

Social Studies 10

Unit 3 Readings

Canadian Confederation

Pages 1-23

## A Movement for Annexation

Unhappy with the economic problems facing the colonies after the end of mercantilism, some Montreal merchants saw only one solution: join the United States. Some of these merchants had been among the mob that had attacked Elgin and burned the Parliament buildings (see pages 68-69). Now, they were ready to break with Britain completely. During the summer of 1849, the movement to seek annexation to the United States grew in strength and numbers.

The following document was published in the *Montreal Gazette* of October 11, 1849. Signed by 325 leading merchants of Montreal, among them, John and William Molson, founders of the famous brewing company, and J.J.C. Abbott, who would later become prime minister of Canada. The manifesto gave the annexationists' views on the situation faced by Canada at that time and their reasons for seeking union with the United States.

### To the People of Canada

The reversal of the ancient policy of Great Britain whereby she withdrew from the colonies...protection in her markets, has produced the most disastrous effects upon Canada. In surveying the actual condition of the country what but ruin or rapid decay meets the eye!...our country stands before the world in humiliating contrast with its immediate neighbours, exhibiting every symptom of a nation fast sinking to decay.

With super abundant water power and cheap labour, especially in Lower Canada, we have yet no domestic manufactures;...Our institutions, unhappily, have not that impress of permanence which alone can impart security and inspire confidence, and the Canadian market is too limited to inspire the foreign capitalist. While the adjoining States are covered with a network of thriving railways, Canada possesses but three lines, which, together, scarcely exceed 50 miles [80 kilometres] in length...a fatal symptom of the torpor overspreading the land....

...Of all the remedies that have been suggested for the acknowledged and insufferable ills with which our country is afflicted, there remains but one to be considered... **THIS REMEDY CONSISTS IN THE FRIENDLY AND PEACEFUL SEPARATION FROM BRITISH CONNECTION AND A UNION UPON EQUITABLE TERMS WITH THE GREAT NORTH AMERICAN CONFEDERACY OF SOVEREIGN STATES.**

Within a week of the appearance of this manifesto, the Annexationist movement had more than 1000 prominent supporters in Lower Canada. Among them were several members of the Parliament of the Canadas. The group decided to press for union with the United States through the elected Assembly. The Annexationists were, for the most part, English-speaking members of the merchant classes. They soon found they had little support for their scheme outside of their own group. Most Canadiens were strongly opposed to annexation. They feared that there would be no protection for their way of life in any union with the Americans. The Loyalist population of Upper Canada, with its sentimental ties to Britain, likewise opposed the movement. Although some reformers favored annexation to the American republic, most, including Robert Baldwin, spoke out strongly against it. With so little popular support, the movement was soon abandoned.



## Reciprocity

Trade between British North America and the United States greatly increased as the result of a reciprocity agreement negotiated in the mid-1850s. Reciprocity is a fancy word for "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." It is a deal that provides some benefit for both parties. A reciprocal free trade treaty is a document signed by two nations that permits goods to pass freely across their borders without any barriers in the form of quotas, tariffs or duties.

During the late 1840s, Canadian merchants had been pressuring their political leaders to negotiate a trading agreement with the United States. The merchants needed access to the United States' market in order to make up for the losses they had suffered because of Britain's new free trade policy. But the American government was not in favor of such an agreement. It had listened to the concerns of manufacturers in Vermont, Massachusetts and other northeastern states. These manufacturers feared that free trade would lead to British manufactured goods being brought into the United States through Canada. Because manufacturing costs were lower in Britain than in the United States, British goods could be sold at a lower cost than similar American-made products.

Failure to reach a free trade agreement with the United States led to a meeting of delegates from the British North American colonies at Halifax in the fall of 1849. This meeting was the first-ever joint

conference of Britain's colonies in North America. The colonial leaders knew that the Americans had long been seeking rights to the rich inshore fisheries of the Maritimes. Here was an opportunity to offer these rights in exchange for free access to the United States market.

In 1854, Lord Elgin, acting on behalf of the colonies, successfully negotiated a trade agreement with the United States. The treaty gave Newfoundland fish, Nova Scotia coal, New Brunswick timber and Canadian flour free entry to the United States. In return, the Americans were now able to fish freely in the waters of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. This agreement with the Americans gave the colonies an increased level of prosperity. As well, the Halifax Conference had established a basis for communication among the colonies on matters of mutual concern. It would be an important step towards Confederation.

Despite this new arrangement, the Atlantic colonies remained politically and economically isolated from the Canadas. Their only link with the rest of British North America was the St. Lawrence River, which was blocked by ice throughout the winter. Most of their trade and cultural contacts were with Britain, the area of the United States from Boston north, or the West Indies. Tense encounters between British ships and American gunboats during the American Civil War showed that these ties could be disrupted by foreign conflicts. These problems would have to be overcome before closer relations between the Canadas and the Atlantic colonies could be established.

1. What is reciprocity? Why did the British North American colonists want a reciprocal trade agreement with the United States in the 1850s?
2. What did the British colonies have to give up to get access to the American market?

---

## The Deadlock Formed: Chaos in the Party System

Two major factors lay behind the problems of finding a stable government in the Canadas. The first was the equal distribution of seats in the elected Assembly between the two Canadas. No government could survive unless it had the support of elements in both the Canadas. The second was the large number of political parties and independent members holding seats in the Assembly. The Act of Union had created a political problem for the Canadas that appeared to have no solution. The division of power between Canada East and Canada West was so evenly balanced that no party could stay in power very long.

Durham had proposed the union of the Canadas to force the Canadiens to become part of an English cultural, political and social system. However, as Sullivan (see page 61) had predicted, the Canadiens were able to control the political life of Canada East. In doing so, they made their region the dominant force in the Assembly. Representation in the Assembly was equally divided between the two Canadas. With the representatives from Canada West split into Conservatives and Reformers, the Canadiens were easily able to control the Assembly. For example, a bill was passed in 1851 to extend support to Roman Catholic schools in largely Protestant Canada West.

