

Religious and Educational Connecting Links between Prince Edward Island and Quebec Province 1534-1948

by
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Having been born in the Province of Prince Edward Island and having lived in the Province of Quebec for the past fifty years, I propose this evening to speak about some of the ties that have connected the Island Province with Quebec during the past four hundred years. In particular, there has been the relationship between the Catholics of Prince Edward Island on the one hand and the Seminary and the University of Laval on the other.

Prince Edward Island was named Abegweit by its original inhabitants, the Micmac Indians. The name means "rocked by the waves." Jacques Cartier, of the seaport of St. Malo in Brittany, France, discovered the Island towards the end of the month of June, close to the feast day of St. John the Baptist, in the year 1534, and he is said to have named it Isle St. Jean. Some days later he took possession of Canada by raising the flag of France, the Fleur de Lys, and a large cross on the coast of Gaspé, Quebec. Isle St. Jean and Quebec remained parts of New France from 1534 to 1763, a period of 229 years.

Isle St. Jean became a colony of England in 1763 and was politically annexed to Nova Scotia. In 1769 it was made a separate colony. In 1799 its name was changed from Isle St. Jean to Prince Edward Island in honour of the fourth son of King George III of England, Prince Edward who was also known as the Duke of Kent. He was Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in British North America and had never even visited the Island that was named after him.

The first meetings of the delegates from what are now the Provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, dealing with Canadian confederation took place in Charlottetown, P.E.I., in

September, 1864. Over one month later, thirty-two Fathers of Confederation including two from Newfoundland met in the city of Quebec and drew up seventy-two of the clauses of the British North America Act which on July 1st, 1867 became Canada's written Constitution. Robert Harris, commissioned by the Canadian Government of the day to paint the well known picture – The Fathers of Confederation – came to Prince Edward Island as a child of five years from Wales. His productive life as an artist was spent between the Island province and Montreal. The original picture was destroyed when a disastrous fire gutted the interior of the Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, about the turn of the century.

In the year 1931 the Parliament of Britain passed the Statute of Westminster. It is held that, since that legislation was enacted, Canada is no longer a colony of England but a sister nation in the Commonwealth of British Nations. Canada now has as much ownership of England as England has of Canada.

It is well known that over 6,000 French settlers were removed from Nova Scotia by the English in the year 1755 and dispersed along the Atlantic New England States. But what is not so well known is that an even worse crime was committed by the English against the French in the year 1758, when over 2,000 Acadians were forcibly expelled from their homes on Prince Edward Island. It is estimated that close to 1,000 were lost at sea when, in the stormy weather of the month of December, the Atlantic crossing was undertaken by unseaworthy English transports loaded with French settlers from Isle St. Jean.

It is now close to 200 years since those two mass deportations of French inhabitants from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were carried out by England. Not much imagination is required in our age accustomed to the outrages of man against man in two world wars, to depict the feelings of anguish, indignation and righteous anger which the people of Quebec shared with all justice-minded people at the abuses and indignities showered upon their compatriots in Acadia and in Isle St. Jean in 1755 and 1758.

François de Montmorency Laval, educated by the Jesuits at La Flèche, was consecrated a Bishop in Paris in 1658 and landed in Quebec on June 19, 1659, with the title of Vicar Apostolic of New France. In 1663 the Quebec Seminary was founded. In 1674 Pope Clement X created the Diocese of Quebec. Its territory included all North America except the Atlantic New England States and the Spanish colonies bordering on the Pacific Ocean. About 150 dioceses have since then been carved out of the original Diocese of Quebec.

