

## ACTIVITIES

1. In your opinion, what was the most important medical/scientific discovery of the Victorian era? Design a plaque to honour the scientist responsible. The plaque should include three or four sentences about the specific value of this discovery.
2. Who was Emily Stowe? What difficulties did she face and surmount?
3. Louis Pasteur did not become wealthy from his scientific discoveries. Should he be a model for today's scientists? Explain.

## LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Victorian Canadians liked to be entertained. Those who lived in cities had many opportunities to go to parties, concerts, fairs, circuses, and shows. In the country, barn raisings, quilting bees, weddings, *ceilidhs* (parties with Scottish or Irish music, dancing and stories), barn dances, and other diversions were freely available. Books and magazines were very popular because many people could read. Stories were published in **serial format** so that people had to read the next week's issue to follow the story. Charles Dickens's stories were serialized, for example.

The Victorians had a taste for many amusements that are still enjoyed by modern Canadians—but some of their amusements would today be considered brutal or bizarre. Sports achieved a new popularity. Swimming for pleasure, a fashion started in Europe, quickly caught on in Canada. But so did “blood sports,” such as bear-baiting and dog-and-bull fighting. Bare-knuckle boxing matches always drew plenty of spectators—the boxers would hammer away at each other, with bouts often lasting more than a hundred rounds. Boxing remained a brutal sport until

Britain's Marquis of Queensbury issued his famous rules for boxing in the 1860s. These rules, which recommend boxing gloves and limit the duration of rounds, form the basis of today's boxing etiquette. They are also unintentionally **droll** because they capture the Victorian spirit—proper, but fascinated with impropriety. Rule Five, for example, notes: “A man hanging on the ropes in a helpless state, with his toes off the ground, shall be considered down.”

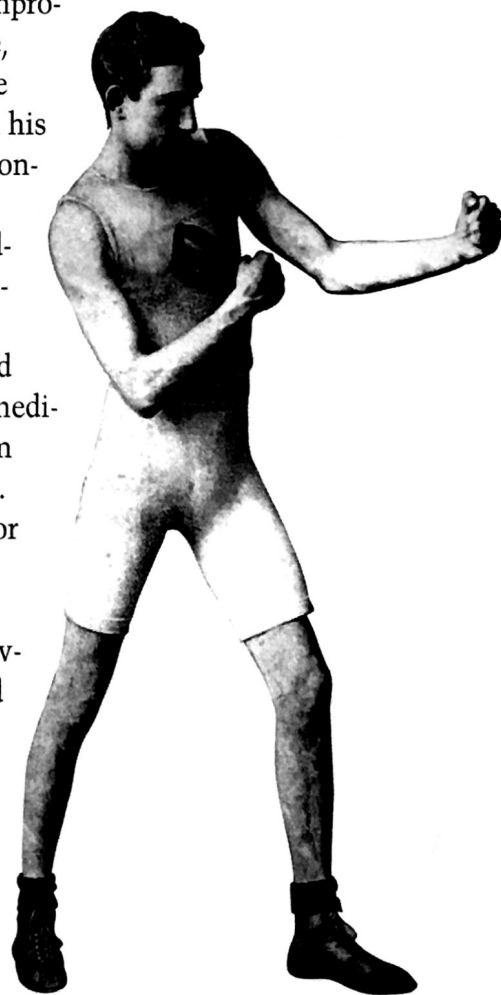
The Victorians loved medicine shows. The patent medicines sold at these affairs promised to cure anything and everything, but many of the medicines were actually made from alcohol, pepper, or turpentine. They would often intoxicate or nauseate people, but with no medicinal effect whatsoever. This was also a new era of travelling circuses. Many disabled people, including children, found jobs in the sideshows,

**Figure 2-14** Bare-knuckle boxing was strongly discouraged with the publication of the Marquis of Queensbury's rules for boxing.

**matriculation ticket:** a piece of paper indicating that a student is enrolled in a course and will matriculate, or graduate

**serial format:** in weekly or monthly installments

**droll:** humorous



## DO YOU KNOW?

The concept of the “teenager” was unknown in the Victorian era. It wasn’t until the middle of the twentieth century that the word entered common usage.

where people paid money to gawk at their handicaps. A travelling circus came to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, during the conference on Confederation held in 1864. You will read more about this important conference later in this chapter.

## Parlour Games

With no television or radio, no movies, videos, or recorded music, people relied on more personal ways to entertain themselves, particularly on winter evenings. They made music, held dances, talked, and played parlour games. Card games, such as **whist**, were very popular, as

were checkers and chess. Since large gatherings provided a venue where young people could meet each other in a socially acceptable way, games served as a natural icebreaker and entertainment. Some games were hundreds of years old and had been passed down through the generations. Those of Native, Black, French, and English ancestry had distinct cultural traditions and developed their own games. In time, many parlour games crossed cultural boundaries and were played in homes and halls everywhere.

These parlour games, for example, originated on L’ Ile Vert, a farming community on the St. Lawrence

**whist:** a card game for four players divided into two teams



**Figure 2–15** Children formed a larger proportion of the population in Victorian times than today. Society was more youthful, since life expectancy was much lower than it is today and people tended to have large families. Victorian children amused themselves with games and outdoor activities, but most were expected to behave properly and to help out with family chores. What clues in this painting would help you identify the social class of these children?

River. Primarily tests of strength and coordination, these games would mainly have been played by men, but would have served the social purpose of allowing the sexes to mingle. What other social purposes might they have served?

### **Pulling Up The Stump**

The first player gets down on his hands and knees, the second sits on the shoulders of the first and, facing toward his feet; he crosses his feet under the first. By giving some jerks, the second player tries to make the first player raise his hands from the floor and to tip him backwards.

### **Pulling the Leg**

The two players lie side by side on their backs with the head of one by the feet of the other; they hold each other by the forearms and raise the left leg three times; the fourth time, they catch the other's leg and each tries to overturn the other.

### **Kissing His Thumb**

The player, hanging by his right arm from a pipe or beam, must raise his body so as to kiss his thumb.

