

## **The Romance of Canada: Tourism and Nationalism Meet in Charlottetown, 1939**

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## The Romance of Canada: Tourism and Nationalism Meet in Charlottetown, 1939

FESTIVALS ARE POLITICS AND Prince Edward Island's 1939 Confederation Celebration was no exception to this rule. This festival served as a matchmaker, linking the goals of Island tourism boosters to the interests of provincial and national governments. Desiring federal funds to help publicize their province as a tourist destination, Island planners transformed the celebration commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference from a local festival into a national event. In the process, they successfully established Charlottetown as the first abiding icon of Canadian nation building. Just as the Fathers of Confederation met in Charlottetown in 1864, tourism and nationalism met there in 1939. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.<sup>1</sup> Yet the strange love affair established between tourism and nationalism on Prince Edward Island was not a serendipitous event; it was largely the result of social and economic forces that had their beginnings in the previous century and were far beyond the control of Island tourism boosters. The Confederation Celebration in 1939 was a pivotal event in the advent of modern mass tourism in Prince Edward Island.

### Tourism Ascendant

Modern mass tourism began in the 1840s when Thomas Cook first organized package tours to the English seaside for middle-class Britons.<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the 19th century, traveling became much more safe and affordable, due mainly to the development of railways and steamship lines. Travel was transformed from a dangerous pastime that could only be enjoyed by society's wealthiest members into a respectable leisure activity for Europe and North America's growing middle class.

Prince Edward Island was not left untouched by this new phenomenon. As early as 1869, the province's self-styled poet laureate, John LePage, was predicting tourism growth as a result of, at least in part, new technology; improved methods of transportation would, "as our Island becomes better known abroad, occasion a large increase in the number of respectable visitors frequenting this gem of the water known as Prince Edward Island".<sup>3</sup> An ever-increasing number of "respectable visitors" did

1 This article is based on a chapter of the author's master's thesis – "Manufacturing paradise: tourism development and mythmaking on Prince Edward Island, 1939-1973", M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 2003 – written with the support of his supervisors Duncan McDowall and Del Muise to whom he owes much thanks. The author is also grateful for the constructive suggestions provided by *Acadiensis*' anonymous reviewers and editor Bill Parenteau.

2 Larry Krotz, *Tourists: How our Fastest Growing Industry is Changing the World* (Boston, 1996), p. 48.

3 John LePage, *Visits of Distinguished Personages to Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown, 1869), pp. iii-iv.

Matthew McRae, "The Romance of Canada: Tourism and Nationalism Meet in Charlottetown, 1939", *Acadiensis*, XXXIV, 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 26-45.

frequent the province as railway and steamship connections improved. The development of the automobile as a reliable and affordable form of transportation in the first part of the 20th century made the Island even more accessible to affluent tourists.<sup>4</sup> Geographer Shelagh Squire notes that, by the early 1900s, the Island's north shore was already a popular resort area.<sup>5</sup> When local author L.M. Montgomery's novel *Anne of Green Gables* became an international bestseller in 1908, tourists begin to flood into the community of Cavendish to see the haunts of the literary heroine.<sup>6</sup>

Why were tourists attracted to Prince Edward Island at all? Was it only because it was the home of the fictional character Anne Shirley or did the province have something more to offer visitors? Squire notes that L.M. Montgomery's novels portrayed the Island as something of a sylvan paradise, remarking that the province was more than just a literary setting: "It also became a poignant symbol of romantic sentimentality, an elusive childhood golden age, and a much longed-for utopia".<sup>7</sup> Sociologist Judith Alder also notes the appeal of the province's pastoral idyll: "The emotional core of Island pastoralism is an attachment to a scene experienced as precious and fragile, just because it is regarded as having already disappeared elsewhere".<sup>8</sup>

The urban and industrial revolution that swept across Europe and North America in the late-19th and early-20th centuries had left Prince Edward Island largely untouched. The majority of the province's population lived on small farms well into the 1950s. For modern, urban North Americans the Island, with its unspoiled green fields and quiet red beaches, seemed an antimodern paradise – a land forgotten by time. Political scientist David Milne identifies Prince Edward Island's sylvan, antimodern identity as the "garden myth". This myth, as described by Milne, was the linchpin of Island identity for the greater part of the 20th century. It gave Islanders an "ideal picture of themselves as an independent agricultural people, protected from the world in an unspoiled pastoral setting".<sup>9</sup>

The garden myth provided Prince Edward Island's tourism promoters with an attractive, pre-packaged brand of antimodernism to sell to tourists. The tourist gaze was directed to a series of "signposts" or "markers" that identified the Island as a worthy tourist destination. Garden myth signposts were numerous and varied, including concepts as vague and generalized as the Island's rural "folk" and objects as specific as the Green Gables house that author L.M. Montgomery had made famous.<sup>10</sup> The garden myth infused all of these markers with the same meaning, as

4 An excellent account of tourism's early development on Prince Edward Island can be found in Alan MacEachern, "No Island is an Island", M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1991.

5 Shelagh J. Squire, "Tourist Development and a Literary Landscape: L.M. Montgomery's Prince Edward Island", discussion paper, Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, Carleton University, 1988, p. 4.

6 Squire, "Tourist Development", p. 6.

7 Squire, "Tourist Development", p. 2.

8 Judith Alder, "Tourism and Pastoral: A Decade of Debate," in Verner Smitheram, David Milne and Satadal Dasgupta, eds., *The Garden Transformed: Prince Edward Island, 1945-1980* (Charlottetown, 1982), p. 132.

9 David Milne, "Politics in a Beleaguered Garden," in Smitheram et al., *The Garden Transformed*, p. 40.

10 Historian Ian McKay discusses the creation of the concept of a rural, antimodern "folk" in Nova Scotia in his book *The Quest of the Folk* (Montreal and Kingston, 1994). Although McKay's work

under the tourist gaze they all came to represent the essentially antimodern “Islandness” many travelers eagerly sought.<sup>11</sup> For the province’s tourist promoters, the garden myth was more than just rhetoric; it was a veritable goldmine.

The early-20th century saw tourism grow throughout North America in rural and urban areas alike. On Prince Edward Island, however, where the fishing and farming economy had slid into a near-permanent decline, tourism held an extra appeal – the industry presented an opportunity for economic development in a province with few options. The first permanent organization dedicated to promoting the tourist trade on Prince Edward Island was founded in 1923. Originally called the Prince Edward Island Tourist Association, it was quickly renamed the Prince Edward Island Publicity Association the following year.<sup>12</sup> The association’s first and only president was Justice Aubin E. Arsenault, one of the Island’s most prominent public figures.

Born in 1870 in Abram’s Village, Arsenault was the son of the first Island Acadian to be appointed to the Canadian Senate. Arsenault the younger first became a lawyer and then followed in his father’s footsteps, entering politics in 1906. He joined the provincial Conservative party and eventually became the province’s first Acadian premier in 1917. Defeated in the 1919 election, Arsenault stayed on as leader of the opposition until 1921, when he accepted an appointment to the Prince Edward Island Supreme Court.<sup>13</sup> Throughout his life, Arsenault was involved with numerous provincial, national and international organizations and had influential contacts throughout the Maritimes, Canada and England.<sup>14</sup> Despite his numerous obligations, Arsenault’s favourite pet cause would always remain the Island’s tourism industry.

