

## A “Home Town” Newspaper

Residents of Prince County - in particular Summerside - experienced something different on October 5, 1951. It was not unexpected, by any means - anyone who'd recently picked up a newspaper would have known of it. But hearing and reading about something is one thing. Actually seeing it and holding its physical form in your hands? That's different.

For years, Summerside and the western portion of Prince Edward Island had been privy to two journalistic bodies. The *Summerside Journal*, a Conservative organ, set up shop in 1865; its stalwart, Liberal-leaning competitor, the *Pioneer*, landed in town in 1880 after unsuccessful runs in Alberton and Montague. From that point on both publications competed fiercely for readership, so entrenching themselves in the town that they became veritable institutions. But on a Friday afternoon in October those two institutions appeared as one, under a single masthead: *The Summerside Journal and The Pioneer*. The Fourth Estate in Summerside had entered a new era.

The reason for this amalgamation was front page material. Despite the fact that the *Pioneer* had garnered considerable patronage during the seven-odd decades it had been published in Summerside, it had begun to lose steam, and ground, to the *Journal*. On the very first page of the very first issue of the newly formed publication, under the rather ho-hum headline “Summerside Newspapers Combine”, was stated:

“In the peculiarly difficult days through which we are passing our esteemed contemporary [the *Pioneer*] came to the conclusion that the exigencies of the times, with all the uphill work which is naturally involved, did not justify the consequent strain so in common with *The Journal* it was felt that the only reasonable action was to follow the trend of the times and combine our efforts.”

And shortly after, a verbatim quote from the final issue of the *Pioneer* to its subscribers:

“Due to tremendous increase the past few years in wages and materials, it is impossible any longer to provide a first-class newspaper for what we are currently charging for subscriptions and advertising. To further complicate matters, it is practically impossible to maintain a full complement of staff. Therefore it is with deep regret we are discontinuing this publication...and we hope you will see your way clear to patronize this ‘Home Town’ newspaper [*The Summerside Journal and The Pioneer*] for the benefit of all.”

Simply put, the newspaper industry had hit a bit of an ebb, and unfortunately for the *Pioneer* it had felt the pinch a little more than most. To publish a newspaper - whatever the frequency - was an expensive endeavour at the best of times. The process, from beginning to end, was labour intensive. It required an ample staff. And this staff had to be paid, which meant

maintaining a sound subscription and advertising base to garner income. Negative fluctuations in any of these areas could easily spell trouble. For instance, a reduction in subscriptions and advertising meant a decrease in profits. And a decrease in profits meant a decrease in wages, or even lay-offs, either of which could impact the overall quality of a paper. And a poor quality paper? There go even more subscriptions. It could be a cyclical nightmare.

Having seen the writing on the wall, the *Pioneer* opted instead to give up the ghost and join forces with the *Journal*. And the *Journal*? It was more than willing to merge assets with its competitor under the umbrella of its own publishing company (The Journal Publishing Company Ltd.). It had recently suffered a setback itself with the death of its longtime guiding light, Arthur Brennan, in June. An amalgamation of this magnitude would help it to rebuild, and give it the lofty distinction of being the largest tri-weekly newspaper in the Dominion.

Despite temporary confusion amongst its Charlottetown counterparts as to who would be assuming editorial responsibilities of *The Summerside Journal* and *The Pioneer*, the transition proved seamless. As opposed to two newspapers printed on a bi-weekly basis, Summerside now had a single publication available three days per week which effectively covered local, regional, national, and international news. At this very moment, whether in print or online, you're reading the descendant of that paper.

While 1951 marked a new beginning for print journalism in Summerside, it is but a chapter in a story that first began 150 years ago in 1865. Join me over the next few months as I delve into the history of Summerside's first official newspaper, the *Summerside Journal*. There will be tales of adversity and triumph, friend and foe, and more than a few interesting characters to meet along the way. Some you may know, and some you may not - either way, I look forward to sharing them with you!