Expo, Mill River, 1 June 1999.

91 In 1938, the federal government contributed $40,000 to the road-paving project. That year National Park spending brought $145,000 to the province.
Island tourism industry had finally found its focus.

In the spring of 1937, full of fiscal anxiety and wishful thinking, the Campbell Government announced that it was ending direct relief. It was expensive for the giver, demoralizing for the recipient, and, the authorities hoped, unnecessary for both. A few months later, in the wake of a miserable harvest and more low prices for farmers and fishermen, the Premier was warning Ottawa of another winter of discontent. At the same time, the federal Department of Labour was demanding that Prince Edward Island refund nearly a third of recent federal contributions to relief because the Province had failed to investigate relief applicants according to Ottawa’s high standards.

Campbell’s administration was outraged by what it saw as the federal bureaucracy’s nitpicking officiousness (and its implied accusation of corruption). It also badly needed the money. The Depression had not gone away after all. After painfully regaining its feet, the Canadian economy staggered and fell again in 1938, and the modest gains of the previous two years were wiped out. By June, sales at the Holman’s Department Store chain were already down $10,000 over the previous year. In that previous year, the owners had written off another $35,000 in bad debts, making a total of $120,000 since the Depression had supposedly “turned the corner” in 1932.

The government’s current account deficit for 1937 was $120,173. Meanwhile, debt funding, mostly for highway construction, continued to bedevil provincial finances. While the Province had been more cautious in its borrowing than other parts of Canada, it had more than doubled the

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Footnotes:

92 As one correspondent complained to Campbell, “As the railroad has carried carloads of potatoes and other feeds from the Island to distressed areas in the Western part of Canada, the farmers think they should carry a carload or two of hay to Tignish freight rates free or at least reduced.” (Everett Broderick, Tignish, to Thane Campbell, 17 January 1938, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32, Box 2, File B.

93 Thane Campbell to Hon. Norman Rogers, Minister of Labour, 17 November 1937; and Provincial Auditor to Thane Campbell, 12 November 1937, PARO RG 21, Box 41, File 57.
provincial debt since 1929 in bandaging the wounds of the Great Depression. Like it or not, government had taken on its citizens as dependents.

In April 1938, one of them wrote the Premier from the fishing community of Ebbsfleet up in West Prince. “I am writing you once more for a loan. I tell you I am right up against it. We haven’t got any thing to eat at all in the house. I don’t know what I am going to do. My little children are crying for some thing to eat and I don’t know what to do for them. I can’t get one cent of credit. No work to earn any. So you should know what it is to see little children hungary. . . . I am that poor that I had to get this letter mailed on credit by the mail man.” There were other, similar letters. The writers did not sound like people no longer in need of relief.

The decade seemed to be winding down much as it had begun, with the government strapped for cash and people appealing desperately for help. In reality, a decade of depression had changed a great deal about Prince Edward Island. Although relief — income support from the State — was meant as a short-term, ad hoc measure, it had set critical precedents for increased government involvement in the economy. In future, private charity would increasingly give way to public assistance, and private enterprise would rely on public investment. On Prince Edward Island, where religious rivalries made it necessary to make carbon copies of every private charity, and where private enterprise was both weak and unenterprising, the sea change was even more profound than elsewhere in Canada. Because no one else could, government increasingly substituted for its citizens in managing the province’s economy and society.

The larger role came at a price. During the 1938 session of the Legislature, Agriculture Minister W. H. Dennis, subbing for the non-existent Opposition, warned that the provincial government was nearing the end of its borrowing power and that “the millstone of debt could not continue.” The Province’s financial incapacity meant that it must either give up powers to, or get
more money from, the federal government. In 1937, the Campbell Cabinet offered to surrender to Ottawa its responsibilities in the area of unemployment insurance, and it was prepared to give up far more.

That was the message that the provincial government gave the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations when it descended on Charlottetown for three days of public hearings in February 1938. While a snowstorm blustered outside, Premier Campbell and his associates listed the disabilities under which they laboured, and rehearsed once more the old arguments about how Confederation’s workings had cost the provincial economy. The various speakers could now compound the historical lack of resources with the cost of government’s new responsibilities. They volunteered to transfer some of them, such as public welfare services, to the federal sphere, and to share others. The Island’s new Income Tax Act, soon to be signed into law, would actually authorize the Department of National Revenue to collect the Province’s income tax for it.

The Commission’s findings, tagged the “Rowell-Sirois Report” after its two chairmen, provides more evidence for those who feel our history would be more exciting if only it turned on the point of a sword instead of a pen. Released in 1940, the Report shed no blood, and it was revolutionary only in its contents. In its recommendations for an overhaul of the BNA Act, it outlined the principles of modern federalism. In effect, the foundations of the social welfare state had been laid on the exposed bedrock of the Great Depression. But that conclusion was for the historians. In the late 1930s, the questioning attitude of the commissioners put bread in no one’s mouth, and their sojourn in Charlottetown caused only a ripple of interest.

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96 Government of Prince Edward Island, *The Case of Prince Edward Island: A Submission to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Charlottetown: [1938]), especially p. 41. See, too, the coverage in the Charlottetown *Guardian*, which misses this key aspect of the briefs. In the aftermath of his submission to the Rowell-Sirois Commission, Campbell advocated that the federal government take on a proposed program of mothers’ allowances. See Campbell to Rev. George A. Christie, 19 February 1938, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32, Box 2, File B.

97 Such an arrangement only went into effect in 1941. Without surrendering its income-taxing powers, the Province shifted the cost of collection to Ottawa.
June 1939 brought a far more dazzling set of visitors. For the first time in the Island’s history, a reigning British monarch paid an official visit to the province. It was an epochal event, and massive preparations were made for it. Five special trains converged on Charlottetown from the four corners of the Island on the morning of 14 June. Thirty-five thousand people, three times the city’s normal population, lined the motorcade route in a drenching rain, hoping for a glimpse of the Royal party. On Great George Street, ranks of children waved tiny Union Jacks as George VI and his Queen, Elizabeth, passed on their way from the waterfront to Province House. Ornate welcome arches and ceremonial guards marked their passage from there to Government House for another official reception. In a few wet hours it was all over, and Canada’s King and Queen had sailed off for other rendezvous with other loyal subjects.98

Not willing to waste such a huge crowd, local fight promoters had shrewdly scheduled a boxing card, one of the staple entertainments of the Depression years, for the night of the Royal Visit. The main event was a rematch between Big George Leslie of Souris and George Graham of Murray Harbour for the heavyweight championship of Prince Edward Island. Unlike George VI, Graham failed to retain his crown.

In an era when royalty could still command more gaping than gossip, the Royal Visit lent a fleeting glitter to the end of a long, grey decade. As it turned out, 1939 was the last summer of the Great Depression. It was also the last summer of peace.

98A rapturous account of the four-hour visit was provided by the Charlottetown Guardian in its 15 June 1939 edition. It covered the boxing match as well.
Chapter Six
War Pictures

A blasted church somewhere in France; a frenzied greeting
In some vague town; two miles of Gerry convoy burned,
Some un-flag-wrapped, un-prettv dead; an evening eating
Eytie food; aircraft recognition learned
The hard way; an eighty-eight; an Indian truck upturned
And mud — in miles of clinging dough about the knees
(“It was in that year his army crossed the Pyrenees.”)

A sinking ship, a NAAFI dance on pay-day night;
A game of poker — God knows where; the colonel’s dog:
They come intruding, casual, joy-or-sorrow — bright,
Nostalgic bits of past, dim voices in the fog . . .

From A. P. Campbell, “The Student-Veteran”

Even during the Depression, someone could usually find money to go to the movies. Eleven cents would get a kid into the Capitol Theatre at the corner of Great George and Grafton Streets in Charlottetown. It cost another nickel to see a film at the toney Prince Edward further down the street. Deep in the countryside, of course, to see a moving picture show was a rare and golden event. Out there, local dances, community concerts, and amateur theatre still ruled the social universe. But in the towns, cinema had wormed its way into people’s expectations.

No one pretended what they saw on the big screen was real — except maybe the kids who whooped it up every Saturday at the B-movie matinees. It was entertainment, an escape from the drab realities of Depression life into a world that was far more exciting and romantic. It was not real, but it resembled reality. During the first week of September in 1939, while the kids over at the Capitol were helping Gene Autry shoot it out with “the toughest gang of thugs that ever rode the plains,” the Prince Edward was drawing big crowds to Confessions of a Nazi Spy, “the Sensational Picture Which Can Only Be Shown in Democracies!” Even as anxious audiences shook their heads at the perfidy of the celluloid Nazis, their democracy was preparing to make war on the actual ones.

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1 The Red and White, 39(May 1948)3.
2 My thanks to Michael Hennessey and Charles Lund, both of Charlottetown, for a memory tour of 1930s movie-going.
Hollywood had been afforded ample time to make villains of the Nazis. A new war had been brewing in Europe since the mid-1930s, and Canadians had watched the storm clouds gather with grave misgivings. An underlying motive for the Royal Tour of 1939 was, in fact, to rally Canadians to the Crown in the expectation of a confrontation with Nazi Germany. All that summer, newspaper headlines had chronicled the rising tensions. “War situation looks very bad,” businessman H. T. Holman told his diary on 26 August 1939. Brought close to events by radio and movie news reels, Holman wrote as if he had been dealing personally with the Nazi leader. “Can do nothing with Hitler. Flies into a rage and will listen to nothing.”

On 1 September 1939, German armies invaded Poland. On 3 September, Britain declared war. When Britain went to war in 1914, its Dominions had automatically gone with it. This time, Canada made up its own mind, even if the decision was a foregone conclusion. The British connection might be weakening, but it was still powerful. Over the next six years, “O Canada” would be sung at innumerable patriotic meetings, but when they played the “National Anthem,” it was still “God Save the King.” And so, as Charlottetowners crowded into the Prince Edward to confront the enemy, the lopsided debate in Parliament pushed toward its decision. On Sunday, 10 September, for the second time in twenty-one years, Islanders found themselves involved in a global war.

Although no one in the province knew it yet, the conflict had already claimed its first victim. Muriel Fraser of Summerside was one of 112 people lost when a German submarine torpedoed the passenger liner Athenia on 4 September 1939. In a war that would be notable for its savagery toward civilians, it was grotesquely appropriate that the first Islander killed was an innocent woman.

Painful memories of the Great War had cured Canadians of jingoism in their attitude toward the new conflict. The national mood was mirrored on Prince Edward Island. “We all know that war is a ......................

3 Diary of H. T. Holman, PARO 4420.

4 Charlottetown Guardian, 10 October 1939.
beastly affair,” the Charlottetown Patriot editorialized on 9 September, “but we have been forced into one and may as well make the best of it. . . .”5 The absence of war fever had no visible effect on the rate of enlistments. During the fall of 1939, hundreds of recruits crowded into a former summer resort near Charlottetown, now recast as Beach Grove Army Basic Training Centre. By war’s end, No. 62 CA(B)TC would train over six thousand soldiers for active service. Many of them wound up as infantrymen, but, given the Island militia’s reputation for gunnery, it was hardly surprising when its two artillery batteries, the 2nd and 8th Medium, skimmed the cream off the early crop of volunteers.

While would-be soldiers learned how to drill at Beach Grove, would-be sailors streamed into the Charlottetown Naval Reserve Division, later commissioned as HMCS Queen Charlotte, in the old Mark Wright furniture factory building at the corner of Kent and Hillsborough Streets. The most romantic and, as it transpired, the most dangerous service was the air force, but its standards were, in the beginning, the strictest of all, both physically and educationally. Moreover, during the early months of the war, prospective aviators had to trek to the Mainland in order to join up. Nevertheless, many did. By March 1941, 330 Islanders had enlisted in the air force.6

Soldiers, sailors, airmen: a whole generation, it seemed, was marching off to war. The celebration of Remembrance Day in November 1939 was “the largest and most impressive ever held” across the province, as the cord of memory tautened between the First World War and the Second.7

The local press had spent much of the Great War defending Prince Edward Island’s recruiting record. The situation was reversed in the Second World War. Although it was difficult to get exact figures, since Prince Edward Island was lumped in with Nova Scotia in Military District No. 6, Island newspapers repeatedly boasted that Canada’s smallest province had the highest rate of enlistments. Over the course of the war, 49.6% of Island males between the ages of eighteen and forty-five would

5“Suppressing Alarmists,” Charlottetown Patriot, 9 September 1939, p. 4.

6 Charlottetown Guardian, 21 March 1941, p. 4.

serve in the armed forces.\footnote{Bureau of Current Affairs, The Province of Prince Edward Island, pamphlet no. 7 (Ottawa: Department of National Defense, [1954]), p.41.}

It is doubtful that Islanders had grown more patriotic since the Great War. In 1914, many of the most likely volunteers had already left Prince Edward Island in the seeping exodus of the young and enterprising that began the century. But the Great Depression had stilled the tide of outmigration even as it idled much of the populace. September 1939 found a ready pool of young recruits among the unemployed and the underemployed. Armed by a potent mix of patriotism and hard-headed economics — even lowly privates made $1.30 a day — they needed little encouragement to enlist. “The call for recruits has brought a ready response from quite a number on the unemployment rolls,” the Patriot reported in September 1939, meaning to applaud their patriotism, but accidentally emphasizing their financial straits.\footnote{Charlottetown Patriot, 9 September 1939, p. 8.} In November 1941, with an estimated seven thousand Islanders in the forces, The Guardian calculated that military pay, separation allowances, and other payments to servicemen were putting $6 million a year into provincial pockets.\footnote{Charlottetown Guardian, 5 November 1941, p. 4.}

Prime Minister Mackenzie King had intended a limited involvement for Canada in the new conflict, and during the “Phoney War” that followed the fall of Poland, his policy seemed possible. Then, in May 1940, the whole Western Front collapsed like a house of cards. The “beastly” war that Canada must “make the best of” turned into a nightmare of rout as the German blitzkrieg rolled over Holland, then Belgium, then France. “Britain is threatened!” The Guardian cried on 21 May, trading its air of reluctant patriotism for a Biblical call to arms. “Let us rise up in our wrath, loose our righteous indignation, and smite the enemy with the full force of our nationhood. Let us whip ourselves to a savage fury that will recognize no obstacles, terrible in its intensity and singleness of purpose.”

But words do not win battles. By the end of June, the British Empire stood alone against Hitler, and the German Luftwaffe was preparing to unleash a bombing campaign against England as a prelude to invasion. Germany seemed everywhere triumphant, and, even before the Patriot began
offering its readers special maps of the European war theatre in the fall of 1940, they had become obsolete. “The scene of the battle is changing so fast,” the Patriot advised readers in January 1941, “that map makers are all up in the air.”

The first phase of the war was over before most Islanders had a chance to be part of it. Among those few who did were Nursing Sister Ida MacKay of Mount Stewart and Earl Dicks, son of that notorious rumrunner, Captain Edward Dicks. MacKay, who was on a course in England at the war’s outbreak, witnessed the fall of France from a field hospital. Dicks had come overseas to join the RAF. He ended up with the Welsh Guards instead, and was captured at Dunkirk, becoming the Island’s first POW.

The Island’s militia had gone to battle more gently. A day after Canada declared war, two companies of the Prince Edward Island Highlanders, military descendants of the Great War’s 105th Battalion, decamped for the Mainland; three days later, the remainder departed, along with No. 6 District Signals. The second contingent of P.E.I. Highlanders were on their way to guard military installations in Cape Breton. The first ended up in Halifax, where its hockey team dominated the Garrison Hockey League that winter. It was there that the unit suffered its first casualty. Urban Joseph Macdonald, an eighteen-year-old private from Cardigan, was shot and killed by a nervous sentry at the Emperor Oil Refinery in Dartmouth when he failed to give the proper password.

A note of innocent bravado characterized the regimental song composed around this time by

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11 Charlottetown Patriot, 22 November 1940, p. 3; and 28 January 1941, p.1.

12 Charlottetown Guardian, 10 April 1943, p. 6.


14 Among the members of “A” Company in Cape Breton was an under-aged Milton Acorn of Charlottetown. By his own admission, he did not make much of a soldier, but he would become a pretty fair poet. See “Island Kilties at Sydney, Officers and Men,” Charlottetown Guardian, 17 October 1939, p. 3.

15 “Pte. Macdonald of Cardigan Is Accidentally Shot,” Guardian, 23 January 1940. The circumstances of his death are drawn from local tradition in the Cardigan area.
Pte. Alan Murray. One verse is enough:

_Oh Heinies hunt your holes for soon_
_We’re coming o’er the foam._
_We’ll make you wish with bayonets fixed_
_That you had stayed at home._
_So Garden Province of the Sea_
_For just awhile goodbye._
_We’re one for all and all for one,_
_The Sons of P.E.I._

It would be 1945 before the Prince Edward Island Highlanders made it “o’er the foam,” unless one counted a stint in Newfoundland. Aside from performing guard duty around Atlantic Canada, the regiment fed a steady supply of soldiers to combat units. When it finally did arrive in Britain, the remnant of the unit was broken up for reinforcements. Serving with regiments such as the North Nova Scotia Highlanders (whose D Company was dubbed the “Prince Edward Island Company”), the West Nova Scotia Regiment, the Cape Breton Highlanders, and the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, the Island infantrymen participated in some of the war’s most savage fighting.

Another interwar militia unit, the Prince Edward Island Light Horse, would fare better as a fighting formation. Leaving behind its cavalry traditions, it mobilized in February 1941 as the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade Headquarters Squadron. While the Light Horse carried on as the garrison unit for Prince Edward Island (where it was also responsible for an aircraft detection corps), its combat incarnation landed in France in July 1944 as part of the 2nd Canadian Corps.

Although they underwent changes in name and equipment, the Island artillery units remained

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16 As printed in the _Charlottetown Guardian_, 9 February 1940, p. 6. It was sung to the air of “Solomon Levi.”

17 F. R. Tripp, _Canada’s Army in World War II_ (Toronto: Unitrade, 1983), p. 51. After arriving in the United Kingdom in October 1941, it was re-designated the 2nd Corps Defence Company. See, too, See, also, _Charlottetown Guardian_, 3 July 1940, “Prince Edward Island Light Horse Will Start Training as Mechanized Calvary”; _Charlottetown Guardian_, 28 June 1941, p. 2; and _Charlottetown Guardian_, 18 April 1942, which notes that the PEI Light Horse had already drawn over 700 recruits.
intact throughout the war. The 2nd Medium Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery, shipped overseas in January 1940. Serving with the 1st Canadian Corps, it saw heavy action on the Italian front during 1943 and 1944, before rejoining the rest of the Canadian Army in north-west Europe early in 1945. The 8th Battery was converted into an anti-aircraft unit while still in Canada. In September 1941, it was sent to Britain as part of the 2nd Canadian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. After three years of warding off sporadic German air raids, the battery followed the Allied invasion into Normandy in August 1944. During the last months of the war, it provided conventional artillery support for the Allied advance across Western Europe.  

Although they turned up everywhere from the Arctic to the Orient, the main theatre of battle for Island servicemen was Europe. Some of them arrived overseas just in time to be sent into combat. For many others, Great Britain became a familiar place: a port of call for merchant marine and sailors; home base for aircrew; barracks and off-duty playground for bored ground troops, chafing to “get at it.” Islander A. P. Campbell captured random images of their time in Britain:

_Nameless friendly faces in an English pub;_  
_A landing barge; an A.T.S. on sentry-go;_  
_Saint Paul’s; some rain-diluted stew; the great hub-bub_  
_Of C-in-C’s inspection day; pup-tents in the snow;_  
_A mine-field taped; a mobile bath; an army show;_  
_The Christmas-comfort hoarding up of daily rum . . . . _

Most memories were less poetic. Canadian servicemen were remarkably young — the average age was a little over twenty — and filled with the invincibility of youth. When they got the chance, they cheerfully raised hell. There is a brash innocence in many of their off-duty escapades during this, the summertime of their soldiering. It is the only kind of story that many veterans will trade in. One member of the 8th Battery remembers touring the Johnny Walker whisky distillery in Kilmarnock with several of his buddies while on leave in Scotland. They enjoyed their tour-ending treat of whisky so

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18 J. E. Wilson, _et al_, _A History of 2 Cdn HAA Regt_ (Soesterberg, Holland: 1945).  

19 A. P. Campbell, “The Student-Soldier.”
much that they came back again the next day to reacquaint themselves with the plant. When they returned the third time, the distillery staff skipped the tour and just gave them their free drink.  

While Island servicemen made their way slowly toward combat, the home front gradually took shape. Many civilians already had one world war behind them, so there were certain expectations about what might be demanded of them in this one. History, after all, seemed to be repeating itself. But, of course, it never really does.

As in the First World War, advertisers showed their ingenuity in warping contemporary events into their sales pitches.

“Kisses Rationed? Then check your breath.”

“Wellner’s Military Watches: Armored like a tank! Watertight as a submarine!”

Hemlines shortened in a patriotic effort to conserve cloth, and double-breasted suits were outlawed as wasteful. Women were enticed to buy “Smart, Glamorous, Enticing, Victory Print Dresses” in their twelve “dashing styles” and “cheerfully, smartly bright patterns.” The silk stockings to go with them rapidly became unobtainable, as available supplies went toward military uses. Moore and McLeod came to the rescue with nylon, “the hosiery that set the whole world talking.” At $1.65 a pair, it needed to be as “incredibly durable” as the advertisers claimed. Soon it, too, was in short supply, as well as the rubber for “two-way stretch girdles.” The shortages had something to do with supply and demand, but they were also the result of war priorities and strict government controls. Those controls were one of the signs that this war’s home front would be different from the last.

“For the only time in Canadian history,” historians Granatstein and Morton observe of the

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20Michael J. MacDonald, interview with author, Newport, 9 October 1999.

21These examples are from, respectively, Charlottetown Guardian, 1 September 1943, p. 7; and Patriot, 20 September 1943, p. 6.

22Patriot, 21 January 1941, p. 8.
Second World War, “the whole nation was organized, involved, and mobilized in a grand effort.”

Every person and every thing, it seemed, was being registered, controlled, counted, or tabulated. Having grown both physically and mentally, government was better equipped for the task than during the Great War, but there was also a greater need. The first three years of the Second World War were years of defeat, and adversity is a hard driver.

During the Great War, the federal government had relied on voluntary conservation of foodstuffs. There was nothing optional about the food rationing that began in Canada in 1942. The initial items were gasoline, sugar, coffee, tea, and butter, but the list lengthened as the months went by. In general, traditionally self-sufficient Islanders were more inconvenienced than pinched by rationing. It was a little different for store-owners such as H. T. Holman. “Getting harder every day to buy merchandise to replace stocks,” he wrote on 12 August 1942. But, like everyone else, he coped.

Scarcity had an inevitable effect on the cost of goods and services. Mindful that inflation had run away with the Canadian economy during the Great War, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board watched as prices spiralled up by 18% between September 1939 and October 1941. Then, in December 1941, the agency slapped a freeze on both wages and prices. Over the rest of the war, the cost of living rose by only 2.8%. At the same time, cost-of-living bonuses and overtime allowed incomes to gain a little ground on expenses. As for the rest, rationing, shortages, and price ceilings meant a curbing of expectations. But Islanders were already used to that.

While conservation was being enforced, extra production was heavily promoted. Families planted Victory Gardens and were treated to helpful newspaper articles such as “Parsnips — A War Vegetable.” For the first time, government also pushed the concept of “recycling,” though the term was not yet an environmental buzzword. The Department of National Defence encouraged Islanders

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23 Granatstein and Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, p. 41.

24 Diary of H. T. Holman, PARO 4420.

25 Granatstein and Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, pp. 38-39. On 27 September 1941, the *Patriot* estimated the rise in the cost of living in the province at 10-15%.

26 *Charlottetown Guardian*, 10 April 1943, p. 6.
to turn their homes into salvage yards, and mounted periodic drives to collect paper, bones, rags, and metal: “Householders! These are your War Weapons. Save them. Give them and help win this War.”27

Money was another war weapon, and Islanders gave extravagantly. There were so many different collections being taken up that the newspapers complained mildly about the revenues they were losing by providing so much free advertising space. In terms of size, the Victory Loan drives easily topped the list. Between January 1940 and the fall of 1945, there were nine highly publicized national campaigns. Perhaps objectives were purposely set low, but Islanders exulted in how quickly and how greatly they exceeded them. In all, Islanders subscribed over $25.8 million, an astonishing total for a province of only 94,000 people, the bulk of whom still practised subsistence farming.28

The most coveted resource was people. In August 1940, the National Resources Mobilization Act registered almost 8,000,000 Canadian men and women over the age of sixteen, and, in March 1942, the National Selective Service was established to co-ordinate the total mobilization of Canada’s work force. Eventually, it would register every Canadian sixteen years old and over (and a considerable number who were under, but lied about their age in order to jump into the work force). As the war went on, restrictions were placed on the free movement of labour within essential occupations, and workers in other jobs became subject to transfer. From conscripting labour to conscripting soldiers would be a short step — but a perilous one.

Determined to avoid the violent rifts that conscription had caused during the Great War, Mackenzie King’s Liberal government had pledged at the outset to fight the new war without relying on the draft. But as the military situation deteriorated and Canada mobilized every other national resource, the reliance on volunteerism began to seem insufficient. The National Resources Mobilization Act of June 1940 introduced conscription for home defence only. At the low point of Allied fortunes in early 1942, this half-measure was not enough to satisfy many Canadians. Under


28The figure was arrived at by adding up the final totals for the first eight drives, as published in the local newspapers. Nationally, victory bonds raised $8.8 billion for the war effort.
mounting pressure, the Liberal government called a non-binding plebiscite for 27 April 1942, asking a release from its promise not to use conscripts for overseas service.

There were “yes” committees organized on Prince Edward Island in the run-up to the vote, but very little real debate since both Tories and Grits wanted to see the no-conscription pledge rescinded. When the results of the national plebiscite were announced, the federal Liberals had gotten their mandate (although not in Quebec). Now there could be, in King’s famous phrase, “conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription.” The “yes” vote on Prince Edward Island, 82.4% of the votes cast, led the country, although the voter turnout was twenty-one points below the percentage for the last general election.29

The overwhelming endorsement of conscription on Prince Edward Island hid a significant disagreement. Fourteen of 183 polls in the province voted against the draft by margins of over two-to-one. Another nineteen polls posted substantial “no” minorities. Of the fourteen polls with anti-conscription majorities, seven were in predominantly francophone districts; the others represented clearly Irish ones.30

While one can glimpse both the memory of ancient grievance and a sense of apartness behind these anti-conscription majorities, they should not be equated with active opposition to the war. Island honour rolls are filled with Acadian and Irish surnames. Nor do the “no” votes gauge the depth of the opposition. Clearly, a “no” vote on Prince Edward Island meant something different from a “no” vote in Quebec or even in northern New Brunswick. There was no anti-conscription campaign on Prince Edward Island leading up to the plebiscite, and, as in the Great War, no evidence of organized defiance afterward. Yet the “no” majorities clearly were a vote against compulsion. The clearest lesson from the conscription plebiscite on Prince Edward Island may be to remind us that to be “Islanders” does not mean to be the same.

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30Charlottetown Guardian, 2 May 1942, p. 9, and 5 May 1942, p. 8. The same ethnic composition also dominates the polls with significant “no” minorities.
“This war isn’t going to be the kind where women sit at home and knit socks,” announced Margaret Hundman of the Executive Committee of the Voluntary Registration of Canadian Women in September 1939. Of course, that is just what many Island women did. The Prince Edward Island Division of the Canadian Red Cross mobilized for the war effort at a meeting on 18 September. A few days later, it renewed its old alliance with the Women’s Institute. Soon, in addition to their regular slate of activities, the partners were performing prodigies of war work. On 5 February 1940, the *Patriot* reported that Red Cross volunteers had already knitted 2,500 pairs of socks, 350 pullovers, 225 pairs of mitts, and 150 scarves, as well as making 400 hospital gowns, 200 pneumonia jackets, 250 triangular bandages, and 200 bed pads, plus other articles. Other community organizations, such as the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire and the Catholic Women’s League, also did their part, knitting and sewing and sending care packages overseas.

As in the Great War, military authorities exhorted women to encourage the men on active service with cheery letters and packages from home. These did matter. “To tell you the truth, Mom, we are like a bunch of kids with a new toy,” wrote Ted Strain to his mother as he watched his comrades tearing into their Christmas parcels. “I couldn’t even describe what those parcels and letters from home mean to the boys here.” One member of the 8th Battery was amazed to receive an affectionate letter, a parcel of cigarettes, and a cake, all from a girl in his community that he hardly knew. He barely had the package open when two smirking battery mates from the same locality showed up. One of them had taken the liberty of impersonating him in a letter to the girl, requesting the supplies.

Laura Jenkins summed up in her own experience the home front for many women: “I knitted

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31 *Charlottetown Guardian*, 19 September 1939.

32 A synopsis of the Red Cross’ war work is provided in Daley, *Volunteers in Action*, pp. 88 - *passim*.

33 E. J. Strain to “Mom,” 16 November 1942, Strain Family Fonds, PARO 4101.

34 Michael J. MacDonald, interview with author, Newport, 9 October 1999.
at least ten pairs of gloves a week for the Red Cross, chaired the Mount Mellick Women’s Institute meetings and attended all the provincial conferences. Meanwhile, I was still cooking two meals a day for our farm hands and I had learned to drive our Model A Ford truck so that I could bring our meat to the butcher in Charlottetown twice a week.”

The absence of their men was emotional as well as physical, and it wasn’t easy. Mary Prosper of Georgetown already had a son in the forces when her husband arrived home from his job with the ferry service in Borden to announce, “I joined the damned army.” He was called up three weeks later, leaving her with seven children to manage, the youngest only two months old. Yet, when she took a job at the local lobster factory, people complained she didn’t need the money since she was receiving “two pensions.”

Years of enforced absence, changing roles, and changing people destroyed many marriages involving servicemen. The rising incidence of marital breakdown eventually forced Prince Edward Island to revive its moribund court of marriage and divorce. Between 1941 and 1945, there were only ten divorces granted to Islanders through acts of the Canadian Senate. In 1948, as it worked its way through a backlog of broken marriages, the provincial divorce court handled forty-nine cases.

Island women did not just fight the war from their kitchens and backyards. Hundreds of them exchanged aprons for uniforms. In 1939 the only women in the military were the nursing sisters of the Army Medical Corps. Before the war ended, some seventy-four of them had gone on active service. At least two, Ruth MacLean and Mary Winnifred MacNutt, would receive the Royal Red Cross in recognition of their war service.

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35Kathy Anne Ling, “Prince Edward Island Women and World War II” (Honours essay, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, 1993), p. 64.

36“Islanders Recall Wartime at Home,” Guardian, 10 November 1992, special supplement, p. 5A.


38Charlottetown Guardian, 17 April 1943, p. 6; and 17 March 1945, p. 1.
By then the nursing sisters were no longer alone. In July 1941, the Women’s Division, RCAF, was established. Hard on its heels came the CWACS (Canadian Women’s Army Corps). The navy followed suit a year later, forming the Women’s Royal Canadian Naval Service, the Wrens. Nationally, 49,000 women would serve in the three branches of the military. Hundreds of Island girls eagerly signed up.\(^{39}\) Indeed, Military District No. 6, comprising Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, consistently led the country in per capita enlistment of women. C. F. Morrissey of Tignish already had a daughter, Annette, in the Army Medical Corps, when he proudly celebrated his daughter Frances, “first soldier girl from Tignish,” in his diary.\(^{40}\) Like the nursing sisters, service women were not intended to fight. By taking over various support roles — as drivers, clerks, secretaries, parachute riggers, operations room staff — they freed up men for combat duty. The same rationale applied to the recruitment of women for war industries.

By 1942, the heavy rate of enlistments among Canadian males had created acute labour shortages in the geared-up war economy. Women increasingly stepped in to fill the gap. At the peak of wartime employment in 1943–44, 439,000 of them were working in the service sector, and another 373,000 were involved in manufacturing.\(^{41}\) Island women were actively recruited to fill vacancies, and there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, among the estimated seven thousand Islanders who left the province for jobs in war plants.\(^{42}\) The industrial recruiters advertised a revolution: “A New Work — A New World — A New Horizon for Women.”\(^{43}\) Island females were less visionary. Current research suggests their chief motivation in taking up the war jobs was the opportunity to make higher

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40 C.F.’s Diary, entry for 1 October 1942. She was with the Army Motor Transport.

41 Granatstein and Morton, A Nation Forged in Fire, p. 37.

42 Examples of recruitment ads include “Women Workers Wanted,” Charlottetown Guardian, 22 May 1942, p. 5; “War Opportunity for Girls,” Charlottetown Patriot, 2 December 1942, p. 8. The general statistic about off-Island war workers was re-printed in Charlottetown Guardians year-end wrap-up on 31 December 1945.

43 Charlottetown Guardian, 13 July 1943, p. 3.

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wages, allied with patriotism and a chance for travel and adventure, pretty much the same motivations that moved men to enlist.\textsuperscript{44}

Lillian Roper went from making $6 dollars a week at a store in Fredericton, Prince Edward Island, to $27 a week in a munitions plant in Ajax, Ontario. The work had a grim side:

We heard this really big bang one day and I happened to be working right across from the door to the cement fortified room where they took apart the bombs. I looked up just as a man came running out with his eye laying on his cheek. The other fellow was killed. They [the supervisors] didn’t say one thing, they didn’t stop for one minute. When there’s a war on you don’t. They brought in a stretcher and took the body out and they didn’t say boo. Everyone kept working like nothing had happened.\textsuperscript{45}

But there was a chance for fun, too. Elva MacPherson worked in Montreal:

At lunch time we all would put pincurls in our hair and cover them with turbans. Then at quitting time we’d simply take them out, fluff out our hair, put on some dark red lipstick and run out to the dance clubs. The old war songs were popular then and everyone knew the words and the different dances to go along with them. All the soldiers were around at night in their uniforms and shiny boots. I think they all must have been taught good manners and how to dance in the Service. We were out until early morning every night of the week. The only problem was making it to work in time to punch your time card at eight o’clock the next morning.

At the Halifax Shipyard, Rita St. Ongé helped build the new Tribal-class destroyers — and then got to christen one of them, HMCS \textit{Nootka}.

There were new opportunities at home, too. Marjorie Saint was followed right into the yard by a prospective employer on her way home from receiving her commerce certificate: “The manager of the Bank of Nova Scotia in Kensington pulled in right behind us. He offered me a job on the spot. . . .” Saint noted that there were only two men working at the bank when she began there. Of course, they were the manager and the assistant manager. The world had been turned on its ear, but not

\textsuperscript{44}Ling, “Prince Edward Island Women and World War II,” p. 33.

\textsuperscript{45}Except where otherwise noted, the quotations in this section are taken from Ling, “Prince Edward Island Women and World War II.”
In July 1939, an editorial in the The Guardian had damned working wives as “a menace to the general welfare, to the public health and to the morals of the nation.”\textsuperscript{46} Four years of war served to modify the paper’s views. When an American spokeswoman announced that, since “the men have persisted in making such a mess of handling international affairs . . . , the women are going to demand a voice in the making of the world which will follow the war,” The Guardian found it “rather strong talk.” But it was hard to deny the mess the men had made. “Maybe the women can do better,” the editorial writer conceded, “And how could they do any worse?”\textsuperscript{47}

In the end, of course, women — especially Island women — did not go out and change the world. After the war, most of them returned to their inherited vision of normality: home, marriage, family. While they may have considered their wartime employments a temporary aberration, the experience fundamentally changed women’s perceptions of themselves and their capabilities. Life in the city also broadened their perceptions and sharpened their expectations, especially toward modern amenities.\textsuperscript{48} In so much as the women had changed, traditional relationships changed as well. For one thing, working wives were no longer considered “chiselers, deserters from their post of duty, the home.”\textsuperscript{49} Many Island servicewomen took advantage of government programs for veterans to obtain further education, often using it as a springboard to peacetime careers. They and other women still made less money than their male counterparts and were, for the most part, shut out of management positions, but they would steadily enlarge the Island work force in the postwar era.


\textsuperscript{47}“The Women Speak,” Charlottetown Guardian, 1 November 1943, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{48}Ling, “Prince Edward Island Women and World War II,” p. 12, 40.

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid.
C. F. Morrissey spent a lifetime coaxing a living out of the scant business opportunities in West Prince. He was lobster packer, merchant, fox breeder, potato farmer, even patronage appointee. Month by month, year by year, he had measured the ebb and flow of his fortunes in his diary. In a thumbnail summary of 1942, Morrissey expressed an unprecedented satisfaction. “A very good year,” he reflected. “Much prosperity.”50 The admission was no more unusual than the fact that it had taken three-and-half years of war to make the statement true. The Second World War may have ended the Depression in the rest of Canada, but prosperity took its time reaching Prince Edward Island.

Islanders had not expected it to take so long. The first rush of enlistments filled people’s wallets in 1939, and, that Christmas, Holman’s Department Stores reported their highest sales in a decade.51 But all was not well in the Island’s primary industries. At the start of the war, agriculture accounted for 71.4% of the Island’s total income.52 Potatoes were by now the bellwether of the farm economy. “Owing to the war farmers here are unable to get sufficient bags to enable them to market their potatoes in the large quantities required,” The Guardian reported on 26 October. “There is always something to keep the rabbit’s tail short.” It got even shorter the following year in the chaos that followed the collapse of the Western Front. With markets uncertain and the price of potatoes halved, the value of agricultural production in the province fell to $10,078,000, the lowest total since 1932.53

The fishery was in far worse straits. Early in the war, Great Britain, which had absorbed 55% of the Island’s pre-war lobster pack, banned the import of lobsters as part of a general prohibition on luxury goods. At the same time, new federal regulations increasing the legal size for lobsters lopped 20% off the Island catch. The combination of lost markets and low catches was disastrous. Even with the federal government guaranteeing a price for lobsters of five-and-a-quarter cents per pound, the 1940 season set a new record low for the modern fishing industry, $714,870. That year, nine hundred

50C. F. ’s Diary, p. 363 (entry for 31 December 1942).

51“Highest Sales in Ten Years,” Guardian, 6 January 1940.


53Cited in H. K. S. Hemming to Editor, Charlottetown Guardian, 1 February 1941, p. 4.
men dropped out of the fishery.\textsuperscript{54} Even the weather failed to co-operate. At the end of June, with one lobster season behind him and another to go, C. F. Morrissey lamented, “A very rough stormy month. Worst for years. Nearly everybody broke.”

While farmers and fishermen fretted, the little engine of tourism chugged on, though the way seemed steep. As the first summer of the war approached, there was great concern that American tourists would be afraid to come to Canada because of the risk of internment or difficulties at the border. In June 1940, The Guardian endorsed a suggestion that Islanders write their American relatives to reassure them that “the welcome mat is still at the door.”\textsuperscript{55} The fears were unfounded: 1940 saw another modest record for Island tourism. After 1941, with the United States now a belligerent, the industry fell back. Just the same, tourist resorts on the North Shore were reporting a successful season in August 1944, although the majority of guests were said to be from Montreal instead of the usual Americans.\textsuperscript{56}

Even as the tourism industry bided its time, its greatest benefactor, novelist L. M. Montgomery, slowly fell apart. Published just before the war, her last book, Anne of Ingleside, returned one last time to the character that had made her career. But Anne had little magic left to shield her creator from the real world. Montgomery’s last years were beset with physical and emotional collapse, culminating in her death on 24 April 1942.

Montgomery was the most famous and arguably the most influential Islander of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Her novels had brought celebrity both to her and to their Island setting. Without meaning to, Montgomery had also fixed in place a romantic, nostalgic image of the province that even Islanders would come to believe. Her burial in the Presbyterian cemetery in Cavendish on 29 April created one more shrine for devotees of her art.

The globalization of the war gradually turned around the other sectors of the Island economy. The


\textsuperscript{55}“Old Home Week Plans Completed,” Charlottetown Guardian, 3 July 1940, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{56}“Covehead Notes,” Patriot, 16 August 1944, p. 8.
war effort developed a consuming hunger for all sorts of fish, and local fishermen found bottomless new markets for their catches. They also found a new harvest, a plentiful variety of seaweed called Irish Moss. For millennia, it had cast up on the North Shore of the Island as storm wrack; now it was suddenly discovered to be valuable. War-induced research developed a whole range of commercial applications for the carrageenin found in the Moss in emulsifying, gelling, and stabilizing food products. But it was only when Mainland buyers suddenly began coming out of the woodwork that Island fishermen realized a new fishery was at hand. C. F. Morrissey joined the moss gatherers in October 1941. He could scarcely believe his luck. “Good easy money,” he marvelled to his diary. The 33 tons of Irish Moss shipped in 1941 became 750 tons, worth about $200,000, the following year. The demand for Irish Moss would survive the war to become a permanent, albeit highly variable, component of the West Prince fishing economy. Meanwhile, the rest of the Island fishery continued to boom into the immediate postwar era, ratcheting up from record low values to record highs. In 1946, with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency swallowing huge quantities of canned fish, the marketed value of fish landings in the province hit $4.47 million, over six times the 1940 figure.

The same little drama was played out among farmers. Despite complaints about prices that had ceilings but no floors, agriculture blossomed after 1941 as domestic and overseas markets absorbed all surplus production. At the federal government’s urging, farmers set about increasing


\[58\] *C.F. ’s Diary*, entries for 21 October and 25th. See, too, repeated references to the emerging business in the diaries of H. T. Holman during 1941.

\[59\] Diary of H. T. Holman, 5 November 1941, PARO 4420. According to Holman’s statistics, Tignish led the way with twenty-one tons. For the 1942 statistics, see “Blowing Our Own Horn by Radio,” *Charlottetown Guardian*, 3 August 1943, p. 8. The value is an extrapolation of figures given in H. T. Holman’s diary entry for 29 October 1942, where he mentions shipping 600,000 lbs. worth $100,000.

\[60\] *Canada Year Book*, 1951; the figures here don’t jibe with those given in Wells.

\[61\] The *Patriot* loyally predicted that Islanders would be “in the forefront of the rooters for the new price-fixing policy,” since the cost of living had allegedly risen faster in rural than urban
production of field crops and, especially, livestock. Soon, lack of workers became a more frequent lament than price ceilings or export restrictions. In 1939, according to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, farm cash income in the province had been $6.4 million; in 1944, it was $13.8 million.

There was a market, it seemed, for anything farmers could raise or grow. In Summerside, businessman Austin Scales won a government contract to produce dehydrated potatoes. At peak production, his plant employed more than two hundred and fifty people. The war even revived the fortunes of the Island’s few starch factories. G. E. Full owned four of them, and he was incensed when the RCMP fined his plant at Baltic for dumping potato pulp into a nearby stream. He wrote an indignant letter to the provincial government, asking that the charges be dropped. In his clinching argument, he staked out the grounds for future contention:

> During the past year the starch factories here have purchased from farmers about 580,000 bushels of potatoes which were not wanted on the general markets and paid to the local labour about $25,000.00 in wages. This we feel is really of more value to the people of Prince Edward Island than the keeping of the streams clear so that fish will rise when a fisherman feels like trying his luck.

He would not be the last entrepreneur to pose choices between industry and recreation or employment

areas, but farm incomes had not followed suit. See *Patriot*, “Farm Living Costs,” 19 August 1941, p. 4; and “Control of Prices,” 16 October 1941, p. 4. In March 1942, the Prince Edward Island Potato Growers’ Association lodged a formal protest against the price ceiling on potatoes, asking instead that it be made the minimum price. The Legislature added its own protest a day later (See *Guardian*, 20 March 1942, p. 1; 21 March 1942, p. 1.)

According to economist J. E. Lattimer, the increase in livestock production, partly using imported feed, was “one of the striking developments of the war.” (J. E. Lattimer, “Economic Survey of Prince Edward Island,” [1944]), p. 46.


and the environment.

On 11 September 1940, a self-important little ceremony was inserted into the program for the local exhibition in Alberton. Premier Campbell and other government officials had come to West Prince to mark the official completion of a continuous paved road spanning (almost) the length of the province. Built piecemeal over the course of the previous decade, the grey ribbon of highway stretched all the way from Montrose in the west to Montague and Souris in the east, a sort of asphalt equivalent to the Prince Edward Island Railway. In the previous two years alone, contractors had paved 140 miles of road, but the ceremony at Alberton brought to a close the cycle of highway construction, which had its roots in the “improved roads” of the 1920s. 66 There would be no more major road work, the Premier intimated, until the return of peace. The Island’s labouring population must now look to the war to provide them with employment.

As historians have pointed out, the Second World War brought a great deal of work, but very little industrial development to the Maritimes. Up to the end of 1943, the Department of Munitions and Supply had invested $1.6 billion in the expansion of Canadian industry, of which about half could be tied to particular parts of country. The Maritimes received less than 4% of that total. 67 Nothing at all was spent on Prince Edward Island, and even though there was precious little industry there for Ottawa to invest in, Islanders rankled at the injustice of it. 68 A decade of Depression had taught them to expect government intervention.

66 “140 Miles of Pavement Laid in Two Years,” Charlottetown Guardian, 14 September 1940, p. 10.


68 By April 1941, the federal government had spent $268.5 million in capital assistance to various firms, none of it went to Prince Edward Island. See “Prince Edward Island Ignored,” Charlottetown Guardian, 22 April 1941, p. 4.
Like the other Maritime Provinces, Prince Edward Island also expected its share of the war contracts that were spilling out of Ottawa. In April 1940, Executive Council provided a $200,000 loan guarantee to the Bruce Stewart & Co. foundry in Charlottetown for their subsidiary, MacKay-Stewart Shipbuilders, which planned to build corvettes for the Canadian Navy. Up to that point, federal departments had placed $163.6 million in contracts, of which Prince Edward Island had received exactly $810.\(^6^9\) While provincial officials pressed Ottawa for consideration, Island companies waited for the bonanza to materialize. When it did, it was in the construction trade, not manufacturing.

A press release and a by-election presaged the building boom. On 17 December 1939, Prime Minister Mackenzie King announced the creation of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (the BCATP). Cost-shared by Britain and her Dominions, the program would use the wide-open skies of the Commonwealth — but mostly Canada — to train air crew for the war effort. Two weeks later, King’s new Minister of Finance, Nova Scotian J. L. Ralston, was elected by acclamation in the safe Liberal riding of Prince County. Even local Conservatives could see the advantage in having a cabinet minister from Prince Edward Island.

In the general election that followed in March 1940, the Liberals swept the country and the province. When Prince County’s new MP was named Minister of Defence in June, the path to political favours became even plainer. In fact, Ralston had already been looking out for his adopted constituents. On 1 May 1940, the Department of National Defence confirmed that the BCATP was coming to Prince Edward Island. There would be a Service Flying Training School at St. Eleanors and a Bombing and Gunnery School at Charlottetown, with relief aerodromes at Mount Pleasant and Wellington.\(^7^0\) No one mentioned the top secret radar base that was opened at Tignish in September 1942, but its lovelorn, bored personnel knew all about it:

\(^6^9\)“War Contracts by Provinces,” Charlottetown Guardian, 7 June 1940, p. 4.

\(^7^0\)Guardian, 1 May 1940. No one mentioned the top secret radar base that was opened at Tignish in September1942. see Allan and Jessie Graham, “Prince County’s Forgotten Military Past,” The Island Magazine, 1(Fall/Winter 1976), pp. 21-22; and Bureau of Current Affairs, The Province of Prince Edward Island, p. 47.
We are the boys from Tignish Station
Miles and miles from civilization.⁷¹

The newspapers had hardly announced the bases before construction crews were working around the clock at the various sites. The spate of urgent construction was a pivotal juncture in the history of M. F. Schurman Co. Ltd., a Summerside lumber and construction firm. Its principal, Harold Schurman, had been J. L. Ralston’s campaign manager in Prince County and was friends with Ralston’s secretary, Islander James Wells. But he also had a genius for business. Derided by Conservative House leader R. B. Hanson as a “two by four lumber company,” Schurman’s made good on its low bid to construct the main air base at St. Eleanors. A whole series of war contracts followed.⁷² At the peak of construction, the company’s work force ballooned to 410 employees. While there was a political backlash against the alleged favouritism shown it in the matter of contracts, Schurman’s wartime enterprise positioned it to become one of the largest building firms in the Maritimes in the decades after the Second World War.⁷³

By early 1941, all of the air fields except the one at Mount Pleasant were up and running. The construction of three air bases, practically from scratch, in a little over six months, despite labour and material shortages and the worst winter in a generation, was a remarkable feat. It had required a brutal work schedule, considerable ingenuity, and lots of federal money. But it had been done. Keyed by the military spending, construction activity in the province during 1940 showed a 125% increase over

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⁷¹Lyrics recited for author by West Prince folklorist John Cousins.

⁷²As described in Margaret M. MacFarlane, The M. F. Schurman Company Limited of Prince Edward Island: A Century of Building (Charlottetown: M. F. Schurman Co. Ltd., 1996), pp. 66-72. Hanson’s remark is quoted on p. 70.

⁷³See Lillian Wells to James E. Wells, Ottawa, 24 September 1943, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.32. She attributed Tory victories in 5th Prince in the 1943 provincial election in part to an anti-Schurman’s movement. She was indignant: “. . . had it not been for the energy and enterprise of Harold Schurman, all of the war contracts which he received would have gone out of the Province to ‘foreign’ contractors and Summerside would have lost the great benefits which it has derived from Schurman enterprise.”
The construction jobs were, of course, temporary. After the first generation of airfields went operational, the building boom stalled, and there was consternation in many quarters when the federal government stopped contributing to direct relief at the end of March 1941. By July, despite heavy enlistments and an exodus of Islanders to work in Mainland war plants, The Guardian was claiming that unemployment in the province was actually higher than at the outbreak of the war.

Even as the paper was brandishing that rhetorical club over the heads of its Liberal opponents, the local economy gathered more steam. Expansion and renovation of the various air bases keyed a fresh burst of construction activity. Meanwhile, the exponential increase in production in the rest of the country, coupled with persistent lobbying in Ottawa, finally began to pay dividends for Island industry. The closest thing to a shipbuilding breakthrough in the province was the handful of harbour boats built in Summerside by Palmer and Williams for the Royal Canadian Navy, but in 1941 Bruce Stewart & Company finally received the first in a series of naval repair contracts. Another part of the plant was soon manufacturing metal boxes for storing shells. At the height of war-time production in 1944, the foundry had 284 men on its payroll, about seven times its pre-war complement. Each week, their paycheques pumped $8,000 into the local economy. At the same time, the company’s competitors, Hall and Stavert, were turning out “intricate tools used in the manufacture of Naval Guns.” Prince Edward Island ultimately received about $400,000 in shipbuilding contracts, a drop

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76 “Significant Figures,” Charlottetown Guardian, 23 September 1941. The figures in question were drawn from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics.

77 Charlottetown Guardian, 12 December 1941, p. 8.


in the Canadian bucket, but an audible splash in the small Island one.\textsuperscript{80}

The sums associated with the BCATP dwarfed any other wartime enterprise. The first sheaf of construction contracts for the Island bases had been valued at $2.53 million, but the eventual cost far exceeded those figures. The creation of the Mount Pleasant facility alone would eventually require $3.3 million.\textsuperscript{81} To put such numbers in perspective, the capital costs for the Borden-Cape Tormentine ferry service, including the two terminals and the construction of two state-of-the-art ferries, plus later renovations, had been $7.86 million, spread over thirty years. Although off-Island firms won their share of the defence contracts, much of the money was spent locally, and the further spending that fed, clothed, transported, and entertained the people stationed in the province rippled through the Island economy for the rest of the war.

Borne on the wings of massive government spending, prosperity had finally alighted on Prince Edward Island. What the government gave, of course, it also took away. Wartime taxation reached deep into Canadians’ pockets. In 1939, a married man with two children and an income of $5,000 paid $139 dollars in income tax. In 1943, he shelled out a little over $1,000, \textit{and} put $600 into compulsory savings.\textsuperscript{82} As with individuals, so with businesses. Holman’s of Prince Edward Island consistently set new sales records during the war years. On the other hand, H. T. Holman calculated in February 1941 that the Summerside branch of the firm stood to lose 60% of its profits to provincial and federal taxes.\textsuperscript{83}

The prosperity was both artificial and transient, in that it was created by special wartime conditions, but it was actual. By the spring of 1942, there were complaints about housing shortages.


\textsuperscript{81}\textit{Patriot}, 14 June 1940, p. 1 provides the initial figures; for the eventual cost of Mount Pleasant, see Graham, “Prince County’s Forgotten Military Past,” p. 20.

\textsuperscript{82}Granatstein and Morton, \textit{A Nation Forged in Fire}, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{83}Diary of H. T. Holman, 20 February 1941, PARO 4420.
in urban Prince Edward Island. By the start of the school year, with so many men and women gone to war or war-related work, school trustees were struggling to find teachers. Farmers and fishermen felt the labour pinch as well. “The kind of help you get now,” observed Belfast’s Harry MacTavish to a neighbour, “they just keep the bread from moulding.”

As 1942 rolled into 1943, the boom continued in every branch of the economy. After securing the provinces’ agreement, the federal government had introduced unemployment insurance in 1940 (something the critics conveniently ignored when complaining about the end of direct relief). As of 31 December 1943, only eight people on Prince Edward Island were drawing claims. With just a hint of self-congratulation, the Liberal Patriot judged 1943, “a banner year for Prince Edward Island. It is said cash revenues were the highest in the Island’s history. . . . Besides a lot of money coming into the country from Army separation allowances, increased payrolls and civil and military work, never have the farmers and fishermen received such large amounts.” Up in West Prince, C. F. Morrissey’s assessment surpassed even his summary for 1942. It had been, he wrote, “a very fine prosperous year.”

By the spring of 1941, Islanders in Summerside and Charlottetown were getting used to the constant

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54 See, for example, “Housing Situation,” Patriot, 7 October 1944, p. 4.


56 Hornby, ed., Belfast People, p. 216.

57 Charlottetown Guardian, 4 March 1944, p. 4.

58 “The Past Year,” Patriot, 8 January 1944, p. 4. Only the newspapers were suffering, the editorial writer observed, citing lost advertising revenues, the donation of free space to countless worthy causes, and paper shortages.

59 C.F.’s Diary, p. 376 (entry for 31 December 1943).
drone of airplanes overhead.\textsuperscript{90} The noise masked the changing nature of the various flight schools as the BCATP expanded and contracted to meet the needs of the air war. Although announced as a bombing and gunnery school, Charlottetown went operational in January 1941 as the site of the RAF’s No. 31 General Reconnaissance School, which relocated from Britain.\textsuperscript{91} In February 1944, the RCAF took over the base, which became home to No. 2 Air Navigation School.\textsuperscript{92} When No. 9 Service Flying Training School in Summerside re-located to Centralia, Ontario, in 1942, No. 1 General Reconnaissance School moved in.\textsuperscript{93}

The quiet fields of Mount Pleasant underwent the biggest transformation of all. Begun as an emergency air strip, the aerodrome there was subsequently turned into a bombing and gunnery school. A now familiar pattern of frantic construction followed during 1942–43. To accommodate the changes, the Western Road even had to be re-routed around the perimeter of the new base. No. 10 Bombing and Gunnery School opened on 26 June 1943. Soon novice gunners were blazing away at airborne drogues (and, sometimes, their tow planes), and enthusiastically strafing stationary targets out on Hog Island in Malpeque Bay. By January 1944, Mount Pleasant had a population of 1,860 service personnel, making the former stretch of farmland the third-largest town in the province.\textsuperscript{94}

As many as 12,000 aircrew received training on Prince Edward Island over the course of the

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\textsuperscript{90}See, for example, diary of H. T. Holman, PARO 4420.

\textsuperscript{91}Charlottetown Guardian, 6 March 1941, p. 10. No. 31 GRS was not officially part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Though identical in most respects, it was administered under the Visiting Forces Act. For the air reconnaissance, school, see, Charlottetown Guardian, 5 June 1941, p. 3. It closed just over a year later. Exact dates for the schools’ operations are provided in Spencer Dunmore, Wings for Victory (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994), p. 355.


\textsuperscript{93}Forty Years, 1941-1981: A History of the Base at Summerside, Prince Edward Island ([Summerside]: 1981], pp. 3-10.

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war. The students logged thousands of flights in all sorts of conditions while they learned their trade. The by-products of so much activity included the inevitable accidents. The worst came in January 1942, when two planes from RAF Charlottetown collided in mid-air over Southport, killing all seven occupants. Over the course of the war, several dozen airmen were killed while serving on Prince Edward Island. They had never seen combat, but they had served their country.

Socially and economically, the Island air bases changed the complexion of everyday life within their orbit. Restaurants found new customers. Movie houses found new patrons. Civilians found new work. Entrepreneurs found new business opportunities. Romance found new possibilities. The dance halls flourished as never before, with local orchestras blaring out the American Big Band sound, while groups like Don Messer and his Islanders mixed in a healthy dose of “Old Time.”

There were uniforms everywhere it seemed: Island servicemen home on leave, reservists, new recruits, and, of course, thousands of BCATP personnel. They were hungry for entertainment. Summerside businessman W. E. Smallman made a living out of servicemen’s transportation needs. In 1941, he founded Airways Bus and Transfer Company to shuttle airmen back and forth from town to air bases. In one month during 1943, its eight buses carried 41,000 passengers. As Gladys

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95 For this estimate, I’m extrapolating from known figures for specific time periods at Summerside, and known student capacities at other sites. Since the schools did not run at peak levels throughout their existence, I’ve moved the number downwards. In other words, it’s a rough guess.


97 In 1941, Summerside businessman W. E. Smallman founded Airways Bus and Transfer Company to shuttle airmen back and forth from town to air bases. In one month during 1943, its eight buses carried 41,000 passengers. (See Graham, “Prince County’s Forgotten Military Past,” p. 21.)

98 See, for example, the *Charlottetown Patriot*, 1 October 1941, p. 8, which describes the regular Tuesday night Legion dance put on by the Canadian Legion War Services; and “The Carry On Canada Corp.,” 15 November 1940, p. 10.

Carruthers remembered, “Summerside was full of airmen . . . . You’d meet them on your lunch break in restaurants, in the department stores or even in your own home. A lot of Islanders invited airmen into their homes to enjoy some hospitality and home cooking. They were a real nice bunch of fellows.”

They were also young men who weren’t sure they would have a chance to grow old. The war made life seem more precious, and it was lived with a far greater intensity than in peacetime. Since no one could do much about the future, they tended to focus on the present, squeezing happiness from the circumstances in which they found themselves. Youth, opportunity, and the sense of urgency engendered by wartime wobbled social mores. On Valentine’s Day in 1944, Dr. B. C. Keeping, the Provincial Health Officer, lectured Charlottetown Rotary about the rising incidence of venereal disease in the province, and, later that month, the provincial budget speech announced that a nurse had been sent to Montreal to train for the war against sexually transmitted diseases. That year, the military population in the province and the intensity of the fighting at the front peaked; in 1945, while the number of births in the province declined, the number of children born out of wedlock shot up by 37%.

The existence of “wet” military canteens in a dry province served to lubricate the social whirl. Bootlegging flourished, too, and when the supply of smuggled liquor dried up, moonshining reached new heights of sophistication. Clovie Perry of Summerside coped with the liquor crisis by setting up his own hidden distillery in partnership with several other bootleggers. Inevitably, word leaked out, and the subsequent trial of the “Summerside Moonshiners” in April 1943 was front-page

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100 Ling, “Prince Edward Island Women and World War II,” p. 86. H. T. Holman makes similar comments in his diary for this period. War-time entries in the diary of Summerside’s Wanda Wyatt reflect how locals adopted the young fliers who came and went from their lives. Deirdre Kessler, A Century on Spring Street, pp, 316- passim.


