

Historica Canada Education Portal

The Confederation Debates: Prince Edward Island Intermediate Mini-unit

This [mini unit](#) for intermediate/senior-level classes helps students to understand and analyze the key ideas and challenges that preceded Prince Edward Island'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: James Colledge Pope's Views on Confederation

When Prince Edward Island's legislatures debated Confederation between 1865 and 1873, James Pope spoke on Confederation. His position shifted over time from anti-Confederate to pro-Confederate, so pay careful attention to whether Pope said each quote before 1873, or during 1873.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

"I regret that I must oppose the measure, for the reason that the details, as adopted by the Quebec Conference, do not offer, in my opinion, fair terms to the people of the Island. It must be remembered, in the discussion of this question, that our insular¹ position, the absence from our soil of minerals, and the difficulty, I might almost say, impossibility, of communication without sister Colonies during half the year, place us, in dealing with this question, in a position totally different from Nova Scotia or New Brunswick. These Provinces are geographically connected with Canada, and have, within themselves, the materials requisite² to constitute³ them manufacturing countries."

PEI Legislative Assembly Debates, 24 March 1865, pg. 45.

"RESOLVED... even if a Union of the Continental Provinces of British North America should have the effect of strengthening and binding more closely together those Provinces, or advancing their material and commercial interests, this House cannot admit that a Federal Union of the North American Provinces and Colonies, which would include Prince Edward Island, could ever be accomplished upon terms that would prove advantageous to the interests and well-being of the people of this Island, cut off and separated as it is, and must ever remain, from the neighboring Provinces, by an immovable barrier of ice for many months in the year; and this House deems it to be its sacred and imperative duty to declare and record its conviction, as it now does, that any Federal Union of the North American Colonies, that would embrace this Island, would be as hostile⁴ to the feelings and wishes, as it would be opposed to the best and most vital interests, of its people."

PEI Legislative Assembly Debates, 4 May 1866, pg. 52.



Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

¹ Insular = isolated

² Materials requisite = required materials

³ Constitute = make

⁴ Hostile = contrary

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

William Henry Pope in Brief



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

William Henry Pope was born on 29 May 1825 in Bedeque, Prince Edward Island, to Joseph Pope and Lucy Colledge. Initially educated on the Island, he went to England to pursue higher education in law. He then returned to PEI to article, and was called to the bar in 1847. He then married Helen DesBrisay in 1851 and they went on to have eight children.

In 1854, William and his extended family took advantage of the government’s attempts to resolve the absentee landlord problem. After purchasing a large estate for £14,000, his family resold it to the government for £24,100. The government paid this exorbitant sum because the Popes threatened to take its tenants to court for payment of arrears in rent—an action which would have provoked riots. When this profiteering became public, it tarnished William’s reputation and it never fully recovered.

As the decade progressed, William and his younger brother James Colledge Pope became increasingly active in the Conservative party. When that party came to power in 1859, William became Colonial Secretary even though he did not hold office in either legislature. That same year, William also became the editor of the *Islander* newspaper and regularly exchanged barbs with rival Liberal papers. When considering the land question, for example, the *Islander* contended that the leasehold tenure system was “obnoxious” and “injurious,” but insisted that it had to be resolved in a way that did not infringe on the rights of the proprietors because it would call their property rights into question. Although Pope, a Methodist, initially tried to build bridges between Protestants and Catholics of sectarian education questions, these efforts failed and threats to mobilize Catholics against Protestants led him to publish a vicious series of editorials in the *Islander* pitting Protestants against Catholics. These eighteen months of editorial exchanges raised Pope’s political profile, but made him something of a *bête noire* to the Liberals.



Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

When the question of forming a Maritime or larger political union arose, William Pope was one of a very small group to support the idea. As a delegate to the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences, he strongly supported the 72 Resolutions even though the colony’s voters overwhelmingly opposed union. When his brother James became Premier at the beginning of 1865, William remained Colonial Secretary, but his pro-Confederation views rendered him increasingly isolated within the cabinet. Later that year, when his brother was about to move a debate on Confederation, William pre-empted the debate by moving eight pro-Confederation resolutions before his brother could speak. James moved a series of counter-resolutions and Confederation’s widespread unpopularity with the colony’s voters ensured their defeat. James then cemented William’s isolation by passing a “No Terms Resolution” declaring Confederation a non-possibility for the foreseeable future in 1866 while William was away on a trade delegation in Brazil. This unambiguous anti-Confederation stance led William to resign in protest shortly after his return.

After his resignation from the cabinet, William Pope continued to push for PEI’s entry into Confederation. He did not win another election but continued to edit the *Islander* and wrote many pro-Confederation editorials. He also mended fences with the colony’s Catholic community, helping to propel the Conservatives back to power. His brother James then eventually sought better terms of union and PEI entered Confederation in 1873. From this date, until his death in 1879, William worked as the judge of the Prince County Court.

[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 is Majestie'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 Majestie'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 Majestie'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 intermediate/senior-level classes. The activities described in the pages, for example, fulfill the following outcomes listed in Prince Edward Island's "Social Studies 7," "History 621A: Canadian History," and "Canadian Studies CAS401A" curriculum guides.

The mini-unit can be accessed here:

<http://hcmc.uvic.ca/confederation/pdfs/pei-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.