

The Hon. Edward Whelan

A Father of Confederation from Prince Edward Island
One of Ireland's Gifts to Canada

BY

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In early boyhood years in Prince Edward Island, I heard people of an older generation talking about Edward Whelan. Among the more frequent things that I recall said about him were:— What a great orator he was! he was not appreciated as he should have been! there has never been his like on the Island! As with other boys, those remarks of my elders made little impression upon me at the time; heedless youth is not interested in those who have left footprints on the sands of Time. As a matter of fact, it was not until comparatively recent years that I began to learn that the Hon. Edward Whelan of Prince Edward was no ordinary man.

Edward Whelan was the outstanding member of the Liberal Reforming Party which won Responsible Government for Prince Edward Island in 1851; he became a Father of Confederation in 1864; because of this double distinction, as well as for his activity in securing other reforms, he deserves to be placed in the front ranks of the leaders in that period of Canadian History from Responsible Government to Confederation, a place equal to that given to MacDonald, Cartier, Brown, McGee, Topper, Tilley and Galt.

Mr. W. L. Cotton, in *Chapters in Our Island Story*, writes as follows about Whelan:— “There are a few names in Prince Edward Island's story, that the people will not willingly let die; one of these is that of Edward Whelan, the man to whom they are heavily indebted for Free Government, Free Education, Free Lands and other blessings fought for in days of storm and struggle before the Island became a Province of the Confederation.” “The Island was then under Downing Street; its lands were owned for the most part by absentee proprietors; the few pounds the early settlers could scrape together in the fall of the year were sent away to England and elsewhere by the proprietors' agents.” “Whelan was a Member of the Executive Council and Queen's Printer and his name is inseparably connected with the various measures which were introduced in respect to Responsible Government, Universal Suffrage, Popular Education, the Abolition of Landlordism and kindred measures for the relief and betterment of conditions on the Island.” “An easy, graceful and eloquent public speaker, a brilliant and polished writer, possessing a highly cultivated literary taste and a well-stored mind, he proved throughout his whole career that he was also a practical man who could frame a parliamentary bill with as much ease as he could prepare a lecture on a literary subject. Apart from his high oratorical powers, in respect

to which, he had no rival in the Legislature or out of it, and no equal since his death, the great lever of public opinion, so powerful throughout the British Dominions, obeyed his masterly hand as often as occasion arose to resort to its agency. His opponents were, however, compelled to acknowledge that he never abused the power of the Press and that he knew how to combine a singularly consistent political career with conciliatory manners.”

In the year 1888, Mr. Peter McCourt presented to the public a biographical sketch of the Hon. Edward Whelan, together with a compilation of his principal speeches, as well as his addresses to the electors of the second district of King's County, Prince Edward Island, (Whelan's constituency), and a verbatim report of a brilliant lecture given by Whelan before the Catholic Young Men's Literary Institution of Charlottetown, in the month of January, 1864, entitled “Eloquence as an Art.”

Edward Whelan was born in the County Mayo, Ireland, in the year 1824. McCourt states that at an early age he emigrated with his parents to Halifax, Nova Scotia. W. L. Cotton, who became managing editor of *The Examiner* in 1873, the newspaper which Edward Whelan founded in Charlottetown in 1847, says, in his book *Chapters in Our Island Story*, that Whelan came as a mere boy to Halifax with his widowed mother; they came across the Atlantic Ocean in an emigrant sailing vessel; the Hon. Joseph Howe, taking an early morning stroll, went along one of the Halifax wharves, where an emigrant vessel was landing its human cargo, and saw a woman standing with a child in her arms, and a small bright boy at her side; placing his hand on the boy's head, Mr. Howe made some enquiries of the mother and at the end of the conversation, attracted by the boy's manner, he took him by the hand to his own home. It is not quite clear from Mr. Cotton's account whether he was sure of the fact that Whelan found immediate refuge in Mr. Howe's home, but he is certain that Whelan was trained for his life's work in Mr. Howe's printing office. Part of the excellent training given to apprentices in the professions and trades in those days came from having the youth live in the homes of their employers.

Joseph Howe was the editor of the newspaper *Nova Scotian*; in addition he printed and published the paper during the greater part of the time Whelan remained in his office. During the latter days of this splendid apprenticeship which Whelan received, John S. Thompson, father of a future premier of Canada, was editor of the *Nova Scotian*. “Howe influenced and encouraged the youthful Whelan to educate himself, and the boy's heart warmed to his benefactor, whom he ever afterwards regarded as a model; his imagination took fire, and, as a result, at a time when most boys are aimless and little concerned with the problems of life, he plunged into the political warfare of his day with a zest and insight quite remarkable. History, poetry and rhetoric were his delight, writing and debating the safety-valves of the national instinct of pugnacity.”

Whelan also acquired practice and experience for his future work, from a Catholic newspaper called *The Register*, established in Halifax by its first editor, the Rev. R. B. O'Brien, and published by Mr. John P. Walsh.

