

ARGONAUTA



**The Newsletter of The Canadian Nautical Research Society /
Société canadienne pour la recherche nautique**

Volume XXXVII Number 3 Summer 2020

Christopher Boultenhouse's *Westmorland* and the Northumberland Strait Steamer Service

by H.T. Holman

The mid-nineteenth-century provision of steam communication between the colony of Prince Edward Island and its neighbours on the Atlantic seaboard took place in an environment that had several unique characteristics.¹ Specifically, the seasonal nature of the passage across Northumberland Strait meant that any venture would operate for - at most - eight months of the year and in many years less than that. The population of P.E.I., growing from 63,000 in 1848 to 81,000 in 1861, was still small compared to its neighbours and its economy, dominated by shipbuilding and agricultural production, did not support the kind of export trade which would support steamship operations. As an isolated and separate colonial administration it was difficult for the colony to develop an effective program of subsidies without the participation of its neighbours New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, whose priorities did not always include links with Prince Edward Island.

These factors combined to create a business environment unsupportive of or even hostile to a developing competitive market for steamship operations. There was, in reality, room for only one supplier, and the history of the Strait steamer service was almost exclusively one of serial small companies dependant on the colony's mail subsidy to offset the anticipated operating losses. The most ambitious venture, the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company, which operated from 1842 until 1847, had been a failure, and subsequent attempts at cross-Strait operations had been small-scale ventures rarely lasting more than one or two seasons.

In addition, by the mid-19th century the question of control had arisen. The lack of success that the first Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company had with the paddle steamer *St. George* was seen as a cautionary tale with regard to local investment and, whether on the Island or elsewhere, there was difficulty in procuring suitable vessels for the seasonal passage across Northumberland Strait to the mainland.² There was equal concern in the colony of Prince Edward Island that the control and ownership of the steam packet service between the Island and the mainland rested in the hands of non-Islanders. Specifically, the disaster of the loss of the New Brunswick-owned *Fairy Queen* in 1853, which sank with 10 passengers and crew drowned, did little to assure Islanders that their best interests were served by a company that did not have its owners and headquarters on the Island.³

The provision for steam navigation services between the Island and the mainland was a subject on which strong partisan views existed, each political group in the Island House of Assembly charging that the other had done little to advance the interests of the colony. There were few subjects on which, according to the *Examiner* in 1857, "there is nothing connected with our local affairs in which strangers are so much interested as in the sort of communication established between this Island and the neighbouring Provinces."⁴

In 1856 Lestock P. DesBrisay, the Richibucto-based owner of the *Lady Le Marchant*, which had been on the route since 1854, was operating on an annual negotiated subsidy that had varied from year to year.⁵ Early in 1857, the Island government advertised for a steamer; no responses were received and a direct offer to the owner of the *Lady Le Marchant* was turned down, although the vessel did make several trips early in the year. Faced with the prospect of reverting to a sailing vessel for delivery of the mails, the *Islander* newspaper, which was aligned with the Tory opposition in the Assembly, began to assail the government's handling of the matter.⁶ The paper observed that minor curtailment of other expenditures would allow the administration to induce someone to put a steamer on the route. They opposed creating a monopoly through a multi-year contract, preferring to pay a higher figure to stimulate

competition. Failure to have a steamer would "do a manifest injury to the Colony," as those intending to settle or speculate in the Colony-or to visit as part of a summer tour-would dislike a sailing vessel.⁷ Pictou was also concerned about the reversion to sail. With the anticipated extension of the Saint John-to-Moncton railway to Northumberland Strait, there was danger that New Brunswick would capture the bulk of the P.E.I. traffic; Pictou and Halifax would lose the Gulf trade.⁸