Prince Edward Island was part of the immense Diocese of Quebec for 155 years, up to the year 1829 when the Diocese of Charlottetown was formed. When the French were dispossessed of their lands in 1758, by the English, the colony was without a priest, until in the year 1772 Father James

MacDonald came with two hundred Highland Scotch Catholics, who left Scotland because of the penal laws against their religion in the British Isles, which were enforced with great severity following the Battle of Culloden in 1746. Letters were exchanged between Father MacDonald and the Right Rev. Jean Olivier Briand, the seventh Bishop of the Diocese of Quebec, who was in charge of the Diocese from 1766 to 1784. Father James MacDonald who had been educated and ordained in Paris attached himself more to the Acadian French than to his Gaelic-speaking compatriots. He died in 1785 when only 45 years old. He was buried in the old French cemetery of Fort St. Louis. That part of Prince Edward Island is now called Scotchfort.

Rev. Angus Bernard MacEachern who was to become the first Bishop of Charlottetown, was born in Scotland in the year 1759. His education for the priesthood was received in Valladolid, Spain, where he was ordained in 1787. After a few years in the Western Highlands of Scotland he came to Isle St. Jean in 1790 bearing credentials from Bishop Alex MacDonald of Scotland to Bishop Jean François Hubert, the ninth Bishop of Quebec. Father MacEachern went about from place to place among the Gaelic-speaking, the English-speaking and the French-speaking people. He wrote the Bishop of Quebec on May 1st, 1793, "that there was only one large Missal in folio on the entire Island, and as the place is so poor and I cannot keep a servant and a horse I find it very burdensome to carry Missal, vestments, altar stone and whatever other little necessities I want from one settlement to another."

Pierre Denault, the tenth Bishop of the Diocese of Quebec, who was also pastor of the Parish of Longueuil, near Montreal, was the first bishop of the Catholic Church to visit Prince Edward Island. Along with his secretary, Father Lartigue, who later became the first Bishop of Montreal, they left Longueuil on May 3rd, 1803, and proceeded by way of Burlington, Vermont, to Boston where they took passage by sailing vessel to Nova Scotia. Performing pastoral duties along the coast line of Nova Scotia, they arrived in Charlottetown on August 15th, after three months from the time they left Longueuil. The pastoral letter written in French and dated, Tracadie, P. E. Island, August 24th, 1803, was translated into Gaelic by Father MacEachern for the benefit of the Scotch Catholics. After visiting the Gaelic-speaking and English-speaking Catholics, who numbered over 1600, he next visited the Acadian people of the Island who were mainly centered in two parishes, Rustico and Malpecque where 520 French Catholics lived. From the latter place he went by sailing vessel to New Brunswick and from Miramichi and Madawaska he eventually reached Quebec City, towards the end of September of the year 1803. Three years later, in 1806, Bishop Denault died at Longueuil and was succeeded by his co-adjutor Joseph Octave Plessis, the eleventh Bishop of Quebec, one of the great figures in the long and distinguished line who have been chief pastors of the ancient diocese. He was the first Bishop since Canada was taken over by England to be officially

acknowledged by the Civil Government as Catholic Bishop of Quebec. After the year 1819 when he had returned from a visit to Rome he was officially known as Archbishop Plessis, the first of the Bishops of Quebec to bear such a title. In the month of May of the year 1812 Bishop Plessis along with Father Beau. bien and Father Maguire left Quebec in a sailing vessel and after visiting missions in New Brunswick they landed on Prince Edward Island on July 1st. Bishop Plessis wrote extensively about this visit and vivid impressions about what he saw and did have been preserved. Father MacEachern acted, as the Bishop's guide during the three weeks spent on the Island. Father Maguire heard confessions in English, Father Beaubien in French, Father MacEachern in Gaelic and Father Painchaud, who came from New Brunswick, gave his services to the Indian inhabitants of the place. The diary kept by the Bishop states that: "In Canada we have little idea of the poverty of the Acadian chapels of Prince Edward Island and no idea whatever of the utter destitution of the Scottish Churches; only a priest brought up in Scotland would ever think of saying Mass in the like." Again he writes, "they [the Scotch Catholics of P.E.I.] are as attached to their priest and as demonstrative in their piety as the Irish. At Mass you hear them sighing and at the Elevation they burst forth into sobs. Many remain prostrate with face to the floor all through the Sacrifice of the Mass. At Communion men and women drag themselves on their knees to the altar rail."