Whelan succeeded to the editorship of this paper. He, at this time, attained facility in public speaking from membership in a society founded by Father O'Brien, called the Young Men's Catholic Institute, which had a Library and Reading Room connected with it. Whelan frequently took part in the discussions. Through his apprenticeship with Howe and Thompson in printing, publishing and editing the *Nova Scotian*, and his additional experience with *The Register*, he became an able writer; by profiting from the mentorship of Joseph Howe, the outstanding orator of his time in Nova Scotia, and by speaking frequently in debates of the Catholic Institute, Whelan very early in life acquired ease and polish as a public speaker. It was not long before he became known as a promising young man, who should have a brilliant future; he was in the front rank of those who were taking part in the agitation for reform of the political system controlled by Family Compacts in the Maritime Colonies.

Prince Edward Island suffered from the same disabilities of irresponsible administration, Family Compact influence, and Downing Street control, as the other provinces of British North America, with the added incubus of an absentee landlord system. There was the same struggle between Family Compact group and Reformers as in the other colonies. Responsible Government came, but not until after it had been achieved in Nova Scotia and the Canadas.

One of the handicaps of the Reformers had been the want of a publication. The Family Compact was jubilant. Again the Liberals were organ of public opinion. Joseph Howe, consulted on the subject, had recommended the securing of the services of his young *protégé*. As a result Edward Whelan, nineteen years old, came by sailing vessel from Nova Scotia to Prince Edward Island, and in Charlottetown, on 31 Aug., 1843, began the publication of his newspaper, *The Palladium*. The motto of *The Palladium* was: "The Liberty of the Press is the Palladium of the Civil, Political and Religious Rights of a Briton." Professor Harvey states that Whelan was indebted to Curran, the great Irish orator, as one of the sources of his literary inspirations, and continues, "This motto reveals the fact that the boy editor was already conscious of the power and responsibility of the press and that this illumination and emancipation had been arrived at by the study of Irish experiences as well as by his own experience and training in the capable hands of Joseph Howe, who in the famous libel case of 1836 had to defend this liberty as Whelan himself had to do in the libel case of 1862."

Notwithstanding Whelan's heroic work, many of his subscribers were unable, or failed in their duty, to pay for the paper; he had no financial backers; consequently much to his regret, he was forced to suspend publication, and leave the island without a newspaper.

An unusual thing took place about this time! In the words of Whelan, when assuming on May 23, 1846, the editorship of the *Morning News*, a paper hitherto unfavourable to Reform, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony, Sir Henry V. Huntley began "to see the impolicy and mischief of governing exclusively for the benefit of a party, and will no doubt perceive the

necessity of entirely casting off the undue influence by which he has been so long controlled, and of adapting his Government to the wants and wishes of the great majority of the people. By pursuing a straight-forward, honest and independent line of action, he will secure their respect and gratitude – by pandering to old prejudices and predilections with the hope of conciliating, he will strengthen the hands of his enemies and cause inevitable and speedy ruin to himself. It will be the object of the *Morning News* – so long, at least, as I may continue to discharge the duties of editorship on its behalf – to note the development of this new and better policy which the Lieutenant-Governor seems inclined to pursue, and to watch, particularly, the movements of the party which is striving to wrest the helm of state from his hands, and who seek to entrap the country into an approval of their proceedings by artifice and misrepresentation.”

A General Election was about to take place in the Colony. The reformers, or Liberals, as Whelan called them, were much encouraged by what had taken place in some of the other colonies of British North America during the past few years; it was hoped that the Family Compact’s long term of autocracy on Prince Edward Island would be terminated and that a Government responsible to the majority of the electors – in other words, Responsible Government – would take its place. Whelan, in another portion of the same article in which he announced his editorship of the *Morning News*, wrote:—“Twelve months ago, when I followed *The Palladium* to its grave, I had little expectation of occupying the editorial chair of another newspaper in Charlottetown. Nor, indeed, was I actuated by any desire to court the labors and responsibilities by which it is surrounded.” Now, however, further responsibilities were about to be thrust upon him. He was chosen, at the age of twenty-one years, as a candidate to represent the Second District of King’s County in the House of Assembly.