In his memoirs, Arsenault described the other founders of the Prince Edward Island Publicity Association as “a body of the Island’s leading citizens”.<sup>15</sup> The association consisted chiefly of businessmen, lawyers and other civic leaders from Charlottetown and Summerside, the province’s only two urban centres. They were united in the belief that an expanded tourism industry would not simply provide an opportunity for resort operators, but would serve the best interests of all Islanders. To this end, representatives of the association spent the better part of the next 17 years telling anyone who would listen that the tourism industry was vital to the economic future of Prince Edward Island. The association did more, however, than just talk. It founded a travel and information bureau in Charlottetown, published and distributed

focuses specifically on the case of Nova Scotia, the proud, independent farmers and fishermen of Milne’s garden myth bear a marked resemblance to McKay’s rugged “folk”.

- 11 Sociologist Dean MacCannell defines a tourist attraction as an “empirical relationship between a tourist, a sight, and a marker (a piece of information about a sight)”. See MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Los Angeles, 1999), p. 41. In *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry explains that “the tourist gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs” and also notes “the contemporary gaze is increasingly signposted. There are markers which identify the things and places worthy of our gaze”, See Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. (London, 1990), pp. 3, 47.
- 12 “Credit to Whom Credit is Due”, transcript of speech by A.E. Arsenault, ex-president and chairman of the Prince Edward Island Travel Bureau, n.d., p. 2, no. 4135, vol. 21, file 21, PAPEI.
- 13 Blair Weeks, ed., *Minding the House: A Biographical Guide to Prince Edward Island MLAs, 1873-1993* (Charlottetown, 2002), p. 4.
- 14 Weeks, *Minding the House*, p. 5.
- 15 A.E. Arsenault, *Memoirs of A.E. Arsenault*, p. 145, no. 4135, vol. 3, file 61, PAPEI.

promotional pamphlets, lobbied for lower ferry crossing rates, and lobbied to schedule more train trips to the Island.<sup>16</sup> Members felt frustrated, though, that they could not do more as limited funding severely restricted the association's ability to fulfill its mandate.

By 1928 the association's annual budget was only \$6,000 and almost completely made up of subscriptions from private citizens in Charlottetown and Summerside. It was glumly noted in the association's 1928 annual report that "apart from a few subscriptions, we regret to report, that the outside districts did practically nothing to assist in our work".<sup>17</sup> The Island's rural population could hardly be blamed for not seeing the benefit of supporting tourism. Historian Alan MacEachern notes that the association had not provided them with any good reason to support the industry: "Though Islanders were assured they would gain materially from tourism, promoters did nothing to put this into practice. In the name of efficiency they sided with the tourists, not Islanders and in doing so distanced guests from their hosts".<sup>18</sup> The association's reaction to their funding crisis was very much in keeping with a tourists-first policy. The 1928 annual report stressed that the association's work "was provincial, and as such everybody should contribute".<sup>19</sup> The report acknowledged that it was a "practical impossibility" to acquire donations outside of Summerside and Charlottetown and thus concluded that "the provincial government must be more generous in its grant in the future than the past".<sup>20</sup> In the eyes of the association, tourism was important enough that everyone should have to contribute whether they wanted to or not. Luckily for the Island's tourism boosters, the provincial and federal governments were beginning to agree.

As early as 1919 the federal government was already encouraging tourism growth with the Highways Act, providing funds to build highways linking affluent American motorists with Canadian towns and cities.<sup>21</sup> On Prince Edward Island the 1920s saw Ottawa provide a new ferry for the Borden – Cape Tormentine run across the Northumberland Strait, the S.S. *Charlottetown*. Unlike its predecessors, the *Charlottetown* was designed to carry not only railcars but automobiles as well. Since Islanders had the smallest number of cars per capita in all of Canada, it is evident the government had tourists in mind when they acquired the *Charlottetown*.<sup>22</sup>

The provincial government was more fiscally conservative than Ottawa, but by the late 1930s a shift in policy was occurring. While the Prince Edward Island Publicity Association's annual provincial grant grew slowly from \$1,000 to \$3,500 between 1923 and 1936, it suddenly doubled to \$7,000 in 1937. In 1938 the amount reached

16 Prince Edward Island Publicity Association, *Fifth Annual Report*, January, 1928, pp. 2-7, no. 4135, vol. 2, file 21, PAPEI. See also letter from G. Frank to A.E. Arsenault, 25 January 1927, discussing direct railway routes between the states and the Maritimes, no. 4135, vol. 2, file 21, PAPEI. Finally, see Arsenault, *Memoirs of A.E. Arsenault*, p. 145.

17 Prince Edward Island Publicity Association, *Fifth Annual Report*, January, 1928, p. 6.

18 Alan MacEachern, "No Island" p. 110.

19 Prince Edward Island Publicity Association, *Fifth Annual Report*, January, 1928, p. 6.

20 Prince Edward Island Publicity Association, *Fifth Annual Report*, January, 1928, p. 6.

21 John Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America*. (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1985), p. 127.

22 Douglas Baldwin, *Land of the Red Soil* (Charlottetown, 1985), p. 118.

\$10,000 and was no longer called a grant; the expenditure was now listed as “tourist promotion”.<sup>23</sup> In its own meagre way, the provincial government was taking an increasingly proactive approach to tourism.

It is not surprising, then, that by the late 1930s the provincial and federal governments had begun to work together to promote tourism growth on Prince Edward Island. In 1936 it was decided to establish a national park in the province. By 1937 a small strip of land running 25 miles along the Island’s north shore had been selected and handed over to the federal government and simply named Prince Edward Island National Park.<sup>24</sup> The province now had a permanent tourist attraction that could serve as a nucleus for the tourism industry. Best of all, the park would be maintained and promoted with money from outside the province. This federal-provincial model for stimulating tourism growth would prove irresistible to Island tourism boosters. In 1939 Arsenault and his fellow association members would attempt to tap into this emerging relationship to promote not only the natural beauty of the Island but also the significant role of Prince Edward Island in the founding of the nation.

Commemorating the 1864 Charlottetown Conference was not a new idea in 1939. A celebration had been planned on the 50th anniversary in 1914, but the outbreak of the First World War put a halt to festivities.<sup>25</sup> Only a single commemorative plaque, erected inside the provincial legislature, hinted at Islanders’ awareness of a special status as the birthplace of Confederation. Referring to the Fathers of Confederation, the plaque stated: “Providence being their guide, they builded better than they knew”.<sup>26</sup> In 1934 the Island’s premier W.J.P. MacMillan expressed a desire to commemorate the conference’s 70th anniversary. Provincial Secretary H.R. Stewart suggested that a Maritime provincial conference should be held to draw attention to the problem of regional disparity and reaffirm the Maritime’s belief in Confederation.<sup>27</sup> The conference was never held, most likely because of the fiscal constraints on the region’s provincial governments and the fact that the federal government was busy celebrating the 400th anniversary of Cartier’s 1534 voyage.<sup>28</sup>

For the 75th anniversary, Arsenault and his fellow boosters reworked Stewart’s idea. Rather than promoting awareness of regional disparity, they wished to promote an awareness of Prince Edward Island in general and Charlottetown in particular as the “birthplace of confederation”. The promoters wished to create what American historian Daniel Boorstin calls a “pseudo-event”: an event organized specifically to legitimize itself.<sup>29</sup> In order to establish a “birthplace myth” in the national

23 *Prince Edward Island Public Accounts, 1925-38* (Charlottetown, 1925-38).

24 For an account of what motivated the establishment of national parks in Atlantic Canada in the 1930s, see Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal and Kingston, 2001).