The government then began discussions with Christopher Boultenhouse of Sackville, another New Brunswick ship-builder and owner of the paddle steamer *Westmorland*.⁹ The steamer was launched in Sackville in 1856 and had operated on the St. John River, and possibly between Sackville and Saint John the same year.¹⁰ While on the St. John River route the vessel had lost its certificate, as repairs required by the Steamboat Inspector were not carried out.¹¹ The "New and Fast-Sailing Steamer" was 156 feet long by 24 feet wide and registered 305 tons. In response to the inquiries Boultenhouse offered to sell his boat for £7,500 or to place it on the route for £2000 per year for five years. After several offers and counteroffers, an agreement was reached for a five-year contract for £2000 for the first year and £1200 per year for the next four years, with the owner free to negotiate additional subsidies from other colonies.¹² The initial routing would operate the ship out of Shediac, and would leave that port on Monday and Thursday for Charlottetown, calling at Bedeque. On Tuesdays and Fridays the ship would continue on to Pictou, returning on Wednesday

The Steamer  Westmorland.

THE new and fast-sailing steamer "WESTMORLAND," E. EVANS, Commander,—employed by the Government of Prince Edward Island for the conveyance of Her Majesty's Mails,—will leave Charlottetown for Pictou every Tuesday morning, at 11 o'clock, and will return to Charlottetown, leaving Pictou immediately after the arrival of the Stage from Halifax. From thence she will proceed immediately to Shediac, via Summerside. Will return from Shediac, leaving that place at 6 o'clock, p. m., on Wednesday, touching at Summerside. Will leave Charlottetown, for Pictou, every Friday at 7 o'clock, a. m., and return the same day, leaving Pictou at 6 o'clock, p. m., and will proceed to Summerside and from thence to Shediac, and return to Charlottetown, via Summerside, leaving Shediac at 6 o'clock, p. m., on Saturday.

Passengers are requested to look after their own baggage, as the owners will not hold themselves responsible for anything unless given in charge of the proper officer, and signed for.

RATES OF FARES:

From Charlottetown to Pictou,.....	\$2.00
" " " Bedeque,.....	1.50
" " " Shediac,	3.00
" Bedeque to Shediac,.....	1.50
" Pictou to Shediac,.....	5.00

C. BOULTENHOUSE.

Charlottetown, August 10, 1857. (all papers.)

Examiner 10 August 1857 p.1.

and Saturday to Shediac and calling at Charlottetown and Bedeque on the way.¹³

The editor of the Charlottetown *Islander* had little good to say about the *Westmorland*. Even before the ship began service, the *Islander* wrote that it was "generally believed to be too unwieldy a Boat for the service she is about to be engaged in."¹⁴ When the new vessel finally reached the Island, the paper remained unimpressed:

The Westmorland arrived here from St. John N.B., via Halifax and Pictou, on Tuesday night last. She is a River Boat, as flat-bottomed as such Boats usually are, high pressure, with a large portion of her machinery above deck. We have heard it remarked by many that she will not answer here in the Fall of the year. She certainly is not the description of Boat we should like to see put on the route—in shape she is very like the Fairy Queen, but we learn that she is a new and substantially built Boat and so far has made her trips very quick.

