

# Prince Edward Island

## – Background

**Population (circa 1860):** 80,000

**Urban centre:** Charlottetown (7,000)

**Key figures:** John Hamilton Gray (1812-1887)  
Edward Palmer (1809-1889)  
William H. Pope (1825-1879)  
Andrew A. Macdonald (1829-1912)  
George Coles (1810-1875)  
Thomas H. Haviland (1822-1895)  
Edward Whelan (1824-1867)



Made up of small, agricultural communities, Prince Edward Island is only one hundred miles long and thirty miles wide. The population is equally divided between Irish Catholics and Scottish Protestants. Largely self-sufficient, many of the residents have never been off the island. During the winter months Prince Edward Island is completely cut off by ice from the mainland. Farming, with the island's rich and fertile lands, is the main source of income. A great many people live on agricultural exports (potatoes, cereal and livestock) to America's New England states. Though a number of residents are fishermen, the United States dominates the island's fishery.

Charlottetown is the colony's urban centre. In fact, no one on the island lives more than a day's journey from the city. With rich church architecture and the impressive Legislature Building, Charlottetown is the colonial capital.

Sixty percent of the farmers on the island rent their land (they are tenant farmers). These islanders rent farms from people who live in Britain (absentee landlords). For over one hundred years, these tenant farmers have been clearing and working the land they do not own and sending rent to their landlords in Britain. Prince Edward Island wants Great Britain to force the landlords to sell their farms at a reasonable price, to the colonists.

After three to four generations as tenant farmers, resentment has grown and left the islanders suspicious of outsiders. To many, Ottawa is as distastefully distant as Imperial London. As an island, a railway link with the other British North American colonies is not an issue. Ultimately, Prince Edward Island is content to remain independent and detached from British North American society.

Though Prince Edward Island does not directly border on the United States and islanders do not fear an American attack, Britain's changing relationship with the colonies is of some concern. Great Britain's reluctance to defend the colonies in the future has made closer ties between the British North American provinces important to security.