This division gave rise to what became known as the problem of the double majority. Under responsible government, the party with a majority in the Assembly formed the government. The leader of the party forming the government became the prime minister. However, in the Canadas each government had to have both an English and a French leader and support from both regions in order to have a majority in the Assembly. This was the double majority. Although the Act of Union had created a single Legislative Assembly, no government could survive unless it had the support of elements in both the Canadas.

Meanwhile, old political alliances and parties in the Canadas were changing. The Conservative Party in Canada West, led by Alan McNab and John A. Macdonald, had become much more moderate. No longer just the party of the old land-owning elite, it was now committed to expansion of industry and commerce. In Canada East, the Bleus were a party of similar interests. Under the leadership of George-Étienne Cartier, this party had allied itself with the Conservatives of Canada West by the mid-1850s.

---

Reformers in Canada West were now divided into two main groups. On the one hand, there was the moderate Liberal Party, led by Francis Hincks, Baldwin's chief advisor. On the other hand, there were the more radical Clear Grits, led by George Brown, publisher of the *Toronto Globe*. Under Brown's leadership the Clear Grits gradually transformed themselves from a small, powerless group into a significant political force in Canada West. The Clear Grits were the party of the frontier farmers, opposed to big business, the Roman Catholic Church and the French language.

In particular, Brown was an outspoken advocate of representation by population in the Canadas. The equal division of seats in the Assembly made in 1840 had been designed to reduce the influence of the larger population of Canada East. However, the census of 1851 showed that Canada West now had 952 000 people, compared with 890 000 in Canada East. If, for example, there was to be one elected legislator for every 10 000 inhabitants, Canada West would have ninety-five seats in the Assembly compared to only eighty-nine for Canada East. Representation by population would now give Canada West a majority of the seats in the elected House of Assembly. Brown thus saw representation by population as a means to reduce the Canadian influence in the Assembly.

This anti-French aspect of the Clear Grit platform split them apart from their counterparts in Canada East, the Parti Rouge. Led by Antoine-Aimé Dorion, the Parti Rouge was opposed to big business in the form of the British merchants, bankers and railway builders. However, the Parti Rouge was a strong defender of the traditions of French-Canada. When the Clear Grits and the Parti Rouge attempted to work together in 1858, the result was the shortest-lived government in Canadian history, one that lasted less than a day.

To further complicate things, there was also a significant number of independents, tied to no party, sitting in the Assembly. Known as the loose fish, these independents often held the balance of power in the Assembly. They would cast their votes with whichever party or group of parties they could strike a deal.

The result was political chaos. Since no one party had enough seats to form a majority, two or more parties would have to agree to work together to form a coalition government. Such a government is faced with the difficult task of making decisions which all its parties support. As you learned in the previous chapter, under responsible government the executive branch (cabinet) must have the support of the elected Assembly. The tradition of responsible

government requires that a party or coalition enjoy the "confidence" or support of a majority of the elected members in order to govern. If a coalition government loses the support of one party, it may be defeated on a vote of **non-confidence**.

In 1854, the Liberals and the Conservatives formed a coalition, the Liberal-Conservative Party. This coalition was able to enlist the support of the Bleus in Canada East. Led by John A. Macdonald of the Conservatives and George-Étienne Cartier of the Bleus, the coalition formed a government following the 1857 election. However, the issue of finding a capital for the united Canadas led to their defeat.

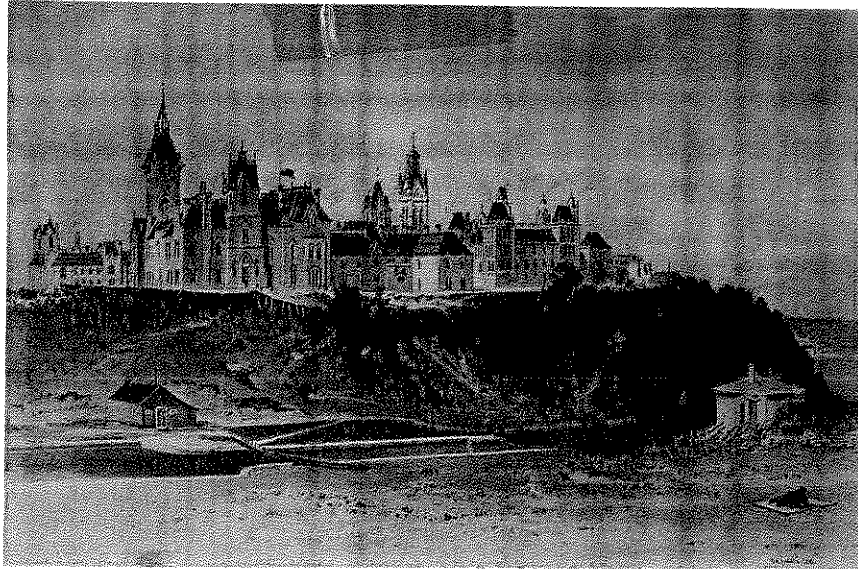
Queen Victoria's choice of Ottawa as capital was put to the Assembly during the summer of 1858 for approval. The Rouges moved a motion calling for a rejection of the royal choice; the Bleus broke with the coalition to support the Rouge motion and the coalition government was defeated. The governor general invited George Brown, leader of the Canada West Clear Grits, and A.A. Dorion, the leader of the Canada East Rouges, to form a government. Despite bitter hatred for each other, the two leaders agreed. Less than twenty-four hours later, their government had fallen, defeated on a vote of non-confidence. Brown called for a new election to be held. Instead, the governor general called again on Macdonald and Cartier to form a new government.

Things became steadily worse. Between 1862 and 1864, for example, five successive coalitions attempted to govern the Canadas. None lasted more than a matter of months. The governmental process in the Canadas had come to a complete standstill.

#### **CHOOSING A NEW CAPITAL**

After the burning of the Parliament buildings in 1849, Montreal had ceased to be the capital of the united Canadas. Instead, the site of the capital alternated between Toronto and Quebec City. After several years of wrangling, the issue was submitted to Queen Victoria for royal arbitration, and in 1857 the Queen chose Ottawa as the site.

