
FOREWORD



The life and legacy of Owen Connolly offer an instructive account of the difference that one person can make. What's more, this narrative provides a rich context to appreciate the historical evolution, changing social values, and economic ups-and-downs of our Island province over almost two centuries.

It says a lot about the individual and the times that Owen Connolly arrived in Prince Edward Island as a teenage farm labourer in 1839, escaping repressive and impoverished prospects in colonial Ireland, and went on to become perhaps the wealthiest person in the province within the space of forty years.

That Owen Connolly did so well in such a short period reflects the 19th century boom times that came with wooden shipbuilding, expanding agriculture, dynamic population growth, and the development of an Island commercial economy. In addition to his base of operations in Charlottetown, Connolly had stores in Souris, Cardigan, and Montague and trading relationships throughout Prince Edward Island and well beyond.

Connolly was a special kind of entrepreneur. With little formal education, he could write well and was good with figures. He believed in education as a path to progress; this would become his core legacy. He continuously got into new ventures. He was charitable and community-minded. He was discerning and expected performance, even from the bishop.

Beyond Owen Connolly's natural lifespan, which ended with his death in 1887, this account takes the reader through the charitable works and governance of his estate to the present day. In 2017, the Connolly Estate is valued at more than \$2 million and has funded approximately \$3 million in bursaries and other investments in education. The estate's evolution offers a case study in the development of greater Charlottetown, from the downtown and waterfront to Parkdale, to Hillsborough Village, to Stone Park, to Spring Park, reflecting the extent of Connolly's land acquisitions during his lifetime.

Among the changing social conditions exposed by this narrative, we encounter shifting tides in 19th century attitudes toward alcohol, struggles to wrest land ownership from absentee landlords, and progress over time toward equality and inclusion. This evolution is fully captured in the struggle to interpret and act upon Connolly's primary legacy to provide bursaries "to educate poor children resident in Prince Edward Island who are members of the Roman Catholic Church and who are Irish or the sons of Irish fathers."

Leonard Cusack — ably assisted by Lori Mayne — deserves our thanks for bringing Owen Connolly's life and legacy to the printed page. This is a significant contribution to our Prince Edward Island narrative.

- Premier Wade MacLauchlan, past-president and chancellor of the University of Prince Edward Island, 1999-2011