25 Edward MacDonald, *If You’re Stronghearted: Prince Edward Island in the Twentieth Century* (Summerside, 2000), p. 34.

26 Plaque outside of Confederation Chamber in Province House, Prince Edward Island.

27 H.R. Stewart, Deputy Provincial Secretary, to W.J.P. MacMillan, Premier, 1 June 1934, p. 1, RG 7, series 13, file 632, PAPEI.

28 *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1934* (Toronto, 1935), p. 199.

29 Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America* (New York, 1964), p. 10.

consciousness of Canadians, however, it would be necessary that the 1939 commemoration be a national celebration.

### **A National Celebration**

Exactly when the planning for the 75th anniversary celebrations began is unknown, but by November of 1938 Premier Thane Campbell had already written Mackenzie King requesting federal funds for the festival.<sup>30</sup> The first meeting of the Confederation Celebration Committee (CCC) was held two months later in January 1939. Premier Campbell was chosen as chairman of the committee and former premier W.J.P. MacMillan was chosen as vice-chairman, but their roles were largely ceremonial and symbolic, serving to demonstrate that this was a non-partisan event. The lion's share of the organizational work was done by the convenor, a position ably filled by Justice A.E. Arsenault. The committee's choice of convenor was a telling one; it suggested the festival's primary goal was publicity and tourist dollars. This was certainly how Arsenault saw things. In a March 1939 letter to Premier Campbell, he argued that the publicity surrounding the festival would create a tourist boom in subsequent years. Arsenault optimistically remarked "the only thing I fear is that our housing accommodation for 1940 is going to be inadequate".<sup>31</sup>

The celebration could not be sold to the public or the federal government simply as an opportunity for tourist development. Arsenault knew the festival would need to have support from the federal government and that the birthplace myth was the key to building a relationship with Ottawa. The federal government had to be seen to endorse the Island's claim to be the birthplace of Confederation. If they did not, the festival would be just another local celebration. "I must emphasize the fact", Arsenault wrote to Premier Campbell in April 1939, "that the whole object of the celebration is not local, but rather national". The festival was to be sold to Ottawa as a way to promote national unity; as Arsenault explained to Campbell, "the celebration would be one important means of . . . making an appeal for a better National sentiment throughout Canada".<sup>32</sup> The premier, however, needed little convincing. In a 1938 letter to King, Campbell had already started making the arguments that would be heard time and time again over the winter and spring of 1939: "The suggestion is mooted here that 1939, being the 75th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference, should be celebrated in a signal manner, and featured as a call to greater Canadian unity. . . . Prominent men could be invited from all over Canada, including the Dominion Cabinet and the heads of the Provincial Governments. I need not enlarge on the possibilities of such a scheme, as they will no doubt immediately present themselves to your mind".<sup>33</sup>

The birthplace myth was thus being presented as cement for the building blocks of national unity. For the federal government, it was an appealing argument. National

30 Thane A. Campbell, Premier, to the Right Honourable W.L. Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, 10 November 1938, p. 1, RG 34, Series 9, File 9, PAPEI.

31 A.E. Arsenault, Chairman Prince Edward Island Travel Bureau, to T.A. Campbell, Premier, 17 March 1939, p. 1, RG 25, series 32, sub-series 1, file 3a "A" 1939, PAPEI.

32 A.E. Arsenault to T.A. Campbell, 18 April 1939, pp. 1-2, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

33 Thane A. Campbell, Premier, to the Right Honourable W.L. MacKenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, 10 November 10, 1938, p. 1, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

unity, particularly between French and English Canada, had always been a tenuous affair, and the government's mishandling of the Great Depression relief programs had only caused further tension. By August of 1937, the federal government had created the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, popularly known as the Rowell-Sirois Commission, with the express purpose of undertaking "a re-examination of the economic and financial basis of Confederation and of the distribution of legislative powers in light of economic and social developments of the last twenty years".<sup>34</sup> The Commission, however, focused almost entirely on economic issues. A festival, argued the Island's tourism boosters, would provide spiritual healing for a bruised and battered Confederation.

Past festivals had attempted to promote a sense of national unity. Extravagant celebrations were held in 1908 to commemorate the tercentenary of the founding of Quebec City.<sup>35</sup> Smaller-scale festivities had also celebrated the anniversary of the arrival of De Monts and Champlain in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in 1904.<sup>36</sup> More recent attempts at commemoration included the 1927 Diamond Jubilee of Confederation and the aforementioned 400th anniversary of Cartier's 1534 voyage to Canada in 1934.<sup>37</sup> These celebrations were all forgotten soon after they ended. In the words of historian H.V. Nelles, "the imagined sharing of a common vision of the past between two peoples did not take place".<sup>38</sup> There were simply too many competing visions of the past to create a common one.

The birthplace myth seemed to have a better chance of forging a lasting national vision. The myth involved not battles, claims or disputes but an agreement between the French and the English and between the different would-be provinces. Indeed, the myth would prove more resilient than those presented in 1904, 1908 or 1934. Although 1939 would ultimately be forgotten, like so many other festivals before and after, it would help establish a national icon that the federal government would come back to repeatedly when seeking to bolster national sentiment. It would also provide Prince Edward Island with another conduit to Ottawa.

At the start of 1939, Ottawa had yet to be fully convinced and agreed to contribute only \$15,000 to the festival. On 24 April 1939 Arsenault wrote Campbell explaining that \$15,000 was not enough; the committee was being forced to cut corners in every area. Arsenault pressed Ottawa for at least another \$5,000 with a two-fold argument. First, the 50th anniversary celebration in 1914 had been slated to receive \$20,000 and Arsenault now claimed this amount as a precedent. Second, Arsenault pointed out

34 As quoted in Donald V. Smiley, ed., *The Rowell/Sirois Report, Book 1* (Toronto, 1964), p. 2.

35 A full account of this celebration and the different interpretations of its significance is contained in H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto, 1999). See also Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto, 2003).

36 Two accounts of these celebrations and the different voices trying to be heard through them are in the Spring 2004 issue of *Acadiensis*: Ronald Rudin, "The Champlain-De Monts Tercentenary: Voices from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Maine, June 1904", pp. 3-26 and Greg Marquis, "Celebrating Champlain in the Loyalist City: Saint John, 1904-10", pp. 27-43.

37 *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1927-28* (Toronto, 1928), pp. 25-30 and *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1934* (Toronto, 1935), p. 199.

38 Nelles, *Art of Nation-Building*, p. 316.

how much Quebec had received for its own national myth-building exercise. The Cartier celebration at Gaspé had received \$100,000; surely \$20,000 was not too much to ask for a much more “national celebration”.<sup>39</sup>

The committee had already arranged for Charlottetown barrister George A. Tweedy, a long-time Prince Edward Island Publicity Association member and now a leading CCC member, to make an emergency visit to Ottawa and meet with federal representatives in order to convince them to commit the extra funds. If the journey was to have any chance of success, Tweedy would need to have the highest possible authority, and so Arsenaault requested that the premier give his blessing.<sup>40</sup> Campbell immediately wrote to Charles Avery Dunning, Minister of Finance and the Island’s representative in the Privy Council, stressing the importance of Tweedy’s mission: “Mr. George Tweedy is authorized to discuss this matter further with you and to urge the need of a larger grant towards this Celebration than was first suggested”.<sup>41</sup> And so it was that George Tweedy was sent to Ottawa with the task of convincing federal politicians that Charlottetown’s little festival was a party the whole country should attend.