The Bishop was obliged to curtail an intended visit to Nova Scotia as the War of 1812.¹⁴ was assuming such proportions that an invasion of Canada by American troops was imminent. Before departing, he gave Father MacEachern a pastoral letter written in French and dated "Picton, August 12, 1812." He asked Father MacEachern to translate it into Gaelic and to have it read to the people at the different missions throughout the Island. One of the important matters in the pastoral directed Father MacEachern to take up collections of money from his missions to defray the expenses of educating two boys, between the ages of twelve and fifteen years, from P.E.I. whom Father MacEachern was to select and send to Quebec to begin studies leading to the priesthood. The two boys selected were Ronald McDonald and Bernard Donald MacDonald. They arrived in Quebec in October of the year 1812 and were placed by Bishop Plessis in the Seminary. These two boys were the first of a long line of students who, for the past one hundred and thirty-six years have come at intervals from Prince Edward Island to the Seminaries of Quebec, Nicolet, and Montreal to prepare for the priesthood. It is difficult to estimate the influence which the seminaries of Quebec Province have had upon the lives of many thousands of people on Prince Island through the training imparted to the majority of their priests for close to one and one half centuries.

Another connection between these two Provinces of Canada has been the

affiliation which has existed between St. Dunstan's College of Charlottetown and Laval University for about 75 years.

Laval University, which has arisen from the Seminary, received its charter from England in 1852 and its pontifical charter from Pope Pius IX in 1876. By virtue of its charter it has the right of conferring diplomas and degrees on all colleges affiliated with it. All the classical colleges in Quebec, except St. Mary's College, Montreal, were at one time affiliated with Laval University. The only college outside of Quebec which was granted affiliation to the extent of having its Baccalaureate examinations conducted by Laval University was St. Dunstan's College of Prince Edward Island. This college began its work in 1855, three years after Laval University was founded. In the year 1922 St. Dunstan's acquired university status and began giving its own Bachelor of Arts degree. Almost from the time St. Dunstan's College became affiliated with Laval University and up to the present there have been French lay students from the Province of Quebec who have gone to St. Dunstan's for their college education and to become proficient in the use of the English language.

This interchange between Laval University and St. Dunstan's College for close to one hundred years has been another of the links which has connected the Provinces of Quebec and Prince Edward Island.

The first of what would now be called the Canadian part of the Diocese of Quebec to become independent was Nova Scotia. This was brought about mainly through the work of the Rev. Edmund Burke who was born in Ireland, ordained to the priesthood in Paris, and who taught in the Seminary of Quebec in 1786. In 1801 he was Vicar General of the Maritimes with headquarters at Halifax; An Apostolic Vicariate was erected by the Pope on December 11th, 1815. The territory included all of Nova Scotia and it was made immediately subject to Rome. The Rev. Edmund Burke was consecrated Bishop in Quebec on July 5th, 1818, by Bishop Plessis.

In August of the year 1820 Archbishop Plessis announced, after his return from London and Rome, that four suffragans had been appointed by the Pope to the Bishop of Quebec; the Right Rev. Joseph Norbert Provencher, for the North West, with the title of Bishop of Juliopolis; the Right Rev. Alexander Macdonell for Upper Canada with the title of Bishop of Rhesina; the Right Rev. Jean Jacques Lartigue for the District of Montreal with the title of Bishop of Telmesse; and the Right Rev. Angus Bernard MacEachern with the title of Bishop of Rosen for the district comprising New Brunswick, Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island.

It was easier in those days to get to Boston and New York from Prince Edward Island than to reach Quebec City and Montreal. It is stated that Father MacEachern went to Boston by sailing vessel, then to New York up the Hudson River to Albany then by way of Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River to Sorel and down the St. Lawrence River to Quebec.