## **Getting Around**

Leisure travel became immensely popular in the Victorian era. People with money to spare travelled to Europe or America whenever they could. There they experienced the nightlife, parties, and entertainments of great cities such as Paris, where they could see the most famous people in the world. Transatlantic travel became much easier after the invention of the steamboat, which reduced the time for an ocean crossing to a few weeks. The *Royal William*, built in Quebec in 1833 (see page 19), crossed the Atlantic in just seventeen days. A few years later, steamships made the



**Figure 2-16** Victorian railway travel. Passenger cars were not comfortable by today's standards, but people still enjoyed themselves. How do these sleeping arrangements strike you?

crossing in less than two weeks. In our era, this seems like a very long time, but for people accustomed to crowded sailing ships that took five weeks to travel from Britain to Canada, the steamship was wonderful. And for those who could afford it, steamships had luxurious cabins and recreation facilities.

### **Changing Technology**

The new steam locomotives made land travel more attractive for everyone, not just the wealthy. Imagine how thrilling it must have been to discover you could travel by train to some distant place in a fraction of the time it had taken just a few years earlier.

Railways and steamships also helped to build the **infrastructure** of Canada after 1830. Canada's first railway was the Champlain Saint Lawrence Railroad, which ran from La Prairie, a suburb of Montreal, to

**infrastructure:** the community systems that make travel, communications, and business easier: for example, roads, canals, transportation, and postal service

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

*The idea of a vacation was radically new in the nineteenth century, and it quickly became a status symbol. People often planned their trips years in advance.*

# Sarah Bernhardt, Superstar

*The life of Madame Sarah Bernhardt may prove the greatest marvel of the nineteenth century.*

—EDMOND DE GONCOURT, NOVELIST

Sarah Bernhardt, perhaps the most famous person in Europe, was one of the first “superstars.” Americans and Canadians who travelled to Paris to see her perform in a Victor Hugo play or in the Théâtre Français could tell their friends that they had witnessed one of the most magnetic performers of all time.

At the time of Confederation, most people in Canada would have recognized her name. She was also known as the “Divine Sarah,” “The Greatest French Woman since Joan of Arc,” or even “The Eighth Wonder of the World.” Marvelously talented, Bernhardt was an actor, sculptor, painter, art critic, singer—and extremely temperamental. She was fired from her first job for slapping the face of another performer and breaking an umbrella over the head of the doorman. Like some performers today, Bernhardt loved publicity and spread shocking stories about herself to attract attention. She let it be known, for example, that she slept in a coffin.

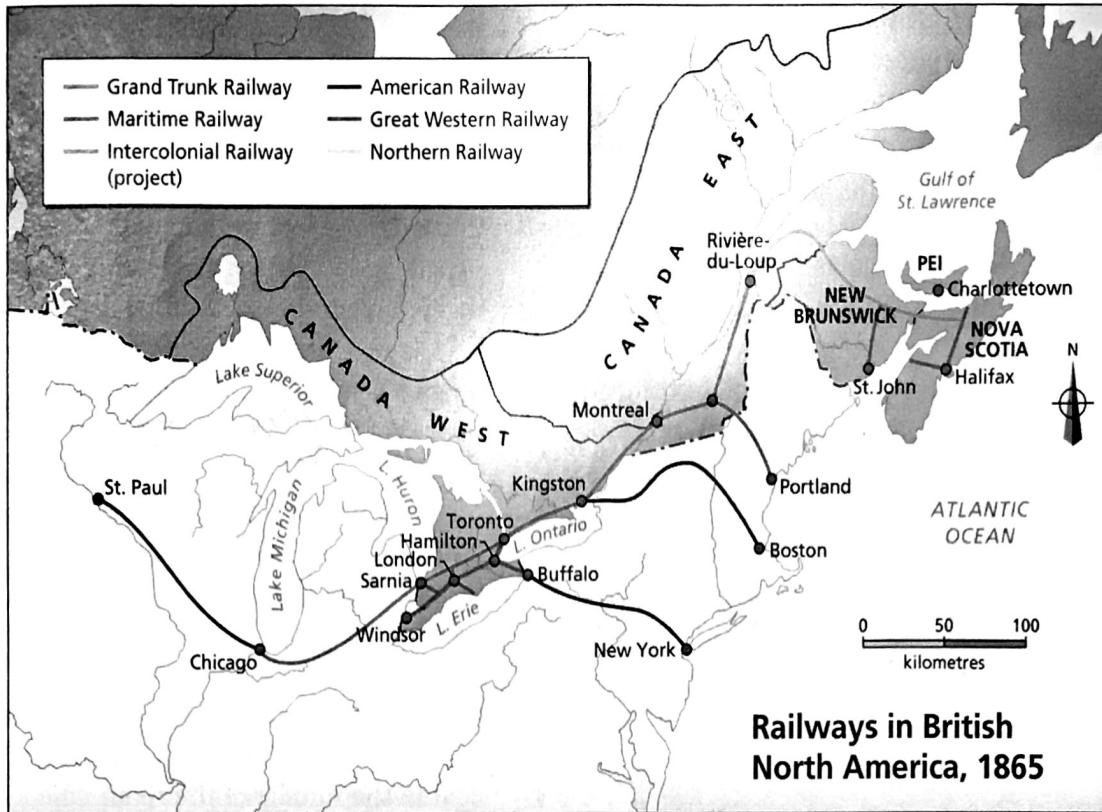
Sarah Bernhardt had an unusual and beautiful face, and a magnetic, forceful personality. People said she had the “eyes of a cat and the smile of a llama.” As a young woman, she was so thin that people joked that “an empty carriage pulled up at the stage door and Sarah Bernhardt got out.” As one of the most important people in Paris, Sarah Bernhardt was someone to know. In 1870, when the Prussian army was attacking Paris, Sarah set up a hospital and worked day and night as an administrator, fundraiser, and volunteer nurse.



**Figure 2-17** The “Divine Sarah” shocked and fascinated the public, which gave her great power. As a public figure, her actions and accomplishments challenged the traditional Victorian view of women as being passive and dutiful. She was for some not only a “superstar,” but a role model.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. What are your criteria for a performer to be called “superstar”?
2. How would easier transatlantic travel and the rise of newspapers (see pages 71 to 72) help to create a superstar such as Sarah Bernhardt?
3. What entertainers today could be compared with Sarah Bernhardt? Why? Refer to your criteria in question 1.
4. How do bizarre, sometimes unflattering, details of a superstar’s life enhance the public’s interest in that person?