There was a rumor, widely circulated in the Canadas, that the queen had chosen the new capital by sticking a pin in a map while blindfolded. To many politicians and civil servants, this was the only possible explanation for the selection of the small lumber community of Bytown, renamed Ottawa in 1855. However, political and military reasons appear to have dictated this choice. The political consideration was the city's location on the Ottawa River, the dividing line between Canada East and Canada West. The military consideration was its location; several days difficult march away from the United States border.



## The Deadlock Broken: the Great Coalition

George Brown, leader of the Clear Grits, was known as a hot-tempered giant of a Scotsman. His violent outbursts against Canadiens, Catholics and Conservatives had deeply divided colonial politics during the 1850s and early 1860s. He seemed an unlikely leader to offer a solution to the political deadlock in Canada. Yet that is exactly what George Brown did.

Brown's leadership in the search for a solution began with his role as chairman of an all-party committee formed to study the deadlock problem. This committee presented its report to the Assembly in June 1864. The report stated firmly that the deadlock could only be broken by a federal union, or confederation, of the British North American colonies. In the proposed federal union, power would be shared by the provinces and a central government. Each level of government would have its own elected Legislative Assembly. At the federal level, the legislature would have responsibility for those things that affected everybody within the union, such as currency, customs and excise taxes, the post office, criminal laws, and inter-provincial trade and transportation. The provincial assemblies would make laws dealing with local matters.

The day George Brown made his report to the Assembly, another government fell on a vote of non-confidence, the fourth in two years. Brown stood up in the Assembly to announce that, to form a government, he was prepared to join with the Conservatives, the party he had been bitterly opposing for several years.

This bold move almost immediately broke the deadlock. Brown announced his willingness to put aside past conflicts, and to join with the Conservatives for the greater good of both colonies. The Assembly burst into wild applause. One of Brown's opponents from Canada East rushed across the floor of the Assembly to fling his arms happily around the feisty leader. Brown's action had required considerable compromise on his part. He had to side with a party that supported the bankers and industrialists, and, he had to join in an alliance with considerable support in French Canada.

Brown shared the leadership of this government with Macdonald,

Cartier and Galt. The leaders of the Grits, Conservatives, and Bleus, had joined forces with Galt, a leading independent, to break the deadlock. Their government, known as the **Great Coalition**, committed itself to seeking a federal union of the Canadas and the Maritime colonies. If that effort should fail, the members of the coalition agreed that they would then form at least a federal union of the two Canadas.

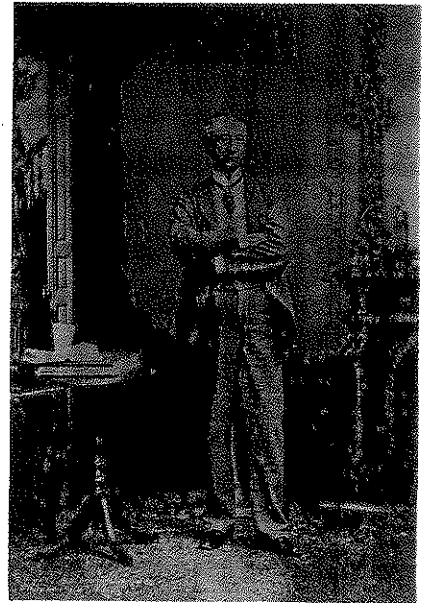
The Great Coalition was led by a group of men rich in leadership and holding strong visions of what Canada might be in the future. Cartier, leader of the Bleus, had worked hard to ensure that the Canadian people were part of the mainstream of Canada's political life while preserving their culture and traditions. Galt, a successful financier, was an Independent-Conservative. He had first proposed a federal union in 1849 as an alternative to the annexationists' move to join the United States. A member of the English minority in Canada East, Galt was very mindful of the Canadiens' concern that their traditions be protected in any union of the British North American colonies.

One man, John A. Macdonald, emerged from the Great Coalition as a leader among leaders. Brown's bold action had created the coalition that had broken the deadlock but Macdonald's great political skills kept it working effectively. Macdonald is in many ways a strange figure in Canada's history. His life was marked by tragedy, scandal, corruption and controversy, yet this tall, friendly, ambling Conservative from Kingston in Canada West became a powerful and well-loved prime minister.

To a large extent, the quest for Confederation shaped the image people had of Macdonald. He would become known as the "Father of Confederation," yet, ironically, Macdonald was cool to the idea

of Confederation almost to the time it was achieved. He had long fought to make the existing union of the Canadas work. In the end, the idea of a larger union put forward by Galt and Brown caught Macdonald's imagination. Once committed to the idea, his good-natured sense of humor and great skill as a tactful negotiator helped steer the tricky course of compromise that negotiations with the other colonies required.

1. Define "compromise." Suggest what could happen in a society or government if people are unable to achieve compromises.
2. What was the Great Coalition? What roles did George Brown play in its creation?
3. What is a coalition government? What problems might such a government face? Why would the leadership skills possessed by John A. Macdonald be so important in such a government?



*Born in Scotland and brought to Canada as a young boy, John A. Macdonald trained to be a lawyer. In 1856 he wrote to an English friend in Montreal: "The truth is that you British Lower Canadians never can forget that you were once supreme. . . . You can't and won't admit the principle that the majority must govern."*



## The Charlottetown Conference

The leaders of the Atlantic colonies were concerned about their weak and isolated position in North America. The American Civil War had given rise to demands for a railway linking Halifax to Quebec City. Such a rail link would allow the quick movement of troops between the two cities if it became necessary to defend the colonies from American invasion. As well, merchants in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were eager for the access to the Canadian markets that the railway would bring. Economic depression

they be allowed to present their proposal for Confederation at the forthcoming Maritime Union Conference.

Encouraged by the renewed Canadian interest in the intercolonial railway, the Maritime colonists agreed to invite the Canadians to come and present their scheme. The date of the Conference was set for September 1, 1864, the place, Charlottetown, capital of Prince Edward Island.