102 Canada Year Book, 1945-1953.

103 In the provincial prohibition plebiscite held in June 1940, Island soldiers voted by a margin of 50 to 1 in favour of government controlled liquor sales.
Islanders had ample opportunity to compare the airmen they knew to the movie version of the RCAF offered by Jimmy Cagney in the Warner Brothers’ hit, Captains of the Clouds, which played at the Prince Edward in June 1942: “Streaking Out of the Crimson Skies Come the Hell Riders of the Heavens!” In spirit, at least, the training version was not so very different. Wireless operator Tom Robinson went along with a group of student navigators on a routine training flight in an Anson Mark 1 with staff pilot Arthur Grime. In a virtuoso display of daredevil flying, Grime skimmed into Souris at wave-top height, climbed steeply over the town, then dropped into a screaming dive, levelling out just in time to smash through a stand of trees near the town. One six-foot branch came straight through the windshield and the better part of a spruce sapling lodged in the plane’s nose. Grime displayed his skills to better advantage in nursing the crippled plane back to Charlottetown.

An advanced student on a solo night flight out of Summerside caused similar consternation when he zoomed along the tracks at treetop height to meet the evening train coming from Charlottetown. Mistaking the Harvard’s landing light for an oncoming locomotive, the engineer slammed on the brakes, scattering passengers and luggage from one end of the train to the other. Small wonder that the Service Flying Training School in Summerside ran ads urging citizens to report instances of “low flying.”

Such hi-jinks were tolerated in part because most Islanders knew that the odds were long for aircrew once they went into combat.

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105 Not surprisingly. The film was the brainchild of a BCATP publicist, had BCATP technical advisors, and was partly shot on location at the BCATP air fields in Ontario. (See Dunmore, Wings for Victory, pp. 262-273.

106 Dunmore, Wings for Victory, pp. 185-187 and 136.

107 “Low Flying,” Charlottetown Guardian, 7 June 1941, p. 11.
return. In Bomber Command, the casualty rate was almost 60%. As one Island pilot reflected, crewing on bombers was “non-habit-forming.” Of 1,659 Islanders who served in the air force during the Second World War, 107 died on active service. Those who came back often returned with harrowing memories. Don MacLean of Summerside survived thirty-four missions with the RAF’s 90 Squadron. His fourteenth was a daylight bombing mission over Calais on 24 September 1944:

Over the target, I could see the Jerries were throwing up more flak than I had ever seen before. The air was like a huge swarm of bees, and they were just the shells we could see. I ducked my head and hunched over the controls as the shells sprayed all around the aircraft. We dropped our bombs and continued on through. Ahead we could see Lancasters going down all over the place. In the fields were aircraft that had blown up — some burning and some crash landing. We closed our bomb bays, turned to starboard and headed for home.

At the end of their tour, MacLean and his entire crew were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Bomber pilot Angus MacLean lasted only six missions before his four-engine Halifax was shot down over occupied Holland. With the aid of the Dutch, Belgian and French Underground, he made a perilous escape through Spain. MacLean’s sense of obligation for his deliverance would help push him into the public service. He would spend twenty-five years as a federal MP and two-and-a-half more as the premier of Prince Edward Island.

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108 Granatstein and Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, p. 118. To be exact, the proportion was one in every 5.5.


110 The provincial war memorial at Beach Grove Memorial Park lists the names of 124 air crew. As usual, it is difficult to be precise in defining “Island” casualties.


Unlike the Great War, the Second World War was a tangible presence on Prince Edward Island. The sky was full of planes, the streets were full of off-duty servicemen, and the days were full of regulations and restrictions. There was a certain reassurance in such visible evidence of the Allied war effort. It was the palpable nearness of the enemy that made Islanders uneasy. In December 1941, Canadian military authorities had identified Prince Edward Island as one of the areas in the country most at risk of German attack.\textsuperscript{113}

As in the Great War, but with more reason this time, there was much talk on Prince Edward Island of saboteurs and espionage, especially in the black months after the fall of France. Germany’s arm had grown long, and it was not hard to imagine Prince Edward Island falling within its reach. In 1940, worried that German spies might use it as a code, Ottawa went so far as to ban the use of Gaelic in telegraph and wireless communications. It was left for Gaelic-speaking Maritimers to point out that their language had been around in the British Isles for a lot longer than English.\textsuperscript{114}

The number of Gaelic-speaking German spies was presumably low, but that did not mean that Islanders discounted the threat that saboteurs posed. The Island committee of the National Service Council was insistent that the military provide security around sites of “national importance,” such as the ferry terminals and, less convincingly, gasoline storage tanks.\textsuperscript{115} A cadre of reservists were organized for such purposes. Although Charlottetonians kept their eye on a suspiciously Teutonic salesman with an Island wife, and while H. T. Holman’s diary for November 1942 recorded a rumour that a rubber dinghy and four spies had been apprehended somewhere “up East,” in the end, the only sabotage ever detected on Prince Edward Island was sniffed out by Tillie the Toiler in the funny pages.


\textsuperscript{115}See, for example, “Our Island Troops,” Charlottetown Patriot, 15 September 1939, p. 4; and “Sub Military District Urged for this Province,” Charlottetown Patriot, 26 July 1940, p. 8.
of the *The Guardian*.

In the eyes of officialdom, there was nothing funny about the possibility of German air attacks, which were deemed possible if not probable. The first precautionary blackout was tried on Prince Edward Island on 19 January 1942. Islanders did not feel much at risk from enemy bombers. Nevertheless, the novelty appealed to them, and they obediently went along with the drill, masking their windows and pulling over their cars.\textsuperscript{116} The same cautious good humour may have inspired Hyndman and Company’s proffered insurance coverage against damage from war hazards, including shelling, bombing, and sabotage.\textsuperscript{117}

Familiarity soon bred contempt. After one practice blackout in Summerside in November 1942, H. T. Holman complained, “Alarms not heard by many and others were very slow about turning out lights.”\textsuperscript{118} The *Patriot* played the stern parent, doctoring a photograph of Queen Street to illustrate what might happen in the event of a German bombing raid, and noting that Charlottetown would have the shortest warning of any Canadian city except Halifax in the case of an enemy attack.\textsuperscript{119} To guard against the possible, an Air Raid Detection post was set up in the summer of 1942 on the roof of Charlottetown’s tallest building, the Charlottetown Hotel. Among the volunteers that helped staff it was Preston Beck.

As it turned out, it was not enemy airplanes that Beck had to worry about. One dark night in February 1943, four twin-engine bombers flying out of Halifax encountered a deadly freezing rain storm. They floundered on blindly through the blackness, instruments useless, losing altitude and lift as ice built up on their wings. Two of the planes made forced landings at the Charlottetown airfield. A third turned back and was lost near Dartmouth. Anticipating a crash landing, the fourth jettisoned


\textsuperscript{117}“Lloyd’s Quote Bomb Insurance in the Maritimes,” *Charlottetown Guardian*, 7 September 1939. As representatives of Lloyd’s of London, Hyndman’s quoted 75 cents per $100.

\textsuperscript{118}Diary of H. T. Holman, 17 November 1942, PARO 4420.

\textsuperscript{119}*Charlottetown Patriot*, “Can It Happen Here?” (ad for Victory Bonds), 19 October 1942; “This City Would Have Short Warning in the Event of Air Attack,” 20 December 1941, p. 4.
its bomb load over what it presumed was the Northumberland Strait. Instead, four depth charges and eight practice bombs rained down onto a snowy field behind the house on Mt. Edward Road where Preston Beck and his wife Jessie had just gone to bed. At first, Jessie Beck thought the brilliant flash outside was lightning. Then the shock wave from the explosions struck her in the face, and windows all over the house shattered.

Miraculously, no one was hurt. Even the air crew survived. They ended up bailing out over the Northumberland Strait, and were picked up by the car ferry *Prince Edward Island* after spending five days on an ice floe. Their plane crashed-landed itself near Shediac, New Brunswick.

The bombing of Charlottetown was a local sensation, but military authorities moved quickly to exert damage control, and only a heavily censored account made it into the local papers. The Air Force paid the Becks $150 for their shattered windows and broken plaster, but nothing for their shattered nerves.¹²⁰ “There are no bomb craters in our fields YET!” a Department of Labour ad in *The Guardian* proclaimed that summer. As usual, the government was wrong.

Against the paradoxical backdrop of wartime prosperity and war-effort austerity, two ambitious new businesses struggled to be born in the early 1940s, one in the air, the other in the water.

In the decade after its establishment in the late 1920s, Islanders had come to depend on their airmail service, especially in wintertime. By 1939, the Dominion airmail contract on the Moncton-Summerside-Charlottetown run was held by Canadian Airways Ltd. Its flights also took passengers, but they were far less common. One woman desperate to reach Summerside for her mother’s funeral was devastated when the CAL pilot judged the airfield there too snowy for a safe landing. Getting off in Charlottetown would mean missing the funeral. She pleaded her case with him. “He asked

would I be willing to jump ten or twelve feet,” she recalled years later. “He didn’t dare let the pontoons touch as he might not be able to get in the air again. I said I’d try, so they threw my suitcase out and he said: ‘Now jump, and good luck.’ I prayed to the Lord and made a safe landing. The snow was soft.”

The incident illustrates the seat-of-the-pants nature of early aviation. It also reveals something about the pilot, Carl Burke of Charlottetown. Not satisfied with its tiny profits from the route, Canadian Airways Ltd. dropped Charlottetown from its schedule in 1940. Already sensitive about its precarious links to the outside world, the Island government pressured Ottawa, which, in turn, pressured its aviation protégée, Trans Canada Airlines, to pick up the route in the short-term. In the established companies’ reluctance, Burke saw the glimmer of opportunity. Patently, he made the rounds of government officials, potential investors, and prospective pilots, putting together his own airline. “This is just a warning for you Bub not to come down here expecting too much at first,” he wrote a prospective employee. “[But] I think you will believe me when I say that if this thing is a success I will see that you are treated right.”

On 7 December 1941 — while Japan was attacking the American fleet at Pearl Harbour — Maritime Central Airways made its maiden flight. Burke was a daring pilot and a tough businessman. Within five years, he would make Charlottetown-based MCA the biggest airline in the Maritimes. Within fifteen, it was the third-largest in the country. In the process, Burke’s ambition would turn the Island’s tenuous air trail to the outside world into a highway across the skies.

One of the last and greatest obstacles to the establishment of Maritime Central Airways had been the quest for a suitable plane, when pretty much anything that could get airborne had already been snapped up for the war effort. Northumberland Ferries Ltd. encountered similar problems in its heroic efforts to launch the new Wood Islands-Caribou ferry crossing. By the end of 1939, the docking

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122Carl Burke to Harry Barrett, 16 September 1941, PARO 3341/32.

facilities for the Island’s second ferry service had been completed at an estimated cost of $500,000. They were paid for by the federal government, which also promised to provide $28,000 in annual operating subsidies. But before Northumberland Ferries’ first vessel, the Charles A. Dunning, could begin service, it was commandeered by the Royal Canadian Navy. With some difficulty, another vessel, the Sankaty, was dredged up, but while she was being refitted in a Halifax dry dock in 1940, she, too, was requisitioned.

Finally, after some intensive lobbying in Ottawa, Northumberland Ferries was able to purchase an old Great Lakes ferry, the Erie Island. Renamed the Prince Nova, it inaugurated the Island’s second car ferry service at 11 a.m. on 28 June 1941. Its tiny size — it carried twenty cars and two trucks — practically ensured the inauguration of another Island tradition, long waits at the boat.

Despite all the delays and frustrations, the new ferry service carried 25,303 people and 7,256 vehicles during its first season of operation, and more or less broke even. It was soon obvious, though, that only government money could make the crossing financially viable. In 1942, Northumberland Ferries ran a $7,000 deficit, and Liberal senators set up a cry for an increase in its federal subsidy.

The opening of the Wood Islands ferry service could not have come at a better time. Only a week


126 Charlottetown Patriot, 30 June 1941, p. 4.

127 The following year, the passenger total climbed to 34,933, before falling to 30,457 the following year. See Charlottetown Guardian, 27 January 1944, p. 8.

128 Senator MacIntyre on Car Ferry,” Charlottetown Guardian, 20 April 1943.
before, on the night of 18 June 1941, the pride of the Island’s ferry fleet, the SS Charlottetown, struck an underwater obstacle on the South Shore of Nova Scotia en route to Saint John for her annual refit. Thirty-six hours later, while a flotilla of little fishing boats was trying to tow her to port, she sank in deep water. The loss of its principal link to the Mainland shook the province: “This is a crisis in our transportation history,” announced The Guardian. The Island’s government, its press, and just about every public lobby clamoured for the Charlottetown’s immediate replacement, but the military effort came first for federal authorities. That old warhorse, the Prince Edward Island, was called back from retirement, and, for the rest of the war, the Borden-Cape Tormentine run had to make do with her and a sooty old tub named the Scotia I. Islanders were less than impressed, and, as always, dire straits inspired a revival of tunnel agitation. But if construction of a new ferry was deemed unfeasible in wartime, the idea of a tunnel was a non-starter. While farmers fumed, potato cargoes piled up each fall at the bottleneck created by the makeshift ferry service, and Island newspapers followed closely as a new ferry navigated from budget estimate to drawing board toward shipyard.

Meanwhile, the Court of Inquiry into the wreck of the Charlottetown made a scapegoat of the vessel’s distinguished skipper, Captain John L. Read, effectively ending his career. For historians, the question of whether or not Read’s handling of his vessel in shoal-infested waters was “not proper and seamanlike,” is less significant than the unpublicized reason for his having charted such a risky course. In an indirect way, the Charlottetown had been a casualty of war.

In the beginning, people may have thought that the only German submarine likely to reach Prince Edward Island was U-Boat 29, the movie showing at the Prince Edward in December 1939. (“Filmed while headlines and radios tell only half the story!”) In February 1940, the Patriot quoted Commander


Edward Ellsberg of the USN, “a world authority on submarines” in pooh-poohing the notion that German subs might try to operate so far from their bases. But, while Ellsberg scoffed, Maritime mariners shared stories of U-boat sightings. Indeed, one of the wild rumours that circulated in the wake of the Charlottetown’s wreck was that she had been torpedomed. She was not, but it seems likely that Read had been travelling fast and as close to shore as he dared as a precaution against submarine attack.

Read’s fears were not unfounded. In June 1941, German U-boats were already lurking off the coast of Newfoundland and along the eastern seaboard. The spring of 1942 brought them right into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. On 11 September 1942, the Flower-class corvette HMCS Charlottetown and HMCS Clayoquot were returning to base after escorting a convoy from Sydney to the Saguenay River in the upper reaches of the St. Lawrence. Neither ship had been following the prescribed zigzag course as they made their way through the fog along the north shore of the Gaspé. The early morning off Cap Chat was calm and peaceful. It was also populated by U-517, which had the Charlottetown square in its torpedo sights. Four minutes later, the corvette was gone, her descent to the bottom marked by the detonation of her depth charges. Despite the vessel’s Island name, there were only two Islanders aboard her. Neither was among the eight crew members who were lost along with their commander, Lt. Cmdr. J. W. Bonner.132

When news of the corvette’s loss broke in Charlottetown, The Guardian was besieged by anxious inquiries.133 Here was something far more real than theoretical air attacks or the faint scent
of sabotage. The Great War had been fought out thousands of miles from Prince Edward Island. Now it seemed that the Second World War was happening right on the province’s doorstep. And, really, it was. By the end of 1942, two escorts, a troopship, and seventeen merchantman had been lost in the “Battle of the St. Lawrence.” On 13 October, U-69 ambushed the SS Caribou on her regular ferry crossing between Cape Breton and Newfoundland. One hundred and thirty-seven people, including several Islanders, lost their lives when she went down.

Sailing home in convoy from a refit in Quebec City, the SS Prince Edward Island almost suffered the same fate. Her crew watched in horror as two torpedoes flashed across the vessel’s wake and struck a Greek freighter beside them. Showing an uncommon burst of speed, the ferry broke out of position on the outer edge of the formation and peeled off down the western funnel of the Northumberland Strait. No one knew her whereabouts until she arrived in Borden the next day. Rumor, translated into local lore, soon had the near-miss occurring on the crossing between Borden and Tormentine.134

The cat and mouse game continued. For civilians on Prince Edward Island, the sea war was part myth and part reality, and it was sometimes hard to tell where one left off and the other began. The lighthouse keeper at North Cape used to tell of hearing U-boats at night when they surfaced nearby to recharge their electric batteries under cover of darkness. As German records demonstrate, he was not imagining things. In late April 1943, U-262 worked its way into the Cabot Strait beneath a heavy ice field. By the morning of 2 May, she had slipped onto the eastern edge of the North Cape Reef in about thirty metres of water. For the next several days she hovered off North Cape, waiting to rendezvous with a planned breakout of German naval officers from the prisoner of war camp near Fredericton. At times, the submarine lurked so close to shore that the sweep of the lighthouse illuminated her upper deck. After four tense days, U-262 abandoned its perilous vigil and stood out to sea. It left behind two curious footnotes.

On 7 May 1943, the day after U-262 left West Prince, Clarence Morrissey wrote in his diary, talked with numerous citizens. And it does just that.”

“German submarine sunk by corvette off Norway Point.” Yet U-262 made no record of any attack then, or on 16 May when an Anson training aircraft out of Charlottetown dropped two depth charges on what the pilot described as a stationary submarine at periscope depth.\(^{135}\) But a handful of Islanders along the Western Shore near North Cape still swear that they witnessed a daylight duel between a Canadian warship and a submarine.\(^{136}\) Whatever the explanation, the incident was a dark reminder to Islanders that this war was all around them.

Of course, the drama in the Gulf of St. Lawrence was not where most Island sailors were playing out their sea-going roles. Nor were they neatly matched up with Island-named ships. The 1,400 Islanders in the Royal Canadian Navy were scattered randomly across the seas aboard corvettes that rolled like barrels in rough weather, on frigates and destroyers and minesweepers and a whole range of other vessels.\(^{137}\) The greatest concentration of Island sailors was in convoy duty on the North Atlantic run, where they battled the elements as much as the German U-boats that were intent on severing the supply line between North America and her overseas Allies. The heavy seas, freezing spray, and lurking menace rapidly turned young men into old salts. They also took lives.

There were three Islanders on the HMCS St. Croix when her Escort Group EG9 was diverted

\(^{135}\) Hadley, *U-Boats Against Canada*, pp. 170-175.

\(^{136}\) In 1989, a skin diver claimed to have seen a deck gun, periscopes, and a 20-mm anti-aircraft gun on an unidentified wreck near the site of the incident. Further dives in the area in 1995 turned up nothing. Guesses as to what locals witnessed range from dummy bombing runs on Dutch or British subs based in Pictou, location shooting for the 1940s film *49th Parallel*, or the sinking of a Vichy French, Dutch, or even Russian submarine. The most complete discussion is a feature article by Mary MacKay in the *Guardian-Patriot Weekend*, 13 May 1995, p. 1C. See also, “Gulf Fails to Give Up Sub Answer,” *Guardian*, 26 June 1995, 3A.

from the Bay of Biscay to the North Atlantic to assist two convoys engaged in a running battle with a German wolf pack. It isn’t known whether any of them were among the eighty-four crewmen plucked from the water when the St. Croix and the HMS Polyanthus were torpedoed by U-305 on the night of 19–20 September 1943, for two days later, their rescue ship, HMS Itchen was torpedoed as well. Only three men, one from each of the three vessels, survived that sinking.138

Sterling Squarebriggs of Charlottetown was aboard one of the vessels sent out to the scene of the Itchen’s sinking. Years later, he was still haunted by what he saw: “We arrived out there and it was a scene of devastation. There were bodies all over the place and life boats with bodies in them. . . . It was a terrible sight.” The sixteen-year-old Squarebriggs was set to work sewing the bodies into canvas shrouds.139

The U-boats’ real targets were the merchantmen in the convoys that the RCN seamen were dying to protect. Even during the war, the men who crewed them struggled for their share of recognition. As one anonymous versifier wrote in “He’s Just Another Merchant Navy Man”:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{You have shuddered in disgust as he grovelled in the dust,} \\
&\text{You have shuddered when you’ve seen him on the spree.} \\
&\text{But you haven’t seen the rig of his gloomy blackout ship,} \\
&\text{Ploughing furrows in a mine-infested sea.} \!^{140}
\end{align*}
\]

Forty-five members of the RCN and fifteen merchant mariners from Prince Edward Island lost their lives during the war.141

138Charlottetown Guardian, 2 October 1943, p.1, and 23 October 1943, p. 3. The Itchen had also picked up three survivors from the British corvette HMS Polyanthus. One crewman from each of the three vessels was rescued.

139Sterling Squarebriggs, interview with Earle Kennedy, 1982.. Quoted courtesy of Mr. Kennedy.

140Coade, Messdeck News.

141Their names are inscribed on a plinth in Beach Grove Memorial Forest in Charlottetown. The official record of RCN enlistees giving Prince Edward Island addresses lists thirty-nine killed.
Amid the travails of war there was a change in government on Prince Edward Island, though not in the usual sense. By the spring of 1943, it was an open secret that Thane Campbell, premier since 1936, would soon be trading politics for a judicial appointment. The certainty was such that Campbell’s caucus selected a premier-in-waiting well before the incumbent announced his resignation! Ignoring Campbell’s own choice, the Liberal members elected a frustrated backbencher, J. Walter Jones, by just one vote, over another Liberal outsider, Horace Wright. “The next week,” writes Liberal party historian Wayne MacKinnon, “after having been ignored for eight years, Jones was sworn into the cabinet. Campbell felt if Jones was going to be premier, he should at least have some experience of government.” A few weeks later, Ottawa named Campbell chief justice of the Prince Edward Island Supreme Court, and Jones assumed the Liberal leadership.

Jones was one of the most arresting figures ever to occupy the Premier’s Office. Although he loved to say that he was “just an old farmer,” he was anything but. In his youth, he had been a championship athlete and served as first principal of the Macdonald Consolidated School at Mount Herbert. He had studied and taught agriculture in the United States and directed an experimental farm there before returning to his native province to become a “scientific” farmer. In 1913, he authored the pioneer fur-farming treatise in Canada, and in 1921 he had the temerity to run federally for the Progressive Party. By the 1930s he had built up one of the finest dairy herds in the Dominion, and in 1935, he was awarded the King’s Jubilee Medal for his cattle-breeding accomplishments. Now, at a time when most men would be winding down their careers, he became premier.

Jones was new and untried, and his unrepentant apostasy with the Progressives was resented among Liberal hard-liners. His brusque manner further exposed the internal dissensions within the...
provincial Liberal party, and they carried over into the provincial election campaign that summer. Inspired mainly by opposition to the upstart Jones, there were four Independent Liberal candidates.

The 1943 provincial election also saw the re-emergence of third-party politics in Prince Edward Island. In the past, third parties on the Island had catered to dissident farmers. That remained true, but the newest incarnation also represented a side-step to the left. This was the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation or CCF. It had recently formed the official opposition in Ontario, was on the eve of election in Saskatchewan, and had just topped a national poll as the most popular party in the Dominion. War and Depression had inured Islanders to an expanded role for government, but were they ready for socialism? The Sydney Post Record thought not. “There may be some CCF candidates entered in Prince Edward Island’s general election,” it reported. “Another evidence that almost anything can happen in an election. Shintoism is no more exotic to a Moslem than Socialism to the average Island farmer.”

As it turned out, neither the five CCF candidates nor the four Independent Liberals saved their deposits in the election on 15 September 1943. Led, still, by W. J. P. MacMillan, the Conservatives made their best showing since winning in 1931. They elected ten members, and a swing of just one hundred votes, spread judiciously over key ridings, would have given them sixteen seats and the government. It would be four elections before they would again do as well. The big winner was J. Walter Jones, the self-styled “Farmer Premier,” whose victory consolidated his leadership and silenced most of his critics. The Jones era now began.

One of the new administration’s first tasks was to prepare for peace. Although no one could predict when the war would end, the tide of battle had turned decisively during 1943. In the same way that it was chiefly responsible for directing the war effort, Ottawa took the lead in planning for demobilization. Anxious to mitigate the economic and personal dislocation that had followed the Great War, the federal government was setting up elaborate programs to help both veterans and the

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146*“Jones’ Government Returned in General Election,”* and *“Yesterday’s Election,” Guardian*, 16 September 1943, pp. 1, 4.
economy adjust to peacetime conditions. Money was one tool, and the average payout for demobilized veterans ended up at $488. In addition, veterans would receive financial assistance to buy farms, acquire vocational training, or go to college. At the same time, Ottawa prepared to prop up the postwar economy with government spending if necessary. It was also busy constructing the social safety net. Old age pensions were still restricted to the neediest of seniors and a plan for national health would be vetoed by the provinces, but the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1940 was now generally accepted, and Family Allowances had been approved in 1944.

Prince Edward Island had its own modest Advisory Reconstruction Committee, and, in the summer of 1944, it engaged Dr. J. A. Lattimer, an economist from Dalhousie University, to conduct an economic survey of the province. His findings were hardly surprising: the Island lacked industries, was handicapped by high transportation costs, and needed to stabilize its farming and fishing sectors. Actually, it was Lattimer who was the precedent, not his report. He was the first in what would become a long line of professional consultants engaged to advise Islanders on the need to plan their future.

11

“By the time you receive this, I’ll have gone on my last flight and arrived, at last, at the end of the trail.” So began Joe Ready’s farewell letter to his brother and two sisters. The RAF pilot from Kensington had hoped it would never have to be sent, but he knew the risks. The letter was dated 18 April 1941, the day he was killed flying a Blenheim bomber on an anti-submarine patrol over the North Sea:

I realize I’ve been, more or less of a great worry to you most of the time between slackness in study and sickness and I want to thank you all, for being so patient with all my faults and drawbacks during our time together. I realize also that it was a great sacrifice for you to finance my way through college and shoulder my medical bills and

[147]Executive Council Minutes, 21 September 1944.
I’ve always intended and hoped to be able at some time to pay you back but it was just not to be so.\textsuperscript{148}

Few Island war casualties had Ready’s chance for one last word. George Howard of Margate was one of eight Islanders aboard the Canadian destroyer \textit{Athabaskan} when it was torpedoed in a pre-dawn action off the coast of France on 29 April 1944. Forty-four officers and men were rescued; 83 were taken prisoner; 129 were lost, including 4 Islanders. Howard clung to the side of an overcrowded life raft with his friend John Agnew of West Royalty. The water was frigid: “Johnnie Agnew didn’t have as many clothes as I had and he didn’t last twenty minutes. I remember him looking over to me and saying, ‘I can’t do this any longer,’ and he turned over.” Howard held on long enough to be taken prisoner.\textsuperscript{149}

Here at the sharp end was the price that war exacted for the prosperity at home; for the comedy, adventure, and camaraderie of military life; for the sense of being part of something important. For as Islanders learned, at the heart of war is death.

In the summer of 1944, ex-PEI Highlander Bill Reid was commanding the Perth Regiment on the Italian front. A German mortar attack caught him and a group of his officers on a recce at a dusty crossroads:

When the mortars started falling, myself or one of the fellows said “hit the dust,” and I dove for the ditch on the north side of the road. The other four boys dove for the ditch on the south side of the road. . . . After the gravel cleared and the smoke died down I got up on my feet — shook myself off. One of the biggest surprises I had was, there wasn’t a sign of those other boys anywhere — not a button, no sign of any cloth or uniform. . . . That was the first time in the war I said to myself, “There but for the grace of God go I.”\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148}A framed copy of the letter hangs on the wall of Ready’s sister, Mrs. Kathleen McIvor, now of Summerside. It is excerpted here with her kind permission.

\textsuperscript{149}Quoted in \textit{Guardian}, 29 April 1994, p. 4.

Death was not always so anonymous. Everett Morrissey of Sea Cow Pond was with an RCAF ground crew just outside Brussels on New Year’s Day, 1945, when a Luftwaffe raid destroyed their air field: “Four of my friends were killed right up against me,” he recalled a half-century later. “I saw the German pilot that hit me and I can still see him as plainly as ever and I will never forget that face. . . .” 151 With an eye to its propaganda value, The Guardian published a letter from an unidentified Georgetown soldier on the Italian front: “I got me a sniper about four days ago. But the dirty dog got four of my pals first, killed one and wounded the others. He came out with his hands up, crying like a baby. That is what they all do when they’re cornered. Hitler’s supermen.” 152

While the Second World War was arguably decided by the vast battles on the Eastern Front, the Allied invasion of Normandy was the pivot on which Prince Edward Island’s experience of the war turned. The Guardian editorial on the morning after D-Day was sobering. “Our people at home,” it warned, “must be prepared for news of heavy casualties.” 153 They weren’t long in coming. The North Novas, with their heavy complement of Islanders, splashed ashore at Juno Beach on the morning of D-Day. “You were so scared,” remembered Ernie Gorveatt, “you didn’t have any feelings — you just kept going.” 154 A day later, having outstripped their artillery protection, the regiment was overrun and nearly wiped out by a counterattack from the crack 22nd Panzer Division. Among those killed, wounded, or taken prisoner were a number of Islanders.

With Island ground troops now engaged on two fronts, and with the air and sea wars still raging, the casualty lists in the newspapers lengthened weekly. By September 1944, victory was in sight, but it could not come quickly enough. Each day on the Home Front, Islanders studied the newspapers, listened to the war news on the radio, and searched the mail for letters from overseas. Always, they lived in fear of a telegram. Read over the phone or painfully delivered to the door, the

151 Kelly Ashley, “He’d Do It All Over Again,” West Prince Graphic, 6 November 1991.

152 “Georgetown Soldier Writes from Italy,” Charlottetown Guardian, 4 July 1944, p. 5. It is curious, and a little suspicious, that the Guardian failed to identify the letter-writer.


telegram was what brought official news of their loved ones, and it was almost always bad. Killed in action. Wounded. Taken prisoner. Reported missing. The official tally of military deaths for Prince Edward Island would be 461 men, the majority of them during the last year of the war. An unofficial list compiled in the 1990s, which included the 15 men lost with the Merchant Marine, named 563 war dead. Eventually, they will be little more than names, but for a generation of Islanders, each death represents a comrade, a son, a brother, a father, a friend. For these people, the Second World War still occupies the realm of memory, not history.

The most noticeable signs that the war was winding down were at home. At the end of January 1945, Beach Grove Army Training Centre closed its doors. Much to the dismay of locals, No. 10 Bombing and Gunnery School at Mount Pleasant shut down in June 1945. The secret radar base at Tignish was another casualty of peace. Soon it was just another patch of woods along the Greenmount Road. Number 2 Air Navigation School at Charlottetown shut down in July, and the fine airfield there reverted to civilian control once more. Of the five air force installations, only the one at St. Eleanor’s survived the war, eventually becoming CFB Summerside. It would be a mainstay of the local economy for another half-century.

The lucrative shower of war contracts went the way of the military presence. In December 1944, Bruce Stewart & Co. laid off nearly half of its wartime work crew while it fished for more naval repair contracts. Whatever “capacity-building” the war may have accomplished for the firm went up in smoke in 1946 when fire gutted the foundry. Only in the primary industries did the economic boom continue. In the shattered wreckage of postwar Europe, massive relief programs would ensure a plentiful demand for Island fish and farm goods well beyond any armistice.

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The war dragged on into April 1945 and beyond, with the last known Island fatality coming on 2 May. The German surrender five days later found much of the Canadian Army in Holland. The day after peace was declared, Brigitte Schuyt and her sister waited with an expectant crowd in Leidshendam for the Canadians to roll into their town:

Someone began to sing. Spontaneously, everyone joined in. We sang all of the patriotic songs which had been forbidden all those years. Forgotten were all the Germans and their detestable rules, the long agonizing years of fear and misery. Now spring was here and peace and freedom . . .

Then we heard it. Over the ringing of jubilant voices came the faint roar of motorcycles. “Here they come,” thundered the crowd. The intersection was jam-packed with people, others sat on gateposts or hung out of the windows, waving flags, cheering and singing. We jumped up and down, hardly able to wait any longer. “Hooray!” we shouted. Here were the Canadians we’d been waiting for.

. . . We were hysterical with joy. The military police tried to move the crowds, but people kept pushing, cheering, almost slowing the army to a halt.158

Canada’s role in liberating their country made a deep impact on the people of Holland, and the Dominion became a popular destination for Dutch emigrants in the postwar period. Brigitte Schuyt was among the several hundred that would make their way to Prince Edward Island.159

Back on Prince Edward Island, the VE-Day celebrations were tempered by tragedy. As the victory parade in Charlottetown dispersed, a truck bearing an effigy of Hitler eased past the crowds still lining Kent Street. Suddenly, one of the children clinging to the side of the vehicle lost his grip,


159See Brigitte VanVliet, We Came, We Saw, We Stayed: The Story of the Dutch in Prince Edward Island (Summerside: Dutch Canadian Association of Prince Edward Island, 1990). Between 1941 and 1969, the number of Islanders of Dutch descent climbed from 494 to 1,288.
fell beneath its wheels, and was crushed. The war that had begun with the drowning of a woman had ended with the death of a child.

Officially, of course, war continued after VE-Day. It would take the terrifying spectacle of two atomic bombs in early August to convince Japan to surrender. But Europe had always been the imaginative focus of the war for Prince Edward Island, the front where most of its combatants had fought. In announcing the ninth Victory Loan campaign in the summer of 1945, The Guardian had to remind Islanders that there was still a war to be won. When it came, victory in the Pacific was an anticlimax, dropped into the middle of a record-breaking Old Home Week.

While some Island servicemen were on their way to the Far East when VJ-Day arrived, a far greater number of them were on their way back home. The first “mass” arrival, twenty-seven veterans and nursing sisters, received a tumultuous welcome at the Charlottetown Railway Station on the evening of 17 June 1945. That night there was another new movie at the Capitol Theatre in Summerside. It was called Gangway for Tomorrow.

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Part Three
The Break

Island Clay

This old house once stood proud upon a hill
Of pine and cedar from the land
Cut by my father’s hand
And hauled up from the mill.
Now she stares at her life spread on the lawn
At strangers picking through her bones.
They take them for their own
And haul them far away.

The auctioneer he sings his songs and the people pay
Old voices echo from this house now dark and grey
And cold as Island clay.

This old farm, 80 acres of life.
Sweat and iron-reddened soil
Paid little for my toil
But saw us through all right
Till the company came
And bought land up all around.
Soon the market prices fell.
I took another loan
And ploughed it underground.

But tomorrow morning they will come and have their way
Though their hands touch not the soil and never will pay
The price of Island clay.

These old hands turned the sod and tossed the seed.
These hands worked hard and they were strong
But they couldn’t hold a printed paper deed.

From the moment that they signed this land away
These old hands are getting colder every day
As cold as Island clay.
Lennie Gallant

1From the album Breakwater, 1988, Revenant Records, used by permission.
Chapter Seven
When the Wind Blows . . .

They talk about Texas, Kentucky, and Maine.
But there’s a little Island, I long there to be.
Prince Edward Island is heaven to me.

From Hal Lone Pine, “Prince Edward Island Is Heaven to Me”

The new century had begun on Prince Edward Island with the ancient portent of a meteor. The heavens provided a far different herald for the postwar era. On Dominion Day in 1947, four highly respectable Summerside residents out for a drive on the paved highway in North Bedeque saw “a bright luminous object travelling at great height in the air.” Formless and eerily silent, it “glittered and gleamed in the bright sunlight” for thirty seconds before disappearing from view at a speed far greater than any airplane. It was like nothing the four motorists had ever seen before. Over the next week, there was a rash of such sightings in various places around the province. One Margate farmer even had the RCMP out combing a patch of nearby woods where he was sure one of the strange objects had swooped to earth.

Prince Edward Island was on the leading edge of a fantastical new phenomenon, UFOs — so new, in fact, that the term had yet to be coined. The first recorded UFO sightings, in Mount Rainier, Washington, were barely a week old in July when Islanders began seeing unaccountable things in their skies. It is hard to imagine that such an incident could have happened on Prince Edward Island even a decade earlier. From falling stars to “flying saucers”: Islanders were coming face to face with “the Modern.”

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3“Four S’Side Citizens See ‘Flying Saucer,’” Guardian, 3 July 1947, p. 1. The witnesses included the superintendent of the Dominion Experimental Fox Farm and the Summerside manager of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board.
To call Prince Edward Island a pre-industrial society during the first half of the 20th century would be to ignore the degree to which the machinery of Island life had engaged with the urban-industrial complex that gave shape to the century. On the one hand, the pace of industrialization in North America is easily exaggerated; on the other, Island farmers were not peasants living in un-splendid isolation. They were not ignorant of the outside world, yet, in fundamental ways, it was irrelevant to them. They were the inheritors of a tradition-heavy rural culture that in certain respects had changed very little for hundreds of years. It was this culture, poor but self-sufficient, insular, deliberate, oral in nature, freighted with custom, pungent with meaning, that disintegrated after 1945. Some social historians, notably David Weale, refer to the process as “the Break.” Despite the term, it was not a violent new departure so much as a dramatic quickening of trends that had their roots in the wellsprings of the century. Nor was it unique. Most of rural North America experienced essentially the same process during the 20th century. The difference on Prince Edward Island was its compression into a few short decades. Behind the dam thrown up by War and Depression, a tremendous weight of change had been building. Now it burst upon the Island landscape, where it would create and destroy and, ultimately, transform.

Modernization was not some life force implanted by extraterrestials. Nor, despite some later judgements, was it a sort of demon that devoured rural virtue. Though planners fondly believed otherwise, it was not a government program either. It was a process, both material and profoundly cultural. It was partly natural and partly artificial, partly deliberate and partly dysfunctional. Its pace varied within the province and among different sectors of the economy and society. If it could be said to have a governing motive, it was sustained prosperity. If it had a label, it was “progress.” If it had a face, it was the blurred countenance of change. It would reach its climax in the tumultuous times

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4The general interpretation here follows the conceptual framework laid out by social historian David Weale in his various writings, particularly Them Times (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1992) and within his “‘No Scope for Imagination’: Another Side of Anne of Green Gables,” The Island Magazine, 20(Fall/Winter 1986).

5As Margaret Conrad observes, the modernization process was going on elsewhere in Atlantic Canada during the same period, but Prince Edward Island was singular in being so overwhelmingly rural in nature and agrarian in character. See Conrad, “The 1950s: The Decade of Development,” in Forbes and Muise, eds. The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation, pp. 382-420.
of the 1970s, and only then would its full price become apparent. But it was in the 1950s that modernization became manifest. To the extent that Islanders thought about it at all, it was welcomed. The decade was no time for nostalgia.

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It would be simpler for historians if “the Break” on Prince Edward Island could be traced back along a trail of fallen dominoes to some epochal First Cause. Unfortunately, modernization was not a linear process. But if there was no First Cause, there was one uniform catalyst.

On 26 August 1950, The Guardian published the architects’ drawing for a proposed new “Dominion Building” in downtown Charlottetown. The old Cabot Building on Queen Square, with its heavy Victorian stonework and bas-relief carving of John Cabot, was bulging at the seams with federal civil servants, and more space was clearly needed. The new edifice took shape later in the decade along a stretch of Richmond Street formerly notable for its heavy concentration of bootleggers. The six-storey structure towered over the city scape. In its monumental blandness, the closest approach Prince Edward Island would ever make to the “International Style” in architecture, the Dominion Building was a perfect expression of the expanding federal presence in the province. That expansion had tremendous implications for Prince Edward Island. For, while government neither created nor controlled change during the 1950s, government dollars fueled it. And that fuel flowed ultimately from Ottawa.

The idea of “big” government in Canada had been justified by the Great Depression and vindicated by the Second World War. Now it was sanctified in the buoyant prosperity of the first postwar decade. An emerging brain trust of federal civil servants convinced federal politicians that for the good of the country Ottawa must dominate its economic and social life. And as prosperity

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*In fact, only four of the eleven federal departments or agencies in the province were housed in the new structure.*
filled the federal government’s purse, the pull of citizens’ expectations loosened the purse strings. Canadians now expected that governments would actively manage the economy to provide them with security, and accepted that deficit spending was an economic lever, not a confession of budgetary failure. At the same time, the notion that the national government had a role to play in areas such as health and education, which had formerly fallen almost exclusively under provincial jurisdiction, rapidly gained ground.

Millions of the federal dollars came directly to Islanders. Each year after 1945, Island mothers received between $2.5 and $3 million in family allowance payments. After 1952, when the Old Age Security system was overhauled, the means test abolished, and fiscal responsibility settled solely on Ottawa, Island seniors received from $3.2 to $4.8 million per year in pensions. The Island’s unemployed began the 1950s by drawing $534,000 in benefits; in 1959, with payouts and entitlements growing more generous, they collected $2.9 million. Island farmers received millions of dollars in federal price support payments.

Among the chief beneficiaries of the postwar boom in federal spending were provincial governments such as Prince Edward Island’s, which were willing to trade powers for services and autonomy for dollars. The entrenchment of federal transfer payments completed the Copernican revolution in Islanders’ perception of their place within Canada. Having once flattered itself the centre of its universe, Prince Edward Island now accepted that it was a tiny planet orbiting tightly around the federal sun, and dependent upon it for the stuff of life. The change was not so much in the degree of Island governments’ dependence on Ottawa. In fact, the percentage of federal funds in the provincial budget was actually less in 1959, 56%, than it had been in 1900, when it stood at

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7The figures are culled from the Canada Year Book for the decade.

8The pension and UI figures are drawn from F. H. Leacy, ed. Historical Statistics of Canada (Toronto: Statistics Canada, 1983).

9See Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” pp. 299-300, 304-305. In 1953, alone, the federal government provided subsidies worth $2.5 million to the Island’s Potato Marketing Board.
64.5%.

The difference was in scale. The provincial government’s total revenues at the turn of the century were less than $300,000. In 1959–60, it took in $17.5 million, of which just under $9 million came from the government of Canada.

Getting money from Ottawa, always a criterion by which provincial administrations were judged, became more important than ever in the new era of “big government.” “Why keep the governments in line?” a Liberal campaign ad had asked during the 1951 provincial election. “Because the Jones’ Government got from Ottawa eight times more money than all previous governments since Confederation.”

The knife cut both ways. The provincial government was outraged in 1956 when federal Finance Minister Walter Harris demanded that Prince Edward Island return a $1.4 million overpayment in transfer grants. He got his money, but the episode cost the Liberals considerable support within the province. Atlantic Canadians, reflected Conservative MP Angus MacLean, felt they would probably receive more sympathetic treatment from Ottawa if they were a developing nation.

There were often strings attached to federal funds. National programs entailed national standards, and since the programs were most often cost-shared with the provinces, they placed new pressures on provincial resources. In many cases, they also served to expose just how far behind the national averages Prince Edward Island trailed. There was a considerable timelag between the establishment of the national programs and the concession by Ottawa that it might have to help some provinces to finance their share of them. That made the 1950s a difficult time for Island governments,

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10 See Statement of Revenue and Expenditure, Journal of the Legislative Assembly, 1960. The percentages refer to ordinary revenues only.

11 Admittedly, almost half of the $9 million in federal transfers was tied to provincial income tax, which since the war had been collected by the federal government in a tax rental agreement with the provinces.


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for as historian E. R. Forbes has pointed out, “No provincial government could easily deny to its citizens such services after they were conspicuously available in nearby provinces.”\footnote{E. R. Forbes, “The Atlantic Provinces, Free Trade, and the Canadian Constitution,” in Forbes, Challenging the Regional Stereotype, p. 206.} In 1900, the provincial debt was $584,000. In 1936, after five years of relief spending, it was $5.4 million. In the middle of the prosperous 1950s, despite a string of surpluses on ordinary account, the debt topped $20 million.

Fiscal urgency drove the Atlantic premiers, bureaucrats, and businessmen into an alliance of convenience, dubbed the “the Atlantic Revolution,” to press Ottawa for a new funding formula based more fully on need rather than matching grants. They were voices crying in the wilderness until wealthy Ontario volunteered at a 1956 interprovincial conference that “have” provinces should contribute toward equalization payments for “have-nots.”\footnote{Forbes, “The Atlantic Provinces, Free Trade, and the Canadian Constitution,” p. 206, notes that it was in Ontario’s interest to help Atlantic Canada acquire the means to buy the consumer goods manufactured in central Canada.} Ottawa was quick to agree (1957 was an election year), and a new phase in federal-provincial relations was born.

The first Atlantic Adjustment Grants to the region, totalling $25 million, were introduced in 1958. Prince Edward Island’s share was $2.5 million. Of course, it was not enough. The provincial debt kept rising. In the last year of the decade, it climbed another $6.75 million. In the end, provincial governments’ bigger pockets turned out to have gaping holes at the bottom, and the money ran out through them even faster than it poured in. The hard reality behind the glittering mirage of federal money was that it was never sufficient to do what politicians wanted and Islanders now expected.

Nevertheless, it did a great deal.

One day when he was a teenager, David Stewart’s mother sent him to Province House with lunch for his father, Premier J. D. Stewart. A premier’s salary in the interwar years did not allow for much
dining out. Young David found his father staring out the window of the little cabinet room upstairs. He stood beside his father and followed his gaze down along Great George Street, past Queen Square School and the steep steps of St. Dunstan’s Basilica, to the entrance of the Charlottetown Club. Two men had just emerged and were making their way unsteadily up the street toward Province House. “David,” the Premier announced, “my government is drunk!”17

Aside from its obvious reflection on the efficacy of Prohibition, the story is a telling comment on the scale of governance on Prince Edward Island during the first half of the 20th century. Although the Island’s Executive Council was an unwieldy nine members, the working cabinet was invariably tiny, with the Premier and two or three others sharing out the four or five actual ministries. The whole cabinet met as necessary, and that was not often; during the 1930s, once every three weeks sufficed when the House was not in session.18 But by the time that David Stewart himself became a minister of the Crown in 1959, both the Island cabinet and its civil service were experiencing an adolescent growth spurt.

Beginning with the creation of the Department of Health and Education in 1931, the number of paper portfolios in cabinet began to increase. But their duties were generally not onerous. The omni-competent Walter Jones was able to hold down six cabinet posts at the same time during one stretch in 1949.19 By the early 1950s, however, government was unmistakably growing. There were more departments: Health and Welfare in 1946, Industry and Natural Resources in 1949, Highways in 1955, Fisheries in 1956. There were more ministers with portfolios: eight by the end of the 1950s. And there were more civil servants: 336 in 1950, 500 by the end of the decade. Including seasonal

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18The chief positions were president of the executive council, attorney general, commissioner of public works, provincial secretary, provincial treasurer, and minister of agriculture. The description here is cribbed from MacKinnon, The Government of Prince Edward Island, pp.174-180.

employees, the number was estimated at 1,900 by 1961. Almost by accident, the Province was becoming one of the Island’s major employers.

One must not exaggerate the capacity of the postwar provincial government. Its expansion was fed by the huge increases in federal transfers. Indeed, some of its divisions functioned primarily to distribute federal grant monies. And while provincial civil servants could no longer be fired for their political sympathies, they were often hired for them, so that the level of professional expertise in their ranks was often more incidental than calculated. In many ways the provincial bureaucracy was little better than a toy replica of its federal counterpart. Still, the provincial civil service of 1960 was vastly larger and, by and large, far more sophisticated than its turn-of-the-century Island predecessor.

The expanding government became far more involved than before in the lives of its citizens. The Department of Health and Welfare, which had been hived off from Education in 1946, was a case in point. At the turn of the century, the Province had underfunded an insane asylum, doled out a few small grants to paupers, and supported a handful of blind and deaf children at special schools. By 1951, Health and Welfare was the biggest department of government with the most employees (nearly half of the provincial civil service) and the largest budget. Of course, it was arguably the most understaffed as well. The great bulk of the ministry’s funding came from federal health grants initiated in 1949, and the province’s “welfare” program consisted mainly of handing out federal pension cheques to mothers and seniors. Social work remained a private, largely denominational undertaking with a heavily moralistic tone.

In health care as in other areas, expectations continued to rise faster than resources. Communities that once were hard pressed just to find doctors now built hospitals: Montague, Souris, Alberton, O’Leary, Tyne Valley. Summerside replaced its aging hospital. In the provincial capital, both the Prince Edward Island and Charlottetown Hospitals added new wings. The health care facilities might be community initiatives, but they were hungry for government funds. To each, the

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21 See Baldwin, She Answered Every Call, pp. 252-253.
Province gave a modest operating grant each year. The monies were not nearly enough to banish the spectre of hospital bills for many families, and, by the late 1950s, the Matheson Government was negotiating with Ottawa to set up a cost-shared hospital insurance program.

The federal government much preferred compulsory health insurance plans, and it proposed that Prince Edward Island introduce a sales tax to levy its citizens’ contributions. Wary of committing taxation suicide in an election year, the Premier declined (though the sales tax came anyway, in 1960, at an initial levy of 4%). The Island, Matheson insisted, lacked the infrastructure or resources for anything except a voluntary system. That is what his government legislated in the Hospital Insurance Act in 1959. Despite the spate of federal health dollars, the Province could not afford universality. And that meant many Islanders still could not afford to get sick.

Health and Welfare reflected one postwar trend: a growing reliance on government for the provision of services. The provincial Fisheries Department represented another: the mounting expectation that government foster economic growth.

Although the British North America Act had made regulation of the fishery a federal responsibility, the province had a vested interest in trying to develop its second most important industry. The wartime recovery of the Island fishery had not banished memories of the Hungry Thirties. Casting about for ways to diversify the industry away from its overwhelming dependence on lobster, the Island government discovered draggers. It had been twenty-five years since the dragger fleets had sent the inshore fishery into a tailspin in other parts of the Maritimes, but on Prince Edward Island, they were expected to complement, not compete with, King Lobster. In 1950, the Jones

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22A. W. Matheson to J. Waldo Monteith, Minister of National Health and Welfare, Ottawa, 23 February 1959. Matheson explained that the Province preferred to “reserve the sales tax for possible future use for other purposes.” “Lack of existing organizational machinery” ruled out a second federal suggestion, the compulsory collection of premiums through payroll deductions. There simply weren’t enough Islanders on payrolls.

23But the voluntary system came close. At the end of 1960, the Hospital Services Commission estimated that 85,500 people, 82% of the population. See also, “Ottawa Gives Veto to PEI Insurance,” Evening Patriot, 3 June 1959; and “Signing Nears on Insurance,” Evening Patriot, 24 June 1959.
government established a Fisheries Development Program intended chiefly to help finance the creation of an offshore dragger fleet. In September, the first Prince Edward Island-owned dragger, the *Souris II*, was ready for launching.\(^{24}\)

By mid-decade, the Island dragger fleet consisted of twelve vessels operating out of Souris, Murray Harbour, Tignish, and Alberton. In 1955 they accounted for a fifth of the cod landed in the province, and their groundfish landings had led directly to the establishment of a filleting plant in Souris.\(^{25}\) Soon the Island had a frozen fish plant as well, and there was much talk about smart packaging and a trendy new consumer product called the “fish stick.”\(^{26}\)

As the value of its catch levelled off, the promise of the dragger fleet gradually waned. In all, twenty-four wooden draggers were built between 1950 and 1961. By 1967, only ten of them would still be operating. If depreciation was factored in, none of them had made any money.\(^{27}\)

Despite money and publicity, the Fisheries Department had been unable to lessen the industry’s overwhelming dependence on lobster. Still, there was cause for optimism. In 1956, the value of the Island fishery topped $5 million for the first time, and at decade’s end, it was closing in on $6 million, a figure that would have been inconceivable in the dark days of 1940.

At the same time, analysts were beginning to complain that the industry was too fluid. Fishing continued to be the job of last resort for many Islanders — a “crutch,” one economist called it.\(^{28}\) What later writers would praise as “occupational pluralism,” the commentators of the 1960s decried. The fishery was overpopulated, they felt, and people moved in and out of it too easily for its own good.

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\(^{24}\)“First P.E.I. Owned Dragger Now Ready for Launching,” *Guardian*, 8 September 1950, p. 5. Unlike later draggers, these were wooden vessels not appreciably bigger than a modern lobster boat.

\(^{25}\)*Guardian*, 31 December 1953.

\(^{26}\)“P.E. Island Fishery Gains Noted in 10 Month Survey,” *Guardian*, 30 December 1955, p. 3.


\(^{28}\)Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” p. 64.
Not surprisingly, fishermen remained more concerned with *their* own good. Improvident in good times, impoverished in bad, they kept fishing.

Government was being stretched in several different directions at once in postwar Prince Edward Island. All the same, it tended to fixate on rural issues. With good reason: farmers were the dominant economic and social group in the province. Moreover, Islanders *saw* themselves as a nation of farmers. At the beginning of the postwar era, they still were.

It was Walter Jones’ shrewd identification with his fellow farmers as much as his personal popularity that enabled him to command Island politics during his decade in office. “The heart of the province is in its agricultural districts,” he told the Maritime Board of Trade in 1949, “and the cities are only places where people can meet and do their business. If the farmers all go foolish like the people in the towns, good-bye Prince Edward Island.”

When the federal government repealed its long-time ban on margarine in 1948, the Jones administration promptly prohibited its sale on Prince Edward Island in order to protect the interests of Island dairy producers (of which Jones was one). When Island teachers, still the lowest paid in the country, approached him about a raise, Jones responded, “Until farmers’ incomes go up, yours won’t.”

How far was the “Farmer Premier” prepared to go to protect farm interests? The Island’s labour movement found out in 1947 during the first major labour dispute in Island history.

On 11 September 1947, the seventy members of Local 282, United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) walked off the job at the Canada Packers plant in Charlottetown as part of a

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30 The courts ruled the legislation *ultra vires*.

31 Charlottetown *Guardian*, 20 April 1949.
national strike for higher wages. It was fall market time, and, as the dispute dragged on, Island hog producers grew impatient, then slightly desperate. Government felt the pressure. On 26 September, Premier Jones offered workers a fifty-cent bonus per hog slaughtered if they would return to work at their old wages, pending a national settlement. When the UPWA rejected its offer, the Government ran roughshod over the union’s Island members. While Local 282 continued to picket outside, the Government took over the Charlottetown plant and operated it with scab labour. On 9 October, it declared the strike illegal. Even after the national strike ended, Jones refused to give the plant back to Canada Packers unless the temporary, non-union employees were given permanent jobs. Local 282’s leadership remained defiant, but, by the end of October, twenty-five members had broken with their union and gone back to work. They had struck for an additional thirty-two cents an hour; they returned for seven.32

Jones was not done with the unions. “If we get our backs up,” he had thundered in October, “we may pass a law outlawing all unions in this province.”33 And that was pretty much what he did. Muttering darkly about communist agitators from Away — it was, after all, the dawn of the Cold War — the Liberals rammed a Labour Act through the House during the 1948 session of the legislature. The new bill gave the Provincial Secretary discretionary power to license trade unions in the province, and explicitly banned any with national or international affiliations.34 No Mainland radicals were going to hold the Island’s farm economy for ransom!

Jones’ anti-union legislation made national news, but not the kind he might have wished. Those who were not amused by the garden province’s “quaint” conservatism were outraged at its denial of civil rights. A year later, under pressure from the federal government and national labour


33Quoted in MacKinnon, Life of the Party, p. 115.

34See “An Act to Amend the Trade Union Act,” The Acts of the General Assembly of Prince Edward Island, 1948, 12 Geo. VI, cap. 38. The powerful Brotherhood of Railway Employees was specifically exempted in the act. Even the pugnacious Jones didn’t want to antagonize the union that controlled the major link between the Island and the Mainland.
organizations, the Jones Government repealed the Labour Act.

Island voters had their chance to pass judgement on the Liberals’ union-bashing tactics. In December 1947, only two months after crushing the Canada Packers’ strike, Jones called a provincial election. His Liberals entered the contest with twenty of thirty seats; they emerged with twenty-four. The pro-labour CCF party fielded a record sixteen candidates. None of them saved his deposit. As Jones well knew, there were considerably more farmers than union members in the Island electorate.  

If anything, rural Islanders applauded the way their Premier had put unions in their place. More likely, their attention was focussed on his treatment of a far older and more delicate issue, an enduring symbol of the “old” Prince Edward Island. Jones had decided to prick the bubble of Prohibition.

The Island’s prohibition law had been upheld by plebiscite as recently as 1940, but the turnout for the vote was low and the temperance majority narrow. Behind the official façade, teetotalism continued to take a beating. By war’s end, the hypocrisy of Prohibition had at last outweighed its propriety. “The public well know that the whole affair is a farce,” a Mont Carmel man reminded the Premier in August 1944. “The country seems to be nearly unanimous for a change,” Jones replied. The Premier’s own sentiments might be guessed from the name that he gave one of his prize bulls: Moonshine.  

Nevertheless, the considerable force of inertia remained on the side of temperance, and the anti-liquor lobby grew more strident as it sensed government’s zeal for Prohibition dampen. For every letter from groups such as the Royal Canadian Legion demanding the legalization of drinking, there was another urging the government to hold firm. The issue was now almost as much political as

35 Wayne MacKinnon feels the Canada Packers’ episode may have contributed to the Liberals’ loss of one of the two Charlottetown seats in the Legislature. The defeated candidate became lieutenant governor a few years later.

36 Napoleon Arsenault, Mont Carmel, to Walter Jones, 22 August 1944; and Jones to Arsenault, 25 August 1944, Walter Jones Papers, PARO RG.25.33.

37 By Jones’ own account, he had given up on Prohibition in 1927. (See “Premier Jones Reviews Issues in Plebiscite,” Guardian, 26 June 1948, p. 12.)
moral. In warning the Premier to leave well enough alone, an elderly King’s County Liberal captured in one paragraph the politics of Prohibition forty-five years along. “Personally,” he wrote, “I can take a drink when in bad company and leave it alone when in good.” But he could not forget the fate of the Stewart government back in 1927: “I believe and venture to state that any government advocating [Government] Control will meet with defeat.”38 Jones had a better sense of the internal pressures that were gradually working the cork out of the bottle, and, in April 1945, he reached for his corkscrew.

When it came, Jones’ change in policy was characteristically abrupt. During the spring session of the legislature, as one of his ministers without portfolio, Horace Wright (“Preacher Wright,” one disaffected Liberal called him),39 was announcing the latest legislative patches to the Prohibition Act, his good friend the Premier unexpectedly supported an amendment that sounded suspiciously like Government Control.40 Charging “breach of faith,” Wright resigned on the spot, though he later recanted. In the end, he and two cabinet colleagues voted against the measure their colleagues had introduced, but five Opposition Tories helped give it a large, bipartisan majority.41

Like fresh eels in a frying pan, Prohibition died hard. When the Prohibition Act Amendment Act went forward to Lieutenant-Governor Bradford W. LePage, a steadfast temperance man, he

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38 C. B. Clay, Bridgetown, to Jones, 11 September 1944, Walter Jones Papers, PARO RG.25.33. For one of several pro-Prohibition letters, see W. R. Clark, North Wiltshire, to Jones, 8 July 1944. Jones was noncommittal in reply, but noted the many people who had complained to him that the Prohibition Act was being enforced too strictly.

