

Close Competition: The *Journal* vs. *Progress*

Joseph Bertram and Henry Barnard were intelligent men; indeed, the former had an extensive background in print journalism and newspaper production. At some point, competition was to be expected. Perhaps what wasn't predicted, however, was a rival that set up shop across the street, bankrolled by one of Summerside's growing mercantile titans. Less than a year after its genesis, the *Summerside Journal* was about to experience a baptism by fire. The honeymoon was over.

Born in 1833, Robert Tinsom Holman's abrupt entry into the world of business at the age of thirteen, out of necessity to support his family, deprived him of a higher education; however, sometimes the school of hard knocks is the best school of all. Arriving in Prince Edward Island in 1851 with like-minded elder brothers, he began in Charlottetown with one, and then found his way to Summerside with another where, in the 1860s, he became sole proprietor of a merchandising establishment. From that point on R.T. Holman prospered, becoming one of the most successful businessmen on the Island. Although mainly a wholesale and retail merchant, money in his pocketbook allowed him to invest in different projects. Like a newspaper, for instance.

Beginning in earnest in 1864, talk of Confederation was rampant. Meetings had even been held that September in Charlottetown which discussed the idea. For Islanders, the answer to such a notion was a (mostly) resounding "no" - the Island was better off on its own. Among this majority was Holman, whose business interests had benefited enormously from reciprocity with the United States. Established in 1854, it ended in 1861 with the outbreak of civil war, and Confederation would jeopardize any chance of getting it back. But there was a problem: not everyone was averse to the Island joining a political union. In fact, two of them were in Summerside. And they owned a newspaper.

From the very beginning, Bertram and Barnard had come out in support of Confederation, and advocated acceptance of the idea. For almost a year, they held the print monopoly in Summerside. But then in July of 1866, Holman, with views quite to the contrary and the funds to promote them, secured the services of Thomas Kirwan. An Islander by birth who'd apprenticed as a compositor in the US before enlisting to fight in the Civil War (and who eventually became an editor for the *Boston Herald*), Kirwan shared Holman's views. Enter *The Summerside Progress and Prince County Register*.

The *Journal* and the *Progress* immediately proved to be diametrical opposites on nearly every issue. This opposition, however, reared its head most with respect to Confederation. Engaged in an often vicious war of words over the idea, the *Journal* touted the benefits of union while the *Progress* fought tooth and nail against it. The conflict reached a crescendo pitch when the *Progress* went so far as to accuse Joseph Bertram and the *Journal* of being in the back pocket of the federal government, bribed by "Canadian gold".

Despite lacking the weight of public opinion, it was the *Journal* that had the last laugh when, in 1873, Islanders were hoodwinked into Confederation. And while its prospects steadily increased, those of the *Progress* dwindled. Holman sold the enterprise in 1876 to Thomas P. Gorman, who could not keep it afloat. By 1882, it was over. The *Progress* and its assets went to auction, and William Arthur Brennan, who had risen from shareholder to sole proprietor of the *Journal*, was there to take over its plant and subscriptions lists.

They were high times indeed for the *Journal*; however, setbacks unforeseen loomed on the horizon.