It was a warm and pleasant September morning as fifteen men in black coats and top hats took their places at the great mahogany table in the Council Chamber of the Legislative building in Charlottetown. The fifteen were delegates from the three Maritime colonies: Newfoundland had chosen not to attend. As they took their seats, the Canadian party, among them Macdonald, Cartier, Galt and Brown, waited aboard the *Queen Victoria*, anchored in Charlottetown Harbour. With them on board their ship were several hundred bottles of champagne, brought along to help convince the Maritime colonists to join the proposed Confederation.

Inside the Council Chamber, the idea of a Maritime union was quickly rejected. The economies of the colonies were too similar, and their populations too small, for a Maritime union to bring many benefits. The discussion turned to the proposal for a larger union of the colonies brought by the Canadians. The plan was greeted by the Maritime leaders with cautious approval. They agreed that confederation of the British colonies in North America might be desirable, providing that suitable terms could be agreed upon. A second meeting was set for later that year, in Quebec City.

With the Charlottetown Conference over, the Canadians threw a gala ball for their hosts before leaving on a tour of the Maritime colonies. It was a triumphant occasion as the delegates danced, toasted each other with champagne and made speeches until three o'clock in the morning. The next day, the *Queen Victoria* left Charlottetown, carrying the Canadians to Nova Scotia. Everywhere they went, Macdonald and his companions gave speeches, claiming that confederation of the colonies would mark the beginning of a strong and prosperous nation. They received a mixed reception from the Maritime colonists, with Joseph Howe leading opposition to union with the Canadas.

they be allowed to present their proposal for Confederation at the forthcoming Maritime Union Conference.

Encouraged by the renewed Canadian interest in the intercolonial railway, the Maritime colonists agreed to invite the Canadians to come and present their scheme. The date of the Conference was set for September 1, 1864; the place, Charlottetown, capital of Prince Edward Island.

It was a warm and pleasant September morning as fifteen men in black coats and top hats took their places at the great mahogany table in the Council Chamber of the Legislative building in Charlottetown. The fifteen were delegates from the three Maritime colonies: Newfoundland had chosen not to attend. As they took their seats, the Canadian party, among them Macdonald, Cartier, Galt and Brown, waited aboard the *Queen Victoria*, anchored in Charlottetown Harbour. With them on board their ship were several hundred bottles of champagne, brought along to help convince the Maritime colonists to join the proposed Confederation.

Inside the Council Chamber, the idea of a Maritime union was quickly rejected. The economies of the colonies were too similar, and their populations too small, for a Maritime union to bring many benefits. The discussion turned to the proposal for a larger union of the colonies brought by the Canadians. The plan was greeted by the Maritime leaders with cautious approval. They agreed that confederation of the British colonies in North America might be desirable, providing that suitable terms could be agreed upon. A second meeting was set for later that year, in Quebec City.

With the Charlottetown Conference over, the Canadians threw a gala ball for their hosts before leaving on a tour of the Maritime colonies. It was a triumphant occasion as the delegates danced, toasted each other with champagne and made speeches until three o'clock in the morning. The next day, the *Queen Victoria* left Charlottetown, carrying the Canadians to Nova Scotia. Everywhere they went, Macdonald and his companions gave speeches, claiming that confederation of the colonies would mark the beginning of a strong and prosperous nation. They received a mixed reception from the Maritime colonists, with Joseph Howe leading opposition to union with the Canadas.

1. What conditions within British North America encouraged the Maritime colonies to consider a union with the Canadas?
2. Why did the Maritime delegates to the Charlottetown Conference reject the idea of a Maritime union?

## The Quebec Conference

One month after the Charlottetown Conference, the *Queen Victoria* made a second voyage to the Maritimes. This time, it returned with delegates from all four of the Atlantic colonies. Newfoundland, though still very wary of the Confederation proposal, had agreed to send observers to Quebec City.

The Quebec Conference began on October 10, 1864. The colonies brought different demands to the bargaining table. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick wanted assurances that the intercolonial railway would be built. Prince Edward Island wanted money to buy back the lands held by absentee landowners. The Newfoundlanders, unsure that they would receive any benefits from Confederation, were there mostly because of pressure from the British government. The delegates to the Quebec Conference vigorously debated the form of the proposed union. Some were committed to a federal union, while others favored a legislative union with a strong central government. Still others were not sure they wanted any form of union at all.

A legislative union would see one central government having all of the powers to make laws for all parts of the country. Each of the individual colonies would have to give up its own elected assemblies. Instead, elected representatives from local areas would be sent to sit in a central Parliament. This was the approach used then, and still used, in Great Britain. In such a union, people have only to deal with one level of government, one system of taxation and one set of laws.

The chief drawback to a legislative union is the fact that not everybody wants to be treated alike. In Britain, minority groups such as the Scots and Irish had seen their traditional customs and languages weakened under the legislative union. The Canadiens, remembering Durham's motives for the Act of Union, feared the same thing might happen to their language and religion. The Maritime colonies, with their small populations, feared their voices would not be heard strongly enough in a legislative union.

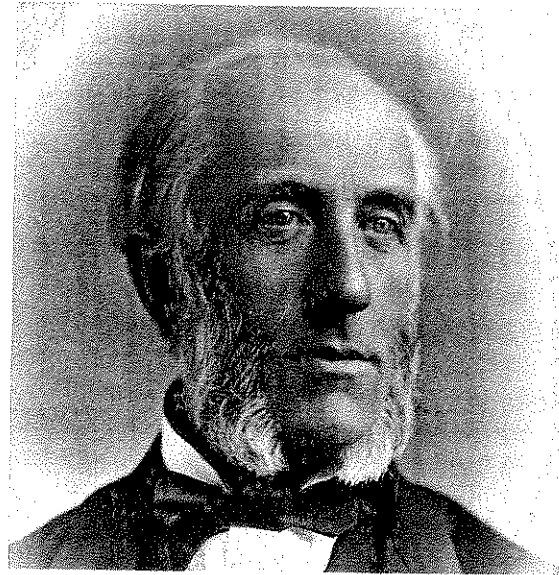
Gradually each of the issues was worked out. The unified colonies committed themselves to the construction of the Halifax-Quebec Railway and to the purchase from the absentee landlords of unoccupied lands in Prince Edward Island. The consensus among the delegates was that a federal union would be the most effective form of government.