Tweedy’s Ottawa visit took on an almost farcical level of solemnity; one would think the barrister-turned-diplomat had been sent to the negotiations in Munich rather than Ottawa. In a letter to A.E. Arsenaault handwritten on Chateau Laurier stationery and marked “Private, Personal and not for Publication!”, Tweedy breathlessly related the results of his mission to Ottawa. The letter makes it evident that the Islanders hoped to secure much more than an extra \$5,000 from the federal government. “I have had two very busy but successful days”, Tweedy wrote. “Last night we were able to arrange a long conference with Hon. [C.D.] Howe as the house was sitting. I feel sure [illegible] will be announcing in a few days that the Road from Borden to the Pier and from the Pier to Tormentine will be black surfaced. We have also the Minister’s assurance that Steam will be kept on the “Prince Edward Island” and a skeleton crew kept on her so that in a very short time she could be put into action by drawing a few men of the ‘Confederation’. . . . As you suggested, I am not saying a word about the requests being granted as if there is any glory to be gained let the Politicians have it. I do feel sure though that in the next few days these matters will be announced through the proper channels. Till then, you and I will say nothing”.<sup>42</sup> The tourism boosters were learning to play Ottawa’s game – national politicians received accolades (and perhaps votes) for their generosity while the Islanders received federal money and their festival received the federal stamp of approval. In this way a local festival provided important political benefits while being transformed into an engine for economic development by providing much-needed infrastructure and tourist promotion dollars.

Tweedy also noted that not all had gone according to plan: “I feared they would consider our celebration a Provincial one. To some extent that was the case”.<sup>43</sup> Ottawa can hardly be faulted if they suspected a petty provincial cash grab was hiding behind

39 A.E. Arsenaault, Convenor, to T.A. Campbell, Premier, 24 April 24, 1939, p. 1, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

40 A.E. Arsenaault, Convenor, to T.A. Campbell, Premier, 24 April 24, 1939, p. 2.

41 Thane A. Campbell, Premier, to the Honourable C.A. Dunning, M.P., P.C., Minister of Finance, 28 April 1939, pp. 1-2, RG 34, series 9, file 3, PAPEI.

42 George A. Tweedy to A.E. Arsenaault, n.d., pp. 1-3, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

43 George A. Tweedy to A.E. Arsenaault, n.d., pp. 1-3.

the festival's veneer of nationalist sentiment. Tweedy was unable to secure the extra \$5,000 for the celebration. Howe only made a vague promise that if the celebration was in "the red" after the fact, the federal government would cover the losses.<sup>44</sup>

Federal political attendance at the festival was also becoming an issue. Arsenault had suggested early on that the entire federal cabinet should attend and a special train be scheduled to take them from Ottawa to Charlottetown. That scheme soon fell apart, and it became a scramble to round up any federal presence at all. Island Member of Parliament A.E. MacLean invited the entire House of Commons and the Senate to attend the celebration, and a memorandum was sent to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance stating: "Unless this celebration is made a National one, it will be of little value, and it will be of little value unless the leading statesmen of Canada are present".<sup>45</sup> Arsenault ultimately had to settle on a compromise measure of federal attendance. Distinguished visitors included five federal cabinet ministers, the premiers of Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, representatives from Ontario and Quebec, and a handful of senators and members of Parliament. This fell far short of the numbers Arsenault had first envisioned. Most importantly, the two biggest fish – the prime minister and the governor-general – had both escaped the convenor's grasp. While Arsenault may have been dispirited, he would make do with what he had at his disposal.

Another attempt was made to secure the extra \$5,000, this time through the new Canadian Government Travel Bureau as more favours were called in from C.A. Dunning. Arsenault hoped the minister could tip the scales in their favour. "I believe that Honourable Mr. Howe is not unfavourable to this project", he suggested to Dunning, "and I know that a word from you would be of assistance".<sup>46</sup> The convenor also used a more direct route and wrote Howe himself, insisting on the national relevance of the celebrations. Arsenault assured Howe they were not setting a precedent for supporting every small festival: "I am not suggesting that every local celebration should make a demand on its funds. I have tried to impress the fact that our celebration must not be considered a local one. It is in every respect national".<sup>47</sup>

To emphasize the festival's national mandate to federal politicians, Arsenault did his best to organize "national" events for the week's festivities. All three branches of the military were invited. International military attendance was even secured, with a promised visit from the American naval vessel the U.S.S. *Hamilton* and the French sloop of war *Ville d'Ys*. Ottawa's naval contribution to the festival seemed to demonstrate its ambivalence: it sent only two vessels and one of them, the H.M.C.S. *Venture*, was nothing more than a three-masted training ship.<sup>48</sup>

Far more original and successful was the committee's strategy of taking seemingly unrelated federal events scheduled for 1939 and weaving them into the fabric of the

44 George A. Tweedy to A.E. Arsenault, n.d., p. 2.

45 A.E. MacLean to Hon. Thane A. Campbell, Premier, 7 March 1939, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI; Memorandum to the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, n.d., RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

46 A.E. Arsenault, Convenor, to Honourable C.A. Dunning, 15 May 1939, p. 1, RG 34, series 9, file 3, PAPEI.

47 A.E. Arsenault to Hon. C.D. Howe, Minister of Transport, 15 May 1939, p. 2, RG 20, vol. 1565, file T-3252-13, Library and Archives Canada [LAC].

48 "Completing Plans For Next Week's Celebration", *Patriot*, 14 July 1939, p. 1.

festival. Many of these federal activities did not line up with the Island's antimodern tourist image, but legitimizing and publicizing the festival took precedence over everything else. The inauguration of the Charlottetown Airport and the first official flight from the airport, for instance, were arranged to occur during the festival. Arsenault wrote to Howe, who was to be present for the inauguration in his capacity as Minister of Transport, that if the Charlottetown airport was not ready in time, "then a good landing and take off can be had at Upton [Air] Port".<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, it did not matter if the airport was ready on time. What was important to the CCC was that a flight occur with Howe present, strengthening the celebration's national associations. The official opening of the Prince Edward Island National Park by T.A. Crerar, the federal Minister of Mines and Resources, was also skilfully worked into the festivities.<sup>50</sup> The presence of federal politicians at these events could only serve to further legitimize the festival's aspirations of national importance.

On a more historic note, the committee managed to convince Professor D.C. Harvey, an Islander and head of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, to unveil several tablets commemorating the Island Fathers of Confederation during festival week.<sup>51</sup> Even history, however, had to be made to serve the primary interests of the festival. D.C. Harvey had initially harboured reservations about the timing of Confederation week in mid-July and said as much in a letter to Arsenault: "In regard to your celebration of July 17th I am a little concerned about the date, as the event which you celebrate took place the week of September 1st".<sup>52</sup> The convenor replied to Harvey with a series of reasoned arguments. The September date would interfere with the provincial exhibition as well as the fall harvest in the province. Furthermore, September's weather was much less reliable than July's and there would a greater chance the celebrations would be ruined by rain. Arsenault saved the most telling argument for last: "Our summer resorts close on the last day of August and our visitors would not have the advantage of visiting and enjoying our beaches".<sup>53</sup> Tourism dollars had the final word in any discussions concerning the celebrations.

National exposure was paramount if more tourists were to visit in the coming years. The newly created CBC was contacted and asked to do a nationwide radio broadcast from the Confederation Chamber in the provincial legislature. Arsenault wanted one or more preliminary broadcasts prior to the main event and remarked that "such broadcasts would be important in giving the advance publicity necessary for the occasion". If the festival was to be truly national, then every Canadian had to be able to participate in it or at least hear it. Luckily for Arsenault, the festival's national subject matter fit perfectly into the CBC's recently minted mandate to link the nation together. Eager to establish its own importance as a national institution, the CBC agreed to a nationwide broadcast from Charlottetown.