**Figure 2-18**  
 Canada entered the railway age after 1837. By the end of the nineteenth century, rail lines linked all the cities in Canada with each other, and with the United States. Today, many of those lines have been abandoned. In fact, many railway beds are now used for bike trails. What transportation system took the place of the trains? Why would another system be more efficient and profitable now, but not in earlier times?

Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, 40 kilometres southeast of Montreal. It was completed in 1836. The railway's steam locomotive, which had been built in England and shipped to Canada, transported people and freight at speeds of up to 48 kilometres an hour.

By 1850, regularly scheduled trains moved goods and people at speeds of 80 kilometres an hour or more, and rail lines linked towns from Canada West to the Maritimes. The Champlain and Saint Lawrence Railroad, for example, was extended in 1852 to Saint Lambert, Quebec, and also travelled further into New York state. The St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad, completed in 1853, gave Montreal and other Quebec towns access to an ice-free port by connecting them to Portland, Maine. The railways had strict timetables, as much to avoid collisions on the same length of track as to accommodate passengers. For this reason, a train could arrive

late, but never early. Train engineers and brakemen were on the job throughout their shifts, even cooking their meals on a shovel in the steam engine's **firebox**.

**firebox:** the steam boiler

## The Rise of Newspapers

In the mid-nineteenth century, every city and most small towns in Canada had one or more newspapers. In fact, newspapers had existed in Canada since the eighteenth century—*The Halifax Gazette* was the country's first paper, founded in 1752. The Victorian era saw the rise of the dailies—newspapers that are published every day of the week. The dailies began in Montreal in the 1840s. By 1873, Canada had forty-seven dailies. Because more and more people could read, and because so many people lived in cities, where access to information was considered important, dailies caught on rapidly.

Victorian newspapers had many features that we recognize in today's

## DID YOU KNOW?

Professional sports would have been an unusual concept for Victorians. They recognized only a few professions, all of which required a university degree.

**bushel:** an old measure of dry goods equivalent to roughly 35 litres

**peck:** one-quarter of a bushel

newspapers, but there were major differences. Professional sports, other than boxing and horse racing, were not a feature of Victorian life, so there was no sports section. Aside from the odd political cartoon, Victorian newspapers had no comics section. They had no professional advice columns, or horoscopes, and few non-news or special-interest features—"helpful hints" were an exception. Moreover, by today's standards, they had limited sources of information. So how did they attract readers? They were one of the few sources of news from the outside world—the United States, the other colonies, and from places far from home. They were also far less inter-

ested in respecting people's privacy. Local news was very important because people loved to know what their neighbours were up to. Court reports and the names, sentences and fines of offenders were usually published, and made for interesting reading. For example, William Wilson sold "spirituous liquor without a license" and was fined \$5.00. Mary Morrison used "abusive language" and was fined 25 cents.

People would buy newspapers only if they found them useful or interesting—as a result, self-help articles, recipes, and helpful hints were regular features. For example, "to remove the smell of paint from a room, place a vessel of lighted charcoal in the middle of the room and throw on one or two handfuls of juniper berries." There were recipes for curing ham ("a bushel-and-a-half and a peck of salt is required for every 1000 pounds of pork"). There was late-breaking news on fad science, for example, phrenology (the science of personality study based on the bumps on a person's head) and the water cure (the theory that water could cure all ailments).

Today, Victorian newspapers may seem hopelessly old-fashioned—as do steamships and steam locomotives. At the time, however, they were revolutionary, and they reshaped society.

**Figure 2-19** Can the bumps on the human skull hold the secrets to the personality within? This drawing from the Victorian era demonstrates that the fad science of the day—phrenology—inspired much enthusiasm. How does this drawing reflect Victorian values and attitudes?



## ACTIVITIES

1. Describe all the ways in which Canada's infrastructure developed after 1830. In your judgement, which contribution to infrastructure was most important?
2. Reread the section, Changing Technology, on page 69. What was the first railway in British North America? When was it extended, and to where? What does this say about trade links between Canada East and the US?
3. Urbanization is about the growth of cities and the change, for many people, from a farm-based to a city-based life. Describe the beginnings of urbanization in Canada, and list some of the changes you would expect to see.

# BUILDING A NATION

... the scheme as a whole has met with almost universal approval.

—JOHN.A. MACDONALD, 1864

Some politicians had been dreaming of Confederation—the union of the colonies of British North America into a **federation**—since the days of Lord Durham. It is safe to say, however, that their dream was far less popular in Canada East, with its French culture, than it was in Canada West. The idea was also unpopular in the Maritime colonies. Macdonald's speech to the Canadian Legislature, excerpted above, was a magnificent piece of rhetoric, but it virtually ignored the fact that almost as many people opposed union as favoured it.

Union would mean a central government, one that would most likely control defence, **external relations**, currency, postage, taxation, and other concerns. Britain already administered most of these functions, however, and many people preferred this arrangement to one that would shift that kind of power to central Canada. In general, those living in the Maritime colonies felt they had little in common with the growing province of Canada, and French-Canadians were wary of any attempt that would make them a minority in an English-speaking nation. Yet the idea was intoxicating—people could create, in their own lifetime, a new country stretching from sea to sea. And that new nation would be immense, one of the largest on Earth.

Like many big ideas, the concept of Confederation started at the top. Those who shared this dream had to

sell their vision. They had to win over politicians and business people who regarded union as a bad idea. Through political manoeuvring, persuasion, and debate, they had to quash the notion that big ideas for governments are usually expensive. In the mid-nineteenth century, many people were as skeptical about the motives of politicians as the public is today. The builders of Confederation had started a long process. The first hurdle they had to overcome was to convince skeptics of the merits of these proposals.

## Towards Confederation

In Chapter 1, you learned that the Rebellions of 1837 resulted in the Durham Report, and that the **Canadas** were joined by the Act of Union in 1840. Many people in French Canada opposed Durham's recommendation to unite the Canadas, but the British government favoured the plan and acted upon it immediately.

