

The Depression of the 1930s in Prince Edward Island

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The purpose of the program

The material that forms this program was written to describe the era of the Great Depression from the perspective of the province of Prince Edward Island. Generally speaking, the decade of the 1930s economically and socially affected North America to the degree that the mere mention of the Depression still strikes fear in the hearts of those who lived through and survived what became known as the "Dirty Thirties." Prince Edward Island was impacted to a lesser degree than other provinces of Canada. During the depression Islanders were challenged in many ways; however through determination and resourcefulness they were able to overcome numerous obstacles. This program will examine the state of the economy and the politics of the time and will address the attempts Islanders made to improve their situation. There are also some interesting stories from those who experienced the difficult times. It is hoped that both teachers and students will grasp a better understanding of life on Prince Edward Island during that memorable decade.

The content of the program

The materials that constitute this program are contained within a suitcase for easy storage and portability. This manual provides the core information. A listing of printed resources and complementary websites is included at the end of the text.

What is an economic depression?

The dictionary defines an economic depression as a period of drastic decline in a national or international economy that results in decreased business activity, lower prices and higher rates of unemployment. It is not good for businesses, consumers or governments.

What caused the Great Depression?

The 1920s were years of prosperity and wealth for many people. Electricity was commonly available in cities, and advances in technology allowed for the fast and efficient production of many goods such as automobiles and radios. Mass production of consumer items led to the creation of many jobs. As the employment rate rose, many middle and lower income families began to be able to afford some of the new technologies, and the economy boomed. More people began to depend on credit for buying consumer goods.

Tuesday October 29, 1929, known as Black Tuesday, was for many in North America, the beginning of a devastating decade. An enormous crash in the New York Stock Exchange caused thousands of people to lose huge sums of money, and the economy began one of its biggest downfalls in history. A stock represents a part ownership in a company. It is also known as a share. A stock market, such as the New York Stock Exchange, is where these stocks are bought, traded, or sold.

The stock market was being greatly influenced by inflation during the 1920s. Inflation is when prices increase at a significant and sizeable rate. As inflation increased the value of shares, people built up the stock market to the point where it was unrealistic. Investors were becoming instant millionaires. Those who had stocks realized that the market was built up and no longer stable or sustainable. Everyone panicked and sold their shares, and the stock market crashed.

The crash in the stock market left the investments of stockholders worth little or no money. Instead of people getting back more money than they invested, they got much less. Even though not everyone had invested in the stock market, its effects were still felt by all. Those who were directly affected by the crash no longer had money to buy everyday items such as clothing and food. This in turn affected farmers, fishers, and storeowners who had no customers to buy their products and produce. Since they were not selling anything, they also had little money and could not afford to pay their bills or purchase products from each other. The financial troubles caused by the stock market crash traveled in circles and affected everyone.

When did the province of PEI feel the effect of the Depression?

The people of Prince Edward Island did not feel the effect immediately. It took an entire year for the trickle-down effect to hit the Island. The trickle-down effect is usually based on the concept that when larger businesses are doing well, the good economic standings will benefit the smaller business and the consumers as well. The effect however, can go in the opposite direction as it did during the Great Depression. When the larger businesses and wealthy people lost huge amounts of money, the economy was harmfully affected and this negatively influenced the smaller businesses and families with moderate and lower incomes. The trickle down-effect took some time to be felt on Prince Edward Island because the majority of Islanders in the 1930s lived in rural areas of the province and made their living by farming or fishing or businesses that served the two industries. The economy was not highly cash based; many people would exchange one product for another or a product for a service. Few Islanders were investing in the stock market, thus the crash had little influence on the province's economy that first year. During 1929, as financial difficulties struck most parts of Canada, Prince Edward Island remained almost unaffected. Everything, including crops, fish, cattle, etc., was selling at great prices. The Island seemed to be an exception to the economically difficult times, and people were living comfortably.

How did PEI with its farm-based economy experience the Depression?

Some say that times were easier for Islanders, even once the Depression's influence arrived because the economic boom of the 1920s had not hugely impacted the Island. During the 1920s, a time of wealth and riches for many, most Islanders were still just trying their best to get by. The period of the Depression was demanding and hard for most Canadians, but for the majority of Islanders life had never been easy. Islanders were accustomed to laborious lives.