His speech of acceptance is too long to reproduce; selections from it indicate along what lines he appealed to the people for support. In his opening remarks he said:

“Neither private interest nor personal ambition has prompted me to seek the honor which it is in your power to confer.”—“If I have any one hope higher than another, it is that, by being returned to the assembly, I may be enabled to strengthen the advocacy of those principles of Liberal policy in the administration of Government, to which three years of my life have been devoted.” Answering the charge brought against him by his enemies that he had changed his principles on becoming editor of the *Morning News*, he exclaimed: “Have I altered my views respecting the state of the tenantry of this Island? No, I still advocate their claims, I still urge on every occasion, the necessity of effecting a settlement of the question so long at issue between the tenant and the proprietor. Have I altered my views respecting the state of Government in this Colony? No, I hold the opinion now that I did three years ago, that the policy of the Government was opposed to the wishes and the

interests of the people. Who has made it so? Not the Lieutenant-Governor. He has been a passive instrument in the hands of others. But the Executive Council, backed and supported by the office holders – the Family Compact – have made it so... From whom have this Executive Council – this Family Compact – these office-holders, from whom have they derived their power? From unfaithful, unscrupulous representatives of the people. Have I changed my mind as to the necessity there exists for the introduction of Responsible Government? No, my opinion in favor of the system is more fully fixed. I have not changed my opinion Responsible Government, I have not changed it respecting the Land Question, the construction of the Executive Council, the dominancy of the Family Compact ... The Land Question leaves the largest portion of the whole population of the Island at the mercy a few absentee proprietors, who would scarcely know the lands they own, if they visited the Colony, and who do not care a fraction how much those who improve and embellish them may be sunk in poverty and degradation, so long as their avarice can be gratified by the large sums of money which they derive from them... How many of the tenants are this day, throughout the whole Island, prevented from exercising one of the most important of these privileges – the franchise? Is it not well known, that many hundreds of tenants paying heavy rents have nothing whatever in the shape lease, agreement or contract with the owner of the soil, and might be dispossessed at an hour's notice. Their franchise is in the landlord's keeping, and it will remain so until the Legislature and Government interfere to prevent this state of things, because the landlord has reason to apprehend that it would be exercised in a manner that would be inimical to his selfish interests."

Whelan goes on to deal with the Family Compact's dominance over successive Governments:

"I stated in 1843 that the Government of this colony was the most corrupt and selfish, ever tolerated by any people who had the slightest pretension to liberty and independence. – It is no more worthy of popular confidence in 1846 than it was in 1843, and cannot establish the smallest claim to that confidence, so long as its whole power and patronage are controlled by a dominant party, whose political principles are at variance with the principles held by the mass of the people, a party who have been always opposed to the adoption of every Liberal measure advocated by the Colony, and who have ruined the character and prospects of every administration that has attempted to govern for the benefit of all parties. You all know, gentlemen, the party to whom I refer, it is the Family Compact, the clique of office-holders and Land Speculators. They are the gentry who have manned and commanded the ship of State, and sailed her, too, for privateering purposes whenever there was a good chance of a successful run. The majority the people's

representatives have been puppets in their hands, because every undue influence has always been exerted at elections to procure the return of a majority of men favorable to their views and interests. They have controlled the House of Assembly, they control the Executive Council – they controlled, for a while, the present Lieutenant-Governor, as they controlled former ones, and have succeeded in shaping the conduct of every Governor to suit their own selfish purposes, so that the very name and office have become matters of universal distrust and alarm”

On August 14, 1846, the returning officer, W. Underhay, declared Edward Whelan and John Jardine the victors, over two other candidates, Whightman and MacDonald, in the appeal made to the electors of the second constituency of King’s County. Whelan continued to be the representative of that constituency in the House of Assembly for a period of twenty-one years, until a campaign of calumny, directed against him by former supporters, defeated him in a by-election in April, 1867.

Edward Whelan’s connection with the *Morning News* was severed by himself. On August 9, 1847, the first issue of *The Examiner* appeared with Whelan its editor; this newspaper, under his control, exercised a powerful influence in securing the most important reforms in the history of Prince Edward Island.

In the House of Assembly, during the 1847 session, – the first in which Whelan took part as a member of Parliament, – a lengthy discussion took place on Responsible Government. He made good a promise to his constituents, during the election campaign of 1846, that the subject would be introduced in the House. An address favoring it was adopted by the Legislature and transmitted to England; the Colonial Office replied that the time was not yet opportune for such a measure to be put into operation. Apparently the proprietors of the land – the absentee landlords – were still able to influence the Colonial Office to postpone the adoption of Responsible Government on the part of Prince Edward Island. Earl Grey, in a despatch to Sir Donald Campbell, who had taken Huntley’s position as Governor, wrote in 1849: “That Prince Edward Island was comparatively small in extent and population; the circumstances which would render the introduction of Responsible Government expedient were wanting, – circumstances of which time, and the natural progress of events, could alone – remove the deficiency.” He thought however, that the time had come when the Island should assume a larger share of the expenses of government, most of which had, hitherto, been borne by the Imperial Government. The House expressed its willingness to accede only when it controlled revenues arising from the permanent revenue laws and when Responsible Government was conceded. The Governor dissolved the Assembly. A new House, which met on March 5, 1850, passed a vote of want of confidence in the Executive Council and refused to vote supplies until Responsible Government was conceded. This motion was moved by George Coles; its framing was evidently the work of Edward Whelan. At the opening of the Legislature on March 25, 1851, the Governor

informed the House that Responsible Government would be granted, on condition that compensation be paid certain officials. The Hon. George Coles was called upon to form a Government; Whelan was one of its leading members; the first Responsible Government that ever ruled the destinies of the Island assumed power on April 25, 1851. There was great rejoicing in Charlottetown and throughout the Colony when it was learned that, at long last, Responsible Government had been won by the people.