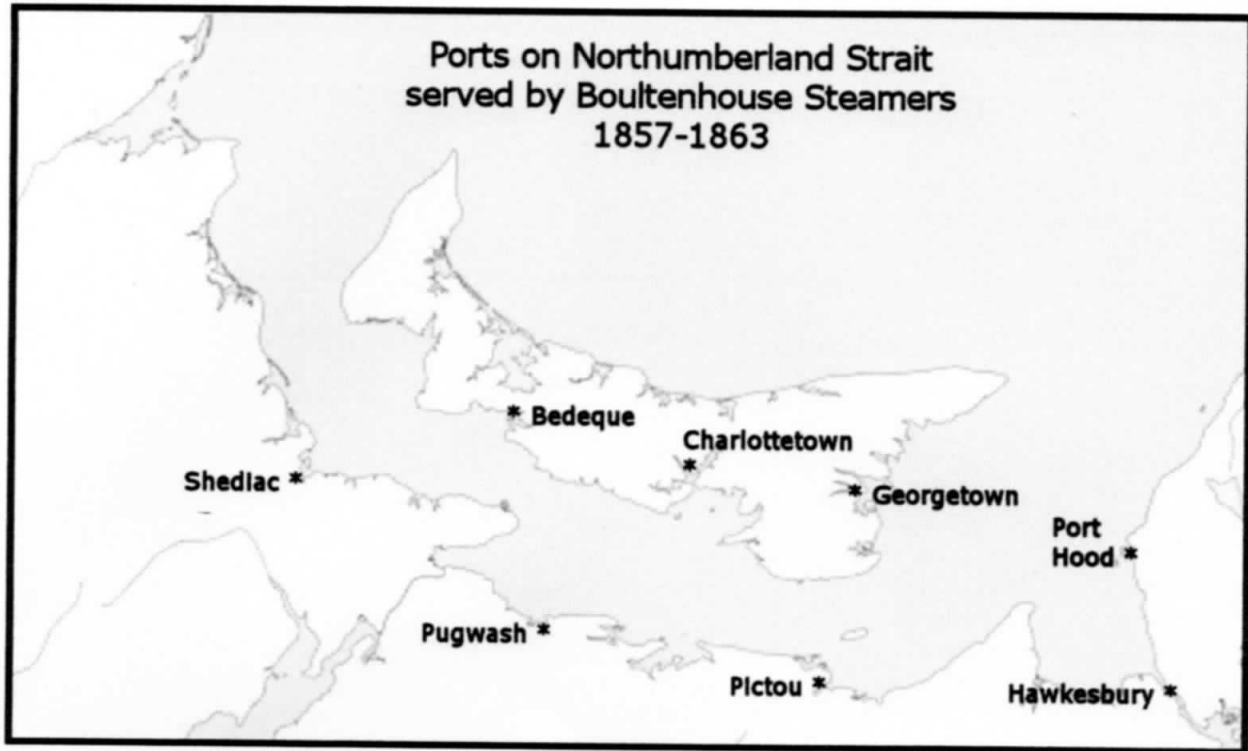
The editor further complained that, had the government advertised for a boat, individuals within the colony would have had one built in Britain and put it on the route for only £1000 per year instead of the "tolerable dear rate" being paid to Boultenhouse. For the *Islander*, the problem was a simple one of politics. In order to avoid money falling into resident "tory" pockets, the government was content to let the contract go for an exorbitant subsidy of £1,200 per year to non-Islanders.¹⁵ The publisher of the *Islander* was John Ings, a supporter of the Tories in the Colony and shortly to become one of the major investors in the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company. He maintained an animosity toward Boultenhouse and the *Westmorland* throughout its service.

Nevertheless, a contradictory and glowing review of the ship appeared in the *Examiner* by J. Barrett Cooper, who had accompanied the steamer from Halifax on its first trip to Charlottetown. He praised the vessel's mechanical equipment and the accommodations, which included a well-lighted and ventilated, elegantly furnished ladies compartment with twenty-six single berths, a gentlemen's cabin with thirty-eight berths that also doubled as the dining saloon, and four three-berth staterooms. Ever mindful of the disastrous *Fairy Queen*, Cooper also noted that the steamer carried four ship's boats, one of which was a zinc lifeboat, along with life preservers and other safety equipment. What was absent from the list of facilities was a bar room for the sale of liquors, which, for Cooper, was a blessing, not a fault: "Had the *Fairy Queen*, whose name has been on so many lips since the *Westmorland* first made her appearance in our harbour, been conducted upon strictly temperance principles, it is, to say the least, probable—notwithstanding her many other defects—that melancholy loss of life, and the disgraceful occurrences connected therewith, and which every reference to that ill-starred vessel is certain to bring vividly before the public mind, would never have happened."¹⁶ Barrett also addressed one of the *Islander's* concerns—that the paddle steamer was a mere river boat:

[As we] stood off a considerable distance from the land, there was sufficient "swell" all along the coast of Nova Scotia, from Halifax to Cape Canso, to prove that the "Westmorland" is not merely a safe and agreeable river boat, but is fully competent, with her powerful machinery and excellent seagoing properties, to contend successfully with any stress of weather to which she might be exposed in navigating the Straits of Northumberland.