The Great Depression gradually started causing problems on Prince Edward Island when the markets to which Islanders were selling their crops and products stopped buying. Farmers had heavy yields from the grain and potato harvest of 1930, and based on previous experiences, had not anticipated any trouble selling to the markets. However, there were no markets buying. Various places in Canada, such as Ontario, Quebec, and the other Maritime Provinces, which used to buy potatoes and other crops from Island farmers, no longer had the financial ability to do so. No markets translated into no sales – which in turn meant no profits for the pockets of Island farmers.

A commission report was conducted in 1933 on farm incomes across Canada. It was found that the average net income that year was twenty dollars. Note that the twenty dollars was an average income. This meant that some farms made much more than this (for example larger farms with lots of cattle) and unfortunately some made much less than twenty dollars of net income in one year. Those twenty dollars of income for farmers included the sale of produce, fruits and vegetables, as well as cattle.

There was no shortage of food on the farm, and since there were no markets to sell to, the families, although sometimes lacking in variety, rarely went hungry. At the time, most farms were practicing mixed farming. This meant that farmers grew many different types of crops and raised different types of livestock in hopes that if one market such as beef was poor, a different market such as pork might be better. This helped farmers keep more stable incomes. With persuasion from the government agricultural officials, many Islanders increased the variety of their mixed farming, adding chickens to produce eggs, dairy cows to produce milk and by diversifying their crops. Although this method of farming was more intense, it assured a more complete diet for the families.

One Island lady, living on a farm just outside of Summerside remembered living off of potatoes. “We ate potatoes. Mashed, boiled, mashed and boiled.” she reports in Barry Broadfoot’s book *Ten Lost Years*. She also spoke of potato plant sprouts becoming vegetables for her family. Meat was not as available as potatoes and other vegetables. After the first few years of the Depression, having a meal with meat became a very special occasion.

One family lived comfortably on a farm with horses, cows and chickens whose eggs were very tiny. They did not have enough grain to feed the chickens so they did not get all the nutrients they needed to produce high quality eggs. One boy remembers the eggs being “about the size of your thumbnail.” (*Ten Lost Years*)

A story showing the shortage of protein sources happened on a farm near Summerside. A young girl and her older siblings had a Shetland pony which they named Baby. Baby was the girl’s prized possession and she loved her very much. One summer the girl went to visit her aunt in Charlottetown and upon her arrival back home, she was informed that Baby had been sick and had died. The girl was very upset. A year later the girl and her family went to visit some relatives and the girl was told by her cousins that their uncle had butchered Baby for her father, and it was because of it that her family had been getting lots of meat. The girl was devastated and did not want to believe it; however,

knowing the hard times her family was having financially, she understood it was probably true. (*Ten Lost Years*)

Shown below is a chart of farm prices prior to the depression and during the years 1931 and 1932. It clearly shows the plight of farmers in PEI. The top figures are the prices during the Depression. The [bottom figures] indicate the value in today's money.

| Product | Value in 1929 (Before the Depression) | Value in 1931 (During the Depression) |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Pork | \$0.16 /pound [\$1.97 /pound] | \$0.03 /pound [\$0.40 /pound] |
| Wool | \$0.23 [\$2.83] | \$0.05 [\$0.66] |
| Butterfat | \$0.45 [\$5.53] | \$0.05 [\$0.66] |
| Eggs | \$0.26 /dozen [\$3.20 /dozen] | \$0.08 /dozen [\$1.06 /dozen] |
| Potatoes | \$1.50 /bushel [\$18.44 /bushel] | \$0.06 /bushel [\$0.80 /bushel] |
| Total Field Crop Value | \$16,940,000 [\$208,299,259.26] | \$6,947,000 [\$92,256,160.00] |