“Under the new régime,” McCourt says, “measures of reform, followed each other in rapid succession – measures which have won for Coles and Whelan the foremost place in the annals of our history, and enshrined their names in the hearts of the people. The fact that, in any section of this Island, an avowal of their principles invariably obtains for political aspirants the respect, if not the votes, of the electors, is sufficient testimony on this point.”

Whelan, having been appointed Queen’s Printer, had to suspend editing *The Examiner*. The departure, however, was only a temporary one; when his party was not in power, he resumed its editorial management. McCourt, who was a newspaper man of ability, has this to say about Whelan as a writer and lecturer:

“The columns of the Examiner were always replete with brilliant editorials, admirable selections and current news, the result of a great deal of mental labor, in addition to which the greater part of the duties inseparable from party organization and political warfare was thrown upon his hands. – He found time to appear frequently upon the platform as a lecturer, a role in which he was singularly successful. His lectures on Shakespeare and other subjects, in the Mechanics’ Institute and in St. Joseph’s Hall, were considered masterpieces of English composition; but owing to his habitual modesty, none of them were given to the Press for publication, except in compliance with a pressing invitation to do so; there is, therefore, great reason to regret the loss of manuscripts by fire some years ago.”

The Liberal Reform Government of Coles and Whelan has to its credit a reform of education which has had far-reaching effects on the lives of generations of the people of the province. Education in Prince Edward Island had suffered from the usual pioneer conditions of inefficient teachers, non-attendance of pupils, and the system of local and voluntary support. By the Free Education Act of 1852 the Government took over the payment of the salaries of teachers, leaving only the maintenance of school buildings to individual districts. In spite of much opposition, the law went into effect and Prince Edward Island adopted Free Schools long before the other provinces of Canada.

In speaking on this measure, Whelan was given the opportunity of

stating his views upon an important question. Some members of the House claimed that because their constituents objected to the Bill, they would oppose it. "I, on the contrary," said Whelan, "whilst I admit it to be the duty of a representative, when so circumstanced, to listen patiently and respectfully to the remonstrances of his constituents, and to give their opinions and agreements the fullest consideration, am fully persuaded that he ought not to abandon his own judgement, or deviate from the path which he conscientiously believes it to be his duty to pursue; unless by the force of facts and reasoning, he shall have been convinced that he had taken an erroneous view of the question." Those who are familiar with the speech of the great Irish Statesman, Edmund Burke, made before the electors of Bristol in the year 1780, when giving an account of his stewardship and declining renomination, will note the similarity of view point on the question – Should a representative vote as his constituents dictate?

Speaking on the subject of Free Education, during the session of the House which began on February 17, 1852, Whelan recommended to the Committee, studying the proposed bill, that it should include a provision for the establishment of three scholarships – one for each county – in connection with the Central Academy which later on became Prince of Wales College. "I am thoroughly convinced," he said, "that the expenditure of ninety pounds would be highly judicious." He cited the example of two young men from the Island who had won Scholarships in the neighboring colonies – one in Nova Scotia, the other in New Brunswick – which encouraged them in competing for and securing the higher prizes of Professorships. The establishment of Government and other types of Scholarships on Prince Edward Island has been of incalculable benefit to many promising young Islanders; they have been the stepping stones by which many young people began the ascent to high positions at home, in other Provinces of Canada, and in many parts of the United States. Professor D. C. Harvey, a Rhodes scholar from the Island, in his lecture on Whelan delivered in 1926, almost three quarters of a century after the plan of Prince Edward Island Government Scholarships had been first expounded, stated: "But as Whelan had the instincts of a scholar, and much of the scholar's equipment, it would be the fittest vindication of his memory at this late date, if some fund could be accumulated, the proceeds of which could be devoted to a Scholarship which would bear his name and lead out into the wider world, which he had explored in imagination, the most promising sons and daughters of the Islanders whose lot he strove so hard to improve to the neglect of his own fortunes. In this way his adopted sons and daughters would do for his name what he did for his adopted home."

An important piece of legislation passed the House of Assembly in 1854: it empowered the Government to purchase land from absentee landlords and sell it to the tenants. At this time four estates were bought. It is interesting to record that, when the remainder of the proprietors in Great Britain were forced to sell their land on Prince Edward Island in the year 1875 the method advocated and practised by the Coles and Whelan Government in 1854 was once again put into operation.

