

# TRADITIONS OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

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PRINCE Edward Island as a province of the Dominion and Charlottetown as its capital city have each some peculiar features which may be mentioned at the outset of this article. The name of this province is the longest attached to any province of Canada. Think, too, of all the trouble we had to get it and change it and settle it. And if it is true that nothing is settled until it is settled rightly, then it would appear that some further work in nomenclature yet remains to be done.

As everyone knows who knows anything about this province, its true and proper name is that by which the people who live there call it, and that is simply "The Island." That is what Island-born people, whether at home or abroad, call it. Unfortunately the majority of those who were born here have chosen to reside abroad,—a great mistake on their part, for this is a goodly land to live in. Many of those who live abroad come back to see us in our ideal summer time, for they love the Island and like to revisit its red shores and rolling uplands. "Yes, we've come back to the Island," they say as they greet us. And many who have gone away in their youthful springtime and failed to come back living, have made a last request that their final repose when their life journey was over should be in some country churchyard in The Island. These at least come to stay; while other native born sons and daughters, when they come to visit us, arrive a little later than the birds in the springtime, and take their departure before the birds wing their flight southward in the autumn. But this by the way.

Speaking of names for the Island reminds the writer that a local poet has said or sung of it that "three nations gave it names of grace." We presume the three nations were the Micmac, the French and the British. The Micmac name, before the predatory white man came hither, was Abegweit, a name still retained by one of our famous athletic clubs. "Resting on the wave" is given as a more or less accurate interpretation of the mellifluous Micmac word. France gave it the saintly name of Isle St. Jean. After the

British conquest it was known for a time as The Island of St. John, which was merely a translation of the French name. But because there was a St. John, New Brunswick, not very far away, and a St. John's in Newfoundland, and postal troubles arose in consequence, it was decided by those in authority again to change the name of the Island. Just then we had a narrow escape from having it designated "New Ireland"! Think of that. But we must remember that there was then a New England under the British flag, also a New Scotland under its Latin name of Nova Scotia. Why not a New Ireland, if only to duplicate in the new world the United Kingdom of the old world?

But destiny forbade, and New England in time became hostile to Old England. The thoughts of those in authority also changed in regard to names. Whether they became less devout than before, or more enamoured of royalty, we know not, but this they did; they relegated saintly names to the background and resolved upon a princely designation. Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, was of royal blood and—although they did not know it then—he was destined to be the father of Victoria, the Great and Good, which has since proved to be a sufficient title to distinction if other claims thereto were wanting. Perhaps had they known of this, they might have shortened the name by one word and one-third, and simply made it "Prince Edward", which would have saved tons of ink and reams of paper also in writing and addressing letters since their day.

When it came to naming the three counties into which The Island was divided, the idea of doing honour to royalty was still uppermost and dominant. The most eastern county was therefore named Kings, the central one Queens and the western Prince. And as a county must have a county town with a name of more or less note and significance, the head-quarters of Kings county was named Georgetown in honour of the reigning Sovereign, while the county town of Prince county was named Princetown, and that of Queens county was designated Charlottetown in honour of Queen Charlotte. But as if this was not enough, they surrounded each of these towns with a royalty of spacious area and made the said royalty the common property of the townspeople, to serve them in the matter of fuel for their fires and pasturage for their cattle.

As for Charlottetown, those in charge of the matter proceeded to lay out a street along its water front which they named Water Street, and then laid out another and broader street at right angles across Water Street northward through the centre of the town to the town limits. This was loyally named Great George Street. Then they paralleled Great George with Queen Street on its left

and Prince Street on its right, and crossed the royal trio at right angles with King Street. Having further decorated the town with a Queen Square in its centre and elsewhere with a King Square, the namers doubtless concluded that they had duly impressed their own and future generations with the meaning and importance of royalty and loyalty. This was all well enough in its way, but the name Charlottetown might well have been shortened to "Charlotte." Every one knows a town when he sees one, especially if he lives in it. Besides, the Island capital has been a full-fledged city for generations past. A city, and a capital city, it was long before Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Victoria or Fredericton attained that dignity,—just as the Island was a province years or even generations before New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta or British Columbia had a legalised existence as provinces.

And it is one of our further claims to distinction that we have here in the Island one of the oldest legislatures in North or South America. It dates from 1773. It is older than the Congress of the United States or the famous Declaration of Independence. Most of the state legislatures across the international border are mere youths, and some of them only babies in swaddling clothes, compared with the venerable Legislative Assembly which holds its annual sessions in the Island capital. In the one hundred and fifty years of its history it has grappled with and legislated upon almost all the questions which any legislature in British America has been called upon to consider. One of the first of these efforts was to regulate the liquor traffic. Twenty odd years ago we ceased from trying to regulate, and passed the first law since the Dominion was founded to prohibit the sale for beverage purposes within the province. And on January 22nd of the present year a plebiscite was taken to decide whether or not the importation and exportation of liquors should be longer permitted.

