

MEMORABLE EVENTS IN HISTORY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND CAPITAL

Pre-Confederation Story Is One Of Stirring Interest

Inspiration to Further Progress and Development Found in Record Which Goes Back to French Regime

(By Prof. D.C. Harvey, in the Canadian Geographic Journal, Reprinted through courtesy of the publishers).

Charlottetown is both a modern city and a city of memories. It was not incorporated as a city until 1885; but its memories go back beyond 1765 when it was designated by Capt. Samuel Holland as the Capital of St. John's Island to 1730 when Denys De La Ronde and Sieur de Gotteville de Belleisle chose the south western side of this harbour as the site of Port La Joye—the administrative centre of the Island during the French regime and the scene of many a stirring incident.

Charlottetown is situated on one of the finest harbours in Canada, capable of receiving ships of heavy burden into a sheltered basin formed by the junction of the North and West rivers with the Hillsboro river. Into this harbour came Denys de La Ronde in the autumn of 1720 and in the following year he wrote: "We are in Port La Joye, one of the most beautiful harbours that the eye can behold." Here came the New Englanders in 1745 and took temporary possession of Isle St. Jean. Here, in 1758, the Acadians of the Island were embarked prior to their deportation to France and on that occasion an eye-witness has recorded that he saw "a 20 and a 13 sale of transports lying in anchor in the harbour." Hither came two American privateers, in November, 1775, to plunder the town and to carry off the administrator of the Government and one of his councillors to General Washington's headquarters.

Protected From Invasion

At intervals during the American war of Independence, the "Diligent", the "Hunter", the "Cabot", the "Danac", the "Lizard", the "Camilla", or the "Hind", British ships of war, rode at anchor in the harbour or kept a watchful eye upon the American privateers, much to the delight of the hundred citizens who lived there at that time in fear and trembling.

In 1768 Charlottetown was again noticed by the British navy, when Rear-Admiral Sawyer paid his respects to Lieutenant Governor Fanning, who wrote in haste to the colonial secretary: "The favorable opinion has been pleased to express of the depth of the water, facility of entrance, and security of the harbour, has afforded myself and all the inhabitants of the town infinite satisfaction."

Since 1775 Charlottetown's memories of ships-of-war have all been pleasant. During the difficulties with the United States over the fisheries, just before the Reciprocity Treaty was negotiated, Rear-Admiral Sir George Seymour paid a call with the "Basilisk" and the "Devastation" to assure the Island of protection; while Commodore Shubrick of the United States Navy also entered the harbour with the "Princeton" and the "Fulton" to show his goodwill and desire to keep American fishermen within the law. In 1868 Commodore le Baron de la Ronciere de Noury of the French navy called at Charlottetown in the "Gassen-dit".

Royal Visitations

But the warships visits which thrilled Charlottetown most of all were those of the vessels bringing the Prince of Wales in 1860 and Prince Arthur in 1869. On the former occasion particularly, the whole city turned out to meet the Prince who arrived on the "Hero". A thousand children greeted him with the National Anthem, and a numerous and brilliant assemblage attended a ball in his honour, where he "danced with much spirit" till "after three o'clock." Prince Arthur also met with an enthusiastic welcome. In the words of acting Governor Hodgson, "His Royal Highness's right princely demeanour and courtesy has won for him the hearts of all classes in the community."

Ship-Building Days

But, if Charlottetown's memories of ar-

rivals in her harbour are mingled, less mingled are her memories of departures. At one time her piers were thronged with ships being built or registered here. Between 1830 and 1878, 3,000 vessels averaging 200 tons were built in Prince Edward Island. Of these Charlottetown had her share. At least five shipyards were steadily employed along the waterfront from the Esplanade to Kensington range. The best-known shipyards were owned by Douse Peake, Duncan, Heard and McGill. From the Duncan shipyard the largest ship ever built on the Island, registering 1,746 tons, was launched in 1838 and christened the "Ethel," with appropriate ceremony. From the Peake shipyard came, among others, the "George Peake," a photograph of which has fortunately been preserved. Most of the smaller vessels were used in the coasting trade and the fisheries, of the larger ones were loaded with timber and sold with their cargo in England or in the West Indies, the proceeds being employed in further building to a similar end.