The CCC also engaged in a publicity campaign larger than anything the province or the Prince Edward Island Travel Bureau had tried before. Fifty thousand new

49 "Completing Plans For Next Week's Celebration", *Patriot*, 14 July 1939, p. 1.

50 F.H. Williamson, Controller, to Hon. Thane A. Campbell, Premier, 27 June 1939, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

51 A.E. Arsenault to D.C. Harvey, 30 December 1938, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

52 D.C. Harvey to A.E. Arsenault, 30 December 1938, p. 1, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

53 A.E. Arsenault to D.C. Harvey, 30 December 1938, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

tourist folders were distributed throughout the Maritimes, Maine and Quebec, and another 100,000 folders were circulated at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. Twenty thousand Confederation booklets were printed to serve as souvenirs of the celebrations and 13,000 copies of a special Confederation edition of *The Busy East* magazine were circulated throughout the Maritimes. Ad space was bought in newspapers throughout Eastern Canada and the northeastern United States and the moving picture *PEIsland on Parade* was shown before service clubs all across Canada. There were even 7,000 "Guest of Prince Edward Island" auto and luggage labels printed.<sup>54</sup>

The federal government finally granted the extra \$5,000 on 15 July, the eve of the festival. The money had been provided just as much for the purposes of promoting tourism throughout the Maritime Provinces as to promote any sort of national sentiment – it was a marriage of a commercial strategy and a convenient aesthetic. The Privy Council spoke to this rationale: "That, in view of the general character of the celebration, its historical significance and interest, not only to the residents of the Province of Prince Edward Island, but to the people of the dominion as a whole, as well as to the former residents of Canada, it is deemed expedient that a suitable sum be placed at the disposal of the Committee . . . and as the Province of Prince Edward Island is undertaking a special campaign to induce tourists and former residents to visit the province during the period of celebration, and as such tourists would, in general, have to travel through other provinces of the Dominion in order to reach the Province of Prince Edward Island, it is considered expedient that the sum of \$20,000 be paid to the Committee".<sup>55</sup> For Arsenault and the committee, the reasoning behind the grant fit into their hopes that the celebration would give a major boost to tourism. The show would go on, and little Prince Edward Island would get the chance to show the entire dominion that it was the "Cradle of Confederation".

### **The Romance of Canada**

The official celebrations began on a religious note on Sunday, 16 July. At 9:30 am there was a military parade to the Charlottetown Exhibition grounds, where an open-air religious service was held for the numerous military units visiting the Island from other parts of Canada and the world. In keeping with the festival's lofty goals of engendering peace, unity and brotherhood, prayers were offered "for his majesty the king, for the Dominion of Canada, for peace for the representatives of the British and American navies present and for the President of the U.S.A. and his people".<sup>56</sup> The military service was the most prominent of countless church services taking place throughout the province. The Charlottetown *Patriot* noted that the "spiritual aspect of Confederation was stressed during these services suitable to the occasion".<sup>57</sup> The rituals and symbols of the church services had infused the festival with a mysticism of its own, as participants were sharing in the divine spirit that had guided the Fathers

54 Memo, n.d. pp. 1-3, RG 34, series 9, file 1, PAPEI.

55 Privy Council 1865, 15 July 1939, RG 20, vol. 1565, file 3252-13, LAC.

56 "Charlottetown Begins her Memorable Celebration of the Birth of A Nation", *The Patriot*, 17 July 1939, p. 1.

57 "Charlottetown Begins her Memorable Celebration of the Birth of A Nation", *The Patriot*, 17 July 1939, p. 1.

of Confederation in 1864. Those at the Charlottetown Exhibition Park certainly thought the occasion important enough that they could ask the Almighty to bless several nations as well as request world peace on behalf of the British and American navies. For those who had suffered through a decade of economic depression and were threatened by the shadow of war, such prayers held a special significance. World peace was not to be in the cards, but the heavens did bless the celebrations with beautiful weather. The heavy rain of Saturday gave way to a week of glorious sunshine of which the festival participants took full advantage.

On Monday religious symbolism was exchanged for a different – though no less solemn – set of signs and signifiers. The historical aspect of the celebrations came to the fore as D.C. Harvey's commemorative tablets were officially unveiled at the exhibition grounds. Every effort was made to mark the spectacle as one of national significance, and the CBC assisted in this process by covering the event as its first nationwide broadcast of the celebrations. Three levels of government lent official gravity to the occasion, with speeches by Premier Campbell, Professor D.C. Harvey and Lieutenant Governor George DeBlois.<sup>58</sup>

Even more important in establishing the unveiling as an iconic event was what can be called *historical symmetry*: the attempt to associate a present event with a past one by mimicking the details of the past event. By removing differences between the past (original) event and the present (copy) event, historical symmetry further established the authenticity of the present. Historical symmetry at the unveiling was simple but effective. Representatives of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario, the four original provinces to join Confederation in 1867, spoke at the occasion.<sup>59</sup> The presence of officials from Canada's four founding provinces no doubt established a link between the 1864 Charlottetown Conference and the creation of the dominion in 1867 in the minds of all those in attendance or listening by radio. Every such link underlined the significance of 1864 and strengthened the Island's claim to be the birthplace of Confederation. The intent was also to reinforce the fabric of Confederation, worn thin by the depression and provincial-federal infighting.

The unveiling's most impressive piece of historical symmetry came in the form of a 95-year-old woman. The venerable Margaret Lord was in attendance to unveil the tablet commemorating her father, Prince Edward Island native son Colonel John Hamilton Gray, who had been the Island premier and chairman of the Charlottetown Conference in 1864.<sup>60</sup> Of all the distinguished guests at the festival, Lord was the only one who had actually been present at the 1864 Charlottetown Conference. Through Lord, those attending the event could perhaps feel that they were participating not only in the festival, but also in the very history the festival was commemorating. An article in the *Charlottetown Patriot* described Lord as "one of the living links connecting the present with the past" and featured an extensive interview about her memories of the Confederation era.<sup>61</sup>

The unveiling was an important event, but the best was yet to come. Monday

58 "Charlottetown Begins", *The Patriot*, 17 July 1939, p. 1.

59 "Charlottetown Begins", *The Patriot*, 17 July 1939, p. 1.

60 "Charlottetown Begins", *The Patriot*, 17 July 1939, p. 1.

61 "Has Vivid Recollections of the Charlottetown Conference", *Patriot*, 14 July 1939, p. 20.

afternoon saw the historical symmetry transformed from a dignified, reserved presentation into a grand spectacle of Wagnerian proportions in two acts: a massive historical parade followed by a breathtaking pageant that evening called *The Romance of Canada*. According to the *Patriot*, the historical parade included more than 2000 participants as well as “thousands of visitors and citizens [who] thronged the streets to witness one of the most colourful and interesting parades witnessed here in years”.<sup>62</sup> Every province had its own historical float that depicted an event in that province’s history and enshrined a set of “Canadian” values. Alberta’s float, for instance, entitled “The Law Rides West”, re-enacted the arrival of the North West Mounted Police to the province in 1874 and “depicted the hanging of a criminal outside the police barracks”.<sup>63</sup> Between each provincial float marched a contingent of men re-enacting historical armies – French musketeers, Hertel soldiers, LaReine troopers, Champlain and his men, 1812 militia, Langedoc soldiers, Montcalm’s elite forces, and, of course, Indian braves on horseback. Warriors who had never met – or if they had, had often fought each other to the death – now marched side by side through the streets of Charlottetown, their differences forgotten in a surging sense of common history.<sup>64</sup>

The final “Canada float” emphasized these feelings of commonality. Nine princesses bore coats of arms representing the provinces and gathered around their queen, who represented the dominion and who was enthroned at the back of the float.<sup>65</sup> Thus the parade demonstrated to all present that the Confederation Celebration was no mere local festival. The display of provincial historical events and of common Canadian values, the soldiers of the past marching with common cause, and the Canada float all spoke in a language of symbolism and pageantry meant to inspire those attending to join the parade’s vision of a strong and united nation. The splendour and symbolism of the parade, however, was entirely eclipsed by the historical pageant which followed that evening.