Durham had also recommended **responsible government** for the colonies. This created trouble for Britain and her Canadian governors. The idea that colonies could govern themselves was entirely new. Nobody knew if, or how, self-government would work. Many thought it would seriously weaken the British Empire, and perhaps even strengthen Britain's potential enemies (such as the United States and France). On both sides of the Atlantic, many feared that self-government could create economic problems both in Canada and in Britain. Many people still clung to

**federation:** a federal union in which the members keep certain powers themselves, and give certain powers to a central government

**external relations:** dealings with other countries

**Canadas:** Upper and Lower Canada, whose names were changed to Canada West and Canada East—modern Ontario and Quebec

**responsible government:** a government in which the executive council is responsible to the legislative assembly, whose members are representatives of the people

**Figure 2–20** Lord Elgin came from a wealthy, well-connected family. In spite of Elgin’s privilege, he was well-suited to be governor. Like his father-in-law, Lord Durham, he believed in responsible government, and he had considerable experience in colonial matters. Why do you think Britain would appoint Elgin governor rather than a Canadian?



entered Britain with low duties, which had helped wheat and flour production to expand in Upper Canada. Now Britain wanted to move towards free trade—it wanted to buy wheat, flour, and other products at the lowest price, and from any country. After the Corn Laws were repealed, Canada’s economy went into a **depression**. Canadians had built ships for the British trade, and they had exported raw materials and agricultural products, but they manufactured very little. With the old economic relationship in tatters, and with few existing industries to revive the economy, Canadians began considering the possibility of creating a country. Then a Canadian government could create its own economic policy—one that would best serve its people.

**mercantilism:** an economic system based on colonialism. The home country takes raw materials in from its colonies and manufactures goods, which it sells for profit.

**Corn Laws:** laws which protected British agriculture

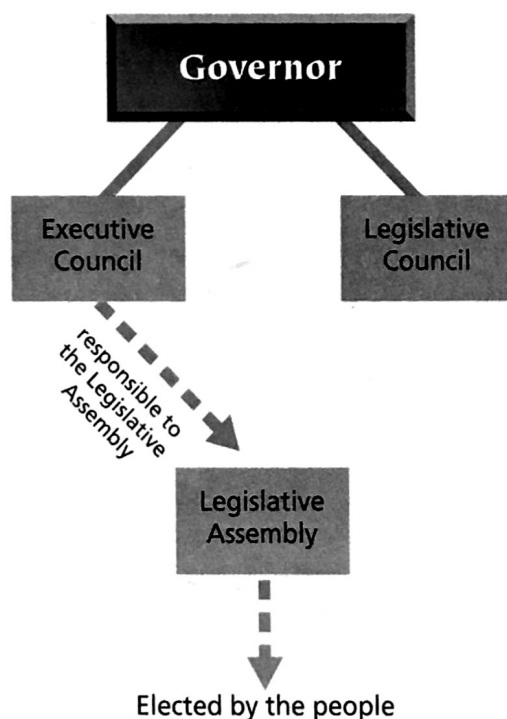
**depression:** a period of low economic activity marked by high unemployment

the old idea of **mercantilism**, which defined the colony’s economic relationship to the home country.

Britain’s economic relationship with the colonies, however, was already changing. In 1846, the British government repealed the **Corn Laws**, which had given trading privileges to the British colonies. Up to this point, Canadian grain had

Support for the idea of self-government was limited. For the most part, the governors who succeeded Durham had not liked the idea, but some, such as Governor Charles Bagot, had brought reformers into the councils. As you learned in Chapter 1, Bagot chose Robert Baldwin and Louis Hippolyte Lafontaine as unofficial joint premiers. Bagot did not believe, however, that he had to do what these men demanded on behalf of the people—the key principle of responsible government. When Britain decided that free trade was in its own best interests, its attitude towards government for Canada changed completely.

In 1847, Britain named James Bruce, the eighth Earl of Elgin, governor of the Canadas. Lord Elgin, who was Lord Durham’s son-in-law, was charged with the task of putting responsible government into operation. The colony was to become Britain’s economic partner, and it



**Figure 2–21** The relationships of responsible government



would cease to be Britain's responsibility. From Britain's standpoint, this was an advantage. It was expensive to govern, defend, and financially support the colonies.

Responsible government would be a new and exciting chapter in the colony's history, to be sure. Yet no one expected the explosive incident that was to occur.

In Chapter 1, you learned how the Rebellions of 1837 pitted the British establishment against a faltering people's crusade. While many people supported an end to privilege and corruption, others believed the reformers had betrayed the government. When, in 1849, the elected—and reformist—government of Canada passed a bill giving financial compensation to anyone, including the rebels who had lost property during the rebellions, anti-rebel forces

were outraged. In their eyes, **treason** was being rewarded. Even the governor, Lord Elgin, was against the Rebellion Losses Bill. But under responsible government the governor had no right to veto a bill: he had to sign it into law. Never had a governor been in such a predicament. Many people were so opposed to the bill that they attacked Elgin's carriage. The violence escalated into a full-scale riot, which **culminated** with the burning of the parliament buildings. Following the riot, angry merchants and citizens who had condemned the rebels published an Annexation Manifesto—a plan for the United States to take over Canada. Nevertheless, Elgin's signature had laid the foundation for a new form of government for the Canadas—democracy.

**treason:** betrayal of one's country

**to culminate:** to climax

#### DID YOU KNOW?

*The first Canadian to be appointed governor general was Vincent Massey, in 1952, more than 100 years after Lord Elgin's appointment.*



**Figure 2-22** This painting depicts the burning of the parliament buildings in Montreal on April 25, 1849, after the passing of the Rebellion Losses Bill. The riots involved thousands of people and lasted for two days. Why were the parliament buildings located in Montreal at this time?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Create an organizer. In one column, list factors that supported Confederation. In the other, list factors that went against Confederation. Based on your observations, which side do you support? Explain.
2. a) How did Britain's economic attitude towards its colonies change in the 1840s?  
b) What economic impact did the repeal of the Corn Laws have on the colonies? In your opinion, would this help or hinder promoters of Confederation? Explain, with reasons.
3. Imagine that you are a witness to the burning of the parliament buildings, shown in Figure 2-22. Write a 1-minute news item for radio, vividly describing the scene and outlining the reasons for the riots.