| Product | Value in 1929 | Value in 1930 | Value in 1931 | Value in 1932 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Wheat | \$1.59 /bushel [\$19.55 /bushel] | \$0.80 /bushel [\$9.75 /bushel] | \$0.85 /bushel [\$11.29 /bushel] | \$0.75 /bushel [\$10.95 /bushel] |
| Oats | \$0.65 /bushel [7.99 /bushel] | \$0.32 /bushel [\$3.90 /bushel] | \$0.29 /bushel [\$3.85 /bushel] | \$0.24 /bushel [\$3.50/bushel] |
| Barley | \$1.02 /bushel [12.54 /bushel] | \$0.60/bushel [\$7.31 /bushel] | \$0.51 /bushel [\$6.77 /bushel] | \$0.40 /bushel [\$5.84 /bushel] |
| Buckwheat | \$1.06 /bushel [13.03 /bushel] | \$0.65 /bushel [\$7.92 /bushel] | \$0.50 /bushel [\$6.64 /bushel] | \$0.45 /bushel [\$6.57 /bushel] |
| Hay & Clover | \$12.29/ton [151.12/ton] | \$11.00 /ton [\$134.02 /ton] | \$9.00 /ton [\$119.52 /ton] | \$7.50 /ton [\$109.45 /ton] |
| Mixed Grains | \$0.75 /bushel [9.22 /bushel] | \$0.40 /bushel [\$4.87 /bushel] | \$0.33 /bushel [\$4.38 /bushel] | \$0.30 /bushel [\$4.38 /bushel] |

Source: *A People's History of Prince Edward Island*, by Errol Sharpe

Was PEI's fishing industry also affected?

The fishing industry was Prince Edward Island's second primary industry. Without trade to the mainland or the United States, the production was much greater than the demand and the economy suffered.

In 1933, the industry met its lowest point since the 1870s. Cod in 1932 dropped to \$0.75 per hundredweight (100 pounds), and lobster, which in 2007 is selling for \$5.00 - \$6.00

per pound, sold for \$0.03 - 0.04 per pound during 1932. In 1929, the value of fish sold in Prince Edward Island was \$1,297,125 (\$15,949,833.33 in today's money). Four years later in 1933, the value dropped enormously with the year value at \$842,315 (\$13,159,933.18 at today's prices.) This would be over a two million dollar difference today. The fishery industry went through much adversity.

How did Islanders share their food supply?

With the overabundance of crops on the Island, and the drought on the prairies prohibiting the growth of any food source in Western Canada, Islanders jumped on the bandwagon to the assistance of many. One shipment made in 1935 sent sixty railway carloads of food and relief to Saskatchewan. This support was sent to the prairies on numerous occasions and was much appreciated by all who received the help.

One funny story related to the shipment of relief involved a group of immigrant farmers. They had been given bone-hard salt fish, typical food for the Maritimes but they had never seen it before. Unsure of how to cook the fillets due to their hardness, the men decided to use them as shingles on the roofs of their homes.

How did the Depression affect people not living on farms?

Although Island farmers and fishers could only get limited income from their work, they were still in a better position than businessmen and laborers. Families in Charlottetown and Summerside who did not live on a family farm often struggled to find food and were too proud to ask for some. Barry Broadfoot's book, *Ten Lost Years*, tells the story of a young boy who used to make trips to the butcher to buy meat for his mother. She always told him to ask for something for the dog, which they could get for free. The butcher gladly supplied them with liver, kidneys, and other animal parts that he did not sell. The butcher soon figured out that the family did not have a dog and that they were eating the bits of meat he supplied them with. He then started adding in onions to help the family, saying, "The dog's fur would need the oils from the onions."

Retail businesses on Prince Edward Island suffered during the 1930s. People had difficulty buying enough food to feed their families and luxuries such as new clothing, furniture or household items, were simply not affordable at the time. Many businesses closed while those that remained open had to let most employees go

Were there any industries that prospered during the Depression years?

Although the Prince Edward Island primary industries of agriculture and the fishery were not very profitable during the Great Depression, some Island industries were. Tourism and the fox fur industry both did exceptionally well during the 1930s and for many Islanders, getting involved in either field was the only way to make a few dollars.

Tourism:

Between 1929 and 1931, visitors to the Island increased by twenty-five percent and continued to increase in the years to follow. High increases varying between fifteen and twenty percent occurred in 1937, 1938, and 1939. The increase in tourists coming to the

province greatly helped the economy and many local families supported themselves through this income source. Many restaurants were opened and did very well.

The reason for the success of tourism during the Depression years had to do with the changes to the face of tourism. Vacations were not as they were in the years prior to the thirties. Instead of traveling by train to the Island for long extended vacations in fancy hotels, tourists were coming in their personal vehicles and staying in cottages or homes being rented out by owners.