At the opening of the first training school for teachers on Prince Edward Island, Oct. 1, 1856, with Lieutenant-Governor Sir Dominic Daly presiding, Whelan could pardonably point out what had been done, mostly through his efforts, for education:

"Though Prince Edward Island happens to be the smallest and the poorest of the North American Colonies, regarding our poverty in a commercial sense, we are entitled to boast, that we have taken the lead and set an example to all the others in the important matter of education. The enlightened policy which placed us in a position thus to boast, though originating with one section of politicians, will be hailed as the brightest inheritance of all who come after us, when the rancour and petty heats of party warfare will be forgotten, and the sons and daughters of Prince Edward Island, unable to take an interest in the conflicts of their predecessors, may exult on a common ground over the boon bequeathed to them. For my own part, though, as I said before, not a native of the Colony, I shall always consider, wherever my lot may be cast, that I have been highly privileged in being not only a member of the community, but a member of the Legislature which gave birth to our free system of education."

Edward Whelan's attitude towards Confederation was consistent; he advocated and supported it by voice and pen, regardless of the state of public opinion. In this respect, he differed from some of the "Fathers" from his own Colony who were influenced by the general distrust of the scheme on the part of the people during the first years after the conferences of 1864.

In September, 1864, the first meeting of Fathers of Confederation took place in the Colonial Building, Charlottetown. A Tory Government was in power in the Colony: Colonel Gray, Edward Palmer, William H. Pope, George Coles and Andrew A. MacDonald were the Prince Edward Island delegates. George Coles was the leader of the Liberal opposition. When the invitation of the Canadian Government representatives, who had come to Charlottetown to attend the Maritime Convention, that all the delegates should meet in Quebec in October, 1864, was accepted, the Prince Edward Island members were increased in number from five to seven, and Edward Whelan, the outstanding man in the Liberal opposition, was included. Whelan had always been a strong supporter of Confederation; he had supported it in the different newspapers he had edited; William H. Pope, his political adversary and rival editor, was likewise supporter of Confederation; Pope and the other Tory members of the delegation had long recognized the great abilities of Whelan; they admired his courage and determination in the shock of many a hard-fought battle; they felt that his eloquent tongue and facile pen would increase the strength and the popularity of the cause of Confederation with the people of the Colony. Consequently, he was invited to be one of the delegates who would proceed to Quebec in October, 1864, and he went. He was the only "Father" who wrote a connected account of the

different public meetings and events which took place during the two months of travel which the "Fathers" undertook to popularize Confederation throughout Lower and Upper Canada and the Maritimes.

In the month of May, 1865, Edward Whelan's book, *The Union of The British Provinces*, appeared. It was written shortly after the Confederation Conferences held in Charlottetown and Quebec, and the series of public functions, arranged for the delegates, in those cities, as well as in Halifax, St. John, Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, Belleville, Coburg, Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catherines and Niagara Falls, in the late autumn of 1864. Its importance to the student of Canadian Confederation rests on the fact that it is the only account of those important functions from the pen of one of the "Fathers" who was present at the meetings, and who was as skilled in writing, as in estimating the importance of the material he was presenting to posterity.

Students of Canadian History are indebted to Professor D. C. Harvey, at present Archivist of the Province of Nova Scotia, who, in 1927, brought out a new edition of Whelan's book. In the foreword Professor Harvey writes "that the three most useful accounts of the negotiations which immediately preceded the creation of the Dominion" came from Prince Edward Islanders; "of these, two were compiled by Fathers of Confederation and the other by a son of one of the Fathers." (The Fathers were Edward Whelan and Andrew A. MacDonald, the other was Sir Joseph Pope, son of William Henry Pope and Secretary to Sir John A. MacDonald). Professor Harvey, in his foreword, says that the writings of MacDonald and Pope "are of value to the student of the Constitution who would know the rocks which threatened the ship of state when it was being launched; but the student of Canadian Nationality, of the spirit in which it was created, of the atmosphere in which it was born, must turn to the work of another delegate, Hon Edward Whelan, whose little book, 'The Union of the British Provinces,' contains a full narrative of that triumphal mobilization of public opinion, which was undertaken between the Charlottetown Conference of September 1, 1864, and the signing of the Quebec Resolutions two months later, in Montreal." Professor Harvey quotes from a letter which Whelan wrote to his close friend, J. C. Underhay of Fortune Bay, Prince Edward Island: "I send you a copy of my little book on Confederation., which you may not deem unworthy of notice. It may be of some use for reference. It is a very humble and unpretending affair; but even such as it is, it has cost me 150 pounds for printing and binding 2,000 copies; and I haven't received a shilling yet for it. However, I may get something by and by."