Much of the discussion at the Quebec Conference focussed on how powers should be assigned to the federal and provincial levels

## BROWN, CARTIER, GALT AND MACDONALD

---

**GEORGE BROWN (1818-1880):** Born in Scotland, Brown emigrated to North America at the age of twenty, moving to Toronto after five years in New York. In Toronto, he founded a newspaper, the *Globe*, which he used to publicize his political views. Elected to the Assembly in 1851, he remained politically active until 1867. In the elections of the autumn of that year, the first of the newly-formed Confederation, he failed to win a seat. He continued to work as editor of the *Globe* and to tend his cattle farm near Brantford, Ontario. An angry ex-employee of his newspaper shot Brown in the leg in 1880, and Brown died as a result of infection caused by the wound.



**GEORGE-ÉTIENNE CARTIER (1814-1873):** Born in St. Antoine, Lower Canada, Cartier was educated in Montreal, where he opened a law practice in 1837. He took part in the Papineau uprising of 1837, fighting with the rebels at St. Denis (see page 43). After a temporary exile in the United States, he returned to Montreal. There, he became Lafontaine's right-hand man. Cartier was first elected to the Assembly of the united Canadas in 1848. In the 1850s, he became involved with the Grand Trunk Railway, acting as legal advisor for its construction. In the early years after Confederation, he served as Minister of Militia and Defence. His unfortunate involvement in the "Pacific Scandal" of 1873 (see pages 194-195) spelled the end of his political career. He died that same year in London, where he had gone to seek treatment for a disease.





**ALEXANDER GALT (1817-1893):** Born in London, England, Galt emigrated to Canada in 1835 to work for the British American Land Company. He served as a land-agent in the eastern townships of Lower Canada, becoming president of the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad in 1849. He was one of the men who signed the Annexationist Manifesto. In 1858, he became Finance Minister in the Macdonald-Cartier government. In the negotiations leading to Confederation, he worked out the plan to have the federal government assume the debts of the colonies. Unable to support either major political party, Galt retired from politics in 1872. In 1880, he began a three-year appointment as Canadian High Commissioner to London.



**JOHN A. MACDONALD (1815-1891):** Born in Glasgow, Scotland, Macdonald's family moved to Kingston when he was five years of age. He was raised and educated there, becoming a lawyer and getting involved in city politics. In 1844, he was elected member of the Assembly of the united Canadas for Kingston. He spent ten years with the opposition Conservatives, until in 1854 a Conservative-Liberal alliance won the election in the Canadas. He succeeded Sir Alan McNab as Conservative leader in 1856, and became premier of the united Canadas in the following year. During the next decade, he gradually came to believe that a larger federal union of the colonies was the best solution for the problems of colonial government. With the Confederation of 1867, he became Canada's first prime minister. Except for the years 1874-1878, he remained prime minister until his death.

of government within a federal union. All of the delegates were aware of the problems in the Constitution of the United States. It provided for a federal system with a weak central government and strong state governments. This system had contributed to the conflict over slavery that had led to the American Civil War. The delegates to the Quebec Conference wanted to avoid a similar situation in Canada. Their solution was to suggest a strong central government, with the individual provinces having limited, clearly defined powers under the constitution of the union. Any **residual powers**, not specifically assigned to the provinces would rest with the federal government.

The powers of each of the levels of government, and other details of the proposed Confederation, were outlined in a series of seventy-two resolutions passed by the delegates to the Quebec Conference. The central government would have powers to raise money through taxes and duties on imported goods. It would control interprovincial communication and transportation, operate the post office, issue currency and provide for military defence. All criminal law would be the responsibility of the federal government. The individual provinces, on the other hand, would be given powers over schools, roads and bridges, local trade and commerce, property and business contracts. The provincial governments would administer the local courts, both criminal and civil, having responsibility for building the courts, keeping records, providing juries, and so on. (A general court of appeal, now the Supreme Court of Canada, and any specialized federal courts that the central government might create, were excluded from provincial administration.) Judges for the higher provincial courts dealing with both criminal and civil matters would be appointed and paid by the federal government.

At the Quebec Conference, the Canadiens demanded and received assurances that their distinctive culture would be protected under the constitution of the new union. Public education, one of the main vehicles through which culture is preserved and transmitted, would be a provincial matter. So would civil law, allowing the Canadiens to maintain their land-ownership traditions and other customary ways of doing business.

The seventy-two resolutions approved by the delegates contained the basic framework of a constitution for the proposed union. Later, these resolutions would form the basis for the British North America Act. However, the proposed union still had to be approved by the government of each colony and to be endorsed by the British government.

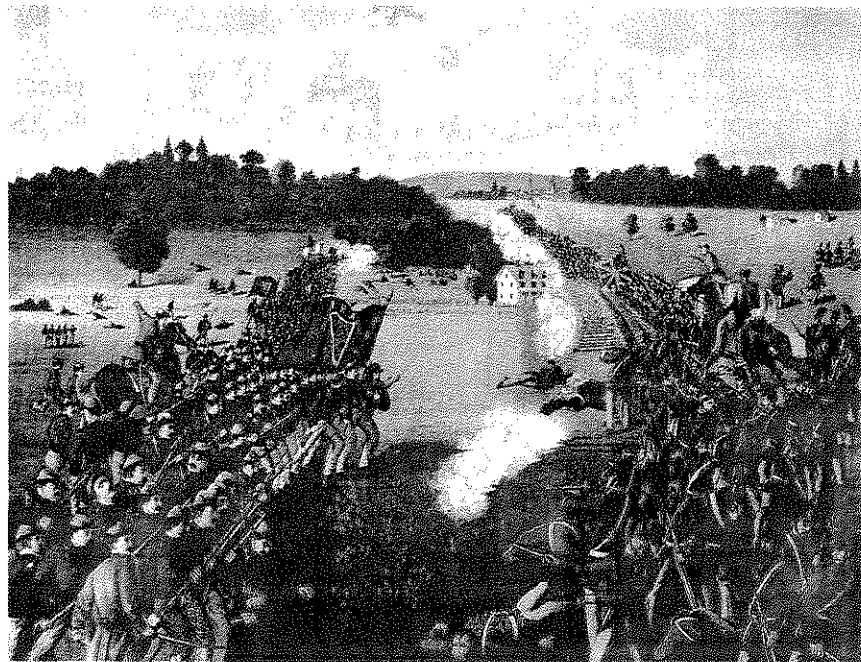
## American Threats

Deep divisions within the United States, the issue of slavery being the main one, resulted in a long and bloody civil war that began in 1861. The southern states, where slavery was legal, attempted to break away from the United States to form their own separate country, the Confederate States of America. After four years of war, the wealthier and more industrialized northern states finally defeated the Confederacy.

