

PANEL #1

The Early Years

primary text

Imagine being aboard a ship on a dark, stormy night. The wind is howling fiercely, pushing large waves over the sides of your vessel. You are at the mercy of the elements. Picture a lack of navigational aids, creating a powerful sense of disorientation as you search desperately in the darkness for any indication of your ship's location. It seems like a nightmare; unfortunately, for the many seafarers sailing around the coast of Prince Edward Island in the days before lighthouses, it was exactly that.

Lighthouses were not always a common feature of the Island's landscape. Prior to 1845, our intricate coastline lacked such structures, making navigation challenging. Merchants and shipowners, whose very livelihood depended upon the safety of their vessels, and the crews that sailed them, continually faced the worry of a shipwreck. Even one could result in financial ruin, not to mention loss of life. Those employed in the fishing industry equally had much to fear.

Coastal communities were affected by this issue, particularly in Nova Scotia. In the early nineteenth century, its government erected a number of lighthouses. To cut costs, nearby colonies were asked to contribute money for construction and maintenance - after all, they would be using the lighthouses as well. Given its proximity, Prince Edward Island naturally invested in these projects.

secondary text

Between 1815 and 1839, Prince Edward Island contributed funds to lighthouses on Cranberry, St. Paul, and Scatarie Islands. **(text accompanied by a map depicting their locations in relation to PEI)**

Prince Edward Island's contributions came from a tax known as a Light Duty. It was charged by the tonne on all registered ships departing from customs houses across the province. **(text accompanied by...)**

Between 1770 and 1845, an estimated 50 - 100 ships were wrecked in Island waters. **(text accompanied by photograph of a shipwreck)**

PANEL #2

A Lighthouse to Call Our Own

primary text

Prince Edward Island's contribution to Nova Scotia's lighthouses inspired the question:
What about building a lighthouse here?

Petitions for lighthouses began to appear before government by the late 1830s. Concerned merchants and shipowners, such as James Peake, Sr., displayed a keen interest. Unfortunately, government's money was tied up in lighthouses in Nova Scotia, and its efforts to obtain contributions from its mainland and American neighbours were unsuccessful. As a result, the petitions quickly fell through.

In 1841, excitement arose when serious consideration was given to building a small lighthouse on Governor's Island. Government voted to set aside money; however, when the question of where to situate the lighthouse was tasked to Governor Sir Charles Augustus FitzRoy, he sought the advice of three Royal Navy officers familiar with the Island's waters. These officers felt that a lighthouse to serve the interests of Charlottetown and Hillsborough Bay would be better placed on Point Prim. But there was a catch: The lighthouse had to be tall enough to cast its light over a greater range. The money earmarked was now insufficient, and the residents of Prince Edward Island would have to wait.

secondary text

In 1836, a petition for a beacon (a small navigational tower) was submitted to the government. It is unknown if it was ever built; however, the desired location was Point Prim! **(text accompanied by an image of a beacon, and scan of the petition)**

Sir Charles Augustus FitzRoy was Prince Edward Island's eighth Governor, and served from 1837-1841. **(text accompanied by image of FitzRoy)**

This map from 1852 depicts Governor's Island in relation to Charlottetown and Point Prim. **(text accompanied by an image of the map)**

PANEL #3

Reliable Communication:

Samuel Cunard, Mail Delivery, and the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company

primary text

At the same time that the Island was grappling with the issue of lighthouses, it found itself dealing with an issue of a different sort: Mail delivery.

Mail delivery was very important, representing the Island's primary means of communication with the outside world. Before 1832, the task of delivering mail during the navigation season fell to masters of sailing vessels, who were paid by the government to convey the mails to and from the Island and the mainland; however, this method proved inconsistent. Depending on the weather, sailing vessels could be ineffective. The government needed something reliable. That something was steam.

In 1842, after a decade of dealing with contractors outside the province, the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company was formed. Based largely in Charlottetown, the company was composed of prominent merchants, shipowners, barristers, and politicians, who pooled their money, along with a hefty government investment, into operating a steamboat that could take over mail delivery. The company would leave its mark in more ways than one.

secondary text

During the winter months, individuals were contracted to carry the mails across the Northumberland Strait. This task was accomplished by using iceboats, useful when open water was present, but dangerous when they had to be hauled by hand over ice floes. **(text accompanied by an image of an ice boat party)**

The concept of communication via steam-powered vessels was brought to the Island in 1832 by Halifax shipping magnate Sir Samuel Cunard. From 1832 to 1842, he operated two vessels, the *Pocahontas* and the *Cape Breton*, between the Island and the mainland, carrying mail and passengers. **(text accompanied by an image of Cunard, and engraving of the Pocahontas)**

Directors of the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company were such notable figures as James Peake, Sr., Thomas Heath Haviland, Sr., William Swabey, Samuel Nelson, Charles Hensley, Francis Longworth, and Andrew Duncan. Shareholders included Joseph Pope, James Yeo, and future Father's of Confederation George Coles, Edward Palmer, and Thomas Heath Haviland, Jr. **(text accompanied by images of Hensley and Peake and Pope)**

Newspaper advertisement for the *St. George*. **(text accompanied by newspaper clipping)**

PANEL #4

A Lighthouse is Born

primary text

Despite its initial success, the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company and its vessel, the *St. George*, ran into difficulties. Even with investments from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, steamboats were expensive to maintain, and the company continually operated at a loss. But it still had enough pull to make its presence known.