The conference at Quebec, referred to above, opened in the Parliament Buildings on Monday, Oct. 10th, and continued to the 27th. On the 28th the delegates proceeded to Montreal, where, on the following day, at an official banquet, speeches were made by fourteen of the delegates, including Edward Whelan. In the concluding portion of an eloquent speech, Whelan stated:

"The connection with the British Crown will not only be not impaired [by Confederation], but will be strengthened; and for the

preservation of those free institutions, which we all value so much, and which we hope to transmit to future generations, he thought there was but one remedy and that remedy was union. But let no man imagine that this much desired object can be effected at Quebec or Montreal. The great work is but commenced. The halls of the several local legislatures, the constituencies of each province in public meetings assembled, and at the hustings are the places in which the great question must be settled. It will be the duty of the public men in each and every province whose representatives are now in Canada, to educate the public mind up to the adoption of their views. The task may be a tedious, difficult and protracted one; but no great measure was ever yet accomplished, or worth much, unless surrounded with difficulties. Deferring reverently to the public opinion of his own province, he would cheerfully go among his people, and explaining it as well as he could, he would ask them to support a measure, which he believed will enhance their prosperity.”

The delegates left Montreal on October 31st and travelled by train and steamer to Carillon. Whelan, in a vivid description of this portion of the voyage, recalls that the Irish poet, Thomas Moore, was inspired to write his beautiful Canadian Boat Song by what he saw in this locality more than half a century before. Ottawa, Kingston, Belleville, Coburg and Toronto were visited, with public functions at each. After a trip to Niagara Falls, the party returned to Montreal, where the resolutions adopted at Quebec were signed by all the delegates present. Whelan concludes his interesting account by stating: “If the work of the Quebec Conference Chamber is not perfect – what human work ever was? – it will not be, however, without its advantages, inasmuch as it may serve to throw some light on the path of more skillful and sagacious adventurers, who – fearless of prejudice and suspicion – may be required to moil through the dark labyrinths of that most perplexing of all sciences – the framing of a Nation's Constitution.”

In the session of 1866 the leader of the Island Government submitted objections to Confederation which became known as the “No Terms” resolutions. Whelan, in reply advocated the gradual education of the people as to the proposals. He prophesied that “if a Confederation of the British North American Provinces takes place, and Prince Edward Island remains out, she will sue to be admitted into it.”

Whelan's amendment to the resolution against Confederation was that no vote should be passed by the Legislature until the people were offered an opportunity of pronouncing at a general election. The amendment was lost by a vote of 21 to 7. This was the occasion of Whelan's last speech in Parliament.

The Rev. John C. MacMillan, in his *History of the Catholic Church in Prince Edward Island*, describes the many unnecessary religious controversies which, during the years from 1850 to 1865, embittered the relations between the Catholic inhabitants of the Island, about 45 per cent, and the Protestant, about 55 per cent. William Henry Pope, editor of *The Islander*, and Colonial

Secretary, although not a member of Parliament, thought to advance his cause in seeking a constituency by attacking in his newspaper the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. Catholic champions struck back, and Whelan could hardly avoid being drawn into the controversy. Provoked on one occasion by an unusually long and abusive article by Pope, he published a rejoinder to which he gave the caption, "Pope's Epistle against the Romans." In 1863 Pope was elected to the House of Assembly. Thereafter he was less truculent, but his conduct had made Catholics suspicious of Confederation, which he supported, and this suspicion tended to alienate their support from Whelan, as another ardent advocate of that project.

Whelan's political opponents took advantage of the situation by nominating an Irish Catholic as his opponent in the election of 1867. Reports were circulated that he was indifferent about his religion and that he no longer possessed the favor of some of the priests, and, in particular, of the Bishop of Charlottetown, the Rt. Rev. Peter McIntyre. Support was given to these rumors when the Bishop removed the Rev. Ronald Bernard MacDonald, afterwards renowned for his piety and for his eloquence, from the parish of St. Peter's Bay, in Whelan's constituency, and replaced him by the Rev. William Phelan, known to be favorable to Whelan's opponent.

After a bitter campaign, in which Confederation was the main issue, the Tory Government was defeated and the Liberal Party, led by George Coles and Edward Whelan, came into power. But Whelan's majority in his own constituency was greatly reduced. He was appointed Queen's Printer, and had to seek re-election. All the old weapons were again brought out against him. In a letter to the electors he thus referred to the alleged hostility of Bishop McIntyre:

"No one understands better than His Lordship the Bishop does that by embroiling himself in an election contest, where Catholics are divided in opinion, respecting the political merits of certain candidates, a spirit of contention would be aroused that would be attended with the very worst consequences to the Community. Every Liberal and enlightened clergyman knows – and His Lordship well represents the most unbounded liberality of sentiment and intelligence – that undue clerical influence is very distasteful to a free people and discouraging to public liberty, while it frequently fails to accomplish the object at which it aims. In this age of progress and liberal ideas, all men are justly jealous of their rights to unshackled freedom of opinion respecting political affairs, and will not willingly part with that right, in mere deference to any authority."

On April 17, 1867, the by-election was held; prejudices and innuendo replaced calm judgement. Edward Whelan, who had represented the constituency from his entry into politics, was defeated by a small majority.

Father MacMillan writes as follows about Whelan's last election: "It was a sad and bitter blow for him. It was said that he never recovered from it.