# THE ADVANTAGES OF CONFEDERATION

**to annex:** to incorporate a territory or country into another country

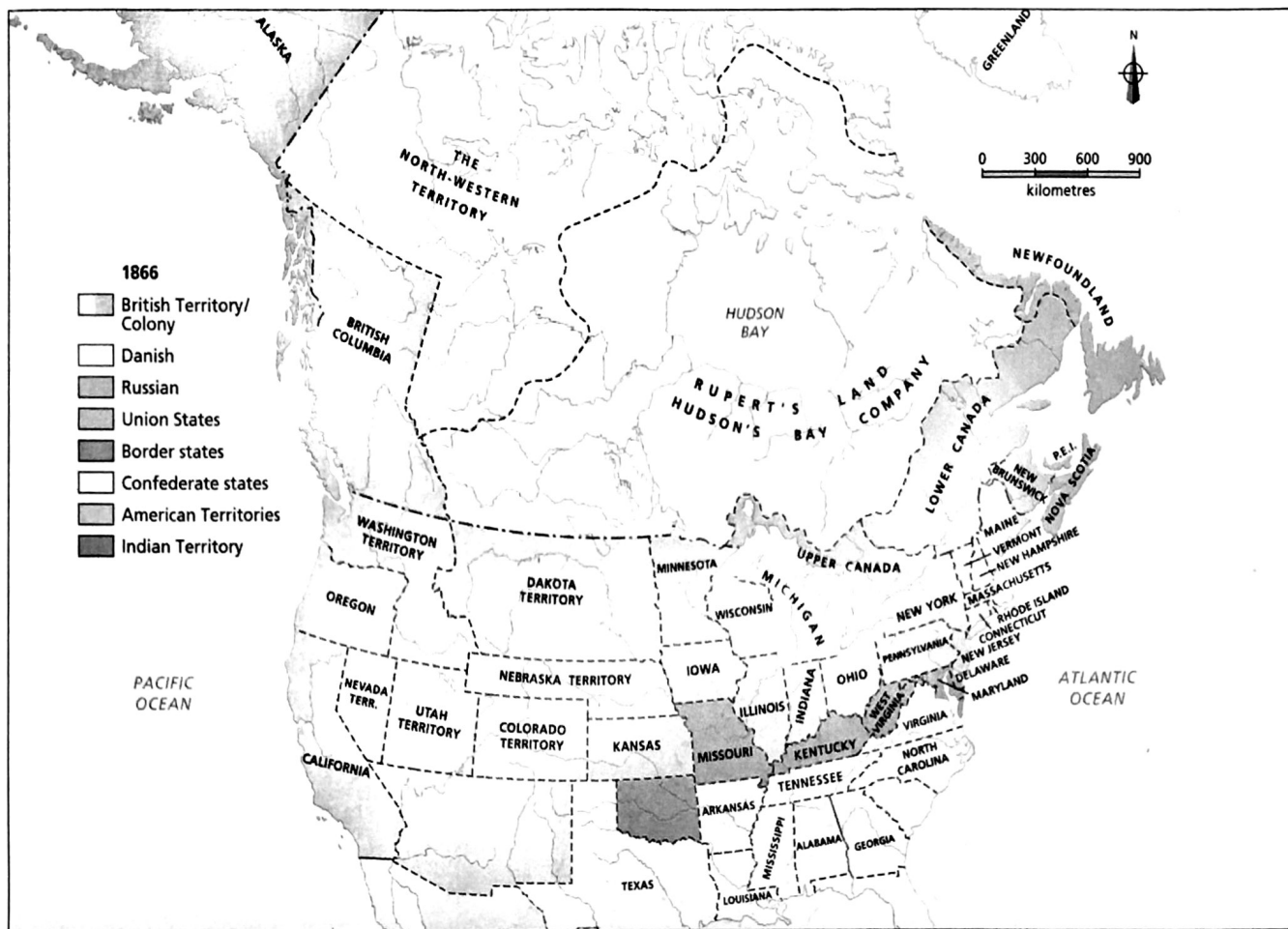
**American Civil War:** a war between the southern and northern American states over states' rights. The divisive issue was slavery.

There were many reasons why uniting the British North American colonies into one country would benefit everyone. As a nation, Canada would enjoy economic stability—economic union could even bring back prosperity. Tariffs and trade barriers which then existed between the colonies could be abolished, and the colonies could begin trading with each other.

A strong central government could also build an intercontinental railway to link the colonies for the purposes of trade and defence. A railway on this scale was something separate colonies could never finance on their own. Linking the central colonies to the Maritimes would mean that goods travelling to Europe in winter could go to a Canadian ice-free port—Halifax—instead of Portland, Maine. Eventually, a railway could extend to the Northwest as far as the Pacific. Although the smaller railways of the Victorian era had been greeted with much enthusiasm, they had never made much money,

and often teetered on the verge of bankruptcy.

In the West, Confederation would help to ensure that the western region of British North America—British Columbia and Rupert's Land—was not **annexed** by the United States. Canadians were very suspicious of US intentions. Some American politicians made speeches about Manifest Destiny, the idea that the destiny of the United States was to include all of British North America. Americans had invaded Canada during the War of Independence and the War of 1812. The scattered British colonies had weak defences against the Americans, but as a united and independent nation, that could change—and the United States would be far less likely to invade an independent nation. The **American Civil War**, which began in 1861, heightened the US threat. When the war ended in 1865, the army of the victorious North had more soldiers than the combined population of the British colonies. It could easily strike across



**Figure 2-23** Canada and the US immediately following the Civil War

the borders. Moreover, Britain had angered the northern states by supporting the South during the war. Many wondered if the North would retaliate by invading Canada.