Fares for the Borden-Cape Tormentine ferry were lowered in hopes of attracting even more visitors. It was also during the Depression years that talks began of a second ferry service leaving from Wood Islands to attract more visitors to the eastern end of the Island. The ferry service from Wood Islands to Caribou, Nova Scotia was implemented in 1941. In 1920, the Island government increased its annual funding in support of tourism promotion to one-thousand dollars. By 1938, over ten thousand was being spent to boost the industry.

National Parks were huge tourist attractions in other part of Canada in the 1930s. With the increased popularity in Prince Edward Island's tourism industry, Island Premier Thane Campbell lobbied for the establishment of the Cavendish National Park at Dalvay-by-the-Sea. Planning began in 1936, and the park opened on July 19, 1939. That first year over thirty-five thousand people visited the park. It became one of the most popular National Parks throughout Canada even though it was smaller and less extravagant than the rest. The park was twenty-five miles long, going from Dalvay-by-the-Sea to New London Bay and the area became the focus of the Island tourism industry.

Lucy Maud Montgomery, a well-known Island author, had written a collection of novels about a red-haired orphan named Anne. Her stories became popular around the world, and many came to visit the famous "Anne of Green Gables" house located in Cavendish. The house became a well-known tourist attraction and brought a lot of people to the Island during the 1930s.

Fox farming:

The breeding of the silver fox played a huge role in the economic history of Prince Edward Island. The red fox was very common but silver foxes were rare which made their fur very valuable and people would pay huge sums of money to own a breeding pair. The pelts were valuable on the international market and one fox pelt could put more money in a man's bank account than working for a decade.

Although the industry was still seeing profits in the 1930s the return on an investment was nowhere near that of earlier days. The industry kept many farmers from going under. One in ten farmers owned foxes as a source of income to help support their families.

In the eastern provinces, the industry surpassed all others during the Depression years. In 1932, there were 607 fox farms on the Island. This increased to more than double the amount - 1,215 - in 1937. In 1939, 76,039 fox pelts went to market, eleven times the amount that was auctioned off ten years prior in 1929.

The increase in pelt sales assisted Islanders immensely and allowed many families to get by during the difficult era. However, the huge increase in the production of fox furs contributed to the industry's decline in the early 1940s. Fox furs, especially silver fox furs, had been very rare and valuable before the Depression years. As availability increased the loss of rarity made the fox furs less desirable and the fashion industry turned towards more uncommon furs. The huge drop in demand along with protests from animal activists curtailed the industry and its profitability.

How did the PEI government help Islanders survive the hardships of the 1930s?

With all the trouble and hardship during the Depression years, many sought government support. Some people blamed politicians for allowing the economy to collapse the way it had, and for not doing enough to change the situation.

James David Stewart served as the Island premier from 1923-1927 and 1931-1933. He fought hard with the federal government to try and get more funding for the Island as well as for the other Maritime Provinces. He was a great voice for the region, and was successful in his endeavor of receiving larger federal subsidies to assist Islanders financially.

William Joseph Parnell MacMillan took over J. D. Stewart's role as Premier from 1933-1935. With the economic depression in full fledge, W.J.P. MacMillan put in place various financial assistance programs and his government spent massive amounts of money to try and stimulate the economy. His time in office ended with the election of 1935, when Walter Lea and his Liberal Party candidates were elected to every seat in the Legislative Assembly. Walter Lea passed away in 1936 and Thane A. Campbell took his place as Premier. He continued to pour money into the province's financial relief programs and projects, and is credited with opening the National Park in Cavendish.

Despite the attempts made by the Island government to help those struggling with the difficulties of the time, there was never enough help available. The provincial debt in 1937 was double what it had been in 1929. This was due to the increased government expenditure, which was implemented in hope of getting the economy back on its feet.

One attempt that was made by the provincial government to assist Islanders was the Farmers' Creditors Arrangement Act. Established in 1934, the Act helped 249 Islanders its first year by allowing farmers to apply for relief funds without having to file for bankruptcy.

In 1935, over 8,500 Islanders received financial help from the government. Those who requested assistance were given \$1.93 per family member per month. Between 1930 and 1937, one hundred and forty thousand dollars was spent on direct relief through social

welfare programs. Communities also pitched in financially to help decrease the burden on Island families. Approximately one hundred thousand dollars was put out into public hands through these government services.

