

Historica Canada Education Portal

The Confederation Debates: Nova Scotia Intermediate Mini-unit

This [mini-unit](#) for intermediate/senior-level classes helps students to understand and analyze the key ideas and challenges that preceded Nova Scotia's entry into Confederation. The first section deals with the debates in the provincial and/or federal legislatures, while the second section addresses more specifically founding treaty negotiations with the First Nations. Each section can be taught independently.

The activities and attached materials will help students understand the diversity of ideas, commitments, successes and grievances that underlie Canada's founding.

By the end of this mini-unit, your students will have the opportunity to:

1. Use the historical inquiry process—gathering, interpreting and analyzing historical evidence and information from a variety of primary and secondary sources—in order to investigate and make judgements about issues, developments and events of historical importance.
2. Hone their historical thinking skills to identify historical significance, cause and consequence, continuity and change, and historical perspective.
3. Develop knowledge of their province/region within Canada, minority rights and democracy, and appreciate the need for reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.



Primary Source: Charles Tupper's Views on Confederation

When Nova Scotia's legislature debated Confederation between 1865 and 1867, Charles Tupper said the following points:

SUMMARY STATEMENT

"The fact is, if we are known at all across the Atlantic, notwithstanding the immense resources of these Maritime Provinces, it is because we happen to be contiguous to Canada. Everything connected without interests tell us of the insignificance of our position. Therefore it is not a matter of surprise, in view of these facts, and of the position we occupy, that the intelligent men of these Provinces have long since come to the conclusion that, if these comparatively small countries are to have any future whatever in connection with the crown of England, it must be found in a consolidation¹ of all British North America. I regret that this harmony does not exist down to the present moment, but I am dealing with the position the question occupied at the time these negotiations were going on."

Debates of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, 22 March 1865, pg. 211.



Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY

"To the local governments were reserved powers of an important character, though of a local interest, which could be exercised without any interference whatever with the unity and strength of the central government. The construction of the local governments was to be left to the local legislatures themselves. The establishment and tenure of Local Offices, and appointment and payment of Local Officers; Education; Sale and Management of Public Lands; Local Works; The Administration of Justice, Property and Civil Rights. I have only referred to some of the more important powers that would be given to the local and general governments respectively. The local governments would not interfere with the powers of the general government, or weaken its strength and unity of action, but would be able to deal with such questions as touch the local interests of the country—the construction of roads and bridges, public works, civil jurisdiction, &c."

Debates of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, 22 March 1865, pg. 208.

¹ Consolidation = unification

[The mini-unit includes primary documents from prominent historical figures who contributed to the debate, such as Charles Tupper.](#)

Joseph Howe in Brief

This summary borrows from the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* entry listed in the “Additional Resources” section of this mini-unit.



Born in 1804, Joseph Howe was raised in a loyalist household and was largely self-educated. By the age of 13, Howe helped his father with his duties as Postmaster General and King’s Printer. By 1827, Howe purchased the *Weekly Chronicle* and published it as the *Acadian*. Later that same year, he acquired the *Novascotian*, and went on to build it into the colony’s most influential newspaper.

He was elected to the Assembly as a Reform representative for the county of Halifax in 1836 and pursued reforms to make government more responsible to the people.

In 1840, he joined the request for Britain to remove Lieutenant Governor Colin Campbell after the latter refused to accept radical Reformers into his cabinet despite their significant numbers in the Assembly. This led to Howe’s entry into the coalition Executive Council as Speaker of the Assembly in 1841 and Collector of Excise at Halifax in 1842. He resigned the following year and subsequently shifted his focus to reviving partisanship and the Reform Party through the *Novascotian* as well as the *Morning Chronicle*. In 1847, the Reform Party won the general election and Nova Scotia became the first colony in North America to achieve responsible government. Howe was the Provincial Secretary. He advocated the construction of a railroad from Halifax to Windsor, Nova Scotia and, in 1854, resigned as Provincial Secretary to become Chief Commissioner of a bipartisan railway board.



Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

In 1855, Howe lost to Charles Tupper during the general election when he mishandled relations between Nova Scotian Catholics and Protestants. He returned to the Assembly in 1859, and soon became Provincial Secretary under the leadership of William Young. In 1860, Howe became premier and dealt with Canada’s political obstacles towards the construction of the Intercolonial Railway (ICR). In 1863, Howe accepted appointment as Imperial Fishery Commissioner, and the leaderless Liberals lost the election to the Conservatives.

