



CHARLOTTETOWN: BIRTHPLACE OF CANADA

FAST FACTS	
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	See Below
Urbanized Area* Population	38,000
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	22
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	58
Population per Square Mile	1,600
Population per Square Kilometer	600
*Continuously built up area	

24 February 2004

Canada as we know it today started in Charlottetown, the small city that is the capital of the smallest legislative jurisdiction in North America, Prince Edward Island. It is less than one-third the size of the second smallest such jurisdiction, the state of Wyoming. With a population of 140,000, the province of Prince Edward Island has fewer people than nearly 400 of the 3,100 counties in the United States. Its population would fit nicely into less than one-third of a square mile of the densest districts in Mumbai or Dhaka.

I visited Charlottetown less than 48 hours after what may have been the heaviest snowstorm on record. On Thursday, 19 February, 30 inches (75 centimeters) of snow fell in less than 24 hours. Five or so more inches led the municipal government of Halifax, little more than 100 miles away to declare a state of emergency, impose curfews and threaten Canadians, generally known as a law abiding people, with \$1,000 fines for violation. It was surreal driving at 75 miles per hour (120 kilometers) per hour on a freeway fully cleared by Nova Scotia provincial officials to hear radio reports of the situation in Halifax. One wondered whether NATO peacekeepers might be called in to restore order to the restive town.

The contrast in Charlottetown and elsewhere along the way could not have been greater. The trip from Halifax International took less than three hours. I crossed the Confederation Bridge, over Northumberland Sound, at about 19:00 on Saturday the 21st and drove into a Charlottetown with streets ready to accommodate my tour. I drove in the dark to Province House, the waterfront and throughout the downtown area to obtain a perspective for a more in-depth tour the next day.

But a highlight of any trip to Prince Edward Island is the Confederation Bridge. Opened less than a decade ago, it is approximately 10 miles and represents the continuing commitment of Canada to maintain a fixed link with Prince Edward Island. Before the bridge was built, regular ferry service met the need. There is a one-way toll, which at C\$39 (approximately US\$ 30) seems high, but is reflective of the increased cost of recently built public infrastructure. Today, some ferries continue to operate to the mainland, but not during the winter.

Province House was the site of the meeting that led to Canada's confederation. The building remains the meeting place for the Prince Edward Island provincial parliament. As so often is the case, local officials appear to have been duped into allowing the nightmares of an architect to disfigure the square on which Province House sits with a cold, cultural center, the Confederation Centre for the Arts. Across the street it would not have been so offensive, but next to Province House seems indicative of the contempt that too often characterizes the products of architects when granted an opportunity to make things work together in harmony. So much for city planning.

From Province House, the city slopes down a gentle hill to the East River, also called the Hillsborough River, one of the three that converge to flow into the Sound here. Here is a quaintness that appears to have been designed by new urbanists. But, of course, such mixtures of 18th, 19th and early 20th century architecture were not the result of some grand master plan. They were rather the genuine result of hundreds or thousands of individual projects as uncoordinated as any market venture. There is a difference between spontaneity and plan.

Around Province House are the kinds of 19th Century brick churches that I would design if I were an architect and the clients could afford it. Within two blocks of this center are St. Dunstan's Basilica (Roman Catholic), St. Paul's Anglican Church and Zion Presbyterian Church any of which any North American city would be proud to house. But the churches did not appear to be overflowing with parishioners that Sunday. Perhaps it was the weather that kept them away, or maybe it was the times. The Trans-Canada Highway from the Confederation Bridge prepares one for Charlottetown's ecclesiastical feast, with a number of white, wood frame churches in higher density than most anywhere else in North America.

But for all of its quaintness, Charlottetown has entered the 21st century, and in a big way. To the west of the pre-1950 city that surrounds Province House are the newer suburban neighborhoods and the sprawling strip shopping malls, where Charlottetown does much of its commerce. Names familiar to Americans are there, such as Wal-Mart and Staples, together with names more familiar to Canadians, such as Zeller's and Future Shop.

Overall, Charlottetown is a very low-density urban area. According to the 2001 Census, the Charlottetown urbanized area has only 1,600 people per square mile, 10 percent less than Atlanta. But such low densities are typical of smaller urban areas in both Canada and the United States. The quintile of urban population living in the smallest urban areas of Canada consumes eight (8) times the land area of the top quintile (which is the Toronto urban area). With the rationality that all too often drives public policy, anti-sprawl activists are concentrating their efforts on the Toronto's of the world, rather than the Charlottetown's, Shenanigan's and Prince Albert's (though even in these smaller places, their proposed solutions would be inappropriate and destructive of economic opportunity).

But, with only 38,000 residents, Charlottetown is not the smallest capital in North America. Augusta (Maine), Juneau (Alaska), Frankfort (Kentucky) and Pierre (South Dakota) are smaller. Each of these, incidentally, has similarly low densities. In fact, Charlottetown is 2.5 times as large as Frankfort and Pierre. Nonetheless, Charlottetown is not even large enough for metropolitan status according to Statistics Canada criteria. More than 60,000 more people will be required, which seems far beyond reach at this point.

Of course, Charlottetown's world-wide reputation rests on "Ann of Green Gables." She didn't seem to be out and about while I was there. Maybe it was the weather.



Halifax Airport: Start of Trip to Charlottetown



On the Road to Charlottetown

Nova Scotia Route 102 North of Halifax Airport: Saturday Afternoon



Province House: Site of Confederation Conference



18th & 19th Century Housing, East of Province House



Confederation Centre for the Arts, Adjacent to Province House



18th & 19th Century Housing, East of Province House



Zion Presbyterian Church Near Province House



St. Paul's Anglican Church Near Province House
Across the Street from Zion Presbyterian Church



St. Dunstan's Basilica (Roman Catholic)
East of Province House



Early 20th Century Housing, West of Province House



Newer Suburban House, Far North of Province House



Where Charlottetown Shops-I, Far West of Province House



Where Charlottetown Shops-II, Far West of Province House



On the Road to Charlottetown from the Confederation Bridge
St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church



Confederation Bridge
Over Northumberland Strait, to New Brunswick

By Wendell Cox

Return: www.demographia.com/rac-ix.htm

Home: www.demographia.com