Those who saw him, on his return to Charlottetown after the Campaign, told, how he had aged in a few short weeks, so that he appeared little more than a wreck of his former self. His step had lost its sprightliness and as he moved about he seemed as if uncertain of his strength. He who had been the welcomed visitor at so many homes, and boon companion of so many friends, seemed to have lost all interest in social gatherings, while the sprightly wit and rich repartee that had adorned his conversation gave way to a settled and sombre taciturnity. Even his political opponents were moved to pity at the change in him, and his friends irrespective of class or creed, could not but regret the untoward circumstances that had conspired to blight his promising career.”

Peter McCourt states:

“ We need not dwell upon the result of this defeat. The hardships and excitement of these campaigns, together with the temporary estrangement of old friends through misrepresentation of his honest and patriotic intentions, proved too deep a wound to be healed on this side of the tomb. As the summer advanced he showed signs of failing health, but his friends did not feel alarmed until the autumn-tide, when all hopes of his recovery rapidly disappeared, and at noon on Tuesday the 10th of December 1867, he breathed his last.” Funeral services took place in St. Dunstan’s Cathedral on Friday, December 13th; the most imposing funeral procession ever witnessed in Charlottetown followed his remains to the Catholic Cemetery on St. Peter’s road near the city limits.”

According to Professor Harvey, Whelan was twice married; in the year 1845 to Mrs. Mary Weymouth – two children were born of this marriage, both of whom died young; after the death of his first wife, in 1851, to Miss Mary M. Hughes, daughter of George A. Hughes of the Halifax Dockyard. Of the three children born of this second union, two daughters died at an early age; the third child, a son, perished at the age of nineteen years, while sailing in Charlottetown harbor, on July 1, 1875. Whelan’s widow survived him many years; she received a small pension of \$300.00 per annum from the Government. Whelan’s home, at the corner of Sidney and Hillsborough Street, Charlottetown, was destroyed by fire in 1876, and with it his library, manuscripts and private papers.

“ Whelan was interested in beautifying his native city, and the beautiful birch trees which now adorn Hillsborough Square were’ planted by him. The late J. C. Underhay dug them up, packed them in a flour-barrel and shipped them in a schooner from Annandale to Charlottetown.”

Thomas D’Arcy McGee’s admiration was expressed in verse not long after Whelan’s death and shortly before his own tragic ending. It is the only tribute in verse, known to the present writer, paid by one Father of Confederation to another. It may be found in the *Collected Poems of McGee* edited by Mrs. James Sadlier in 1869. The first and last of the four stanzas are

here quoted:

By this dread line of light,
Rises upon my sight,
Borne up the churchyard white,
The dead! – mid the bearers;
Sharply the cold clods rung –
Silent far aye that tongue
On which delighted hung
Myriads of hearers!

Long may thy Island home
Look for thy like to come –
Few may she ever
Find more deserving trust,
Freer from thoughts unjust,
Than this heart – in the dust
At rest – and forever!

The late Mr. J. C. Underhay of Fortune Bay, Prince Edward Island, was one of Whelan's closest friends. He was desirous of collecting a fund for the erection of a monument to his memory; speaking on the subject in 1886 he said:

“No marble monument is needed to perpetuate the memory of Edward Whelan in this province. Our free schools, free lands and self government, with the well-tilled fields and comfortable homes, which all over the province have taken the place of the rude structures and neglected farms of the rent-paying era, are all monuments to his memory, more lasting than freestone or marble. But the people of Prince Edward Island need to erect a monument to his memory to tell to future generations that we, who were the immediate recipients of the benefits his patriotic heart, his gifted intellect, and his eloquent tongue procured for us, are not ungrateful for, or forgetful of, the great benefits he was so largely instrumental in securing for this Province.”

Shortly after Whelan's death, a tribute in verse appeared in *The Examiner* over the signature “Mourner.” The first and last of the verses are here reproduced:

They lowered him gently down,
To rest with the silent dead,
And over his grave the falling snow
Like a winding sheet was spread.

Let a grateful country haste to show

The sense of his trustful zeal,
And thus to lessen the bitter woe
The bereaved ones sorely feel.

In the summer of 1938, during a holiday visit to Prince Edward Island, this writer was driven over a portion of the constituency which the Hon. Edward Whelan formerly represented in Parliament. Mr. Wade Hughes, a member of the Island Legislature, was the guide, and brought me to see his colleague in Parliament, Mr. George Saville, who has always evinced a keen interest in the history of the Island. Mr. Saville resides in Annandale, the place where Whelan made his first appearance as a nominated candidate for the House of Assembly. Mr. Saville's grandfather, Mr. Howlett, was the Sheriff who conducted the election in that constituency in the year 1846.