Other big questions dealt with by our legislature in its early days were Catholic emancipation, absentee and delinquent landlordism, the introduction of responsible government, sanctioning the treaty of reciprocity with the United States in 1854, repeated extensions of the voting franchise, the building of railway lines, the abolition of the Legislative Council by absorbing it into the Legislative Assembly, and the union with the Dominion of Canada. The last of these great questions was viewed hesitantly and with a measure of apprehension in the Island, as it was in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. It was not until 1873, six years after the sister provinces across the straits had joined the union, and one

hundred years from the foundation of our legislature, that the Island became part and parcel of the Canadian Federation. The great inducements which overcame all the many objections to the union were the assumption of our then formidable railway debt, and the promise of daily steam communication for mails and passengers between the Island railway and the railways of the mainland. This promise was thought to be of the most vital importance, as the Island was then isolated, ice-bound and winter-cursed during the five colder months of the year.

Otherwise the financial terms of the agreement were found to be sadly inadequate for decent provincial housekeeping. And the promise of daily steam communication with the mainland was not kept. It is true that an attempt was made to keep up winter communication from Georgetown to Pictou, first with one ice-breaking steamer and later with two, but it was constantly being interrupted sometimes for a week or two weeks at a time, while in the year 1905 no crossing was made by the winter steamer for a full month. At that time, owing to a drought, the preceding summer hay had been a short crop; cattle were starving in the barns, while hundreds of tons of hay bought by the provincial government to relieve the distress, were side-tracked in cars at Pictou, some of which did not reach the Island until the grass had grown. Passengers who crossed the Straits during that dreary month, and any mail matter that came or went across, were carried in little amphibious ice-boats fitted with runners, oars and sails, and plying between Cape Traverse, P. E. I., and Cape Tormentine, N. B.

There was a squadron or fleet of these craft owned and operated by the Dominion Government—operated only in part officially, however. Most of the passengers—all the able-bodied ones in fact—usually worked their passage. They, like the crew, were equipped with straps attached to the boats, working like horses to pull the boat across the snowy ice-fields. When open water was found, they launched the boat therein and rowed or sailed it; then meeting ice again, they dragged it out once more, and this might occur scores of times in a single passage. It was the work of brave and stalwart men thus to launch, or drag out of the icy water these boats heavily laden with baggage and mail-bags. Often it was difficult to effect a landing from the rushing tide full of tumbling bergs to the solid ice—board-ice so-called—which extends out from either shore. Often after or during a storm the treacherous snow covered up and concealed open water beneath, and the otherwise luckless strap passenger plunged to the armpits in the chilly slush and water, and was dragged out by his fellow toilers to suffer

the zero cold in his wet garments, still thankful that his life had been saved by a strap, the emblem of his servitude!

Sometimes the ice boats and their crews and passengers set out to cross, and after labouring for hours at their hard task were forced to return. Sometimes they were overtaken by a snow storm in mid passage and were carried far up or down the strait and then, in the night time it might be, had to hunt up a team to convey them over unbroken roads to their destination. Several times they were out all night in stormy winter gales, driven and tossed about, not knowing where they were. Betimes they lay upon the ice and burned their boats and mailbags to keep from freezing to death before morning. More than one owed his death, others a life-long maiming, or serious frost-bite to the perils of this winter passage. The distance between the Capes is eight miles in a straight line, but the strap passenger often found the space covered in actual crossing to be two or three times as great as that. For this service a generous Dominion Government permitted him to work his passage on a payment of two dollars. Women, aged or sick persons paid four dollars a trip. It may be inferred that few women or small children ever made the winter crossing at the Capes.

In those dark days the Islanders did not bless Confederation. Rather it was looked upon as an untoward event. And this sort of thing went on for forty-five years after our union with the Dominion. It went on from 1873 to 1918. It went on under the successive premierships of Macdonald, Mackenzie, Abbott, Thompson, Bowell, Tupper and Laurier. In the meantime we lost twenty-one thousand from our maximum population of one hundred and nine thousand, besides all the natural increase of the finest breed of men and women produced in Canada. For many years, contrary to popular belief, the average Island family was larger than that of Quebec, the boasted homeland of big families, as vital statistics prove. But we lost them in tens of thousands, sons and daughters in their youthful vigour of manhood and womanhood, our best and strongest and bravest, by the bleeding exodus that set in and is not yet stayed. It has attained a sad momentum which is hard to overcome. It has made a tragedy of each successive census for the past thirty years. If, as has been said, every native born son or daughter, reared to maturity and educated, is worth a thousand dollars to the country—and who will question it?—then the Island's mere monetary loss in this way amounts to untold millions.

