

TORONTO STAR

CLASSROOM CONNECTION

East Coast & Confederation

TEACHER GUIDE

Canadian Press reporter Michael MacDonald looks at how the Maritime region, at one time an economic engine that boasted the finest homes in the land, has long since fallen behind its wealthier neighbours to the west.

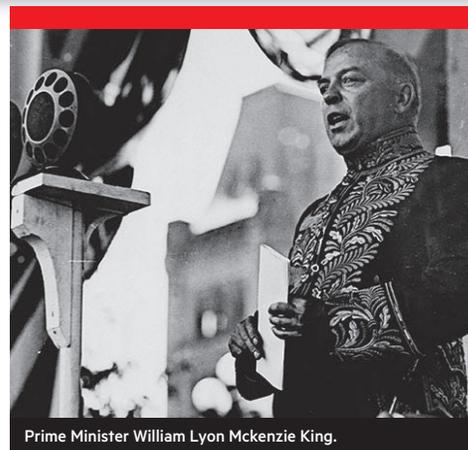
In the 1860s, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were wealthy, confident, self-governing colonies that stood little to gain by uniting with the virtually bankrupt and politically deadlocked colonies that would later become Ontario and Quebec. However, politicians from the province of Canada ultimately persuaded their colleagues in the Maritimes to join a new nation.

Concerns about American aggression and the promise of an expanded railway system were among the reasons Nova Scotia and New Brunswick joined Confederation in 1867, with Prince Edward Island remaining on the sidelines until 1873.

While it is true that Canada has largely become a secure and prosperous nation over the past 150 years, there is ample evidence to show Canada's East Coast has experienced an economic and political decline that stands in sharp contrast to its proud past.

Additional discussion/research points:

- The pre-Confederation years are known as the “Golden Age” on the East Coast. What political and economic factors contributed to that optimistic view?
- Many people in the Maritimes were not happy when Canada became a country on July 1, 1867. What were they angry about?
- Nova Scotian politician and journalist Joseph Howe was a vocal critic of Confederation, and he campaigned to have his province taken out of the enterprise. What reasons did he give for his opposition?
- Some scholars have suggested that the economic decline of the East Coast was inevitable, given the fact that sailing ships were already being replaced by steam-driven vessels in the 1860s. As well, they say the region's small population contributed to that decline. What do you think?
- What were some of the steps taken by the federal government to address the grievances of Maritime politicians who complained the region was not being given a fair deal from Ottawa?
- Among other things, the federal government supported a number of industrial projects to boost the East Coast economy. Research some of the more prominent failures associated with regional economic development.
- Between 1900 and 1930, an estimated 300,000 Maritimers left the largely rural region to find work, with about three-quarters moving to the United States. Research why this happened and explain how it affected the region.
- What would you do to improve the economy and political clout of Atlantic Canada?



Prime Minister William Lyon Mckenzie King.



A house built in 1867 by shipbuilder John Ferguson.



Joseph Howe (1804-1873).