39 Doug Bell to Thane Campbell, 17 March 1936, Thane Campbell Papers, PARO RG 28.42, Box 2, File B.

40 The “Cullen Amendment,” as it was subsequently called, actually authorized medical doctors to issue prescriptions for liquor -- the only legal way to get alcohol -- for six months at a time, instead of having to write up a prescription each time his patient required treatment. In practice, the Government regarded the provision as a “modified permit system.” (See, “Premier Jones Reviews Issues in Plebiscite,” Guardian, p. 12.)

startled almost everyone by withholding Royal Assent. “Generations to come would rise up and call him blessed,” the Temperance Federation exulted.\footnote{Guardian, 18 April 1945; quoted in MacKinnon, \textit{The Government of Prince Edward Island}, p. 167.} Undaunted, the Premier waited a month for LePage’s term to expire, then presented the act to the new vice-regal representative, Joseph Bernard! Bernard obligingly signed the bill into law in September 1945. Leaving the lawyers to sort out the constitutional mess, Jones pushed ahead with his revised “script”-granting procedure for the purchase of alcohol.\footnote{MacKinnon, \textit{Government of Prince Edward Island}, pp. 157-60.} By the time the Island Supreme Court declared the Amendment Act dead three years later, so was Prohibition.

In March 1948, during the same session that outlawed unions, Jones introduced legislation that would establish a formal government control system for liquor sales. The act had a suspending clause, pending the results of yet another province-wide plebiscite.\footnote{“New Liquor Bill Passes Committee Reading In House,” \textit{Guardian}, 24 March 1948, pp. 1, 11; “Unique Legislation,” \textit{Guardian}, 25 March 1948, p. 4; \textit{Assembly Journal}, 25 March 1948.} Voters would choose between Jones’ euphemistically named “Temperance Act” and the old, unreformed Prohibition Act. Just under half of the Island electorate voted on 29 June 1948, the highest plebiscite turnout since the very first prohibition vote back in 1893. This time “Temperance” beat “Prohibition” by a landslide, claiming 73% of the votes cast.\footnote{“Province Votes to Adopt New Temperance Act,” \textit{Guardian}, 29 June 1948, pp. 1, 15.}

The system established under the Temperance Act was hardly wide open. There would be no bars allowed, and annual permit books would ration the amount of liquor any customer could purchase each month at “the vendors.” But since there was no strict attempt made to enforce the monthly quota provision, it was easy enough for a dedicated drinker to obtain a supply of booze.\footnote{Permits were signed for and numbered to prevent patrons from using other people’s scripts, but vendors do not seem to have inquired very closely into their ownership. See \textit{The Acts of the General Assembly of Prince Edward Island}, 12 Geo. VI, cap. 37.} All that was left to die-hard temperance women were censorious vigils outside the liquor stores,
where they primly recorded the names of fellow church members who went inside. Their lists must have been long; overnight, the moral climate in the province had turned wetter.

Borrowing a page from the Conservatives’ premature platform of 1927, the Liberals had championed government control as a temperance measure: better limited access to alcohol than unchecked, illegal boozing. It was a little like boring holes in a leaky dory to let the water out. Such backwards reasoning was a necessary fiction, and it may have appealed to some consciences. Cynics pointed to the spectacular rise in government revenues from liquor sales. Administration of the Prohibition Act yielded $179,753 in 1945. By 1960, the Temperance Act was bringing in over $2 million a year. Islanders still could not drink in public, but their terrible thirst had at last been assuaged.

Walter Jones was a complex and contradictory man, but as the death of Prohibition and the Canada Packers’ strike showed, the Jones style was as subtle as a gang plough. He dominated his government — his prize dairy cows made more headlines than his cabinet ministers — and he dominated its policies. And yet, the Premier’s agrarianism seems in the end to have been more a matter of attitude than accomplishment. It is easy to mistake personality for policy, and, behind his flamboyance, Jones’ posture was essentially reactive and defensive. There were no major departures during the Jones administration because Jones evidently did not think that was government’s job. As might be expected of a man whose attitudes had been formed during the early years of the century, he put his faith in scientific farming, not government handouts. “You would not be here at all if you were good farmers,” the Farmer Premier scolded a delegation from the Federation of Agriculture who had come to his office to request what he regarded as inappropriate supports for their industry. “If you were real farmers, you could hardly afford to be away from the place.” There were many small initiatives

47MacKinnon, *Church Politics and Education in Canada*, p. 78.

48Wayne MacKinnon takes a more generous line in “The Farmer Premier.” It has to be conceded that the Island government’s chronic lack of resources was a factor as well.

during his tenure, but the truly important programs of the postwar era would blossom after, not during, the Jones era.

That era came to an end in 1953. After three election victories and ten years in office, Jones retired to the Canadian Senate. His chosen successor, confirmed by caucus, was A. W. Matheson, a canny lawyer cut in the Jones mold. Like Jones, he could be alternately charming, caustic, or enigmatic, and he hid his political intelligence behind a folksy style. Like Jones, he was a fighter, relishing the rough and tumble of political conflict. And, like Jones, he had a domineering streak, had trouble delegating, and was something of a political loner, qualities that, over time, would take their toll on his government. Matheson came by his various nicknames, “Long Alec,” “Big Alec,” “Tall Alec,” honestly. He was a huge man, six foot six, with a temper to match. During his six years in office, he would find issues to match his frame.

In the manner of centenarians, Margaret MacKay Walsh was the centre of attention when she turned 100 in 1973. She had lived most of her life in Cape Wolfe, along the Island’s western shore. Among the standard list of questions, a local reporter asked her what had been the greatest change that she had witnessed during her lifetime. Walsh was as old as the province, and had lived to see two world wars, the dawn of the nuclear age, men on the moon. She thought for a moment before answering. “The Pavement,” she said.50

Provincial transportation policy during the postwar era can be summed up in two words: road-paving and ferries. The first had much to do with the local universe of people such as Margaret Walsh. The second had to do with the Island economy’s ability to compete from the margin of North America. Both had everything to do with automobiles.

50As related to the author by John Cousins, Bloomfield, 24 October 1999.
As with other Maritime governments, the provincial Liberals’ postwar infatuation with modernity initially focussed on road construction. The war-induced hiatus in highway improvement proved short-lived. Peacetime was full of the impatient roar of car engines as Islanders increasingly took to the roads. Each year they acquired more cars and drove them more often. Between 1945 and 1959, the value of gasoline taxes collected on Prince Edward Island rose 600%, and was consistently the largest revenue item (after federal transfers) in the provincial budget. Over the same period, motor vehicle registrations more than tripled. By 1961, there were over 32,000 automobiles in the province, one for every 3.25 Islanders.

As with so many 1950s trends, a push-pull effect was at work. The number of automobiles in operation both required and reflected highway improvement. Island drivers were no longer content to leave their cars up on blocks for three seasons of the year. “Snow plowing of our principal roads now is an accepted feature of Public Highway Service,” a highways official noted in 1948. “[T]he added benefits to rural community in matters of health, religion, education and social life are incalculable. Once experienced they tend to become indispensable.” Each year thereafter, the Highways Division put more ploughs on more miles of road. While the growing fleet of snowploughs might open snow-blocked roads, only pavement could make them passable in mud season.

With its rich blend of patronage and practical benefits, the construction of all-weather roads made more political sense than ever after the Second World War, and provincial governments rifled their coffers to create transportation “infrastructure.” The new road-building era began in earnest in 1947–48, when the province spent $1.5 million dollars on highway construction, then quickly shifted into high gear. All through the 1950s, departmental crews and private contractors expanded the spiderweb of surfaced roads. By 1955, so much activity had warranted a separate Department of Highways.

Heavy-handed patronage had always characterized the Public Works Department on Prince Edward Island. It was ritually dispensed by the parties in power and righteously denounced by the parties that were out. The heavy expenditures on highway construction that began during the 1920s


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made it the choicest plum on the patronage tree, and the long Liberal hegemony after 1935 allowed the fruit to fall near Grit baskets year after year. Between 1947 and 1959, the province spent $38.2 million on highway construction, and there was big money to be made by enterprising contractors with proven ability and the right party connections.

Although the bulk of the money spent was provincial, the paving programs with the highest profiles were the ones that were cost-shared with the federal government. During the 1950s, nothing had a higher profile than the Trans-Canada Highway. The concept of a national highway from sea to sea was nearly as old as the century; in fact, when the road from Charlottetown to Borden (by way of Summerside!) was paved during the Depression, it had been financed as a Trans-Canada Highway project. The postwar version, as laid out in the Trans-Canada Highways Act of 1949, was far more grandiose. Although the official attitude on Prince Edward Island was nonchalant — Premier Jones allowed as how it would help pay for a few new highway bridges — the Public Works Department could not wait for the program to start. In 1949, it began on its own, carrying out preliminary work on the roadbed in anticipation of federal assistance.

A contract with Ottawa, based on a standard 50–50 cost-sharing formula, was finally signed in April 1950. The seven-year agreement provided for the extension of the Trans-Canada from Borden to Wood Islands, ferry to ferry. The circuitous route of the 1930s was now set aside in favour of a more direct line of road that plunged straight across the rolling hills and modest rivers of southern Prince Edward Island. The first pavement for the new Trans-Canada was laid down in 1951, but reaching national standards of highway construction was an expensive business in a province with little gravel and no adequate road base, and so, progress was slow. After much argument, the Trans-Canada was eventually routed through Charlottetown down Elm Avenue and out along Grafton

52 Jones’ public attitude may have been disingenuous. He intervened personally in selecting its route across the province, especially through his own constituency. (See MacKinnon, “The Farmer Premier,” p. 6.)

53 The following account is based largely on the annual reports of the Department of Public Works and Highways in the Journals of the Legislative Assembly.
The funding ratio for the Charlottetown section was 50% federal, 25% provincial, and 25% municipal. The last Island portion, a new highway bridge across the Hillsborough Bridge, opened on 6 August 1962, a month after the official opening of the national route.

By that time, the Island was already deep into another national highways project. In 1958, the Diefenbaker government had unveiled its “Roads to Resources” program. It was intended as a way to open up the riches of the Canadian North, but the Atlantic provinces shrewdly adapted the program to their own needs. The “resource” that the Island government planned to exploit was tourism and the whole province was defined as the destination, making just about every road eligible for federal dollars. The resulting five-year, $15 million agreement set a target of 438 miles of pavement “from one end of the province to the other.”

Road construction was one of the visible success stories of the 1950s. In 1943, less than 6% of Island roads, 206 miles, had pavement. By the end of the decade, 656 miles had been blacktopped with no end in sight. That figure still represented only a fifth of the mileage in the province, though when gravelled roads were thrown in, the percentage of “improved” roads reached the much more satisfying total of 72%. A decade later, Prince Edward Island could boast that it had more paved roads per capita than any province in Canada.

The problem with Island pavement was its life expectancy. Heavy car and truck traffic gradually pulverized it, completing the destruction already begun by soft roadbeds and hard frosts. As Island road crews discovered, asphalt was as much in need of maintenance as the “improved” dirt roads of the 1920s. As Maritime singer-songwriter Allan Rankin relates, springtime brought out the worst in the new roads.

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54 The funding ratio for the Charlottetown section was 50% federal, 25% provincial, and 25% municipal.

55 “Year of Steady Progress Seen by Premier Shaw,” Guardian, 31 December 1959, p. 3. See, also, Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” p. 60. The program was subsequently extended over a period of eight years, and consisted mainly of “loop roads” around coastal regions. See J. Philip Matheson, Minister of Highways, to Hon. Alvin Hamilton, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 15 October 1959, PARO RG 49/92-004.

56 These figures have been compiled from the Canada Year Books for the period.
. . . Rough pavement, boys, beware!
Rough pavement, rough pavement! Slow down and beware!
In spring-time the potholes occur everywhere.
Oh that black roller-coaster will kill me, I swear.
You can scramble an egg, count your change in mid-air —
On rough pavement, boys, beware.57

Already, by the late 1940s, government was spending over three quarters of a million dollars each year on “maintenance” of its transportation system. Over the next decade, the figure more than doubled. Some of that was for such things as snow clearing, but there was an endless cycle of paving, repaving, and repair, and bumpy grey roads, patched and repatched like an old farmer’s overalls, would become as much a feature of the Island landscape as the red clay fields they ran alongside.

The philosophy behind hard-surfacing was simple: to make life easier for rural Islanders. And all-weather roads clearly did that. But they also helped to undermine rural communities. The coming of the pavement completed the transportation revolution begun by the advent of the motor car. For generations, the limitations imposed by technology and topography had dictated that the necessities of rural life be located within the distance that could be covered in one day by a horse and buggy on a clay road. Most rural people worked, played, worshipped, politicked, shopped, gossiped, courted, and were educated almost entirely within the borders of that horse-drawn kingdom.

Cars and pavement changed all that. It was the Pavement that made school consolidation at last practical. It was the Pavement that ensured that farmers who wanted to increase their acreage could travel to more distant fields and get their larger crops from field to shipping point. The Pavement meant a person could live in the country, but not work there. The Pavement allowed shoppers to seek lower prices in town that the local general store could never hope to match. The Pavement mixed people from different communities more often and more easily. The Pavement broadened the playing field of romance. The Pavement brought people to dances and concerts and hockey matches and baseball games a half a county away and more.

57From “Rough Pavement,” by Allan Rankin, song property of Wild Garden Music. Used by permission.
Pavement made life larger.

Like some sort of gravitational disturbance, the Pavement gradually bent the very landscape toward its path. For the first time in millennia, rivers ceased to be a highway for people and commerce. One by one, the little wharves along the Hillsborough and the West Rivers fell into ruin. River steamers such as the Harland disappeared from the coastline; likewise, the little government ferries that had once crisscrossed so many rivers and bays. In the time it took them to putter across a river, cars and trucks could now muscle their way around. At one stroke, the busy thoroughfare that led down to the ferry wharf became a dead end road.

Already ailing because of outmigration, two of the province’s main offshore communities, Boughton and St. Peter’s Islands, were dealt a death blow by the transportation revolution. When the water ceased to be a thoroughfare, they were too hard to reach, too expensive to improve. By the early 1950s, both were deserted. On Lennox Island, the Mi’kmaq began to press for a causeway to the mainland.

In the rest of the province, the Pavement created a hierarchy of highways that gradually affected where people chose to live. In siting the new generation of bungalows that sprang up in the countryside during the 1950s and 1960s, rural Islanders were increasingly drawn to the convenience of the all-weather highways. Stripped of their inhabitants by several converging trends, some roads were no longer worth the cost of maintenance. During the orgy of paving between 1943 and 1959, nearly five hundred miles of Island road were actually abandoned.

Time itself seemed to speed up with the car engines that revved down country roads. In 1957, folklorist Sandy Ives came up from the University of Maine to West Prince to research local songmaker Larry Gorman. He set out in his car with Gorman’s nephew to visit a neighbour’s house: “We’d been driving for about half an hour, turning this way and that, until Charlie threw up his hands. ‘I know it sounds funny, Mr. Ives,’ he said, ‘because I’ve lived hereabouts all my life, but I’m completely lost. You couldn’t lose me in a horse and wagon, but going this fast I just don’t seem to recognize things at all.”

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58 Edward D. Ives, Drive Dull Care Away: Folksongs from Prince Edward Island (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1999), p. 43.
It is safe to say that most Islanders took to the world of automobiles more readily than Charlie Gorman. Still, they were stubborn about it. Although workmen had begun painting centre lines on Island asphalt in 1948, one poky West Prince driver was notorious for always driving straight down the middle of the road, blocking off both lanes. “Do you think you own the road?” a frustrated neighbour finally demanded. “No-o-o,” he answered. “Cos if I did, you wouldn’t be drivin’ on it.”

The flip side of the coming of the Pavement was the gradual eclipse of the Island’s railway. By the 1950s, the rivalry between trucks and railcars was out in the open. Within the province, more and more cargo was moving by motor vehicle. In the years to come, transfer trucks, each one freighting a load the size of a small schooner, would provide door-to-door shipment of goods that the trains simply could not match. If there was money to be made on the railway, it was in the shipment of bulk goods over long distances. But after doubling between 1938 and 1948, rail freight traffic across the Northumberland Strait yielded progressively less revenue. Even the postwar change-over from steam to diesel locomotives could not revive the railway’s fortunes in the province. It had never made money on the Island, and, in the age of automobiles, a railroad could no longer be defended as a development tool that might some day turn a profit.

Already in 1951, the warning lights were flashing. That year, CN permanently abandoned its line across the Hillsborough Bridge. The structure was no longer considered safe for rail traffic, and, in the railway’s straitened circumstances, it was not worth replacing. When CN peremptorily closed the bridge to automobiles as well in July 1955, it fell afoul of Big Alec Matheson himself. The Premier arrived on the scene armed with an injunction, a bulldozer, and a black temper. Traffic resumed.

The situation with respect to passenger service was even worse. Where train passengers were shackled to schedules and time-consuming, multi-stop “milk runs,” motorists revelled in convenience and freedom. As the decade went on, fewer and fewer Islanders travelled by rail. While railway unions demanded better wages and working conditions, and politicians squabbled with railway

59 The story was told to the author by John Cousins in Bucksport, Maine, 5 November 1999.
management over freight rates, the transportation revolution quietly eroded the old dispensation. It was a sort of surrender in 1954, when CN asked permission from the province to operate buses in lieu of mixed passenger-freight trains. By the end of the decade, it was beginning to phase out its Prince Edward Island Division.60

Economic arguments over transportation often converged at “the boat.” The ferry service was the umbilical cord that tied Island producers to their markets, and control over the crossing between Borden and Cape Tormentine, the most direct route from the Island to the rest of the continent, gave Canadian National Railways a competitive advantage over all other forms of shipping. All through the 1950s, truckers railed against inadequate service, preferential treatment for train traffic, and high ferry tolls. Special rail freight provisions for potato producers after 1954 only sharpened their sense of grievance.61

Such disputes highlighted Islanders’ continuing sensitivity about their links to the Mainland, and the physical incapacity of the operations at both Borden and Wood Islands obsessed the provincial government during the 1940s and 1950s. How seriously did Islanders take their connection to the outside world? On 11 August 1947, an estimated 20,000 Islanders, one-fifth of the population, toured the new queen of the Northumberland Strait ferry run, the MV Abegweit, during an open house in Charlottetown.

Long promised and impatiently awaited, the successor to the ill-fated Charlottetown cost the federal government $6.5 million. The Abby was functionally elegant; carried 19 railcars, 69 automobiles, and 950 passengers; and was touted as the most powerful icebreaking car ferry in the world. But the swelling volume of automobile traffic seeking passage across the Strait during peak seasons soon overtaxed her carrying capacity. The mismatch between the number of cars and the

60 Guardian, 31 December 1954; and A. W. Matheson to Jean McLean, Charlottetown, 31 July 1959, Matheson Papers, PARO RG 25.39. McLean was a CN Staff and Record Clerk

61 Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” p. 301-302. Reductions were needed; between April 1948 and March 1953, rail freight rates on potatoes shipped from the Atlantic Provinces to central Canada increased by about 90%.
capacity of car ferries contributed to a new Island tradition, as generations of motorists leapfrogged along the traffic-strewn highways that led to the terminals in a headlong, instinctive race to “catch the boat.”

The tiny ferries plying the Wood Islands-Caribou run were deficient in equal proportion to the traffic on that run. When a national railway strike closed down the CN ferries at Borden-Cape Tormentine in August 1950, the traffic lineups for the Wood Islands-Caribou service reached two-to-four miles. The situation necessitated an emergency sitting of the Island Legislature, which argued with Ottawa that a primary link so vital to the welfare of the province should not be left in the hands of a strike-prone, profit-hungry national railway, even one owned by the federal government. Ottawa did little more in the short term than table the Island complaints.

The need for timely, efficient shipment of goods prompted the Island government’s indignation over the CN strike, but, over the course of the decade, it was the general crush of all traffic, commercial and recreational, that fuelled the mounting demands for better service on both crossings. Authorities responded with more crossings; Island politicians and interest groups demanded more boats. By the time the Lord Selkirk finally joined the Northumberland Ferries fleet in May 1958, easing — slightly — the long waits on the Wood Islands run, frustrated Islanders were talking again about a fixed link.

The sleet began falling in the still of the night on 5 January 1956, and Islanders in the western half of the province awoke the next morning to a silver thaw. It was hard to call what followed a storm; there was little wind and no drifting, just a steady patter of sleet that fell and fell and fell, freezing and thickening on every surface that it touched. The hallmark sound of the “Great Ice Storm of 1956” was the shattering crash as ice-encrusted trees, poles, and power lines snapped, one after the other, under

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62 J. Walter Jones to Louis St. Laurent, PARO 2570/27.
their burden of ice. All of Friday the sleet fell, and all of Saturday. Finally, on Sunday morning, the
temperature climbed lazily toward a true thaw.

By then, western Prince Edward Island had been devastated. By then, western Prince Edward Island had been devastated. 63 Thousands of fallen trees lay in the ruins of their branches. In O’Leary, the weight of ice had collapsed the roof of the local rink. In Summerside, it toppled CJRW Radio’s transmitter tower, temporarily putting the station off the air. Phone service was badly disrupted as well: at least 3,000 telephone poles were down, 968 alone on the main highway between Summerside and Alberton. Even more seriously, the power was out all over western Prince Edward Island. Maritime Electric lost 2,800 power line poles. Its smaller rival, Summerside Electric, would end up replacing 1,200, and would have to rebuild a quarter of its lines. 64

It was April before all of Summerside’s subscribers had their power back, and June before it was restored to all parts of the province.

To be without electricity for more than a few days would be as catastrophic for the Islanders of 2000 as it was for the Québécois of 1998. But in the Prince Edward Island of 1956, it was still possible to cope. Although many urban Islanders were left without light or heat when the power lines went down — a state of emergency was declared in Summerside and the Premier announced his intention to declare Prince County a disaster area — out in the countryside, life went on. The storm could not take away what many rural people did not possess, and those who did have electricity still remembered how to do without.

The Great Ice Storm had caught Prince Edward Island in transition. “This Province still has a long way to go in rural electrification,” The Guardian remarked on the Monday after the storm, “but the havoc wrought in disruption of rural services indicates the progress we have made in this respect in recent years.” 65 The progress was not incidental. Along with road paving, “Rural Electrification”

63 The account of the storm and its aftermath are based on newspaper reports in the Charlottetown Guardian and the Summerside Journal-Pioneer. The latter had to print its storm issues in Charlottetown at the Patriot office in the absence of power in Summerside.

64 The statistics for Maritime Electric and Summerside Electric’s losses are drawn from Kenneth Bell, Getting the Lights, pp. 15 and 41, respectively.

was a cornerstone of government policy during the 1950s.

Rural electrification was in both Liberal and Tory election platforms as early as the 1943 provincial election. According to an Advisory Reconstruction Committee struck shortly afterward by the Jones government, only a fraction of the Island’s 12,200 farms were electrified. The Committee considered several schemes for helping Island farmers “get the lights,” but none of them was pursued right away. Instead, the government commissioned Dr. Thomas H. Hogg to examine the electrification situation in the province.

Hogg found two relatively large electric companies in the province, the municipally owned Summerside Electric and Charlottetown-based Maritime Electric; along with one medium-sized firm, Scales Hydro-Electric, with its plant on the Dunk River; and six other small electric companies, most of them located near towns and villages. “While the rural areas on the map supplied by these various systems appear imposing,” Hogg noted, “it is apparent that only a very partial coverage has been obtained to date . . . [A] considerable demand for rural service exists which has not yet been satisfied and the amount of power distributed to the rural areas is comparatively small.”

The only firm with sufficient resources to pursue those new markets was Maritime Electric, and, in March 1945, with the end of war and wartime shortages in sight, the company announced an electrical development program for the province. Over the next five years, it continued its policy of buying up small rural electric companies, which lacked the capital, the technology, and the interest to keep up with their customers’ demands for more power. By the end of 1953, there were only three power companies in the province: Maritime Electric, Summerside Electric, and Scales. As it

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66“Interim Report of the Prince Edward Island Advisory Reconstruction Committee,” 1945, PARO RG 34, Series 10. The Committee put the number of farms with electricity at about 2,000, but this seems high, considering that the figure in 1951 was only 2,200. There is a distinction, as well, between farms and rural customers.


68Guardian, 12 March 1945.
swallowed the small fish, Maritime Electric also upgraded its own capacity, installing ever larger steam generators, and steadily advanced its distribution lines into rural Prince Edward Island. The peak year was 1950, when the company added 82.5 miles of wire to its network. Nearly half of its customers were now rural.

“You can have the good old days!” cried a Maritime Electric ad from 1950. “My dad has hired Reddy Kilowatt. And gee whiz! You never saw anyone as happy as Mom since Reddy took over the housework. Yes Sir, give me the good NEW DAYS!”

Neither the electric companies nor farmers had the financial capacity to finish rural electrification on their own. In 1951, there were still only about 4,000 rural customers and 2,226 farms in the Island power grid. By now, the “empowerment” of farmers had become more than a business opportunity or a way for governments to score political points with rural voters. Electricity had become bound up with the widening gap between urban and rural standards of living. Without “the power,” farmers could not enjoy the benefits of modern living. And without the benefits of modern living, why would they stay on the farm? That consideration pushed the provincial government into a more activist stance. On 11 September 1953, Premier Matheson officially launched a rural electrification program. Its target was five hundred miles of new rural power line within five years. Government would finance construction of the distribution lines through private contractors. The Public Utilities Commission would oversee the expansion. The major electric companies would service the new customers.

By the end of 1954, more than one hundred miles of line had been finished, bringing, Premier Matheson boasted, “a higher standard of living to hundreds of farm homes.” One hundred and fifty-two miles and 796 farm customers were added the next year, bringing the total number of customers to 5,420, almost twice the number in 1947. The new program was an electoral trump card, and

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Matheson was not shy about playing it during the 1955 election campaign. “My God, to hear them
tell it,” cried Tory Walter Shaw afterward, “they were going to electrify everything from the barnyard
rooster to the distant hills.”

The Liberals did the crowing. They took twenty-seven seats, their best
showing since 1939.

The Great Ice Storm of 1956 was a bitter setback for the electric crews. Nevertheless, by the
end of 1958, the five-year plan had strung over 600 miles of wire at a cost to the province of $1.39
million. It was a great leap forward, even if the power lines still had a long way to go to reach every
Islander.

Boxed Essay: Ringing the Changes

“Hello, Operator?”

“Number, please.”

Islanders’ conversation with telephone technology grew steadily more uniform in the decades after the
Second World War. Even as Maritime Electric was consolidating its coverage of rural Prince Edward Island,
Island Telephone was gradually swallowing up the Island’s hodgepodge of local phone lines. One by one, the
small rural companies had fallen by the wayside, wearied by the effort to maintain their local systems. Island
Telephone, which already connected the local networks to one another and to the outside world, had both the
means and the motive to absorb the rural companies. The postwar era saw a dramatic expansion in phone
service, as new telephone poles marched across the countryside in tandem with electric poles. There were only
7,642 telephones on Prince Edward Island at the end of the Second World War. Fifteen years later, the number
was 18,573.

What communities lost in local control, they made up for in improved service. At the same time, Island

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71 Heath Macquarrie, Red Tory Blues, p. 110. Shaw made the comment during the 1959
election campaign, when he did substantially better at the polls.

72 “Premier’s Annual Message Reviews 1958 Achievements,” Guardian, 31 December
1958, p. 1. The spending figures were tabulated from the public accounts tabled in the annual
Journal of the Legislative Assembly.

73 In fact, the Rural Electrification Program didn’t wind down until the early 1970s.

74 Statistics are taken from editions of the Canada Year Book for the period.
Telephone’s monopoly over the medium meant that ordinary Islanders lacked any real leverage to force the pace of modernization. Until the 1970s, crank-operated phones and party lines continued to rule rural communication.

Making a local call required a certain manual dexterity in cranking out numbers: for example, “one long and two shorts” rang out the number “twelve.” Listening in on conversations (without being noticed) was also an acquired skill on party lines. The invasion of privacy was considered a small vice in rural areas, where no one’s business was ever really their own, and it gave new wings to local gossip. For more important news, the local telephone operator — invariably a woman — was an important clearing house. Besides connecting callers to outside exchanges, she became the discreet repository for a great deal of information.

“Line busy?”
It certainly was.

The financial key to rural electrification was not distance so much as density. It made no business sense to run lines through the countryside unless the provider sold enough power to turn a profit. The Public Utilities Commission set a quota of at least four signed-up customers per mile of road before it would consent to build a line through a given district. Moreover, at least 75% of the residents there were required to sign the application for service. The higher the proportion of customers per district, the higher the priority given their request.

In poorer communities, the density stipulation posed a daunting challenge. For while the idea of electricity was seductive for rural Islanders, it was also expensive. First, there was the cost of wiring homes and barns, then the expense, which varied with the length of one’s lane, of bringing the power in from the road. Finally, there was the monthly electric bill to pay, an important consideration in a province where the cost of electricity remained far above the national average.

Where the number of subscribers was in doubt, Islanders anxious to have electricity coaxed and cajoled their more reluctant neighbours. On one dirt road, an old farmer with a particularly long lane listened politely to several neighbours as they outlined the workings of the Rural Electrification program, extolled the advantages of electric power, and urged him to sign up for it. He took it all in,
then commented thoughtfully, “I think I’d rather have the Pavement.”

For most rural Islanders, the lure of electricity was too powerful to resist for long. In the 1920s and 1930s, they might have considered electricity a luxury; by the 1950s, it had become a necessity. In home after home, people used carefully hoarded savings or scraped together money from other sources. Looking back on his hectic work days during the 1950s, one former electrician remembers that he was almost always paid in cash for the wiring he did in Kings County farms.

Maritime Electric need not have worried about getting its money back from Rural Electrification. By 1960, Island power companies had 22,000 customers, twice the number in 1949, and some 5,700 farms had been electrified. Not only did more and more Islanders pay to be hooked up, but they also used more and more electricity. Between 1943 and 1959, electrical consumption on Prince Edward Island increased by nearly 500%.

“It seems we have a never ending increase in the number of electrical gadgets which are being used in the homes at the present time,” marvelled W. H. Poole of the Department of Industry and Natural Resources in 1956. The most popular electric product was probably the “plug-in” radio, which quickly displaced cumbersome battery-powered sets. But there were also washing machines and stoves, hot plates and heaters, refrigerators and eggbeaters and toasters and irons and record players — all the electric appliances that had become the hallmark of North America’s consumer society.

Each new consumer durable chipped away at the old, time-intensive, work-heavy way of doing things, and, more subtly, at the culture that had grown up around it. In that respect, there was

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75 The story was related to the author by John Cousins, 3 November 1999.

76 The story was related to the author by Lt. Gov. Gilbert Clements, Charlottetown.

77 In 1949, according to the Canada Year Book for 1952-53, there were 10,877 customers, divided between private and public electric companies. The 1961 census (Vol. 5, Part I, Table 21) counted 5,728 farms with electricity out of a total of 7,335.

78 Poole was reporting on the activities of the Electrical Inspection Division during 1955. (Report of the Department of Industry and Natural Resources, Journal of the Legislative Assembly, 1957.)
For the most part, “change” during the 1950s merely represented an acceleration of existing trends. Television was the exception to that rule. If radio had brought echoes of the distant world into Island homes, television captured the world itself within a little box. To turn on the switch was a little like rubbing Aladdin’s lamp, magical but perilous in unforeseen ways.

The first public demonstration of television dated from the 1920s, but it was only in the affluent postwar era that commercial broadcasting began to take off. Canadians living along the United States border could pick up American programming by the late 1940s. Canada’s first two television stations, both owned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, went on the air in September 1952.

The following year, Arthur Arsenault of Charlottetown won a nation-wide car sales contest. He had a choice of prizes between a speedboat and a solid mahogany home entertainment unit containing a radio, a record player, and an Admiral television. Arsenault took the entertainment unit, becoming arguably the first Islander to own a television. Unfortunately, there was no broadcast signal near enough for Arsenault’s set to pick it up. Nevertheless, he lived in hope.

Radio pioneer Keith Rogers, owner of CFCY, was irresistibly drawn to the strange new invention. His daughter has described how each Sunday her father would come to visit Arsenault, his wife, and their new television. Together they would twiddle knobs and gaze intently at the noisy “snow” on the TV screen: “Then suddenly one Sunday a hazy black and white picture leaped into life. It was a little man swinging back and forth on a trapeze. The three of them . . . huddled in excitement

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79 The story was re-told by members of the Arsenault family to the author, 14 August 1999, and is supported by an undated newspaper clipping from the Guardian, 1953.
close to the screen as that little fellow swung back and forth.”

In a freak of atmospheric clarity, television had arrived on Prince Edward Island.

Rogers soon owned his own television, but he dreamed of owning his own station. He was busy promoting the idea when he died of a heart attack in January 1954. It was left to his daughter, Betty, and her husband, Bob Large, to carry through with the promise of television in the province. Pioneering television was an expensive gamble, requiring an investment of $250,000, but an exciting one. On 1 July 1956, two years after CBC opened its first Maritime station in Halifax, CFCY-TV began broadcasting from Charlottetown as a CBC affiliate.

CFCY’s 300-foot high transmitting tower in Strathgartney was the tallest structure in the province. There was an obvious symbolism in that, for television quickly reached into Islanders’ lives. Like many other CBC affiliates, CFCY carried network shows but offered its own programming as well. Veteran radio broadcasters such as Helen Herring moved gingerly into the new medium. She hosted a popular show called Today at Home, while a brash teenager from Birchwood Junior High named Mike Duffy was hired as DJ for the station’s music program Teen Hop. The ambitious teen was too young to be taken seriously by the folks at CFCY. He would leave his music career behind to become one of Canada’s best-known television journalists.

Television seemed to have limitless possibilities, but it was also seen as a temptation. The tension between entertainment and education that characterized the medium elsewhere extended to programming on Prince Edward Island. In October 1958, the Department of Agriculture launched a weekly television program, Forward with Agriculture. With topics like “Care of Milk and Milking Equipment” and “Vertical Integration,” it probably did not draw the same rabid attention as the

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80 Large and Crothers, Out of Thin Air, p. 163. The Arsenault family have donated that pioneer television to the Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation.

81 Large and Crothers, Out of Thin Air, pp. 164-68. Bob Large, telephone interview with the author, Charlottetown, 27 January 2000.

82 Large and Crothers, Out of Thin Air, pp. 168 - passim.

television version of *Hockey Night in Canada*, which debuted in the Maritimes earlier the same year. Despite the high moral purpose of many people involved, television bid fair to become the 20th century’s opiate of the masses.

Nowhere is the acceleration of change more evident than in the alacrity with which Islanders took up the television. By 1961, 16,500 families, 70% of Island households, owned at least one set. In terms of Prince Edward Island’s traditional culture, the new medium was devastating. Historian David Weale has described the impact of television on the Island tradition of visiting. When televisions were still few and mysterious, people flocked to visit the houses that owned one. But now, instead of entertaining themselves with gossip and stories or traditional songs and music, the neighbours crowded around to view the posh new world that paraded across the little screen in the corner of the parlour. In another decade, after everyone had a television of their own, no one, it seemed, visited at all, and they had begun to covet that posh new world for themselves.84

That is an exaggeration, of course. To a certain extent, Islanders were able to assimilate television into their lives. Local nicknames, for example, expanded to include popular television characters. There was no immediate falling-off in country dances and other forms of entertainment during the 1950s. Nor were Islanders conscious of any loss of identity. As with the other major innovations of the decade, the impact of television was cumulative rather than cataclysmic.

When folklorist Sandy Ives returned to Miminegash in 1963, after a five-year absence, he was greatly struck by the changes he found there:

Edmund [Doucette] hadn’t changed a bit in five years, but Miminegash sure had. The Shore Road and the road through town down to the run were both blacktopped, and apparently just about everyone had electricity now. Certainly Edmund did, and I could see in a moment the tremendous difference that it made in the quality of life for him and his family — from the refrigerator and electric teakettle in the kitchen to the

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84 A number of informants make essentially the same point in talking about the decline of Island fiddling in Ken Perlman, “‘Couldn’t Have A Wedding Without A Fiddler’: Traditional Fiddling and Community Life on Canada’s Prince Edward Island,” unpublished manuscript, 1999, Chapter 19, pp. 7-8.
television set in the living room.\textsuperscript{85}

Ives does not mention the irony in this situation. The modernity that was improving the quality of Edmund Doucette’s life was at the same time sapping the vitality of the oral culture that the folklorist had come to collect.

Boxed Essay: \textbf{Acadian or Acadian?}

The weight of modernization pressed most heavily perhaps on Island Acadians. For while it tended to homogenize Anglophones, it tended to anglicize Acadians. As historian Georges Arsenault observes, preserving the French culture was not made any easier by the fact that the language occupied an inferior status on the Island and in the country as a whole.\textsuperscript{86} Even among French-speakers, the Acadian dialect, a holdover from medieval times, was often ridiculed. Like 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Prince Edward Island’s third major language, Gaelic, it bore the stigma of unsophistication.

In a Roman Catholic diocese that served them with few francophone priests, in communities that were progressively less isolated from outside influences, in an economy that was increasingly integrated, and in an educational system that had little concern for French-language instruction, many Acadians slipped toward assimilation. In areas where they lived intermingled with other nationalities, the process was already well under way. In the 1921 census, 83\% of the Island’s Acadians had listed French as their mother tongue. In 1941, the figure was 72\%. By 1951, it had slipped to 58\%; by 1961, to 49\%.\textsuperscript{87} At the same time, the number of Acadians and their proportion of the Island population both rose. As language and population statistics diverged, a subtle gap began to open between those who had “lost” their language and those who still clung to it.\textsuperscript{88}

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\textsuperscript{85}Ives, \textit{Drive Dull Care Away}, p. 103.

\textsuperscript{86}Arsenault, \textit{The Island Acadians}, pp. 249-50.

\textsuperscript{87}Of that total, 1,219 spoke only French.

\textsuperscript{88}Georges Arsenault wrestles with the question of language and cultural identity in “The Acadian Experience in Prince Edward Island” (Public lecture delivered at the University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, 24 November 1982.)
\end{flushright}
The great government programs that ended up by undermining traditional rural life on Prince Edward Island, paving and Rural Electrification, had set out to save it. The status quo had long ceased to be an option for either the government or the people at whom its policies were aimed. The lesson of the 1950s was that one could either wait for change or try to meet it. Depending on their circumstances and their inclinations, Islanders did both. Either way, change came.

The goad for much conscious modernization was rising expectations. On one level, Island farmers had always recognized that they were poor. But so were their neighbours, and the insulated nature of their culture did not cast the circle of comparison much further from their door than that. They saw differently in the harsh glare of postwar progress. Throughout the 1950s, per capita income on Prince Edward Island was little better than half the national average, and twice it dipped below 50%. "There is no glory in poverty," reflects economic consultant William Janssen, "and most people, including farmers, will try to escape it." That was essentially the story of agriculture during the postwar era.

In the beginning, a thin layer of green camouflaged the subtle erosion of the Island farm industry. The wartime boom in agricultural prices lingered on for a few years. Livestock generally held its value, and dairying plugged along as well, although the number of community dairies continued to dwindle as improved transportation made centralization possible. It was potatoes, though, that continued to make the difference between good years and bad for most farmers.

On the surface, all seemed well enough. After the brutal prices of the Great Depression, farm revenues set new records during the 1940s and early 1950s. But the unpredictable interaction of acreage, yield, markets, and prices put the Island’s chief cash crop on a dangerous roller coaster from year to year. In 1947, the potato crop represented 45% of the total value of Island crops, $10.4 million

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out of $23.3 million. By 1950, the estimated value of the potato crop was down to $2.94 million. The next year, it more than tripled, to $9.42 million, and farm revenues surpassed $25 million for the first time. The year after that, the value of potatoes doubled again, rising to the astonishing figure of $18.5 million. But 1952 was an extraordinary year. Fears that the Korean War might touch off another global conflict drove farm prices to new highs even as Island farmers harvested a bumper crop of potatoes. Then the Korean War ended, and North American agricultural prices collapsed. By the mid-1950s, the value of the Island potato crop was back down to $5.9 million.

Boxed Essay: The Politics of Potatoes

The wild swings in potato prices took a heavy toll on Island farmers, and during the early 1950s, politicians, growers, and lobby groups such as the Federation of Agriculture strained to bring more stability to the potato business. In 1950, after two years of good crops but low prices, the Province established the Prince Edward Island Potato Marketing Board to co-ordinate the marketing of the Island potato crop. Although private dealers were represented on it, the Board was dominated by potato growers. The personification of their influence was D. A. MacDonald of Glenfinnan, a long-time co-operator who was both chair and manager of the new agency.

Conflict was inevitable, since private warehouse owners and shippers fundamentally opposed the idea of producer-controlled boards setting prices or selling potatoes. The simmering feud between the two parties came to a boil in 1954. Inspired by the sky-high prices of 1952, North American growers had overplanted in 1953, bloating the market and driving down prices. In response, the Potato Marketing Board set up a voluntary selling agency, which hoped to regulate the flow of Island potatoes to market in order to curb any further slump in prices. Encouraged by the selling agency’s success — it handled eight million bushels and also qualified for $2.4 million in federal price support subsidies — the Board turned its voluntary marketing scheme into a compulsory one in 1954. This was too much for the private shippers, who rebelled against “the dictator which had crept in the back door.”

“Trying to get the dealers and the producers to work together,” Premier Alex Matheson remarked, “is


92 Quoted in Bruce and Cran, “Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island,” p. 111.
like putting a lion and a tiger together in the same cage.” From outside the bars, he brokered a plebiscite on the compulsory marketing question. After a vicious campaign that demonstrated just how fractured the potato industry was, Island growers narrowly rejected the concept of a compulsory, single-desk marketing system for Prince Edward Island potatoes. Years of uncertainty, confusion, and perpetual reorganization followed. By the time the Potato Marketing Board found its feet again, it had become little more than a promotional agency.

The Potato Marketing Board’s failed attempt to harness potato prices factored into the demise of another adventure in centralized marketing. Island Co-operative Services was launched in 1949 to serve as a marketing and wholesaling agency for the province’s co-operative stores. Under the visionary leadership of two Morell co-operators, Jerome O’Brien and Frank Dunn, the Central expanded boldly — in hindsight, recklessly — during the early 1950s. Although it traded in many commodities, Island Co-operative Services was drawn deeper and deeper into marketing potatoes, and soon became the biggest dealer in the province.

The co-operative stores to which the Central sold goods bought them on credit, since it was customary for their cash-poor customers to do the same from them. In the fall, when the farmers sold their crops, they settled up with the stores, which then settled up with the Central. But the Central was also buying those crops, paying for them outright and then playing the international market in quest of profits. Essentially, the Central was financing the whole system. When potato prices collapsed in 1955, both producers and Central lost their ability to translate credit into cash. Island Co-operative Services had no reserves with which to cover its $108,384 deficit. It went bankrupt, dealing a tremendous psychological blow to the co-operative movement.93

Another central, the Producers’ Co-operative Association, was quickly formed, with D. A. MacDonald, ex-manager of the Potato Marketing Board, as head, but too many co-operators had now lost confidence in the central marketing model. Although the Association was soon the biggest potato dealer in the province, it could not keep pace with the prices that local dealers and off-Island brokers offered producers. The Central steadily lost clients, and by 1962 it was out of business.94 By that time, it was evident that no group, nor agency, nor

93One could argue for both decline and consolidation of the co-operative movement. For example, while the number of credit unions scarcely changed between 1949 and 1959 (and membership dipped slightly), they doubled their assets. Similarly, the Island’s co-operatives doubled their assets during the ‘50s, but they lost a third of their associations. Over the same period, their profits rose 350%. (See Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” pp. 139, 178.)

government department was going to control the agricultural industry on Prince Edward Island.

In the scramble to keep up with the bounding prosperity in the rest of Canada, Island farmers began to mechanize with a vengeance during the postwar years. In 1950, they borrowed $605,518 through 706 individual loans under the Farm Improvement Loan Act. Nearly three-fifths of the total was spent to buy tractors.\footnote{Figures quoted in \textit{Guardian}, 11 April 1951, p. 6. During the previous five years of the act, loans to Islanders had amounted to less than $275,000.} That set the pattern for the decade. By 1961, Island farmers owned ten times more tractors than in 1941, and six-and-a-half times as many trucks. From a grand total of four combines, they now operated 644.

As with Rural Electrification and the Pavement, mechanization had unconsidered consequences. The epidemic of tractors in the fields and cars on the roads decimated the Island’s equine population. The number of horses fell by one-quarter between 1941 and 1951. Over the next decade, it fell by two-thirds, from 21,349 to 7,867. In 1951, nine of every ten Island farms still worked horses.\footnote{Cousins, \enquote{Horses in the Folklore of Western Prince Edward Island,\enquote{ p. 24; Clark, \textit{Three Centuries and the Island}, pp. 178-80.}} In 1961, more farms had tractors than had teams. \enquote{The breeding of draft horses is almost a thing of the past,\enquote{ the Department of Agriculture noted wistfully in 1960. From caring for horses, the Island’s remaining blacksmiths now turned to fashioning truck boxes and farm trailers, while the buggies, slovens, truck wagons, and carts of the old Prince Edward Island quietly rotted away in farmyards or outbuildings. Almost overnight, the horse-drawn culture that had for so long dominated Island life crumbled.

Most farmers that continued to keep horses did so from fondness (and, occasionally, for harness racing). Foxes seldom inspired such sentiment. Although the number of farms with foxes had soared during the early war years, as farmers cast about for a crop that might generate income, the increase could not mask a calamitous decline in fur values. They failed to rebound. In 1947, the Province sent a dozen matched platinum fox skins to Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth II) as a wedding gift. Afterward, fox-farming went the way of the Empire. There were just over a
thousand ranches on Prince Edward Island in 1942. By 1951, there were eighty-eight; a decade later, fifteen. By the 1960s, the once mighty fox industry had dwindled down to hobbydom.

The farmscape lost more than foxes and horses during the 1950s. While the rest of the nation was enjoying unprecedented prosperity and the national economy was growing by leaps and bounds, the decade of the 1950s left net farm income on Prince Edward Island more or less where it had found it. As an industry, Island agriculture was standing still — or worse. The cost of living had held steady during the first half of the decade, but, in the late 1950s, it began to creep upward once again. At the same time, the costs of production were rising faster than farmers’ returns. The Island farms of 1900 had pretty much fed and clothed their owners. But the farmers of the 1950s could not grow televisions or oil furnaces or tractors. For those they needed cash. During the second half of the decade, Island farmers were netting only 30–40% of the average income for waged Canadians. By the time Canada sank toward a decade-ending recession, the farm problem on Prince Edward Island was turning into a farm crisis.

All through the postwar era, Island farmers had taken advantage of the federal financing available through programs such as the Farm Improvement Loans Act (1944). The number and size of the loans had risen over time, though it is hard to say whether the borrowers were opportunistic or desperate. In the spring of 1959, the Province enacted its own legislation to help young farmers establish themselves in agriculture by financing the purchase of land and machinery, the repair of farm buildings, and other improvements. By early December, the Department had received 145 applications for loans, and its modest appropriation for the fiscal year had been used up. The

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97 Statistics are from the Canada Year Book for 1955 and 1963-64.

98 Figures compiled from statistics published over the course of the period in the Canada Year Book.

99 Cost of living statistics are taken from Leacy, ed. Historical Statistics of Canada, K1-43.

100 Statistics drawn from the Canada Year Book show year to year fluctuations, but a clear increase over time.

provincial program was a forlorn recognition that something had to be done. The gesture was meant to be more than symbolic, but the tide of statistics told against it.

At the turn of century, the Island had struggled to hold onto its farm youth. By 1960, the farms themselves were vanishing. Of the 12,230 Island farms enumerated in 1941, almost one-half had been classified as subsistence. The 1961 census found only 7,335 farms. Some 4,900 farms had disappeared, with over half of the decline coming after 1956. Marginal operations went first. In 1941, more than seven hundred farms had been under ten acres in size; twenty years later, 80% of those were gone. They were lost to attrition more often than to bankruptcy. Elderly farmers died without anyone willing to take over. Others simply gave up in discouragement.

What outmigration had begun, poverty now finished. The countryside was flecked with the grey of abandoned farm buildings, like so many gravestones dotting the green hills. The vacant fields were invaded by bushes or swallowed up by neighbouring farms. That trend toward farm consolidation was another characteristic of the new countryside. By the end of the 1950s, experts were arguing that only larger acreages could achieve the economies of scale that might keep Island farmers competitive. For those still left in the industry at decade’s end, farming was becoming very much a business. It was too expensive to be anything else.

As with farms, so with farmers. Between 1941 and 1961, the farm population fell by one-third, to 34,514 people. Although Prince Edward Island remained by far the most rural province in the Dominion, only two-thirds of the population was now classified as “rural,” and for the first time, farm families were out-numbered by that awkward classification, “rural non-farm dwellers.” Numerically, farmers had once dominated the Island. By 1960, they did not even dominate the countryside. The demographic shift had tremendous implications for Prince Edward Island. The

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102 The same process was going in elsewhere in the Maritimes. Between 1956 and 1966, the number of farms in Nova Scotia dropped by 55%, while the figure in New Brunswick was an astonishing 76%. See D. William Carr, *The Competitive Position of Maritime Agriculture*, Background Study No. 2 [Ottawa: Atlantic Development Board, 1969], p. 9.

103 Statistics for 1951-1961 show that the smaller the farm, the more likely its disappearance. Only the number of farms 200 acres or larger showed an increase, rising from 770 to 1,065.
family farm had always been the DNA of Island society, and its sudden decline threatened to alter the basic nature of life in the province.

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The slide in farm population was all the more telling when silhouetted against the demographics of the postwar era. For while the number of farmers was falling, the number of Islanders was rising. Between 1941 and 1961, the population climbed laboriously from 95,047 to 104,629. The increase came despite the continuing exodus of the young. Net migration for the period was -24,766. The migrants no longer slipped down to the “Boston States,” or set out for the waving wheat fields of the Prairies. They were “going down the road” to the burgeoning cities of industrial Ontario, places such as Hamilton, Oshawa, Toronto.

Although it was measured by the hundreds, not the thousands, there was a small but noticeable counterflow into Prince Edward Island during the same time period. The bulk of the newcomers were from the United Kingdom, among them war brides and ex-RAF servicemen, but the most visible immigrants were German farm labourers and Dutch farmers in search of land. The Dutch, especially, proved tenacious. The 1961 census found 371 people on Prince Edward Island who had been born in the Netherlands. Within a generation they would put down roots in the

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104Satadal Dasgupta, “A Statistical Overview,” in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, eds. The Garden Transformed, p. 244. Dasgupta calculated net migration by subtracting the figures for natural increase from the change in population. Weir, “Rural Reconstruction,” p. 81, claims that Prince Edward Island had the highest rate of out-migration in Canada during the 1950s.

105In 1953 alone, 210 Germans came to Prince Edward Island. Most did not stay, since the 1961 census listed only 122 Islanders born in Germany. Among those that did was Ben Schmalz, who arrived in Cherry Valley with $1.50 in his pocket, as an indentured farm labourer. See Ben Schmalz, “Sometimes I Feel Proud that I Have Lived Through So Much,” Abegweit Review, 5(Spring 1987)2: 38-42.
province, leavening the countryside with exotic-sounding surnames.\footnote{There were 371 people residing on Prince Edward Island in 1961 who had been born in the Netherlands. A fresh wave of immigrants began arriving in the 1980s.}

It was the Baby Boom, of course, and not the trickle of immigration, that offset the tide of outmigration. The characteristic sound of the 1950s was arguably the wail of new babies, as the women who had invaded the workplace during the Second World War withdrew to the home to raise their children.\footnote{Prince Edward Island averaged 2,750 births per year during the period 1946-1959, compared to 2,258 in 1945. The birthrate in 1961 was the third highest in Canada after Newfoundland and New Brunswick.} Increasingly, those homes were in urban settings. The proliferation of wartime jobs had served to accelerate the population shift from country to town that was already under way in the province. By the end of the 1950s, a third of the Island’s population lived in urban areas. Charlottetown’s population had climbed to 18,318, Summerside’s to 8,611. Moreover, both centres had acquired the modest trappings of yet another postwar phenomenon, suburbia.

While cars and pavement made suburbia physically possible, it was the steady growth in government and service-sector jobs that made it feasible on Prince Edward Island. Urban Prince Edward Island was where the work was. During the 1950s, neat rows of bungalows sprouted in the fields bordering Charlottetown. By 1961, the two new towns of Parkdale and Sherwood were 3,315 citizens strong and still growing.\footnote{\textit{Census of Canada}, 1961, Vol. 1.} From nothing they had grown in fifteen years to become the third- and fourth-largest municipalities, respectively, in the province.

The situation was, as usual, slightly different in Summerside. There the fox ranches that once ringed the town had given way to middle-class dens. But the main suburb, St. Eleanors, was no postwar upstart. The village predated Summerside, and, unlike Sherwood or Parkdale, its economic life orbited around the local air base, not the local capital. The base itself spawned the community of Slemon Park to help house its personnel.

Peering in through the bungalows’ newly fashionable picture windows, one could just glimpse new patterns of living. As in the rest of North America, the postwar era left many suburban
women trapped at home while their husbands drove off each day to earn a living. That was not so very different, perhaps, from what women had experienced on Island farms. But now increasing numbers of Island women were going off to work as well. Although farm wives’ unwaged labour continued to elude the statisticians, there were 7,400 women among the 26,000 people in the official Island work force by the end of the 1950s, one-third more than when the decade began. Over half of the Island’s working women were employed in what the census termed “white collar” jobs.\(^{109}\) As historians have noted, their job histories tended to have two phases: before children and after.\(^{110}\) Obviously, traditional concepts of the family were not left behind when Islanders packed up and moved to the city.

The psychological shift in the balance of power from rural to urban on Prince Edward Island could be measured in time — Daylight Saving Time. In 1947, Walter Jones had scorned the notion of “fast time” in his Uniform Time Act because it was unpopular with rural Islanders. On 25 June 1960, over howls of protest from Island farmers, the provincial government put “minor urban wants” ahead of “important rural interests,” and moved clocks forward one hour for the three months of summer.\(^{111}\) Time, one might say, had left the farmers behind.

Hobbled by partisan considerations and operating without the long perspective that hindsight affords, the Island’s political leaders struggled across a 1950s landscape that was changing faster than they could. Like the first astronauts, politicians only appeared to be in command of events. They sounded


\(^{110}\)Strong-Boag, “Home Dreams,” p. 375. Among M. F. Schurman Company’s 300-500 employees, women were expected to leave work once they became pregnant. When Mary Woodside asked to stay on during her pregnancy in 1961, it necessitated a special management meeting. Permission was granted — provided Woodside dressed appropriately. (See MacFarlane, \textit{M. F. Schurman Company}, p. 118.

the part. They dressed appropriately. They attracted a great deal of publicity and were determinedly self-important. But in many ways they were little more than passengers as their spaceship hurtled toward the New Frontier.

Federally and provincially, the province had been a Liberal fiefdom since 1935. The leaders might change, but not the electoral results. The hapless Conservatives lurked harmlessly on the outskirts of power, winning just enough seats to be a presence, but not enough to constitute a real threat. Their chief accomplishment had been to depose their defeat-prone leader, W. J. P. MacMillan, in 1949 in favour of lawyer R. R. Bell. Different leader, same result.

The provincial CCF did even less well. The sixteen candidates of 1947 became the five of 1951. Afterward, the struggling third party temporarily abandoned the field. It continued to lack two prerequisites for political success: money and a base of support. Nevertheless, it made history.

In 1950, pioneer suffragette Elsie Inman, once again president of the Prince Edward Island Women’s Liberal Association, had pointed out to *The Guardian* that, since women held the purse strings in nine of ten families, “It is not too far a step from home financing to the problems of finance that confront our municipalities, provinces and federal government.” Inman’s own bid for the Liberal nomination in 4th Queens was defeated, but a Prince County farmwife named Hilda Ramsay took her up her challenge. Twenty-nine years after women had won the right to vote in provincial elections, “Mrs. Leslie Ramsay” (as custom dictated) became the first female ever to run for political office on the Island, contesting 3rd Prince for the CCF in the 1951 general election.

Ramsay’s platform emphasized the significance for women of social welfare issues. Meanwhile, newspapers made her sound less like a political candidate than one of the beauty contestants that were beginning to crop up on their Women’s Pages. After praising Ramsay’s community leadership, *The Guardian* noted, “She is an extremely attractive person, a fluent speaker,

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113 For Inman’s abortive bid for the 4th Queen’s nomination, see John Crossley, “Picture This: Women Politicians Hold Key Posts in P.E.I.,” June 1995 (Special Collections Department, Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island), pp. 6-7.
has a friendly personality, and a ready smile.” Ramsay was not front-page news.

Ramsay did badly in the election, garnering only 236 votes, but she did as well as any of the other CCF candidates. In keeping with Island third-party tradition, all of them lost their deposits. Prince Edward Island might not be ready yet for female politicians, but it would take a woman running for one of the mainstream parties to provide a proper measure of their chances. In the meantime, precedent hunters would have to settle for Elsie Inman’s appointment to the Senate in 1955 and Dorothy Corrigan’s election to the Charlottetown City Council in 1960.

The provincial election in 1955 was another rout, with the Liberals taking twenty-seven of thirty seats, their biggest margin of victory since 1939. Not even the flamboyant antics of Tory ad-man Dalton Camp could rally the lacklustre Tories, and several Conservative candidates lost their deposits. It was the Liberals’ sixth straight electoral victory, an unprecedented feat in the Island’s political history. Instead of gloating outright, the Patriot pondered instead the future of the two-party system on Prince Edward Island in the face of “such a continuous, overwhelming, Liberal superiority.”

Just when it seemed that political power on Prince Edward Island had become hereditary, the Liberals fell back to earth. According to party historian Wayne MacKinnon, the Liberal dynasty of the early 1900s had grown bored with power. In 1959, he argues, it was Island voters who were bored with the Liberals. It may have been as simple as that. Certainly, the electorate had grown restless. As the 1950s drew to a close, Islanders sensed that they were slipping further and further behind the rest of Canada. On paper, the province had made impressive progress toward modernity, but the bar was continually being raised. And, behind the numbers, the Island economy appeared to be slowing. “Although farm production has been up, I am sorry to say that our farmers through low prices have not shared in the national economy to the extent to which I feel they are entitled,” Premier Matheson

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admitted in his New Year’s message for 1958.\textsuperscript{116}

The Liberals were also weakened by internal dissensions. Premier Matheson’s reluctance to confide in his colleagues had gradually antagonized a Liberal cabinet that had already endured ten years of the same treatment under Walter Jones.\textsuperscript{117} On the Dominion front, the Premier had fallen out with his Liberal colleagues in Ottawa in 1956 over the transfer overpayment fiasco, and he continued to bicker with them over health insurance. Such episodes hurt his prestige among Island voters even as they provided fresh fodder for the mingling of resentment and reliance that had come to characterize the province’s attitude toward the federal government.

The idea of “keeping the parties in line” now worked against the Liberals in any case. Under Prairie populist John Diefenbaker, the federal Tories had finally toppled the Liberal regime in Ottawa, converting the minority government they gained in 1957 into a massive majority in 1958. The results on Prince Edward Island had been equally stunning. The Progressive Conservatives swept all four Island seats in both federal elections. Even Prince County, the safe haven that had once sheltered Mackenzie King and J. L. Ralston, went Tory, the first time since 1904. Matheson’s was one of only two Liberal governments left in Canada when he called a provincial election for 1 September 1959.