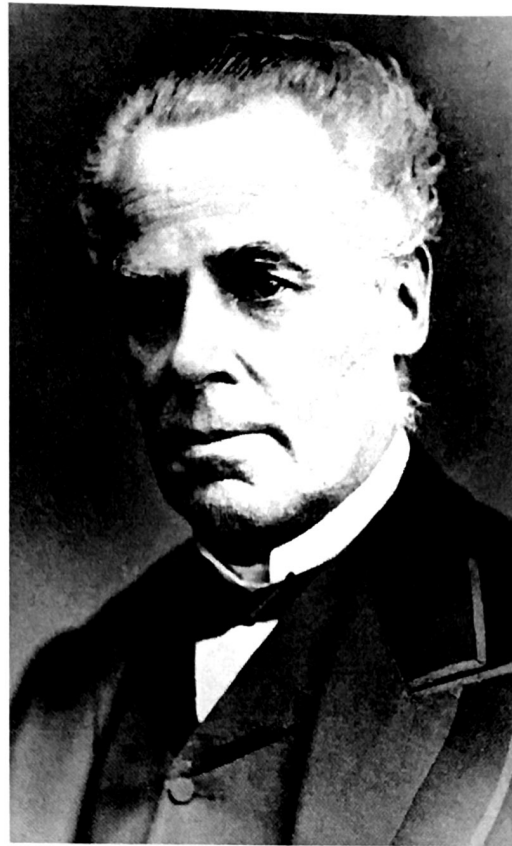
Confederation could also improve the way the colonies were governed. The government of the province of Canada was markedly inefficient. The Act of Union had given Canada East and Canada West an ineffective system saddled with numerous elections and plenty of idle time. In addition, there was little structure. Modern political parties maintain internal organization and discipline so that everyone acts together and speaks with one voice. A modern party also has a **whip** to ensure that members vote together on bills. While this reduces the independence of members, it makes the party stronger and more effi-

cient. By contrast, the government of the Canadas was filled with “loose fish,” or independent members of the Legislative Assembly. These members could topple a government by voting against one of its bills. Since the colony was governed by alliances of political groups, rather than by single parties, the defection of independent members often created a political crisis.

In a way, the government of early Canada operated like the modern governments of Italy and Israel. In these countries, governments are formed by coalitions of political parties because the party that wins an election seldom has enough seats to rule on its own. Its leader must ask other parties to help form the government, and to compromise. If even a minor party leaves such a coalition, the government can fall.

**whip:** the person responsible for ensuring discipline and solidarity within a political party

**Figure 2-24** George-Étienne Cartier was a wealthy businessman who had invested in and promoted railways. As a young man, Cartier had fought with the rebels in the Rebellion of 1837, and had spent time in exile. He became leader of the *parti bleu*, and was a joint premier of Canada with John A. Macdonald. Cartier was one of the driving forces behind Confederation. He died in 1873.



**Clear Grits:** so-called because a brave person has "grit"

Politicians in the Canadas had to build coalitions to keep power, and they were often frustrated by the problems this created. For example, members from French and English provinces rarely agreed on an issue, since what was good for French Canada invariably hurt English Canada, and vice versa. In Canada East, the small, radical *parti rouge*, led by Louis-Joseph Papineau, attracted French-speaking farmers and business people opposed to English commercial interests. They also favoured an American-style government, and hated the Act of Union.

George-Étienne Cartier led the most powerful political group in Canada East. The *parti bleu* focused on the economic development of Canada East, and on the protection of French-Canadian rights. Because the *parti bleu* defended traditional French cultural values, and had a working relationship with the Catholic Church, it had wide support in the province, and in govern-

ment. The *parti bleu* was also prepared to work with politicians in Canada West to achieve its goals, as long as English Canada did not threaten French interests.

In Canada West, the more radical party was known as the **Clear Grits**. Led by George Brown, the publisher of the *Toronto Globe* newspaper, the Clear Grits defended English-Canadian interests and attacked corruption in government. Brown disliked both Catholics and the French, and he made enemies easily, but he and his party tried to make the province more democratic. For example, Brown supported the idea of representation by population, which meant that the number of members an area could send to the legislature would be determined by the number of people in the riding. Representation by population was violently opposed in Canada East, where there were now fewer French-speaking people than in Canada West. The middle ground in Canada West belonged to the Tories, led by John A. Macdonald. Macdonald's views were less democratic than those of Brown, but he was a more astute politician. Macdonald made a deal with the *parti bleu* that enabled the combined party—the Liberal-Conservatives—to form a government. In a backhanded compliment to Macdonald, a reporter once said of Brown:

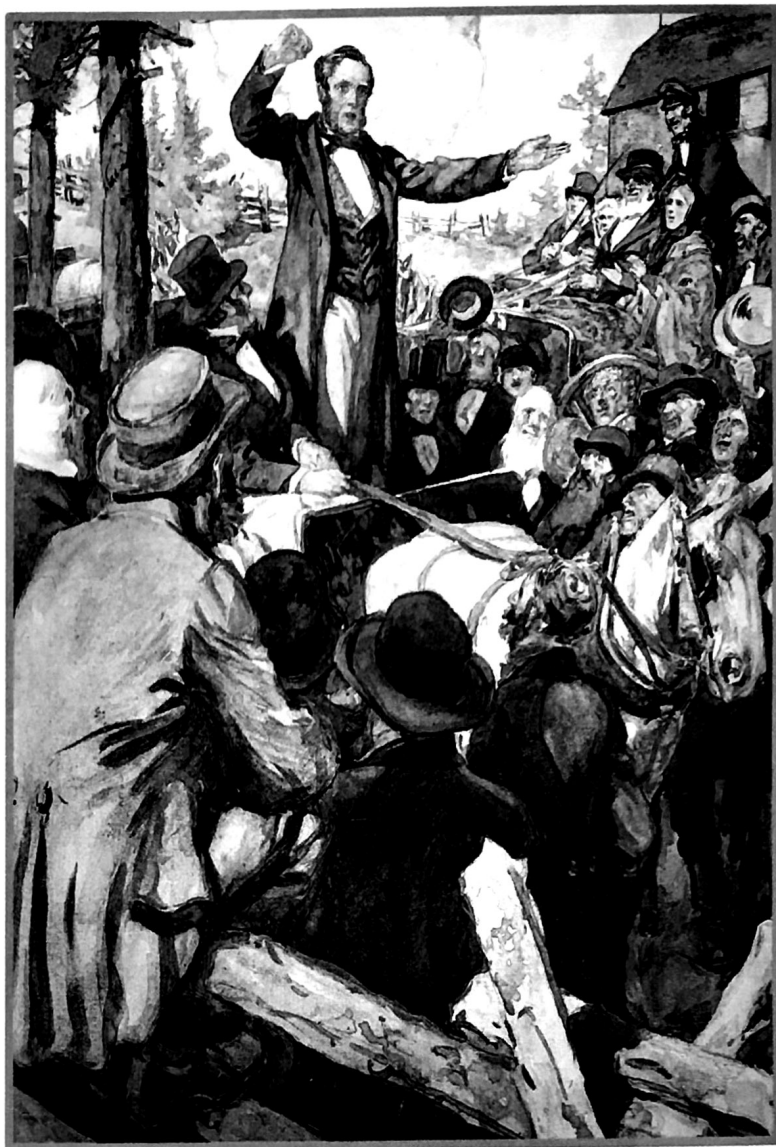


Now that he is a member of parliament, we venture to remark ... What is he going to do? That is the question. Will he become finance minister in the present government? Will he give members of this administration a violent personal opposition? Will he join John Hillyard Cameron to

secure Rep-by-pop? Will he coalesce with John A. Macdonald? These are things everybody wants to know and which, in due time, will be known, but to gratify natural curiosity, we give the prophetic answer: No!