British support for the losing Confederate side gave rise to fears that Canada might be invaded in retaliation. Following the victory of the northern forces, a small but vocal group of Americans called for an invasion of Canada by the United States. Many Americans felt that it was their nation's manifest destiny, or God-given right, to rule all of North America. For them, it was merely a matter of time before the remaining British colonies in North America followed the original thirteen states into the Union.

Many Irish Catholics who immigrated to the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century remained committed to freeing their homeland from British rule. In 1857, they formed a

*Flying their banners of Kelly green with gold harps, the Fenians met an army of volunteers near the Niagara frontier. The Fenians were pushed back to the Niagara River where they surrendered.*



secret organization, known as the Fenians, to fight for Irish independence. After the Civil War, the Fenians had a membership of more than 10 000 veterans, organized into military clubs. They began to make plans to invade Canada because it was the closest place where they could attack the British. The Fenians were confident they would receive help for their invasion from the Americans. They also felt that Irish Catholics in Canada, and perhaps the Canadiens, would also support the Fenian cause.

The first Fenian raid on British North America came in April 1866. A small party of Fenian raiders attacked New Brunswick from Maine. The raid quickly collapsed in the face of local resistance. Its only real impact was to increase support for Confederation in the province of New Brunswick.

Less than two months later, the Fenians invaded British North America again. Shortly after midnight on June 1, 1866, more than 1000 Fenian raiders slipped across the Niagara River into Canada. They were armed with weapons left over from the just-ended American Civil War. Many had fought on the Union side during that war. Now, however, the enemy was the British, not the Confederacy. News of the invasion was quickly telegraphed to Toronto. Within forty-eight hours, 20 000 men from Canada West had answered the call for volunteers and were rushed to Niagara by train and steamboat. The Fenians were driven back to the banks of the Niagara River, where they surrendered.

A week later, another group of Fenian raiders invaded Canada East, just north of Lake Champlain. This incursion lasted less than forty-eight hours. The Fenians had found no support from the Americans or from the Irish Catholics and Canadiens for their attacks on British North America. However, the attacks forced many of the colonists to recognize just how difficult it would be to defend themselves against a major attack. The Fenian raids strengthened the arguments in favor of Confederation.

1. What was "manifest destiny" as perceived by Americans? How did it affect their attitudes towards British North America?
2. Who were the Fenians? Why did they wish to attack British North America?
3. Which groups in British North America would be most likely to sympathize with the Fenians? Why?



## Reciprocity Ended

The Reciprocity Treaty between the United States and the British colonies expired in 1865, although it could have been renewed. At first, the treaty had been popular in both the United States and the colonies. However, support for the treaty dropped sharply during the Civil War. Some American business leaders and politicians wanted to end the Reciprocity Treaty in retaliation for British support for the Southern side in the conflict. Others wanted the treaty scrapped because they felt that the colonists had benefited most from the accord. There was some truth to this, as British North America owed its new found prosperity to the reciprocity agreements.

In March 1865, the United States government gave Britain the required one year's notice, stating that the Reciprocity Treaty would end in 1866. Many residents of the northern United States believed that an end to reciprocity would force the collapse of the colonies' economies. These Americans believed that, in the chaos that would ensue, the people of British North America would welcome annexation by the United States.

To counter the end of reciprocity, colonial leaders intensified their efforts to promote interprovincial trade within British North America. They also emphasized the role that the proposed federal union could play in increasing trade among the provinces. Macdonald and the other members of the Great Coalition, especially Galt, used trade concerns after the end of reciprocity to promote union during the Confederation debates.

1. In your opinion, what connection might there have been between "manifest destiny" and the cancellation of the Reciprocity Treaty by the government of the United States?

## Confederation Achieved

The planned union had to be approved by the provinces before Confederation could take place. Over the two years following the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences, people throughout the colonies debated the idea of Confederation. These debates were often heated, even violent. In some colonies, elections were held on the issue of Confederation. Newfoundland's voters went to the polls in 1865, soundly defeating the pro-Confederation forces. In

## THE VISION OF A GREAT NATION FROM SEA TO SEA

---

Many traditional histories of Canada focus on the internal political problems and external pressures that led up to Confederation. But some influential leaders had a more positive vision that helped guide them along the road to Confederation. During the late 1850s and early 1860s, in the minds of political leaders like George Brown and Thomas Darcy McGee, a vision was forming of a great nation from sea to sea, uniting all of the peoples of British North America.

Many things contributed to the shaping of this vision of a great nation, not the least of which was the fact that the United States had been steadily expanding westward for several decades. California became a state in 1850 and by 1862, despite the American Civil War, construction was underway on a great transcontinental railway that would link the eastern United States with the Pacific coast. The discovery of gold in British Columbia in 1856 was another factor contributing to the desire for westward expansion of Canada.

Thomas Darcy McGee, a poet and politician of Irish origin who would be killed by an assassin's bullet, had a more poetic vision of a nation from sea to sea. This was how he expressed his vision of a greater union:

I call it a Northern Nation—for such it must become, if all of us do our duty. I see in the future one great nationality, bound by the blue rim of the Ocean. I see communities, each disposing of its internal affairs, but all bound together by free institutions. I see the peaks of the Western Mountains and I see the crests of the Eastern Waves, the winding Assiniboine, the five-fold lakes. . . . I see a generation of industrious, contented, moral men, free in name and in fact.