The campaign was fought from the hustings, through the press, over radio, and, for the first time, on television. The new leader of the provincial Conservatives was a 71-year-old ex-civil servant named Walter Shaw. He emphasized his party’s commitment to progress by nailing a causeway plank to the Tory platform, and he leaned heavily on the “friendly, outstretched hand of John Diefenbaker.” On election night, Shaw’s Conservatives claimed just 50.4% of the popular vote, but it was enough to elect twenty-two members. After twenty-four years in power, the provincial Liberals found themselves out of office. At least now there would be a decent Opposition, growled ex-Premier Matheson.

The postwar era had tangibly come to an end. “It is always an impressive moment when ‘Old


\textsuperscript{117}The account Liberal in-fighting is taken from from MacKinnon, The Life of the Party, pp. 128-129.
Man History’ writes ‘finis’ to a chapter, turns over the page and begins anew,” intoned a post-election editorial in *The Guardian* (studiously neutral in political matters since joining the Thomson chain of newspapers at mid-decade). The new chapter would read much like the old one — with one essential difference. On balance, the governments of the 1950s had merely reacted to change. In the 1960s they would try harnessing it to development.

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Chapter Eight

. . . The Cradle Will Rock

Anne of Green Gables never change
I like you just this way,
Anne of Green Gables sweet and strange
Stay as you are today.

Though blossoms fade and friends must part
Old grow the songs we’ve sung.
Anne of Green Gables, in my heart
You are forever young.

From Anne of Green Gables: A Musical

The summer of 1960 crackled underfoot, tinder-dry and oppressively hot. In late August, the drought fuelled a series of brush fires in Island woodlands. The largest of them quickly broke out of control and began devouring central Prince County. The fire was the worst in two centuries, and, for a province unused to extremes, it was a terrifying spectacle. Treetops blazed like torches along the Western Road. In other places, the fire travelled underground, blistering men’s feet through the soles of their boots before flaring up in some unexpected quarter. Everywhere, dense smoke blanketed the countryside like fog, day after day, choking firefighters and blearing the sun.

Newspapers called the roll of imperilled communities: Foxley River, Freeland, Conway, Portage, Mount Pleasant, Enmore, Bideford, Ellerslie. For a time, West Prince was practically cut off from the rest of the province. Part of Tyne Valley had to be evacuated. On Lennox Island the forest was devastated, and the future of the Mi’kmaq reserve there jeopardized. In McNeill’s Mills, in the heart of the fire zone, Mrs. Reginald Campbell and her family were forced from their home five different times as the fire turned like an angry bull with each shift in wind direction.

It took three weeks, the herculean efforts of a thousand firefighters, and a weekend of rain to tame the conflagration. By then, over 17,000 acres had been reduced to blackened ruin.²

¹Excerpt from Anne of Green Gables — the Musical, by permission of the authors, Donald Harron and Norman Campbell.

²The foregoing account draws on contemporary newspaper reports in the Summerside Journal-Pioneer and Charlottetown’s Evening Patriot and Guardian, supplemented with
The apocalyptic weather persisted into winter. Over 155 inches of snow fell in some parts of the province, and there were so many blizzards in March 1961 that a state of emergency had to be called. In 1962 it was rain. The year was the wettest on record, highlighted by a combination of torrential downpour and spring run-off that washed out bridges and flooded roads all across the province on April Fools’ Day.

No one considered that the cycle of extreme weather had any connection to human affairs. Nevertheless, it did provide an uncannily accurate forecast for the decade to come. It would be a tumultuous time.

In some ways, the 1960s on Prince Edward Island were like the 1950s, only more so. The major trends that had helped to define the previous decade -- road paving, electricity, urbanization, farm decline, the growth of bureaucracy -- continued to accelerate, their very speed blurring the pattern of Island life. The effect was disorienting for both government and the governed. With a great deal of energy but only a limited sense of direction, the new Conservative administration set out in search of ways to narrow the social and economic gap between Prince Edward Island and the rest of Canada. Given the character of their leader and the temper of the times, it was not surprising that they would begin by trying simply to graft new development onto the ailing trunk of the old order.

Walter R. Shaw once told an interviewer that Premier Walter Jones had tried to recruit him as his successor. The story is not as implausible as it sounds. While Shaw’s family background was fervently Tory, he and Jones were alike in many ways. Both had farm backgrounds. Both built their political philosophies around the paramount importance of agriculture. Both were college-educated,

additional commentary by Bill Glen of the provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Walter Shaw, Interview with P. C. History Project, February 1978, Subseries 4, PARO 3688/162. Shaw’s memory was by this time somewhat faulty. He continued that he had he joined the Conservatives in 1957; in fact, he ran and lost as a Conservative candidate in 1955.
and while Jones had once run an experimental farm, Shaw had served for twenty years as the province’s Deputy Minister of Agriculture before entering politics. Both men attained the premiership at an age when others thought of retirement, and brought to it a restless energy that belied their years. Both nourished healthy egos, but affected a folksy, down-to-earth style with voters.

The similarities ended there. Where Jones could be brusque and caustic, Shaw was a voluble extrovert, remembered for his warmth and sincerity. The public Shaw was equal parts Biblical allusion and barnyard metaphor. It was a style that still sold well in rural Prince Edward Island. Behind the rhetoric, he brought to government what political economist David Milne has called, “the confidence of the rational planner and civil servant.”

That was the essential difference between the two leaders. The same Shaw who loved to expound on the simple virtues of rural life would usher in the age of consultants, and came to depend on their nostrums for shoring up the rural economy. If he sensed the contradictions inherent in holding two such opposed credos, he contained them easily within his generous frame. Both Shaw the old farmer and Shaw the bureaucratic manager were real.

Shaw’s initial guide for the Tories’ “Adventures in Progress” was Hartwell Daley, an American journalist with an Island wife, who moved to Prince Edward Island in 1959. Daley was, variously, Charlottetown bureau manager for the Journal-Pioneer, broadcaster, ordained minister, and adult educator before being named Shaw’s Director of Industrial Development in 1961. There was an immediate rustle of activity, as the government set up local committees to study rural development and began sizing up investment opportunities that would generate more income for the provincial economy. Daley tried to teach agricultural extension workers to concentrate more on development, but he had little success. The problem on Prince Edward Island, he concluded, was “a combination of contentment with the situation combined with a pessimism about the ability to change anything

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5In newspaper retrospectives on Daley’s career, he remembers the position as “Director of Research and Development”; departmental reports have him heading up the “Research Division.”
significantly.”

In the search for economic opportunities, Daley once proposed reviving Prince Edward Island’s trading links with the West Indies. Daley’s idea was to grow pumpkins, convert them into pumpkin soup, and market the value-added product to the West Indies. To his chagrin, Premier Shaw declined to take the pumpkin soup proposal to the Caribbean, and the concept died on the drawing board. Privately, a colleague asked Shaw about his refusal. “There is no way,” Shaw replied, “I am going to talk people into eating something that I wouldn’t eat!”

Most of Daley’s ideas made more sense than pumpkin soup. In later years, he liked to think of himself as a sort of godfather to the Comprehensive Development Plan that climaxed the decade. In reality, the Shaw administration’s development revolution was both ad hoc and piecemeal. That had much to do with the limitations of provincial resources, both human and fiscal, and where those shortcomings could best be remedied: the federal bureaucracy.

Ottawa spat out acronyms during the 1960s like potatoes from a beater digger. Each one represented a federal foray into the experimental new field of regional development. To provide aid to rural development, there was ARDA (1961), and then FRED (1965). There was the ADB (1962), a vehicle for federal politicians to deliver high-profile dollars into their constituencies; and, to help lure secondary industry into have-not regions, there was ADA (1963) and its piggy bank, the ADIA

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7 As related by Doug Boylan, University of Prince Edward Island, e-mail exchange, 10 December 1999.

8 See Alex Campbell, interview as part of Council of Maritime Premiers Ora History Project, PARO 4073. According to Campbell, Daley presented him on election with the outline of a development plan that Daley felt was “all set to go.” His plan turned out to be, in Campbell’s words, “only a list of potential opportunities.”

(1965). Each program meant to fight regional disparity by building “capacity,” and each shared the same remedy for regional decline: large doses of federal dollars. By 1968, the ADB alone had channelled $14.6 million into Prince Edward Island for various infrastructure projects.

The federal development agencies provided evidence for the modern complaint that there is always money to study problems, but never enough money to do anything about them. The Shaw years were awash in surveys and studies commissioned by the government, either separately or in tandem with ARDA. Consultants “from Toronto to Colorado Springs” swarmed the province, which in its islandness was proving itself an attractive laboratory for social planners. There had already been eight studies by the time the province signed a new five-year planning agreement with the federal government in 1965. The agreement provided the context for the provincial government’s hiring of Acres Research and Planning Ltd. of Toronto to carry out a whole new series of sectoral studies with an eye to recruiting more federal funding. The help was badly needed. While the consultants were consulting, the Shaw government’s ongoing adventure in industrial development had gotten completely out of control.

There is an encouraging sense of continuity to Island history. In 1902, out-of-province investors

\footnote{The summary is borrowed from E. R. Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype*, p. 211. For the record, ARDA stood for the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act; FRED stood for the Fund for Regional Economic Development; the ADB was the Atlantic Development Board; ADA was the Area Development Agency; and rather than an opera, ADIA meant}

\footnote{According to John Kenneth Burbridge, “The Atlantic Development Board and Atlantic Regional Development” (M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, 1971), p. 77, 78% of the $189.5 million spent in the region by the end of March, 1969 had gone towards either highways or power development.}

\footnote{The quote is from Milne, “Politics in A Beleaguered Garden,” in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, eds. *The Garden Transformed*, p. 45.}
convinced the Island government to provide them tax exemptions and loan guarantees in return for establishing a major meat-packing plant in Charlottetown. A heavy ground drift of public opposition soon changed the government’s mind. The investors were “mere promoters, who are here today and gone tomorrow,” charged one opponent. “It is a pretty serious business to have the revenues of the Province exploited and our finances probably shipwrecked for the benefit of a few, able, oily-tongued strangers.”

On the surface, at least, things had changed by the early 1960s. Instead of being courted by outside industry, Island governments were now doing the courting. Provided with a handsome dowry by federal funding programs, they turned their earnest charms on out-of-province entrepreneurs. Island governments had never really done this sort of thing before, and it should come as no surprise that they were sometimes taken advantage of.

Although later critics preferred to equate the practice of “forced development” with “unwanted development,” the term was really a greenhouse metaphor; it entailed jump-starting industry through government incentives. There was a commendable logic behind the first attempts at state-fostered development: put a modern spin on what the province already did well. Frozen food plants, for example, updated the old-time canning industry, adding value to the Island’s staple exports of fish and farm produce.

Among the Shaw government’s early initiatives were Seabrook Frozen Foods, which opened in New Annan in 1961, and British Columbia-based Langley Fruit Packers, which began operations in Montague in 1963. Despite Langley’s name, both plants produced frozen vegetables, and to supply them Island farmers experimented with unfamiliar cole crops such as cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and carrots.

In the summer of 1962, employee Gerard MacLellan, “the poet laureate of Seabrook’s,” immortalized the plant’s first-ever crop of peas:

*There’ll be one awful battle*  
*When wimmin go to buy*

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They’ll fight like wild mad cattle
For peas from P.E.I.

There’s peas here by the billions
This year we’ll ship by heck
In gallons, a hundred millions
Of pea-soup to Quebec.¹⁴

Billions of peas later, in 1971, Seabrook went bankrupt, though not out of business. It would wind up as Cavendish Farms, a part of the Irving business empire. Langley’s also had a chequered career before closing its doors for good in 1976.¹⁵ While neither plant lived up to expectations, they were notable success stories compared to the debacle that unfolded in Georgetown during the mid-1960s.

In many ways, Georgetown epitomized the Island economy’s historical decline. One of the best deepwater ports in Atlantic Canada, the King’s County capital had nothing to ship and little to sell by the 1960s. The ferries at Borden and Wood Islands now handled the people and products that had once made their way off-Island through the town, and the spider web of pavement that enmeshed the province had left the fading seaport on its long finger of land a dead-end destination.

In August 1963, a Montreal businessman of Norwegian extraction named Jens Moe approached Premier Shaw with a proposal to build a fish plant at Georgetown. His timing was perfect and probably not accidental. Only that spring, the Shaw Government had been soliciting Scandinavian investors for just such a venture. By October, the Province’s Prince Edward Island Industrial Corporation had agreed with Moe to invest 75% of the cost of a $1 million fish plant, Gulf Garden Foods; Moe Industries undertook to supply the balance of the money needed. A month later, Moe convinced the Province to lend him $3.85 million to relocate a small shipbuilding firm that he

¹⁴“Ode to Seabrook Farms” (1983), PEI Collection, Special Collections Room, Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island.

¹⁵From the beginning, there were rumours and doubts about the plants. Dorothy Cullen noted some of them in her diary entry for 16 January 1964: “There are complaints about farmers not getting good returns for their products – brussels sprouts, broccoli, pears, beans, and other stories of big profits.” My thanks for Cullen’s nephew, Dennis Curley, for sharing the diary with me.
had acquired, Bathurst Marine, from New Brunswick to Georgetown.

No one, it seems, thought to confirm Moe’s financial backing or his business credentials. “Those in Government,” a subsequent Royal Commission charitably observed, “were obviously carried away by Mr. Moe’s salesmanship.” In fact, Moe was a 34-year-old ex-sales engineer with “no conception of how to run a balance sheet or how to arrange working capital.” But he was both persuasive and plausible. Eyes wide shut, the government plunged ahead into financial quicksand.

The double-barreled initiative quickly became the flagship enterprise of the Shaw Government’s development strategy. “Geo’town Booms!” The Guardian applauded, “A Town Reborn.” Bathurst Marine was mainly producing trawlers to fish for Gulf Garden Foods, but its echo of the lost golden age of shipbuilding kindled Island imaginations. On 11 December 1965, the yard launched the Gulf Grenadier, the first steel ship ever built in the province. “Georgetown Harbour Rings with Hammers of Shipbuilders.”

At its opening, Gulf Garden Foods was touted as “the first fully integrated food-processing plant” in Canada, capable of packaging both fish and agricultural products. But behind the glossy brochures there was chaos. The plant was poorly conceived: Georgetown’s harbour iced over in winter and fish had to be trucked in from Nova Scotia to keep the factory open. It was badly designed: entire sections of the processing line never worked properly, and construction costs were more than two-and-a-half times the original estimates. And it was spectacularly mismanaged: Moe

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17 The quote is from the testimony of his business associate, Patrick Cavanagh, President of Premium Iron Ores Limited. Quoted in Mathias, Forced Growth, p. 19.


20 Allan T. Muir, comp. The Gulf Garden Story (1965). This was a promotional booklet published to mark the official opening of the plant.
had virtually no private investors, and frantically used government advances on shipbuilding contracts at Bathurst Marine to prop up the floundering fish plant. Meanwhile, a significant amount of the government’s money found its way to Moe Industries. There was so much chicanery, confusion, and incompetence that the whole undertaking ended up as a case study in how not to manage development.

By 1966, fanfare had turned to fiasco. By 1967, Moe was gone and both Georgetown firms were bankrupt. In between, on 30 December 1966, a Royal Commission was established to find out what had gone wrong and who was to blame. When it finally appeared in 1969, the Commission’s report applauded the government’s intentions, but condemned its performance, singling out the questionable conduct of the minister responsible, who had over-ridden both his advisors and the tendering process.\textsuperscript{21} He may only have been guilty of playing the old game of patronage, but he had been doing it in the expensive new world of industrial development.

The “rebirth” of Georgetown had been a money pit. Between 1963 and 1967, the Province had invested $9.35 million in Gulf Garden Foods and Bathurst Marine. In return, it ended up with two plants on life support and a debt in excess of $6.2 million, a huge sum for that time. Somewhat later than its sister provinces, Prince Edward Island had lost its economic development virginity. It had also lost a lot of credibility with both outside investors and federal bureaucrats.

After measuring the benefits from the first generation of government-sponsored industrial ventures in underdeveloped regions, one critic concluded, government “might have done better just giving the money away.” Malfeasance notwithstanding, he blamed the failures on a general lack of “expertise, judgment, experience, and reliable advice” on which governments could draw. Those lessons were not lost on the next generation of development planners, but, as they would discover, there were always new mistakes to be made.\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{22}Mathias, \textit{Forced Growth}, pp. vii, xiii-xiv.
With rural electricity, paving, and business incentives, Island governments were building physical infrastructure. With educational reform, they were trying to develop intellectual infrastructure. When Acres’ consulting study called education “a powerful engine for development” in 1967, it was only echoing conventional wisdom. The federal government had justified its friendly invasion of the provincial prerogative in the field of higher education on the same grounds: a skilled, educated workforce was an investment in the Canadian economy.

The postwar baby boom had put tremendous pressure on the Island’s educational system, further exposing its many shortcomings. In comparison to the rest of the country, Island students were, on average, badly housed, badly taught, and badly educated. For every one hundred students in Grade 2 in 1952, only twenty-nine would make it through high school; the national average was fifty-two. The system was also inequitable. The combination of supplementing government grants with local taxation meant that the more prosperous communities could afford better facilities and better qualified teachers than other areas. Inevitably, it was the pupils who suffered for their parents’ poverty.

The further one progressed through the school system, the worse things got. Outside of urban Prince Edward Island, one-room schools still dominated the primary grades. High schools were few, scattered, and ill-equipped. Of course, most students did not aspire to high school. They went to work instead. But they were ill-qualified even for that. The rapid decline of the family farm was pushing more and more Islanders out into the waged workforce. Their numbers pushed up the unemployment statistics (since farmers, being self-employed, had not counted), and their untrained presence put a new twist on the old preoccupation with “manual training.”

The whole educational infrastructure cried out for improvement, but that had been true since before the failed attempt at school consolidation back in 1905. The Matheson Government had already laid the legislative groundwork for change by appointing a Royal Commission on educational

finance. Donning its development armour, the Shaw government now gingerly grasped the nettle of reform.

There were two main thrusts to Conservative educational policy. Generous funding under the federal Technical and Vocational Assistance Act was used to build new vocational schools in Summerside and Charlottetown. And, as a first step toward school consolidation, the province began constructing a network of regional high schools. By 1963, there were fifteen of them. The faces of their first graduates gaze steadily out from the black-and-white starkness of high school yearbooks. They do not look like pioneers.

As expected, there was a modicum of petty rivalry, cross-purposes, and genuine anxiety about innovation, but on the whole the regional high school program was a resounding, if expensive, success. The new schools were hardly elegant, little more than concrete and brick boxes, but they represented a revolution in facilities, and were much prized as a mark of progress. Since rural high schools had been so few, regionalization allowed the government to give without really taking anything away. The next round of consolidation would not enjoy that luxury.

By 1965, the government was ready to address the primary grades. To help even out the quality of teachers in one-room schools, it had already taken over and standardized the local supplement that school districts taxed themselves to raise. But equality of funding could not begin to address the manifest inadequacies of the old school system. To do that would require economies of scale. That meant reducing the number of schools. And that meant more consolidation.

The capital costs of new school construction were too high to make more than a strong beginning during the 1960s. As of May 1969, there were 24 high schools and 57 elementary schools of three or more rooms in the province, but there were also 248 schools with only one or two rooms. A high percentage of teachers, particularly in the east and west, were classified on paper as under-qualified. And of the 25,265 school children between kindergarten and Grade Eight, nearly 16,000

24 Among other things, the Report of the Royal Commission on Educational Finance, released in May 1960, had recommended the upgrading of teachers’ qualifications, the creation of regional high schools, and a program of consolidation. According to Shaw’s Minister of Education, George Dewar, the Commission’s report was used as the blueprint for reform. (See George Dewar, Prescription for a Full Life (Summerside: L. George Dewar, 1993), p. 174.
attended schools that were judged physically inadequate.25

In time, a fierce debate would develop over the implications of school consolidation for the nature of education and the health of communities, but there was an immediate and jarring impact on the students who made the transition from the little red schoolhouse to the big brick one. This emotional texture of consolidation is often forgotten in the scholarly talk of curricular reform and community development. For many rural children, consolidation meant their first encounter with school buses, their first sustained exposure to children of other faiths, their first involvement in organized sports — in some cases, their first experience of running water and flush toilets.26

It is difficult today to recapture the naivete of those 1960s school children. In one rural fishing community, a group of plamates earnestly discussed what it would be like in the new consolidated school that was set to open in a few weeks’ time. They had little to go on except for the schoolyard scenes depicted in their copies of Fun with Dick and Jane, which conjured up a wonderland of shiny toys and ice cream cones. One of the children gravely observed, however, that you were likely to hear “bad words” at the new school, even “the baddest word.” The other children canvassed their meager vocabularies, but could not come up with a swear word that began with the letter “F.” And since their playmate refused to say it, and could not spell it, his friends went unenlightened — until the first recess at the consolidated school.

There were no toys either.27


26Walter Jones had pioneered the introduction of flushless toilets to many rural schools during his premiership.

27Personal recollection of author, whose one-room school was absorbed by Cardigan Consolidated Elementary School.
In 1956, the Innkeepers’ Association held a contest to come up with an official tourism slogan for Prince Edward Island. The winner was Avonna MacAusland from New Glasgow, deep in the rolling hill country of central Queen’s County. MacAusland suggested that the province be promoted as “Holiday Island.” To all appearances, Prince Edward Island was already growing into its new sobriquet.

The rapid growth of tourism during the 1950s was not unique to Prince Edward Island. The postwar era had popularized the notion of “recreational democracy” in North America, a belief that recreation time, including a yearly vacation, was a right for everyone (or at least the middle class). A booming economy and rising standards of living during the 1950s and 1960s allowed many people to exercise that right, and the baby boom ensured that they would vacation as families with small children. What better destination for them than “Holiday Island”?

Step by step during the 1950s, Island tourism took on the trappings of a bona fide industry. The Prince Edward Island Travel Board, publicly sponsored but privately run, began to issue yearly visitors’ guides. The 1953 edition was typical. It featured a beach on the front, Cavendish in the centre, and Green Gables on the back. As the province’s Roads to Resources program would argue, the entire province was a tourist destination, but Green Gables and the Prince Edward Island National Park were the magnets that drew many tourists to the Island. Tourism promoters advertised Prince Edward Island as a place for people to get away from it all. Tourism operators then busied themselves creating things for the visitors to do. While the literature purveyed Montgomery-esque images of an unspoiled paradise, local entrepreneurs began to fill in the vistas with generic attractions that would be familiar pretty much anywhere in North America.

The customer is always right, Frank MacKinnon, the brash and energetic new principal of Prince of Wales College, had told the Prince Edward Island Innkeepers’ Association in 1950: “Give

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28 Minutes of the Prince Edward Island Innkeepers’ Association, 26 May. The honorable mentions included “Holiday Haven,” “Recreationland,” and “Canada’s Leisure Land.” I am indebted to Dr. Alan MacEachern for sharing his tourism research and his insights with me.

29 Alan MacEachern, “We Sell Seashells by the Seashore: Tourism Promotion on P.E.I.,” lecture delivered as part of Island Lecture Series, Charlottetown, 22 March 1999.
the tourist what he wants, not what we want to give him.”

The advice did not seem incongruous at the time. The operators were not all that clear on what visitors wanted, though, since no one had yet thought to ask them.

Nevertheless, the number of visitors continued to increase. By the mid-1950s, the Tourism Division of the Department of Industry and Natural Resources was ranking tourism third among the province’s industries. Unable to measure its economic impact in any meaningful way, officials classed the tourism trade as “an invisible export,” and cast vague estimates at its value, settling for a figure of between $4 and $5 million dollars annually.

Box Essay: Beauty and the Beasts

The new emphasis on tourism also pumped air into Old Home Week, which had begun as a turn-of-the-century tourism promotion to lure expatriates and gradually become an Island institution. The weathered old celebration was given a fresh layer of gilt in 1960 with the inauguration of the Gold Cup and Saucer Pace, a spectacularly successful exercise in harness-racing hoopla, which quickly added a parade and a quasi-beauty pageant to its newly minted traditions. The annual gathering was as important to Islanders as to tourists, and its arrival each year marked the passage of the seasons. No matter what the calendar may say, every Islander knows that summer ends with Old Home Week.

Not to be outdone, Summerside continued to trump its annual Lobster Carnival, founded in 1955, and before long there were fêtes and festivals and carnivals all across the province. Some were new inventions, but most built on to the old tradition of tea parties, picnics, and agricultural exhibitions.

The old and new Prince Edward Island rubbed shoulders in the crowds that thronged the fairgrounds each summer. The Gold Cup and Saucer Girls, for instance, with their riding crops and abbreviated racing silks, presented a curious contrast to the Queen of the Furrows, who was crowned each year at the Dundas Plowing Match, the Kings County equivalent to Old Home Week. In addition to their other refinements, Queen of the Furrows contestants had to be able to plow. Harness-driving skills were definitely not a prerequisite for Gold Cup and Saucer Girls. Their job was to promote the big race, and the selection of Miss Gold Cup and Saucer

30Minutes of the P.E.I. Innkeepers’ Association, 2 February 1950.

31See the Trade Division Reports within the Report of the Department of Industry and Natural Resources in the appendices of the Journal of the Legislative Assembly. The “invisible export” quote was made in the report for 1955.
was determined by which horse won, not who was judged the best exemplar of some feminine ideal. Neither contest was very typical, and Islanders embraced them both without any trace of embarrassment.

Tourism’s growing importance could be indexed by the interest that government took in it. Over the course of the 1950s, its tourism promotion budget increased by 368%. The dollar figure was less impressive; the total for the entire decade was less than $700,000.

Government had also begun to invest in tourism infrastructure. In 1947, the province launched a modest “Tourism Accommodation Loan” program. More than $300,000 was disbursed during the next eight years. One-third of that total, $99,000, was lent in 1954, and much of that went to Wally Rodd of Highfield. That year, he built the province’s first full-service motel, a sixteen-unit complex at Winsloe, part way between Charlottetown and the North Shore beaches. Others quickly followed. In 1964 alone, ten new motels would open.

Summer resorts had been leisurely catering to tourists on Prince Edward Island since the 1860s, but the new accommodations were different. “Motel” was short for “Motor hotel.” The name spoke volumes. Long and low, strung out like stables at a race track, motels were essentially one-night stands for families on the move. Even lower on the cost spectrum were campgrounds. During the 1950s and 1960s, the provincial government established a network of provincial parks that catered specially to campers. The first of these opened in the summer of 1958, at Strathgartney, on a forty-acre plot of land donated by Robert L. Cotton. By the end of the 1960s, the province was administering nearly forty campgrounds and picnic sites.

An important watershed came in 1960, when tourism was raised to the dignity of a government department (albeit with a shared minister). As sociologist Judith Adler points out, the

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32Rodd received some $40,000 (Executive Council Minutes, 18, 24 February 1954). A generation later, the Rodd family would assemble a whole chain of resorts in the Maritime region.


new status implied that something so important needed to be managed. In the mid-1960s, Acres Planning and Consulting would devote a whole sectoral report to the problems and potentialities of tourism. Many Islanders might still be ambivalent about the hospitality industry, but everybody now took it seriously.

It was hard not to. A dramatic boom in tourism numbers was one of the hallmarks of the 1960s. Every year set a new attendance record. Over the course of the decade, the number of tourists nearly tripled, from 208,000 to 573,000. Tourism spending kept pace. In 1970, officials estimated that visitors had spent $19.6 million in the province, a 40% increase in five years. That year, for the first time, the Department of Tourism’s budget topped the million-dollar mark. Tourism was no longer an “invisible export.” Tourists -- and tourist attractions -- had begun to leave their mark on the Island landscape.

Like the tourism operators, the ferries scrambled to keep up with the increasing traffic. In 1962, with cars piling up at the ferry terminals, the federal government finally placed an additional boat on the Borden-Cape Tormentine run. Designed with the summer bulge in tourist visitation in mind, the new vessel somewhat resembled a floating bridge: automobiles drove on one end and drove off the other. It was not equipped to operate in ice, and it did not take railcars.

This was a telling new departure. The first tourism brochures in Island history had been produced by the railways, and the first modern ferry, the SS Prince Edward Island, had been built expressly for conveying railcars. Now trains were essentially irrelevant to tourism transport. In fact, the railway service on Prince Edward Island during the 1960s was a lot like the wreck of the old ‘97: going downhill dangerously fast. Declining traffic resulted in cutbacks in service, which resulted in


37 The figures are taken from the annual reports of the Department of Tourist Development.

38 There were hopes that the “ro-ro” ferry (“roll-on, roll-off”) could operate in winter, but the first ice-season disproved that notion. See John Edward Belliveau, Silver Donald Cameron, and Michael Harrington, Iceboats to Superferries: An Illustrated History of Marine Atlantic (St. John’s, NF: Breakwater Books, 1992), p. 79.
further declines in traffic, which justified further cutbacks in a dreary cycle familiar to most Maritimers.

Islanders instinctively resisted the round of station closures and layoffs, but not many of them used the railway. By late 1967, CN’s passenger service between Summerside and Borden was averaging less than a person per day. When the passenger service was finally abandoned in October 1969, hardly anyone noticed. By then, trains were also losing the battle for freight traffic to motor transport. The last train was still twenty years away, but mile by mile of abandoned track and station closure by station closure, the railway was clearly dying.

In 1962 all of that was for the future. Given contemporary trends, one might have expected a new car ferry to be called the “Holiday Island.” Not yet. The ship-namers had rediscovered another status to promote. Islanders’ new link with the rest of Canada was called the MV Confederation.

5

In the mid-1960s, a nation in search of nationalism contracted a case of centennial-itis. The contagion eventually infected all parts of the country, even Quebec. Symptoms included a mild euphoria with a marked tendency toward nostalgia. The condition was not terminal, though it lasted for nearly a decade, and it came in distinct waves, cresting in 1967. The first, and last, outbreaks would be on Prince Edward Island.

It was entirely in keeping with the Island’s paradoxical attitude toward Ottawa that a province that was apt to blame Confederation for all of its woes should now glory in being its “cradle.” The claim was based on having hosted the Charlottetown Conference back in 1864, the first stop on the rocky road to Confederation. The province had too little boast about its role in the nation’s doings to ignore its part in the nation’s making.

The 1964 centennial witnessed a heavy spate of programs and promotions. There were history

contests, costume balls, “Centennial Farm” plaques — the whole gamut of what soon would be standard Centennial fare in other parts of Canada. Tourists, tournaments, and conventions descended on the Island like a plague of locusts (though more welcome), demonstrating better than any consultants’ study the many holes in the province’s tourism infrastructure.40 There was a parade of politicians, too, fishing for favourable comparisons with their constitutional ancestors.

“The big day is here,” librarian Dorothy Cullen reported to her diary on 1 September, the anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference:

P.M. Pearson and 10 premiers gave commemorative addresses at Confederation Chamber at 10 a.m. — they were broadcast. Actors representing 1864 delegates arrived via Queen Victoria at 3:00 p.m. and drove by horse drawn carriages to Provincial Building. They re-enacted some of the discussions and then drove to Government House with present day leaders in open cars following. Great crowds on the streets. Laura and I saw the parade and I took several pictures. The crowd was equal to anything I’ve ever seen here. . . .41

Not everyone was so pleased with the day’s wonders. Cullen noted: “It seems Mr. Le Sage [Quebec premier Jean Lesage] objected that no one in [the] re-enactment spoke French. It is pointed out no one did in 1864.”Exactement, the Quebec premier might have replied.

At year’s end the outbreak of centennial-itis receded, but it left in its wake a few glistening landmarks. In a celebration that was bound to involve flag-waving, it had been something of an embarrassment that Prince Edward Island had no flag of its own to wave. With considerably less controversy than the emotional flap that would attend the adoption of a national flag, the spring sitting of the Island Legislature quickly approved provincial colours based on the armorial bearings of 1905.

The province’s paper-strict liquor laws, which still banned booze from public places, would have made toasting either Confederation or the new flag difficult had the Legislature not relaxed the

40The number of tourists, a third of a million, set another new record. According to the Tourist Development Department, many of them headed for Charlottetown.

41Dorothy Cullen, diary entry for 1 September1964 (courtesy Dennis Curley).
regulations to allow alcohol along with meals in hotel restaurants and their lounges.\textsuperscript{42} The debate in Cabinet over the new rules had been long and fractious. Even sixteen years after the repeal of Prohibition, politicians had to step lightly around the sensibilities of fierce temperance advocates. Among those was Premier Shaw’s own wife, known to the Premier and his circle as “Mom.”

On the evening after the pivotal cabinet meeting, a colleague found the Premier sitting alone in his office in the gloaming:

“Mr. Premier,” he said, “are you okay?”
“No, I’m not,” Shaw replied curtly.
“Can I help you?” He thought the Premier must be ill.
“No. I’m beyond help.”
“What’s wrong?”
“I’m afraid to go home. Mom will kill me!”\textsuperscript{43}

The most important legacy of the 1964 Centennial required less fortitude, but considerably more vision. One of the premiere events of the year was the opening of a state-of-the-arts cultural complex in the heart of Charlottetown. The Montreal firm of Affleck, Desbarats, Dimakopolous, Lebensold, and Sise had won the national competition for its design, but the real architect of the Fathers of Confederation Memorial Building was Frank MacKinnon, the political scientist principal of Prince of Wales College.

As early as 1950, MacKinnon had advocated the construction of a multipurpose cultural centre on Prince Edward Island to commemorate the Fathers of Confederation.\textsuperscript{44} Beginning with Premier Alex Matheson’s rash promise in 1956 that the Province would maintain the structure if he could get it built, MacKinnon quietly began rallying support for the project. At the same time, he set

\textsuperscript{42} Alcohol could also be sold in clubs with clearly defined basis for membership (not counting the consumption of alcohol) and in “lounges,” as long as they were in conjunction with licensed dining rooms. See \textit{The Acts of the General Assembly of Prince Edward Island}, 1964, 13 Eliz II, cap. 21.

\textsuperscript{43} Douglas Boylan, interview with author, University of Prince Edward Island, 6 July 1999.

\textsuperscript{44} MacKinnon raised the idea in his brief to the Massey Commission on the Arts, Letters, and Sciences The germ of the idea of a Centennial Memorial Building is sometimes said to have originated with Mrs. Glady Harriet Ellis, who envisioned a provincial museum and modern art gallery. (See \textit{A Century of Women}, [Charlottetown: Zonta Club, 1973], pp. 70-71.)
up a public trust, and enlisted a prestigious national board to run it. Together they went about the
delicate task of convincing eleven governments to contribute proportionately toward the estimated
$5.6 million construction costs at a ratio of 15¢ per Canadian citizen.\textsuperscript{45} The formula thus provided
for the federal government to provide one half of the cost, with the provinces supplying the balance.
Prince Edward Island’s contribution was in kind: the construction site.

Forceful, well-connected, stubborn, and convincing, MacKinnon steered carefully through
the shoals of politics, parochialism, and self-interest that could kill a project requiring such
widespread consensus.\textsuperscript{46} In his favour, he had powerful friends, national prosperity, and the early
symptoms of the centennial bug. He also had an exciting concept. Some might have thought that the
eventual design looked like a mausoleum or, as one local wag claimed, a potato warehouse, but it was
intended as a living memorial to the Fathers of Confederation. There would be a memorial hall, but,
also, a thousand-seat theatre, an art gallery and museum, and a library.

Premier Robert Stanfield of Nova Scotia had already turned the first sod in February 1963 by
the time the final funding agreement was in place. The complex, three separate buildings joined
underground so as not to overpower the surrounding architecture, quickly took shape over the next
twenty months. The “Fathers of Confederation Memorial Building” flanked Province House, site of
the Charlottetown Conference, on Queen Square, at the physical and official centre of the provincial
capital. In fact, several local landmarks were bulldozed to make room for it. To emphasize the
historical link to 1864, the buildings’ concrete walls were clothed in the same Wallace stone from
which Province House had been constructed. A handsome stone market building, recently gutted by
fire, had once stood on the site of the Main Stage theatre. Where generations of Island farmers had
gathered to gossip and do business, a monument to “high” culture now rose.

On 7 October 1964, on time and on budget, the Centre was officially opened by Queen

\textsuperscript{45}The formula thus provided for the federal government to contribute one half of the cost,
with the provinces supplying the balance.

\textsuperscript{46}The account given here is largely based on Frank MacKinnon’s version behind the
Centre’s founding in Honour the Founders! Enjoy the Arts!: Canada’s Confederation Memorial
Elizabeth II. Islanders watched in awe as she arrived at the theatre, “looking like a fairy tale Queen.”

This is a memorial to Confederation, orated Prime Minister Lester Pearson, “But it is dedicated also to the fostering of those things that enrich the mind and delight the heart, those intangible but precious things that give meaning to a society and help create from it a civilization and a culture.” Dorothy Cullen’s assessment was more prosaic. “The theatre is wonderful,” she told her diary, “but I don’t care for the charcoal color of the wall panels.”

Although the rest of the building was unfinished, the theatre had been ready in time to host the annual Dominion Drama Festival in April 1964. There was a certain appropriateness in launching the new arts centre with a tribute to amateur theatre. For decades, it had thrived on Prince Edward Island through community and church groups and organizations such as the Little Theatre Guild.

Afterward, the professionals took over. Various performances filled the Main Stage for the rest of that first summer, but, by 1965, the Centre’s distinguished director, Mavor Moore, was ready to unveil the first Charlottetown Summer Festival.

Shakespeare trod the boards at Stratford, Ontario. Shaw declaimed at Niagara-on-the-Lake. From there it was no great leap to imagine that Charlottetown might corner the Canadian market on musical theatre. That ambition received a tremendous boost when the first Summer Festival offering became a smash hit. Given the setting, the choice of subject had been, perhaps, inevitable. With a great deal of panache and a dollop of sentiment, composer Norman Campbell and lyricist Don Harron converted Canada’s most endearing children’s novel, Anne of Green Gables, into its most enduring musical. Critics liked it, audiences loved it, and the Summer Festival was launched into national orbit. There it outshone the rest of the Centre’s several functions, attracting the lion’s share of the publicity.

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47Dorothy Cullen, diary entry for 7 October 1964.

48Pearson is quoted in MacKinnon, Honour the Founders!, p. v; Cullen made the diary entry on 20 May 1964 after attending one of the Dominion Drama Festival offerings in the main theatre.

49The cultural contribution of amateur theatre groups was noted in the submission to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences prepared for the Province by Cyrus MacMillan, December 1949.
the funding -- and the criticism.

“Something wonderful has happened in Charlottetown,” national theatre critic Nathan Cohen wrote of the Centre in 1965: “a symbol of genuine national meaning has been created.” The more common response from the “uncultured” segment of Island society was, “What’s that got to do with the price of potatoes on Prince Edward Island?” Such attitudes soon began chipping away at the grand edifice that MacKinnon had engineered.

Both Cohen and the unpublished critics were right. The Confederation Centre (as it came to be known) was wonderful, but it did not have much to do with the price of potatoes or with any other aspect of most Islanders’ everyday lives. Indeed, because it was extravagant and expensive, the Centre focussed some of the latent tensions in Island society. Some detractors saw in the complex an expensive exercise in cultural elitism created to “provide work for a few people from Toronto.” Such comments could be dismissed as small-minded, but, even among the cultural intelligentsia, there were murmurs of dissent when it became apparent that the Confederation Centre could not fulfill all of their aspirations. There had been room in MacKinnon’s vision, or at least in his persuasion, for Island heritage and art. Until it was actually built, the Confederation Centre could be all things to all people. But it did not take long for a gulf to open between the Centre’s national mandate and the growing demands of local culture. And, since the provincial government bore the brunt of financing its operation, the cross-purposes became a nagging political headache. Frank MacKinnon had built a magnificent monument for Canadians, but Islanders might be forgiven for wondering how much and for how long they should have to pay for it.

50Quoted in MacKinnon, Honour the Founders!, p. 38.

51According to Frank MacKinnon, Church Politics and Education (p. 54), Premier Walter Jones had pointedly informed the Massey Commission at a government dinner in its honour in 1950, “I can’t see why the Commission should bother with Prince Edward Island at all; it doesn’t need any culture.”
In December 1965 the new Confederation Centre hosted a boisterous political convention called to choose a new leader for the provincial Liberal party. The winner was Alex B. Campbell, a 32-year-old lawyer from Summerside. By-elected only that February, he was the newest and youngest member of the Legislative Assembly. Now he became Leader of the Opposition.

Campbell had an excellent political pedigree. His father, Chief Justice Thane Campbell, had himself been a highly successful Liberal premier from 1936 to 1943. Alex Campbell was young, handsome, and charming. He personified the new Prince Edward Island, and he would learn to play up the contrast between himself and the elderly Shaw and his middle-aged colleagues: the “horse and buggy boys,” Campbell would label them. In reality, there was little enough to choose between the two party platforms except image, but there was nothing very unusual in that.

It was hard to say which way the political tide was turning. The Liberals were back in power in Ottawa, albeit with a minority government, by the time Campbell entered politics; but Prince Edward Island continued to send Tory MPs to Parliament. One of them was a woman, Margaret Macdonald. Her victory, the first by an Island woman at any level higher than municipal politics, would have seemed more momentous had the circumstances been different. Macdonald’s chief qualification was that she had been married to the sitting Member for Cardigan, John A. Macdonald, a popular merchant and war hero who had died tragically young. There was a mite of political opportunism in his widow’s nomination, and a measure of both loyalty and sympathy in the votes that gave her a by-election victory on 29 May 1961. Those sentiments went only so far. “Mrs. John A.,” as campaign literature styled her, held the Cardigan seat at the next general election in 1962, but was defeated in the fall of Diefenbaker’s minority government in 1963. Her political career ended there.

Mindful of Islanders’ habit of matching the political stripe of their provincial governments to the federal pattern, Premier Shaw had called a snap election in December 1962, while Diefenbaker was still clinging to power. The Tories took 19 seats, making Shaw the first Conservative premier to win consecutive terms since J. A. Mathieson in 1915. Shaw was 75 now, and he had been seriously ill earlier in 1962. Outwardly, he bounced back, but his government seemed to age rapidly during its

second term as events increasingly slipped beyond its grasp. When the House was dissolved in 1966, the Conservative majority was down to four seats.

The ensuing election was difficult to predict. Liberals and Conservatives seemed evenly matched. Moreover, the political landscape that they were contesting had visibly changed as intimations of modernity at last overtook the province’s creaking electoral machinery. Voters’ lists had been introduced and the archaic “property vote” provision for councillors’ seats eliminated. The same reforms had also done away with the patchwork riding of 5th King’s, giving its two seats to much underrepresented Charlottetown. Bowing to political pressure, the Shaw Government resurrected the lost riding in time for the election by the clever expedient of enlarging the house from thirty to thirty-two members.\(^53\)

Pundits agreed that the campaign was dull, but election night on 30 May was a cliffhanger. The contest swayed back and forth all evening, with no clear victor emerging. After all of the recounts were over, the two parties were deadlocked at fifteen seats apiece. The government would be decided in 1st King’s, where the voting had been deferred after one of the candidates suddenly died in mid-campaign. All eyes turned (north)eastwards.

Depending on one’s views about small-scale political corruption, the 1966 by-election in 1st Kings is either famous or notorious. According to rumour, the selling price of a vote soared to $100. Money was only one persuader. The Government named one of its candidates Minister of Highways (the incumbent minister having been defeated in the spring) and a sudden bonanza of roadwork befell the riding. A popular version of the Tory strategy ran, “If it moves, pension it; if it doesn’t, pave it.”\(^54\) One local wit allegedly erected a sign on part of his property reading, “PLEASE DON’T PAVE; THIS IS MY ONLY PASTURE.”\(^55\) There was a hint of desperation in the Tories’ antics, for it was

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\(^53\)The riding had initially included only Georgetown and Royalty, but its small population had led over the years to its enlargement to include a series of headlands jutting out from central Kings County into Northumberland Strait.

\(^54\)Frank MacKinnon repeated the joke in *Canadian Annual Review* for 1966 (p. 151), and it has been repeated many times since.

\(^55\)The most complete and colourful account is given in Marlene-Russell Clark, “Island Politics,” in Bolger, ed. *Canada’s Smallest Province*, pp. 314-316.
clear now that the tide had turned. On 11 July, the Liberals took both seats handily. That night, cars and trucks full of jubilant Grits toured Main Street in Souris, “with horns blasting and the occupants cheering and whooping in their hour of triumph.” The Liberals were back in the driver’s seat.

Contemporaries have described Alex Campbell as a populist, a man who loved to mix with people. He was a politician, not a philosopher, but he had definite ideas about his party. “I would say that there is very little philosophical difference between the present Liberal and Conservative Parties,” he told one inquirer in 1968, then proceeded to differentiate between them: “The Conservative Party of Canada is very cognizant of tradition and approaches the concept of change with its feelings for tradition very apparent. Conversely, the Liberal Party of Canada does not consider tradition to be an essential element in its approaches to policy. The Liberal Party is more concerned with the concept of new ideas than with the concept of old traditions.” It was a telling distinction. The new Premier was not just coping with change; he believed in its necessity.

“I wish to grow my hair to a length comparable to the Beatles,” a high school student appealed to Premier Campbell in 1967. “I would like to know if there is any rule or such that can prevent me from wearing my hair at the length I wish. I have attempted to wear this style of hair to school and have


57 In 1971, he told Peter C. Newman of MacLean’s that “necessity has more often been the author of my actions than an established political philosophy.” See A. B. Campbell to Peter C. Newman, editor, MacLean’s Magazine, 1 February 1972. A. B. Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.36. Newman had sent him a series of questions about his personal tastes and beliefs.

been told to get my hair cut by the teachers.” Soon enough the young premier would be sporting his own fashionably long hair and sideburns, but at this point the “Swinging Sixties” were pretty much a television phenomenon on Prince Edward Island. Campbell tactfully advised the student to do as his school required.

As school authorities discovered, fashion, like change, cannot be legislated. In 1970, the Charlottetown School Board retreated from one of its general policies. Henceforth, it announced, female students attending junior or senior high school would be permitted to wear slacks. Pants might be unladylike, but they were apparently preferable to mini skirts.

 Islanders did eventually let their hair down and their hems up, but not too much. Prince Edward Island was not Haight Ashbury or even Yonge Street. When promoters announced plans for a massive rock festival, Junction ’71, the government panicked. Visions of drug-dazed, sex-crazed hippies crowding their imaginations, members of the Legislature co-operated to ram through an ill-considered act early in 1971 that empowered the Attorney General to prohibit any public gathering “which in his opinion may contribute to the disruption of public order.” It was the most draconian piece of legislation since the Walter Jones’ muzzling of Island unions. The government thought better of proclaiming the legislation, but that did not stop Time Magazine from dubbing us “the uptight little Island.”

While the government was busy banning rock concerts, its new tourist resort at Brudenell was busy unveiling a “Kitten Club.” Local wags made predictable jokes as high-heeled waitresses wobbled around in satin bathing suits, complete with net stockings, cleavage, and cat whiskers, serving drinks to well-heeled patrons. Hugh Hefner was apparently a more commendable model for

59 Charles Dawson to Alex Campbell, A. B. Campbell Papers, 28 February 1967; and Campbell to Dawson, 10 March 1967, PARO RG 25.36, 1966-67 1035.


development than Woodstock.

As such examples suggest, American popular culture had overtaken Prince Edward Island’s Baby Boomers. The Generation Gap was less wide, however, than the cultural gulf that had opened in Island society. The dismantling of the Island’s traditional rural order was almost complete in many communities by 1970. Its fate was embodied in the rapid decline of fiddle music.

For a time in the 1950s, modernization seemed to favour traditional music in the province. Improved transportation made it possible for people to travel much farther to attend “old time” dances, and the Island’s fiddlers were more in demand than ever. But their following gradually fell away as country-and-western music and, especially, rock-and-roll, pushed their way onto the dance floor. Older Islanders may not have known that rock and roll was American ghetto slang for sex, but most of them knew that they did not like it, and many rural dance halls banned the new music during the 1950s. It did little good. Rock-and-roll had already become a touchstone for teenagers, who emerged as a distinct social group in the postwar era. Instead of taking up the fiddle, they bought electric guitars. Instead of dancing sets, they learned how to jive.

The musical conflict posed here is to some extent artificial. There was no real reason why Baby Boomers could not like fiddle music and folk or rock or country-and-western -- the “East Coast music” of the 1990s, in fact, represented a fusion of those genres. Whole families still gathered around the television during the 1960s to watch Don Messer and his Islanders on CBC, and fiddlers were still common at house parties in various parts of rural Prince Edward Island. Nevertheless, Beatle haircuts seemed somehow incompatible with strathspeys and reels. Modernization, with its trend toward global culture and its unravelling of the Island’s social fabric, had cost fiddling its

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62 See J. J. Hornby, “The Fiddle on the Island: Fiddling Tradition on Prince Edward Island” (M.A. Thesis, Memorial University, NF, 1982), pp. 87 - passim. He sees 1957-58 as something of a watershed, when Don Messer live fiddling on CFCY Radio came to an end. See, also, Largus MacInnis, Lakeville, interviewed by Ken Perlman (transcript provided courtesy Ken Perlman, Boston).

cultural milieu. More and more, it was the music of an older generation, and, as that older generation constantly reminded school children, the future was in the hands of the young.

If the 1960s were sounding different, they were tasting different, too. On 15 September 1960, as firefighters wrestled with the flames in Prince County, Vernon Mitton celebrated the grand opening of his “immaculately clean and shining new” Dairy Queen outlet on the corner of Summer Street and Elm Avenue (soon to be re-named University Avenue) in the outer reaches of Charlottetown. Featuring “the Dairy Queen delights that are so well known across North America,” it was the Island’s first fast-food franchise. In 1964, an A & W drive-in opened a little further out of town, at the corner of University and Belvedere Avenues. Kentucky Fried Chicken joined the strip in 1969. By the mid-1970s, a full menu of North America’s fast-food brand names waylaid appetites along the main entries into Charlottetown. Where stately elms had once shaded a quiet residential neighbourhood, a trail of French fries now led down University Avenue into the city. The fast-food revolution, soon to be followed by an epidemic of doughnuts, had arrived on Prince Edward Island. Within a few years, the principal streets leading into Charlottetown and Summerside would be remarkably indistinguishable from main streets all over small-town North America.

Fast-food restaurants were not the only franchises gaining weight in the service sector. By 1960, there were already ten Mainland-based chain stores represented on Prince Edward Island. Seeking to leave a record for future generations, diarist Dorothy Cullen carefully noted one of their effects. “The stores in Charlottetown are open Friday nights until 9 or 9:30. The night was changed some years ago from Saturday night. Since Eaton’s came to Charlottetown some years ago there is great rivalry between them and Holman’s and Moore & McLeod’s. One of them is putting on some

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64 The information for the fast food franchises is drawn from a collection of newspaper clippings focusing on Island businesses in the PEI Collection, Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island.

65 Because off-Island “chain stores” were taxed by the province, a list was provided in the revenue section of the Public Accounts. See “Public Accounts, 1959-60,” Journal of the Legislative Assembly, 1961.
kind of sale nearly every week — a lot of unnecessary junk sometimes.” 66 The competition got fiercer that year when Zellers located its first retail outlet on the Island right alongside the Eaton’s store on Kent Street. The outcome was perhaps predictable, since Island-based department stores such as Holman’s could not compete with the big chains’ buying power. Consumers voted with their wallets; retail sales by chain stores on Prince Edward Island tripled during the 1960s. 67 One by one the old-time fixtures of Island commercial life began to close up shop.

The department store itself was being redefined on Prince Edward Island in the 1960s. A few hundred feet from the Dairy Queen, Hughes’ Pond had for decades supplied ice to help preserve local residents’ food. By the mid-1960s, most Charlottetonians had refrigerators, and, in 1965, the pond was landfilled to provide the site for a 70,000-square-foot shopping mall, the Island’s first. The project was an organizational and construction disaster that nearly crippled the developer, M. F. Schurman Company, but the “Royalty Mall” survived. 68 Soon there were others, each with its own national department store as anchor tenant, each a little further away from the old business districts. Within a generation, Prince Edward Island would reportedly have twice as much retail space per capita as the national average. 69

The suburban malls had obvious attractions. Store owners paid lower property taxes away from the downtowns and had room to grow. In the biting cold of winter, shoppers could stroll from store to store in climate-controlled comfort. Malls were also trendy. In the beginning, at least, everything there was new and exuberantly modern. No more lounging around the blacksmith shop or the general store now.

The malling of Prince Edward Island underpinned a steady migration of people and commerce

66 Diary of Dorothy Cullen, 24 January 1964 (courtesy of Dennis Curley, Port Elgin, Ontario).


68 A company version of the construction saga is provided in MacFarlane, The M. F. Schurman Company Limited: A Century of Building ([Charlottetown]: M. F. Schurman Co. Ltd., [1996]), pp. 149 - passim.

from downtown to the suburbs. As each new layer of homes and stores was added to the peripheries of Island towns, the urban cores grew more hollow. By the end of the 1960s, “Olde Charlottetown” had begun to look distinctly shabby, and its waterfront was practically deserted. The major trends of the 1970s would do relatively little to reverse the process. It was little comfort to reflect that this decay reproduced in miniature the experience of most North American cities.

The enabler for these trends was the automobile. The Island had travelled a great distance from the Anti-Automobile Act of 1908. It was the car that made the suburban malls easy to reach, and the car that made downtown shopping inconvenient. It was the car that brought the hordes of summer tourists, that took Islanders to work and play. Drive-thrus were still to come, but the drive-in restaurant flourished. The 1960s were the heyday of the drive-in movie as well. In former cow pastures across the Island, cars clustered like June bugs caught in the light of the giant picture screens. The night air was pungent with the heavy aroma of popcorn and the sizzle of hamburger grease from the canteen and the tinny sound of metal speakers clipped onto car windows. While romance blossomed on the big screen, in the velvet darkness of the automobiles sexual mores were put to the test. “Five minutes to show time!”

The debate over traditional values was not just taking place in the back seat at the drive-in. The Island family was changing as rapidly as the family farm. The number of working women was expanding even faster than the Island work force. By 1971, there were 14,715 women on the job, an 80% increase in one decade. Their presence was partly a reflection of women’s changing aspirations, and partly a response to families’ need for more income. Their sheer number, combined with the coming of age of Baby Boomers, placed new pressures on the Island economy. At the same time, it encouraged a gradual redefinition of women’s roles and rights within Island society.

Families were being redefined, too. For one thing, they shrunk. The widespread adoption of the birth control pill was one conspicuous reason. Modernization was a more subtle one. On subsistence farms, where children constituted an unpaid work force and the fruits of one’s labour could be eaten, there were certain economies of scale to large families. In a wage economy, large families merely sharpened the edge of poverty.

Extended families went the way of the family farm. At the same time, the number of single-parent families mushroomed. Even before the federal government’s new divorce legislation in 1968
removed government “from the bedrooms of the nation,” the divorce rate on Prince Edward Island had been rising; in the previous five years it had more than doubled. But in the three years after the new law, it tripled. Over that period, over twice as many women as men filed. The gap between the number of people wanting divorces and the number seeking them was clearly narrowing.

It was not so much that social pressures were driving couples apart, but that social pressures were no longer keeping them together. Although Prince Edward Island remained an essentially conservative place, the moral and spiritual climate in the province was in a state of flux. Most Islanders still identified strongly with their particular religious denomination, but they were far less inclined to obey the clergy’s dictates in acting out their lives. A secularizing wind was blowing strongly through the province. Dorothy Cullen confided some of the changes in the Roman Catholic Church to her diary on 20 February 1964: “This morning a rather sweeping change in our Liturgy. At Mass the priest turned and read the Epistle & Gospel in English.”

The intended reforms within the Catholic Church were meant to extend beyond ritual. They were accompanied by tentative attempts at dialogue among the various Christian denominations. Observers thought they detected a rise in religious tolerance, even on Prince Edward Island, but it was too early yet to know whether the real trend was toward ecumenism or apathy. Opinions on that differed mightily, and one person’s “renewal” was another’s apostasy. For while organized religion on Prince Edward Island might feel slightly unwell, it was clearly not dead. In any case, denominationalism had always been a compound of faith and other loyalties. As the 1960s would demonstrate, the mixture was still combustible.

The delicate system of accommodation that kept religion from becoming an open issue in the

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70 The figures are published in the various editions Canada Year Book for the period. In the first year of the new legislation, there were 102 divorces granted on Prince Edward Island, compared to 20 the previous year. At the same time, the Island’s divorce rate remained among the lowest in the country.
province had begun to crumble in the 1950s as the social and cultural ground shifted beneath it. Trouble started in 1957, when Roman Catholic St. Dunstan’s University encroached on a prerogative of government-operated Prince of Wales College by convincing the Matheson government to license teachers trained at St. Dunstan’s. Protestant critics of the decision railed against a policy that allowed a sectarian university to train teachers for a non-denominational school system. Ominously, the argument ranged across party lines and spread into the press.

The positions were reversed in 1964, when a carefully orchestrated campaign of briefs and presentations pushed the Shaw government into introducing legislation that would elevate Prince of Wales College to university status. Roman Catholic opposition to the PWC Bill had severely practical dimensions. A Prince of Wales University would strip St. Dunstan’s of its monopoly as the only post-secondary institution with degree-granting powers in the province. But, as with so many issues on Prince Edward Island, past history gave the dispute its intensity. Prince of Wales was by legal definition non-sectarian, but in the eyes of most Roman Catholics, and some Protestants, it had always been a de facto Protestant school dominated by a Protestant administration. From the official Catholic perspective, Prince of Wales’ academic ambitions were construed as a deliberate challenge.

The higher education issue was also undeniably about money. In the decade since the federal government first began making per capita grants to post-secondary institutions in the 1950s, both Prince of Wales and St. Dunstan’s had come to rely on federal funds to underwrite the human and physical resources required to operate in the modern era. As the first Baby Boomers reached university age in the 1960s, a tremendous expansion of facilities loomed. Only government could finance the necessary growth.

The shadow of the past leaned darkly over the Shaw government as it considered the PWC Bill. The Tory caucus split along religious lines, with the Provincial Treasurer, Alban Farmer, acting out the part of defender of Catholic interests. “Met with Premier on 11 March 1964 re the P.W.C. Act,” Minister of Education George Dewar recorded in his diary. “He is very disturbed about the bill. Feels government may be defeated on it. Farmer making threats.” That evening after the session,
Shaw called a special meeting of the Protestants in his caucus to work out a position. An observer might be excused for confusing the 1960s with the 1860s.

Eventually, another Catholic Conservative, Henry Wedge, brokered an acceptable compromise: pass the act, but withhold its proclamation pending the report of a royal commission on higher education. Although the Minister of Education voted against the Wedge amendment, the Tory caucus closed ranks behind it, and the legislation passed without bringing down the government.

The subsequent Royal Commission on Higher Education recommended that government proclaim the PWC Act, which the Shaw administration accordingly did on 1 June 1965. But the Report also looked askance at the financial absurdity of a province of 110,000 citizens supporting two full-fledged undergraduate universities. Raising PWC to equal status with St. Dunstan’s was meant as the first step toward a federation that would feature two distinct campuses within a single University of Prince Edward Island.

Although there were deep divisions within the Catholic community on the issue, the St. Dunstan’s administration regarded the federation concept as a way to preserve some semblance of a diocesan university that was fast becoming too expensive for the Diocese to operate on its own. Even before the Prince of Wales Act came into force, St. Dunstan’s amended its own charter to create -- on paper at least -- a more secular, and so, more financially deserving, university.

The Prince of Wales perspective was markedly different. Having already orchestrated the unlikely creation of a national arts centre in Charlottetown, PWC president Frank MacKinnon saw no reason why his college could not become one of the great universities of Canada. In his view, the government of Prince Edward Island already had an excellent school. It needed no other foundation for the future of higher education in the province.

