

# Dominion of Newfoundland 1907-1934



- **Achieved Dominion-status along with New Zealand September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1907**
- **Newfoundlanders served honourably during World War One - One day seared the horror of modern warfare into the collective conscience of Newfoundland: July 1st 1916. On that day 801 officers and men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment went over the top at Beaumont - Hamel on the Somme. When the fighting ended only 68 answered the roll call.**
- **Newfoundland entered the post-war era in a mood of somber optimism. Prime Minister William Lloyd represented the Dominion at the January 1919 Paris Peace Conference as a member of the British delegation.**
- **Aviators flocked to the island after the Daily Mail (British newspaper) renewed its offer of 10,000 pounds to the pilot of the first plane to cross the Atlantic non-stop. John Alcock and Arthur Brown took off from Saint John's on June 14th. Sixteen hours later they crash landed their Vickers Vimy in an Irish bog.**
- **The decades that followed would be ones of unprecedented economic hardship.**



- **The Mediterranean countries, traditional markets for Newfoundland cod, now favored the catch of Scandinavian trawlers operating off Iceland.**
- **Prewar diversification programs had succeeded in reducing the fishery's share of the GNP to about 25% but it still employed nearly half the work force.**
- **Demand for minerals and forest products also slumped as pre-war trading patterns reasserted themselves.**
- **The Government was forced to expend ever increasing sums to keep the unprofitable railway in operation. Eventually it was forced to take over from the private operators.**
- **Debts incurred to finance the war effort also added to the nation's fiscal burden – by the 1930s Newfoundland's debts consumed 65% of its revenues!**
- **A powder keg of public discontent was ignited on February 11, 1932. Finance Minister Peter Cashin had resigned after charging Prime Minister Richard Squires with falsifying the minutes of cabinet meetings to conceal misuse of public funds.**

**The charges became public knowledge and a largely unemployed mob of several thousand gathered in front of Squires' offices. Distribution of emergency relief vouchers averted a riot and the mob disbursed for the moment. Squires, whose first administration ended with a 1923 arrest and tax evasion conviction, demanded an immediate investigation by the Governor and a committee of the Legislature. The investigation quickly cleared him of all charges but public suspicions remained strong. An aroused citizenry was further provoked by a March 23rd announcement of tariff increases and cuts in veterans pensions. The Legislature reconvened on April 5th. An angry mob gathered in front of the Colonial Building demanding a full inquiry into the charges against Squires. The demonstration's leaders attempted to enter the building to present**



Prime Minister Squires

**their demands but were rebuffed. Squires and the legislators managed to escape rough justice but dozens of policemen and demonstrators were injured in the ensuing riot. Damage to the building was extensive. Not a pane of window glass remained unshattered. The mayhem spread into Saint John's business district and subsided only after members of the Great War Veterans Association began patrolling the streets.**



Riot at the Colonial Building

- **Newfoundland's last election as an independent self-governing dominion resulted in a sweep for the United Newfoundland Party which won 24 of the 27 seats in the legislature. The new Prime Minister, Frederick Alderdice had promised little other than the appointment of a committee to investigate the possible advantages of, "placing the country under a form of commission for a period of years."**
- **On February 16, 1934 Newfoundland reverted to the status of a Crown Colony. Prime Minister Frederick Alderdice signed an Act suspending the constitution. The Legislature and the Executive Council were temporarily abolished and their powers surrendered to a Commission of Government consisting of the Governor, three British and three Newfoundland commissioners, all appointed by and directly responsible to Westminster. Seventy-nine years of democratic self-rule came to an end. The Saint John's city council would be Newfoundland's sole elected representative body for the next fifteen years.**

- Given Newfoundland's strategic location in the Battle of the Atlantic, the Allies (especially the United States of America) built many military bases there. Large numbers of unskilled men gained the first pay-cheques they had seen in years by working on construction and in dockside crews. National income doubled overnight as an economic boom took place in the Avalon Peninsula and to a lesser degree in Gander, Botwood, and Stephenville. The United States became the main supplier, and American money and influence diffused rapidly from the military, naval, and air bases. Prosperity returned to the fishing-industry by 1943. Government revenues, aided by inflation and new income, quadrupled, even though Newfoundland had tax-rates much lower than those in Canada, Britain, or the United States. To the astonishment of all, Newfoundland started financing loans to London. Wartime prosperity ended the long depression and reopened the question of political status.
- Newfoundland girls married American personnel by the thousands, "the Yanks' jaunty manner and easy social ways making an often stark contrast to the Canadian servicemen who at this time began to coin the epithet 'Newfie.'" The American connection worked so well that the Canadian government in Ottawa became alarmed. A new political party formed to support close ties with the U.S., the *Economic Union Party*. Advocates of union with Canada denounced the *Economic Union Party* as republican, disloyal and anti-British; Britain refused to allow the people the option to vote on union with the U.S., and the U.S. State Department, needing British and Canadian cooperation in WWII, decided not to press the issue.



- After much debate, an initial referendum took place on June 3, 1948 to decide between continuing with the Commission of Government, reverting to Dominion status, or joining the Canadian Confederation. The result proved inconclusive, with 44.5% supporting the restoration of Dominion status, 41.1% for confederation with Canada, and 14.3% for continuing the Commission of Government.
- A second referendum on July 22, 1948, which asked Newfoundlanders to choose between Confederation and Dominion status, produced a vote of 52% to 48% for confederation with Canada.

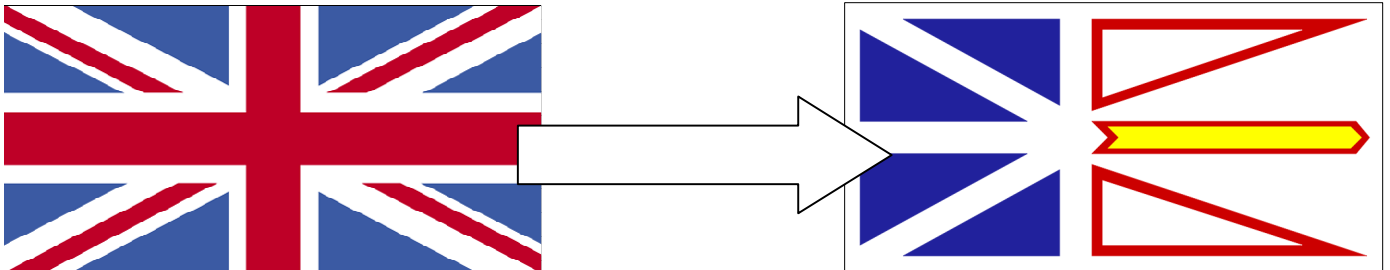
- **British Governor Gordon Macdonald openly campaigned for confederation, making him unpopular with those Newfoundlanders who opposed joining Canada. Anti-confederates cited Macdonald's interference in arguments to throw out the 1948 referendum results on joining Canada.**

**When Governor Macdonald left the island after it joined Canada, the following poem was published in the Daily Telegraph:**

**The prayers of countless thousands sent  
Heavenwards to speed thy safe return,  
Ennobled as thou art with duty well performed,  
Bringing peace, security and joy  
Among the peoples of this New Found Land.  
So saddened and depressed until your presence  
Taught us discern and help decide what's best for  
All on whom fortune had not smiled.  
Remember if you will the kindness and the love  
Devotion and the respect that we the people have for Thee**

**- Farewell!**

- **Newfoundland joined Canada on March 31, 1949.**
- **Newfoundland adopted its own provincial flag (after using the Union Jack since 1934) in 1980.**



- **Newfoundland changed its name to “Newfoundland and Labrador” in 2001.**