In 1845, two petitions were presented to government. Signed by the directors of the Steam Navigation Company and its shareholders, the petitions called for the erection of a lighthouse on Point Prim to safeguard the travels of the *St. George*, and to protect “lives and property”. Included was a report addressed to Governor Henry Vere Huntley, providing estimates for materials and supplies for a lighthouse. It was signed by four of the company’s directors, who had been assisted by Samuel Cunard in his role as a lighthouse commissioner for Nova Scotia, and noted architect Isaac Smith, who provided a design.

Government’s large investment in the company, the company’s influential members, and the report by the company’s directors made it difficult to ignore the petitions. Funds were set aside, and a survey team was formed, which featured a number of shareholders. Construction of a round lighthouse, of stone and brick, began in the summer according to plans drawn up by Isaac Smith; Richard Walsh was the successful contractor. When completed, it stood 60 ft. high, and in December was lit for the first time.

secondary text

Considered one of Prince Edward Island’s premiere architects, Isaac Smith was also responsible for such architectural masterpieces as Government House (Fanningbank), built in 1834, and the Colonial Building (Province House), completed in 1847. **(text accompanied by image of Smith, Fanningbank, and Province House)**

Sir Henry Vere Huntley was Prince Edward Island’s ninth Governor, serving from 1841-1847. **(text accompanied by image of Huntley)**

Notice from the *Islander* of December 16, 1845. **(text accompanied by scan of “Notice to Mariners”)**

Tender issued for construction of the lighthouse. **(text accompanied by scan of tender)**

The *Islander* of April 5, 1845, published an account of the survey party’s excursion to Point Prim. Note the presence of George Coles, who would go on to become a Father of Confederation. **(text accompanied by scan of newspaper article)**

William Douse, Esq. (1800-1864). Politician, land agent for Lord Selkirk, proprietor, shipbuilder and master, he was known for his ability to obtain local improvements for his district and for having the largest funeral in Colonial history. **(text accompanied by image of Douse)**

PANEL #5

Lighting the Way:

Point Prim Lighthouse, the 1864 Charlottetown Conference, and the Road to Canada

primary text

Late in the summer of 1864, two events descended upon the city of Charlottetown. One was a circus; the other, a political conference. Of the two, it was the circus that captured the attention of Islanders. But it was the conference that would have a lasting impact as one of the defining moments in Canadian history.

As you stand here, take a moment to look out across Hillsborough Bay to Charlottetown Harbour. Place yourself in the shoes of Finlay MacDonald, the lightkeeper in 1864, and imagine the sense of curiosity at seeing three different vessels steaming their way towards the Island's capital. He would not have known that aboard these ships were delegates from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Canada (Ontario and Quebec), coming for a conference on Maritime Union, but which quickly changed to a meeting about the idea of Confederation; nor would he have known that he was seeing history in the making, and that he was a part of it, as the nation of Canada was being conceived mere miles away.

Now look behind you. This lighthouse, built in 1845, was envisaged by some of the same minds who met in Charlottetown in 1864, and a host of other individuals instrumental in shaping the Islands' history. What you see is not merely a lighthouse - it is a legacy. The Fathers of Confederation are credited with "building better than they knew". The same could be said of the fathers of Point Prim Lighthouse.

secondary text

By the time of the 1864 Charlottetown Conference, the Point Prim lighthouse had been serving its purpose for nearly twenty years. Though geographically removed from the meetings, it nevertheless boasted connections.

- Isaac Smith, its architect, had designed the Colonial Building (Province House), which played host to the gathering;

- Two of the Island's delegates, George Coles and Edward Palmer, and later Thomas Heath Haviland Jr., a delegate at the Quebec Conference, had all been shareholders in the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company, and are today regarded as Fathers of Confederation (William Henry Pope, another Father, was the son of Joseph Pope, a leading figure in the company);
- The steamships *Heather Belle* and *Princess of Wales*, responsible for transporting the delegates from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, were operated by the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company, which had all but dissolved in 1847 shortly after succeeding in having the lighthouse built, but which was reformed under new management in 1863/64.

Images:

- *Heather Belle*
- Fathers of Confederation group shot (outside Fanningbank)
- George Coles (1810-1875): A dominant figure in Island politics, Coles co-founded the Liberal party, and was the first Premier of Prince Edward Island, responsible for passing the Free Education Act, obtaining Responsible Government, and universal suffrage. He was a delegate at the Charlottetown Conference, and then again at the Quebec Conference.
- Edward Palmer (1809-1889): A key player in the Island's Conservative party, Palmer would hold such posts as Premier, Solicitor General, and Attorney General, and was also a Chief Justice in the Island's Supreme Court. He was a delegate at both the Charlottetown and Quebec Conferences.
- Thomas Heath Haviland, Jr. (1822-1895): Instrumental in orchestrating the Island's entry into Confederation in 1873, Haviland was a prominent politician, a mayor of Charlottetown, a Lt. Governor, and a Senator. He was a delegate at the Quebec Conference in 1864.