Many families were very embarrassed to have to call on assistance from the government. To be on relief took away a family's sense of pride, and men were ashamed to not be able to provide for their families. A young Maritime boy remembers having to sneak out at 6 a.m. to walk to the store, which opened at 6:30 a.m., to get the family's groceries and supplies. He would go very early and sneak around because his family did not want anyone finding out they were on relief. When on relief, vouchers for food would be given and the store would supply you with what the vouchers allowed. (*Ten Lost Years*)

Were jobs difficult to find?

There were very few jobs available during the decade of the 1930s. Before the Depression hit Island soil, around twenty-one hundred men were employed on a salary or wage, meaning that they were being paid a fixed amount of money for their work on a regular basis. This was considered a relatively low number because most men were involved in farming or fishing and supported their families by selling their products instead of being paid for labor. Of the twenty-one hundred men, fifteen hundred were unemployed once the economic troubles began.

Instead of giving everyone direct relief, jobs were created and funded by the government so men could work and earn a living instead of accepting direct charity, which many were too proud to do. The provincial and federal government provided funding to have many highways paved during the 1930s. Before the Depression began, there were very few paved roads in the province. The highway leading from Borden to Charlottetown as well as to Summerside was originally paved as a source of relief work.

Jobs were certainly in demand. If a man could not get a job he would often do his best to create his own employment. Some men would go door-to-door peddling or trying to sell whatever they could to whoever would buy. At times they would even try to sell their own possessions in an attempt to get by. One father sold his golf clubs and encyclopedia set in order to pay for material for his daughter's wedding dress. He only got four dollars for the trade, but it was just enough for the fabric. (*Ten Lost Years*)

If a person was fortunate enough to have a job, he would often try to work as many hours as he possibly could, even up to twenty hours a day, in order to make ends meet. Work was hard to come by for men, but even more so for women. One lady who lived throughout the Depression recalls the trouble she was faced with when trying to find a job. She remembers only being able to get four weeks of work in four years. She would get a week of work each December around the season of the Christmas rush, and that would be all. (*Ten Lost Years*)

On one occasion, when news got out of a job available on a farm, a group of nine men walked nearly eleven miles and upon arrival found out that thirty-nine men had also made the long hike and had arrived before them.

How was PEI's population affected?

Prior to the Depression years, many Islanders left their beloved homes to travel to the mainland and beyond in search of jobs. Young people, in particular, would work to support themselves as well as their family back on the Island. Often times they would live off of as little as they possibly could and send the rest to their parents. Having older children working away from home also left the family with fewer mouths to feed, which again helped the family finances. The Island's population had been continuously decreasing since 1891.

This out-migration ceased with the economic collapse of the 1930s. The decade marked the beginning of a continual population growth, which continues even to this day. There was little work to be found in the province of Prince Edward Island at the time, but this was the situation in most places. Those who had left in earlier years returned to their home on the Island and the population increased. Although parents enjoyed having their children come back, it was difficult to pay all the bills and expenses without the extra income that used to be sent home. The children would always help out in farming, fishing, or the family business, but there was no longer an external income.

Were there organizations that helped people during the Depression years?

Times were tough for everyone during the 1930s. People did not have a lot of money to buy food from the farmers and fishers. Since farmers and fishers had financial trouble too, they had to try to get fair prices for their products. To help find level ground in the debate, co-operative groups were created. A co-operative group is an organization in which those having products to sell (farm crops or fish for example) negotiate with the consumers - those buying the products - to find the price that was fair for everyone. On Prince Edward Island, the co-operative movement really expanded and had huge growth because of the "Great Depression" days.

The first co-operative movement began in the village of Tignish in 1925. A second was started in Alberton in 1930, and the two merged in later years. Four new groups started in 1935 and the following year, 1936, seven new groups emerged. Another six were formed in 1937. By 1942 there were twenty-eight different unions on Prince Edward Island. A total of forty co-operative movements exist in PEI in 2007.