And because we lost these worthy sons and daughters in such numbers, we lost one-third of our representation in the House of Commons, which has been reduced from six members to four. At

the coming readjustment of federal representation it must be further reduced to three if not to two, were it not for the timely measure carried through Parliament by Sir Robert Borden which precludes any further reduction. And he and his government also gave us the Car Ferry, now regularly plying daily between the Capes and across the Straits where the little ice-boats and the strap passengers, mentioned already, used to wend their uncertain and perilous way. As a recognition of what he did to relieve our distress in this and other ways, the now incorporated town which stands at the Island entrance to our admirable winter highway to the outer world bears the name of "Borden."

We have suffered greatly, we have lost much, but much still remains. Hope and courage remain, somewhat revived and enhanced by the ameliorated conditions referred to. Our farmers prospered during and after the war owing to the high prices for all they could produce. Old debts were paid off and money deposited in the savings banks. On the whole perhaps our people are as well off as any farming community in the Dominion, notwithstanding the swift decline of the past two years in the market values of our field products. Under our system of mixed farming, the products of the stockyard, the dairy and the poultry yard, for which high prices are yet maintained, redress the losses of the field. And our lobster fishery last year produced a value of over a million and a quarter in dollars. Our fox-farming industry must also be taken into account as a revenue-producing asset. But we greatly need more factories to afford continuous employment, and especially to give work and wages during the winter season. Our forests have been cut away until on most of our farms only a small woodlot remains, and many farms have not even this resource. Coal is imported in large quantities from Nova Scotia to supply our railway, our city and towns, our light and power services, for household use in the towns and to an increasing extent in the country districts. At present prices the call for imported fuel takes a heavy toll from the annual earnings and receipts of the people. In like manner we are heavy importers of lumber, bricks, lime and cement for building purposes, of farm implements and machinery, of cotton, woollen and other fabrics, ready-made clothing, boots and shoes, carriages, harness, motor cars, scarcely any of which are manufactured in the province. Canned food products are also imported in large quantities, which should be produced here, but are not. Even the wheat flour consumed in the city and towns is mostly imported from the mainland.

Fortunately almost all our soil is arable, easily cultivated and

naturally fertile. Our people are industrious, thrifty and frugal; else the farms would not be able to pay the bills for all the goods, merchandise and wares which yearly come to us from abroad. They are also cheerful and courageous, and face the future with fortitude. Regret is felt for the exodus, but those who remain are not apparently downhearted on that account. Our Protestant and Catholic churches and people, now closely approaching an equality in numbers, live and work together in admirable peace and harmony. More Protestants than Catholics have migrated abroad in the past; and should this continue, as seems to be probable, the equality will be established within a few years. From having resided for considerable terms of years in New Brunswick, Ontario, and for more than a quarter of a century past in the Island, I am led to conclude that our people here attend their church services more generally and observe the Christian Sabbath more strictly than do the people in any other province of the Dominion. And for the fifty years since Confederation the official criminal statistics have shown that here the proportion of drunkenness and indictable offences to population is the most favourable of any province in Canada. Arrests for drunkenness are mostly those of a few confirmed victims of the drink habit, ten of whom—each arrested ten times—would count for 100 arrests. A drunken man seen on the streets of Charlottetown is always subject to more notice than a like unfortunate in most other cities in Canada.

The province may be said to be well equipped with railways, heretofore owned and operated by the provincial government at first and—since the union—by the federal government. No part of the Island is more than ten miles from the steel rails, and probably three-fourths of the provincial area is within five miles of the rails. What is greatly needed is that the entire lines of 272 miles shall be widened to the standard, or continental, gauge. At present only the main line between Charlottetown and Summerside and the branch line to Borden have been widened, this being less than one-fifth of our total railway mileage. Telegraph and telephone services are adequate in the towns and throughout the country districts as well. Churches, colleges and schools are in sufficient number. And we have no lack of politics, or of political discussion. As has been said, 'the smaller the pit, the fiercer the rats will fight.' A provincial general election will be due next summer and will no doubt, as usual, arouse much interest and excitement.

And what of our future? Maritime Union has been talked of in the sister provinces, mostly in Nova Scotia. Here in the

Island, so far as the writer's observation goes, it meets with little favour. Such union would necessarily remove our Government, Supreme Court and civil service to some point on the mainland. Charlottetown would cease to be a capital city. Our legislature, now 150 years old, would be blotted out. These are features not attractive to Islanders, who remember sadly the disappointments that followed the union with Canada. We can understand why Maritime Union might find favour in Nova Scotia as that fine province, having a population considerably greater than New Brunswick and the Island taken together, would dominate the Acadian Government and Parliament absolutely. The Island is not ready as yet to make such great sacrifices as Union would necessarily involve, and is not likely to entertain such a proposition within a generation to come. Like Rhode Island in the big Republic, we will retain our provincial status, and what we have we hold.