On Sunday June 17, 1821, Bishop MacEachern of Prince Edward Island received episcopal consecration in the Church of St. Roch, Quebec. Archbishop Plessis had as his assistants his coadjutor Bishop Panet and Bishop Alexander Macdonell of Upper Canada. Bishop MacEachern's consecration was the first occasion on which four bishops were seen together in one church in Canada. On August 11, 1829, Charlottetown, P.E.I., was made an Episcopal See with the Right Rev. Angus Bernard MacEachern as its first Bishop. His jurisdiction extended over New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands. These Islands are fifty miles north-east of Prince Edward Island and are politically part of the Province of Quebec.

In the year 1842 Charlottetown Diocese was dismembered by New Brunswick being separated from it with the Episcopal See at Saint John. In October, 1946 the Magdalen islands, which for 117 years were part of the Diocese of Charlottetown, became attached to the Diocese of Gaspé, Que.

Bernard Donald MacDonald was the first native born of Prince Edward Island to become a priest. He went to Quebec in 1812 and was ordained there in 1822. On October 15th of the year 1837 he became the second Bishop of Charlottetown. He was consecrated in St. Patrick's Church in Quebec by Archbishop Signay who had as his assistants Bishop Turgeon and Bishop Bourget, coadjutor of the Bishop of Montreal. Father McMahon, the pastor of St. Patrick's Parish, Quebec, preached the sermon.

Another bond between the two Provinces has been the large number of young ladies who have come to Quebec from Prince Edward Island to enter convents for the training of teachers or to become nurses. It is not known, with certainty, the number of young ladies from the Diocese of Charlottetown who have entered the religious life and become teachers or nurses or who did, or are doing other types of services in community life. But in proportion to population the number is large, judging by those who have become members of one religions community, the Congregation de Notre Dame, whose mother house is in Montreal. Well over three hundred members of that order of teaching sisters were born and received their elementary and secondary education on Prince Edward Island.

McGill University, Montreal, has attracted a number of students from P.E. Island to all its departments. It is not generally known that the University's greatest financial benefactor was a native of Prince Edward Island. The late Sir William Christopher MacDonald is reported to have given over twelve millions of dollars to McGill. It was Sir William's grandfather, Captain John MacDonald, who was the leader of the 200 Highland Scotch Catholics, who left their native land because of the harsh penal laws against their religion in the British Isles. In 1770 they came to P.E.I. and settled on land which Captain John MacDonald had acquired the year before they migrated. Two of Sir William MacDonald's grand uncles were priests of the Catholic Church. Sir William's early days were spent with a

paternal uncle who was a parish priest on the Island. Two of his cousins were members of the Society of Jesus and lived for years in the Immaculate Conception House of that order in Montreal. Sir William was a Catholic in his early years but in his later years he became indifferent and did not go to mass or frequent the sacraments.

From these instances which I have taken at random it is seen that a connection has existed between the smallest and only insular Province of Canada and Quebec, one of the largest and wealthiest, from the earliest days of discovery of new territory by Jacques Cartier down to our own time, a period of over four hundred years.

Along with Abbé Maheux of our Canadian Catholic Historical Association who has done much by his lectures and writings to make the different parts of Canada better known to each other, we as members of our Historical Association will continue to promote a better understanding between Province and Province, between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians to an extent that our beloved country will become, in the words of Thomas D'Arcy McGee that "Great, New, Northern Nation," that Canada is destined to be.

In conclusion, speaking on behalf of the English Section of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association, I wish to state our gratification, in knowing that under the chancellorship of Archbishop the Most Reverend Maurice Roy, D.D., the twenty-first Bishop of the ancient diocese of Quebec and well remembered as a chief chaplain of the recent World War, Laval University, has begun a campaign of expansion which will include a removal from its present crowded-in site to a suburban situation which will allow it to enlarge its sphere of usefulness in keeping with its ancient traditions and the great future it has as one of the famous seats of scholarship on the North American continent.