Cruise Of the Fanny

One local product, however, was destined for another fate. This was the "Fanny" built by James Peake, sold in 1849 to a group of 49 Islanders who had caught the California gold fever; and, in this vessel of 250 tons, sailed around the Horn to San Francisco, a voyage of six months. In San Francisco they found about 700 vessels riding at anchor while their owners sought the yellow dust. The owners of the "Fanny" sold their vessel; distributed the proceeds; and, during the next three years, drifted about the diggings, only to return to their native province, little richer, save in experience.

Shipbuilding was an industry which produced seamen as well as carpenters and finishers. Many an old time citizen of Charlottetown had, through this industry closer contact with the British Isles and Europe than he has ever had since the decline of the industry; for the great stream of commerce now goes past the little Island to Quebec and Montreal or to Halifax and St. John. But the memories of the old days survive, and it is pardonable, however inaccurate, in those who treasure these memories to blame Confederation rather than the depletion of timber reserves and the advent of iron steamships for the loss of a picturesque industry.

The Site Selected

Charlottetown, named after Queen Charlotte, consort of George III, was projected as the capital by Captain Holland in 1765, because of its excellent harbour, its central position, and its easy communication with the interior of the Island as well as with the outside world. Further, the ground designed for the town and fortifications was well situated upon a regular ascent from the water-side, the harbour could be commanded by a battery or two and the intricate channels of the rivers would afford additional protection.

The town was laid out in 1768 by Surveyor Charles Morris of Nova Scotia, acting under orders from Lieutenant-Governor Franklin, in accordance with Royal Instructions based upon Captain Holland's report. Morris determined the general outlines of the present city, marked off the principal streets and square, made reservations for parks, public building, and a common. In addition to this, he commenced the erection of buildings for civic officials, when suddenly the orders of Franklin were countermanded by Lord Hillsborough and these buildings were left unfinished.

First Civic Buildings

These first buildings in Charlottetown were described in October 1763, as follows: "A dwelling house 56 x 26, one storey, with a pitched roof shingled and clap-boarded, and filled in between the studs with stone laid in rough mortar, two stacks of chimneys, with two ovens and six fire places, two parlors, two

kitchens, and lodging rooms, and stoned under one half of the house" and "a house intended for a dwelling house, of the same dimensions, clap-boarded and shingled, now used as a store, but partitions fixed up for the same number of rooms as the above house, a cellar stoned under the whole house and a stone pier at one end of it for a foundation for a chimney."

The first of these houses was taken over by Governor Patterson in 1770; the other was later fixed up by Chief Justice Dupont, and after his death was used as a church, court house, assembly room, jail, and what not, until finally it was granted in property to Chief Justice Peter Stewart, who had it repaired as a private residence.

In 1771 Patterson made some alterations in Morris' plan of Charlottetown, but these affected only that part lying between Richmond and Water Streets, by reducing the width of the cross streets and increasing the depth of the house lots. He also doubled the size of the pasture lots making them 12 acres instead of six. The present city has grown considerably over the original site and the Common of Patterson's day.

Early History

It had been the original intention that only one house and one pasture lot should be granted to each bona fide settler; but the officers of government soon succumbed to temptation and commenced appropriating desirable lots, first for their children and then by collusive action with men who would allow them to use their names as a legal means of violating the law. Under Lieutenant-Governor Desbrisay, this practice was fully indulged in. A return of 1780 showed that Desbrisay, Stewart, Callbeck, Hirdly, Wright and Curtis were the worst offenders. Patterson ordered the return of all lots over and above one for each member of the officer's families; but his councillors refused. On appeal to the Secretary of State, Patterson was upheld and some surrenders were made, but from this date a feud commenced between the Patterson and Stewart-Desbrisay families, and full restitution was never made.

But it was the obsequious and petty-fogging Lieutenant-Governor Fanning who commenced tampering with the Charlottetown Common, establishing the precedent by which the Common was ultimately lost to the Citizens of Charlottetown. First it was agreed that to lease the Common for a period of years would be in the interest of the province. Then it was gradually appropriated, bit by bit, until now it has all passed into private hands and is indistinguishable from the rest of the city, except by the angle in the streets that start from Euston northward.

During the first half-century of its history the population of the Island and of its capital increased slowly, and owing to maladministration and faction it was subject to alternating ebb and flow. A return of 1797 places the entire population of Charlottetown and Royalty, including the garrison, at 424; but a statute labor return gives only 58 householders. In 1827, when the first reliable census of the Island was taken, its population was 649; in 1834 it had increased to 1,965. In 1855, when incorporated as a city, its population was 6,500; and today it is only double that number.

