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# A Year to Remember, 150 Years to Celebrate

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## Hon. Robert Henderson, MLA

*Prince Edward Island prides itself on its historic role in the development of Confederation. Celebrations are planned throughout 2014 in honour of the 150th anniversary of the original Charlottetown conference.*



This year marks an important anniversary for Prince Edward Island and Canada. It is the sesquicentennial of the 1864 Charlottetown Conference, an event which has come to be recognized as pivotal to the formation of the Canadian Confederation. To commemorate this milestone, Prince Edward Island is welcoming all Canadians to take part in

a province-wide, year-long celebration of our shared history. We call it simply “2014” and consider it to be an opportunity to showcase our hospitality, heritage, communities and culture. The calendar is filled with more than 150 events, festivals, and a variety of activities to satisfy all interests. And, like all the best Island parties, there will be great music, good food, high spirits, and new friends to meet.

The celebrations commemorate the occasion when 23 representatives of the British North American colonies –Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Canada (present day Ontario and Québec)–gathered in Charlottetown to discuss the merits of creating a Canadian Confederation.

Originally the intent behind the September 1864 conference had been to discuss a proposed union of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, under one government and legislature. The Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island of April 18, 1864 recorded the following motion, “Resolved, that his Excellency the Lieutenant Governor be authorized to appoint Delegates (not to exceed five) to confer with Delegates who may be appointed by the Governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, for the purpose of discussing the expediency of a Union of the three Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, under one Government and Legislature, - the report of the said Delegates to be laid before the Legislature of this Colony, before any further action shall be taken regard to the proposed question.” The motion was carried 18-9 and the resolution was adopted, paving the way for Island delegates to participate.

The Canadian government took note, and requested it be permitted to send a delegation to the conference to see if the proposed union could be extended to include all the provinces. The request was granted and a delegation of seven Canadians, including John A. Macdonald, came to Charlottetown to join in the discussions slated for the first week of September in 1864.

The formal meetings of the delegates took place in the Legislative Council Chamber on the second floor of the Colonial Building, as it was then called. This room, with its soaring ceiling and rich appointments, remains a popular destination for visitors touring the building. Province House, as it is known today, is the only original meeting location of the Fathers of Confederation still remaining from the Charlottetown and subsequent conferences. It is a tangible connection

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*The Hon. Robert Henderson was first elected to the Legislative Assembly in the provincial general election of 2007 in District 25, O’Leary-Inverness and re-elected in 2011. A former economic development officer, employment counselor and farmer, he was appointed Minister of Tourism and Culture on October 18, 2011.*



**Above: The north side view of Province House in Charlottetown. Opposite page: (top) The Legislative Assembly Chamber and (bottom) the Confederation Chamber (formerly the Legislative Council Chamber) in Province House.**

to our past and, as such, an incredibly valuable legacy for all Canadians. In recognition of its unrivaled place in the country's history, Province House was commemorated for its national significance in 1966. It is perhaps one of the most recognized and photographed buildings in Canada and is a fine example of neo-classical architecture.

Province House has been home to the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island since its opening in January 1847. A contemporary newspaper described the building as "an honor to the Island, [...]which seems to command a feeling of pride and satisfaction in all who visit it." It was a worthy setting for the important Charlottetown Conference some 17 years later, and it continues to be the centre of Prince Edward Island's ceremonial and political life. Over the past year, Province House has been readied for 2014 with

restorative work completed on the exterior sandstone facade. It looks much as it did when the conference delegates walked up Great George Street after arriving by ship at Charlottetown's bustling waterfront.

Many of the conversations about the possibilities of a new nation which took place at the Charlottetown Conference happened outside of the formal setting of the Legislative Council Chamber. The Fathers of Confederation had occasion to attend teas, banquets and grand balls, one of which was held in the current Legislative Assembly Chamber and featured not one, but two orchestras in the public gallery playing music well into the wee morning hours. Island hospitality and cordiality accompanied the more serious negotiations and possibly strengthened their purpose.

Prince Edward Island will continue this tradition of conviviality throughout 2014, and looks forward to hosting visitors from across the country and around the world. The planning is well underway. Starting in 2012, communities, organizations and not-for-profit groups in the province have been developing and implementing projects and events that pay tribute to this very special anniversary. Financial support has been provided through a dedicated fund which was created to assist in this endeavour. A total of \$5 million is funding collaborative enterprises including theatrical productions, eco tours, community festivals, art installations, youth conferences and literary projects, among others.

One of the most exciting events is Founders' Week, scheduled for August 28 to September 7, coinciding with the dates the delegates began arriving in Prince Edward Island for the Charlottetown Conference and the dates of the conference itself. One highlight will be the Tall Ships sailing into port in Charlottetown and Summerside, offering a glimpse into what those busy harbours might have looked like 150 years ago.

The centrepiece for the summer months of 2014 will be the Celebration Zone, located at historic Confederation Landing on the Charlottetown waterfront. It is intended to represent the 2014 guiding principles of honouring the past, celebrating the present and planning for a bold tomorrow. From July through September, the Celebration Zone will be filled with activity—concerts, food tasting, children's plays, cultural presentations, interactive tours and more. It will be a place of entertainment and education, truly a celebration of past and an inspiration for the future.

Please join us in Prince Edward Island in 2014 as we commemorate one of the most important weeks in Canadian history.

Photo by Brian Simpson



Photo by Mike Needham