Boultenhouse's financial situation during the period is unclear. Owing to a downturn in the shipbuilding market, he had been forced to declare bankruptcy in 1859. He was, however, able to retain control of the *Westmorland*, possibly owing to the subsidies which the vessel attracted. He emerged from bankruptcy and reopened his shipyard in 1861.¹⁷

In 1860, Boultenhouse offered an additional service with a smaller paddle steamer, the 133-foot *Lord Seaforth*.¹⁸ The *Lord Seaforth* had been built in 1855 in the Davie shipyard in Levis, Québec. Primarily designed as a tow boat, it had passenger accommodation added and in 1859 was put on a route connecting Georgetown P.E.I. with Pictou, Pugwash, and



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:Carte administrative des Provinces Maritimes du Canada.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carte_administrative_des_Provinces_Maritimes_du_Canada.svg)
Locations identified by author.

Cape Breton ports in Nova Scotia. The following year Boultenhouse made a proposal to the governments of both Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia for a route that would include Pictou, Cape Breton and Georgetown.¹⁹ The *Lord Seaforth* also stood in for the *Westmorland* while the latter was refitted in the summer of 1860. Later in that year, the Island was served by both vessels with regular crossings to both Pictou and Shediac. The following year the rumour that the *Lord Seaforth* would replace the *Westmorland* caused some alarm; the *Lord Seaforth* was considered slow and inferior. However, temporary replacement while the *Westmorland* was under repairs was allowed by the government contract so long as the vessel was "one equally good, substantial and sufficient."²⁰ Discussions concerning the replacement led to a major disagreement between Boultenhouse and the government, which refused to employ the *Lord Seaforth* as the mail packet and contracted for a sailing vessel in its place.²¹ It was reported that inquiries had been made to Lestock P. DesBrisay regarding the hiring of the *Lady Le Marchant* to replace the *Westmorland*, and that, if possible, the government intended to set aside the contract with Boultenhouse.²² In spite of these reports, the *Westmorland* provided services for the entire 1861 season and the New Brunswick Custom House Returns credited the twice-weekly service between Shediac and the Island with a substantial increase in the Shediac tonnage.²³

The disagreement between Boultenhouse and the government was ostensibly about the safety and certification of the vessels, and when the *Westmorland* returned to service after extensive repairs, the Colonial Government refused to put it back on the mail contract without a survey of the vessel. Boultenhouse maintained that the contract did not require a survey and demanded its reinstatement. However, during the conflict another reason for problems began to emerge; in 1859 the government had changed and the Tories were now in control. The *Examiner* opined that "There is no doubt that the Government are anxious for a pretext to run the *Westmorland* off the line, so that the contract may be given to a political friend."²⁴ As there was no place in Charlottetown where an inspection could be made of the

hull out of the water, Boultenhouse arranged to have the ship go to Halifax, the nearest port where it could be carried out.²⁵ In late June 1861, Boultenhouse advertised that both of his steamers had been inspected in New Brunswick and met the requirements.²⁶ Nevertheless, the *Islander* reported that the Lt. Governor had seen fit to cancel the contract in late November of that year, and that the remainder of the season would see the mails carried by sailing vessels.²⁷ The New Brunswick government, however, continued to send their mails by the *Westmorland*, and the steamer received a \$2000 subsidy from that colony's inter-colonial communications account.²⁸ The service also received a subsidy for \$800 from Nova Scotia.²⁹ The P.E.I. government's protestations of the danger to safety for passengers and the mails were further undermined by the fact that the Island's Colonial Secretary, William Pope, and his brother the Hon. J.C. Pope elected to use the *Westmorland* to carry themselves and the Lt. Governor's dispatches across Northumberland Strait rather than take the slower packet schooner.³⁰