There was a righteous logic in MacKinnon’s position, as well as a measure of professional arrogance. He had a scarcely concealed scorn for St. Dunstan’s, specifically, and Catholic colleges in general, and he harboured dark suspicions about the machinations of the Roman Catholic

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72Dewar quotes his diary entries in Prescription for A Full Life, pp. 184-85.
MacKinnon seemed convinced that he could win a showdown with the Island government on the issue of higher education. For that battle he marshalled every weapon at his disposal: student protests, private lobbying, public pressure, his golden vision of the Prince of Wales that might be, and the force of his own formidable personality. In a chill fog of intrigue and rumour, the University Question stumbled toward its resolution.

In the end, the 1960s were not like the 1860s after all. To MacKinnon’s chagrin, Island Protestantism could no longer be rallied to speak with a single voice. The Island Catholic monolith had fissured as well; in the world of Vatican II, there was room for divergent opinions on non-doctrinal matters. Ecumenical liberals, for example, thought to modernize Islanders’ faith by integrating it into the wider society. A number of them were members of the so-called Group of Ten, an articulate alliance of prominent Protestants and Catholics, who pressed their own solution to the University Question. The federation proposal was essentially a compromise that strove for cost-efficiency while preserving the existing schools’ long traditions. The Group of Ten argued that progress required a break with the past and its deadweight of religious intolerance. Instead of federation, it urged the government to make a fresh start by amalgamating the two existing institutions.

Despite its wafer-thin majority, the new Liberal government was not intimidated by history or by Frank MacKinnon. Premier Alex Campbell had no personal ties to either St. Dunstan’s or Prince of Wales. He also had one unanswerable weapon, if he could keep his caucus behind him: in 1967 the federal government had changed its granting policy to place the financing of universities entirely in provincial hands. Campbell now controlled the funds that the two universities needed to survive.

When the half-hearted federation talks at last foundered, Campbell took matters into his own

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73MacKinnon gives his version of events in his *Church Politics and Education: The P.E.I. Experience* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1995). He blames the demise of Prince of Wales on the insidious influence over government of the Roman Catholic hierarchy on the Island (e.g. “. . . the church has virtually a veto over the conduct of provincial affairs. [p. 42]). For his opinion about the academic credentials of Maritime Catholic universities, see, particularly, p. 58.

hands. In April 1968, by-passing his own Minister of Education, the Premier abruptly announced that
his government intended to create a single, public, provincial institution, the University of Prince
Edward Island. If either Prince of Wales or St. Dunstan’s wished to continue operations, they were
free to do so, but they would receive no government funding. The Premier’s white paper on higher
education cut the past loose from the ship of state.

Given his narrow majority, Campbell’s higher education policy represented an act of great
political courage. But he had judged his times rightly. Despite sound and fury, Bill 72 passed final
reading on 25 April 1968. It was proclaimed a year later. By that time, Frank MacKinnon had
departed in great bitterness for the University of Calgary.75 Acquiescing in its own demise, St.
Dunstan’s sold its campus to the province for a hefty — some said “exorbitant” — sum, and filed
away its university charter. The buildings at Prince of Wales were converted for a badly needed
technical school, Holland College.

The University Question represents a watershed in Island history. After being suppressed for
almost a century, the genii of religious dissension had escaped from the bottle and . . . nothing had
happened. Religion would continue to be a factor in Island politics, but it had lost its power to topple
governments. The University Question also provided a crucial lesson in context. While his opponents
were still locked into the old paradigm of sectarian rivalry, Alex Campbell and his allies had
approached the issue in terms of the comprehensive development planning that had by now begun
to define the era on Prince Edward Island. The Premier’s stand on higher education threw down the
gauntlet. His government was serious about change.

Mrs. B. M. Bayne was incensed, and she wanted the Premier to know just how she felt: “I would
suggest,” she wrote, “that your intensive campaign to bring tourists to your gorgeous Island borders

75 A number of PWC faculty resigned as well.
on the immoral when you do not warn people of the horrors of reaching and leaving it.” She was not referring to iceboat travel, but to the excruciating waits at the ferry terminals during the height of the summer tourist season. The Premier did not take her up on her suggestion that the Tourist Guide carry a disclaimer about the “nightmare journeys involved.” He already thought he held the key to solving the province’s transportation dilemma, a causeway.

After a generation of quiescence, the idea of a fixed link, now cast in the form of a causeway, had gathered momentum again during the 1950s. In 1959, Walter Shaw’s Conservatives had campaigned as the “Party of the Causeway,” and federal officials obligingly began a fresh round of feasibility studies. Progress was so slow that it prompted Liberal spokesman Jack Pickersgill to dub the project the “Pauseway,” but, by the early 1960s, federal politicians had promised it halfway to reality.

The key commitment was a pre-election pledge in April 1962 from Prime Minister John Diefenbaker. The causeway would be built, Diefenbaker announced, and it would cost $105 million. Not to be out-promised, Lester Pearson added a causeway plank to the Liberal platform. All through the middle years of the decade, while the provincial government waited in a fever of impatience, public works officials in Ottawa made haste slowly with plans. The fixed link that slowly took shape on federal drafting boards was equal parts causeway, bridge, and tunnel, but, in the popular imagination, it was and remained simply “the Causeway.”

As before, the strait crossing was closely identified with economic development: the flow of goods to market and, now, of tourists to the Island. After so many years and so much talk, the imagined benefits for Prince Edward Island had assumed almost mythic proportions. The project came to embody the 1960s ideal of “progress” and the federal government’s obligation to combat regional disparity, and it was an integral part of the Shaw government’s economic development strategy.

There was always more of electioneering than engineering about the Causeway. Even before

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Diefenbaker proclaimed the project a go, the Progressive Conservative Club at St. Dunstan’s University had wheelbarrowed a token load of rock to Borden and dumped it in the Strait as a symbolic start to construction. The actual beginning was hardly more auspicious. The first round of tenders was called during 1965, and on 5 November, during the run-up to yet another federal election, Island Liberal MP Watson MacNaught bulldozed the first sod in a shabby little ceremony that neglected to include either senior federal or provincial officials. The publicity stunt did him little good; he was defeated in Prince County by a United Church clergyman named David Macdonald.

While federal officials waited for the estimates to come in, federal work crews began construction of the approach roads at either end of the project. In Albany, just outside Borden, motorists are today mystified by the grassed-over roadbed to nowhere. It was the closest Prince Edward Island ever got to the Causeway.

In 1966, the year the Campbell Government took office, construction was “re-scheduled not deferred,” according to Prime Minister Pearson.

Early in 1967, the target for completion of the Causeway was set for 1972.

Then the first round of tenders came in.

The numbers suggested that the Causeway might cost three times as much as the original estimates.

The project was put on hold.

By 1968, even tentative construction dates were no longer mentioned in federal communiqués. That October, a frustrated Alex Campbell telegraphed Prime Minister Trudeau: “The daily barrage of rumours emanating from officials in departments at Ottawa suggesting the [causeway] project

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already scrapped, too expensive and not justified, most annoying to us here." The official response was evasion rather than denial. It did not take a weatherman to tell which way the wind was blowing.

In March 1969, Campbell made a last-ditch counter-proposal, that the federal government provide loan guarantees and subsidies (tied to the cost of the ferry service) so that private interests could undertake construction of a fixed link. The idea was summarily rejected. Federal officials had carefully reviewed that option, Prime Minister Trudeau replied, but felt it was “undesirable.” In the end, the only causeway built on Prince Edward Island would be the one linking the Mi’kmaq reservation on Lennox Island to the rest of the province. The Mainland, which had loomed so close, receded into the distance once more.

The Island government let go of the Causeway with palpable reluctance. A few years later, when Maclean’s Magazine asked him what else he would choose to do if he were not premier, Alex Campbell joked that he would like to be “a ticket vendor on the PEI Causeway.” In the event, he would have to settle for a judgeship.

On 5 March 1969, the federal government officially abandoned the Causeway project. There would be new ferries instead. A day later, the federal minister responsible for the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, Jean Marchand, arrived on Prince Edward Island for a quite different announcement. The federal and provincial governments were set to launch an unprecedented new program that would assimilate all of the disparate trends of the postwar era, social change, educational reform, rural decline, tourism development, economic diversification, transportation improvements. On 7 March 1969, comprehensive development planning became the Comprehensive Development Plan.


83A. B. Campbell to Peter C. Newman, editor, MacLean’s Magazine, 2 February 1972, PARO, RG 25.36.
In the hoopla surrounding the Comprehensive Development Plan, it would be promoted as boldly going where no Canadian governments had gone before. There were other ways of seeing it. Many Islanders, and some federal officials, regarded it as the consolation prize for losing the Causeway. It could also be described as a way to rescue Prince Edward Island from the financial corner into which it had painted itself.

The Island’s financial dilemma can be explained simply. Each year, expenditures rose faster than revenues as the government struggled to keep up with the provincial Joneses in terms of social and economic development programs. By 1965, the provincial debt was $364.40 per person, a hundred dollars more than any other Atlantic province and far higher than any other part of Canada. There was a limit to deficit financing, and the incoming Liberals thought the Tories had reached it. In 1960, the provincial debt was $36 million. By the time the Campbell government tabled its first budget in the spring of 1967, the total was $99 million.

“I am very concerned about the Province’s financial condition,” Deputy Provincial Treasurer G. D. Dennis began a pre-budget memo on 13 January 1967. According to his analysis, the high per capita provincial debt made it hard to raise money on the bond market; moreover, an alarming proportion of the province’s liabilities were in short-term notes, and there was some doubt the government could cover any sudden demands for payment. “I feel it is essential,” he concluded, “to aim for a balanced budget on ordinary and capital [accounts] combined.” Government must begin

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84 Frank MacKinnon, “Prince Edward Island,” in *Canadian Annual Review*, 1965, p. 173. The figures were $233.21 for Nova Scotia, $244.68 for New Brunswick, and $258.51 for Newfoundland.

85 This set of deficit figures is taken from Leacy, ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada*, Series H404-415. The only provinces with a faster increases were Newfoundland, whose provincial debt (direct and indirect) rose 374% over the same period, and Quebec, with a 287% rise.

to live within its means. But given the climate of expectations, government could not afford to. For the first time, perhaps, since the great railway crisis of the 1870s, the Island’s solvency seemed in doubt. And, as in 1873, there was really no place else to turn but Ottawa.

Perhaps the most discouraging aspect of the staggering debt load was how little it seemed to have bought for Islanders. Despite the piecemeal development efforts of the 1960s, Islanders’ standard of living still trailed far behind the national average and its social welfare programs compared badly with the richer provinces. Seasonal unemployment habitually ranged between 15% and 20%. In a memo to the provincial Minister of Finance in June 1971, Keith Wornell of Treasury Board would lay out the “facts” with respect to agriculture, the Island’s leading industry. Expenditures by the Department of Agriculture had increased tenfold since 1946, he noted, and cash receipts from farming had almost tripled, but net farm income had scarcely budged. In fact, when inflation was factored in, farmers had lost ground, despite the fact that farm earnings were now divided among half as many farmers as at the end of the war.87

The story was essentially the same throughout Atlantic Canada. As the decade aged, and the region appealed for ever more federal dollars, Ottawa bureaucrats began reconsidering how those dollars might best be spent. Their conclusion was that regional development planning needed to be more integrated. In 1966, FRED, the Fund for Rural Economic Expansion, began a self-appointed task of “provincial state-building” by designating Prince Edward Island as one of five special areas

short-term debt load is amplified in Hickey to Mitchell Sharp, Minister of Finance, Ottawa, 30 November 1967, A. B. Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.36, 1967-68/1142; and H. M. Hughes, Provincial Auditor, to A. B. Campbell, 8 December 1967, A. B. Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.36, 1967-68/1072: “At the present time we are burdened with far too much short term debt, and this liability has increased sharply over the last two years. I am informed that our position with regard to all types of borrowing is causing concern among the senior officials of our local banking fraternity.”

that it had singled out for long-range, comprehensive development planning.\footnote{As James Bickerton terms it in “Federal Regional Development Policies and Atlantic Canada’s Islands,” in Baldacchino and Greenwood, eds. Competing Strategies, p. 241.}

The statistical pivot for the policy change on Prince Edward Island was the series of sectoral studies produced by Acres Planning and Consulting. They had been commissioned by the Shaw administration, but it was the Campbell government that received the reports in 1967, and used them as the starting point for ongoing negotiations with federal development planners. In 1967 the Province set up a special planning agency, a crown corporation called the Economic Improvement Corporation (EIC), and empowered it both to plan and implement development programs.

The head of the EIC was Del Gallagher, a former advisor to the Robichaud government in New Brunswick. Gallagher became a lightning rod for the controversies that soon followed. He was a driver: bright, capable, dynamic. Chain-smoking, tie askew, Gallagher got things done, but in the doing he could also be caustic, rude, and domineering. Suspicious of political interference, he preferred to work in secret, and the lack of openness in the planning process became a serious liability for the Premier. Worst of all to his critics, Gallagher, and most of the team of planners that he hastily assembled, were “From Away,” and did not care to apologize for it. Described by colleagues as “a high-powered economist with a social conscience,” Gallagher had little concern for traditional institutions or attitudes.\footnote{Atlantic Provinces Economic Council [APEC], “A History of the Prince Edward Island Comprehensive Development Council to 1977,” Report for the Prince Edward Island Department of Development, January 1980, pp. 35-38. Gallagher found the Island cabinet no better and no worse than others he had worked with in the region: “There were three or four real capable guys in there, three or four shithheads and three or four who really weren’t members of the cabinet except for name only.” (Del Gallagher, interview with Wayne MacKinnon, in Wayne MacKinnon, “The Politics of Planning: A Case Study of the Prince Edward Island Development Plan” (M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1972), p. 129.}

He was the opposite of how Islanders had defined themselves, and he came to epitomize everything that the old Prince Edward Island hated about the new.

“In terms of Island conventions,” one political analyst retrospectively claimed, “the Campbell men can only be described as revolutionaries.”\footnote{David Milne, “Politics in a Beleaguered Garden,” in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, eds. The Garden Transformed, p. 48.} In the beginning, at least, they did not see themselves
that way. What became the Comprehensive Development Plan took shape gradually, meeting by meeting, report by report. It did not begin with a grand vision, but it did start with an attitude, that there must be fundamental change if things were going to get better on Prince Edward Island. Campbell was blunt with the federal cabinet: “I submit that the Prince Edward Island Development Program presents the best opportunity, if not the last opportunity, for rational social reform and resource development in this Province.”

All through 1967 and into 1968, Gallagher’s team at the EIC worked furiously to pull together an integrated development plan. There had already been three comprehensive development plans in Canada under the FRED, in parts of Manitoba, Quebec, and New Brunswick, but Prince Edward Island’s was the first to encompass an entire province. As one historian of the Comprehensive Development Plan notes, “No one knew how to organize a provincial plan, or how to implement one.” Federal ARDA officials were drawn in to assist in the process, although they evidently did not try to control it.

By May 1968, there was approval in principle on a comprehensive development scheme for Prince Edward Island, but it took another year to iron out the details. The most contentious variable was the size of the federal contribution. The original draft worked out by Gallagher’s team called for $422.9 million from Ottawa in a plan worth $722.7 million, but Ottawa flatly refused to commit so much money. Draft followed draft (thirteen in all) as provincial planners sweated to push the plan’s foot into the federal shoe. The climate of negotiations was made doubly uncertain by mounting tension within Premier Campbell’s caucus over a plan that seemed beyond political control, and a battle within the federal bureaucracy over the new Trudeau administration’s insistence on greater control over programs involving federal funds. There was “lots of arguing and yelling,” recalls one

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of the Premier’s advisors.95

Even something so basic as language posed difficulties. No one knew better than Alex Campbell that the Development Plan would have to be sold to voters as well as bureaucrats. “It now seems clear that a major re-writing job is needed on the program guide,” he wrote Tom Kent, the Deputy Minister of Forestry and Rural Development, in October 1968:

> We feel that we should de-emphasize the “controlled” society in favour of programs for people and programs for progress. Suggest you remove the notion of viable human beings. I suggest . . . that you read any three pages of the program guide emphasizing where they appear such words as “dictate,” “determine,” “control,” “mismanage,” “severe,” “outmoded,” “ineffectual,” “viable,” “negative,” “role,” and in place of these select a language which will warm the cockles of all Island hearts and will inspire their efforts to renew, restore and revitalize the Island they so much love.”96

Campbell dispatched his personal assistant, Andrew Wells, to Ottawa to help humanize the text. According to Wells, none of his editing suggestions was accepted.97

Federal bureaucrats approached the developing plan as they would a Third World nation: with a mixture of good will and condescension. Although the EIC drafted the proposals, Ottawa’s planners controlled the money, and with it the agenda. “Once again,” Premier Campbell wrote federal minister Jean Marchand November 1968, “I must emphasize that we feel considerably handicapped in these negotiations, since there is little, if any, prior consultation on the main issues.”98

While federal officials squabbled with the province’s consultants, rumour swelled the plan’s significance and weighed it against the familiar causeway project. It was 7 March 1969 before an agreement was ready to sign. During a meeting at the Kirkwood Motel in Charlottetown on the night

95 Andrew Wells, interview with author, Hazel Grove, 9 December 1999.


97 Andrew Wells, interview with author, Hazel Grove, 9 December 1999. The explicit connection between Wells’ recollection and the letter quoted above is mine.

before the official announcement, the federal minister, Jean Marchand, demanded that Campbell tell reporters the provincial government had chosen the Comprehensive Development Plan over a causeway. Otherwise, Marchand, threatened, he would not attend the signing ceremony. Prime Minister Trudeau might have chosen between the two mega-projects, but Campbell wanted it clear that the province had not. 99 He decided to call the federal bluff. Next day, Marchand signed. 100

The social and economic blueprint unveiled in March 1969 was, in the words of Plan historian Wayne MacKinnon, “not only bold, but ambitious.” 101 “The common aim of these programs,” the preamble to the planning agreement modestly declared, “is to create conditions in which the people of Prince Edward Island can create viable economic enterprises for themselves.” In vague but sweeping terms, it went on to target four broad program areas: resource development and adjustment, social development, resource-supporting and commercial services, and implementation. The language was expansive. Agriculture would be exploited, the fisheries rationalized, education extended, tourism developed, the forests utilized, manufacturing expanded, the public service professionalized, health and welfare services improved, housing provided, infrastructure built. And for the first time in the history of regional development, each separate program would support and complement the others. 102

Many observers looked past the jargon to the money. The sums involved seemed enormous at the time: $725 million spread over fifteen years, with $255 million coming from the federal coffers and the balance raised by the province. There would be, in effect, three five-year plans. Phase One funding would consume $118 million in provincial funds, and $125 million in federal dollars.

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99 One example among many in the Campbell Papers is Campbell to Arthur Laing, Minister of Public Works, Col. Edward Churchill, Coordinator, Northumberland Strait Crossing, and Paul Hellyer, Minister of Transport, 20 August 1968, A. B. Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.36,1968-69/1131. In fact, the Campbell government had argued that the Causeway and the Development Plan were co-dependent.

100 Andrew Wells, interview with author, Hazel Grove, 9 December 1999.


In its scope and complexity, the CDP was a planner’s dream, and it attracted widespread attention. Naturally, Islanders were suspicious. The octogenarian Shaw, no longer Conservative chief but still the party’s House Leader, tagged the venture the “Incomprehensible Development Plan.”

Political commentator and recent expatriate Frank MacKinnon was even less impressed. Writing in the Canadian Annual Review, he called 1969 “one of the most difficult years in the entire history of the province.” Pursuing a “death wish” with “reckless abandon,” the Island government had invited federal intervention to stave off financial disaster. In return, it got a development plan “and a large task force which moved to the Island and literally took over the government.” The Campbell administration had effectually surrendered its sovereignty to federal moneychangers, he said. Both politics and the economy were depressed to the point “where the Island’s very existence as a province was in jeopardy.”

There was both a measure of accuracy and a kernel of spite in MacKinnon’s assessment. Planners and consultants had indeed descended on the Island, though not quite as the Assyrian on Israel, and it was true that they doubted the provincial bureaucracy could be trusted to manage development. Given the Georgetown fiasco, they may have been right. The planners’ own naive faith in the infinite capacity of social planning can be passed over in silence.

For its part, Campbell’s government did not feel it had surrendered control. Nor did it intend to. But it was willing to make compromises to achieve its ends. In the heady days of the Plan’s unveiling, the provincial government may have considered the rapid polarization of opinions proof that they had truly embarked on a revolutionary enterprise.

The bloodless coup of the planners was too much for Campbell’s Minister of Health, Keir Clark, who looked askance at the sudden invasion of pushy bureaucrats and the path down which they seemed to be stampeding his party. After a scathing denunciation of the Development Plan and development planners — “We have bartered our provincial autonomy for pieces of silver” — he crossed the floor

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103 Douglas Boylan, interview with author, University of Prince Edward Island, 26 April 1999.

to sit as an independent. The loss of Campbell’s working majority determined the timing of the election call that soon followed. The Premier made the Development Plan his platform, as he would for the rest of the decade. The Conservative campaign had little to offer except criticism and clever puns on the name of its new leader, Summerside’s George Key. On 11 May 1970, the Liberals won twenty-seven of thirty-two seats and an astonishing 58% of the popular vote. Islanders had given Campbell and the Plan an overwhelming mandate.

As the magnitude of the Grit victory became apparent on election night, there was great jubilation in the hotel suite where the Liberal party brass had gathered to watch the results on television. The desperate days of their single-seat majority were over. The Government could do whatever it wanted. Andrew Wells, the Premier’s personal advisor, turned soberly to the person beside him.

“We’re in trouble now,” he said.105

105 Andrew Wells, interview with author, Hazel Grove, 9 December 1999.
Part Four
The Realm of Possibility

Everett Wigmore

Everett Wigmore
broke
the hydraulic
on his loader

so

he couldn’t clean out his stalls

so

the manure piled up
until the animals scraped their backs
on the ceiling

so

the old black bugger
who was always causing trouble
broke a light bulb
over some dirty straw

so

Everett Wigmore
quit farming
to become
a mechanic

Allan Rankin¹

Chapter Nine
The Struggle for Development

The Island’s small... Every opinion counts.
I’m accustomed to fighting for them.

From Milton Acorn, “I, Milton Acorn.”

It was enough to break a farmer’s heart. Earth-moving equipment had scraped the turf from what had once been open fields along the Upton Road in West Royalty, and now, day after day, a hot dry wind whipped up miniature dust storms from the exposed soil. Whenever the workers looked up from the rusty re-bar and half-finished footings, they could watch the dust devils forming off at the western edge of the worksite. As each tiny cyclone swept down on them, the workers bent their heads and held their breath. For a moment, the world was reduced to a blinding, stinging murk, then the dust devil rushed on, and the men went back to work until the next one descended.

The bare, baked ground was so hard that men could hardly drive a stake into it, yet there was dust everywhere. It covered the workers’ clothes and coated their hair. It clung to their sweat and caked their nostrils. It sifted into their workboots and left little packets of sand in their pockets. It made their eyes burn and filled their mouths with the taste of grit. But the men toiled on, cursing and spitting and gazing over now and then at the knots of workers at other building sites. It was the late summer of 1975, and they were creating the Island’s first industrial park in the deep, dusty heart of the Prince Edward Island Comprehensive Development Plan.

It may be an overstatement, but no lie, to say that the postwar history of Prince Edward Island can be divided into two epochs: before “the Plan” and after it. On one side of the Development Plan era lies the Island that was; on the other, still too close to see clearly, looms the Island of today. In popular memory, the Comprehensive Development Plan is thus both coffin and cradle.

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3 Personal recollection of author.
The Development Plan years were the time when modernization became official government policy, and when Islanders at last confronted the process of change that had been transforming their lives all along. It was a schizophrenic decade, full of optimism and anxiety, and dominated by a running debate over the direction, nature, and necessity of change. Arguably, everything of importance that happened during the 1970s either flowed from or through “the Plan.” Three decades later, it remains the prism that bends our view to the past.

At the risk of reckless oversimplification, the plot for the Comprehensive Development Plan went something like this. The Plan began with the notion that sustainable economic growth should be based on the Island’s staple industries, but could not be achieved without fundamental social change. Higher incomes for farmers and fishermen would be realized by increasing revenues through better training and greater specialization — and by dividing the returns among fewer operators. The surplus farmers and fishermen would be assisted to acquire modern housing and retrained for employment in other industries, such as tourism and manufacturing. Those sectors would be developed, in turn, through judicious spending on physical infrastructure and incentives to private business. While the adults re-trained or upgraded, their children would be socialized for appropriate careers in the new economy within a modernized and reformed education system. Investment in health and welfare reform would keep Islanders physically and psychologically fit for progress. And, finally, the management of change would be confided to a more expert and efficient civil service that had been taught to think strategically. The objective was to “restore flexibility and capability” to the Island’s economy. The target was a 7% per annum increase in the Island’s Gross Domestic Product over the course of the agreement.²

Del Gallagher and his Economic Improvement Corporation team always intended that they would implement the comprehensive blueprint they had so painstakingly devised. Indeed, the Plan’s

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emphasized on putting in place a development *process* as opposed to a minutely detailed set of programs made it all the more important that implementation be flexible and quick to adapt to changing circumstances. In the EIC’s opinion, the provincial civil service lacked the necessary expertise and perspective for that job. Only when the line departments were ready, and the Plan was well established, would provincial bureaucrats be trusted with executing it. Not surprisingly, provincial civil servants tended to resent the cocky EIC outsiders with their higher salaries.

The EIC also felt that the Development Plan was far too important to be left to short-sighted politicians. The politicians felt it was far too important to be left in the hands of unelected planners. Well aware of the divisions within the Liberal caucus, the Opposition hammered away at the EIC’s supposed control over provincial affairs. In reference to a popular television sitcom, Conservative House leader Walter Shaw took to calling the province “Gallagher’s Island.”

In reality, power had been shifting steadily away from the EIC. Ever the pragmatist, Alex Campbell eventually compromised between the “planners with their economic models and the politicians with their pet projects.” The planners would implement the Development Plan, but under political control. The vehicle that Campbell chose was the Department of Development, which was

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6As disaffected cabinet minister Keir Clark told one researcher, “I don’t think [the other ministers] had any particular views. . . . they just thought it was Santa Claus or something.” See MacKinnon, “Politics of Planning,” pp. 128-129; see, too, APEC, “History of the Prince Edward Island Comprehensive Development Plan,” p. 38.

7MacKinnon, “The Politics of Planning,” p. 103. He was referring, of course, to *Gilligan’s Island*. In the judgement of the APEC history of the Plan, the EIC hoped to become “a sort of technocratic cabinet” (APEC, “A History of the Prince Edward Island Comprehensive Development Plan,” p. 105.)

8Alex Campbell, interview with Council of Maritime Premiers Oral History Project, PARO 4073/2. In Campbell’s words, “It boiled down to who, in fact, was going to preside over the governing of this Province, . . . and to pass the responsibility for the implementation of such a plan over to the manager of a given corporation, who, no doubt, would have insisted on legislative protection of their autonomy, would have been tantamount to throwing the key of the Premier’s office away.
established in the spring of 1970 as a line department of government with himself as the minister responsible. The decision may have looked cosmetic — many of the EIC staff accepted employment within the new Department of Development — but its practical implications were considerable. They might still be hived off from the rest of the Civil Service, but the planners were now formally part of the system. The Department of Development’s staff soon swelled to 224 employees, then shrank again as most of its planning staff were dispersed to other government departments.9

An incident early in the implementation process suggested the shape of things to come. After the province coaxed an advance on Development Plan funds for a pre-election bout of road paving, EIC planners painstakingly developed a scientific set of criteria for deciding the order in which roads should be paved. They earnestly presented it to the Department of Highways, only to be shown an even more powerful rationale, the list of paving priorities delivered by each MLA for his own constituency.10 Island politicians might have much to learn about the workings of the Development Plan, but the planners had much to learn about the workings of Island government.

As government spokesmen were fond of repeating, the public’s participation in the Development Plan was vital to its success. “The Development Plan belongs to you,” declared John Maloney, Campbell’s successor as Minister of Development.11 And yet, the Development Plan had been very much a top-down creation. For its architects, “public participation” meant people signing up for programs, not helping to design them. So defined, the public participation mandate was contracted out to the Rural Development Council.

The Rural Development Council, or RDC, had come together in the early 1960s. Initially, a loose coalition of clergy and community activists, it incorporated elements of participatory


11The Development Plan: It Helps You; Thirty-five Programs You Should Know About (Charlottetown: [Department of Development, n.d.]).
democracy, Christian social teaching, and Maritime co-operativism. An earnest, if self-anointed, spokesgroup for ordinary Islanders, its members believed that successful community development must happen from the bottom up. And if that bottom tended to be passive, apathetic, and defensively cynical, well, the top was paternalistic and controlling. Since 1967 the RDC had warily accepted funding from the Economic Improvement Corporation. After much agonizing, the advocacy group signed a formal agreement with the province in 1970.

The government’s general expectation was that the Council would disseminate information about the Plan and send development workers into the community to facilitate participation in Plan programs. The RDC was less sure of its direction, and it initially stumbled, rent by internal divisions over whether it could be both Development Plan missionary and the voice of the grassroots. As historian Michael O’Grady notes, it had “compromised its founding philosophy” by agreeing to promote public participation in development programs that had not been devised through community-based decision-making.\(^{12}\) The Council seemed trapped inside its paradox. Nevertheless, by 1973, it had twenty-one full-time employees and a budget of nearly $350,000, almost all of it from Development Plan funds.

The RDC had its work cut out for it. Islanders had not asked to be poor, but they had not asked to be “developed” either. A 1970 survey found that two of every three Islanders objected to the government having employed “outsiders” to prepare the Plan in secret.\(^{13}\) “It will succeed,” Del Gallagher declared in 1971, “but [Islanders] will have to work hard at it — damn hard!”\(^{14}\) Under the circumstances, the planners should not have been surprised to discover that ordinary Islanders were reluctant participants in the grand design they had not sought.

Implementation of the Development Plan was well into its fourth year when Statistics Canada announced that Prince Edward Island had wrested from Newfoundland the dubious title of “Canada’s

\(^{12}\)O’Grady, *From Grassroots to Grim Reapings*, p. 94.

\(^{13}\)MacKinnon, “Politics of Planning,” p. 205.

poorest province.” The average personal income on the Island had risen only $106 per head in 1971, less than any other province, to a total of $2,188, the lowest in the country.\textsuperscript{15} As the bureaucrats valiantly assailed the Island economy with their paper planning models, the “challenge of opportunity” heralded by the 1969 Speech from the Throne settled into a struggle for development.

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On an island, land is a finite resource. On Prince Edward Island, it was also the most valuable one. Before planners could manage that resource, they must first inventory it, and so, the text of the Development Plan agreement announced that “an intensive survey of property ownership, land use, and ownership characteristics” was already in progress. The results were illustrated to Cabinet by means of a huge map of the Island, which plotted each category of ownership and use with a different colour. The ministers were genuinely shocked by the amount of one particular hue: 92,000 acres of land, and 78 miles of Island shoreline, were owned by non-residents.\textsuperscript{16}

If the non-residents had wanted to settle down as immigrant farmers, Islanders might not have felt so threatened. Of course, the vast majority of the off-Island buyers were interested in cottage lots or recreational properties. That many of them were expatriates or the descendants of Islanders did little to blunt the practical consequences. Economic advisors and farming organizations worried that valuable farm land was going out of production, and that the pastoral countryside was growing up in weeds and worthless scrub timber. Those with an historical perspective railed about the return of “absentee proprietorship,” the besetting evil of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century in Island mythology. In either scenario, outside control over land meant outside control over the province’s major resource. And all the while, the price of land was climbing beyond the reach of ordinary Islanders, especially the farmers who might cultivate it.

\textsuperscript{15}These census statistics were cited in “Island Has Unenviable Distinction,” \textit{Guardian}, 15 September 1972.

\textsuperscript{16}Alex Campbell, interview with Council of Maritime Premiers Oral History Project, PARO 4073/2.
Unlike Cape Cod or Martha’s Vineyard, developmental horror stories cited by some activists, Prince Edward Island possessed what one political scientist would later term “the gift of jurisdiction.” Prodded by concerns over the rate at which non-residents were gobbling up land, the provincial government set up a Royal Commission on Land Ownership and Land Use in 1972. The ghost of the old Land Question hovered over its proceedings.\(^\text{17}\)

Even before the Royal Commission began its deliberations, the Campbell Government took its most decisive action, legislating the Real Property Act. Its key provision required all purchases by non-residents in excess of ten acres of land or 330 feet of shore frontage to have the approval of the Governor-in-Council. The government’s right to restrict land ownership was fought all the way to the Supreme Court in Ottawa, which upheld the legislation. “We in Prince Edward Island,” Premier Campbell told a federal-provincial conference in May 1972, “have no intention of allowing our province, through attrition, neglect or oversight, to end up in the hands of non-residents who have little interest in the communities of our province, little concern for the preservation of our way of life, little involvement in our Island institutions and who may simply view the province as a place either to spend a holiday or opt out of an urbanized society.”\(^\text{18}\) It was easy for a government to be tough with people who had no vote.

The Island government’s legal claims stirred considerable interest in other jurisdictions, and the Province was for a time touted as a leader in land ownership issues. In practice the strictness of the legislation was left very much to the government’s discretion — and it was very discreet. During the balance of 1972, there were some 231 non-resident applications under the terms of the Act; only thirty-eight of them were rejected.\(^\text{19}\) That ratio set the trend for ensuing years. Apart from discouraging would-be purchasers, the legislation denied very few actual ones, although the rejections

\(^{17}\)Of the Commission’s twenty-three recommendations, which included better land use planning and comprehensive zoning, fifteen were ignored. See John McClellan, \textit{Rules of the Game: Land Use and Land Ownership on Prince Edward Island} (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1990), p. 1.

\(^{18}\)Quoted by Andrew Wells (who may well have written Campbell’s speech) to William Reed, Maine, 12 November 1973, A. B. Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.36, Box 5, File 1124A.

were usually significant. The principal control over non-resident ownership turned out to be red tape not rejection, and, by 1976, another 66,000 acres had passed into the hands of non-residents.

One common thread ran through the Royal Commission’s deliberations: the mythic figure of the “tiller of the soil,” who had created the Island landscape. In stark contrast, Development Plan Program 1.1, “Integrated Land Management,” began, “The historical pattern of land ownership in Prince Edward Island is badly adapted to the needs of modern technology for agricultural, forestry and tourist development.” In one sentence, the planners shrugged aside two hundred years of Island history, with its defining struggle for control over the land and its defining image of the small family farm. Writing in the twilight of the Development Plan, academics would berate Islanders for the “mawkish nostalgia and romanticism” with which they clung to a “garden myth” of their province, and yet, identity is built around just such shared myths. The farmer, mythic and actual, walked the fields of the Comprehensive Development Plan — sowing discontent.

“The next time you have occasion to speak on T.V.,” an angry farmer wrote Premier Campbell, “will you please tell us what you intend doing for the ordinary farmer & how you think he should pay his bills and keep going? We are, for the most part, not interested in the big Confederation Building, all the parks you are going to build, tourists, etc. We would like you to tell us how we can survive on 80 cents a bag for graded No. 1 potatoes. . . . When is this better deal for farmers going into effect?”

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20 According to the figures for 1972-76, of 1,070 petitions, 911, 85%, were approved. Cited in Esther Kienholz, *The Land-Use Impacts of Recent Legislation in P.E.I.: An Analysis of the Land Development Corporation and Non-Resident Ownership*, Land Use in Canada Series, No. 18 (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1980). Despite the high rate of approvals, Kienholz felt that the legislation was achieving its ends.


Disastrous agricultural prices prompted the Island government to seek federal compensation and debt relief for the cole crop producers that it had coaxed into existence barely a decade previously. But the federal Agriculture Minister had little time for a handful of Island farmers. Compensation was out of the question, he advised Premier Campbell. Debt relief would be considered for “serious” farmers; “for others who, because of neglect, inability or poor...

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23 *Agreement Covering Development Plan for Prince Edward Island*, p. 33.


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Agriculture was in crisis, and the pressure fractured the farm community. Dissatisfied with the moderate leadership of the Federation of Agriculture, frustrated farmers turned to the National Farmers’ Union, which was both more radical and more confrontational. While government fostered with economic models, the NFU charged, Island farmers were being crushed between low prices and high costs. At the height of the 1971 tourism season, NFU members demonstrated their frustration by driving their tractors with deliberate, traffic-snarling slowness down the main tourist arteries. In less than twenty-five years, Island farmers had fallen in stature from the dominant interest group in Island society to an angry faction. Somewhere, the ghost of Walter Jones was fuming.

Meanwhile, the Land Development Corporation continued buying up Island farms. By the end of the decade, it had acquired 134,572 acres. About half of that had been “leaked” to government departments for development purposes (mostly forestry), and 40,000 acres had been sold outright. Of the 25,000 acres remaining in the LDC’s land bank, just over 16,000 were under lease to Island farmers. Some eighty elderly farmers had retired, selling their land to the LDC in exchange for an annuity to carry them until they turned sixty-five, and the right to live in their homesteads, rent-free, for the rest of their lives.

It was fashionable in the 1970s to claim that a farm a day was disappearing on Prince Edward Island. That might not be fast enough for the Land Development Corporation, but, for many thoughtful Islanders, the exodus represented a profound crisis. They had begun to realize that the family farm was more important as a social unit than as an economic one. An undertow of protest gradually slowed the LDC’s momentum.

management, have been unable to meet their financial commitments even under normal conditions, any misfortune tends to hasten their decision as to their alternatives to farming.” A. B. Campbell to J. J. Greene, Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa, 7 March 1968; and Greene to Campbell, 15 March 1968, A. B. Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.36, 1967-68/1072 and 1968-69/1133.


27 Cited in Frank MacKinnon, “Prince Edward Island,” Canadian Annual Review, pp. 202-203. Annuities were offered to farmers aged sixty or older and farmers who would turn sixty during the first ten years of the Development Plan.
In the spring of 1972, under heavy pressure from the Liberal caucus to “do something” for small farmers, development planners designed a “Family Farm Program” of small capital investment grants to farmers. The stated objective began with standard Development Plan-ese: “to increase and stabilize net farm income in Prince Edward Island.” But it promised now “to obtain this objective while still preserving as much as possible the traditional rural values in Prince Edward Island, i.e., maintenance of the family farm as the backbone of Island agriculture.”28 The ensuing Speech from the Throne was confined entirely to agricultural issues. Government, it said, would “do everything in its power to stem the tide which is eroding away the family farm.”29

Farmers had seemed allergic to the Development Plan’s complicated schemes for farm consolidation, modernization, and training, which demanded much and guaranteed little. Subsidies, they understood. Even though the money required them to work with agricultural extension workers and formulate “five-year development plans” for their farms, there was a gratifying rush of applications. By early 1973, the Family Farm Capital Grants Program had disbursed $865,000 to 1,200 applicants. By the time it gave way to “Farm Development” and “New Farmer” programs in 1977, over $6 million had been spent.30

In obvious ways, the Family Farm Program was at cross-purposes with the goal of reducing the number of Island farms. More than any word or gesture, it suggested how much the Development Plan’s agricultural strategy had been compromised. The connection between Development Plan policies and the fortunes of agriculture was, in any case, suspect. As in the past, Island agriculture remained very much at the mercy of larger trends and cycles. From the abyss of $4.8 million in 1971, net farm income shot up to $39.2 million in 1973. The next year it was $46.6 million, and two years later, $50.6 million. The good years made the mediocre ones that followed more bearable, and took the edge off agrarian unrest just as the Island government was backing away from the more provoking components of its agricultural policy.


30See annual reports of the Land Development Corporation for this period.
Some of the desired changes in agriculture did come about. By the end of the Development Plan, there were fewer farmers and fewer farms, only 2,833 in 1986. That was more than the supposed optimum of 2,500 farms, but far less than the pre-Plan number. There were also more large farms, some of them corporate operations, and the large farms were, on average, bigger than before. The average acreage had crept up to 251 acres by 1979. But the amount of land under cultivation had fallen instead of increasing. The occasional spikes in net farm income also masked a disturbing trend. While productivity had risen and local processing had expanded, profit margins had continued to shrink. As agricultural consultant William Janssen explained in 1982, “Today’s farmer has to produce twice as much just to have the same income as he had in the early 1950s.” Each step from field to supermarket shelf shed profit: for every dollar spent in Canada on Island-produced food, Island farmers received only 11.8¢.31

Debt loads climbed steadily during the Development Plan years as farmers borrowed in order to expand, and yet they made little progress in narrowing the income gap between themselves and other Canadians. By 1976, one in three Island farmers held down full-time jobs off the farm, and an ever increasing number of farm women entered the work force to supplement family incomes.32 In the decade to come, the market would continue to drive Island farmers in two different directions: toward crops that generated as many dollars as possible — or out of the industry.

Boxed Essay: The Thundering Herd
Amid such a bewilderment of change, the outline of the future was hard to discern. Some observers thought they could see it in a venture called Dundas Farms. Back in 1968, while the EIC was still struggling with the federeaucracy, Montreal millionaire Howard Webster and a group of off-Island investors had been buying up small farms around Dundas in central Kings County. By the time the Province moved to place limits on absentee proprietorship, they had already assembled a 7,700-acre spread. Dundas Farms was a specialty beef


The Ponderosa, of course, was the name of the ranch featured in the long-running television western, Bonanza. A series of newspaper clippings in the Special Collections Room, Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island, chronicles the history of the operation.

Dundas Farms was both larger and more capital-intensive than anything the Plan contemplated for Island agriculture. Before long, it was clear in any case that the sprawling cattle ranch was an anomaly rather than a trend-setter. A flurry of publicity attended a great $858,000 cattle auction held on the grounds in the fall of 1973, with buyers coming in from all over North America, but afterward, Dundas Farms’ prospects slowly faded. The only cowpokes in the Island’s future would be the expats coming home from the oil fields of Alberta in their Stetson hats and cowboy boots.

By the time that Howard Webster died in 1990, the operation at Dundas had been dramatically scaled back. Only sentiment, not business sense, had kept the farm going, it was said. When the business went up for sale shortly afterward, it was bought by two Island entrepreneurs, Ray Keenan and Elwood Lawton. They represented what time had revealed as the true direction of farm consolidation on Prince Edward Island. Both were large-scale, high-profile potato farmers.

In 1969, the various Island fisheries employed 4,100 fishermen. Underemployed,” development planners thought. They wanted far fewer fishermen — as few as a thousand — concentrated in fewer places through a judicious mixture of compensation and consolidation. Georgetown and Souris would be further developed as offshore fishing centres. In the inshore fishery, there would be heavy

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33 The Ponderosa, of course, was the name of the ranch featured in the long-running television western, Bonanza. A series of newspaper clippings in the Special Collections Room, Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island, chronicles the history of the operation.


35 The figure of about 1,000 fishermen was cited by Parzival Copes of Simon Fraser University in examining fisheries policy under Phase One of the Development Plan. See Wells, Fishery of Prince Edward Island, p. 27.
investment in fourteen to twenty designated ports. The rest would essentially be left to shift for themselves.

The “rationalization” of the fisheries was one of the most notorious provisions of the Development Plan agreement, and even if the Deputy Minister of Fisheries, Eugene Gorman, had not stonewalled the strategy, it would probably still have been abandoned as politically untenable.\textsuperscript{36} By 1970, the retreat had already begun. “Twenty major Island fishing ports will have the finest facilities possible to help fishermen make a better living,” a Liberal election ad assured voters. “At the same time, the Federal Government maintains ALL OTHER EXISTING PORTS so that fishermen may continue to operate from the harbours they know so well. No ports will be abandoned. No fishermen or his family will be forced to move.”\textsuperscript{37} The relocation of fishermen was ignored until 1974, when it was explicitly abandoned because “it runs counter to the concept of viable rural communities.”\textsuperscript{38}

The second phase of the Development Plan was more subtle in its attempt to reduce the number of Islanders in the fishery. Its voluntary “Lobster Licence Buyback Program” was less radical, less sudden, and far less controversial. Launched in February 1977, the program bought out 182 licences in its first year of operation, nearly half the target figure of 400. But, over the next two years, only five more lobster fishermen decided to sell.\textsuperscript{39} Statistics suggest why. After hovering between $10 million and $12.7 million for most of the decade, the landed value of the Island fishery more than doubled between 1976 and 1979. Almost every year, new records were set. Inflation accounted for part of the increase, but the fisheries boom was real. Between 1974 and 1979, Island fishermen

\textsuperscript{36}See APEC, “History of the Prince Edward Island Comprehensive Development Plan,” p. 73. In his annual report in 1971, Gorman reflected that in their plans to “rationalize” the primary sector, the planners had insufficiently considered the ability of Island economy to absorb displaced workers.

\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Guardian}, 5 May 1970, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{38}Quoted in APEC, “History of the Prince Edward Island Comprehensive Development Plan,” p. 88.

\textsuperscript{39}The funding split on the federal-provincial program was 90:10, an excellent deal for the province.
tripl ed their net income from fishing. No one wanted out of the industry anymore; they were clamouring to get in.

Except in the most general sense, the Development Plan could not take credit for the fishery’s remarkable buoyancy. Obedient to the Plan’s expectations, the provincial Department of Fisheries had doggedly sought to diversify the industry during the 1970s, searching for new scallop beds, promoting a silversides fishery, trying (without much success) to stabilize the Irish Moss harvest, nursing along oyster stocks, pursuing high-priced Japanese markets for the giant bluefin tuna that sports fishers had been reeling in by the hundreds since the late 1960s, testing the markets for clams, crabs, quahogs, dogfish, whelks, squid, and anything else that might turn a profit.

The decade’s big success story was clearly the mussel. Each low tide had always exposed the great reefs of wild mussels that flourished along river estuaries, but, as found in nature, mussels were gritty, small, and unmarketable. Beginning in 1974, the provincial department’s Aquaculture Division began investigating the European technique of growing mussels on lines suspended in the tidal currents above the sea bottom. By 1978, private interests had become involved, and that year, the first tiny harvest of “cultured” mussels, raised on the Cardigan River in central Kings County, was marketed, earning the grand sum of $5,283. A decade later, having conquered marketing obstacles, growing pains, and a deadly denomic acid outbreak, the industry would see production reach three million pounds, for a landed value of $2.4 million. By 1990, vast fields of white mussel buoys were crowding bays and river estuaries — you could walk dry-shod from shore to shore on them, sniffed frustrated boaters — and steaming pots of “Island Blues” were gracing tables all across the continent.

Proud fisheries officials might flex their mussels and the future might even belong to aquaculture, as the director of that branch speculated in 1980, but the present was still ruled by King

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40 Annual Report of the Prince Edward Island Department of Fisheries, 1975 (p. 38) and 1980 (p. 68). The statistics for this section are taken from those tabled in the provincial department’s annual reports.

41 Besides the annual reports of the Department of Fisheries, see “Curiosity and Vision Led to PEI’s Dominance in Mussel Industry,” Aquaculature Review (Department of Fisheries and Environment, 1997): 4-5, 34.
Lobster. As it had for a century, lobster dominated the Island fishery, accounting annually for about two-thirds of the industry’s landed value and an equally high share of fish processing income. After hitting a twenty-seven-year low in 1974, lobster landings began climbing rapidly in the late 1970s. Returns rose even faster. Between 1969 and 1988, the average price for lobster nearly quadrupled. Fishermen who remembered the desperate years of the 1930s could only shake their heads.

By 1981, the Island’s inshore fishery was booming. Better management of the resource was one reason, as was price competition from Mainland fishbuyers and better penetration of international markets. The fishery’s first golden age had sprung from the introduction of lobster canning technology. A century later, rapid transport and refinements in refrigeration were shifting the emphasis to live and fresh-frozen lobster, which fetched fish buyers much higher prices in the marketplace. The lobster connoisseurs of the 1980s no longer needed a can opener, and the days had passed when the children of poor Islanders could be identified by the lobster sandwiches they took to school.

As for the Development Plan, it had improved facilities at the Island’s “designated” ports, and it could take credit for having encouraged new expertise and new technologies. But it did not put the lobsters in the traps. Nor did it provide the reliable income supplement that fishermen had discovered in the unemployment insurance program. In the end, neither fish nor fishermen could easily be rationalized, and the last of the hunter-gatherer economies steered its own course into the uncertain waters of the future.

Translated into English, the Development Plan’s jargon-laden tourism strategy targeted visitors who

42 It is difficult to account for the rise in landings. Trap limits, escape mechanisms for small lobsters, and stricter enforcement of regulations protected stocks even as more efficient fishing equipment and techniques attacked them. Environmental or biological explanations are even more conjectural.

43 Unemployment insurance benefits were first extended to self-employed fishermen in 1956, but the UIC system was greatly expanded in the early 1970s.
might stay longer, spend more money, and spread out over the landscape and the seasons. The Plan-funded resort developments at Brudenell in the east and Mill River in the west would tackle all four objectives at once, offering high-end accommodations meant to prime the pump of tourism in lightly visited regions of the province. Planners hoped they would prime the pump of private investment as well.

This emphasis on luxury tourism irked Department of Tourism officials, whose preferred goal was to increase tourism numbers generally.\textsuperscript{44} The argument between quantity and “quality” was lost on critics outside government, who had trouble with both propositions, the one because it smacked of elitism, the other because it twisted priorities toward the needs of outsiders. As the hand of tourism began shaping the landscape, some Islanders began harping on the threat of tourism rather than its promise. In their jaundiced view, Prince Edward Island was turning into Coney Island, and the new style of tourism promotion was little more than pandering.

As evidence, the critics could offer an advertisement that the Department of the Environment and Tourism published in local newspapers during the early summer of 1973. The ad offered Islanders a few pointers about how to improve their “tourist manners.” “Be friendly. Be helpful. Be hospitable,” it enjoined. There were other admonishments, each mingling command with condescension:

- Speak slowly and distinctly (but don’t “shout”) when assisting a foreign visitor.
- Walk with him a block or more to point out the way.
- If he is a photo fan, offer to take a snapshot of him with his camera. Many tourists appreciate this courtesy.
- Be enthusiastic and well informed about your local sightseeing attractions.

And so it went: eight tips in all for how Islanders could make “Welcome A Visitor Week” successful. “Our very hospitality has been commercialized and demeaned,” raged one commentary on the ad, “and we are expected to smile while we watch ‘The Garden of the Gulf’ being converted into

\textsuperscript{44}The conflict is noted in APEC, “History of the Prince Edward Island Comprehensive Development Plan,” p. 73.
‘Holiday Island.’”45 Tourism policy, its opponents charged, traded dignity for dollars.

Besides, it did not work.

By mid-decade, despite considerable expenditure, the Plan’s tourism strategy had failed to lure substantial numbers of tourists outside the “golden triangle” formed by Borden, Cavendish, and Charlottetown.46 It had not done well in attracting more visitors to Prince Edward Island either. After leaping forward by about 10% a year for much of the 1960s, the industry crested in 1975, then visibly slowed over the latter years of the decade. By 1980, it had failed even to reach the most conservative projections of 2.8% annual growth, and the number of visitors seemed to have stalled at about 500,000-700,000 annually, depending on how one estimated the numbers.47

If there was a symbolic turning point in the tourism decade, it was 1973, the one hundredth anniversary of Canada’s entry into Confederation. In late August, during the late summer heat of the Centennial celebrations, with tourists flocking to the Island in record numbers and five ferries making seventy-eight crossings a day at Borden-Cape Tormentine, CN employees went on strike. There had been other interruptions in the ferry service, most recently in 1966, but never at such an inauspicious moment. The tie-up at Borden-Cape Tormentine was the longest ten days in the history of Island tourism. The visitor traffic flow, which had been beating all previous records, plummeted by two-

45Baglole and Weale, eds. Cornelius Howatt: Superstar!, pp. 130 and 17.

46In 1975, tourism officials calculated that 75% of tourism-related employment was situated between Charlottetown and Summerside.

47This assessment is based on figures tabled in the annual reports of the provincial department of tourism. It is hard to know what to make of the estimates, which industry insiders admit were never taken too literally. The number of visitors for 1972 was originally set at over 685,000. A comparison of statistics in the following year’s report puts the 1972 figure at 523,000! This suggests that a change was made in the way that estimates were arrived at. Similarly, the Development Plan agreement cites visitation statistics for 1965 of 247,000, with tourism expenditures of $6.0 million; the departmental statistics tabled for 1965 were 377,000 and $14.0 million, respectively. Figures for “number of parties” were published in Prince Edward Island Statistics: Past and Present (Charlottetown: Department of Finance, 1990), Table 61. According to this measurement, tourism crested in 1975, setting a record that would not be surpassed for another twelve years.]
earlier that summer, there had been another defining moment in the history of Island tourism. The idea of situating a second Prince Edward Island national park in the East King’s region originated in a federal-provincial shoreline study in 1964 and took shape during 1969 in the context of the Development Plan. It is easy to see why the federal government would want to replicate in East King’s the extraordinary success of the Prince Edward Island National Park, and it is easy to see why the provincial government might welcome the proposal: the townships of East King’s had been decimated by decades of heavy out-migration, and the 8,000 acres proposed for the new park were beautiful, sparsely populated, and under-developed.

But it is also easy to see why the people of East King’s did not take to the park idea. No one had asked them about turning their district into a national park, and they quickly concluded that the scheme set far more store by their land than by their welfare. The first public statements about a new park appeared in March 1970, but a formal proposal was not unveiled until March 1973. Meanwhile, conflicting rumours swirled around East King’s like snow squalls from the Gulf.

At the Island government’s insistence, the federal-provincial agreement made provision for area residents to carry on their traditional occupations within park lands, and to lease back from government properties falling within park boundaries. But, as belated public consultation made clear, the locals did not trust the planners or the leasing deal, did not like proposed zoning restrictions, and did not care to be living exhibits for gawking tourists in the intended “cultural landscape park.” They would have liked even less the initial federal position: that the residents be relocated and the park developed as wilderness.48

The hornet’s nest of criticism quickly warned off the provincial government. In a dramatic gesture, Premier Campbell tore up the federal-provincial park agreement during a public meeting at Fairfield on 28 June 1973:

We the farmers in the East Point area, wish to thank you Mr. Premier for your broad mindedness of tearing up the Proposal of the Proposed National Park for good we

48The account here follows the case study published as Appendix II in McNiven, Evaluation of the Public Participation Programme, p. 27.
hope. Thank you for not selling us farmers down the river to the federal government who will destroy our farms and our community and our way of life. . . . If we were rude to you in presenting our objections to the park we are truly sorry.49

It would be another twenty-five years before a national park came to eastern Prince Edward Island. When it did, the Greenwich “annex” would encompass land that was already wilderness.

The East Point Park controversy entwined many of Islanders’ reservations about the Development Plan: lack of public input into planning, excessive control over land use, planners’ willingness to move people around like pieces on a chessboard, and a feeling that both the federal and provincial governments were putting tourists before Islanders. Such resentments lingered long after the torn-up pieces of the park proposal had been swept away.

In 1979, for the first time during the decade, tourism numbers actually fell, and, even though the 1980 season set a new record, the total increase in visitations over the post-Centennial period was only 14%. Besides quieting the “tourism-as-threat” talk, the industry’s modest growth after 1973 provided another lesson in the limits of planning. Like the Island’s other leading industries, agriculture and the fishery, tourism was both seasonal and heavily dependent on factors over which provincial bureaucrats had no control: inflation, the health of the North American economy, the strength of the Canadian currency, the price of fuel, competing attractions in other parts of the country, even the weather.

The typical “tourist” of the early 1900s had generally been following a homing instinct in coming to Prince Edward Island; the 1970s version faced the tyranny of choice. It was a fiercely competitive market — tourism, after all, was now being touted as the world’s fastest-growing industry — and the Island’s marketers went about their work with ever-increasing calculation. Industry growth during the decade might have not have equalled predictions, but the 1970s had put tourism on everyone’s lips. And into their brains. Twenty years later, many Islanders could still sing the jingle that the Department of Tourism commissioned from Stompin’ Tom Connors to help people
dial “the Land of Fun”:

Golf the courses, play the horses, nothing’s out of reach,  
Fishing for the tuna or bathing at the beach.  
Make this call the best of all for Prince Edward Island fun,  
Eight double-zero 565-7421.⁵⁰

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Island’s tourism promoters would redefine the higher-spending, longer-staying visitor whom they coveted. As the Baby Boomer generation greyed, the marketers played increasingly to the interests of the well-cultured rather than the well-heeled, the highbrows as opposed to the high rollers. The term “cultural tourism” gradually entered the industry’s lexicon, along with concepts such as “shoulder season,” and that most unfettered of travel families, the DINK (Double Income, No Kids). Tourism marketers would strike out for the future armed with an ever-larger arsenal of surveys, studies, and strategic thinking. Their industry had clearly come a long way from the homey tradition captured by Island songmaker Allan Rankin:

My Great Uncle Heb and my Aunt Isabel  
Are coming from the Boston States  
With a Chrysler car and a smoky cigar  
And white boots made from the skin of a snake.  
Tell Aunt Mabel, put the food on the table  
Summertime can wait  
My great Uncle Heb and my Aunt Isabel  
Are coming from the Boston States.⁵¹

The Development Plan was in full swing by 1973, when Prince Edward Island came to celebrate the

⁵⁰Excerpt from “Dial An Island,” words and music Tom Connors, copyright Crown Vetch Music, used by permission.

⁵¹Excerpt from “My Great Uncle Heb,” property of Wild Garden Music, used by permission.
Centennial of its entry into Confederation. The bland good humour of the “Smiling Father [of Confederation],” the ubiquitous Centennial mascot, presided over a by-now predictable slate of celebrations. There was the usual dressing-up and acting-out, the usual crop of Centennial memorabilia, the usual slate of prestigious visitors, including the Queen, and the usual polite speeches about the many benefits of Confederation. At times the Centennial seemed little more than a gigantic tourism promotion. When Island licence plates proclaimed the province, “The Place to Be in ’73,” it was not clear whether they were speaking to other Islanders or just to tourists.

The Brothers and Sisters of Cornelius Howatt had their own thoughts on that question. The brainchild of two young historian-activists, Harry Baglole and David Weale, the BS-CH (as it liked to acronym-ize itself) provided a satirical counterpoint to the official mood of self-congratulation. “He who controls the past controls the future,” Baglole and Weale quoted George Orwell, and, in their hands, history hunted the present. Their tongue-in-cheek lionization of Cornelius Howatt celebrated an obscure opponent of the Island’s entry into Confederation. “At the heart of his opposition,” wrote Brother Harry Baglole, “was an optimistic belief in the Island’s ability to manage its own affairs.” For them, Howatt embodied a tradition of “assertion” and “self-reliance”: “if something of Cornelius Howatt is not present the ceremonies will be contrived and hollow, and the gaiety a misguided affectation.”52

In a flurry of press releases and publicity stunts, the Brothers and Sisters poked disrespectful fun at the official celebrations. They countered the “Smiling Father” with “the Pie-Faced Kid” (“an Island farm boy turned desperado who bore a terrible and implacable grudge against all tourists and foreigners”)53 and used their manure spreader logo to “Spread the Word” across the Centennial Year that Confederation was not all that it cracked up to be.