An Acadian man by the name of J. T. Croteau is given credit for expanding the co-operative movement on P.E.I. He came to the Island in 1932 from the United States and arranged what were known as "study groups" to teach Islanders the principles of co-operative movements. Mr. Croteau took a co-operative program that was being used in Antigonish, Nova Scotia (where the movement originated) and modified it to suit Islanders needs. The program had been greatly supported by Roman Catholic priests in Antigonish and local Island priests also gave their support and encouragement to the movement. Father J. J. Tompkins, a big supporter of the movement, was well known for his belief in the abilities of each individual.

The main principles of the movement include the belief that anyone should be able to be a member, and no one should be forced to be a member. When important decisions need to be made, resolutions come about in a democratic manner: all members get one vote. Other principles include co-operating with other co-operatives, showing genuine concern for community, and equally sharing any profits made by the co-operative among its members. [For detailed information on the principles of co-operative movements in PEI, an excellent source is *Working Together*, written by Marian Bruce and Elizabeth Cran.]

Islanders learned how to manage a co-operatives, with Croteau's assistance, opened Credit Unions. Credit Unions are locally owned and operated banks. During the Depression years they were able to give loans to people with lower interest rates. Many banks on Prince Edward Island were forced to close in the 1930s due to lack of finances and people with outstanding loans. Credit Unions avoided this problem by cautiously selecting those who would receive the assistance. Seventy-two of these financial institutions covered the Island tip to tip at one time, and the movement is still strong on the Island today.

What were some of the unusual measures taken by Islanders?

Those living on Prince Edward Island found lots of innovative ways to survive when times were tough. Empty flour sacks were used to make all kinds of clothing and were a common sight in the 30s. Three holes would be cut out and the letters of the flour company's name bleached out to make a girl's dress. One company's bags had flowers on them and these flour bags were used as dresses for special occasions. The bags could also be cut and sewn to make bloomers, which were girls' underwear.

"Rum-running," also known as bootlegging, was a common practice on Prince Edward Island during the years of prohibition, 1906-1948. The prohibition law made it illegal to make and sell alcohol. Importing, exporting and transporting alcohol was also illegal. This ban on alcoholic beverages was a movement put in place by many provinces to try and close businesses where people were getting drunk.

During the 1930s, although the activity was against the law, smuggling alcohol into the province became a source of income for numerous Islanders. The contraband liquor arrived on sailing ships known as schooners. These vessels would stay off shore so they could not be seen as easily and smaller boats would go out to pick up the supply. Schooners would come into ports all over the Island from Halifax, Boston, New York and Saint Pierre, a small island off of Newfoundland. Although there was a great danger of being caught and subsequently jailed or fined, it was one of the ways for many to make a few dollars. As the illegal importation increased during the Depression years, laws became more severe and policing increased. By 1935, few men took part in "rum-running" as the consequences of being apprehended outweighed the benefits of taking part.

When did the economy begin to improve?

Despite the efforts of Islanders to bring the economy back to where it had been prior to the 1930s, it was only with the start of the Second World War that the economy began to make a come back. Men were needed to fight overseas and thousands of Islanders quickly enlisted in the military so a pay cheque would be sent home. The fabrication of much needed supplies also led to the employment of thousands. Civilians, both men and women alike, found employment making clothing, airplanes, ships, munitions, and weapons. Many businesses received contracts for the production of these various wartime materials. Charlottetown, Summerside, and the small community of Mount Pleasant became locations for the nation-wide British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

As jobs became readily available both in the military and the production fields, families were able to get back on their feet and support themselves. With the increase in jobs came an increase in the financial well being of Islanders as well as those living elsewhere. With a little extra money now available, consumers started buying again, exports and imports increased and the economy, though troubled by times of war, was in much better shape than during times of depression.

What are some examples of the hardships experienced by Islanders?

(The following stories are taken from the book *Ten Lost Years*, by Barry Broadfoot)

Mourning story

After the passing of their father, the door at the Thompson family home was adorned with a black mourning wreath. Some neighborhood children, who were outside playing on bikes saw a man walk up to the door, take the wreath and hide it inside his coat. Everyone in the Thompson family was away from the house attending the funeral. The neighborhood children followed the man right back to his home where they saw him place the wreath on his front door. It was later on learned that his wife had passed away the previous night. Money was very scarce.