Another barrier to good government was the so-called “double majority.” In order for a bill to pass in the Legislative Assembly, there had to be a majority vote in both the Canada East and Canada West sections of the assembly, rather than just a simple majority. Imagine how hard this would be—rather like passing identical laws in Quebec and British Columbia. Usually one section or the other was not really affected by the laws which were being passed. French or English voted against, or worked against, important bills that the other side wanted passed, particularly when the bills concerned schools, religion, or language.

The problems arising from French-English and Catholic-Protestant divisions were insurmountable for the Union government. Moreover, without having their own provincial governments to legislate matters of provincial interest, both groups were forced to conduct themselves as a single government.



**Figure 2-25** George Brown was an imposing figure. He had popular support all over Canada West and owned a newspaper with which to spread his views. It was well known that Brown hated John A. Macdonald, and that the two were political and personal enemies. Like many people, Brown was contradictory. He was prejudiced against Catholics and French-Canadians, but he was also an abolitionist and fought against slavery. After Confederation, Brown and Macdonald reportedly never spoke to each other again.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Explain the “double majority” principle of government. How did it affect good government?
2. Chart the major political parties in Canada East and Canada West, with two or three characteristics for each.
3. In what ways did politicians expect Confederation to solve economic problems in the colonies?
4. Explain the concept of Manifest Destiny. Why was the United States such a threat to British North America?
5. Discuss the American Civil War as a factor in Confederation.

# CONFEDERATION ACHIEVED

**homogeneous:** similar to everyone else

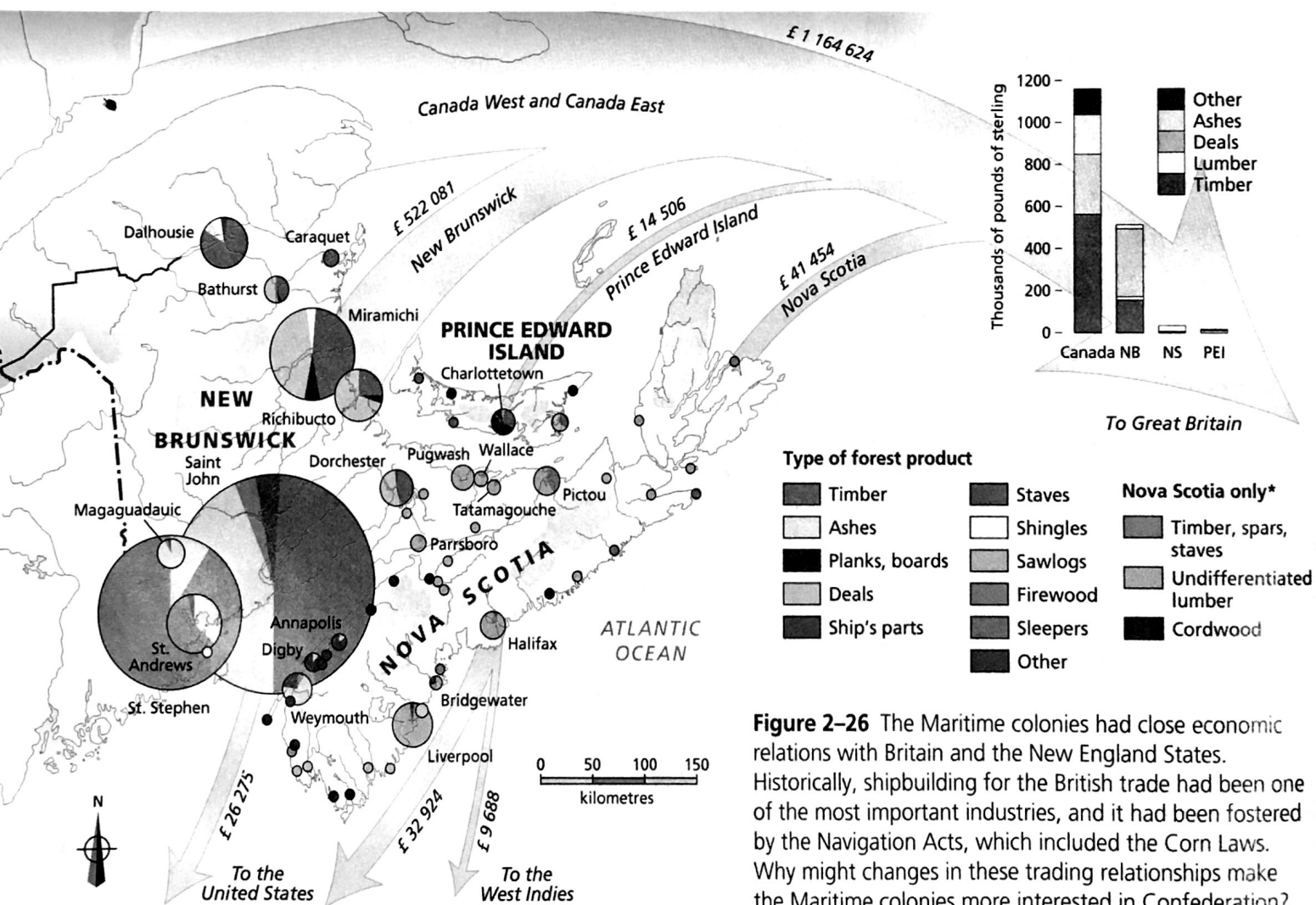
**franchise:** a special privilege granted to a group

**sovereignty:** the right to self-determination

It may have been portrayed as a lofty political goal, but Canadian Confederation was actually more “deal” than “ideal,” and the colonies would join only if they received favourable terms. With the exception of Canada East and Canada West, the colonies were completely separate before 1867. This meant that the citizens of each colony were British subjects, and that the British colonial office was responsible for their well-being and defence. The colonies were often on friendly terms, economically and socially, but they had separate legislatures.