In response to the government protests, Boultenhouse provided his own highly detailed account of the condition of the *Westmorland* in a lengthy submission published in the *Examiner*. With a series of certificates and testimonials from shipwrights, surveyors and inspectors, he produced evidence of the ship being in a satisfactory condition both in hull and mechanical equipment. In offering his side of the story, Boultenhouse also revealed that he had been asked by Attorney General Edward Palmer to relinquish the part of the contract to carry mails to Pictou so that the colony could instead advertise for tri-weekly service from Charlottetown to the Nova Scotia port of Brule. Boultenhouse had understood that the Shediac part of the contract would continue and was shocked to learn that the whole contract had been terminated. He found the attack on the *Westmorland* by the *Islander* particularly offensive: "The *Islander* not satisfied with publishing the aforementioned falsehoods, endeavours to bring the officers of my boat into disgrace by coupling the management of the *Westmorland* with the ill-fated *Fairy Queen*."³¹ In support of the government's desire to institute a new service to Brule, the *Islander* described the accommodations on the *Westmorland* as "wretched in the extreme" and complained that the ship had been put on the route that year with its boilers completely burnt out.³²

Boultenhouse's protests seem to have met with some success, for the *Westmorland* was back in service in 1862. However, sometime in early 1862, there appears to have been a falling out between Boultenhouse and Capt. Evander Evans, the long-time skipper of the *Westmorland*, as an advertisement appeared in Island newspapers warning readers not to trust Capt. Evans, formerly of the *Westmorland*, "as he has not for some time been in my employ," or to pay him any monies owed to Boultenhouse. Command of the *Westmorland* was shifted to Capt. Charles Boultenhouse, described as the son of the *Westmorland*'s owner.³³ In contrast to the *Westmorland*'s drama, the *Lord Seaforth* quietly fell out of notice; it seems to have discontinued service in the region following the 1861 shipping season, and by 1865 had been sold to the U.S. Government and re-registered there.³⁴

At the end of the 1862 season, ownership of the *Westmorland* was transferred from Christopher Boultenhouse to the Crane Estate of Sackville. The Crane Estate was represented by Joseph F. Allison, one of the estate's executors, who appears in advertising as the proprietor of the *Westmorland*.³⁵ With the change of ownership, Captain Evans took back the command and the plan was that, following a winter on the Pictou marine slip to undergo a thorough overhaul, the ship would continue to operate on the route from Pictou to Charlottetown and Shediac.³⁶ In advertising the service in the spring of 1863, it was noted that the ship had undergone a thorough repair and alterations to improve its speed.³⁷ Under its new ownership, the *Westmorland* continued to conduct a regular passage from Shediac and Pictou to the Island in 1863 and again received a subsidy from New Brunswick.³⁸

Early in 1863, tenders had been called for steam communication between the Island and the mainland, and these were discussed in the House of Assembly in March 1863. At the time of first discussion only two bids had been received: one from Michael Stevenson of Québec and the other from W.C Bourke and R.R. Hodgson of Charlottetown. However, a bid was also expected from Christopher Boultenhouse, and discussion was deferred until it could be considered. The *Examiner* noted issues with the Charlottetown bid as "we understand that three or four members of the House of Assembly are concerned in it."³⁹ The deferred debate was testy. Although Boultenhouse's bid (which had promised a vessel larger than the *Westmorland*) was by far the lowest, there was concern that he should provide securities for performance.⁴⁰ While Boultenhouse was obtaining such securities, the House reconsidered their decision and "the majority of the House expressed a desire to give the preference to Island residents, even if the service could cost a few hundred pounds more than it would if placed in the hands of a neighbouring Colonist."⁴¹ The vote gave the government authority to enter into any arrangement for intercolonial steam communications which was in the public interest to begin 1 May 1864 and not exceed ten years, and limited to a cost of £1500 per year if one boat was in service or £2000 per year if two boats were operating.⁴² The *Examiner* was critical of the deal: "thus was clearly exhibited the farce of advertising for tenders for a service which is predetermined should fall into the hands of none but Island Tories of true orthodox stamp."⁴³