McGee's vision of a larger, stronger Canada was not just poetic. He was very aware that American western expansion would spill over into the North West if the British colonies did not establish their control over the region. McGee was opposed to American-style democracy. He feared the absorption of the colonies by the Americans unless the British constitutional monarchy were strengthened on the North American continent.

1. The quotation from McGee is a brief but effective description of Confederation. What words does he use to describe how he foresaw a federal union of British North America?

New Brunswick, the anti-Confederation party won one election, only to be defeated by pro-Confederationists led by Sir Leonard Tilley a short time later. In Nova Scotia, Joseph Howe led a strong opposition to Confederation. In Prince Edward Island, the Assembly decided against both Confederation and Maritime union.

In the end, the legislative assemblies of three colonies, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the united Canadas, voted to support Confederation. The next step was out of their hands. The British government had to approve the plan. The three colonies appointed a delegation to take the seventy-two resolutions approved in Quebec to London.

## The London Conference

In London, the delegates worked with British government officials throughout the winter of 1866-1867, drafting a bill to be put before the British Parliament as a treaty between two governments. As a treaty, the bill had to be approved or rejected by the British Parliament without any changes. Given the mood of the British government, rejection was unthinkable. Even so, one member of Parliament received a petition from Nova Scotia bearing the signatures of 30 000 persons opposed to Confederation. On behalf of those Nova Scotians, he argued unsuccessfully for defeat of the bill. Passage of the bill, titled the British North America Act, was swift. It received Royal assent on March 29, 1867. "One Dominion under the name of Canada" had been created by an act of the British Parliament.

The new Dominion had four provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. It had self-government in all domestic matters. But the new Constitution, the British North America Act, remained an act of the British Parliament. Canadians could not modify or revise it until 1949, when they obtained some limited power to amend the Act. It was not until 1982, under the government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, that Canadians finally got a Constitution that could be changed in Canada. Even then, the British North America Act (renamed in 1982 the Constitution Act, 1867) remained the basic document of Canada's Constitution.

## The Structure of Government under the BNA Act

The British North America Act established Canada as a **constitutional monarchy**. It assigned law-making powers to the Crown and to a Parliament comprising the House of Commons and the Senate. The lower chamber, the House of Commons, would be made up of elected members of Parliament. Representation, to the greatest extent possible, would be based on population. Each member of Parliament would represent a **riding** or **constituency** of approximately the same number of people. The number of seats in the Commons would not be fixed under the terms of the Constitution, but would be able to increase as the new Dominion's population grew.

Consistent with British Parliamentary tradition, the founders of Confederation saw the House of Commons as the place where most

## The London Conference

In London, the delegates worked with British government officials throughout the winter of 1866-1867, drafting a bill to be put before the British Parliament as a treaty between two governments. As a treaty, the bill had to be approved or rejected by the British Parliament without any changes. Given the mood of the British government, rejection was unthinkable. Even so, one member of Parliament received a petition from Nova Scotia bearing the signatures of 30 000 persons opposed to Confederation. On behalf of those Nova Scotians, he argued unsuccessfully for defeat of the bill. Passage of the bill, titled the British North America Act, was swift. It received Royal assent on March 29, 1867. "One Dominion under the name of Canada" had been created by an act of the British Parliament.

The new Dominion had four provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. It had self-government in all domestic matters. But the new Constitution, the British North America Act, remained an act of the British Parliament. Canadians could not modify or revise it until 1949, when they obtained some limited power to amend the Act. It was not until 1982, under the government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, that Canadians finally got a Constitution that could be changed in Canada. Even then, the British North America Act (renamed in 1982 the Constitution Act, 1867) remained the basic document of Canada's Constitution.

## The Structure of Government under the BNA Act

The British North America Act established Canada as a constitutional monarchy. It assigned law-making powers to the Crown and to a Parliament comprising the House of Commons and the Senate. The lower chamber, the House of Commons, would be made up of elected members of Parliament. Representation, to the greatest extent possible, would be based on population. Each member of Parliament would represent a riding or constituency of approximately the same number of people. The number of seats in the Commons would not be fixed under the terms of the Constitution, but would be able to increase as the new Dominion's population grew.

Consistent with British Parliamentary tradition, the founders of Confederation saw the House of Commons as the place where most

laws affecting the Dominion would be proposed, debated and voted on. All laws related to government spending and taxation would have their origins in the House of Commons. As well, the prime minister and most of the cabinet would be drawn from the elected members of the House of Commons.

The Senate was intended to be a parallel to the British House of Lords. In the words of one of the Fathers of Confederation, it was designed as "a power of resistance to oppose the democratic element." The Senate was also intended to represent the interests of Canada's regions. Fearful that Canada West, with its rapidly growing population, would control the House of Commons, delegates to the Quebec Conference from Canada East and the Maritimes insisted that each of the three regions have equal representation (twenty-four Senators each) in the Senate. (Today there are twenty-four Senators from each of Quebec, Ontario, the Maritimes and Western Canada; six from Newfoundland and two from northern Canada.)