"Do you see that building over there?" Mr. Saville said to us, as he pointed through a window of his home, which is beside the bay. "Well" said he, "on that plot of land, near that building, Edward Whelan made his first appeal to the electors of this constituency; he spoke in the open air, standing on top of a molasses' puncheon." "And I've been told" continued Mr. Saville, "that it was a great speech; — it must have been a great speech, because men in this district recall hearing their fathers speaking about it." "Yes," said Mr. Saville, "Whelan was a great man; he got a raw deal in his last election; but my people voted for him; who remembers his political opponent nowadays? but Whelan is remembered and will continue to be remembered as the greatest statesman of this Island." When Mr. Saville was asked if there was any one living in the district who recalled seeing and hearing Whelan, he said: "Yes there is a remarkably well preserved man not far from here who actually voted for Whelan in his last two elections in 1867; go and see Mr. James Norton, who is well over ninety years of age; he has a splendid memory and he is well informed."

Mr. Norton was found in a field weeding turnips. After the lapse of over seventy years he could recall Whelan's appearance and the impression he made on groups of people when speaking. "Whelan was the finest speaker I have ever heard." "Do you know," Mr. Norton said, looking at us in a humorous way, "I came very near being related to Edward Whelan; he and my aunt, Harriet Underhay, were great friends; it was said at one time that they were going to be married." "What happened?" Mr. Norton was asked. "Oh, it is hard to say!" he replied; "only another instance, I suppose, of the course of love not running smooth." "It's too bad," Mr. Norton continued, "you did not give me timely warning of your coming; I would have hunted up some of my old papers and diaries." "Yes! Whelan was a great man. In this part of the constituency, Whelan had the support of the majority of the electors; many of us differed from him in religion, he was a Catholic; we are Protestants; that made no difference; we admired the man and always voted for him." "In the two elections of 1867, I was old enough to vote, and I voted for him. There were untrue stories circulated about him in his last election. We shall never see his like again."

Mr. William Cain of New Perth, Prince Edward Island, has in his possession a portrait of Edward Whelan which was given to him by the daughter of the late J. C. Underhay. Mr. Cain took a leading part in advocating the erection of a monument to Whelan and was responsible, along with the Benevolent Irish Society of Charlottetown (of which Society Whelan was at one time President), in having Professor Harvey deliver his lecture, "The Centenary of Edward Whelan," in Charlottetown on August 9, 1926.

During the week beginning July 16, 1939, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Confederation Conference was celebrated in the Cradle of Confederation, Charlottetown. It was an outstanding success.

One of the main features of the celebration was the unveiling, under the auspices of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, of bronze plaques to the memory of the "Fathers" of Confederation who represented Prince Edward Island at the Quebec Conference. The Hon. Edward Whelan's plaque was unveiled by the delegate representing the Irish Historical Society of Canada, Dr. Emmet J. Mullally of Montreal, a native and a former resident of Prince Edward Island.

Edward Whelan Underhay wrote to this writer recently:

"My father was a great admirer of the man. As you see, from my name I have been called after him. Whelan and my father were very staunch friends and admirers of each other; they held the same views on politics; in the years after Whelan's death my father never tired of extolling his virtues and political sagacity." "My father not only had me named after Edward Whelan but he had my older sister named after Whelan's wife - Mary Major; I am sending you what I believe to be the only sample of Whelan's handwriting in King's County; the man mentioned in the letter was the son of a neighbor who had journalistic hopes and had applied to Whelan for the position of Printer's Devil; be it said, however, that he never got the job, probably not being able to fill Whelan's somewhat exacting requirements."

This letter of Whelan's is dated May 7, 1860 - and is addressed to John C. Underhay. It reads as follows:

My Dear John:

I am in receipt of your last favor. If Billy - has anything of a civilized look about him - if he is not quite a dwarf nor yet a giant - if he knows B from a Bull's foot - if he is not in rags and has a good appetite - if he won't, in short, be a disgrace to my very respectable constituents - send him along and I will take good care of him. His wages will, of course, be in proportion to his merits - from 10 to 30 shillings per month. If he is not a positive numbskull - if he can read and write tolerably well - if he is decently clad, and a good quiet, steady boy, I will put him into the Printing Office at once and give him schooling at my own expense - his

father to find him clothing for the first year of his apprenticeship. Tell his father that in any case, he must not be sent to me destitute of clothing, if he is a good boy, smart, intelligent and industrious, he will be well cared for under any hands; if he is the reverse, he will be sent home again.

Yours dear John,

Edward Whelan.

The above pages tell a little of the story of an Irish emigrant who came to Canada in his early boyhood; by reason of a rigorous use of natural ability and self-education he became the editor of a newspaper at the age of nineteen years; a member of Parliament at twenty-one; the co-leader of a political party at twenty-eight; a Father of Canadian Confederation at forty; and when he died, at the age of forty-three years, he left a rich heritage of public services which the intervening Seventy-three years have shown to be valuable not only for his adopted province of Prince Edward Island but for Canada as a whole.

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