The matter was re-visited the following year when the House considered the appropriations for the steamer service subsidy. Liberal George Coles, leading the opposition, charged that the government had saddled the colony with unnecessary costs in not accepting the Boultenhouse offer. Mr. Pope countered that "It was desirable to bring into and keep within the community as much money as possible, and a Company was formed, in which all who were so disposed might take shares."⁴⁴ In a continuation of the debate several days later, Coles again charged that four members of the House - three of them in the administration - were shareholders in the new company and that "their pecuniary interest in the Company not only affected their seats in the House but was the means of entailing a loss to the Colony of £1500 a year."⁴⁵ That year, the second Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company was incorporated and took over the cross-Strait contract.

Notwithstanding the *Islander's* reservations, the *Westmorland* seems to have fulfilled the terms of its initial five-year contract and even a few additional years beyond without incident, and might have continued longer had it not been for the American Civil War. As that war dragged on, the movement of troops and supplies for both the Union and the Confederacy, as well as the necessity of moving goods for the populace, meant that there was a sharp increase in demand for ships. Shipyards increased production but it was not enough to meet the needs. While the South was in the market for blockade runners, the North needed transports. The *Westmorland's* owner decided to sell out to the Americans.

In 1864, the *Westmorland* headed to the United States and in August was reported on transit from Halifax to New York.⁴⁶ Here its trail seems to peter out, as there were a number of ships in American waters with the same name. The American government owned 177 tugs, schooners, canal barges, and steamers at war's end. When they were sold the following spring, one carried the name *Westmoreland*, but it is not clear if this was Boultenhouse's steamer or another with the same name.⁴⁷

The departure of the *Westmorland* from the P.E.I. mail run paved the way for the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company to take over the responsibility for the steamer service. This company and its successors were to be involved with the route for more than fifty years, and brought the Island into the twentieth century. There was some continuity between the two services, though; the *Westmorland's* original captain, Evander Evans, made the transition to the new company. If the *Westmorland's* safety had frequently come under question, Evans's had not: at his death in 1890 it was noted that he never lost a man at sea or had an accident.⁴⁸

Endnotes

1. A dated but still useful overview of sailing packet and steam vessels engaged in the services between Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia during the period is provided by J.S. Martell's "Intercolonial Communications 1840-1867," Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada, 1938 17 (1), 41-61. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300170ar> Can you please check the publication date on this; it seems to predate the article itself (if I'm reading it correctly)
2. For more details on the Prince Edward Island Steam Navigation Company see <https://sailstrait.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/prince-edward-island-steam-navigation-compan1.pdf>.
3. James F. Smith, "Crossing to Catastrophe," *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* Vol 3 No 4 December 1973 pp.309-322.
4. *Examiner* (Charlottetown) 20 July 1857 p.3.
5. <https://sailstrait.wordpress.com/2015/02/28/northumberland-strait-steamer-lady-le-marchant-became-us-revenue-cutter/>
6. In the discussion there is very little recognition that at the time there was a steamer service between Summerside and Shediac (Charlottetown to Boston in 4 days!) using William Heard's *Rosebud*. *Islander* 3 July 1857 p. 3. For more on the *Rosebud* see <https://sailstrait.wordpress.com/2016/05/30/depending-on-the-public-patronage-the-steamer-rosebud-and-the-subsidy/>
7. *Islander* (Charlottetown) 10 July 1857 p.3.
8. *Islander* 5 June 1857 p.2, quoting from the Pictou *Eastern Chronicle* 28 May 1857.
9. In reports and documents the name is variously spelled "Westmoreland" and "Westmorland." As the vessel was likely named for the county in which it was built the latter form has been used throughout.
10. A brief biography of Boultenhouse can be found at https://tantramarheritage.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/christopher_boultenhouse_by_al_smith.pdf.
11. *Journal of the House of Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick* 1857. Report of the Steamboat Inspector p. ccxcii.
12. *Examiner* 20 July 1857 p.3.
13. *Islander* 7 August 1857 p.3.
14. *Islander* 17 July 1857 p. 3.
15. *Islander* 7 August 1857 p.3.
16. "The Westmorland" *Examiner* 10 August 1857 p.2.
17. https://tantramarheritage.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/christopher_boultenhouse_by_al_smith.pdf
18. *Examiner* 10 April 1860 p.2.
19. *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island* 1860 p.60; *Journal of the House of Assembly for Nova Scotia* 1860 p. 60.
20. *Examiner* 29 April 1861 p. reporting a debate in the House of Assembly 9 March 1861.
21. *Examiner* 3 June 1861 p.3.
22. *Examiner* 10 June 1861 p.2.
23. *Journal of the House of Assembly of New Brunswick* 1862 Custom House Returns p.11.