Potato bug killer

People would do anything to make money. One newspaper advertised a company's claim to have developed a potato bug killer which farmers across the country were very keen on. It was supposed to be very easy to use and could be purchased for only \$1.50. Many farmers were quick to take advantage of this too good to be true offer. When their purchase arrived in the mail, farmers found two small pieces of wood and a piece of paper with the following instructions: "Just go out into the potato patch, pick up a potato bug, put it on one piece of wood and slam the other piece of wood down hard. Goodbye, spud bug." Although the invention was of no practical use to farmers, some said the \$1.50 was worth the good laugh once they received the gadget in the mail. While times were tough, there were few amusing events.

Twelve Miles at Twenty Below

A young boy worked at a hotel during the Depression to save up for Christmas. He earned a dollar by beating all the rugs in the hotel. This was the cleaning method before vacuum cleaners were invented. Rugs would be "beaten" to get all the dirt and dust off of them. With the one dollar saved up, the boy was able to buy Christmas presents for his

entire family. Socks, perfume, bobby pins, piano sheet music, two hot dogs, tree decorations, and a box of crackerjacks were all purchased for a dollar.

College during the Depression

One boy remembers growing up in the Thirties and wanting to go to college in Charlottetown. Although he had great marks and was eager to learn, the lack of revenue from the family farm forced him to stay at home and help with the workload, as his father could not afford to send him to school. In 1933, the family income was just a little over three hundred dollars. They had sold animals, pigs and cows, as well as any crops they could. Although the income was more than the average at the time, it was still not enough to support a family and far from being able to send a child to university. The student loans that are available today were not offered in those days.

Questions for Critical Thought and Ideas for Further Exploration

What is an economic depression?

- Discuss the definition of an economic depression. Are there any signs of this today?
- Who would be most hurt by an economic depression, the rich or the poor?

What caused the Great Depression?

- What are stocks and what is a stock market?
- Why would the day of the crash be known as ‘Black Tuesday’?

When did the province of PEI feel the effect of the Depression?

- Why would there be differences in the ways by which the Depression affected different provinces?
- Did Islanders expect the Depression to affect them as it did other Canadians? Why or why not?

How did PEI with its farm-based economy experience the Depression?

- If prices for produce and other farm products were so low, why did some families still have trouble buying enough food?
- Would it have been easier to be a farmer, a fisherman, or a businessman during the Depression years?

Was PEI’s Fishing industry also affected?

- What would have been more beneficial for the fishing industry, selling their catch at very low prices in an attempt to sell more, or selling fewer at a higher price?
- What is a primary industry?

How did Islanders share their food supply?

- Why was it important for Islanders, amidst their own struggles, to put effort into helping others during this difficult time?
- Were their efforts worthwhile even though they did not receive anything in return?

How did the Depression affect people not living on farms?

- What sort of businesses would struggle the most during tough economic times?
- What are some of the pros and cons to rural and urban life during the 1930s?

Were there any industries that prospered during the Depression?

- Why was the Island a good tourist destination in the 1930s?
- If people had very little money during the years of the Depression, why were they investing huge sums of money in fox farming?

How did the PEI government help Islanders survive the hardships of the 1930s?

- How would increasing the Island government's debt help stimulate the economy?
- Other than providing direct relief, in what ways could the government have helped Islanders?

Were jobs hard to find?

- Why was the paving of highways a good idea? Who did these new roads benefit?
- How do you think the Island compared to other provinces in employment availability?

How was PEI's population affected?

- Why was out-migration popular prior to the Depression?
- Why did the economic turnaround change the out-migration trend?

Were there organizations that helped people during the Depression years?

- Why would the term "co-operative" movement be used?
- Why did this movement expand and grow so much during these tough times?

What were some of the unusual measures taken by Islanders?

- What were the intentions behind the actions of these individuals?
- Did they find their risky actions to be worthwhile?

When did the economy begin to improve?

- How do you think Islanders felt as the Depression began to fade away?
- From where did the root of improvement come? What implications or consequences came with the economic change?

What are some examples of the hardships experienced by Islanders?

- What do you think people learned by living through the Great Depression?
- Why was the Great Depression historically significant?

