

Historica Canada Education Portal

The Confederation Debates: Nova Scotia Senior Mini-unit

This [mini-unit](#) for 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.

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.

REPRESENTATION BY POPULATION AND NOVA SCOTIA'S INFLUENCE WITHIN CONFEDERATION

"I ask any public man to show me, although the scheme has been rigidly examined a single statement in the press of England, or of any other country, calling into question the soundness of the principle of representation by population, as applied to British North America. I have examined all the criticisms I could have access to, and I have yet to find a single press that has



Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

¹ Consolidation = unification

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



Amor de Cosmos in Brief

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

Amor de Cosmos was born under the name William Alexander Smith in Windsor, Nova Scotia, in 1825 to a family of Loyalists. In 1852, he moved to California to work as a photographer. In 1854, a bill from the California Senate approved his name change to Amor de Cosmos. Four years later, he joined his brother at Vancouver Island after hearing that gold has been found on the Fraser River. He founded the *British Colonist* newspaper in 1858, where he began his lifelong advocacy for the city of Victoria. His paper also fought for responsible government, the unification of the colonies, and the development of a “nation” in BC that employed Chinese workers without giving them full rights within the community. He also espoused a strong belief in progress, growing populations and an economic future for BC based on farming, fisheries, and forestry. He held a seat in the Vancouver Island Legislative Assembly from 1863 until 1866. After the union of the provinces of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, he sat in the British Columbia Legislative Council for four years.



Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

De Cosmos supported Confederation because he believed it would prevent American expansionism into British Columbia. He hoped that, with time, a larger British political union would mature to the point that it would occupy a seat in an imperial legislature in London, England. His intense advocacy for Victoria also led him to push for that city to become the chief Canadian Pacific transportation hub. To accomplish these lofty goals, he founded the Confederation League with other British Columbian politicians in 1868. At the League's convention in Yale that year, the League passed motions to join Confederation, and sparked considerable support for the colony to join Canada. He and his supporters continued to pursue responsible government and Confederation for several years against those who opposed uniting with Canada. This latter movement was led by de Cosmos's chief rival: John Sebastian Helmcken.

From 1871 to 1874, de Cosmos was elected to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, where the lack of sufficient progress on the Canadian Pacific Railway limited his effectiveness. De Cosmos served as British Columbia's second premier from 1872 to 1874. He is known as British Columbia's “Father of Confederation” because of his important role in founding the Confederation League, uniting the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, and for fervently advocating bringing the province into Confederation.

[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.

That if the Indians have made any prisoners belonging to the Government of Nova Scotia or Acadia during the course of the war they shall be released at or before the ratification of this treaty.

That this treaty shall be ratified⁵ at Annapolis Royal.

¹ Concession = to give up

² Indians = an archaic term for First Nations Peoples

³ Molest = bother

⁴ Endeavoring = trying to accomplish something

⁵ Ratified = made official

[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 Nova Scotia senior-level classes. The activities described in the pages, for example, fulfill the following outcomes listed in Nova Scotia's "Canadian History 11" curriculum guide.

The mini-unit can be accessed here:

<http://hcmc.uvic.ca/confederation/pdfs/nova-scotia-national.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.