Beneath the satire was a serious sub-text. The Brothers and Sisters’ real target was the Development Plan’s vision of Prince Edward Island. The BS-CH felt that the touchstone for the Island’s future should be what was particular to the province, not how the province could be made

52Baglole and Weale, eds., Cornelius Howatt: Superstar!, p. [8].

to resemble central Canada. The Development Plan’s pursuit of “national standards” in such areas as income and education was also seen as fundamentally empty: “We have learned,” wrote Brother Weale, “that economic prosperity is not the solution to all our human ills, and that the quality of life does not automatically rise and fall with the consumer index or the gross national product.” The BS-CH did not so much reject being Canadian as to articulate a “Prince Edward Island” nationalism, seeking for qualities that they believed the workings of Confederation had bleached out of Island life.

The society “self-destructed” as promised on 31 December 1973, after nailing its “Last Will and Testament” to the door of Province House. But its critical attitude and its ideas persisted, providing an intellectual gloss on Islanders’ instinctive resistance to imposed change.

One of the Brothers and Sisters’ main tenets, the significance of the past, resonated in another by-product of the 1973 Centennial, the heritage movement. There had been an historical society on Prince Edward Island as early as 1882, but, in the way of volunteer organizations, its various incarnations had come and gone with the personalities that dominated them. During the 1950s and 1960s, a postwar version of the Prince Edward Island Historical Society lobbied government to establish a provincial museum. For a time, it seemed as if the Confederation Centre of the Arts might fulfill that dream, but, in the end, the expectations of local heritage had been disappointed. They revived again in 1969, when Premier Campbell called together a small group of heritage-minded citizens to discuss the “historic resources of the Island.”

It is tempting to think that the godfather of the Development Plan had a mind to archiving the past because his planners were preparing to dismantle it, like saving valuable fragments of a building about to be torn down, but the Premier’s thinking on the subject was considerably more prosaic (and enlightened) than that. He had a genuine interest in heritage, and an administrative dilemma with respect to it. As he explained in February 1972, “There are literally dozens of historical projects being proposed by individuals or groups, to the government for consideration. The central purpose for establishing the Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation, was to bring the heritage interests of our citizens together, in one single organization, and recommend to Government those areas most

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deserving of public and financial support.”

The “Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation” was formally established in 1970 with Wanda Wyatt, a wealthy Summerside citizen with a penchant for local history, as its first chair. In the beginning, the Foundation had a small budget and modest pretensions. In many ways, it was little different from its historical society antecedents — heritage had always been essentially a middle-class hobby. But now it put down grassroots.

For history-minded Islanders, the ritual of remembering that accompanied the Centennial decade, 1964–1973, carried an undertone of urgency, for the past seemed literally to be vanishing before their eyes. Island artifacts were being carted off by the truckload by antique dealers. The province’s architectural heritage was being razed or allowed to crumble. Even the thread of memory was fraying with the disintegration of the Island’s oral culture. The reformist zeal of the Development Plan spread the unease more widely, convincing many ordinary Islanders that rapid change, disguised as progress, was destroying their social and cultural heritage. The process of modernization, they sensed, was severing Islanders’ connection to their past. Nothing is valued so much as when it is taken away. There was a heritage “movement” during the Development Plan years because “history” had suddenly become relevant.

Of course, money helped, too.

Someone once quipped that the major Centennial activity financed by the federal government on Prince Edward Island during 1967 had been the construction of ice hockey rinks. In 1973, Ottawa gave the province $1.4 million to help it celebrate the centennial of its provincehood. This time, after due deliberation, the Island government decided to spend the gift money on heritage preservation instead of community projects.

The seed funding provided by the Prince Edward Island Centennial completed the Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation’s transformation from a volunteer-based advocacy group to a professional, pan-heritage organization. A former nurses’ residence on Charlottetown’s fashionable

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56 Wyatt’s involvement in the early days of the Foundation is recounted in Kessler, A Century on Spring Street, pp. 381-382.
West Street, the Cundall Home, was converted into the organization’s headquarters and officially opened by no less historic a personage than the Queen in July 1973. In a small but suggestive gesture, the house was given back its original name, Beaconsfield, to recall its historical origins as the W. C. Harris-designed home of a wealthy shipowner.

Over the course of the decade, the Heritage Foundation became the acknowledged voice of Island heritage. Under the passionate leadership of heritage advocate Catherine Hennessey and architectural historian Irene Rogers, it took over responsibility for the handful of museums that had been built with Centennial money, recruited a membership base, encouraged family history, mounted research projects, collected and exhibited artifacts, established a publishing program, fought to save the built heritage amid an onslaught of bungalows and prefabrication, and preached the gospel of preservation to anyone who would listen (and many who would not).

Like most crusades the heritage movement drew its strength from the public mood. As change lost its sting, the heritage movement lost some of its fire. It also lost a measure of its funding, as the province moved into an era of recession and retrenchment at the end of the 1970s. For governments struggling to make ends meet, heritage was a luxury, not a necessity. At the same time, the Province had now admitted its obligation to help preserve the heritage of its citizens. In future, budgets might suffer, the target audience might shift between tourist and Islander, and promotion might at times outweigh actual preservation, but government would not abandon the heritage institutions that it had created.

While the Comprehensive Development Plan stumbled in its efforts to rationalize the province’s main industries, it approached the task of reforming the Island’s social and administrative infrastructure with more confidence. The results were unmistakable, though often unintended. A case in point was the provincial government, which the Plan set out to re-structure and ended up by transforming.

At the turn of the century, the neo-classical confines of Province House had sufficed to house the
government of Prince Edward Island. That changed after the Second World War, as the growing civil service spilled out into various buildings around the downtown. Finally, in 1967, a no-frills barracks of exposed concrete was poured into the West End of Charlottetown to bring the departments of government more or less together. Some unintentional irony attended the choice of site. Governor’s Pond was landfilled to furnish a parking lot, and the actual office complex was itself built on the location of a 19th-century slum known, for topographical reasons, as “the Bog.” It was, perhaps, an unfortunate foundation for a bureaucracy.

In 1963, the year after the Island’s Civil Service Act proclaimed the merit principle for hiring, the provincial government had 1,154 classified employees, not counting the hundreds of casual and seasonal workers whose political loyalties were generally as important as their job skills. By 1968 the number of classified civil servants nudged up by 12%, to 1,278.\textsuperscript{57} But over the first five years of the Development Plan, the provincial bureaucracy mushroomed, as government assumed ever more control over the affairs of its citizens. In 1974, as Phase I of the Plan wound down, Statistics Canada was reporting 4,081 full-time salaried and wage-earning employees in the provincial civil service.\textsuperscript{58}

Political analysts had long belittled government on Prince Edward Island as “big engine, small body.” But whether government’s weight gained during the 1970s represented bulking up or bloating remains debatable. Although the Island’s population was small, its provincehood was the same variety as any of its sisters, and modern government carried with it obligations that only a larger bureaucracy could fulfill.

That the civil service grew bigger mattered less to development planners — so they claimed — than that it grew better. In addition to providing civil servants with more training, the Development Plan gave its blessing to a complete overhaul of the existing job classification system. Meanwhile, the administrative link between cabinet and its bureaucracy was tightened by the creation of two new entities, Planning Board and Treasury Board. Whether or not the Development Plan was wholly responsible, the Island’s civil service was exhibiting more expertise, more system, and better

\textsuperscript{57}Figures are taken from the annual reports of the Civil Service Commission. The actual number of positions, as opposed to people, were 1,297 and 1,421, respectively.

\textsuperscript{58}The numbers are elusive. Citing Statistics Canada, \textit{Prince Edward Island Statistics: Past and Present}, Table 79, puts the number of provincial government employees at 4,005.
strategic thinking by the mid-1970s.

Government not only managed the Island economy by the 1970s, it comprised a large part of it. Taken together, the provincial and federal governments had become the Island’s biggest employer, providing jobs for over seven thousand people. The significance of that went well beyond paycheques. In 1900, Prince Edward Island had been a land of farmers; by 1980, it was more and more a world of white-collar workers.

The bureaucratization of Prince Edward Island had social and cultural implications that have yet to be plumbed. For example, the availability of government jobs significantly broadened the work horizons of Island women. In 1970, for the first time, they outnumbered men in the provincial civil service. While they continued to suffer wage discrimination (for example, until 1974 there was a different minimum wage for men and women), and were particularly underrepresented in managerial positions, working women would gradually find their voice.

On a more symbolic level, the 1970 provincial election at last brought a woman into the Island Legislature. On her second attempt, a Crapaud storekeeper named Jean Canfield was elected for the Liberals in the former Tory stronghold of 1st Queen’s. Two years later, she entered the Liberal cabinet as a minister without portfolio, responsible for housing.

The growth of government also gave a tremendous boost to the Island’s union movement, greatly enlarging its membership and diluting its blue collar origins.\(^59\) In 1964, unnoticed amid the Centennial celebrations, twenty-three local unions had joined together to establish the Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour. Nine years later, in 1973, the Prince Edward Island Public Service Association signed its first collective agreement with government. Showing a shrewd appreciation of public opinion, public servants opted for consultation over confrontation, eschewing the right to strike in favour of a system of negotiation and arbitration. With little history of labour strife and a

\(^{59}\) In 1964, unnoticed amid the Centennial celebrations, twenty-three local unions had joined together to establish the Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour. See David Frank and Heidi MacDonald, “Island Labour: The Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour” (get rest of reference).
widespread feeling that civil servants were “lucky” to have relatively well paying, year-round jobs, Islanders were unlikely to sympathize with militant unionism or aggressive strike tactics.\(^{60}\) That had been true during the Jones era, when Island society was overwhelmingly rural, and it remained true in the 1970s, when Islanders were increasingly urban, but still thought “rural.” Union leaders shrewdly guessed that they would win more concessions at the arbitration table than on the picket line. In 1971, the Prince Edward Island Teachers’ Federation took that line of thinking to its logical extreme when it threatened to strike in order to obtain the right not to!\(^{61}\)

Formalizing the collective bargaining process undoubtedly led to improved employee benefits. It arguably helped boost wages, too, although the minimum salary for a provincial employee had already risen 80% between 1969 and 1973. As the Civil Service Commission noted, wage increases had been necessary to maintain “parity” with the other Maritime Provinces. Nevertheless, provincial civil servants continued to make appreciably less than their counterparts in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. On the other hand, they made, on average, appreciably more than workers in the Island’s private sector. Affluence, like poverty, is relative, after all. Even as Islanders complained about the size and cost of their bureaucracy, they scrambled after that most coveted of white-collar positions, the “good government job.”

Boxed Essay: Three Heads Are Better Than One?

On 7 December 1970, Professor Roman R. March, a political scientist from McMaster University, told a parliamentary committee on the constitution “that Prince Edward Island should be abolished and that it was ridiculous for it to have a legislature and a voice in Parliament.”\(^{62}\) Islanders bristled at such remarks, which

\(^{60}\) For a thorough discussion of these issues, see Sheila Lund MacDonald, “Collective Bargaining in the Provincial Public Service: A Case Study of Prince Edward Island” (Master’s Research Paper, Industrial Relations Department, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, 1990), pp. 32-34.


exposed both the rough edge of their pride and their vulnerability. For some Canadians, it appeared, Prince Edward Island was nothing more than an expensive inconvenience. The sentiment served to raise the stakes for everyone involved in the Comprehensive Development Plan. For federal bureaucrats, the attitude demanded that the lavishment of so much money on such a small society must produce measurable results. From an Island perspective, our place in Confederation now seemed tied to our ability to stand on our own feet economically.

Within this context, the resurrection of the Maritime Union concept at the end of the 1960s seemed particularly threatening to Island nationalists. Following a report commissioned by the region’s premiers from Dr. John Deutsch, there were official discussions about uniting the three Maritime Provinces. Would political union with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick be the planners’ ultimate rationalization? Although no desperate delegation from the Canadas arrived to hijack the deliberations as in 1864, the conjectured benefits of Maritime Union once again proved less convincing than its certain disadvantages. The exploratory talks were a little like the exploratory oil wells that dotted the Island landscape during the 1970s: highly publicized but essentially empty. The end product was tentative cooperation and some useful mechanisms for regular consultation. In the hierarchy of loyalties, “Islander” still ranked considerably above “Maritimer.”

Intrepidly polling, though he knew Islanders already felt surveyed to death, J. G. L. Adams submitted some startling statistics about urban housing to the Atlantic Development Board in 1968. According to his research, only 13.2% of the houses in Tignish had their own flush toilets. In North Rustico, 86% of the homes had no furnace. Less than half of O’Leary residences had hot and cold running water. The larger towns, either newer or wealthier, tended to boast more comfortable percentages. Nevertheless, the lack of modern amenities in a good part of urban Prince Edward Island was sobering. The country fared even worse, and farm families worst of all. According to the 1961 census, half of the homes in rural Prince Edward Island had no running water. Only a quarter of them had

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*J. G. L. Adams, “Urban Centres in Prince Edward Island: Report to the Planning Division of the Atlantic Development Board” (Ottawa: 1968).*

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central heating. Two out of every three lacked indoor plumbing.\textsuperscript{64}

For development planners — and most Islanders — to turn on a tap or flush a toilet was evidence of modernity. The hand pump and the outhouse had no place in the province’s future. New housing did.

The Development Plan estimated that 10,000 to 11,000 housing units would be needed to accommodate normal population growth and in-province migration. To help the process along, the Home Ownership Assistance Program was created in June 1970 to provide forgivable loans to low-income home-builders. Although 85\% of the funding was federal, administration was provided by the province through the newly created Prince Edward Island Housing Authority. By the time it wound down in September 1974, the building program had disbursed $5.5 million dollars to 1,570 projects, fully one-third of the housing starts in the province over that period.\textsuperscript{65} While many deserving families received assistance, eligibility had been interpreted rather generously: an evaluation in 1973 suggested that 66\% of the home ownership grants had been awarded to people who were not eligible for them.\textsuperscript{66}

The Home Ownership Assistance Program was only the most expensive of the Housing Authority’s undertakings. It contributed toward “manors” for the elderly and “social housing” for the poor, assembled land for low-income subdivisions, sponsored co-operative housing ventures, and spent $4.3 million in matching grants for home renovation projects. By mid-decade, as the Development Plan shifted away from building infrastructure, and the Housing Authority surrendered the programming initiative to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), construction activity in the province had reached unprecedented heights.

\textsuperscript{64}The fractions approximate the detailed statistics in Census of Canada, 1961, Vol. 2, Part 2.

\textsuperscript{65}Annual Report of the Prince Edward Island Housing Authority, 1974-75. At the same time, a Home Improvement Program had paid half the eligible costs (labour and materials) for renovations to existing dwellings. It handed out $4.3 million dollars through 5,723 grants.

\textsuperscript{66}Cited in Frank MacKinnon, “Prince Edward Island,” \textit{Canadian Annual Review}, p. 246. The evaluator, Professor John McClellan (soon to become executive director of the Prince Edward Island Land Use Commission), also found that 41\% of home ownership grants resulted from political pressure or administrative laxity.
The Development Plan had expected as many as 3,300 displaced farmers and fishermen to “resettle,” presumably in town, and designated Charlottetown, Summerside, Montague, Souris, and O’Leary for special housing assistance. Bumper crops of subdivisions did spring up on the peripheries of urban centres, gradually merging with existing neighbourhoods, but they were not filled with ex-farmers or fishers so much as their children, Baby Boomers drawn to the jobs that were concentrating in urban environments. Three-quarters of the grantees under the Home Ownership Assistance Program were under forty years old.

Nor, by any means, were all of the new homes built in the burgeoning suburbs. The mobility offered by the automobile and the lure of cheap land encouraged some rural Islanders to commute from their old communities to their new urban jobs. Their building lots were often carved out at the fronts of their parents’ farms. The same convenience lured middle-class urbanites out into the countryside as well, giving a modern twist to the time-honoured aspiration of becoming “landed gentry.” The term “strip development” was coined to describe the linear pattern of rural housing, with its mishmash of new homes dangling from the highway like charms on a bracelet. They did not provide the arcadian vistas that tourism promoters were promising visitors, but they helped check the drift toward suburbia. In 1981, 62.7% of the Island population was classified as rural, even though only 9.8% of it farmed.

That the majority of the new construction was in Queen’s County and East Prince suggested another pattern. The tilt of the provincial economy was sliding more and more Islanders toward the middle of the province, where the bulk of the jobs were. The automobile had only shrunk distances, after all, not eliminated them. In 1900, rural Islanders had spread out more or less evenly across the countryside. By 1986, 88,000 people, 70% of the population, lived within a fifteen-mile radius of either Charlottetown or Summerside. Statisticians had to invent a new label for the North American families that clustered just outside municipal boundaries. They called them “rurban.”

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In all, there were 12,240 housing starts on Prince Edward Island between 1969 and 1979. The bulk of the residential construction, nearly ten thousand homes, was comprised of single-family dwellings. It was the biggest housing boom in modern Island history, and it gave the 1970s their characteristic look, the cheap, affordable, shoebox-shaped bungalow. In 1966, there had been just over 25,000 private dwellings in the province. By 1981, there were upward of 38,000. All but three hundred had indoor plumbing. For the generation that had grown up with chamber pots and two-holers and Eaton’s catalogue toilet paper, that statistic represented as great a revolution as the Modern could offer.

Although “social development” was high on the Development Plan’s list of priorities, health and welfare issues remained outside of its comprehensive mandate, in part because federal officials had resisted their inclusion. Yet the Development Plan’s aura was so powerful that coincidental reforms were often seen in its light. A case in point was Medicare, which was launched on Prince Edward Island on 1 December 1970. Its range of coverage and its universalism supplanted the half-way measures of the 1959 Health Insurance Act, placing medical care within the reach of virtually every Islander.

The amalgamation of the Island’s three hospital-based nursing schools into a single Prince Edward Island School of Nursing was not a Development Plan program either. In most ways, it was

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69 By way of comparison, there were 4,776 housing starts in the decade before 1969. The figure for the 1980s was 7,039, of which only 4,725 were single family dwellings. See Government of Prince Edward Island, “Prince Edward Island: Historical Statistical Review” (Report prepared by the Economics, Statistics, and Fiscal Analysis Division of the Prince Edward Island Department of Finance and Tourism, 1990).

70 The statistics here are drawn from the 1981 federal census. The exact number of private dwellings was put at 37,660.

the logical culmination of Island nurses’ drive toward greater professionalization. At the same time, the nurses’ initiative played squarely into the Development Plan’s zeal for efficiency, and the Plan provided a context for the requisite negotiations with government on the issue.\textsuperscript{72}

On the other hand, the idea of a new general hospital to serve the entire Island population was explicitly mentioned in the original Plan agreement, although no funds were earmarked for its construction. It was the spring of 1975 before the provincial government and its health care partners were ready to break ground on the new building. At that point, health reform began ailing.

The rub was that the new institution would also replace Charlottetown’s two existing hospitals, one Protestant and one Catholic. Both were aging gracelessly; both boasted long traditions; both engaged a stubborn sectarian loyalty. There was an ominous quiet about the proposed new hospital, and, as the call for tenders neared, the Campbell Government got cold feet. In September 1975, it withdrew its financial support, citing an absence of the public support essential for the new building’s construction and operation.\textsuperscript{73} The abandonment served to rally the medical fraternity, but, while “Doctors for A Single Hospital” fumed, the building plans were being rolled up.

The setback was not quite a triumph of faith over science. While denominational loyalties undoubtedly inclined them toward retaining the old hospitals, many Islanders also appeared to understand the high cost of a new hospital better than its necessity. Their minds could be changed, and, by 1978, the public had come round sufficiently for the $24 million, 330-bed hospital to go ahead with widespread support and little denominational fall-out. Health care was clearly secularizing.

So were social services, which had long been left to church-sponsored agencies. The Development Plan decade was the time when social welfare programming came to maturity in the province. In September 1972, lost within the echo of general government restructuring, the Department of Welfare was reorganized as the Department of Social Services. Already it was one of the biggest branches of government, with as many as eight hundred employees by mid-decade.

\textsuperscript{72}Katherine Dewar, \textit{This Caring Place : the History of Prince County Hospital and School of Nursing} (Summerside, PE : Prince County Hospital Foundation, [forthcoming]. See Chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{73}“Press Release Premier Campbell, September 1975,” PARO RG 3487 (Doctors United for A Single Hospital).
The Department’s constituency comprised the people that Deputy Minister John Eldon Green called “social casualties,” the poor, the infirm, the aged, Islanders pushed to the margins of society by a combination of their own frailties — physical, intellectual, or economic — and the ingrained attitudes of the more fortunate. Although social ills were not actually growing as fast in the 1970s as the belated recognition of them, the department’s resources never equalled its responsibilities. In a familiar pattern, staff were inevitably caught between the demands of their clients and the popular mythology of “welfare bums” living like parasites off the body public. “The General Welfare Assistance program represents possibly the most difficult service to manage in Government,” observed the 1971–72 annual report. Field staff “are invariably carrying excessive caseloads, are dealing with extremely complex and sometimes hopeless situations, and have limited resources to draw from.” It would be the tragedy of Social Services that exactly the same description still applied twenty-five years later.  

For in a perpetually cash-strapped province, the weight of social assistance was financial as well as physical. Over time, it provided a grotesque lesson in bureaucratic reasoning. One whole category of provincial employment strategies during the 1980s and 1990s would be geared to finding enough weeks of employment to shift provincial welfare recipients onto unemployment rolls. The rationale was simple. Even though well over 80% of Social Services’ budget habitually originated in Ottawa, unemployment insurance was 100% a federal responsibility.

Health and social welfare policy periodically irritated Islanders during the 1970s, but the emotion was nothing compared to the outrage that overtook the Development Plan’s designs for Island education. A key element of the advertised restructuring, the creation of a provincial university and a modern technical college, had been accomplished almost before it was written into the Plan. Another, school consolidation, had already been under way for more than a decade. But both were given a new rationale as part of the Plan’s “human resource development” strategy.

Put bluntly, the Development Plan intended to modernize education as a tool to modernize

74 The summary is based mainly on the annual reports of the provincial Department of Welfare and the Department of Social Services for the period 1968-1980.
Islanders. A society in which 50% of the work force had not gotten beyond Grade 8 would not be acceptable in the new Prince Edward Island. The Plan intended to double the number of students completing Grade 12 and to institute a more “flexible” system of education, based on “the most successful modern approaches to education.” In the conventional wisdom, it went without saying that those modern approaches worked best in large, centrally located, efficient, well-equipped schools.

Federal planners initially balked at helping pay for new school construction, and the original Development Plan agreement placed that burden squarely on the narrow shoulders of provincial finances. It took two years to persuade the Department of Regional Economic Expansion to contribute to capital costs. By then, the Province had its reforms ready. In November 1971, with the number of children enrolled in Island schools at an all-time peak, the Campbell Government enacted legislation that centralized control over the Island education system. All school taxation was gathered into provincial hands, and, with the stroke of a pen, the Island’s 217 remaining school districts were replaced by five regional administrative units. Some seven hundred trustees were reduced to seventy-five. Having consolidated school administration and finance, the Province would now finish consolidating the schools. As one excited planner boasted, “Conditions were right for education in Prince Edward Island to leap from the nineteenth century to the cutting edge.”

The cutting edge hurt.

The Premier had been advised from the beginning that he might expect trouble, that tradition, pride of ownership in local schools, fear of the unknown, and lack of job opportunities for the newly educated might inspire resistance to educational reform. As it turned out, the trouble came mostly after consolidation was largely complete. Most Islanders had accepted the need for educational reform. The dissidents simply did not accept that improvement and consolidation had to go hand in hand.

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76Donovan Russell, chairman of the Educational Planning Unit, quoted in Smitheram, “Development and the Debate Over School Consolidation,” in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, eds. Garden Transformed, p. 188.

77Don Hoyt to Campbell, 9 August 1971, A. B. Campbell Papers, PARO RG 25.36, 1971/1108-B.
hand. Their stubborn, highly publicized campaigns against the closure of various small schools made minister of education the most thankless job on Prince Edward Island during the late 1970s.78

The planners had not expected reason to ally itself with emotion in opposing the consolidation program. To their surprise, heartfelt sentiment in the lament for the one-room school was reinforced by a good deal of sophisticated theorizing about optimal school size and the science of pedagogy. Both science and sentiment reached the same general conclusion: that bigger was not always better. Everyone on both sides of the consolidation argument agreed that quality of education was the paramount concern. Of course, the definition of “quality” is still being debated today.

Other opponents charged that the new education system was turning Island children into urban Canadians, not just in terms of the social values imparted, but because the sorts of skills that students were learning could only be employed in urban settings. Few people cared to recall that the old system, for those few who were able to follow its path to the end, led to exactly the same destinations. But again, the medium was the message. As Professor Verner Smitheram warned in 1982, “The large consolidated school, regardless of its location, is itself an urban place because of its hierarchical organization, the content it teaches, and the kind of personal relations it demands. The potato field that may surround it has nothing to do with life in the schools.”79

In that sense, the consolidation debate was about community as much as education. In abolishing the old school districts, the Development Plan destroyed one more rallying point for rural community, and eliminated one more lever of local control over community affairs. Edward Gillis of Eldon caught the drift of things. At the old one-room school, he told an interviewer, “If we had some change, or something we wanted to do, or something we wanted to say, we went up to the school at their annual meeting and we said it there. . . . Now, nobody bothers going to [school board meetings in] Montague. As soon as you get there, they pass out an agenda — that’s it.” “Agenda”: an entire bureaucracy resided in the word.

78Ironically, Smitheram observes, the regional school boards proved far more intransigent than the politicians in holding to the gospel of consolidation. Of course, they had no other plan to fall back on.

The consolidation program went ahead despite the angry protests. The 380 schools of 1969 had become 70 by 1978. Those consequences of consolidation that could be measured suggested progress. Provincial spending per student, which had been only 42% of the national average in 1956, rose to 86% by 1976–77. Students were staying in school longer, though it was unclear whether or not they were learning more. The qualifications, at least, of teachers were markedly better. There were many more consultants, counsellors, and specialists. Facilities were more modern and better equipped. The curriculum became more diversified and elective. In some high schools it even included Island history.

In purely quantitative terms, school consolidation would stand as the “most effectively executed aspect” of the Development Plan. Parents might have felt divorced from their children’s far distant schools, and turnouts for trustee elections were invariably abysmal, but, as provincial politicians well knew, education continued to matter to Islanders. Each year, education spending was larger than almost any other item in the provincial budget, yet smaller than public expectations. The rural decline that critics had once linked to school consolidation continued, compounded now by demographics, as Baby Boom gave way to Baby Bust, and migration patterns shifted population densities within both town and country. People are mobile, schools are not, and, by the 1990s, still wedded to economies of scale, government planners would be talking about consolidating the consolidated schools.

Meanwhile, the old one-room schools continued to haunt the countryside. Here and there they masqueraded as homes, workshops, or cottages. In many cases, the only clue to their former lives was a telltale bank of south-facing windows or the metal ventilating tubes that still protruded from their roofs. Whether surplus consolidated schools would prove as recyclable was more questionable.

In reconstituting the Island’s educational system, the Development Planners had intended that there would be only four school units, but in their passion for efficiency they had reckoned without the demands of Island Acadians. A fifth unit, comprising the scattered Francophone school districts, was
THE STRUGGLE FOR DEVELOPMENT

added to the administrative structure. Island officialdom had not always been so sensitive toward Acadian “rights.” Francophones were clearly benefitting from the consciousness-raising that flowed from the federal commitment in the late 1960s to a policy of bilingualism and biculturalism. They gained in a material sense as well. In the ensuing decades, federal programs would provide a steady source of funding for Francophone institutions, programs, and organizations such as the St. Thomas Aquinas Society.

While a wave of political radicalism was washing over New Brunswick, where the Parti Acadien called for the creation of a separate Acadian province during the 1970s, the smaller Acadian community on Prince Edward Island chose not to challenge the formal status quo. Rather, its leaders campaigned quietly to strengthen their people’s position within Island society and to shore up the eroding island of Acadian culture within the province.

Despite new programs, renewed pride among Acadians, and new respect from Anglophone Islanders, the number of French-speakers in the province continued to decline. The problem was no longer intolerance, or even indifference, but cultural seduction. The communications revolution allowed North American culture and values to pour into Acadian lives. Isolation and the old sense of grievance had at least reinforced group identity and cultural boundary. The new cultural imperialism was neither deliberate nor directed — all Islanders were its victims — but that only made it harder to combat. For those who valued distinctiveness as a source of strength, globalism was insidious. Of the nearly 15,000 Islanders of French descent in the early 1980s, only about 6,000 listed French as their mother tongue.

A noticeable number of those Francophones were not even Acadians. As part of a plan to decentralize services, the federal government announced in 1976 that the Department of Veteran’s Affairs would be relocated to Prince Edward Island, the home province of its Minister, war hero “Daniel Dan” MacDonald. Over seven hundred federal employees were eventually slated for transfer to Charlottetown. Although some would choose not to follow their department east, the infusion of hundreds of bilingual public servants subtly changed the complexion of the Island’s French community. French was a first language for many of the newcomers, and to ease their anxieties about relocating, the provincial government promised to build a French-language school in Charlottetown. The Island francophonie was strengthened by the new arrivals, but, at the same time, the French
language ceased to be an exclusive possession of Island Acadians.

The descent of the DVA bureaucrats was part of a larger trend. During the 1970s, for the first time in a century, more people moved to Prince Edward Island than left it. Total migration (immigrants minus emigrants) for the decade was 3,230, helping push the Island’s population up to 122,506 by 1981. Of that number, only 80% had been born on Prince Edward Island, a revolution compared to 1941, when 97% of the Island’s population had been native-born, or even 1971, when the figure was still 85%. It was no coincidence that the 1970s popularized the expression “CFAs,” — “Come From Aways.”

Most of the newcomers moved to urban Prince Edward Island, the Charlottetown and Summerside areas, generally. Among them were career-oriented bureaucrats and entrepreneurs, who came down to Prince Edward Island in connection with the Development Plan or its spinoffs. They brought with them different tastes, different loyalties, and different interests that helped to broaden the parameters of Island life.

Beginning in the late 1960s, rural Prince Edward Island got a different sort of immigrant entirely. In common with other parts of North America, the province experienced a minor, but highly visible, “back-to-the-land movement.” These “refugees from the Woodstock generation” had consciously rejected mainstream North American culture as constricting and emotionally stultifying. Some of them were merely dropping out; others were in quest of affordable land where they could get back to basics and simplify their lives.

The early back-to-the-landers drifted in like pollen, by chance and circumstance mainly. Although they seldom established communes, they did tend to cluster in areas where land was cheap, often on abandoned farms, converting derelict houses back into homes and constructing

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81 The descriptive phrase comes from land use expert John McClellan in The Garden Transformed.
unconventional dwellings of their own. Their most famous haunt was, perhaps, the Dixon Road in the lost farmlands of central Queen’s County, but King’s County and West Prince attracted a goodly share of the strange immigrants as well. They cobbled together a subsistence in various ways: by farming, by hiring out as labourers, and by turning to their hand to arts and crafts.

The newcomers were young, and while one of their number has described them as “university drop-outs with no skills,” they were, compared to most rural Islanders, well-educated.82 They took no name to themselves, and locals did not quite know what to call them, usually settling for terms such as “hippies,” “twig-eaters,” or “rubber-booters.” Their attitude to the newcomers was an ambivalent mixture of bemusement and prejudice; they did not know what to make of people who apparently scorned electricity, indoor plumbing, central heating, and television, luxuries that Islanders had struggled all their lives to acquire. These “hippies” did not get their hair cut, did not go to church, and did not get married — “That is the woman with whom I sleep,” one of them politely explained to an inquirer.83

And yet, many of the “hippies” shared characteristics that older Islanders could appreciate: neighbourliness, an unofficial attachment to the Golden Mean, a healthy cynicism about Authority, and, as time went on, a fierce attachment to the island that they had adopted. The back-to-the-landers also seemed to value the people they found on arrival and, unlike the shirt-and-tie planners, did not insist that they must change. Despite their conjectured drug use, their odd appearance, and their unconventional lifestyles, they were not threatening, perhaps because they were so greatly outnumbered by native-born Islanders. Out in Lewes, on the high back of southern King’s County, artist and back-to-the-lander Lindee Climo shared a manure spreader with local farmer and federal MP Angus MacLean. There was room on the thin, sandy soil for both of them to put down roots.

It is difficult to generalize about people who themselves shared a limited sense of group identity. Actuality fell somewhere between Islanders’ stereotypes of back-to-the-landers and their own self-image. The newcomers cherished romantic notions about their lifestyle choices, about the

82 The comment was made in conversation by Nancy Murphy, now of Charlottetown, who considered herself a non-conforming non-conformist during the early 1970s.

83 Personal recollection of author.
island that they had discovered, and about Islanders. In time, they made whatever compromises with modernity that they felt were necessary. Not many chose to continue without the physical amenities of modern living. Most clung, however, to a fundamental idealism, countering Islanders’ tendency toward fatalism with their own penchant for activism. In the 1980s and 1990s, they would play an influential role in Island life.

As the 1970s went on, the motives for immigration among back-to-the-landers became more focussed. In some ways, the latecomers still resembled the “bourgeois bohemians” of a few years earlier, but now they came to Prince Edward Island largely by choice rather than chance, and they were not “dropping out” so often as “dropping in” to a deliberate choice of lifestyle. Like the earlier arrivals, this “Harrowsmith generation,” as historian Boyde Beck has termed them, were intelligent, articulate, and increasingly committed to their chosen community. In a culture of conspicuous consumption and reckless waste, they were taking seriously the responsibility to “live lightly on the land.” That they had come to Prince Edward Island to do it had much to do with the province’s developing environmental movement.

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On 7 September 1970, the oil barge Irving Whale sank in the Gulf of St. Lawrence north of Prince Edward Island, taking 2,400 tons of bunker “C” oil to the bottom with it. There was no massive oil spill from the wreck, but the sunken barge became an ecological time bomb, ominously close to the Island’s North Shore beaches. Until it was finally raised a quarter of a century later, the rusting hulk was an invisible reminder that “pollution” was more than a just a trendy buzz word in magazines from “Away.”

The Island’s environmental concerns in the 1970s were usually more mundane, if no less

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84 I’m indebted to Island historian Sasha Mullally for spinning the term “bourgeois bohemians.” Ann MacCallum has emphasized the conscious decision that she and her husband made in becoming “back-to-the-landers” on Prince Edward Island (e-mail correspondence with author, January 2000).
pressing. Where to put things — especially waste — is a particular dilemma for small islands. Just a generation earlier, frugality had been considered a pre-eminent virtue on Prince Edward Island, and Islanders had been well-schooled in the old maxim of “making, making over, and making do.” A later generation would call it “recycling.” But by the 1970s, Islanders’ garbage could no longer be confined to a small pile behind an outbuilding or a corner of the back woodlot.

What Charlottetown did not haul to its dump, its sewers often emptied, untreated, directly into the harbour, and the smell of raw sewage at low tide was many a person’s introduction to the “Cradle of Confederation.” The Development Plan provided funding for sewage disposal and waste treatment in Island municipalities as well as for major industrial plants. In rural areas, a network of community dumps was established. In fact, rubbish was the common denominator in most of the Island’s environmental enactments. Under the determined leadership of its minister, Gilbert Clements, the Department of Environment’s controversial “derelict car” program taxed Islanders in 1975–76, to remove over 17,000 abandoned cars from Island properties. Strict signage legislation would address visual litter by banning most advertising billboards. Another roadside irritant, aluminum beverage cans, were prohibited in favour of refillable glass bottles, a ban that undeniably benefitted the province’s pop-bottlers, while ensuring a continuing source of pocket money for industrious scavengers.

For the first half of the 1970s, Environment was housed in the same ministry with Tourism. That twinning underscored the initial emphasis in environmental awareness in the province: the elimination of the unsightly. The “unsightly” was often defined from the point of view of the tourist. From the point of view of cultural activists, ironically, it was the tourist attractions that often offended most, and there were memorable battles over the debatable enchantment of plywood castles and their ilk. The debate was often — and unnecessarily — couched as a clash between the cultural and the commercial, with the visual integrity of the Island landscape as the stakes.

During the course of the 1970s, the environmental movement within the province both

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55See Weale, Them Times, p. 68. Jean Halliday MacKay outlines the practical dimensions of this attitude in the descriptions of household economy in her The Home Place: Life in Rural Prince Edward Island in the 1920s and ’30s (Charlottetown: Acorn Press, 1999), especially, pp.77-91.
deepened and broadened. By hijacking energy prices, the world oil crisis of the mid-1970s forced Western governments to invest in alternative sources of energy, and, for a brief time, economics and social conscience were in precarious alignment.

Prince Edward Island — where change was official dogma and oil-fired electricity the most expensive in Canada — was especially susceptible to new ideas about energy. Early in 1975, the Campbell Government created the Institute of Man and Resources to investigate, instigate, and propagate alternative technologies that were, as its constitution stated, “socially desirable and ecologically sustainable.” The IMR’s visionary pragmatism came largely from its first director, Andrew Wells, one of the Premier’s former advisors. Its opportunities often flowed from federal policy. Late the following year, the federal government announced that it would spend $12 million to increase energy efficiency on Prince Edward Island. The bulk of the money would pay Islanders to insulate their homes, but there was also $3 million for research into renewable energy.86

At North Cape, the federal government established a wind test site to find better ways to capture that ancient energy source. At the other end of the province, on a long finger of red sandstone called Cape Spry, the American-based New Alchemy Institute inspired international enthusiasm for an ambitious experiment in total self-sufficiency. By blending hi-tech with tradition, the dwellers in “The Ark” intended to grow, raise, or harvest all of their own organic food, while satisfying their energy needs through solar and wind power. As it turned out, the Ark generated more attention than energy, and the noble but expensive experiment eventually foundered amid controversy and recrimination.

Fired with the sort of idealism that was now fading from the Development Plan, the Institute of Man and Resources took a hand in all of the major energy initiatives of the late 1970s, and for a time Prince Edward Island was on the leading edge of alternative energy research in Canada. Then oil prices stabilized. As the quest for alternative energy lost its urgency, alternative energy research gradually lost its federal funding. Around the same time, there was a change in government on Prince Edward Island. Afterward, the political climate began cooling with respect to the IMR, and it found itself increasingly marginalized. Bereft of government’s patronage, the Institute steadily lost

momentum, and, by the end of the 1980s, it had gone the way of the Ark.\textsuperscript{87}

Well before the IMR’s demise, the emphasis within the environmental movement had shifted back from energy to ecology. What passed for “wilderness” had long been an endangered species in the nation’s most densely settled province, but Islanders’ environmental awakening had been slow. When a small group of preservationists formed the Prince Edward Island Conservation Association in the late 1960s, local newspapers repeatedly ran their meeting notices as gatherings of the “Conservative Association.”\textsuperscript{88} It may have helped attendance.

During the 1970s, the International Biological Program recommended fourteen sites on Prince Edward Island for conversion into ecological preserves. In response, the Province established a Natural Areas Advisory Committee, but when the government demonstrated that it was far more likely to talk about natural areas than preserve them, a coalition of naturalists and environmentalists created the Island Nature Trust. Incorporated in 1979, the Nature Trust set out to acquire and manage ecologically significant tracts of land and water. Over the next decade, the new organization acquired an aggressive profile as it stretched its meagre resources to advocate and, on occasion, agitate in defence of the Island’s ecosystem. By the early 1990s, the Nature Trust was managing 721 acres of wilderness in trust for the people of Prince Edward Island — whether they wanted it or not.\textsuperscript{89} By then, other environmentalists were already moving to the left of the Trust’s once “radical” positions.

\textsuperscript{87}A detailed account of the Institute of Man and Resources and its tangled relationship with the Ark, the Atlantic Wind Test Site, and other energy adventures are re-counted in Alan MacEachern, \textit{Energetic: A History of the Institute of Man and Resources} (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, [forthcoming]).

\textsuperscript{88}Dr. Ian MacQuarrie, conversation with author, Charlottetown, 22 March 2000. The same story is told by a co-founder of the Association, Daryl Guignon.

On 28 April 1975, the Charlottetown Guardian published a piece of poetic commentary that went, in part:

*Give us this day our development plan*
*(So that we might hire a foreign man)*
*Who has been chased from everywhere*
*To come and take us in his care!)*

*Forgive him if he’s short of knowledge*
*We’ll let him teach at Holland College*
*And if he is really a nut*
*We’ll let him sit upon his butt*
*And give him great remuneration*
*As head of a government corporation*

. . . . . .

*The farmers, bless ’em, can plant their crops*
*In between the tourist stops!*
*The LDC will own our land*
*We’ll have to rent a place to stand.*

That bit of doggerel was typical of the many attacks on the Development Plan during the 1970s. Some were politically inspired, but most came from the heart. As Wayne MacKinnon has observed, “There is a fundamental conflict between Islanders’ desires to maintain their way of life and improve their standard of living.”90 The Development Plan assumed that for Islanders to have what other people had they must live as other people lived. And if they were to live as other people lived, they must be as other people were.

James Bickerton captures the essence of the dilemma in his assessment of regional development strategies:

Achievement of a state of “modernity” was the primary goal of development planners, and modernity was generally defined in terms of the characteristics of large, industrialized societies . . . . [This concept] links the economic problems of the

periphery with the latter’s stubborn adherence to the traditional value system, a link that denigrates and devalues the culture of the periphery. Yet, should the periphery ever actually abandon its own culture in order to ape that of distant metropolitan centres, it is fated to always and inevitably be a second-rate cultural replica that never quite “measures up” to the cultural norms emanating from the metropole.91

The result is a cultural dependency that reinforces the economic disparity.

Bickerton’s analysis exaggerates the cultural divide between Atlantic Canada and other parts of the nation. It also conveniently overlooks that not everything in an indigenous culture is admirable or functional. Where the champions of the traditional Prince Edward Island saw integrity, tradition, stoic endurance, and a sense of place, planners found apathy, narrow parochialism, and petty jealousies — an oligarchic society, dominated by potato dealers, fish buyers, merchants, and other elites, that was suspicious of new ideas and new people.

Of course, both were right.

With its coterie of outsiders, its murky bureaucratese, and its apparent disregard for individual Islanders and their traditions, the Plan was an easy target. The Brothers and Sisters of Cornelius Howatt had skewered it with satire. Others used blunter instruments. Some of the criticism was justified, though much of it was not. In any event, the tone was more important than the particulars. During the modernization of the 1950s and 1960s, government had done things for Islanders; in the perception of its critics, the Development Plan was doing things to them. Even though the effect was more or less the same, the distinction was significant. “It was not,” concludes MacKinnon, “fertile ground for an uncompromising politics of development.”92

In a newly reflective mood, Premier Campbell told the Charlottetown Rotary Club in May 1973 that Prince Edward Island was “Between Two Cultures.” He was right. Islanders were astraddle the fence that separated the new Prince Edward Island from the old, and, as any farm child can attest, that was a most uncomfortable position.


Pain is a politically volatile sensation, and, as Phase I of the Development Plan — and Campbell’s mandate — wound down, there was an audible shift in the Premier’s rhetoric. No one had ever actually declared that “bigger is better” in the Development Plan, but the premise lurked in its every crevice. Now Campbell began reminding people that “Small Is Beautiful,” the title phrase from E. F. Schumacher’s influential book arguing for appropriate development instead of economic gigantism.

Although cynics would scoff at the Premier’s “warmed-over Schumacher,” his conversion seems to have been genuine, if qualified. Campbell’s public utterances suggest that he was listening to the voices of dissent. He had also learned that the Development Plan was not delivering on its promise to pull the Island economy up by its bootstraps. While infrastructure reforms might provide the necessary platform for development, as evaluators suggested, the fact remained that the Plan had missed virtually all of its Phase I economic targets. That the targets seemed to have been chosen arbitrarily in some cases was likely of little solace. Much had been expected of the revolutionary blueprint, and disappointment made the ruling Liberals cautious.

The independent evaluations of Phase I were ready by the fall of 1973, but Campbell’s government prudently sat on them until someone leaked the details to the press during the run-up to the provincial election in the following spring. As in 1970, the main issue was the Development Plan. One could say that it dominated both Liberal and Conservative platforms, since the Tories, now led by ex-federal MP Mel McQuaid, campaigned mainly by attacking the Plan’s shortcomings. The Conservatives hoped to strike a responsive chord with discontented voters, and perhaps they did. But the election results only confirmed that silent approval was louder than vocal dissent. Campbell’s Liberals trounced the Tories once more, taking twenty-six of thirty-two seats.

Their landslide victory, only one seat less than in 1970, should have fortified the Liberals. Instead, they felt increasingly vulnerable. Under its new leader, former Liberal Aquinas Ryan, the NDP had run a record twenty candidates. While the third party garnered only 6% of the votes cast,

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93See, for example, the conclusions in Hickling-Johnston consultants’ “Review of Original Goals for Agricultural Sector, Comprehensive Development Plan, Prince Edward Island” (March 1973).
research suggested they were ex-Liberal votes. If Island politics was a religion, more and more voters were apparently prepared to commit heresy.

What politicians sensed was the birth of several trends. While patronage was alive and well, and the traditional brand of “boss-follower” politics continued to flourish in much of the countryside, the swing vote was growing, especially in urban areas, where issues were beginning to outweigh inherited loyalties. As Campbell was discovering, the most serious challenges to government were no longer shouted from the Opposition benches or mouthed by party newspapers. They came from a cacophony of advocacy groups, many of them ad hoc and temporary, and each with its own agenda. The damage any single group could inflict seemed slight. It was the cumulative effect that Liberal strategists worried about. Could it be enough to pull down a government?

That question provided the political context for the demise of the Rural Development Council. Despite its contract with the provincial government to implement the public participation element of the Development Plan, the RDC had consistently shown more loyalty to the people than to the Plan, and its field workers had often ended up rallying community opposition to aspects of it. The Liberal government did not appreciate the RDC’s self-appointed role as a sort of provincial ombudsman. It thought it had hired the organization to communicate the Development Plan to Islanders; the RDC thought its job was to help Islanders communicate their concerns about it to government. More ominously, its network of field workers threatened to usurp the MLAs’ traditional role as the link between government and grassroots opinion.

In May 1975, the government abruptly announced that it no longer required the RDC’s services, and that its contract would not be renewed. There was an outcry in the press, but very little in the communities the Council had thought to champion. Thrust back on its own resources, the RDC lapsed into obscurity. The government’s line departments would interpret Phase II of the

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94 O’Grady, *Grassroots to Grim Reapings*, p. 85.

95 This reading is offered in Milne, Politics in a Beleaguered Garden,“ in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, eds. *The Garden Transformed*, p. 63, and amplified in O’Grady, *Grassroots to Grim Reapings*, pp. 86-87.

96 Michael A. O’Grady analyzes the RDC’s fall from political grace and its context in *From Grassroots to Grim Reapings*, pp. 63-68, 82-88; its failure to enlist public sympathy is
Development Plan to Islanders.

Selling the Plan to Islanders was one thing. Financing it was another. In theory, federal contributions to the Plan were meant to fall dramatically during Phase II, but, when provincial revenues did not increase as expected, provincial negotiators pressed the Department of Regional Economic Expansion to ante up more money. As a result, the burden of financing shifted decisively toward Ottawa: most of the Phase II programs were 90% federally funded. The trend would continue with the contract for “Part Two” of Phase II, which was signed in 1977, and with Phase III in 1981. At the outset, the federal government had pledged $225 million to the Development Plan, compared to the province’s $500 million. The actual amounts were far more reflective of actual resources. Ottawa’s escalating contribution ended up somewhere around $301 million; Prince Edward Island’s share was $186 million.97

To raise even that much money, the provincial government was forced to reach deeper and deeper into its citizens’ pockets. In 1971, the province collected $3.5 million in personal income tax. In 1981, the figure was nearly ten times as much, $33.2 million. Admittedly, the vastly higher tax harvest was grounded in higher incomes as well as rate increases — sales tax revenue increased almost seven-fold over the same period despite only minor tinkering. But taxpayers have always had a different sense than government about their own ability to pay. “Alex, we’ve had it,” began one letter preserved in the A. B. Campbell Papers. “Out we go next election — more and more taxes are being piled on citizens. . . . Do any of the elected members know who is being employed? Do they realize we the taxpayers did not vote for Deputy Ministers and heads of departments?”98 Perhaps not, but the taxpayers were paying for them. Yet, despite the bonanza of federal money and the huge increases in provincial tax revenue, the Island government recorded deficit after deficit during the 1970s. As the provincial debt climbed higher and higher, it became evident that development was not covered in pp. 71-79.

97 These were the figures cited in the Canadian Annual Review, 1983, p. 283.

By Phase II, the “comprehensive” had gone out of the Comprehensive Development Plan. Despite two years of negotiations, writes Don Nemetz, “no recognizable plan” had emerged for the second five-year period. There is a planner’s chagrin in his explanation: because the Province could not offer planners a “reasoned set of priorities.” The pragmatism of the politicians had clearly triumphed over the idealism of the planners.

The interlocking jigsaw puzzle of programs in Phase I now gave way to a loose assemblage of policies and initiatives that related only generally to the objectives of the original Plan. However, Phase II did assume a definite direction. It moved away from reforming systems and sectors toward something that seemed far less fractious, the encouragement of manufacturing. Beginning in 1974, Development Plan money financed construction of industrial parks on the outskirts of Charlottetown and Summerside, complete with innovative “incubator malls” as nurseries for new industries and a honeyed array of incentives, tax breaks, and subsidies to tempt Mainland investors.

This new industrial model of development was a lot like the old one, with two essential differences. The Shaw government’s forced development schemes of the early 1960s had had less money to play with, and they concentrated on processing local products. The new strategy was far more eclectic in the types of manufacturing that it nurtured. It had a weakness for small, off-Island firms that sported new technologies and premised markets outside the region. By 1979, at least twenty-three “non-indigenous” companies with no connection either to agriculture or fisheries had

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100 Savoie, “Building An Island Economy,” pp. 18-19.
been set up with government assistance.\textsuperscript{101}

The intent of the industrial strategy was to diversify the Island’s economy, to avoid the domino effect that might ensue if all manufacturing were tied to the ups and downs of primary industries. The development planners were no fools; they did not expect every new enterprise to succeed. Instead, they were scattering seed on the stony ground of the industrial parks in the hope that some of them would take root. The dubious likelihood of growing “exotic industries” on Prince Edward Island did not appeal to DREE, and it went along with the strategy with transparent reluctance.

The Province’s development agency, Industrial Enterprises Incorporated, had made ninety-four loans worth $25.1 million in the ten years after its creation in 1965. It took IEI just five years to loan as much during Phase II of the Development Plan.\textsuperscript{102} On paper, at least, the investment in industrial development paid dividends. Between 1969 and 1979, the value of shipments of Island manufactures nearly quadrupled, to $212.5 million. Even taking into account the galloping inflation of the 1970s, it was an impressive increase. The underlayer of statistics was less encouraging. Despite all the attention to the “non-indigenous” industries, food products, the traditional staple of the Island processing sector, still accounted for around 70% of manufacturing each year through the 1980s.\textsuperscript{103}

Moreover, the growth in non-traditional manufacturing was in many ways artificial, since it came at a huge cost in terms of financial incentives, subsidies, and what economists term “opportunity costs.” Between 1976 and 1981, Industrial Enterprises subsidized eleven multinational companies, twelve off-Island firms, and thirty-two local businesses, creating, respectively, 544, 331, and 313 jobs. Success was long-term; failure was more immediate. By April 1981, five of the


\textsuperscript{103}See statistics tabled in the \textit{Canada Year Book} for the period.
multinationals and five of the off-Island firms had closed.\textsuperscript{104} None of the Island-based businesses had shut down. That year alone, with interest rates soaring and the Canadian economy sliding into recession, IEI wrote off nearly $8.3 million in bad debts.\textsuperscript{105}

While record high interest rates and inflated oil prices helped spoil the timing of the government’s industrial strategy, the approach also suffered from inherent flaws. Modelling manufacturing industries on the industrial economies of other regions deliberately ignored traditional structural problems such as high energy costs, the necessity of importing raw materials, and the expensive distance from raw material to plant and plant to markets. While government addressed the cost of energy to some extent by attaching what Premier Campbell aptly called a huge extension cord to the New Brunswick power grid, it had no cure for the intractable problem of location. The only thing that made many of the new industrial enterprises attractive to outside entrepreneurs were government incentives — “anyone would have to be an idiot not to take advantage of them,” said one who did.\textsuperscript{106} And when government stepped back, the “non-indigenous” businesses had an alarming tendency to fall flat on their faces.

In the end, few industries went forth from their incubator malls to multiply. For most of the 1970s, the construction industry was actually more important to the Island economy than manufacturing. There is a discomfiting irony in the thought that the building of the new plants might have generated more economic activity than their operation. Another set of statistics provided further evidence of the limitations of development planning. For the \textit{real} growth in the Island economy during the 1970s was not in farming or fishing, nor manufacturing, nor even in the building trade, but in the service sector, where the waves of federal and provincial spending rippled out through Island society. That was not how its framers had meant for the Comprehensive Development Plan to work.

\textsuperscript{104}The figures are cited in Profit, “Comprehensive Development Plan and Underdevelopment,” p. 98. None of the Island companies had gone out of business.


In 1970 and 1974, Island voters had overwhelming endorsed the Development Plan, and there was little reason to suppose they would do any different in the election that Alex Campbell called for 24 April 1978. The Plan was by now a familiar platform. But in politics as in aphorisms, familiarity breeds contempt. The Development Plan generated little excitement among voters anymore and a spreading recession was in any case obscuring its efforts. The rhetorical advantage had clearly shifted to the Conservative Party, which had acquired a new leader and, at last, a persuasive platform.

Angus MacLean, former Minister of Fisheries in the Diefenbaker government, was the most successful federal politician in Island history, having won ten straight elections between 1951 and 1976. When Mel McQuaid was appointed to the Island bench, the sixty-two-year-old MacLean was persuaded to offer for the leadership of the provincial Conservatives.\(^{107}\)

For years Conservative leaders had been denouncing the “Ottawa mandarins” who controlled the Development Plan. Now a majority of Islanders were ready to listen. Part of the reason was the unflappable MacLean, a shrewd strategist who had acquired a reputation for sagacity and integrity. “For some reason that is not obvious to me,” he would muse, “people trust me.”\(^{108}\)

The rise of television had pushed image into political prominence, even on Prince Edward Island. There was no sizzle to sell in MacLean, and the media wrestled with his lack of obvious appeal. “It was a quite a contrast,” MacLean remembered, “to come back to the Island and find myself depicted by some of the local media as a country clown — an absolute hayseed. . . . ‘He looks agonized on public occasions,’ the local correspondent for the *Globe and Mail* wrote on one occasion. ‘He is the man who has stepped off the bus at the wrong stop — bewildered, vaguely embarrassed, uncertain where he is or how he got there, groping for words which might explain his predicament. . . . On the platform he has all the charisma of another Prince Edward Island product, the potato.’” As MacLean wryly observes in his memoirs, “I had not realized I was such a


bumpkin.”  

The ruling Liberals ran on a “platform of action,” actions, presumably, that they had not had a chance to take during their twelve years in power. At MacLean’s insistence, the Conservatives published only “principles” instead of promises. Their platform knit together philosophical objections to the Development Plan and many ordinary Islanders’ instinctive resistance to radical change. The campaign’s chief architects were David Weale and Harry Baglole, ex-Brothers of Cornelius Howatt. They preferred to talk about “rural renewal,” but the tag line that caught on with the public was “Rural Renaissance.” Borrowing a phrase from Quebec politics, MacLean promised to make Islanders “masters in their own house” once more by revitalizing rural communities, restoring Islanders’ sense of self-reliance, and emphasizing “appropriate” development. The “Rural Renaissance” meant advancing by retreat.

Superficially, the election contest pitted the handsome, still youthful Campbell, apostle of progress, against the grandfatherly MacLean, steward of tradition. In hindsight, the campaign contrasted a careworn leader atop an ageing platform with a party that had taken Islanders’ inchoate resentment, anxiety, and guilty aversion to change, and shaped it into a seductive policy that seemed to look both ways at once.

The Liberals squeaked out a 17–15 victory in the 1978 election, giving Alex Campbell a record fourth straight mandate. The Premier had now come full circle, having gained office with an identical margin in 1966. But the similarity ended there. Campbell had done remarkable things with a two-seat majority during his first turn, but twelve years in the crucible of change had worn him out physically and mentally. In September, the century’s most influential Island premier resigned, and in December was appointed to the Island Supreme Court. He was not quite forty-five years old, yet his lifework was essentially completed.

The new Liberal premier, ex-schoolteacher Bennett Campbell, was the first Roman Catholic in forty-three years to lead the government. His tenure was brief. With Alex Campbell’s departure, the Liberals’ majority fell to one. Appointing a speaker of the house would eliminate it entirely.

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110 MacLean, Making It Home, pp. 223 and 222.
Instead, Premier Campbell bowed to the inevitable and called an election for 23 April 1979. In nearly everyone’s mind, the Liberals were already beaten. And they were. MacLean’s Tories took twenty-one seats. True to its traditionalist rhetoric, the government made its only significant act during its first session a moratorium on the construction of shopping malls.

The triumph of the “Rural Renaissance” coincided with the passing of the Development Plan. It was not killed by the Conservatives. In fact, the Plan officially lasted another five years. But by 1979 it had spent its momentum, its idealism, and its ideas. On the federal side, the Department of Regional Economic Expansion was already fixated on a “growth centres” strategy for underdeveloped regions. It had regarded the Comprehensive Development Plan as an anachronism almost from the moment it was signed, and did not mind at all that it had degenerated into just another federal-provincial funding mechanism. Islanders did not seem to mind either. By the late 1970s, “the Plan” was no longer on everyone’s lips. Twenty years later, many Islanders who had grown up in its shadow would not even know what it was.

And what, in the end, was the Comprehensive Development Plan? What did it do for or to Prince Edward Island? As an exercise in social engineering, the Development Plan had been an abject failure. As Wayne MacKinnon concludes, it proved that people cannot be “developed.” It is also advanced as proof that regional development policies must be tailored to the societies to which they are being applied, and not the other way around.\(^{111}\)

That the Plan failed to hit its ambitious economic targets goes without saying. Yet proponents of the Development Plan can talk about limited victories. The income gap between Prince Edward Island and the rest of the country did narrow, from 62% of the national average in 1969 to 71% in a decade later. Educational reform, with its dogged pursuit of school consolidation, was perhaps the most far-reaching change, although its roots were actually in the 1960s. The increased

professionalization of the civil service was also of lasting consequence.\textsuperscript{112} Of course, many people still tend to think of the Development Plan as begetting “big government” in the province rather than merely accentuating it.

The Comprehensive Development Plan’s most notable achievement was to complete the modernization of Prince Edward Island. It brought to fruition trends that had their roots in the wellsprings of the century. In the process it purposely dismantled a traditional society that was already tottering. Even more important, perhaps, the Plan confronted Islanders with the fact of its dissolution. The loss of that culture, with its ancient roots and innate integrity, still haunts many Islanders. It is left to the changemakers to remind us that feet too firmly planted cannot easily switch direction. The post-Development Plan generation would be less rigid, less passive, less cowed by authority, less parochial. They would be free of the past’s weight, but they would also lack its protection.