24. "Steam Communication" *Examiner* 10 June 1861 p.2.
25. "The Government vs. Steam Communication" *Examiner* 24 June 1861 p.2.
26. *Examiner* 24 June 1861 p.1.
27. *Examiner* 25 November 1861 p.3, quoting from the *Islander*.
28. *Journal of the Legislative Council of the Province of New Brunswick* 1862. Report of Public Works p.57. New Brunswick had changed to decimal currency in 1860. Equating colonial currencies is difficult as it is not always clear if sterling or colonial values are used in documents. See McCullough, Allan B. 1983. "Currency Conversion in British North America, 1760–1900". *Archivaria* 16 (January), 83-94. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12649>.
29. *Journal of the House of Assembly for Nova Scotia* 1860.
30. *Examiner* 2 December 1861 p.3.
31. "Steamer Westmorland" *Examiner* 9 December 1861 p.3.
32. *Islander* 15 November 1861. Quoted in *Guardian* (Charlottetown) 10 October 1952 p.4.
33. *Examiner* 6 June 1862 p.3. Charles was born ca. 1835 <https://tantramarheritage.ca/museums/boultenhouse-heritage-centre/boultenhouse-family/> accessed 2 May 2020.
34. *Mills List* <http://db.library.queensu.ca/marmus/mills/> accessed 8 May 2020.
35. Joseph F. Allison was one of the Crane executors. See *Botsford v. Crane Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of New Brunswick* 1877. <https://books.google.ca/books?id=YUNHAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Reports+of+Cases+Determined+in+the+Appeal+and+C+hancery+Divisions+...+Volume+17&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj1rCynpbpAhVOoHIEHUXbB3kQ6AEIODAC#v=onepage&q&f=false>
36. *Examiner* 22 December 1862 p.3 quoting from the *Colonial Standard* (Pictou).
37. *Islander* 29 May 1863 p.1.
38. *Examiner* 1 June 1863 p.3; *Journal of the Legislative Council of New Brunswick* 1864 p.A3-28.
39. *Examiner* 16 March 1863 p.2.
40. This bid may have involved a vessel that Boultenhouse had under contract with the New Brunswick government for a service between Shediac and Campbellton, stopping at intermediate ports. *Journal of the House of Assembly for New Brunswick*, 1864. Report of Public Works for 1863 p.15.
41. "Steam Communication" *Examiner* 30 March 1863 p.2.
42. *Prince Edward Island Parliamentary Reporter* 26 March 1863.
43. "Steam Communication" *Examiner* 30 March 1863 p.2.
44. *Prince Edward Island Parliamentary Reporter* 14 April 1864 p.70.
45. *Examiner* 25 April 1864 p.2.
46. *Portland Daily Press* (Portland Maine) 25 April 1864 p.3.
47. *Mills List* states her name had been changed to Rochester when transferred but no source is given. <http://db.library.queensu.ca/marmus/mills/>
48. *Chignecto Post* (Sackville) 15 May 1890 p.2.