Howe did not sit in the Assembly during the Confederation debate, nor was he present at the Charlottetown and Quebec constitutional conferences. Instead, he anonymously published a series of “Botheration Letters” in the *Morning Chronicle* between 11 January and 2 March 1865 critiquing the proposed union. Howe opposed the union on several grounds. He worried that the union would distance Nova Scotia from the British Empire and contended that the deal served and empowered central Canada at the expense of Nova Scotia’s prosperity and autonomy. His strongest objection, however, was Premier Charles Tupper’s willingness to approve Confederation without asking voters to validate it at the polls. When the Assembly approved Tupper’s motion to pursue further negotiations towards union in England, Howe took up a speaking tour and then spent nearly a year in London fruitlessly lobbying against the union deal.

After Confederation, Howe negotiated better terms for Nova Scotia within the union and entered the federal cabinet as Secretary of State in 1869, where he oversaw Manitoba’s entry into Confederation. In 1873, Howe became Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia and died three weeks later on 1 June 1873.

[The mini unit provides short biographies of all historical figures.](#)

Handout: Copies of Treaties of Peace and Friendship



Note: The spelling in these treaties is very inconsistent, so we did not mark misspellings with [sic].

Treaty of 1725 for Ratification at Annapolis Royal

Reproduced from: *“Indian Treaties and Surrenders, from 1680-1890: In Two Volumes, Volume 1.”*
Ottawa: S.E. Dawson Printer, 1905: 198.

ARTICLES OF SUBMISSION AND AGREEMENT made at Boston, in New England, by Sanquaaram alias Loron Arexus, François Xavier and Meganumbe, delegates from Penobscott, Naridgwack, St. Johns, Cape Sables and other tribes inhabiting within his Majesty's territories of Nova Scotia or New England.

Whereas His Majesty King George by concession¹ of the Most Christian King, made at the Treaty of Utrecht, is become the rightful possessor of the Province of Nova Scotia or Acadia according to its ancient boundaries: We, the said Sanquaaram alias Loron Arexus, François Xavier and Meganumbe, delegates from said tribes of Penobscott, Naridgwack, St. Johns, Cape Sables and other tribes inhabiting within His Majesty's said territories of Nova Scotia or Acadia and New England, do, in the name and behalf of the said tribes we represent, acknowledge His said Majesty King George's jurisdiction and dominion over the territories of the said Province of Nova Scotia or Acadia, and make our submission to His said Majesty in as ample a manner as we have formerly done to the most Christian King.

And we further promise on behalf of the said tribes we represent that the Indians² shall not molest³ any of His Majesty's subjects or their dependants in their settlements already made or lawfully to be made, or in their carrying on their traffick and other affairs within the said Province.

That if there happens any robbery or outrage committed by any of the Indians, the tribe or tribes they belong to shall cause satisfaction and restitution to be made to the parties injured.

That the Indians shall not help to convey away any soldiers belonging to His Majesty's forts, but on the contrary shall bring back any soldier they shall find endeavouring⁴ to run away.

That in case of any misunderstanding, quarrel or injury between the English and the Indians no private revenge shall be taken, but application shall be made for redress according to His Majesty's laws.

¹ Concession = to give up

² Indians = an archaic term for First Nations Peoples

³ Molest = bother

⁴ Endeavoring = trying to accomplish something

[The mini unit also includes Indigenous primary documents, including texts from the Treaties of Peace and Friendship.](#)

Curriculum Objectives

This mini-unit has been broadly designed for intermediate/senior-level classes. The activities described in the pages, for example, fulfill the following outcomes listed in Nova Scotia's "Social Studies Grade 7" and "Canadian History 11" curriculum guides.

The mini-unit can be accessed here:

<http://hcmc.uvic.ca/confederation/pdfs/nova-scotia-provincial.pdf>

Background

Before each province and territory became a part of Canada, their local legislatures (and the House of Commons after 1867) debated the extent, purposes and principles of political union between 1865 and 1949. In addition to creating provinces, the British Crown also negotiated a series of Treaties with Canada's Indigenous Peoples. Although these texts, and the records of their negotiation, are equally important to Canada's founding, as the Truth and Reconciliation Committee recently explained, "too many Canadians still do not know the history of Indigenous peoples' contributions to Canada, or understand that by virtue of the historical and modern Treaties negotiated by our government, we are all Treaty people."

The vast majority of these records, however, remain inaccessible and many can only be found in provincial archives. By bringing together these diverse colonial, federal and Indigenous records for the first time, and by embracing novel technologies and dissemination formats, [*The Confederation Debates*](#) encourages Canadians of all ages and walks of life to learn about past challenges, to increase political awareness of historical aspirations and grievances and engage present-day debates, as well as to contribute to local, regional and national understanding and reconciliation.