The art of historical pageants did not come from a yearning to re-enact history, but rather a desire to transform the present. Modern English historical pageantry was invented in 1905 by Louis Napoleon Parker, “a musical actor, playwright, and ardent Wagnerian”, when he staged a gala outdoor performance to celebrate the founding of the English town of Sherbourne.<sup>66</sup> After that, pageantry’s popularity grew in leaps and bounds and soon spread across the Atlantic. Each pageant was an individual affair tailored to the community that performed it, but the pageants more or less followed a basic code set out by Parker who believed these productions should “re-awaken civic pride”. Embedded within this goal was an explicitly antimodern impulse: “The aim apart from community education and entertainment, was to combat the spirit of the age. . . . Reason and commerce had literally disenchanting society; historical pageantry

62 “Historical Street Parade Was a Great Success”, *Patriot*, 19 July 1939, p. 1.

63 “Historical Street Parade”, *Patriot*, 19 July 1939, p. 1.

64 MacCannell speaks of parades, festivals and pageants as “cultural productions” and argues that they can create a sense of commonality: “Strangers who have the same cultural grounding can come together in a cultural production, each knowing what to expect next, and feel closeness or solidarity, even where no closeness exists.” See MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 32.

65 MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 32.

66 Nelles, *Art of Nation-Building*, p. 143.

aimed at nothing less than the re-enchantment of daily life".<sup>67</sup>

By 1939 the glory days of pageanting had long since ended; the art form was hard-pressed to compete with motion pictures and had lost much of its idealism after the horrors of the First World War.<sup>68</sup> However, for one brief evening in Charlottetown, pageanting enjoyed a spectacular rebirth. In a city of not much more than 10,000 residents, over 8,000 souls crowded onto the exhibition grounds to witness a production called *The Romance of Canada*. In keeping with Parker's dictum, the pageant was a community production, featuring more than 80 amateur performers accompanied by an 80-person chorus and a 20-piece orchestra, all from the Island. In an ironic twist, modern technology proved the key to presenting the pageant's antimodern ideals to the assembled audience. The *Patriot* reported that a state-of-the-art loudspeaker system and an extensive array of electric lights "enhanced the stage setting".<sup>69</sup>

The *Romance of Canada* was a performance in two parts. The first part focused on the Fathers of Confederation, who took positions onstage to create a tableau of Island artist Robert Harris' famous 1883 painting of the meeting in Quebec City.<sup>70</sup> Although the tableau was not of the Charlottetown Conference, it still had the effect of creating a connection with the past through an iconic image. Historical accuracy was again to take a backseat to expediency. The tableau came to life as the fathers stepped forward to address the audience. The entire affair had a surreal, dreamlike quality. The pageant broke down the walls of time and space, placing the spectators in the same fictional blend of present and past as the performers. Colonel John Hamilton Gray's address to his fellow delegates of 1864 amply demonstrated the pageant's perception-altering qualities: "You find great changes here and great progress has been made in these seventy-five years that have elapsed since your historic visit of 1864. But amongst all those changes there is one thing that has not changed and that is our great spirit of hospitality, and as in 1864 we opened our hearts and our homes to you, so do we in this year of 1939 extend to you that same degree of friendship and hospitality. I now request you, Sir John A. McDonald [*sic*], as our great leader, to once again address to us words of knowledge and wisdom".<sup>71</sup> In this surreal environment, the fathers were presented as the stuff of legends: Sir John and his men were Canadian Knights of the Round Table and Charlottetown was their Camelot.

The mythical undertones became no subtler in the *Romance's* second act. Performers ceased to be specific historical characters and instead became icons and symbols meant to embody specific "Canadian" virtues and characteristics. As in the parade, each province was represented by a young woman who this time was accompanied by two figures from provincial history. Other women appeared on stage portraying mythical characters such as the Goddess of Fame, the Snow Queen and Britannia, the female embodiment of the British empire. The traditional association of femininity with abstract ideals and virtues was used to convey past and present in an

67 Nelles, *Art of Nation-Building*, p. 144.

68 Nelles, *Art of Nation-Building*, p. 144.

69 "Confederation Pageant was a Magnificent Sight", *Patriot*, 18 July 1939, p. 1.

70 The painting was destroyed by fire on Parliament hill in 1916, and only a black and white photograph remains.

71 Loose page of script for "The Romance of Canada", n.d., RG 34, series 9, file 22, PAPEI.

easily interpreted language of symbols and images.

Not all of the pageant was dedicated to the glory of goddesses and statesmen. Among the cast were less regal, although no less iconic, representatives of the nation's people throughout history: the preacher, soldier, nursing sister, fisherman and sailor. The pageant lauded these individuals as the true foundations of Canadian Confederation, but gave the pioneer family the position of greatest honour. The Goddess of Fame praised the pioneers and "recalled the past and those who made possible the Canada of today".<sup>72</sup> The message was clear: to succeed in the future, Canadians must look to the values of the past. The *Patriot* even suggested that the "climax was reached when Britannia crowned the pioneer mother as the most worthy to receive the homage of all Canadians".<sup>73</sup> By placing the simple, austere life of the pioneers on the highest pedestal of virtue, the "Romance of Canada" was giving homage to the antimodern values of pageantry. Louis Napoleon Parker would have heartily approved.

The constant barrage of symbols and signifiers temporarily abated on Tuesday the 18th as the festival exchanged didactic purpose for less political entertainment. For a time the celebrations began to more closely resemble a local festival, although the event's nationalist aspirations never dropped completely out of sight. A fireman's parade to Victoria Park occupied the morning while yacht races filled the afternoon. The visiting Disciples of Massanet Choir of Montreal presented a concert that evening. Islanders and visitors alike obviously enjoyed the celebrations, as the *Charlottetown Guardian* reported that attendance remained in the thousands.<sup>74</sup>

Wednesday the 19th saw a return to the motifs of the first two days. The federal Minister of Mines and Resources T.A. Crerar officially opened the Prince Edward Island National Park. Afterward, a crowd of approximately 500 watched Crerar play a much-anticipated nine-hole golf match against the Minister of Transport C.D. Howe on the park's newly completed Green Gables Golf Course. If one believed the *Patriot* newspaper (a well-known backer of the provincial Liberal party), both men were professional golfer material – apparently both made opening drives of over 200 yards. "They played the game", the writer gushed, "in the earnest and serious manner in which they do their ministerial work".<sup>75</sup>

High above this clash of would-be titans of the green flew a detachment of Royal Canadian Air Force planes out of Halifax. Aircraft were still a rarity on Prince Edward Island in 1939, thus the arrival of the flying machines caused much excitement. After circling the Green Gables golf match, the planes turned towards the Charlottetown Exhibition Grounds and delighted the large crowd that had gathered for the Firemen's Tournament scheduled for that afternoon.<sup>76</sup> The opening of the federally funded park and the appearance of Canada's neophyte air force once again drew attention to the festival's national implications, even if they did not entirely coincide with the Island's antimodern image.

