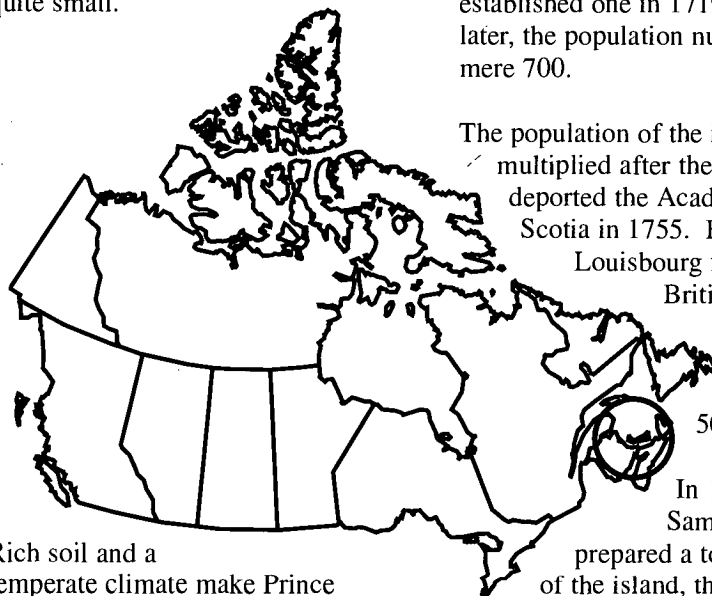


Prince Edward Island

The Land

One of the four Atlantic Provinces, Prince Edward Island is also Canada's smallest province in both area and population.

The crescent-shaped island is 224 km in length and ranges in width from 6 to 64 km, giving it a total area of 5 660 km². It lies in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, separated from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick by Northumberland Strait. Its highest point is 152 m above sea level. The province has numerous lakes and rivers, most of which are quite small.



Rich soil and a temperate climate make Prince Edward Island an ideal place for mixed farming. Half of its land is under cultivation, earning it the nickname, "the Garden Province." It is renowned for its red soil, sand dunes and 800 km of beaches.

The History

Prince Edward Island was called "Abegweit" by the Micmac Indians, who lived there for some 2 000 years before the arrival of the Europeans.

The name means "lying down flat," but is freely translated as "cradled by the waves." There is evidence that the ancestors of the Micmacs lived on the island 10 000 years ago, presumably having migrated across the low plain now covered by Northumberland Strait.

The Europeans discovered the island when Jacques Cartier landed there in 1534; he described it as "the most beautiful stretch of land imaginable." In spite of his enthusiastic description, it was a long time before the island was settled. No permanent colony existed until the French established one in 1719; 30 years later, the population numbered a mere 700.

The population of the island multiplied after the British deported the Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755. By the time Louisbourg fell to the British in 1758, the island's population had risen to 5000.

In 1766 Captain Samuel Holland prepared a topographic map of the island, then known as the Island of Saint John, dividing it into 67 parcels of land and distributing it by lot to a group of British landowners. The absentee landlords, many of whom never set foot on the island, gave rise to numerous problems. Some refused to sell their lands to their tenants, while others demanded exorbitant purchase or rental prices.

In 1769 the Island of Saint John became a separate colony, and in

1799 it was given its present name, in honour of Prince Edward of England. Prince Edward Island is known as the cradle of Confederation, since Charlottetown, its capital, was the site of the 1864 conference that set Canadian Confederation in motion. This distinction notwithstanding, the island waited until 1873 to join the Dominion of Canada.

The People

The population of Prince Edward Island was 130 000 in 1991. Of this number, 62 percent live in the rural districts, including 8 percent on farms. With a population of 33 000, Charlottetown is the only urban centre.

Approximately 80 percent of the people are of British (mainly Scottish and Irish) origin. About 15 percent are of French origin, and five percent speak French.

The island population is quite young - about 38 percent of the people are under 25.

The Economy

Agriculture, tourism and fishing are the economic mainstays of Prince Edward Island. Most of the industrial activity has to do with food processing, although high-technology industry is becoming important, especially in the medical, electronics and agricultural fields.

Prince Edward Island's rich, red soil is ideal for growing potatoes, which are the most important source of income for the province's farms.

Although lobster is king of the waters off Prince Edward Island, about