The Development Plan’s great failure was its inability to break the vicious cycle of dependency.\textsuperscript{113} The Plan approach had always been something of a paradox: to use a massive infusion of federal funds to build a society that would not need federal funds. Instead, the Development Plan had relieved the symptoms of regional disparity without curing the disease. And, in the process, it had addicted Islanders to the treatment. As a means of coaxing money out of Ottawa, a consultant noted in 1980, the Development Plan had been a smashing success. No other federal-provincial agreement during the era featured such a high per capita or absolute level of federal funding.\textsuperscript{114} But, as a springboard to self-reliance, it came closer to journalist Kennedy Wells’ assessment. The Plan, he told the readers of Atlantic Insight in 1979, “is a big, fat flop.”\textsuperscript{115}

The Island’s relationship with Ottawa was mirrored in its citizens’ attitudes toward their

\textsuperscript{112} These opinions are also shared by Bickerton, “Regional Development Policies,” p. 242 and Campbell confidant Andy Wells.

\textsuperscript{113} As Donald Savoie found in his formal assessment, “the Plan failed in one of its major objectives, to lessen dependency on the federal government.”

\textsuperscript{114} APEC, “History of the Prince Edward Island Comprehensive Development Plan,” p. 98.

\textsuperscript{115} Kennedy Wells, “‘The Development Plan’: A Decade Old, It’s Still a Big, Fat Flop,” Atlantic Insight 1(October 1979)7: 16-17.
provincial government. Islanders resented their bureaucracy, Premier Campbell admitted in 1973, and yet, “Whenever a group or an individual seeks a solution to a problem, their first — and all too often their only — answer is to toss the need in the lap of the government.” Communities must do for themselves, he warned his listeners. “Government action alone does not create a strong community.” At the end of the 1970s, neither the Province nor its people had made much progress toward self-reliance, and there was still truth in one writer’s contention that “the first step any individual or group takes in initiating a project is in the direction of their member’s door.”

Whatever the route, the path of dependency ultimately led to Ottawa. Besides the Development Plan spending, other federal-provincial programs continued to pump scores of millions of dollars into the provincial government each year. The tide of direct federal expenditures was also on the rise during the 1970s. Between 1965 and 1975, the proportion of personal income on Prince Edward Island stemming from direct transfer payments soared from 15.3% to 22.2%. The payments did not represent any special concession to Prince Edward Island, but Islanders often shared disproportionately in the benefits of the welfare state.

Consider unemployment insurance. Until 1970, the size of UI benefits had been kept low in relation to weekly earnings in order to maintain a strong work ethic. But a major overhaul of the system in 1971 fundamentally changed the underlying philosophy of unemployment insurance from short-term relief to “income maintenance.” Payments went up, the number of work weeks required to qualify came down, and the mandatory waiting period was reduced. The gap between the premiums that Islanders paid and the benefits they collected widened rapidly. In 1976, the UIC program paid out $30.5 million to Islanders. And, of course, unemployment rates continued to float.

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118 The national figures were 8.3% in 1965 and 12.7% in 1975, respectively. See J. C. Fine and P. Nagarajan, “The Impact of Unemployment Insurance on the Economy of Prince Edward Island,” Report published by Department of Economics, University of Prince Edward Island, November 1976.
The underlying problem, one 1976 study pointed out, was not “a disinclination to work,” but “inadequate opportunities.” And yet, the “pogey” created its own sly culture of dependency: a complex blend of defeatism, defiance, cynicism, apathy, and entitlement. Local songmaker Alton MacLean took the measure of those qualities in his ditty “Unemployment Insurance.” It was inspired, he told an audience in West Prince, by a conversation that he had overheard among three neighbours, all waiting for their unemployment cheque to arrive:

There was [another] one who spoke up, and she said, “Well, I went in yesterday to file my claim,” and, she said, “do you know what they asked me to do?”
“No,” she said, “I don’t know.”
“They sent me three different places looking for work!”
The other one said, “Well, did you find any?”
She said, “No.”
“My God, weren’t you lucky!”

It can plausibly be argued that expanded unemployment insurance payments helped to reverse the tide of outmigration from Prince Edward Island during the 1970s. If so, it exacted a hidden cost. Economic planners had originally intended UI as a bridge between jobs. In some households, by the 1970s, work was becoming a bridge between unemployment claims. Whether the tendency for such Islanders to make “the pogey” an objective instead of a strategy represents moral rot or the failure of government policy — or both — largely depends on one’s personal perspective. Clearly, though, hope and initiative were often casualties of the culture of dependency. “In many [children’s] families,” an end-of-the-century brief would lament, “no one has worked steadily for three or four generations: these children are defeated almost out of the womb. Their heads are down and their horizons end a foot in front of their shoes.”

In 1992, a senior provincial official would reflect to economic consultant Donald Savoie that, “when you include everything, something like 75 percent of our economy consists of federal

119 Quoted in Ives, Drive Dull Care Away, p. 218.

spending.”¹²¹ A century earlier, the Island’s government had been dependent on Ottawa. Now its people were.

Islanders of the 20th century have been quick to point to the brief interlude between Responsible Government in 1851 and Confederation in 1873 as Prince Edward Island’s “Golden Age.” Superficially, at least, the era launched by the Development Plan was another. In almost every measurable way, the material quality of Islanders’ lives improved. But this second “golden age” was founded on social insecurity, dependent on the ebb and flow of federal transfers. The Development Plan did not create the dependence on Ottawa, but it made ordinary people acutely aware of it, and that awareness seeded a great insecurity. The confidence of a culture is based in large part on the illusion that it controls its own destiny. Thoughtful Islanders of the 1950s had worried that their society was falling behind the rest of Canada; thoughtful Islanders of the 1970s worried that they had lost control over their lives.

Chapter Ten
The Temper of Our Times

Looking for the laughter to follow the tears.
Turn the earth in autumn, and hope for next year.
From Lennie Gallant, “The Hope for Next Year”¹

The “Rural Renaissance” that brought the Tories back to power in 1979 was not destined to change
the course of Island history. J. Angus MacLean’s personal commitment to the idea of “rural renewal,”
reflected in his choice of historian/activist David Weale as his principal secretary, was unquestioned.
A Department of Community Affairs was established, with a cultural division, to help shore up small
communities, and there was talk of developing a “community resources strategy” to combat the
breakdown of “family and neighbourhood bonds.” But principles are hard to translate into policy.
Many of the items on the Conservative agenda — road paving, promotion of alternative energy
sources, assistance to small farmers — looked much like recent Liberal ones. During MacLean’s
tenure, the Rural Renaissance was more than a posture, but not much more than an attitude. As the
Development Plan had already demonstrated, governments can come to terms with change, but they
cannot dictate the conditions by which it will happen. The momentum of a whole society is a difficult
thing to shift, and boldness was not obvious among the Premier’s virtues.

MacLean’s victories over the tide of modernity were largely symbolic, though often shrewd.
The moratorium on new shopping malls might have been ideologically motivated, but it also made
business sense; Prince Edward Island already had more retail space per capita than any other
Canadian province, and by 1980, all of the malls were owned by off-Island developers.² The
expensive breaking of a signed contract with the New Brunswick government to purchase energy
from its Point Lepreau nuclear power plant made an ethical statement as well — even if there was
no way to screen out nuclear-generated particles from the rest of the electricity that flowed into Prince

¹From the album Breakwater, 1988, Revenant Records, used by permission.
²Douglas B. Boylan (chairman), ‘Everything Before Us’: Report of the Royal Commission
on the Land (Charlottetown: Queen’s Printer, 1990), p. 156.
Edward Island from the New Brunswick power grid.\textsuperscript{3}

In terms of “rural renewal,” the most significant piece of Conservative legislation was the Lands Protection Act, which was introduced into the legislature in April 1982. Of a piece with Islanders’ long-standing sensitivity about land ownership and their protective attitude toward the family farm, the legislation was, in Newtonian terms, an equal and opposite reaction to a request from Cavendish Farms for permission to acquire 6,000 acres of Island farmland to go with the 3,000 acres that it already owned. Cavendish Farms was part of the New Brunswick-based Irving business empire. Its food-processing plant specialized in French fries, and the Ivings were major customers for local potato growers. There was business logic behind Cavendish Farms’ thrust toward vertical integration, but it had economic implications for an Island potato industry worried about corporate control over agriculture, and psychological overtones for an Island society wary of being held to ransom by big business. True, Islanders were already dependent on “big government,” but at least they had a say in electing their political masters.

As originally enacted, the Lands Protection Act restricted individual land holdings to 1,000 acres and corporate holdings to 3,000 acres. Now it was the Ivings’ turn to claim that their best interests were being held hostage by the Island government. The Act’s trammelling of free enterprise won applause from most farm activists. Nevertheless, the trend toward corporate agriculture would not be turned aside so easily. Various leasing strategies soon weakened the Act’s intent with legal perforations.\textsuperscript{4}

The Lands Protection Act may have reflected Angus MacLean’s attitude toward appropriate development, but it actually came about after his resignation. When he became provincial Conservative leader in 1976, MacLean had promised himself five more years in public life. Adhering to his own private timetable, the Premier announced his retirement in August 1981, after only two-and-a-half years in office. At the ensuing leadership convention, James Lee, MacLean’s Minister of

\textsuperscript{3}MacLean, \textit{Making It Home}, pp. 240-41.

\textsuperscript{4}Boylan, \textit{‘Everything Before Us,’} p. 80. Various leasing strategies were devised to get around the ownership restrictions.
Health and a long-time party organizer, beat out three fellow cabinet ministers to become the new premier.

Whatever remained of the Rural Renaissance departed with Angus MacLean. As was the case with rank-and-file Liberals and the Development Plan, the provincial Conservative party had shown a limited appreciation for, and little commitment to, the philosophical principles behind its own platform. For many Tories, the “Rural Renaissance” seems to have been little more than an electoral strategy. Once back in power it was business as usual. The new premier was representative of his caucus. He had MacLean’s cautious prudence without his reputation for sagacity or philosophical depth. For Jim Lee, governments were to be managed, not led. He preferred common sense to “vision,” and he felt Islanders did, too. It was not a style that inspired.

Even had Lee’s administration wanted to seize events by the throat, it is questionable whether any government could have done much in the 1980s to reverse the major trends in Island life. Lee came to office as the North American economy was sagging into its worst recession in thirty years. The fizzling of the economy clearly affected the continent’s political climate, and Prince Edward Island soon felt the chill. Keynesian fiscal theory, with its emphasis on deficit-spending and government intervention, fell out of favour, discredited by burdensome public debts and unresponsive economies. Into the void marched the New Right, as symbolized by Republican president Ronald Reagan and Great Britain’s Tory prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, both neo-conservatives who championed smaller government and the unfettering of private enterprise.

The sea change was signalled in Canada by the enormous majority given Brian Mulroney’s Progressive Conservatives in the 1984 federal election. The Mulroney government’s infatuation with supply-side economics and its pretence at austerity (programs were cut, but deficits continued to mount) spelled trouble for have-not provinces, since the retreat of Big Government left the economy increasingly in the hands of Big Business, which felt little obligation toward regional development. Of course, neither the welfare state nor regional development was jettisoned. The difference was mainly one of degree. For example, the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE) disappeared in favour of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), whose freewheeling approach made regional development less bureaucratic, but also more political. As Canadian governments tilted toward retrenchment (sometimes masked as reform), the gilt began to flake off
Prince Edward Island’s golden age.

In the manner of new premiers in the age of public opinion polls, Lee chose his post-selection honeymoon with the public to call a general election. “It may be all over but the snoring” the Globe and Mail’s Michael Harris wrote of the 1982 campaign. ³ He obviously had not been paying much attention to the flamboyant new Liberal leader.

A month before the Tories’ held their leadership convention, Island Grits had staged their own, choosing ex-party president Joseph A. Ghiz over interim leader Gilbert Clements. Joe Ghiz was a brash, ambitious, Harvard-trained lawyer with a high-profile Charlottetown law firm. He was also a first-generation Islander, the son of a Lebanese shopkeeper. Ghiz was comfortable with his roots, but he was not sure how they might sell to voters — “My skin isn’t the same colour as yours,” he had gently reminded a prominent Liberal bent on recruiting him as a leadership candidate.⁶ The new Liberal leader now set out to see whether or not Island voters were colourblind.

The contrast in styles between the stolid, plainspoken Lee and the articulate, aggressive Ghiz was striking. Lee might have been flattered when the Globe and Mail quipped that he had “the charm of a potato,” since it had trotted out the same lame metaphor to describe Angus MacLean. As for Ghiz, “For people who have never gone walking in a monsoon, listening to Liberal Joe Ghiz give a political speech would nicely simulate the experience.”⁷ For the time being, voters opted for spuds over speechifying. The Conservatives repeated their margin of victory from 1979, electing twenty-one members. But Ghiz did win his own seat, defeating a high-profile cabinet minister in the process. The lawyer with the quick tongue and the charismatic manner was now in the House. In the legislative sessions that followed, it gradually became clear that, while the Tory majority had not changed, the


⁶As recalled to the author by Liberal party strategist David Hooley, 30 December 1999. It must have irked Ghiz to see himself described in one post-election analysis as being of Portuguese descent. (See Adamson, “Note on the 1982 Election.”)

political momentum had.

A good year for Island agriculture in 1981 cushioned the onset of the recession that was mauling the rest of the North American economy, but the provincial Conservatives’ 1982 budget forecast a record deficit of $14.6 million. The need for restraint seemed to rob the Lee government of initiative, and it did little more than keep House for the rest of its mandate. Restraint did have its benefits; deficits were reduced, if not eliminated, and, in 1985, Prince Edward Island could boast the lowest per capita public debt in Atlantic Canada.

Political pundits expected a narrow Conservative win in the 1986 general election, in part because of Islanders’ penchant for matching their own governing party to the party in power in Ottawa. But Island voters had already broken with tradition in 1982, electing the Tories when the Liberals still ruled in Ottawa. They spoiled the pattern again now, giving the Liberals an eleven-seat majority. Devastated by the outcome and defeated in his own riding, Jim Lee passed into premature retirement. The eclipse of his party had only just begun.

Joseph Atallah Ghiz made history in the 1986 election, becoming the first Canadian premier of non-European ancestry. It was an intensely proud moment for Ghiz, who considered his victory an achievement for all children of immigrant Canadians. That Ghiz’s electoral precedent was set in one of Canada’s most socially conservative provinces suggests how much “the Break” had changed Island life. It was only four years since Jim Lee had become the first elected Catholic premier since 1889 — in a province where half the population were Roman Catholics.

There was more at work in Ghiz’s victory than changing attitudes among Islanders. The very definition of “Islander” was changing. In-migration was one reason. By 1996, there were 24,600 people living on Prince Edward Island — nearly a fifth of the population — who had been born in other provinces. Some of these were the children of Islanders, but many were Islanders by choice or circumstance, and the weight of the province’s social history, with its elephantine memory for past
grievances and ingrained biases, sat lightly on their shoulders.\textsuperscript{8}

Other non-natives had even less in common with the Island’s past. Between 1971 and 1996, 5,600 immigrants came to Prince Edward Island from other parts of the world, primarily the United States and Europe.\textsuperscript{9} Many moved on, but some stayed, so that the percentage of Islanders born in other countries had risen to 3.3\% by the mid-1990s.\textsuperscript{10} Compared to other provinces, their proportions were minuscule, and most of them tended to cluster in urban areas, particularly Charlottetown, but their presence subtly changed the complexion of Island life.

The 1996 census enumerated nearly eighty different ethnic groups within the Island population. The Prince Edward Island Multicultural Council, founded in 1975, was visible evidence of the “cultural mosaic” that, according to national mythmakers, distinguished Canada from the American “melting pot.” Paradoxically, “difference” was chiefly what members of the Multicultural Council had in common. While newcomers struggled to find a place for their cultural baggage within the dominant “Island” culture, long-established cultural groups, such as the Mi’kmaq, Acadians, and even Ghiz’s Lebanese, guarded their own sense of precedence within the fragile mosaic.

One must be careful not to misjudge the extent of cultural diversity. In the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Prince Edward Island remained the most ethnically homogeneous province in Canada. Its population was overwhelmingly white, Christian, and Western; the 1996 census classified only 1,520 Islanders as “visible minorities.” As in 1900, however, the homogeneity broke down under the microscope. Even for those with deep Island roots, ethnic pride was still a touchstone. Like newcomers, “mainstream” Islanders, especially those of Irish and Scots ancestry, continued to polish immigrant memories of social, economic, and political oppression.

As usual, tolerance in a society is inversely proportional to the extent to which the dominant culture feels threatened. Small minorities offend less than large ones, and Prince Edward Island’s visible minorities — ethnic and otherwise — continued to be small. As a result, the overt

\textsuperscript{8}In contrast, the 1996 census found 47,500 native Islanders living in other provinces.

\textsuperscript{9}Cited in Institute of Island Studies, “A Place to Stay?” p. 32.

\textsuperscript{10}Cited in Institute of Island Studies, “A Place to Stay?” p. 64.
discrimination that they encountered, while hurtful, tended to be sporadic. How deeply systemic it might be, how pervasive in Island institutions, was open to debate. Entrenched intolerance was masked by a characteristic reticence. Islanders may be highly judgmental, but they are not very outspoken. Their silence did not prevent minorities from feeling unwelcome and marginalized within the larger community.  

Did Joe Ghiz’s victory represent a major breakthrough in social toleration on Prince Edward Island? Perhaps not. Just the same, his victory could probably not have happened in the Prince Edward Island of 1960. The majority of electors voted Liberal in 1986 because of Joe Ghiz, not in spite of him, and that he was Lebanese was obviously less important to them than that he was an effective leader. As for Ghiz, like other Lebanese Islanders, he side-stepped the question of prejudice. “I don’t feel ethnic,” he told the Toronto Star. “I didn’t grow up with a feeling that I’m different.”  

The point was that other Islanders felt that he was.

Ghiz went on to become one of the most popular Island premiers of the 20th century. He had a shrewd strategic sense, and a knack for striking dramatic poses on high-profile issues. In 1989, he won a second term with a crushing victory over the Conservatives, gaining thirty of thirty-two seats and a stunning 60% of the popular vote.

Winning his huge majority proved easier than wielding it. According to several senior advisors, politics fascinated Ghiz, but governance bore him. Perhaps it is fairer to say that the mechanics of administration did not engage his mercurial intellect. Admirers maintain that Ghiz remained very much in charge, but authority and control are not synonyms, and his influence over

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11 Members of visible minorities have no doubt that discrimination is systemic. Alexandra McCallum, P.E.I. Multicultural Council, Charlottetown, interview with author, 6 March 2000.


13 Doug Boylan and Andrew Wells, both to some extent admirers of Ghiz, agree on this point, as do several other party insiders. See Doug Boylan, interview with author, 26 April 1999, Charlottetown; and Andrew Wells, interview with author, 9 December 1999, Hazel Grove. Other Ghiz supporters disagree, for example, Rick Coles, interview with author, Charlottetown, 1 March 2000.
specific policies was only as strong as his interest in them. The Ghiz style thus gave considerable latitude to his ministers and their deputies. It also encouraged another trend. Ever since the genesis of the Development Plan, the growing complexity of government had magnified the role of senior policy advisors. Under Ghiz, power continued to shift from the office of the premier to the Premier’s Office.

National affairs proved a better fit for talents that had been honed in the courtroom. The immigrant son’s pride in belonging to a country that could embrace diversity without crushing it made Ghiz a passionate Canadian nationalist, and the constitutional crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s gave him ample opportunity to show it. On the national stage, Ghiz played the role of honest broker, and he cast a longer shadow there than did his tiny province. He was an eloquent supporter of the Meech Lake Accord — “this initiative of reconciliation,” he called it — and stumped the country in its support. A happy Quebec, after all, meant a stable federal regime that could concentrate on the problem of regional disparity instead of obsessing about the threat of disunion. Joe Ghiz’s reputation in his home province rests largely on an appreciation of his national profile. Islanders knew how easy it would be for the big provinces to trample Prince Edward Island’s interests in the bitter struggle to remake Confederation, and his evident credibility in the national arena made political capital for Ghiz at home.

Once reopened, the Constitution unleashed a Pandora’s box of cross-purposes and “me-tooism.” Meech Lake failed, and each subsequent attempt to revive or replace it seemed to divide the country further. In late August 1992, with Confederation seemingly coming apart at the seams, Ghiz welcomed Canada’s first ministers to Prince Edward Island for the last in a summer round of constitutional discussions. Back in 1864, the Charlottetown Conference had conceived a new country. History did not repeat itself. The exercise in nation-mending foundered when the Charlottetown Accord’s formula for amending the Constitution was rejected in a national referendum on 26 October

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14 Observers often wondered out loud whether or not Ghiz had national aspirations based on his national profile, but there is no clear evidence of this (although he did take French lessons).

15 Joseph A. Ghiz, “The Meech Lake Accord: A Step Forward for Canada,” speech before Toronto Rotary Club, 16 February 1990. In the same talk, he called the Meech Lake Accord “a moral undertaking” for those who had drafted it, and “the best deal possible.”
1992. Prince Edward Island was one of only three provinces to give the Accord a clear majority, and the margin of approval, 73.6% of the votes cast, led the country.\textsuperscript{16} Four days later, a key chapter in his career finished, Ghiz announced that he was stepping down as premier.

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The spiritually wasting constitutional quarrel, which revealed much but resolved nothing, engendered a mingled anger and anxiety in the province. The same mood seemed to pervade Island affairs in general as the 1980s clicked dully over into the 1990s. As established trends in politics, finances, and economics drifted toward their logical extremes, the province seemed to lose its balance.

The Island’s leading industry, agriculture, exemplified the general pattern. As in other parts of Canada, the steady movement toward fewer, larger, more commercial farms had continued during the 1980s. The nature of farm ownership was changing, too. Although agriculture had long since changed from way of life to business, it had at least been a family business. But it was a hard way to make a living, and the tendency for farms to pass from generation to generation within families was measurably weakening by the 1980s. The economic imperative also dictated what was raised, and how. As one study noted, commercial agriculture in North America was now characterized by capital-intensive, highly specialized, chemically dependent monoculture.\textsuperscript{17} In Prince Edward Island terms, that complicated description translated as one word: potatoes.

The specialization in Island agriculture was obvious by the 1980s. Once the backbone of the industry, mixed farms had become an endangered species. Instead, there were hog farmers, dairy farmers, beef farmers, tobacco farmers. And, of course, there were potato growers. After remaining more or less constant for half a century, potato acreages began to climb rapidly during the late 1970s. Markets and prices were as unreliable as ever, but, as farm debt escalated, nearly doubling between


\textsuperscript{17}Royal Commission on the Land, 1990, p. 61.
1980 and 1991, farmers turned increasingly to the cash crop with the greatest earning potential. Despite a perpetual ferment over the proper balance among producers, dealers, and government in the marketing of potatoes, the industry continued to grow, albeit in jerks and starts. In 1984, 72,000 acres of potatoes were planted, half again as much as the average acreage between 1960 and 1977. That year, potatoes accounted for 37% of farm cash receipts on Prince Edward Island, more than twice the gross from any other agricultural pursuit.

The rise in potato acreage could be linked to an explosive growth in frozen food processing. North Americans were still fond of potatoes, but they were more apt now to prefer them French-fried rather than boiled or baked, and they were as likely to eat them in fast food restaurants as at the kitchen table. Life had speeded up, and there was often no time and no one home to cook elaborate meals. Fresh-frozen potato products filled a consumer need in newly industrialized countries as well, and provided another significant market for Island potatoes, complementing the long-established trade in seed potatoes, which still fetched the highest prices, and table stock.\(^\text{18}\)

In 1990, buoyed by two years of strong prices, Island growers set another new record, planting 75,100 acres of Russet Burbanks, Superiors, Kennebecs, Shepodys, Yukon Golds, and two dozen or more other specialized potato varieties. At Cavendish Farms in New Annan, the Irvings unveiled plans for a major expansion, while their New Brunswick rivals, the McCains, announced that they would build their own potato processing plant near Borden.

Hard on the heels of this new growth, disaster struck the seed potato industry.\(^\text{19}\)

At the end of 1990, Agriculture Canada detected “potato virus Y-necrotic” on a number of Island potato farms. Islanders would come to know it by its common contraction, PVYn. The virus was as harmless to humans as it was to the potatoes, but it was potentially damaging to other crops, especially tobacco. Island growers’ North American markets collapsed, as first the United States, then

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\(^\text{18}\)Between 1988 and 1996, the amount of acreage devoted to raising potatoes for processing more than tripled. (See *Cultivating Island Solutions: Report of the Round Table on Resource Land Use and Stewardship* (Charlottetown: Queen’s Printer, 1997), p. 16.

\(^\text{19}\)The account which follows is based on newspaper reports, the annual reports of the Prince Edward Island Department of Agriculture and Forestry, summaries in the *Canadian Annual Review* for the 1990-92 period, and an interview with David N. MacSwain, Area Program Officer for Prince Edward Island with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.
other Canadian provinces denied entry to Island seed potatoes and any table stock that could be used as seed.\textsuperscript{20} Test results in 1991 indicated that nearly a hundred crops were afflicted with PVYn. The damage to seed growers’ revenues was immediate and devastating, but the damage to Prince Edward Island’s reputation as a seed producer was even more ominous. Growers, scientists, and government took harsh measures to eradicate the virus, and Ottawa promised a compensation package for affected farmers. That season, Agriculture Canada ordered four thousand acres of infected potatoes ploughed under. Islanders were even forbidden to grow table stock in their own vegetable gardens.

Prince Edward Island’s predicament inspired jokes about police dogs by-passing stands of marijuana to sniff out covert fields of potatoes. Islanders’ laughter rang hollow, and no one laughed at all when word got out in March 1992 that eighty-five of the ninety-six test results were false positives, and not caused by PVYn at all.\textsuperscript{21} At the same time, the revelation caused relief, since it confirmed that the problem was much less widespread than everyone had assumed. By April 1992 the industry had devised an effective zoning plan to identify and isolate infected fields. The Americans took longer to convince, and it was conveniently late in 1992 before the United States lifted its embargo on Island potatoes.

Instead of driving farmers out of potatoes, the PVYn debacle, ironically, plunged them in deeper. As with a gambler in one of the casinos that sprang up across the region during the era, there was really only one quick way for growers to recover their losses: double or nothing. In the midst of the PVYn crisis, Islanders planted 78,000 acres of potatoes, a new record. In 1992, still barred from North American markets, they planted 85,000. Farming, after all, is founded on hope — in this instance, the assumption that the growing demand for processing potatoes could absorb increased

\textsuperscript{20}Exports of the 1990 crop grown in Zone 5, western Prince Edward Island, were eventually allowed, since the virus was not found there. In 1991, the embargo was Island-wide. Table stock could only be exported within the United States and Canada if it had been treated with sprout inhibitors, which would prevent the potatoes from reproducing if planted.

\textsuperscript{21}New testing procedures confirmed that the positive readings in eighty-five of the suspect crops were caused by a combination of harmless PVX and PVY viruses. The scientists mistook another, harmless PVY strain for PVYn. Island growers sued Ottawa over the consequences of the false positives, eventually settling out of court for about a quarter of the $60 million they had claimed.
production and guarantee stable prices.

Boom or bust, the planting binge continued across the 1990s. By the end of the decade, potato acreage on Prince Edward Island had soared to 112,000 acres, twice the figure from the 1970s. Half of the usable potatoes now went to processing.\(^{22}\) On average, potato income was now accounting for 46% of farm cash receipts.\(^{23}\)

There was an aura almost of desperation about the feverish expansion. In the quest for more land, long-abandoned fields were cleared with bulldozers, and marginal ground, normally too wet or too steep for potatoes, was pressed into service. During the 1990s, for the first time in sixty years, the amount of improved land on Prince Edward Island began to grow. By late in the decade, rising demand had made Prince Edward Island farmland the most expensive, on average, in Canada.\(^{24}\) So much exertion brought neither security nor stability. Profit margins continued to erode, and at century’s end, analysts were speculating that potato production might have reached the limit of its potential.

The price of expansion went well beyond debt loads. Over-cropping, the bugbear of 19th-century agriculture, grew more widespread. Debt-driven farmers could not afford to let their fields lie fallow and unremunerative. In most operations, the old four-to-seven-year cycle of crop rotation was reduced to three. As much as 30% of potato land did not even get that.\(^{25}\) In extreme cases, the joke ran, the rotation had become “potatoes-snow-potatoes.” Like a political candidate running on too little sleep,


\(^{23}\)That was the average between 1989 and 1998, as computed from provincial Department of Agriculture figures.


\(^{25}\)“Interim Report of the Round Table on Resource Land Use and Stewardship” (Charlottetown: Government of Prince Edward Island, 1996), p. 16. That 1,561 of 2,217 farms practised crop rotation in 1996 (according to the official census) was less surprising than that 656 farms did not.

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the land was artificially vitalized with heavy doses of chemicals. Other compounds — insecticides, herbicides, fungicides — cast a chemical shield over the crops that the fertilizers fed.

Inevitably, the landscape began to show signs of stress. Pesticide-laden run-off caused highly publicized fish kills in the late 1990s. People worried about chemicals leaching into the Island’s groundwater. Environmental watchdogs rallied public opinion about the dangers of pesticide use. Agri-business’ preferred alternative, the genetic modification of plants, aroused fear among an even larger cross-section of the population. Organic approaches were deemed environmentally preferable, but commercially suspect.

The straying pesticides that killed fish and threatened local aquaculture reached Island watercourses mostly on the back of soil erosion. It, too, intensified during the 1980s and 1990s. For years, hedgerows separating small fields had been razed to make room for the giant machinery that propelled commercial farming. Without, and even despite, contour ploughing, steep hillsides bled topsoil into rivers, streams, and ditches with every fall of rain, stripping the land and silting the watercourses. Even distant factors, such as North American consumers’ preference for long French fries, contributed to the problem. Fashionably long fries required long potatoes, strains which took longer to mature, which meant harvesting later in the fall, which made it too late to plant winter wheat, which left bare fields exposed like giant abrasions to the scouring of wind and rain.26 On some potato land, as much as three hundred tons of soil per acre per year were being lost to erosion; the average for sustainable cropland is three.27 Field studies in the early 1980s suggested that the virgin thickness of Island topsoil had been about eight inches, but that the current thickness was down to an average of five inches and, in places, only four.28 How much longer before the land either wore out, grew poisoned, or eroded away?

To the unobservant, soil erosion was mostly invisible, a small stain on the patchwork quilt of the Island landscape. The scars from timber-cutting were far more obvious. The wholesale destruction


27Interim Report of Round Table on the Land, p. 12.

of the Island’s forest cover during the 1800s had finished the forest industry for half a century. Almost as soon as the tree cover had regenerated, it was felled again during the early 1950s. Each successive harvest removed the best trees, leaving the poorer ones to regenerate. At the same time, farm abandonment seeded fresh crops of scrub timber so that, by 1990, a patchy forest covered almost half of the Island land mass. The Development Plan had talked bravely of reversing the cyclic degradation of Island woodlots, but it was the 1980s before progress became measurable. Despite a shortage of crown land (90% of Island forests were privately owned), the provincial Forestry Division employed its slender resources with increasing success to improve tree stocks and to encourage better management by private woodlot owners.

Patience and persuasion were little match for the soaring price of lumber and paper, which galvanized the forest industry in the 1990s. Entrepreneurs canvassed the countryside, soliciting property owners for permission to cut off their mature softwood stands before they died out or blew down. The rip of chainsaws shattered the forest stillness, and mechanical harvesters prowled woods that a century earlier had sheltered black bears. In low-farming districts in West Prince and King’s County, thousands of acres of white spruce and other softwoods were clear-cut. Stacks of cordwood sprawled across Island pulpyards, their fresh-sawn butt-ends gleaming a dull yellow, and here and there in the yards rose little pyramids of wood chips and sawdust. By mid-decade, experts were predicting that the current cutting rates would destroy the Island’s commercial softwood cover within fifteen years. There were ominous signs that hardwoods might be next. The implications of unsustainable cutting rates went beyond economics. Trees were not just embryonic boards or paper. They were habitat, soil stabilizers, landscape-makers.

The very fury of the onslaught on Island forests shocked a people grown unused to visual or emotional extremes. In little more than a generation, their lifestyles had been transformed. Now the familiar landscape on which they had fastened their identity was changing before their eyes.

The seascape was harder to read, although the message was just as worrisome. By the late 1990s, fishers — there were women as well as men on the water now — were living in the loud echo of the

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29 For a summary, see, *Cultivating Island Solutions*, pp. 76-84.
great boom of the 1980s. As before, the industry was predicated on shellfish: oysters, mussels, and, of course, lobsters. Although the value of the sector continued to rise, reaching a new peak in 1998, mussel farming was nearing its geographical limit in terms of expansion. Virtually all farmable bodies of water were now under lease, and questing entrepreneurs like the Dockendorffs, Prince Edward Island’s “Mussel King’s,” were looking off-Island for new opportunities. No other line of aquaculture had broken through economically, and the heady sense of unlimited potential had dissipated.

The collapse of the Atlantic cod fishery in the early 1990s had limited impact on an Island fishery predicated on shellfish, but it was much on the minds of fisheries officials. After peaking in 1991, lobster landings were nosing downwards once more by the mid-1990s. For a time, it seems, the industry’s ability to conserve lobsters had outstripped fishers’ ability to catch them, guaranteeing a steady rise in catches. But sophisticated locational technology and a growing specialization in gear had gradually shifted the advantage back from hunted to hunter. By century’s end, many observers felt that Islanders were catching lobsters faster than the lobsters could reproduce. Even fishers who agreed with that analysis felt they had little choice: although continued high prices disguised the trend, escalating costs were eating away at their profit margins. Many did not agree either. Although the weight of a fisherman’s wallet was palpable, the sea retained its mystery. Everyone could see the lobster traps that came dripping up over the side, but no one could really tell what was happening down below. More than any other producer, fishers live in the present. While scientists worried about lobster stocks, and fishermen and bureaucrats argued about size limits and Native access to the fishery, no one could agree on whether the industry was headed for trouble or transition.

There was even less agreement on what to do about the problems above the high tide mark. The ongoing debate about land use issues revived age-old conflicts between individual freedom and the
public good, self-interest and the common good. Lack of consensus made governments reluctant to risk political capital by decisive action with respect to land issues. “Indecision,” noted one investigator, “is a form of land-use planning, but it is usually the most costly one.”

Twice in the decade after 1988, commissions were ventured where governments feared to tread.

By the time the Ghiz administration appointed Douglas Boylan to chair its Royal Commission on the Land in the fall of 1988, the family farm had essentially vanished. The Boylan Commission was about saving the land itself. “For years, we have been dipping into our capital in most areas relating to our ‘land,’” it announced. “We are not at the point of bankruptcy, but such an end is not far off. It becomes, then, a matter of will for Islanders and their Government. The time has come to cease the talk and to tend the garden.”

The Commission’s massive report, released in 1990, ranged widely and boldly across land issues, but its lodestone was the necessity for comprehensive land management — voluntary if possible, legislated where necessary — for the entire province. The Commission’s sense of urgency was not widely shared. The most notorious of its 220 recommendations were those few that government actually adopted. In an effort to control suburban sprawl, protect urban cores, and promote orderly development, the Province amalgamated the cluster of municipalities surrounding the Island’s two largest population centres. An enlarged Summerside became the province’s second city. Charlottetown spread out into its historic royalties, while the new towns of Stratford and Cornwall coalesced on its borders. The restructuring of urban Prince Edward Island was accomplished over the vocal objections of various interest groups, especially suburban ratepayers, for whom an integrated municipal tax structure almost invariably meant higher taxes. Like most change that is driven by policy rather than popular demand, the civic amalgamation program would cost its authors, the ruling Liberals, votes.

Many of the other issues identified or reiterated in the Royal Commission were still festering when the Liberal government established a Round Table on Resource Land Use and Stewardship


32Boylan, Everything Before Us, p. 8.
early in 1996, and mandated it to develop a “Resource Land Use Strategy.” The sophisticated appreciation of land use problems that the sixteen-member panel encountered suggested how much more evident the problems had become. The Round Table’s final report in 1997 cultivated a practical balance between environment, recreation, and resource exploitation in developing its strategy for sustainable land use in what American geographer Mark Lapping calls the “working rural landscape.” The actual strategy also balanced approaches, emphasizing public and private partnerships within its matrix of policies, regulations, and programs. Turning words into deeds would require two commitments that neither the Round Table nor the Royal Commission on Land could guarantee: willpower and fiscal resources.

After lagging behind social change for decades, politics became its barometer during the 1990s. In 1982, Islanders had broken with tradition to elect a Roman Catholic premier. In 1986, they had countenanced someone of non-European ancestry in that office. In 1993, Prince Edward Island became the first province in Canada to elect a woman to it. Just as Ghiz was not selected leader because of his Lebanese roots, so Catherine Callbeck was not chosen because she was a woman, but for a bluntly practical reason, because her party felt she could win. Potential rivals stood aside with such alacrity that the party gathering to choose Ghiz’s successor was less a convention than a coronation. Callbeck won 79% of the ballots. The provincial election that inevitably followed on 30 March 1993 was another slaughter. The Opposition in the new legislature consisted of a single member, Conservative Pat Mella, the first female Leader of the Opposition in Island history.33

In some ways, Catherine Callbeck was an unlikely candidate for the symbolic breakthrough she represented. A well-to-do Islander with a distinguished surname and a family business background, she had set aside her painful shyness to devote herself to public service. In 1974 she

33Leone Bagnall had served as Tory House Leader in the previous legislature, since party leader Mel Gass had no seat.
became the second Island woman elected to the provincial legislature, filled a cabinet post there, and then made a successful transition to federal politics. She could hardly be described as a feminist icon, and would not have been elected had she been one. A social conservative, she had once resigned as chair of the Confederation Centre Board over “gratuitous” obscenities in the Centre’s production of a musical about Elvis Presley, and as premier she would take a personal stand against video gambling and Sunday shopping. That the person and her precedent-setting career path seemed at variance helped Callbeck elude stereotyping. Even critics admired her integrity, and those that knew her well understood her old-fashioned determination to “do what was right” for Prince Edward Island.

According to political scientist John Crossley, the real breakthrough for Island women — in politics, at least — had come one election earlier, in 1989, when twenty-one of eighty-one candidates were females, triple the number in 1986. Of the twenty-one, eight were elected.\(^{34}\) The dramatic increase in the number of women legislators came about, argues Crossley, partly because opinion polls suggested to male party organizers that women could get elected. That many voters now accepted the idea of women politicians was more evidence of how fundamentally Island society had changed in recent years. And within that larger acceptance resided a narrower and even more telling one: an increasing number of Island women now conceded that politics might be “women’s work.”\(^ {35}\) That they had needed convincing only underscores the diversity of attitudes among Island women. For while women were easily the most visible interest group on Prince Edward Island, they seldom behaved like one.

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women embodied in its internal politics the tensions within the women’s movement. Established by government in 1975, the Advisory Council proved an uneasy meeting place for traditional women’s groups and women’s rights advocates. Differing conceptions of what women could or should aspire to were inevitably complicated by clashes over issues of conscience, such as abortion and same-sex relationships. As in 1900,

\(^{34}\) Boylan, *Everything Before Us*, p. 8.

\(^{35}\) John Crossley, “Picture This: Women Politicians Hold Key Posts in P.E.I.,” June 1995 (Special Collections, Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island). A condensed version was published under the same title in Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, eds. *In the Presence of Women: Representation in Canadian Governments* (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, 1997).
conflicting loyalties and overlapping identities prevented Island women from projecting a single image or speaking with one voice. Perhaps, then, Premier Callbeck was an appropriate symbol after all.

The metamorphosis of Island women remained incomplete on Prince Edward Island at century’s end. Nevertheless, they had changed considerably from their corseted ancestors of a century previous. They were more urban and better educated — the number of Island women with university degrees quadrupled between 1971 and 1981 alone — and they were far more likely to work for a living. The Island work force contained nearly 33,000 women in 1996, over 46% of the working population. In further contrast to 1900, a high proportion of that female work force were married and/or had children. In a society that allowed them to be breadwinners but still expected them to be homemakers, working mothers were torn between domestic guilt and career ambition. Many women can be excused if they felt exhausted rather than empowered.

Some aspects of the work place had changed only by degrees over the course of the century. Occupational stereotyping still concentrated women in a narrow range of occupations, often at the bottom end of the salary scale, and, despite two decades of “affirmative action,” women continued to make less money than men doing comparable work. A Pay Equity Act, which required employers to adopt and maintain the principle of equal pay for equal work, was actually legislated in 1988. The employers, governments among them, appeared to accept the principle involved. They just did not think they should have to pay for it.

Changing roles for women counted as only one factor, albeit a major one, in the gradual redefinition of Island families during the late 1900s. Widespread birth control, changing values, economic pressures, and the evolving relationship between individuals and society all contributed to smaller families (although the average Island family was still the second largest in Canada in 1996). The demographic “echo” of the Baby Boom, the Boomers’ children, were outnumbered by their

36Crossley, “Picture This,” p. 17.

37According to 1996 census figures, while 2.28% of Canadian women made over $60,000 per year, only 0.9% of Island women made as much. The figures for men were 9.2% and 5.2%, respectively.
parents. Although extended families had become rare, the “jobless recovery” from the severe economic recession of the early 1990s meant that many adult, unmarried children chose not to leave home. Many elderly Islanders could not afford to stay there, and as the population aged, seniors’ facilities multiplied.

The elderly had become more numerous as well, as modern medicine added years to Islanders’ average life spans. By 1999, 13.2% of the Island population was over sixty-five years old. In the way of elders in every era, the older generation was not always happy with what it saw in the new. Between 1981 and 1991, the rate of increase in common-law relationships in the province was among the highest in the country as Islanders began to catch up with a longstanding national trend. Single-parent families were on the rise as well. Too often, their members suffered for it. Two out of every five children living below the poverty line in the mid-1990s had a lone, female parent.

Meanwhile, organized religion, the great champion of the “traditional family” on Prince Edward Island, was losing its authority if not its following. According to the 1991 census, only 4,880 Islanders, less than 4% of the population, had no religious affiliation, compared to 12.5% of Canadians. The comparable figure on the Prince Edward Island of 1901 had been seven — people, not percent. Church attendance remained relatively stable as well. An Angus Reid poll in 1993 found that 50% of Atlantic Canadians, well above the national average, went to church at least once a month, and 77% of them considered religion an important part of their lives. In the 1980s, historian George Rawlyk began referring to the Maritimes ad “Canada’s new Bible Belt.” And perhaps it was. Nevertheless, vocations to the religious life continued to decline, and for the first time in a century many rural congregations had to make do without a resident clergy. With the decline of local

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38 And had since 1971.


40 The figures are cited in G. A. Rawlyk, Is Jesus Your Personal Savior? In Search of Canadian Evangelicism in the 1990s (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), pp. 50 - passim. The national figure for church attendance at least once a month was 31%.

41 This is particularly evident within the Roman Catholic Church; Protestant clergy were already spread more thinly by the 1990s.
churches, one of the last rallying points for the traditional community weakened.

The link between family and community is too obvious to miss, although too complex to quantify. It is clear, however, that the restructuring of both placed enormous pressures on Islanders and their institutions in the closing decades of the century. Child care provides one illustration. For much of the century, children typically had been reared at home by some combination of parents, siblings, and close relatives. By the 1980s, that general equation had changed. Daycares sprouted across the province during the 1980s like dandelions on a new-mown lawn, and in the 2000 provincial election all three parties would promise publicly funded kindergartens to provide uniformity to preschool. Primary schools, too, doubled as babysitters for working parents. Back at home, the babysitter for the Baby Boomers had been the flickering screen of the television. For their children, it was increasingly the personal computer. The educational potential of the PC was often eulogized but only occasionally tapped. More often, it became a video arcade, with the Internet a place for young people to hang out.

Only one cultural trend seems unmistakable. Disconnected from its own past and ever more integrated into a global culture, Island society had come more and more to reflect North American norms.

Even as popular culture blindly homogenized during the 1980s and 1990s, tourism sought to exploit the ways in which Prince Edward Island was different. The Montgomery-esque vision of the province still held. If anything, it was more pervasive than ever. It was the “land of Anne,” as much as her shrines, that continued to draw tourists to the province. Although most roads still led to Cavendish — and for a time Island cars even sported Anne on their licence plates — surveys consistently suggested that enjoying the pastoral landscape was the most common visitor activity. That landscape very much represented the intersection of nature with culture, and tourism marketing promoted both in its neverending quest for more visitors who would spend more money in more locations during more months of the year.
Island tourism was a mature industry now, professionally organized, thoroughly analyzed, and promotionally energized. If anything, it had grown more refined, as it developed a clearer sense of what and how it should be selling to its customers. Although tourism literature no longer promoted Prince Edward Island to prospective visitors as a place out of time, it was still portrayed as a place apart: more peaceful (but with lots to do!) and somehow more rooted, a magical conjunction of red braids and red clay.

During the heavy-handed 1970s, cultural activists had sometimes painted tourism as the enemy, a monster that trampled what was special and unique about the province in its rush to get to the beach. In the 1980s, marketers seeking quality “product” rediscovered local cultural producers in search of an audience. Their marriage of convenience was called cultural tourism.

It seems ironic that the province’s traditional culture should be packaged just as it was crumbling. Many Islanders had been raised in the “old” Prince Edward Island, but very few of them lived there anymore. By the 1980s, in fact, the Island’s heritage had itself become an artifact to be treasured and shared (and sometimes exploited and degraded). Tourism marketing’s official themes included an official “year of the Irish,” and a “year of the Scots,” while annual visitor’s guides paid obligatory homage to the Island’s history and culture. The “Anne Authority” was created to regulate the merchandising of L. M. Montgomery’s fictional progeny. In Charlottetown, new emphasis was placed on the city’s status as “Cradle of Confederation,” a title formally confirmed in the 1990s by Parliamentary resolution.

Meanwhile, out in the private sector, homely virtues received a sophisticated gloss as tourism operators took aim at visitors’ perceived longings. Culture had become a commodity. Commercial lobster suppers continued to facsimile “old-fashioned” Island cuisine. Trendy new bed-and-breakfasts hung out their shingles, offering “old-fashioned” Island hospitality to compete with conventional tourist accommodations. Drawing on another tradition, institutionalized ceilidhs (from the Gaelic word for “visit”) recreated “old-fashioned” entertainment. Beginning in the 1970s, traditional handicrafts were revived or, sometimes, coaxed into existence. After decades of decline, “old-time” fiddling was nursed back to health by the people who loved it. Older players found an audience again, and young fiddlers fused traditional rhythms with modern rock music to court a new and more cosmopolitan generation of listeners.
In a sense, the fiddle had been saved by moving it from the kitchen to the stage. The same might be said of the culture that had provided fiddle music with its context. Purists could argue that when customs become so self-conscious, they are artificial. Certainly, the “traditional culture” to which promoters and preservers gave a forum was now a recollection of something that had once been spontaneous and natural. And yet, because the Break was so recent, Islanders were a great deal closer to their roots than many other North Americans. Even within the relentless reductionism that characterizes tourism marketing, there was a nearby authenticity, a time within memory, that could inform the stylized version of traditional culture that entertained both visitors hungry to connect with an earlier time and Islanders warmed by the glow of nostalgia.

The “new traditionalism” that characterized cultural tourism was but an expression of a greater creative ferment in the province. In the more culturally adventurous (and subsidized) world that had emerged from the Development Plan, arts and letters flourished as never before. In the 1970s, their practitioners had curbed their instinctive iconoclasm long enough to form the Prince Edward Island Council of the Arts as a forum for their concerns and aspirations. That the era’s artists and writers often drew inspiration from the Island’s past was actually a minor triumph; popular culture is seldom respectful of its antecedents. As that popular culture twisted away into a new millennium, it remained to be seen what fragments of the older traditions might be carried along with it.

The tourism industry’s impact on the cultural landscape was more nebulous than its physical manifestations. Despite non-resident ownership restrictions and a property tax schedule set at double the rate for year-round inhabitants, summer Islanders continued to buy up Island coastline; by 1988, 10,000 non-residents owned 140,000 acres of Island land. Prime agricultural land continued to pass over into recreational or residential use. In high tourism areas such as the North Shore, the pressure on the landscape attracted the attention of the 1990 Royal Commission on the Land, which advocated tighter controls on tourist development. To cope with the chaotic situation in Cavendish, which encompassed pretty much everything that was good and bad about Island tourism, a local-government anomaly, the Cavendish Resort Municipality, was established.

Part of the concern in Cavendish was ecological. Like agriculture, tourism sometimes
threatened the environment that it traded upon. One of Tourism’s annual marketing slogans during the 1980s was “Touch Nature,” but too much touching could easily destroy it. In 1988, the Island Nature Trust spearheaded a controversial campaign to block off-Island developers from building a $30-million condominium-style tourist complex on the Greenwich peninsula, an ecologically sensitive site featuring a unique assembly of fragile sand dunes and rare wildlife habitat, plus the earliest evidence of human habitation in the province. Greenwich was “saved,” ultimately to become part of the Prince Edward Island National Park, but local residents desperate for jobs bitterly resented the outside interference. If the Island landscape was indeed their birthright, they complained, how come Islanders were not allowed to dispose of it as they wished?

The answer to that question lay in the necessity for sustainable development. As with motherhood, everyone supported the concept of sustainability. There was even widespread consensus about what it meant: a level of resource exploitation that did not destroy what it exploited. There was just no agreement about how best to achieve it.

In the case of Island tourism, the answers could wait. In 1989, the industry capped six years of steady growth with another record year. Afterward, a North American recession effectively controlled the increase in tourism pressures.42

It did not seem to matter who the Liberal Party put at its head in the early 1990s, so powerful was its stranglehold on office. Indeed, the Catherine Callbeck “team” so strongly resembled the Joe Ghiz “team” that detractors began suggesting that the new premier merely presided over her government rather than running it. Real power, they argued, now lay with the Premier’s non-elected advisors, the

42 Between 1984 and 1989, the number of tourist parties coming to Prince Edward Island rose by 20%, and the estimated amount of their spending by 81%. Beginning in 1992, tourism statistics excluded spending by business travellers, making it difficult to compare spending numbers from the 1990s with those from the ‘80s. The statistics are published in the various editions of the Province of Prince Edward Island Annual Statistical Review for the period.
The conclusion is based on the running commentary about deficit matters found in the annual Report of the Auditor General to the Legislative Assembly for this time period.
when the economy was strong, Island governments tended to overspend, content that they could pay their interest charges, if not their debts. But when times were bad, Island governments overspent even more, both because public sector spending was the biggest controllable lever in the provincial economy, and because voters expected governments to soften the economic blows that fell on the people.

Barring a significant increase in federal funds, as with the Development Plan, the only way to bell the deficit cat was through tax hikes or spending cuts, and no Island government during the 1980s was willing to do either. In an economy addicted to government spending, balancing the books was unlikely to win many votes, but higher taxes, job cuts, or program reductions were certain to lose them. It did not really matter which party was in power. Politics makes Oppositions brave, and Governments timid. In sickness and in health, the Island’s net debt grew.

But debt can eventually hobble a government by sucking up its revenues in carrying charges and ruining its credit with lenders. Money may not make the world go round, but the good opinion of the bond market can dictate fiscal policy. That is essentially what happened in the early 1990s. As federal transfers plunged and Ottawa, alarmed by its own debt woes, ruthlessly slashed federal-provincial programs, Prince Edward Island rang up a series of record deficits: $51 million in 1991–92, $82.5 million in 1992–93, $71.3 million in 1993–94. In only five years, the province’s net debt had nearly doubled, climbing from $1,470 to $2,699 per capita. “We have now spent ourselves into a corner,” announced the Auditor General.44

As the Island’s per capita debt load slowly began to crush provincial finances, the Liberal government attacked the deficit crisis with the few weapons available to dependent provinces. The air filled with the sound of falling dominoes.

Fiscal urgency drove the Callbeck ministry’s heavy-handed program of government restructuring in 1993. It was highlighted by a consolidation of departments and its logical consequence, a top-down purge of civil servants. It was only a trick of the tail to claim that government was getting smaller in order to get better. Fear gripped the civil service amid rumours of massive layoffs, although only about 200 people actually left the civil service in 1993, most of

them through early retirement packages that brought government few short-term savings. Then, for the third straight year, Ottawa announced a drop in equalization payments to the province. The decrease neatly erased all of the Island government’s painful savings.

Provincial policymakers quickly concluded that wage reductions (paying fewer dollars to employees), would be less hurtful, less politically damaging, and more cost-efficient than job reductions (paying fewer employees). The 1994 session brought an abrupt change in tactics. In his budget speech that April, Provincial Treasurer Wayne Cheverie reluctantly announced a 7.5% cut in the wages of all public sector employees: civil servants, doctors, nurses, hospital workers, teachers, faculty and staff at Holland College and the University of Prince Edward Island — more than 12,000 people. The media quickly dubbed the initiative “the 7.5 Percent Solution.” It would save an estimated $24.6 million. It also required the breaking of several collective agreements.

During the last recession, in March 1982, the Jim Lee government had proposed abrogating a 10% wage increase that had been granted to government employees in a recent contract settlement. The union-led backlash soon forced the government to back down, but the attempt undoubtedly hurt Lee at the polls. Twelve years later, the Callbeck government was more desperate, and its employees more militant.

Nothing like it had been seen on Prince Edward Island since the Tenant League disturbances of the mid-1860s. In April and May, angry public servants staged a series of marches on the provincial legislature to protest the wage rollback bill. The climax came on 11 May, when five thousand public sector employees, the largest demonstration in Island history, converged on Queen Square, waving placards and shouting abuse at legislators. For the first time since the crisis broke, the Premier came out to face the demonstrators. Flanked by Liberal MLAs, she tried to deliver a short, prepared statement. But the protesters wanted a target, not dialogue, and Callbeck was drowned out by catcalls and boos. As the politicians turned away, someone in the crowd pelted eggs at them. He missed.

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45By 1998, the provincial civil service had been reduced by 735 positions, although many of those had actually just been re-defined rather than eliminated. (See Maurice Beaudin, ed. The Economic Region of Prince Edward Island (Moncton: Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development, 1998), p. 130.)
The government’s only concession was to halve the wage reduction for employees who made under $28,000 per year. As the House considered the bill on the last night of the spring session, seven hundred protesters invaded Province House. Cleared from the Visitors’ Gallery, they roamed the corridors outside the chamber, singing and chanting and calling for blood. The mood, at least, was violent, and when the House recessed, the Premier and her cabinet slipped out through an underground tunnel.

High drama mixed with low comedy. During the tense times at the end of the session, the Premier’s car was ticketed for being parked illegally on a side street near the Legislature. Given the government’s growing disability, she might have been forgiven for parking in a handicapped zone. Union members delighted in referring to her vehicle as “the getaway car.”

The 7.5% Solution proved to be a fiscal success but a political disaster. The bitterness over the wage rollback was palpable and pervasive. While there was scattered applause from critics of big government and its “fat-cat” civil servants (the provincial unemployment rate, after all, was hovering around 18.2%), public opinion generally sided with the government employees. The Callbeck Government was vilified as both faithless and heartless. “I’ve aged ten years in the last ten weeks,” Provincial Treasurer Wayne Cheverie told one reporter. So had the government.

Making a virtue of necessity, the Liberal administration embraced structural reform as a way to protect future budgets by making government and governance more cost-effective. The remodelling of government departments in 1993 had already compressed public administration. Much more followed. Municipal reform reorganized urban Prince Edward Island. Educational reform streamlined school administration, reducing the four English-speaking school boards to just two. Health reform struggled to consolidate hospital services amid a staggering inflation in health-care costs. And in the midst of it all, electoral reform reformed the reformers. On the same day that five thousand angry demonstrators were shouting down their Premier, the Legislature gave second reading to a sweeping redistribution bill.

46 The ticket was dismissed on a technicality.

The Island’s system of dual-member ridings had been to modern politics what the tailbone is to human evolution, the vestigial remnant of something that had long since vanished, in this case, the Island’s old bicameral legislature. The dual constituencies had persisted at first mainly because they made it easier to avoid religious confrontations in electoral contests, and in the end, because they entrenched the political influence of rural areas. By the early 1990s, no amount of tinkering could remedy the inequities of a constituency system that discriminated heavily against urban Prince Edward Island; the growing imbalance between crowded urban ridings and thinly populated country ones had stretched the principle of “representation of population” almost beyond recognition.

Legal challenges from urban voters were already fracturing the old system. Gripped by reformist zeal, the Liberal-dominated House now tore it down entirely. Amid lively controversy, it introduced a bill to abolish the Island’s sixteen dual ridings in favour of thirty single-member constituencies, only to accept Liberal Ross Young’s counterproposal of a twenty-seven-seat legislature. The reform cost eastern Prince Edward Island five of its ten members. Metropolitan Charlottetown gained proportionately, but still felt cheated of its rightful share of seats. King’s County lost proportionately less than it might— but still felt cheated of its rightful share of seats. The re-alignment also meant a layoff notice for five Liberal MLAs from eastern Prince Edward Island.49

That was the way of reform in the 1990s. Whatever its authors’ motives, it always seemed to alienate more voters than it won over. Health reform was the most controversial of all. Although health and welfare services were by far the biggest expenditure item in the provincial budget, costs were rising much faster than government’s resources. Between 1981 and 1991, the cost of medical services soared from $89 to $211 per person per year. Despite doubling its health care expenditures, the provincial government fell from third to tenth among Canadian provinces in per capita health care spending. Over the same period, the demand for medical services in the province rose 41% even though the population grew only 6%.49 Obviously, Islanders were getting the hang of medicare.

48The original intention was to give Kings County five seats in a 30-member House. Ross Young’s smaller legislature at least gave the five eastern members more clout by putting them in a smaller legislature.

49For health care spending, see Canada Year Book, 1997, p. 110. For health care costs and demand, see the Report of the Auditor General to the Legislative Assembly, Prince Edward
The Calbeck government tackled the spiralling cost of health care with a now familiar strategy of administrative reorganization and consolidation of services. Accompanying nostrums about the importance of prevention and the promotion of “wellness” were greeted with derision. When the Callbeck government proposed to “rationalize” the level of care available in community hospitals, the derision turned to hostility. In West Prince, where three local hospitals served a small but jealous population, the storm of protest over anticipated hospital closures rivalled the anger over wage rollbacks. The health reform process quickly bogged down, but the sector’s funding problems persisted. The difficulties were, in fact, nation-wide and, by century’s end, Canadians had begun to refer to the “health care crisis.” Diagnoses of the illness abounded, but there were no cures.

Whatever its good intentions, the government clearly had lost the good will of its citizens. A casualty of her own determination to “do what was right,” Catherine Callbeck stepped down as premier in August 1996, when opinion polls suggested that she could not win the next election. One of her less controversial cabinet ministers, Tyne Valley’s Keith Milligan, upset the Party establishment’s choice, Provincial Treasurer Wayne Cheverie, in a leadership convention in October. Hoping the iron was still hot, Milligan tried a quick appeal to the electorate.

The Conservatives, too, had a new leader, Pat Binns, a former provincial cabinet minister and ex-federal MP for Cardigan. Binns’ biggest asset in 1996 was that he was not a Liberal. Still smarting over wage cuts and unwanted reforms, voters gave the upstart Tories eighteen of the Legislature’s twenty-seven seats on 18 November 1996. Up in the Liberal stronghold of West Prince, disaffected Grits helped elect NDP leader Dr. Herb Dickieson, who thus became the first successful third-party candidate in Island history. Though few remarked on it, the election set another precedent. Saskatchewan native Pat Binns, the politician turned bean farmer turned politician, became the first premier since Confederation who had not been born on Prince Edward Island. Times had indeed changed.

The new government reaped the benefits of both its predecessors’ money-saving reforms and the return of economic prosperity. By the last half of the 1990s, both the Canadian and Island
economies were bounding forward. The Island’s major industries were all performing well, and there was much optimism about the future of light manufacturing. Although there were pockets of trouble and unemployment remained intractable, the average income on Prince Edward Island had climbed to 82.75% of the Canadian figure by 1996.