Clear Distinctions

Prior to the achievement of Responsible Self-government in 1851, the population of Charlottetown was more differentiated by class distinctions than it is at present. At that time the office holders were practically all born and bred in the British Isles and brought their social distinctions with them. They were inclined to look down upon a tenant class, the artisan and the small retailer. Accepting the larger merchants of necessity, also the agents of the landlords, and inter-marrying with them, they tried to build up an exclusive society around Government House and the military officers. When the garrison was withdrawn and Responsible Government created an official class from amongst the people, and confederation made customary the appointment of local Lieutenant-Governors and Judges, and direct connection with British military and official tradition was lost, it became more difficult to keep up the estate and pretensions of an earlier day. Such of the old families as remained had to face a declining prospect, the prestige of place and monopoly of power having been lost and revenues having begun to shrink. All this has led to a realignment of social groups. New generations and new families dispense justice, administer government, support education, religion and public works, and thus represent and determine the character and tone of Charlottetown. The

survivors of the older families who have not found an official or a social outlet for their energies, have had either to join the democratic migration to Western Canada or to mingle with the more prosperous at home, as an alternative to futile isolation. But, in education, in manners, and in the desire for public service, these families have left a tradition which Charlottetown cannot and does not entirely ignore.

Gradual Development

Public buildings have kept pace in Charlottetown with the gradual growth of the city and the increasing needs of the people. At first, make shift arrangements were made for a jail, a court house and legislative chambers. Sites had been reserved for such buildings by Morris, 1768; and in 1771 a grant of 3,000 pounds had been made by the Imperial Government for their erection; but this money had been used by Patterson to finance the needy officers of Government, whose salaries depended upon a preparatory quit rent that was never paid in full. Consequently the first meetings of legislatures and judges were held in private residences rented for the occasion; and the first prisoners were confined in the unfinished building commenced by Morris.

Between 1779 and 1797 the need of a jail was severely felt; and in the latter year, a log hut was erected for that purpose. This served the City until 1830. During this period prisoners were ill-provided with light and even with air. The Grand Jury of 1812 reported that the jail was in a deplorable condition of rottenness and decay, and consisted of two rooms, 15 x 12 and 8 x 15, the criminal cell being without a fire place and without ventilation at night. Since 1830, the jail has been twice remodelled and is now comparatively a comfortable building.

First Legislative Session

The courts and the legislature first met in the house of James Richardson, a comparatively wealthy adventurer who brought 15 settlers to the Island in 1770. In 1781 Alexander Richardson, a school master, received a town lot on which he built a school. He built on the corner of Queen and Dorchester Streets, and his establishment, known as a Cross Keys, was rented during a number of years by both the Supreme Court and the legislature. In 1812 a court-house was built; and it was used for legislation as well as the administration of justice until 1848, when the colonial building was completed. On the eve of Confederation the present court house was built, and the old building, after serving as a post office, telegraph office and police court was moved to Euston Street, and converted into a tenement house, its site being occupied by the present market building. It was in this old court-house that Lieutenant-Governor Smith carried his parliament and delivered his judgments in Chancery. Here, too, the legislators decided to build a legislative chamber of their own.

The Colonial Building

The colonial building was not built without friction. The money was raised by a land-assessment act; and the members of the council, the watchdogs of the proprietors, were anxious to keep down the cost 10,000 pounds, the sum originally voted; but the Assembly found that it would require 2,000 pounds more to execute the original design and made the appropriation accordingly.

Lieutenant-Governor Huntley assented to the bill, but sympathized with the council and explained his opposition to the Colonial Secretary in the following caustic way: "The affect seems very disproportionate to the expense; the alteration made consists in a portico for the front entrance which is sufficiently in character with the building, and two abutments, very ostentatiously called "Wings" and bearing about as much proportion to the body of the building as the wings of a penguin do to the body of the bird; but they are of no comparatively relative use. These wings are intended to serve for side entrances for which purposes two porticos could have been erected at much less expense and would have been quite as useful."

Huntley, at that time, was at loggerheads with the Speaker of the Assembly, Joseph Pope, and may have allowed his sudden passion for economy to triumph over his aesthetic appreciation, but all citizens of Charlottetown then and since have been pleased that the Assembly have been pleased that the Assembly executed the original design; and if the reader will compare the building as it was in Mr. Bayfield's drawings of 1849 with the photograph of the building as