

Nova Scotia – Background

Population (circa 1860): 331,000

Urban Centre: Halifax (29,580)

Key figures: Charles Tupper (1821-1915)
William A. Henry (1816-1888)
Jonathon McCully (1809-1877)
Adams G. Archibald (1814-1892)
Robert B. Dickey (1811-1903)
John William Ritchie (1808-1890)



Nova Scotia plays a key role in sea communications between Great Britain and the United States. It is common for ships bound for New York and Boston to stop at Halifax and for ships bound for Liverpool and London to also dock here. For many seafaring Nova Scotians, the British West Indies feels closer than Quebec. Above all, Halifax is the central base for the British Navy in the West Atlantic. With an ice-free harbour and the citadel, a grand fortress on a hill overlooking the harbour and the city, Halifax stands out as a symbol of Imperial Britain's power.

A great majority of Nova Scotians make their living, in one way or another, from the ocean. Almost half of the colony's residents are fishermen, while others work on ships exporting cod and importing coal and wool. Over one-third of Nova Scotia's exports are fish and fish products. Shipbuilding is an enormously prosperous industry, and Nova Scotians produce and own more ships than residents in any other British North American colony.

Politics is highly sophisticated in Nova Scotia. The first British North American colony to achieve responsible government, in 1848, Nova Scotian politics is marked by its leaders. First, Joseph Howe, and later, Charles Tupper, brought unity to the colony by bringing together various regional and cultural interests. A federal union, though not initiated by the Nova Scotians, is something to be considered, discussed and debated.

The significant British military and naval presence in Halifax reduces the immediate threat of an American attack. But Great Britain's reluctance to defend the colonies in the future makes closer ties between the British North American provinces crucial to security. Any change in British policy would have a serious effect on Nova Scotia because of this close relationship.

There is no railway connection between Nova Scotia and the Canadas. Many prominent British North Americans believe an Intercolonial Railway must end in Halifax. The Intercolonial would not only help in the defence of British North America, but it would also open up other North American markets to Nova Scotian businesses. Since the 1850s Nova Scotia has relied on reciprocity (free trade) with the United States. It is crucial to Nova Scotia's future to secure other North American markets, in case the United States imposes tariffs on Nova Scotian goods.