Suggestions for Activities

1. On the Bank of Canada inflation calculator, determine the CPI index for \$100 in 1930 as compared to that amount today. Talk about the meaning of the Consumer Price Index.
2. Discuss what \$1.00 could buy in 1930 as compared to what \$1.00 can buy today.
3. Prepare a household budget for one month and then try to cut it by half, an exercise many homemakers were forced to do during the 1930s. What could you do without? Discuss the difference between needs and wants. What are some of the items on household budgets today that wouldn't have been there in the 1930s? (An example would be cable TV)
4. Check out the Holman's Catalogue from 1932. You are establishing your first home. You have one hundred and fifty dollars to furnish your two-bedroom apartment. This includes everything from dishes to bedroom furniture. Shop wisely. Think of some creative ways you can recycle and save some money.
5. Play a game of Monopoly. Monopoly was the brainchild of Charles Darrow who found himself unemployed in the United States during the Great Depression. In 1934, he saw his board game as his financial way out of economic despair. Darrow took his game idea to Parker Brothers to produce and market; however, the company gave him fifty-nine reasons the game wouldn't sell. But Darrow had faith in Monopoly and went ahead on his own to produce five thousand copies and place them in stores for the Christmas of 1934. By 1936 it was the most popular game in the United States. Why do you think Monopoly is still popular today?
6. Have a class discussion on whether youth of today are being given the tools they need to financially succeed in the world. The concern has been raised that many low-income families have trouble eating well as fewer people know how to bake and cook from scratch. There is a greater dependence on prepared and processed food. Do you agree or disagree?

7. Make a meal for the class consisting of homemade baked beans (not canned), homemade bread, and tea. This is a project where parents might give a hand. Figure out the cost of the dinner. How would this compare with ordering in pizza for everyone?

Items in the suitcase

Besides the written material contained in the binder, a number of other materials have been gathered for the suitcase that will increase the students' understanding of how the Great Depression affected Islanders.

If You're Stronghearted; Prince Edward Island in the Twentieth Century

Written by Edward MacDonald, former curator of the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation, this book gives an in-depth look at numerous factors that caused, influenced, or helped ease the struggle of the Depression years.

Holman's Catalog, Number 51, Winter 1932-1933

This catalog reproduction allows students to develop a greater understanding of the time period; for example, how homes were lit and heated, what food was eaten, what farm equipment was used, and what hand-powered technology was available. The Holman's Catalog also provides students with prices for a better understanding of the economy of the day and also the concept of inflation.

Monopoly

This board game was first produced in 1935 and included in the suitcase is the First Edition Classic version. Board games would have been a relatively inexpensive form of entertainment, much needed during the stressful times of the suffering economy. Has the game changed much over the years?

Resources used to compile this information

[Note: Some of the books used to compile this material may be out of print. Check your local library.]

If You're Stronghearted; Prince Edward Island in the Twentieth Century, by Edward MacDonald. Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation, 2000

Along the North Shore, by J. Clinton Morrison. Crescent Isle Publishers, 1999

Silver Fox Odyssey: The History of the Canadian Silver Fox Industry, by Joseph E. Forester. Canadian Silver Fox Breeders Assoc. with the assistance of the P.E.I. Dept. of Agriculture and Forestry, 1982

Working Together; Two Centuries of Co-Operation on Prince Edward Island, by Marian Bruce and Elizabeth Cran. Island Studies Press, 2004

A People's History of Prince Edward Island, by Errol Sharpe. Steel Rail Pub., 1976

Ten Lost Years, 1929-1939: Memories of the Canadians Who Survived the Depression, by Barry Broadfoot. McClelland & Stewart, 1997

It Came By The Boat Load: Essays on Rum-Running, by Geoff and Dorothy Robinson.
Self-published, 1983

The Hungry Thirties, by Max Braithwaite. Canada's Illustrated Heritage series. Natural Science of Canada Ltd., 1977

World Wide Web suggestions

Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator

http://www.bankofcanada.ca/en/rates/inflation_calc.html

Backgrounder: Population and Demographic Trends on Prince Edward Island.

www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/population_bkg.pdf

Prince Edward Island Premiers Gallery

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/premiersgallery/>

A timeline of prohibition and liquor legislation in Canada CBC News June 2005

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/prohibition/>

The Stock Market Crash of 1929

<http://people.few.eur.nl/smant/m-economics/crash1929.htm>

The World War II Home Front in Summerside Prince Edward Island

<http://www.wyatheritage.com/homefront>