72 "Confederation Pageant", *Patriot*, 18 July 1939, p. 1.

73 "Confederation Pageant", *Patriot*, 18 July 1939, p. 1.

74 "Massanet Choir is Head in Fine Program", *Charlottetown Guardian*, 19 July 1939, p. 1.

75 "Minister of Transport Won the Historic Golf Match Today", *Patriot*, 19 July 1939, p. 1.

76 "Opening of Golf Course Seen From the Air", *Patriot*, 19 July 1939, p. 1.

Wednesday night began with the crowning of the Carnival Queen selected from eight women, each representing an Island community. Fittingly enough, Charlottetown's candidate, Miss Sally Hughes, won out. Premier Campbell declared at Miss Hughes' coronation that the Island was not only the birthplace of Confederation, but also the home of beauty.<sup>77</sup> This was the last mention of Confederation for the evening; any thought of the festival's national implications were forgotten in the massive Mardi Gras parade and carnival that followed the coronation. It seemed to matter little to anyone present that Mardi Gras had nothing to do with the Island's history or culture and traditionally took place in winter. The *Patriot* reported that Charlottetown celebrated like never before, noting "never, it is believed, has a larger crowd been seen on the city streets than that which viewed the Mardi Gras parade from the Forum to Market Square last evening".

The city abandoned all pretence of antimodernism or historical symmetry. Instead, the carnival was a tribute to the influence of North America's growing mass culture. The *Patriot* dutifully catalogued the myriad of costumes that would not have been out of place in any major North American city: "Popeye was there on his boat with Mickey Mouse, Golden Bear, and other funny characters in addition to cowboys, Indians, Roman soldiers, etc".<sup>78</sup>

The carnival that followed was no less frenetic. At midnight an impromptu parade through the city was organized. One group broke off from this parade to form yet another march, this one down Richmond Street.<sup>79</sup> The *Guardian* reported that the celebrations went on in this vein into the early morning hours. The newspaper rhetoric has to be taken with a grain of salt, but there can be no doubt that both Islanders and visitors were enjoying the festivities. The *Guardian* described it as a "saturnalia of merrymaking".<sup>80</sup>

Thursday morning the mood returned to one of sober celebration. Federal Transport Minister C.D. Howe oversaw the first transcontinental flight from Charlottetown's new airport. The remainder of the day was lower key, featuring a farmers' picnic at the experimental farm in Charlottetown and horse racing at the exhibition grounds. That evening the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides staged a massive campfire at Victoria Park.<sup>81</sup> Attendance was excellent, numbering between 4,000 and 5,000 persons, and the event also featured singing by the assembled throng and a "brilliant display" of fireworks at the end of the night.<sup>82</sup>

The final day of the celebration was devoted to military exercises at the exhibition grounds, attended by a crowd of 7,000. In hindsight, the military demonstration, which included "gas mask" drills, provided an ominous end to Confederation week and a sign of the coming conflict in Europe. Ominous, too, were the newspaper headlines with which the festival shared its front-page space. The *Patriot* headline – "Hectic, Happy 'Confederation Week' Ends" – competed with a photo of an air raid drill in London, England and the declaration "Germany is 100 Per Cent Optimistic

77 "Queen of Carnival Was Crowned In State", *Patriot*, 20 July 1939, p. 1.

78 "Queen of Carnival Was Crowned In State", *Patriot*, 20 July 1939, p. 1

79 "Queen of Carnival Was Crowned In State", *Patriot*, 20 July 1939, p. 1.

80 "The Carnival Spirit", *The Guardian*, 21 July 1939, p. 4.

81 "Confederation Anniversary Celebration: Programme", *Guardian*, 11 July 1939, p. 1.

82 "The Camp Fire at Victoria Park", *Patriot*, 21 July 1939, p. 4.

There Will Be No War”<sup>83</sup> Despite such warning signals, the storm clouds gathering over Europe would not burst until September of 1939. Islanders and tourists alike had the chance to return to their homes and regular lives. There was time to stop and reminisce about the events of Confederation week and what it had all meant.

Charlottetown’s newspapers immediately began to bask in the glory of the week that had been. An editorial in the *Patriot* admonished its readers to forever remember the true meaning of Confederation week, which was commemorating “those immortals who created our Dominion”.<sup>84</sup> Editorials in the rival *Guardian* echoed these sentiments, remarking “old men and women who are now children will recall the details, and many who are not children will shortly begin to wonder whether they really happened”.<sup>85</sup> The irony of these remarks would emerge later, as the festival faded from public memory.

For A.E. Arsenault and the Confederation Celebration Committee, Confederation week vindicated over seven months of planning, preparing, negotiating and begging. For one week the eyes and ears of the entire dominion turned towards Charlottetown. The province had stood alone in the spotlight. The *Guardian* gleefully exclaimed that “the Province . . . has received more front-page publicity from coast to coast than on any other occasion, not excepting the Royal Visit in which, naturally, we shared the spotlight with other provinces”.<sup>86</sup>

The newborn Prince Edward Island National Park had also enjoyed the benefits of the spotlight. After the festival, National Parks Bureau representative Robert J.C. Stead wrote Arsenault to praise the celebrations and stress the symbiotic relationship between park and province: “I feel that publicity for the national park in Prince Edward Island and general publicity for the Island are one and inseparable”.<sup>87</sup> For Island tourism promoters, who wanted as much assistance as possible in their promotional efforts, such words were music to their ears.

There was no denying that the festival had given an immediate boost to the Island’s tourism industry. The Prince Edward Island Travel Bureau reported more than a 100 per cent increase in inquiries for the month of June over the same month in 1938.<sup>88</sup> The Island’s transportation facilities were barely able to handle the overflow of visitors; the extra Borden-Tormentine ferry George Tweedy had secured on his mission to Ottawa saved the day, running extra trips across the strait for the duration of Confederation week.<sup>89</sup> While the exact number of tourists attending the festival was not recorded, both Charlottetown newspapers estimated that tourist attendance at festival events numbered consistently in the thousands. Most importantly, the Island was leaving its mark on the visitors. As one *Guardian* editorial noted, “The unanimous verdict of visitors during the week is ‘We have had the best time ever’”.<sup>90</sup> Prospects for tourism’s future had never looked brighter.

83 “Germany is 100 Per Cent Optimistic There Will Be No War”, *Guardian*, 22 July 1939, p. 1.

84 “An Eventful Week”, *Patriot*, 22 July 1939, p. 4.

85 “A Red-Letter Week”, *Guardian*, 21 July 1939, p. 4.

86 “A Red-Letter Week”, *Guardian*, 21 July 1939, p. 4.

87 Robert J.C. Stead to Judge A.E. Arsenault, 26 July 1939, RG 34, series 9, file 9, PAPEI.

88 “Look for Big Increase in Tourist Traffic”, *Patriot*, 8 July 1939, p. 1.

89 “Extra Ferry Service Between Island and Mainland Next Week”, *Guardian*, 13 July 1939, p. 1.

90 “Editorial Notes”, *The Guardian*, 22 July 1939, p. 4.

