

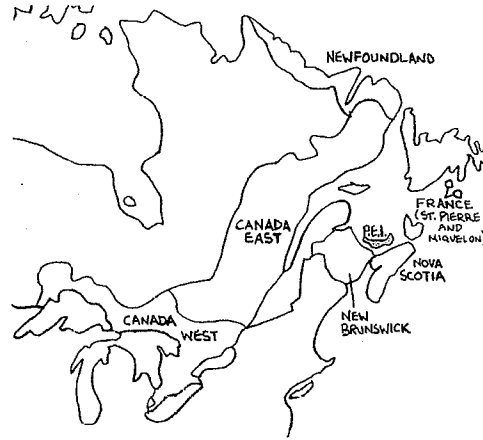
# Prince Edward Island

## – Background

Population (circa 1860): 80,000

Urban centre: Charlottetown (7,000)

Key figures: John Hamilton Gray (1812-1887)  
Edward Palmer (1809-1889)  
William H. Pope (1825-1879)  
Andrew A. Macdonald (1829-1912)  
George Coles (1810-1875)  
Thomas H. Haviland (1822-1895)  
Edward Whelan (1824-1867)



Made up of small, agricultural communities, Prince Edward Island is only one hundred miles long and thirty miles wide. The population is equally divided between Irish Catholics and Scottish Protestants. Largely self-sufficient, many of the residents have never been off the island. During the winter months Prince Edward Island is completely cut off by ice from the mainland. Farming, with the island's rich and fertile lands, is the main source of income. A great many people live on agricultural exports (potatoes, cereal and livestock) to America's New England states. Though a number of residents are fishermen, the United States dominates the island's fishery.

Charlottetown is the colony's urban centre. In fact, no one on the island lives more than a day's journey from the city. With rich church architecture and the impressive Legislature Building, Charlottetown is the colonial capital.

Sixty percent of the farmers on the island rent their land (they are tenant farmers). These islanders rent farms from people who live in Britain (absentee landlords). For over one hundred years, these tenant farmers have been clearing and working the land they do not own and sending rent to their landlords in Britain. Prince Edward Island wants Great Britain to force the landlords to sell their farms at a reasonable price, to the colonists.

After three to four generations as tenant farmers, resentment has grown and left the islanders suspicious of outsiders. To many, Ottawa is as distastefully distant as Imperial London. As an island, a railway link with the other British North American colonies is not an issue. Ultimately, Prince Edward Island is content to remain independent and detached from British North American society.

Though Prince Edward Island does not directly border on the United States and islanders do not fear an American attack, Britain's changing relationship with the colonies is of some concern. Great Britain's reluctance to defend the colonies in the future has made closer ties between the British North American provinces important to security.

# Prince Edward Island – Viewpoints

Drawn from P.B. Waite, *Confederation, 1854-1867* (Holt, 1972) and Waite, *Pre-Confederation* (Prentice, 1965).

1. **“Prospects of Confederation in Prince Edward Island”**  
(Charlottetown *Islander*, 6 January 1865)

The majority of people are under the impression that Confederation would ruin the Island. They have been told that if the Island should be united with the other Provinces, under a Federal government, the people would be heavily taxed—that they would be marched away to the frontiers of Upper Canada to fight for the Canadians; and that the completion of the intercolonial Railroad would bring the produce of Canada to St. John and Halifax, and thus injure the farmers of P.E. Island. Firmly believing that all these evils would come upon them were they to enter the Confederation the people, with but few exceptions, are unanimous in the cry “away with Confederation—we will have nothing to do with it.” Confederation, in the terms of the resolutions of the [Quebec] Conference, will, we assume, at the coming Session, be almost unanimously rejected in both Houses of the Legislature of this Island.

2. **On Union**  
(Charlottetown *Examiner*, 22 August 1864)

Shall we, then, think seriously about a Federal Union. We believe we ought. Great Britain is constantly urging upon our attention a Union of some kind. The only kind of Union we can have is a Federal one. That means little or nothing short of separation from Great Britain. . . . If we make up our minds for an Independent Federation. . . . we must prepare to bid goodbye to old Mother England.

3. **On debt**  
(Charlottetown *Examiner*, 22 October 1864)

Canada proposes to deal with the Maritime Provinces in the most broad and liberal spirit. She emphatically declares that the burden of her debt shall fall upon Upper and Lower Canada—and upon *Upper and Lower Canada alone*.

4. **Edward Palmer at the Quebec Conference: Fears for the Future of Prince Edward Island**  
(Charlottetown *Monitor*, 15 December 1864)

I fear our little Island is to be sacrificed [in the Federal Union]. The Canadian ministers or their leaders are clever and ingenious men. They are in this position: their government must stand or fall in the accomplishment or failure of the Union. . . . The paltry proportion of representation we are *now* likely to have in both branches of the [central] Legislature is little more than nominal, and leaves us at the mercy of the other Provinces. . . . In short, I am thoroughly disgusted at the course things have taken here and would be disposed to “sit. . . . and weep” for years, if I thought our Island people would be taken in by the scheme.