

1870 the island shared in the ship-building boom of the Maritimes. However, by the 1880s steam power and iron construction spelt the decline of the wooden shipbuilding trade.

Development

The economic gap between central Canada and the Maritime provinces widened during and after World War II. A causeway to the mainland was promised and approaches were actually built, but the project went no further. Canada's first comprehensive development plan, signed in 1969 between the federal and provincial governments, made provisions for long-term economic, social and environmental programs. The plan opened up many possibilities which hitherto had not been considered.

Agriculture

Prince Edward Island is self-sufficient in grain production and will soon become an exporter. There are three grain elevators on the island. Cash crops include a wide variety of vegetables, notably turnips, cauliflower and broccoli. These are well suited to farms where whole families take part in cultivating and harvesting. The island's dairy herd numbers some 25,000 animals, which satisfies local needs and contributes to cheese and evaporated milk exports to the mainland. In recent years hog production has been a profitable adjunct on many farms.

Tobacco is a valuable export, but requires intensive cultivation and is vulnerable to weather damage. Less demanding are the strawberry and wild blueberry crops.

Potato industry

The potato crop is the economy's cornerstone. Potatoes thrive in the temperate climate and have been grown on the island since the early days of French settlement. The arrival of many Irish settlers after the 1830s added to the importance of the potato.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, potato production was just one facet of mixed farming as practised throughout the island. In 1916 when a few strains of Irish Cobblers and Green Mountains — then the chief varieties — were found to be virtually free of disease, a seed potato certification program was instituted. That gave rise to the great seed potato industry. Varieties were grown not to be consumed, but to seed fields of table potatoes in Canada and around the world. Now farmers are relying on the processing industry, particularly the companies that freeze french fried potatoes and preserve new potatoes. Approximately one-half of the potato crop is processed.

Forests

Prince Edward Island originally was covered with woodland. The trees hindered early settlers, but were a boon