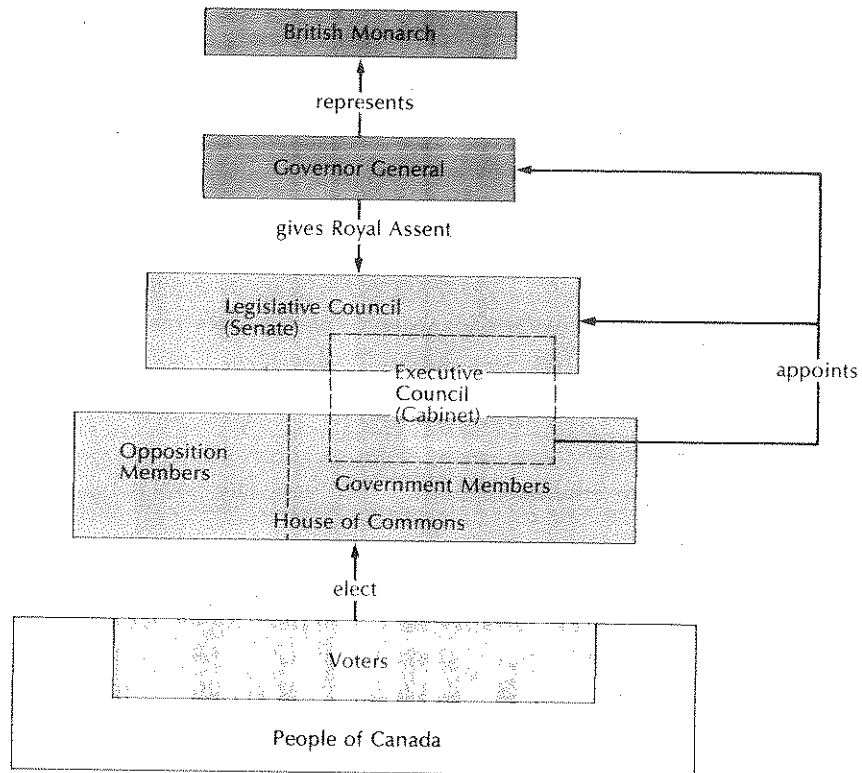
Appointments to the Senate are made by the governing party in the House of Commons. Initially, Senators were appointed for life; now they must retire at age seventy-five. Senators are supposed to take "a serious and sober second look" at legislation passed by the elected representatives of the people. Yet the Senate, like the Legislative Councils before it, often served as a place where the party faithful could be rewarded or where those who could not be elected could be brought into government. The structure of Canada's government, as set out under the BNA Act, is shown in the diagram on page 102.

The roles of the government and opposition were not defined under the BNA Act, nor were the positions of the prime minister and cabinet ministers. In fact they were not even mentioned in the Act. This aspect of Canada's Constitution is unwritten, arising from British Parliamentary tradition.

The main purpose of the BNA Act was, and still is, to define the distribution of powers between the federal and provincial levels of government. Section 91 of the Act outlines powers of the federal government; Section 92 lists powers of the provincial governments.

1. In a chart, compare the House of Commons and the Senate using these headings:
  - selection of members
  - purpose
  - powers.

The Structure of Government as set up by the BNA Act



## July 1, 1867

The new Dominion of Canada officially came into being on Monday, July 1, 1867. That morning, George Brown wrote the following editorial in his newspaper, the *Toronto Globe*:

With the first dawn of this gladsome mid-summer morn, we hail the birthday of a new nationality. A united British America, with its four millions of people, takes its place this day among the nations of the world. The DOMINION OF CANADA, on this first day of July, in the year of grace, eighteen hundred and sixty seven, enters on a new career of national existence.

Not everyone in the new nation shared Brown's pleasure. As Brown was writing these glowing words, Joseph Howe, editor of the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, was setting the type for his editorial. It would be a bitter attack on those he felt had sold-out Nova Scotia to Confederation. Outside the offices of the *Morning Chronicle*,

black crepe, the symbol of mourning, hung listlessly in the muggy night air. Howe would campaign actively for the next two years seeking to have the BNA Act repealed. However, following his election to the House of Commons in 1869, Howe spent his final years as a strong supporter of what he once called the "Botheration Scheme."

In most cities and towns, joyful celebrations welcomed the birth of the new nation. Church bells were rung; cannons were fired in twenty-one gun salutes. People gathered in public places to hear the Queen's proclamation read. That night, there were lavish balls and great displays of fireworks.

Against the backdrop of the new Houses of Parliament, the governor general, Lord Monck, read the Royal Proclamation. Queen Victoria sent a message to the people of the new Dominion of Canada via the recently completed transatlantic telegraph cable. Included in her message was a knighthood for one of the leading architects of Confederation: Canada's first prime minister was now Sir John A. Macdonald. From platforms decorated with red, white and blue bunting, political leaders from all parties honored Macdonald and the new nation he and so many others had struggled to create.

## Summary

Under the leadership of John A. Macdonald, along with Brown, Galt and Cartier, Confederation was achieved in 1867. Born out of internal political deadlock, and spurred on by external pressures, it was a significant act of skilful political compromise. Canada's political leaders had put aside their personal and political differences in an attempt to create a solution that would serve the greater good of all the colonists.

Conferences held at Charlottetown and Quebec City saw the framework for a federal union of the colonies worked out. But, the Confederation proposal still had to be endorsed by the governments of the individual colonies, then passed into law by the British government. The voters of Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island rejected the union, leaving Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to become the first four provinces of the new Dominion of Canada. The powers of these provinces and the federal government were defined in the British North America Act, passed by the British Parliament in March 1867. The result was the new

Dominion of Canada, extending from the western shore of Lake Superior to the Atlantic Ocean. But the Fathers of Confederation had no intentions of stopping with Canada as it had been shaped on July 1, 1867; they now turned their attention westward.

---

## REVIEW

### Checking Back

1. Write one or two sentences summarizing the significance of each of the following conferences in bringing about Confederation.  
Charlottetown      Quebec City  
London
2. Discuss the role the American Civil War played in the call for Confederation.
3. Who were the Fenians? Discuss the role they played in the call for Confederation.
4. In your own words, summarize how the seventy-two resolutions of the Quebec Conference proposed the power to make laws be divided between the federal and provincial governments.

### Using Your Knowledge

5. At various times before Confederation, union of the Atlantic colonies was considered. Suggest advantages and disadvantages of a union.
  6. Imagine you are one of the Canadian delegates at Quebec City. Write a letter to a delegate from New Brunswick explaining why you feel public education must be a provincial power.
  7. Suggest one or two reasons for the unease felt by the Quebec delegates to the London Conference when they discovered how willing Britain was to grant independence.
  8. Explain why the British government, in the 1860s, was eager to see a union of the North American colonies.
  9. Examine the people profiled on pages 92-93. What characteristics did these people have in common?
  10. Read Thomas Darcy McGee's vision of Canada's future (page 99). Did his predictions come true?
  11. List the reasons for the creation of the Senate.
  12. The colonies of British North America were legally joined together as of July 1, 1867. Since that time, do you think the regions of Canada have successfully formed one nation?
  13. Design a poster that illustrates how either a pro- or anti-Confederationist might have felt on July 1, 1867.
-