

NEWFOUNDLAND: THE ROAD TO CONFEDERATION

THE ARCH OF CONFEDERATION

John Pearson's magnificent Peace Tower is the crowning feature of Canada's Parliament Hill and has become, like the maple leaf, a symbol of Canada around the world. The main entrance to the Centre Block is through a fine Pointed Gothic arch at the foot of the tower. The carvings on the chaste yet ornate archway were designed in 1936 by Cléophas Soucy, who planned a series of shields to display the nine provincial coats of arms within a *motif* of native foliage, animals and birds.

It is easy to arrange nine shields around a Gothic arch — one shield at the summit, four on each side. But a difficulty arose. Which of the nine provinces was to crown the arch? Ontario? Or Quebec? They had formed the original Province of Canada, but as a unit. The solution adopted was to place twin shields side by side at the summit. Then the coats of arms of the four western provinces, in geographical order, were carved down the west side of the arch, and those of the three maritime provinces down the eastern side. That, of course, left a vacant shield at the foot of the eastern segment. It was a blank, but it might also be a portent.¹ It must be confessed that when the carving was done there was nothing in sight to suggest that the blank stone escutcheon would soon hold another provincial coat of arms.

However, as the years went by, more than one Newfoundlander, more than one Canadian, for that matter, pausing at the entrance to the Parliament Buildings, noted the blank shield, and wondered . . . And inside the arched entrance everyone could read the stirring lines written by John Almon Ritchie, Ottawa poet and playwright:

*The wholesome sea is at her gates
Her gates both east and west.*

¹ It is also said that the architect, John Pearson (an uncle of Walter Marshall who was Secretary for Finance in the Newfoundland Government when Newfoundland joined Canada and for many years thereafter), planned it that way. Indeed the remarks of Canada's Prime Minister on April 1, 1949 (see p. 110) suggest that it was the Canadian Government that planned it.