## Conclusion

Confederation week's primary goal may have been to promote the province's tourism industry, but few who attended believed that this was the festival's true *raison d'être*. The 75th-anniversary celebrations had a much loftier and overt goal: to rekindle the "Confederation Spirit". The "true" meaning of Confederation week was made evident in a 17 July *Guardian* editorial entitled "Why We Are Celebrating". The editorial argued that the Charlottetown celebrations emphasized "the existence of a united dominion". Charlottetown was compared to an old family hearth – those huddled around it could "draw inspiration from the vision and initiative of our forbears, and seek new common ground in facing the problems of present and future".<sup>91</sup> Ottawa might be the political heart of the dominion, but Charlottetown was the spiritual centre, a shrine to which a beleaguered nation could make a regular pilgrimage to heal its depression-splintered soul. This was not just the opinion of the Island's newspapers. The *Montreal Gazette* suggested Charlottetown could offer a spiritual solution to current political discord by infusing politicians with the "Confederation Spirit" of the 1864 meetings: "It should be possible, for these meetings to recreate, or at least, to revive, the Confederation Spirit and to show by what means the difficulties which now beset the dominion might be overcome".<sup>92</sup> The *Ottawa Journal* similarly argued that the success of Charlottetown's celebration proved the existence of a strong, united Canada, declaring that "the long-term factors of national unity and evolution continue to operate imperceptibly. Charlottetown's celebration is proof of that".<sup>93</sup>

Whether it was reviving a long-sleeping "Spirit of Confederation" or simply giving a means of expression to a pre-existing nationalist sentiment, it was agreed that Canada's sense of purpose and unity had received a much-needed symbolic shot in the arm on the streets of Charlottetown. The spectators had taken meaning from the continuous barrage of symbols and icons on display during Confederation week. The pageant, for instance, was surprisingly successful in its goal of presenting a common history and a common vision for all Canadians. Newspapers consistently lauded it and an impressive list of politicians and other notables, including C.D. Howe, insisted that the *Romance of Canada* "should be presented right across Canada as an inspiration to unity and patriotic sentiment".<sup>94</sup> Ironically, the pageant was also the most persuasive example of how the past was being made subservient to the present at the Confederation Celebration. The *Guardian* declared that the pageant "faithfully portrays the founding of Canada".<sup>95</sup> It did nothing of the sort. The pageant mixed and matched historical eras and characters while completely neglecting others to create a fictional universe where a fictional vision of Canada's identity could be presented to the world. The pageant, as well as all of Confederation week, was using history to

91 "Why We Are Celebrating", *Guardian*, 17 July 1939, p. 4.

92 "Looking to Charlottetown", *Guardian*, 21 July 1939, p. 4.

93 "Ottawa Comment", *Guardian*, 25 July 1939, p. 4.

94 "High Praise for Confederation Celebration P.E.I.", *Moncton Daily Times*, n.d., RG 34, series 9, file 1, PAPEI; "Senator Has High Praise For Pageant", *Guardian*, 22 July 1939, p. 1; A.E. Arsenaault, Convenor, to Barbara Roper, 21 July 1939, RG 34, series 9, file 3, PAPEI; "A Red Letter Week", *Guardian*, 21 July 1939, p. 4.

95 "Confederation Anniversary Celebration: Programme", *Guardian*, 11 July 1939, p. 11.

help start Charlottetown's transformation into a national shrine, a process sociologist Dean MacCannell calls "site sacralization".<sup>96</sup> The festival marked the Island as separate from other regions, and worthy of national and tourist attention, based on its value as the site of an historical event.

As importantly, the Confederation Celebration exposed Islanders to the tourism industry like never before. The festival relied heavily on volunteer labour, from the pageant performers to those serving on the CCC. A massive recruitment drive stressed the importance of the celebrations to all Islanders, regardless of their social status or vocation. Ads in both the *Guardian* and the *Patriot* read, "A National Celebration – A lifetime event. . . . YOU may be of vital importance in making the events a success". Islanders were challenged to "give visitors something to remember the 'Island' by".<sup>97</sup> Recruiting ads also targeted specific groups in Charlottetown's population, such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, merchants and car owners. One newspaper ad was addressed directly to the "ladies". It implored the women of Charlottetown to assist by decorating with Christmas lighting and trimming their windows. The entire population of Charlottetown, along with much of the rest of province, had been mobilized for Confederation week. Citizens were all but told it was their duty to help make the festival a success, but were offered no financial recompense for their work. The Island's tourism boosters were continuing to assume that publicity equalled prosperity, but not stopping to think too hard about prosperity for whom. Nevertheless, the enthusiastic participation of Islanders from all walks of life as spectators, volunteers and participants in the events was one of the first real signs that the ambivalent attitude towards the tourism industry was changing.

There was no denying that Confederation week had been a spectacular success. It had satisfied the local population with tremendous spectacle and celebration. It had met the needs of federal politicians, who used it as a platform to promote tourism, take credit for economic development and champion the cause of national unity. Most importantly, it had exceeded the wildest dreams of Island tourism boosters by providing unprecedented publicity for the province. It is difficult to say whether Arsenault and the CCC were simply shrewd businessmen and politicians using the birthplace myth to their province's advantage or whether they were visionaries creating a permanent shrine to the Canadian nation at Charlottetown; most likely there is some truth to both these portraits. Regardless of the actual intent, the 1939 festival succeeded in transforming Charlottetown into a national shrine in the minds of millions of Canadians. Along with the national park, the birthplace myth now seemed set to serve as a permanent funnel to draw federal and tourist dollars into the province. Yet this did not happen. Instead, the events of Confederation week were almost immediately forgotten by the entire nation. The 1939 celebration disappeared under the massive shadow of the Second World War that began in September of that year. It would be 25 years before another national celebration would be held in the birthplace of Confederation.

In 1964, the festival commemorating the centennial of the Charlottetown

96 MacCannell, *The Tourist*, pp. 43-4. MacCannell notes in the same pages that there may be some sights "which are so spectacular in themselves that no institutional support is required to mark them off as attractions". In comparison, most modern attractions "are not so evidently reflective of important social values", and so "[m]assive institutional support is often required for sight sacralization in the modern world".

97 "Confederation Celebration", *Guardian*, 6 July 1939, p. 8.

Conference would dwarf the 1939 Confederation Celebration in every way. The celebration would be a year-long event instead of a week-long one, with celebrations in every corner of the province. Rather than a \$20,000 grant, the province would receive more than \$5 million to construct a massive multipurpose cultural complex dedicated to the Fathers of Confederation.<sup>98</sup> Nine years later, in 1973, the ownership of the provincial legislature where the Fathers had met was transferred to Parks Canada and the building was made a national historic site.<sup>99</sup> The process of site sacralization had come full circle.

The centennial and the ensuing enshrinement of the Island legislature owed much to the 1939 festival. While brainstorming for possible events in the early 1960s, centennial mastermind Frank MacKinnon demonstrated this debt by suggesting that a pageant “in the style of 1939” might be a good idea.<sup>100</sup> The efforts of Arsenault and his Confederation Celebration Committee were not completely lost in the fog of war. The 1939 festival demonstrated the potential power of the birthplace myth and served as a model for future celebrations. In staging a successful national celebration, Arsenault and his colleagues had taken some of the first steps towards creating a national shrine on Prince Edward Island that could serve as a permanent conduit for tourist and federal dollars.

98 This is detailed in *Prince Edward Island 1964 Centennial Committee: Report of the Board of Directors*, p. 83, RG34, series 13, file 26, PAPEI.

99 Not everyone agreed with the legislature becoming a shrine to Canadian nationalism. See Harry Baglolle and David Weale, eds., *Cornelius Howatt: Superstar!* (Summerside, 1974), p. 183.

100 Frank MacKinnon to Hon. J. D. Stewart, memo, 3 February 1960, p. 2, RG34, series 13, sub-series 1, file #16, PAPEI.