The Island’s financial situation had already improved dramatically by the end of the Liberal tenure, and, in three of the millennium’s last five years, Provincial Treasurers were able to post budget surpluses. The ruling Conservatives naturally took credit for the province’s fiscal health, and good times unquestionably smoothed their path to a second term. No Island government had failed to win a second term since 1935, but even the most optimistic Tories were surprised by the magnitude of the Conservative victory in the April 2000 provincial election. The party took all but one of the Island’s twenty-seven ridings. The new Liberal leader, Wayne Carew, failed to win a seat, while the NDP leader, Dr. Herb Dickieson, lost his. Pat Binns entered the new millennium very much in the driver’s seat.

After the travails of the early 1990s, it was a time of cautious optimism. Provincial policymakers pointed to the steady decline in the proportion of provincial revenues that came from federal transfers as a mark of the Island’s increasing self-reliance.\(^{50}\) That the decline had been entirely involuntary on Prince Edward Island’s part was conveniently overlooked. As the new century began, provincial leaders continued to preach greater self-reliance even as they pressed Ottawa to restore its earlier cuts to social transfers. The percentages might have wavered, but the equation of dependency had not changed.

Boxed Essay: A Seven Percent Solution

The politics of dependency are nowhere better illustrated than in the closure of Canadian Forces Base

\(^{50}\)Between 1992 and 1996, federal expenditures as a percentage of the Island’s Gross Domestic Product fell from 51% to 43%. (See “Bridging Tradition and Technology: An Economic Development Strategy,” released by Government of Prince Edward Island, 7 March 2000.) Meanwhile, Statistics Canada figures indicated that 22.1% of total income in Prince Edward Island came from government transfer payments in 1996, compared to a national average of 14%.
Summerside.

A disproportionate number of military bases were located in Atlantic Canada during the Cold War. The reason was partly strategic — the region was, after all, the country’s eastern frontier — and partly political, since military bases were a cheap way to siphon federal spending into have-not provinces. Among those bases was CFB Summerside. By the 1980s, it was, after the provincial government, the biggest employer on Prince Edward Island, providing 1,300 direct, and 1,700 indirect, jobs. Its continuance had been at risk several times over the decades, most notably during the early 1970s, but local pressure had always persuaded Ottawa to relent. Then, in April 1989, the federal government placed Summerside on the front line of a wave of planned base closures.51

While there was an argument to be made for Summerside’s continuance as the headquarters for 411 Search and Rescue Squadron, there was more economic consequence than military importance to the base. The downsizing of Canada’s military had little regard for local economies, but Islanders did, and protests were inevitable. Over the years, CFB Summerside had put down deep roots in the local community that went far beyond the local jobs it provided or the money it injected into the Island economy. A sense of loss lent emotional intensity to the campaign to save the base. Over the following months there was a steady spate of marches, protest rallies, speeches, briefs, and petitions. “Save Summerside, Close Mulroney” read placards during one demonstration on Parliament Hill.52

At the political level, the campaign featured the usual posturing, with some hard-nosed politicking behind closed doors. While grassroots crusaders fought closure, Island politicians concentrated instead on compensation. As a result, the federal government announced in May 1990 that a processing centre for the recently created Goods and Services Tax would be built in Summerside. Paperwork from the 7% levy would provide four hundred federal jobs in the province. The Prince County capital thus became perhaps the only community in Canada to benefit from the imposition of the unpopular new tax.

The GST Centre was welcomed, even if the jobs that it created were ill-suited to many base employees. Federal dollars were also invested in public-private partnerships aimed at using the physical infrastructure of the abandoned air base to help seed an aerospace industry. By the time the flag came down at CFB Summerside on 1 April 1992, the economic blow of the closure had been greatly softened.

Ottawa giveth and Ottawa taketh away. . . and Ottawa giveth.


Except when it cut into their pocketbooks, ordinary Islanders seldom dwelt on their dependence on the federal government. It had become a fact of life, as inalterable as the weather, or the necessity of planning off-Island car trips around the ferry schedule.

But, as Islanders had discovered, even the facts of life could change.

During the 1980s, traffic to the Mainland continued to be defined in terms of vessel names. In December 1982, a massive new car ferry, the Abegweit, replaced her venerable namesake on the Borden-Cape Tormentine run. Built in Saint John, New Brunswick, she was as elegant as a parking garage — an expensive parking garage, since she cost $50 million, over seven times the price of the first Abegweit. In May 1988, Ottawa announced that it would build a new vessel (duly christened the Confederation) for Northumberland Ferries Limited down at the other end of the Strait. In between those events, the province marked the centenary of the launching of George Howlan’s campaign for a tunnel to the Mainland. As if to mark the occasion, Public Works Canada received no less than three proposals during 1985 from private-sector companies seeking to construct a fixed link across the Northumberland Strait. One of the century’s most durable fantasies had been revived. The price being bandied about, $500–600 million, was only ten times the cost of the new Abby. As a way to finance the crossing, promoters revived the stratagem that Ottawa had summarily rejected back in 1969: private enterprise would take on the project in exchange for federal loan guarantees and annual subsidies.

Dismayed by the continuing, escalating expense of operating the ferry service, the federal government cocked an ear to the little swell of bridge talk. It may even have started it. In any event, federal interest amplified the buzz, and soon “the Fixed Link” was a full blown public issue. Drawing on past history, cynics dismissed the sound and fury as signifying nothing, but this time the talk was different. Ottawa was driving the discussion instead of dragging its heels. There was not even an

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These were Omni Systems, proposing a rail tunnel; Northumberland Bridge Builders; and Nova Construction (later, Abegweit Crossing), which began with a hybrid bridge/causeway/tunnel concept but later advocated a bridge.
election in the offing (yet).

What Islanders thought of the renewed agitation was of considerable importance to its outcome. As political commentator David Milne noted, the jurisdiction involved in a fixed crossing was federal, but the crossing’s main impact would be provincial.54 When Islanders had agitated for a tunnel at the beginning of the century, their campaigns had overwhelming public support within the province. Any local opposition, it appears, was confined to indifference. Even in the 1960s, the era of the much promised Causeway, a fixed link was still regarded as a sort of panacea for all of the Island’s ills. There was no such unanimity on the Prince Edward Island of the 1980s. A substantial number of Islanders now believed that a fixed link would create more problems than it solved.

The first grains of opposition to a fixed crossing could be traced to the wheelbarrow of Causeway clay that the Brothers and Sisters of Cornelius Howatt pushed from Borden to Charlottetown in 1973. The symbolic soil was auctioned off in tins labelled “Can the Causeway.” Where its advocates had regarded the Causeway as an umbilical cord to Canada, the Brothers and Sisters chose to see it as a leash. In their way of thinking, the Northumberland Strait was a moat against cultural and economic imperialism, and an efficient ferry service was as much drawbridge as the Island needed.

A similar coalition, now including peace activists, came together in the mid-1980s to fight a proposal that the Province subsidize Litton Industries to establish a plant on Prince Edward Island for the assembly of components for anti-missile radar systems.55 Their fierce agitation made the new Liberal government cautious about the tentative deal that it had inherited from the Lee regime. While Litton did not come to the Island ostensibly because Nova Scotia made the company a better offer, its opponents could count the decision as a victory. They now provided the spiritual underpinning for the anti-Fixed Link group “Friends of the Island,” which formed in November 1987. The “Friends’” friends included groups such as Marine Atlantic ferry workers, whose livelihoods, rather than their vision of Prince Edward Island, were at stake in the debate over a fixed crossing.

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55 According to the terms of a defence contract it had won from the federal government, Litton had to locate a manufacturing plant in Atlantic Canada. The plant in Nova Scotia lasted only as long as the defence contact. Anti-Litton forces on Prince Edward Island felt vindicated.
Arrayed against the naysayers were “Islanders for a Better Tomorrow,” an alliance of organizations and individuals who either believed a fixed link was essential to future progress or who stood to gain from its construction — sometimes both. Though the organization was dominated by business people, its members were confident that they spoke for the silent majority, and they resented their opponents’ claim to the moral high ground. Link opponents fought the crossing mainly because of what it might do to Prince Edward Island. Link supporters endorsed it because of what it would do — eliminate a transportation bottleneck — and were confident about the rest.

Few issues in the 20th century stirred so much emotion or division on the Island as the drawn-out debate over the Fixed Link. At least one Friend of the Island leader considered it the most important issue since Confederation. Islanders argued over bread-and-butter issues, such as jobs created (2,600, temporary, during construction) and jobs lost (400 permanent, 250 seasonal). They argued over environmental considerations, such as ice flow through the Strait and damage to the fishery. They argued over trade implications: the Fixed Link would put Prince Edward Island closer to its markets but also put Island markets closer to Mainland competitors. They argued over tourism and its acceptable limits. They argued over metaphysical questions of islands and identities, myths and symbols versus sameness and mass culture, islands as havens, islands as prisons. They argued about alleged boondoggles and conspiracies, and a secretive, pig-headed federal government bent on its pet project. They argued over construction booms and busts, and over ripples of spending, and the price of land. They argued over the fate of Borden (and Cape Tormentine). They argued over business sense and commonsense and simple convenience. They argued in church halls and hotel ballrooms and living rooms and ferry lineups and coffee shops. They argued on the hustings and through the media, in music and art and advertisements. They argued with their heads and their hearts. They argued calmly, angrily, sadly, stubbornly, wittily.56

And some did not argue at all. Their minds had been made up, one way or the other, from the very beginning, and they saw no need to talk about it.

The Ghiz government chose not to take sides in the argument, announcing instead that it

56Most of the anti-link arguments are captured in Lorraine Begley, ed. Crossing that Bridge: A Critical Look at the Prince Edward Island Fixed Link (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1993), which seethes with anger and indignation at federal skullduggery.
would abide by Islanders’ wishes. To gauge them, the government called a plebiscite, the first in the province since Prohibition. It posed a simple, but ambiguous question: “Are you in favor of a fixed link crossing between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick?” What sort of link and under what conditions was not stipulated. On 18 January 1988, 59.1% of those casting ballots opted in favour. Only in King’s County, where a fixed crossing would place the future of nearby Northumberland Ferries in jeopardy, did a majority vote against the project. Urban Prince Edward Island was steadfastly for it.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the plebiscite was the voter turnout. Pundits had predicted that it would be as high as 90%. In fact, only 65% of eligible voters declared themselves, high compared to other plebiscites in Island history, but low compared to election turnouts. In other words, 39% of the total electorate gave a qualified “yes” to a fixed crossing; 26% said “no”; and 35% failed to express an opinion. Why did so many who could vote choose not to? Was it ambivalence? Fatalism? Indifference? There is no way to know what combination of motives was at work, but the low turnout begs the question of what the “majority” wanted. Even the “yes” vote was to some extent equivocal, since, strictly speaking, the referendum question had only proposed further exploration of an unspecified fixed crossing. “If you do not know, say ‘no,’” Friends of the Island had urged. “If you say ‘no,’ we’ll never know,” rebutted David Hooley of Islanders for A Better Tomorrow. For policymakers, nevertheless, the numbers were convincing, and the plebiscite results provided the mandate that the provincial and, especially, federal governments had sought.

As the fate of the Fixed Link was being worked out, the transportation icon of another era quietly met its end. Under cover of darkness, the last rolling stock from the Island’s railway was trundled aboard

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57 Since Ghiz’s death, there have been persistent rumours that he personally opposed the fixed link, and his personal convictions continue to be a posthumous prize among supporters and opponents of the crossing, a sure indication of how deep emotions on the issue still run.

58 That percentage was, however, the best turnout in Island plebiscite history.

59 The exchange is re-told in Copthorne Macdonald, Bridging the Strait: The Story of the Confederation Bridge Project (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997), p. 33.
the Borden ferry in the waning hours of 1989.\footnote{The deregulation of the rail industry and its implications for Atlantic Canada are discussed in E. R. Forbes, “The Triumph of Ideology: Transportation Policy and the Atlantic Provinces in the 1980s,” in his Challenging the Regional Stereotype, pp. 136-147.} The tracks that had led Prince Edward Island into Canada, and that had wound their way through so many lives in the century afterward, were torn up and the railway ties sold. The rail lands were turned over to the Province, and over the next decade, its “Rails to Trails” program resurrected the railbed as a recreational pathway for hikers, cyclists, and snowmobilers. In a perhaps unintentional irony, the trans-Island route was dubbed the Confederation Trail.

As a preliminary to the 1988 plebiscite, Premier Ghiz had set ten conditions that any fixed link proposal must meet if it hoped to win provincial support. “Joe’s 10 Commandments” were mostly economic, but the main sticking point was the question of environmental soundness. Over the next four years, it sparked more heated arguments. In the wake of the plebiscite results, Public Works Canada and many pro-Linkers resisted the necessity of any formal environmental review beyond what had already been done. Bowing to public pressure, Public Works at length commissioned an independent Environmental Review and Assessment Panel. By now, the crossing concepts had been narrowed down to only one option, a bridge. Opponents of the Link rejoiced when the Panel announced in August 1990 that the generic plan available for consideration posed “unacceptable environmental risks.”\footnote{John Crossley, “Prince Edward Island,” Canadian Annual Review, 1990, p. 209.} Public Works Canada shrugged its shoulders, declared that it would modify its bridge design, and pressed on.\footnote{The Panel had interpreted its “environmental” mandate quite broadly. To deal with the most substantive of its reservations, that a bridge would impede the flow of ice through the Strait, causing a whole raft of problems, Public Works convened a special “ice panel,” which decided that a bridge would pose no appreciable risk.}
been the only factor, a fixed link would have begun the century, instead of ending it. The fixed crossing went ahead in the 1990s primarily because the federal government was determined to build it.\textsuperscript{63} For short-term political reasons, the Mulroney Conservatives seemed bent on having a mega-project in Atlantic Canada. But they also perceived a long-term fiscal gain for Ottawa in ridding itself of the indefinite and ever-escalating financial burden represented by the ferry service. And in neo-conservative thinking, there was a philosophical satisfaction in being able to substitute private enterprise for a public undertaking. How Islanders felt about the Link was relevant, but secondary.

Announcement by announcement, study by study, then span by span, the bridge inched closer to reality. In October 1993, the federal government signed a formal contract with Strait Crossing Incorporated of Calgary, whose design had been chosen over two other competitors. In return for building the bridge, SCI was guaranteed a $42-million annual subsidy for a period of 35 years. That sum was equivalent, the federal government solemnly alleged, to what it spent each year on the ferry service; CN Marine estimated its actual subsidy at about half that figure. The estimated cost for the project was set at $800 million, including $120 million in financing. The completion date was set for 31 May 1997.

With Paul Giannella the sweater-clad president of SCI, on hand to oversee construction and finesse the public relations challenges, work quickly got under way. The first of the forty-four bridge piers was poured in July 1994. In due course, the world’s largest ocean-going crane, the HLV \textit{Svanen}, lumbered across the Atlantic to lift the concrete bridge spans into place. By the summer of 1995, with construction at its peak, SCI had 2,600 people on its payroll. Subcontractors employed another 500. Exactly as predicted, the local economy boomed.

The Friends of the Island fought to the last through the courts, then clung (almost to the last) to the belief that either the project or its political support would collapse. It did not. The “longest bridge over ice-covered waters in the world” proceeded on time and pretty much on budget.\textsuperscript{64} For

\textsuperscript{63}Ian G. Johnston makes the same argument in “The Politics of the Link: An Examination of the Fixed Connection in Prince Edward Island” (M.A. thesis, St. Mary’s University, Halifax, N.S., 1995), especially pp. 90 - passim.

\textsuperscript{64}The announced cost for the completed structure was $840 million. According to provincial figures, 70% of that total had been spent on Prince Edward Island. The figures are
three years, passengers riding the pendulum-swing of the ferries gathered at the rail to view the structure taking shape off to the westward. Marine Atlantic crews, whose jobs would end with the bridge’s completion, could not help but see as well.

From a distance, the bridge was oddly graceful as it arched its slender back across the Strait. One enterprising Islander coined and copyrighted the term “Flink” to describe it, and merchandized the name hopefully. “The Flink” did not catch on. In a singularly unimaginative choice, officials decided to call the new structure the Confederation Bridge. That title did not make much headway with Islanders either. Even after its completion, Islanders still tended to call it “the Fixed Link.” In the same way that they had once referred to the Borden crossing merely as “the Ferry,” locals eventually settled on “the Bridge.”

History is fond of symbols, but no respecter of round numbers. For Prince Edward Island, the new millennium began on 31 May 1997, when the Confederation Bridge officially opened for business. The day before, 50,000 people showed up to run and walk the completed span during “Bridgefest” — the “only time,” officials announced (incorrectly), that foot crossings would ever be allowed. Many of the trekkers never even got to Borden: on the Island side, the traffic snarl extended all the way back to DeSable. At 25 kilometres, it was considerably longer than any lineup in the history of the ferry service.

Those who did make it from Prince Edward Island to the other side finished their odyssey in the traditional way. For one last time, they took the ferry home.

The following afternoon at 5 P.M. the first regular traffic rolled onto the Confederation Bridge. A mile away, the MV Abegweit began her last commercial crossing, filled largely with Marine Atlantic employees and their families. The province was now securely tethered to the Mainland. It was left to the purists to argue about whether or not it should still be called an island.

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65Of course, another Bridge walk was staged in 1998.
The crush of participants that overwhelmed the organizers of Bridgefest were sure that they were helping to make history. And they were. But the real significance of the Confederation Bridge will take longer to reveal itself.

Besides a sudden boom in bridge metaphors, the most immediate impact was on tourism. In 1997, tourism numbers shot up. For the first time ever, the number of visitors to Prince Edward Island topped the million mark. The shoulder season continued to slope steeply, but there were sweaty traffic jams in summertime Cavendish, and whenever it rained, there was big-city crowding on Charlottetown streets. On any given day during the peak of the tourist season, the Island’s population swelled by over 40%, 50,000–60,000 extra people, most of them crammed into the middle third of the province. 66

The Confederation Bridge got the credit (and, sometimes, the blame) for the surge in tourism. Admittedly, the Bridge had nothing to do with the strong North American economy, which gave people the money to travel, or the weak Canadian dollar, which persuaded Canadians to vacation at home and Americans to come to Canada. But curiosity did tend to bring travellers to Prince Edward Island to see the much-promoted engineering marvel.

The closer the Bridge, the stronger its attraction: many of the one million came from exotic locales such as Halifax, Moncton, and Saint John. 67 While tourism marketing continued to target people who would stay longer, spend more, and break out of Island tourism’s “golden triangle,” Maritime tourists tended to do just the opposite. Prince Edward Island was easier to get to, but also easier to get from. No one counted the number of day-trippers to the province, but many tourist accommodations complained that their visitors were not staying as long as in other years. For the time being, the increase in volume more than made up for any fall in unit value. Tourist spending jumped

66Cited in Institute of Island Studies, “A Place to Stay?” p. 33.

67See Annual Statistical Review of Prince Edward Island, 1998. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, which usually supplied about a quarter of the pleasure travel to Prince Edward Island, showed the biggest jump, going from 22% in 1996 to 30% in 1997. The proportion of tourists from wealthy Ontario also rose steeply, from 18% to 24%. Curiously, the percentage of American tourists fell back to 23% of the total in 1997 from 29% in 1996. In 1998, it fell again, to 18%. 66
63% the year that the Confederation Bridge opened, and another 12% the following year.

Tourism was already on the move, rebounding from the recession of the early 1990s. In the four years before the Fixed Link opened, tourist spending had risen by 40%. The opening of the Bridge merely accentuated the trend. The overall increase in visitor spending between 1993 and 1999 was a whopping 173%. As the millennium approached, tourism, the industry that relied on the kindness of strangers, seemed set to overtake agriculture as the province’s economic leader. The working rural landscape that had defined Prince Edward Island for Islanders was now equally important as a tourist attraction. The cultural history of the century, lamented historian/activist David Weale, “can be summed up in how we’ve gone from being ‘Spud Island’ to ‘Holiday Island.”

Once the novelty of the Confederation Bridge wears thin — and declining visitor numbers in 1999 suggested that might be happening — it may well be that the Fixed Link’s most lasting contribution to Island tourism is the accessibility that it provides. The Bridge made the Island much less “a place apart” than before, posing one final paradox for tourism marketers. “Summer is here,” they coaxed. But so was everyone else.

Had Prince Edward Island, in fact, become too accessible for its own good? Would the Bridge sufficiently reduce the temporal and physical distances that hamper Island trade? Would Island business go forth to conquer new markets or be conquered by invading competitors? Would Moncton draw western Prince Edward Island within its commercial orbit, as the throngs of Islanders off on their weekend shopping trips to the Champlain Mall suggested? Could we build the entrepreneurial confidence necessary to overcome a hidden barrier as wide as the Northumberland Strait, our own inferiority complex? Psychologically and materially, could we afford to fail? Would the pressures on Island land increase now that prospective cottage owners from neighbouring provinces no longer had to worry about weekend ferry lineups coming between them and their Island hideaways? What would happen to property values? To wilderness areas, whose benefits are often intangible? What would happen to transportation patterns? Was the Wood Islands ferry service still viable? Would easy access to Moncton or Halifax make Charlottetown Airport superfluous? Would the Fixed Link integrate

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Prince Edward Island more fully into the Maritime economy? And, if economic integration came, could political integration be far behind?

Finally, did the conquest of physical isolation have cultural and mythic implications in an age when the information highway already ploughed across Islanders’ psyches? A body surrounded by water. “To be born on an island’s to be sure / You are a native with a habitat,” wrote poet Milton Acorn. In the post-Bridge epoch, would that sense of self be strong enough to survive the smothering embrace of global culture? Did it even matter?

There are no ready answers to such questions in the grey arches that tiptoed across the dark waters of the Strait. They simply carry us forward to the distant shore.

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Conclusion
Unmaking Geography?

How odd, when you think of it, that a man rows backwards.
What experience, deduction and sophistication
There had to be before men dared row backwards
Taking direction from where they’d been
With only quick-snatched glances at where they’re going.

from Milton Acorn, “The Squall”¹

History does not stop and go as if a century were a set of traffic lights. But we pretend that it does, and the turning of a millennium poses an irresistible temptation to look back down the road we’ve travelled, all the while convincing ourselves that we are peering into the future. For whether or not we think so, we do take direction from where we’ve been.

What direction, then, can we take from the 20th century on Prince Edward Island? Now that our physical and cultural isolation have evaporated, the province is left with the fact of globalism. In the way of most change, it presents both threat and opportunity. The integrated global economy, suggests political scientist Wayne MacKinnon, compromises the nation-state’s ability to set its own policy agenda, and that will fundamentally affect the economic and political relationships that have defined the last century. As Ottawa’s preoccupations turn outward, provinces and regions that have depended on — and resented — their client relationship with the federal government may lose priority in the affairs of state.² In this new “Gilded Age,” where capitalism reigns as triumphantly as it did in the 1890s and “multinational” describes business corporations rather than countries, small places such as Prince Edward Island will have to exploit whatever powers of jurisdiction they possess to carve out a niche for themselves. Without the power of self-determination, warned The Guardian in its millennial editorial, “we cannot control our destiny.”

Behind the melodrama of The Guardian’s statement lurks the opportunity. Potentially, there


is room for small, peripheral places within the emerging global economy. Computer technology has spawned the Internet, and, when it comes to the most precious commodity of all, information, the Internet has unmade geography. Physical distance from markets has always been a disability for Prince Edward Island. As its promoters constantly remind us, the Internet destroys distance. In the process, it erases the distinction between “centre” and “periphery,” leaving the Island as close to the rest of the world as New York or Hong Kong.

Such claims are in some measure mere puffery. Not every product travels well on the “information highway.” You can market seed potatoes through the Internet, but you cannot ship them that way. On the other hand, commodities such as money, stock shares, ideas, and know-how are extremely computer friendly.

It is Prince Edward Island’s challenge in the new century to define and exploit the specialized knowledge that it has to sell. In that sense, then, the most valuable resource in Prince Edward Island’s future may well be what in the past has been the stuff of cheap rhetoric, the quality of our people. Instead of exporting brains through outmigration, we can sell expertise. Perhaps the knowledge industry can provide the extra ingredient needed to push the Island economy into sustained prosperity. If so, a great post-Confederation quest will have been fulfilled.

That will not happen easily or automatically. The Internet gives the Island no particular advantage over any other jurisdiction anxious to exploit its possibilities; it merely helps to level the playing field. And there is much to be done. According to the 1996 census, Prince Edward Island had the lowest percentage of households in Canada owning personal computers.

Just as a 19th-century invention, the automobile, dominated the 20th century, so a 20th-century invention, the computer, bids fair to become the defining innovation of the 21st. Already, for example, it is shaping the pattern of where people work and, by implication, where they choose to live. The car (along with the Pavement) made it possible for Islanders to work outside their home community. The computer enables some people to work primarily out of their homes. Instead of Islanders “going to work” in the 21st century, will work simply go to them? If so, their choice of where to live will be much less constrained by the tidal flow of commuting. Will they decide to live in the countryside or in urban settings? And how will their decision affect our landscape?
The Internet creates its own “virtual communities” among specialized users, but, as long as people live near to one another there will be physical communities as well. Whether or not the residents of Island communities, rural and urban, will have much more in common than physical proximity will depend on what glue can be found to bind them. A sense of community will require a sense of common purpose and common interests, and a common belief that through their institutions people can exercise a measure of control over their collective lives.

The same might be said of this province. “We must become more self-reliant as a people,” the Throne Speech chided Islanders in 1981.\(^3\) The same phrases echoed through Throne Speeches across the 1990s. But self-reliance is always easier to talk about than to achieve. As advertisers prove every day, societies can be manipulated, and marketing — the world of image-makers and spin doctors — increasingly dominates politics, pushing issues into the background. And yet, as the Development Plan demonstrated, societies are not like cattle; they cannot be herded and they will not be led. The only practical way for governments to proceed, obviously, is one small step at a time. But for small steps to arrive at a destination requires a flexible, long-term strategy, and the political vision to stay the course.

“Self-reliance” is a rhetorical exaggeration. In an integrated global market, it is at best a relative term. Perhaps the best Prince Edward Island can hope for in the new century is to substitute “inter-dependency” for “dependency.” For a society that has learned to regard itself as a victim, that step toward equality would be a significant advance. Writing at the end of the 20th century, economic analyst Maurice Beaudin felt Prince Edward Island was making progress:

These rapid changes in Island society — its growing flexibility and new willingness to open up to and connect with the world at large through trade missions and telecommunications technology — have made the Island an economic laboratory in which the process of globalization can be observed working at accelerated speed. How well have Islanders fared under these conditions? On the strength of the evidence, many are showing that they can survive and even thrive in this brave new

\(^3\)Quoted in *Canadian Annual Review*, 1991.
Beaudin’s allusion to *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley’s chilling novel set in a soulless future, was probably accidental, but it does point the way to some less material considerations.

It is unlikely that land, the touchstone of Island history, will lose its importance in the decades to come, although its mythic qualities may change. The sandy red soil has always been the province’s principal resource, and it continues to underpin our two greatest industries: agriculture and tourism. On a small island, it bears repeating, land is a finite and fragile resource. Most of us have yet to concede just how fragile. Whether it is labelled environmentalism, sustainable development, or stewardship, the need to protect the land and the waters that surround it can only grow in importance. In the process, it will pose difficult choices between freedom and regulation, employment and preservation, private gain and the public good. In many ways, those choices are already upon us.

Fixed link or no, there will also be continuing relevance in being an island. Writers and artists continue to exploit the imaginative implications of that condition. Anthropologists and sociologists have long appreciated it. Political scientists and economists are now coming to grips with it. Islanders have always felt it. A small island is not just another small place. Islands *are* different. This is not a boast. It is not some special virtue. It is not a coping mechanism or an excuse. It is merely part of the historical and cultural landscape. The simple but powerful fact of islandness remains a critical part of our identity. In a world increasingly without boundaries, we would do well to nourish it.

In 1900, the last of the pioneer generation on Prince Edward Island was vanishing, costing Islanders their tangible connection to the transforming days of settlement. In 2000, tradition itself is dying. A whole generation of Islanders has now been raised within the post-Development Plan world, a generation which, for the first time in two hundred years, has virtually no contact with, or experience of, its inherited culture, except through what they learn in school and the fragmented memories of their parents. The cultural storyline that gives a society its uniqueness is at risk. Identity is not built on cultural amnesia. If it has no roots, it will be compelled to invent them.

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“It is a question of self or no self,” Cornelius Howatt once said of Prince Edward Island’s proposed entry into Confederation. To sustain their own sense of self, tomorrow’s Islanders will have to find a place somewhere along the continuum between the universal and the local, progress and nostalgia. Is that possible in this “brave new world”? It will take another century to find out.
Sources and Further Reading

While the original draft of this book was extensively footnoted, the footnotes have been omitted from the published version in the interest of reducing the book’s bulk. A fully referenced version of the text has been deposited in the Special Collections Room at the University of Prince Edward Island’s Robertson Library; we also hope to make the footnoted text available through the Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation’s website. Anyone still puzzled about my sources should contact me directly through the University of Prince Edward Island’s Department of History.

The following essay is a guide to the major sources used in the preparation of the various chapters. Unless otherwise noted, the place of publication for books mentioned in the essay below is Charlottetown.

ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td><em>Canadian Annual Review</em></td>
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<td>CYB</td>
<td><em>Canada Year Book</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>DCB</td>
<td><em>Dictionary of Canadian Biography</em> (University of Toronto Press)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PARO</td>
<td>Prince Edward Island Public Archives and Records Office, Charlottetown</td>
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<td>TIM</td>
<td><em>The Island Magazine</em></td>
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GENERAL

There really is no general history of Prince Edward Island during the 20th century. *Canada’s Smallest Province* (Prince Edward Island 1973 Centennial Commission, 1973), edited by F. W. P. Bolger, is now dated; in any case, it covers the post-Confederation period only through a handful of thematic essays. Douglas Baldwin’s *Abegweit: Land of the Red Soil* (Ragweed Press, 1985) adopts a similar approach for the modern era. Although later recast for general release, it was written as a Grade Six
social studies text. Errol Sharpe’s resolutely Marxist gloss on Island history, *A People’s History of Prince Edward Island* (Toronto: Steel Rail Publishing, 1976), is provocative, but superficial and error-prone. Among other general treatments, Frank MacKinnon’s *The Government of Prince Edward Island* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951) remains a fine book, but fits its 20th-century history into an analysis of how our institutions of governance have evolved. Another classic of Island history, A. H. Clark’s *Three Centuries and the Island* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), folds its historical insights into historical geography. The closest thing to a running commentary on 20th-century Prince Edward Island can be found in the yearly synopsis of Island affairs included in that remarkable chronicle of national life, the *Canadian Annual Review*. Founded in 1901, the CAR lapsed in 1938, but was revived in 1960.

E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993), struggles in fitting Prince Edward Island into its regional paradigm, partly because the book runs light on Island-based research and partly because the Island seldom fits. Nevertheless, the Forbes/Muise collection offers indispensable context and a needful antidote for Islanders’ tendency to believe their history begins and ends at the shoreline. While not always convinced by Forbes’ trenchant arguments, I almost invariably find them impressive, and on many issues have taken a lead from his *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989).

On a national level, I have tended to rely on the two-volume overview of “Canada’s century” provided by Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English in *Canada, 1900–1945* (1987), and, especially, *Canada since 1945: Power, Politics, and Provincialism* (rev. ed., 1989), both published by the University of Toronto Press. Prince Edward Island does not figure largely there.

While general histories are generally lacking, the body of historical writing dealing with specific aspects of 20th-century Prince Edward Island is steadily increasing, and I have been fortunate to draw upon it. Many of those works are discussed in the chapter notes that follow. The most useful, despite its superior tone, is *The Garden Transformed: Prince Edward Island, 1945–1980* (Ragweed Press, 1982), a collection of essays edited (and some of them written) by Verner Smitheram, David Milne, and Satadal Dasgupta. Other works track fewer themes over a larger span of years. Although it loses its critical edge as it approaches modern times, Wayne MacKinnon’s official history of the
provincial Liberals, *The Life of the Party* (Summers: Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island, 1973), is cautiously informative, richly anecdotal, and rhetorically eloquent. My account of the early development of Island tourism owes a great deal to Alan MacEachern’s excellent M. A. thesis, “No Island Is An Island: A History of Tourism on Prince Edward Island, 1970–1939” (M. A. Thesis, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ont., 1991); he will not agree with all that I have to say, but I subscribe to much of what he writes. Social historian David Weale’s sensitive evocation of traditional Prince Edward Island, most fully realized in *Them Times* (Institute of Island Studies, 1992), is invariably seductive. Hamstrung by their need for consensus, the numerous local histories tend to plod through the recent past. Not so *Belfast People* (Tea Hill Press, 1992), an oral history edited by Susan Hornby and Mary Ross; it resonates with the actual voices of rural Islanders. As a general resource, one returns time and again to the articles published in the Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation’s semiannual popular history journal, *The Island Magazine*, founded in 1976. One such article, Earle Kennedy’s “Tabling the Legislature: One Hundred Years of General Elections, 1893–1993,” 42(Fall/Winter 1997), has become a standard reference tool for me.

Although a project such as this in the end leans heavily on secondary sources, a great deal of original research was also necessary. Island newspapers were used systematically to zero in on key issues and historical “flashpoints” in Island history, and they were read intensively when filling historical gaps. The primary newspaper sources were *The Guardian* and the *Patriot*, both published in Charlottetown, the *Summerside Journal* (after 1951, the *Journal-Pioneer*), and, for the last third of the century, that highly opinionated Montague weekly, the *Eastern Graphic*.

Government sources were, of course, indispensable, particularly for the postwar period. The annual reports published in the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* are, in general, far more useful than the terse minutes of the Executive Council. Although some premiers are thinly represented in the “Premiers’ Papers” fonds assembled at the PARO (RG 25), others, such as Alex B. Campbell, have left a much more substantial record for posterity. In general, trolling through the Premiers’ papers can be rewarding for the well-informed researcher — if one is prepared to slog. The same might be said of the *Canada Year Book*, a yearly compendium of social and economic statistics originating from the federal government. Buried among its mountain of (mostly) national statistics are informative provincial breakdowns.
An historian can drown in statistics, and the various census returns for the century, now supplemented by endless Statistics Canada releases, provide ample opportunity to do that. But they tell us important things, too. One of the best compilations, from an historical standpoint, is F. H. Leacy, ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Statistics Canada, 1983). The Economics, Statistics, and Fiscal Analysis Division of the Prince Edward Island Department of Finance and Tourism has performed a similar service on a strictly provincial basis with successive editions of its “Prince Edward Island: Historical Statistical Review.”

Of course, tremendous gaps remain in our understanding of the 20th century on Prince Edward Island. Only more research, and more writing, will make our task easier.

**CHAPTER ONE: THE DOORSTEP OF THE CENTURY**

The poetic epigraph from J. H. Fletcher’s “Ode to Prince Edward Island” that begins the chapter was published in the *Prince Edward Island Magazine* 2(January 1901)11. Although now read chiefly for its antiquarian articles about the Island’s pioneer days, the *Prince Edward Island Magazine* is also a valuable source for turn-of-the-century news, views, and issues. This chapter draws extensively on contemporary newspapers as well. A little-remembered but revealing profile of the province was published as a special supplement, titled “The Garden of the Gulf: Picturesque Prince Edward Island’s Prosperity Portrayed,” in the 30 November 1900 edition of the *Canadian Trade Review*.

Much good work has been done on the Island’s major ethnic groups, although few studies trace the persistence of ethnic identity into the 20th century. An exception is Georges Arsenault’s *The Island Acadians, 1720–1980*, trans. by Sally Ross (Ragweed Press, 1989). For the references to the Island’s Mi’kmaq, I have used principally Alan Andrew MacEachern, “Theophilus Stewart and the Plight of the Mi’kmaq,” TIM 28(Fall/Winter 1990); for the Lebanese, David Weale, *A Stream Out of Lebanon* (Institute of Island Studies, 1988); and for the Island’s black community, Jim Hornby, *Black Islanders* (Institute of Island Studies, 1991).

The 20th-century interface between religion and politics is tackled forthrightly in Wayne MacKinnon’s *Life of the Party*. The theory that the Roman Catholic hierarchy exercised undue
influence over public affairs in the province is articulated in Frank MacKinnon, *Church Politics and Education: The P.E.I. Experience* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1995). It is not MacKinnon’s best work. The examples of patronage so rife in the various Premiers’ Papers is supplemented by the 1890s correspondence of Richard Hunt (PARO 2654).

It is a continuing astonishment that no comprehensive history has yet been written of the Island’s most essential industry, agriculture. The details about the birth of the dairy industry are largely culled from Elizabeth Cran and Marian Bruce, “The Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island,” a manuscript slated for publication by the Institute of Island Studies sometime in 2000. The Prince Edward Island Railway is as ill-served as agriculture in Island historiography. We know a great deal about how the railway’s construction ushered the Island into Confederation, rather less about its rolling stock, trackage, and railway stations, and next to nothing about its role in Island life. My brief account is culled from federal reports and statistics in the CYB. The fisheries summary owes much to research published in Kennedy Wells, *The Fishery of Prince Edward Island* (Ragweed Press, 1986), a useful but historically incomplete study. The basics on Islanders’ involvement with the Boer War are provided in Darin MacKinnon and Boyde Beck, “Islanders and the Boer War,” TIM 26(Fall/Winter 1989).


**CHAPTER TWO: PROSPERITY’S ECHO**

The smug quatrain from H. E. Mathewson’s “Prince Edward Island,” which provides the epigraph for this chapter, echoes a standard joke about Islanders’ insularity. Asked by a stranger where she (or he) is from, the Islander responds, “The Island.” “Which island?” the stranger asks. “Prince Edward Island! What other ‘Island’ is there?”

Andrew Robb profiles Arthur Peters in Vol. XIII of the DCB (1994). Mary Cullen ably covers “The Transportation Issue” in *Canada’s Smallest Province*. I have supplemented her summary with

The last word has yet to be written about out-migration from Prince Edward Island. (The attempt to encourage immigration to the province in the 20th century has not been treated at all.) Alan A. Brookes deals only with the first phase of outmigration — and the most popular destination — in “Islanders in the Boston States, 1850–1900,” TIM 2(Spring/Summer 1977). The best Island treatment of the harvest excursions is Susan Hornby’s “Memories of a Golden Land,” TIM 7(Fall/Winter 1979). Maritimers’ annual forays to the lumberwoods are both explained and evoked in folklorist Edward D. “Sandy” Ives’ groundbreaking work on Island songmaker Larry Gorman. He gives a concise overview of the phenomenon in “‘The Boys of the Island’: P.I.’s in the Maine Lumberwoods,” TIM 16(Fall/Winter 1984). The complete run of *The Maple Leaf* (1907–1947), makes fascinating reading. Andrew Robb appraises its value in “Michael A. McInnis, *The Maple Leaf*, and Migration from Prince Edward Island,” TIM 17(Spring/Summer 1985). The outmigration microcosm represented by the Creed family was culled from the correspondence in PARO 3098. My thanks to Carter Jeffrey for providing background on the “lost” community of Lauretta.

The discussion of the automobile issue owes much to Sasha Mullally’s “Fad of Millionaires and Fools: The Automobile on Prince Edward Island, 1905–1919,” a paper delivered in Montague, Prince Edward Island, in March 1999 as part of the Island Lecture Series; and to Deborah Stewart, “The Island Meets the Auto,” TIM 5(Fall/Winter 1978). My major secondary source for the history of prohibition on Prince Edward Island has been Mark C. Davis, “‘I’ll Drink to That’: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition in the Maritime Provinces, 1900–1930” (Ph. D. dissertation, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 1990), which contains substantial Island material. Joanne E. Veer’s “Feminist Forbears: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in Canada’s Maritime Provinces, 1875–1900” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, N.B., 1994) has much to offer on both the anti-liquor crusade and women’s rights. The several references to the Wyatt family in this
and other chapters are taken from Deirdre Kessler, *A Century on Spring Street* (Indigo Press, 1999).


**Chapter Three: “Weary with the World’s Woe”**

While there is a growing body of literature dealing with Canada’s role in the Great War, there is very little about Prince Edward Island’s involvement, save J. Clinton Morrison’s *Hell Upon Earth: A Personal Account of Prince Edward Island Soldiers in the Great War* (Summerside: J. Clinton Morrison, 1995), which is based largely on diary entries and letters from soldiers. Bare-bones unit histories were reprinted in the Cummins Atlas Co.’s *Atlas of Prince Edward Island, Canada and the World*, published in Toronto in 1928. For a general history of Canada’s involvement, I have relied principally on Desmond Morton and J. L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914–1919* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989). The best estimate about the
number of Islanders who enlisted for service appears to be the one provided by C. A. Sharpe in “Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914–1918: A Regional Analysis,” Journal of Canadian Studies 18(Winter 1983–84)4.

The extracts from the war poetry of Frank Walker are taken from Mary F. Gaudet, ed., From a Stretcher Handle: The World War One Journal and Poems of Private Frank Walker (Institute of Island Studies, 2000). The chapter title is taken from a line in Walker’s poem “From the Somme.” Folklorist John Cousins of Bloomfield loaned me the wartime letters of Robert Warren from his private archive. Percy MacNevin’s war journal can be found at the PARO.


CHAPTER FOUR: “SEED POTATOES AND SILVER FOXES” (AND RUM)

On political matters, third-party politicking is ably summarized by Andrew Robb in The Garden Transformed. John A. Dewar’s split with the Conservative Party is chronicled by Katherine Dewar in “John A. Dewar: The Principled Maverick,” TIM 43(Spring/Summer 1998). There has been little
work done on labour issues here. I am grateful for access to a draft manuscript, “Island Federation: The Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour,” prepared by David Frank of the University of New Brunswick, and Heidi MacDonald, now with the University of Lethbridge. The joke about road crews is retold in David Weale’s *A Long Way from the Road* (Acorn Press, 1998).


Catherine Lyle Cleverdon’s pioneering *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950) has come under increasing fire in recent decades. However, it remains the most detailed account of the women’s suffrage movement on Prince Edward Island. I have been able to revise her treatment slightly through further research, and with assistance from Baldwin’s *Abegweit: Land of the Red Soil*, Wayne MacKinnon’s *The Life of the Party*, and personal glimpses provided in a history term paper by Edith Daly, “Women and the Franchise,” dated 28 March 1979. For access to the latter, I am grateful to her professor, Dr. David Weale.


Geographer F. A. Stilgenbauer’s period pieces about Prince Edward Island during the 1920s are “The Geography of Prince Edward Island” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1929) and “Geographic Aspects of the Prince Edward Island Fur Industry,” *Economic Geography* 3(1927). The rapid development of the seed potato industry was profiled in a Special Edition of the *Summerside Journal* on 20 June 1923; the early history of the Potato Growers’ Association appeared in the annual report of the provincial Department of Agriculture in 1929.
The fragment from a temperance poem that starts section 9 was recited from memory by Lorne Stevenson of New Glasgow for Reg Thompson for Thompson’s radio series, “The Bygone
Days.” The most detailed depictions of Island rumrunning are found in a delightful trio of self-
published books by Geoff and Dorothy Robinson: *The Nellie J. Banks* (1970); *It Came by the Boat
Load* (1983); and *Duty Free* (1992). My account of Church Union on Prince Edward Island is based
on James D. Cameron’s “The Garden Distressed: Church Union and Dissent on Prince Edward
Island,” TIM 30(Fall/Winter 1991) and 31(Spring/Summer 1992), a distillation of his Ph. D.
dissertation at Queen’s University. The classic treatment of Maritime Union remains Ernest R.
1979).

The story of Angus and the telephone was related to Boyde Beck by Edwin Beck, Montague.
Walter C. Auld, *Voices of the Island: History of the Telephone on Prince Edward Island* (Halifax:
Nimbus Publishing, 1985) and A. Kenneth Bell, *Getting the Lights* (Prince Edward Island Museum
and Heritage Foundation, 1989) are labours of love, but of limited utility. On the other hand Betty
Large and Tom Crothers provide a wonderful anecdotal history of CFCY Radio in *Out of Thin Air
* (Applecross Press, 1989). Jim Hornby has much to say about Island fiddling in “The Fiddle and the
Island: Fiddling Tradition on Prince Edward Island” (M.A. thesis, Memorial University of
Newfoundland, St. John’s, 1983). I am also indebted to ethno-musicologist Ken Perlman for sharing
extracts and insights from his unpublished manuscript, “Couldn’t Have a Wedding Without the
Fiddler.”

CHAPTER FIVE: SOMETHIN’ DESPERATE

The opening vignette in this chapter and part of the section on the co-operative movement are
borrowed from my own *The History of St. Dunstan’s University, 1855–1956* (Board of Governors
of St. Dunstan’s University and Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation, 1989). The
only sustained examination of the Great Depression’s impact on Prince Edward Island is Leonard
John Cusack’s “The Prince Edward Island People and the Great Depression, 1930–1935” (M.A.
Thesis, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, N.B., 1972). While I do not agree with Cusack’s underlying thesis, that Islanders were resolute *laissez-faire*-ists until the Depression forced them to embrace government intervention, it is a valuable work in many ways. Cusack also passed along the anecdote about W. J. P. MacMillan’s confrontation with R. B. Bennett over federal relief funding, which Cusack has tentatively fitted to the circumstances of fall 1933. The federal trend towards collectivism is discussed by L. M. Grayson and Michael Bliss in their introduction to *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R. B. Bennett, 1930–1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

A facsimile edition of Clarence F. Morrissey’s terse but informative diary, which covers almost half a century of local affairs in West Prince, was published as *C.F.’s Diary, 1913–1952*. My copy was supplied by Reginald Porter, who also provided the lyrics to Alec Shea’s “Tignish Breakwater” from his own recording of Shea singing it. Reg Thompson dug into his personal archive of interviews with Islanders to supply me with oral testimony about how Islanders coped with the Depression: Helen Herring, on getting ahead – if one had a job; Donald MacKay, on hauling gravel. David Weale’s *Them Times* supplied the story about flour-sack bloomers. A stranger stopped Weale on the street in Victoria to tell him about the homesick boy from Breadalbane. John Eldon Green recounted his encounter with Depression-era hobos in “Feeding the Hungry, Clothing the Naked, and Comforting the Afflicted,” a talk given as part of the Island Lecture Series in Charlottetown on 12 April 1999.

The story of how the Antigonish Movement came to Prince Edward Island is told most memorably in J. T. Croteau’s memoir, *Cradled in the Waves* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1951). His work is updated and deepened in Cran and Bruce, “The Co-operative History of Prince Edward Island.” Folklorist John Cousins provided the confidential letter about price-fixing in the lobster industry.

The fall of W. K. Rogers is retold in Large and Crothers, *Out of Thin Air*. My account of the founding of the National Park follows closely the version given by Alan MacEachern in “The Greening of Green Gables: Establishing the Prince Edward Island National Park,” TIM 45(Spring/Summer 1999). The “thirty jackasses and a Camel” joke was told to me at Seniors’ Expo in Mill River, 1 June 1999.
CHAPTER SIX: WAR PICTURES

English professor A. P. Campbell based his poem “The Student-Veteran,” which supplies the epigraph for this chapter, on his experiences Overseas during the war. It appeared in the May 1948 edition of the *St. Dunstan’s Red and White*. Contemporary newspapers (and commemorative issues published in recent years) supplied the bulk of the research for the chapter, but it has been supplemented by other material. General context was provided by J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War, 1939–1945* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, [1989]). Enlistment statistics were culled from the Bureau of Current Affairs, *The Province of Prince Edward Island* (Ottawa: Department of National Defense, [1954]).

Much of the material for the thumbnail sketches of Island-based army units was provided by F. R. Tripp, *Canada’s Army in World War II* (Toronto: Unitrade, 1983). One has only to win the confidence of an Island veteran to hear stories about their experiences in the Second World War. One of my informants was my own father. Much decorated Spitfire pilot H. Charles Trainor, now of Stratford, gave generously of his time to recount some of his war experiences. Others’ exploits have been recorded in print. “Bill Reid’s War” and “Don MacLean’s War,” annotated interviews with an infantry commander and bomber pilot, respectively, were prepared for publication in *TIM* 38(Fall/Winter 1995) and 39(Spring/Summer 1996) by Earle Kennedy and Boyd Beck. J. Angus MacLean’s escape from Occupied Europe is recounted in *Making It Home: Memoirs of J. Angus MacLean* (Ragweed Press, 1998).


The coming of the BCATP to West Prince is chronicled in Allan and Jessie Graham, “Prince


A framed copy of aviator Joe Ready’s farewell letter to his family hangs in the home of his sister, Mrs. Kathleen McIvor, now of Summerside. It is excerpted here with her kind permission. Brigitte VanVliet wrote of her town’s liberation by the Canadians in “Here Come Our Liberators,” *Guardian*, 8 May 1985.

**Chapter Seven: When the Wind Blows...**

The annual reports of several provincial government departments figured largely in the research for this chapter, especially those for the Departments of Fisheries (after 1956), Highways and Public Works, Industry and Natural Resources, and Agriculture. John Angus Weir’s update on the co-operative movement on Prince Edward Island, “Rural Reconstruction in Prince Edward Island: An Evaluation” (Ph.D. dissertation, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Ind., 1964) is rich in both statistics and analysis. The quantitative data in such sources tends to bear out the general paradigm of “the Break” that David Weale has posited in his writings, which draw mostly on oral sources. My approach to the Atlantic Adjustment Grants follows Forbes in Challenging the Regional Stereotype.

Douglas Boylan passed along David Stewart’s story about his father’s cabinet and their luncheon foray to the Gentleman’s Club.


I am indebted to folklorist John Cousins for a number of illustrative stories from West Prince about the coming of the Pavement and electricity. Sandy Ives’ brilliant memoir/anthology, Drive Dull Care Away: Folksongs from Prince Edward Island (Institute of Island Studies, 1999), supplied the stories about Charlie Gorman and Edmund Doucette. Heath Macquarrie’s memoir, Red Tory Blues (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), quotes Walter Shaw on the Rural Electrification program. The early days of Island television are recalled in Large and Crothers, Out of Thin Air. Bob Large, a co-founder of CFCY-TV, confirmed a few details for me over the telephone.

William Janssen’s essay in The Garden Transformed is very good on Island agriculture after the Second World War, and it figures largely in the postwar chapters of this book. The best source about the Island’s Dutch immigrants is Brigitte VanVliet’s compilation of family histories: We Came, We Saw, We Stayed: The Story of the Dutch in Prince Edward Island (Summerside: Dutch Canadian

CHAPTER EIGHT: . . . THE CRADLE WILL ROCK

The opening vignette draws on contemporary newspaper reports, supplemented with additional commentary by Bill Glen of the provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Although they have yet to be indexed in any comprehensive way, the Premier’s Papers of Walter R. Shaw and Alex B. Campbell, respectively, constitute an extremely valuable source for the 1960s. Shaw was interviewed by the P. C. History Project in February 1978 (Subseries 4, PARO 3688/162), but by then he was very elderly and his memory was faulty in places. The interview by the Council of Maritime Premiers Oral History Project with Alex B. Campbell, conducted after his retirement from politics (the transcript is in PARO 4073/2), is far more comprehensive and revealing. The anecdote about Shaw and the pumpkin soup was supplied in an e-mail from Douglas Boylan on 10 December 1999; the delightful story about Shaw and the 1964 liquor law amendments came from Boylan as well, in an interview on 6 July 1999.

The key secondary source for this period is The Garden Transformed, particularly Milne’s provocative “Politics in a Beleaguered Garden”; Smitheram’s thoughtful assault on school consolidation; and Mary Olga McKenna’s “Higher Education in Transition, 1945–1980.” The fierce controversy over the creation of the University of Prince Edward Island has now given way to arguments over its telling. I have supplemented McKenna with, among other sources, my own short summary in The History of St. Dunstan’s University, L. George Dewar’s memoir, Prescription for a Full Life (Summerside: L. George Dewar, 1993), and Frank MacKinnon’s bitter polemic, Church Politics and Education.

A useful source for the industrial development debacle in Georgetown is Philip Mathias, Forced Growth: Five Studies of Government Involvement in the Development of Canada (Toronto:

The most detailed account of the creation of the Confederation Centre is *Honour the Founders! Enjoy the Arts!* (Fathers of Confederation Buildings Trust, 1990). One of the 1964 Centennial activities was an essay contest exploring life in 1864. Her difficulty in finding information for her entry inspired librarian (and intermittent diarist) Dorothy Cullen to keep a special 1964 diary for the benefit of readers in the 21st century. My old friend Dennis Curley, her nephew, shared it with me.


**Chapter Nine: The Struggle for Development**

The opening vignette is a personal recollection of working on the footings for the Grewal Die Cast Products plant, one of the Industrial Park’s most spectacular failures. Many of the Development Plan sources listed above are relevant here as well. In addition, there is much to gain from examining the
text of the agreement itself (*Agreement Covering Development Plan for Prince Edward Island*), and the host of planning studies, program guides, and evaluations that it spawned. They do not make easy reading. The annual reports of various provincial government departments and agencies help track the Plan’s impact, for example, the Department of Tourism (in any of its several twinnings with other departments), the Department of Agriculture, Department of Welfare (later Social Services), the Prince Edward Island Housing Authority, the Land Development Commission, and Industrial Enterprises Incorporated. They do not make easy reading either.


As a follow-up to the 1972 Royal Commission on Land Ownership and Land Use, I found useful Esther Kienholz, *The Land-Use Impacts of Recent Legislation in P.E.I.* (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1980); and John McClellan, *Rules of the Game: Land Use and Land Ownership on Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Institute of Island Studies, 1990). Judith Adler’s tourism essay in *The Garden Transformed* outlines an inherent tension between “tourism” and “pastoral” that is to some extent artificial, but her reading is faithful to the era. Tourism is a principal target in Harry Baglole and David Weale’s collection of BS-CH editorials, letters to the editor, squibs, press releases, parodies, poems, and briefs, *Cornelius Howatt: Superstar!* (Summerside: Williams and Crue, 1974). I also quote from a Baglole piece that was not anthologized: “The Brothers and Sisters of Cornelius

For the growth of public sector unions and the Prince Edward Island slant on collective bargaining, see C. Gordon Simmons, “Collective Bargaining in the Public Service on Prince Edward Island” (Study for the Prince Edward Island Government, 1977), and a more recent update, Sheila Lund MacDonald, “Collective Bargaining in the Provincial Public Service: A Case Study of Prince Edward Island” (Master’s Research Paper, Industrial Relations Department, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, 1990). Background was gleaned for some of the developments in health care, a very under-researched field on Prince Edward Island, from Katherine Dewar’s forthcoming history of the Prince County Hospital’s Nursing School and the “Doctors United for A Single Hospital” fonds at PARO (RG 3487).

While they cannot be blamed for any inaccuracies in my account of the “Back to the Land” movement, three participants, Anne McCallum, Morley Pinsent, and Nancy Murphy, willingly shared their perceptions with me. I borrowed the term “bourgeois bohemians” and “Harrowsmith generation” from my colleagues Sasha Mullally and Boyde Beck, respectively. The Institute of Man and Resources is chronicled in Alan MacEachern, Energetic: A History of the Institute of Man and Resources (Institute of Island Studies, 2000). The anecdote about the Provincial Conservation Association came, independently, from both Dr. Ian MacQuarrie and Professor Daryl Guignion. Dan McAskill remembered the origins and context of the Island Nature Trust for me in a telephone interview on 7 February 2000, and directed me to “Origin of the Trust,” Island Nature Trust Update (Special Edition, [1993]). J. Angus MacLean wrote engagingly, if selectively, about his foray into provincial politics in Making It Home. Alton MacLean’s introduction to his song “Unemployment Insurance” is reproduced, verbatim, in Ives, Drive Dull Care Away.

**CHAPTER TEN: THE TEMPER OF OUR TIMES**

The recent past is perilous ground, where the border between history and reportage blurs, and the historian must tread warily there. In chronicling the last twenty years of the century, I have been
guided by my own sense of what is historically significant.

While Angus MacLean was able to publish his own, albeit self-censored, version of his political career, the late Joe Ghiz awaits his biographer. The Joseph A. Ghiz fonds at the PARO contains a crosssection of papers from Ghiz’s career. Charlottetown lawyer David Hooley recounted for me his exchange with Joe Ghiz when seeking to recruit him for the Liberal leadership race. Rick Coles, Douglas Boylan, and Andrew Wells, among many, shared their personal reflections about Ghiz and his style. The interpretation presented here mixes these opinions with my own.

Other individuals have been generous with their time in providing opinions and information about other topics in this chapter. Alexandra McCallum of the P.E.I. Multicultural Council, Charlottetown, talked to me about systemic discrimination in an interview on 6 March 2000. David N. MacSwain, Area Program Officer for Prince Edward Island with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, led me through the PVYn crisis. David Younker and Brian Gillis of the provincial Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture, and the Environment provided the latest fisheries statistics.

On issues pertaining to land and land use, I found a great deal of valuable discussion and background in Douglas B. Boylan (chairman), “Everything Before Us”: Report of the Royal Commission on the Land (Queen’s Printer, 1990). The Round Table on the Land, whose findings were published as Cultivating Island Solutions: Report of the Round Table on Resource Land Use and Stewardship (Queen’s Printer, 1997), is chock-full of insights and information as well. The “longer French fries” example came from a talk by William Glen and Jean-Paul Arsenault, “History Repeats Itself; A Review of Land Use Patterns on PEI,” which was delivered in Charlottetown as part of the 1999 Island Lecture Series.

The volume of statistics available to the researcher has grown exponentially over the past twenty years. For this chapter, besides the general sources mentioned earlier, I have drawn on agricultural statistics published yearly by the provincial Department of Agriculture, the Province’s more general Annual Statistical Review, and Maurice Beaudin, ed., The Economic Region of Prince Edward Island (Moncton: Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development, 1998). Statistics about Atlantic Canadians’ religious beliefs and practices derive from G. A. Rawlyk, Is Jesus Your Personal Savior? In Search of Canadian Evangelicism in the 1990s (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996). Statistical information about Island women was largely

A yearly snapshot of the Island government’s debt problems during the 1980s and 1990s is provided by the provincial Auditor General’s annual reports. Local media charted the public response to the government’s austerity program. The invaluable Special Collections Room at UPEI’s Robertson Library has indexed newspaper stories dealing with many recent issues, including the closure of CFB Summerside and the Fixed Link. Most of the anti-Link arguments are captured in Lorraine Begley, ed., Crossing that Bridge: A Critical Look at the Prince Edward Island Fixed Link (Ragweed Press, 1993), which seethes with anger and indignation at federal “skullduggery.” Copthorne Macdonald’s Bridging the Strait: The Story of the Confederation Bridge Project (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997) is less polemical. Ian G. Johnstone’s “The Politics of the Link: An Examination of the Fixed Connection in Prince Edward Island” (M.A. thesis, St. Mary’s University, Halifax, N.S., 1995) is cynical. The closing questions about the impact of the Confederation Bridge are really my own.

CONCLUSION: UNMAKING GEOGRAPHY

Wayne MacKinnon’s observations about the impact of globalism on Canadian federalism were made in his essay, “Dependency and Underdevelopment on Prince Edward Island,” in Competing Strategies of Socio-Economic Development for Small Islands. The Guardian’s millennial editorial
was published in its 31 December 1999 edition. Beaudin’s comments come toward the end of his *The Economic Region of Prince Edward Island*.

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