

CONFEDERATION THROUGH GENERATIONS

1948

In the late 1940's Newfoundland's future was uncertain. The possibilities for governing included continuing Commission of Government which began in 1934. Britain helped with Newfoundland's debt, but we had to surrender political sovereignty. St. John's businessman, Chess Crosby, promoted economic union with the United States. The other options, return to Responsible Government elected by the people or Confederation with Canada.

One persuasive Confederation argument was the promise of social programs, unemployment insurance and family allowance. The pro-confederates distributed a leaflet stating "Once we get Confederation we know that never again will there be a hungry child in Newfoundland."

Money was scarce before Confederation. To help support his family, at age fifteen, my father quit school at the Christmas break. His final report read: *"Would have made an excellent student. Showed great interest in his work. Had good capacity for learning and would have made good if he kept to school."*

Anti-confederates, merchants of the day, feared they would lose power over the locals. Catholics were encouraged to vote against Confederation. Debates bitterly divided families and communities, with religion influencing the outcome.

June 3, 1948 the first vote for Confederation was forty one percent. The second referendum July 22, 1948 saw fifty two percent in favor.

Early on June 22, 1948, my father was awakened by loud voices and the fire engine's clanging bells. He saw flames and plumes of smoke. He walked to Petries Crossing and soon realized there was no saving the Loyal Orange Lodge. Built in 1898, it burned to the ground, along with equipment belonging to the Church Lads Brigade, and band instruments for the Loyal Orange Association. Charges of arson were laid and a resident of Petries was sentenced to three years in prison.

When Old Age Pensions started arriving, some seniors were ashamed to cash them. Newfoundlanders were always proud and self sufficient. An honest day's work for an honest day's pay was the unspoken motto.

While daily living seemed to improve in my Grandparents day, Newfoundlanders of my generation can see it came at considerable cost. A lot of wheeling and dealing went on behind closed doors between politicians and investors. Newfoundland has been, and still is, rich in natural resources but mismanagement and give-aways plague our history. The Upper Churchill

Power Project sees Quebec earning \$2 to \$4 billion annually while Newfoundland gets enough to maintain the facility. With Confederation, the Grand Banks of Newfoundland became the Grand Banks of Ottawa, a bargaining chip for the Federal Government. Our rail service was discontinued with a "roads for rails" deal, promising a divided highway across the island.

Commentators on national television refer to this great country of ours, from Vancouver to Halifax. If there is mention of Newfoundland and Labrador, we are ridiculed as uneducated, lazy and always looking for handouts from Ottawa.

When we consider our place in Confederation, we can be proud of our natural resources, strategic position and unique culture.

The sun rises first in Newfoundland.