When Confederation was proposed, the various colonies wanted to know how the deal would benefit them. Although MacDonald favoured a strong national government and limited powers for provincial governments, very few colonial politicians agreed with this idea. People who lived outside of central Canada were not eager to be ruled by a government in central Canada—a sentiment that enjoys some popularity today.

The Maritime provinces—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland—regarded themselves as mature, independent colonies. Though they



**Figure 2-26** The Maritime colonies had close economic relations with Britain and the New England States. Historically, shipbuilding for the British trade had been one of the most important industries, and it had been fostered by the Navigation Acts, which included the Corn Laws. Why might changes in these trading relationships make the Maritime colonies more interested in Confederation?

# Confederation: For and Against

Confederation stirred emotions for many reasons, perhaps because it raised questions about identity—in particular, the question of a Canadian identity. In the following excerpts from speeches by John A. Macdonald and Joseph Howe, notice how identity is cleverly linked to other issues. What are some of these issues? Joseph Howe, a long-time Nova Scotia politician who had guided the colony to responsible government, strongly opposed Confederation.



Let us see what the Canadians desire to do. They are not, as we have shown, a very harmonious or **homogeneous** community. Two-fifths of the population are French and three-fifths English. They are therefore perplexed with an internal antagonism which ... must ever be a source of weakness. They are shut in by frost from the outer world for five months of the year. They are at the mercy of a powerful neighbour whose population already outnumbers them by more than eight to one ... on the opposite side of a natural defenceless frontier. Surely such conditions as these ought to repress inordinate ambition or lust of territory on the part of the public men of Canada.

[I]t is evident that a more uncompromising nucleus of a new nation can hardly be found on the face of the Earth, and that any organized communities, having a reasonable chance to do anything better, would be politically insane to give up their distinct formations and subject themselves to the domination of Canada.

... When **franchises** were conferred upon the people of the Maritime Provinces, and legislatures given to them, these could only be yielded up by voluntary consent, or be forfeited by misconduct. When self-government was conceded, it could never afterwards be withdrawn.

—Joseph Howe



For twenty long years I have been dragging myself through the dreary waste of Colonial politics. I thought there was no end, nothing worthy of ambition; but now I see something which is well worthy of all I have suffered in the cause of my little country ...

The dangers that have risen from this system we will avoid if we can agree upon forming a strong central government—a great central legislature—a constitution for a union which will have all the rights of **sovereignty** except those that are given to the local governments. Then we shall have taken a great step in advance of the American Republic. If we can only obtain that object—a vigorous general government—we shall not be New Brunswickers, nor Nova Scotians, nor Canadians, but British Americans ...

In the case of a union, this railway must be a national work, and Canada will cheerfully contribute to the utmost extent in order to make that important link, without which no political connection can be complete. What will be the consequence to the city [Halifax], prosperous as it is, from that communication? Montreal is at this moment competing with New York for the trade of the great West. Build the road and Halifax will soon become one of the great emporiums of the world. All the great resources of the West will come over the immense railways of Canada to the bosom of your harbour.

—John A. Macdonald

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. In an organizer, list Joseph Howe's points against Confederation in one column and Macdonald's points in favour of Confederation in another.
2. How do Macdonald and Howe represent the presence of the United States? In a paragraph, describe who, in your opinion, used the American factor most effectively.
3. What does Macdonald say citizens of his proposed Confederation would call themselves? Would this be a selling point for French-Canadians? Explain your answer.

**Figure 2-27** Canada at Confederation



had problems, a distinctive Atlantic outlook gave these colonies a sense of shared identity. They also had responsible government and independent trading relationships with Britain and the United States. Newfoundland, for example, had almost no trade with Canada, so there was little or no economic benefit to be had from union. Building a railway to link the colonies, a major argument for union, held no promise for Newfoundland or Prince Edward Island. But there were threats on the horizon. The United States planned to end its Reciprocity Treaty, which had allowed goods to pass into the US duty-free, in 1866. Britain had already repealed the Corn Laws, which had put a damper on trans-Atlantic trade. Moreover, the development of steam and steel technology seriously threatened the Maritime shipbuilding industry. Macdonald and his supporters had to show how Confederation would resolve some of these concerns. Even then, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland could not be convinced.

## The Conferences

Most of the colonies of British North America were facing difficult times by the mid-1860s. The northern US states, who were winning the American Civil War, were not on good terms with Britain. In the Maritimes, the loss of favourable terms in British markets for Canadian products (see pages 73 and 74) had damaged the economy. Canada East and Canada West were nearly bankrupt as a result of their depressed economies, and their union government barely worked at all. Between 1849 and 1864, twelve different governments had been in power. Many leaders saw Confederation as the only solution to these crises. Even George Brown, to the astonishment of friends and allies, agreed to work with Macdonald and Cartier in what has been called the “Great Coalition”—first to save the government of Canada, then to try to unite the colonies.

The next step on the road to



Confederation was a series of meetings known as the “conferences.” At these meetings, representatives from all the colonies hammered out details of a new union. The meetings began in 1864 in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, where the Maritime colonies had planned to discuss a Maritime union. Accompanied by the land speculator and railway builder, Alexander Tilloch Galt, the three members of the Great Coalition asked to join the discussion to present their plans for Confederation. They were so convincing that Samuel Tilley and Charles Tupper,

from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, respectively, and Edward Whelan, from Prince Edward Island, agreed to work out the details with the Canadian delegates at another conference at Quebec.

Newfoundland also came to the Quebec Conference, but its voters were not enthusiastic about Confederation.

The delegates to the Quebec Conference, held in the fall of 1864, planned the birth of a new nation, a difficult, time-consuming task. After much discussion, and much disagreement, they decided that provincial governments should retain

**Potato Famine:** the failure of the potato crop in Ireland in 1840s, which caused widespread starvation and caused many people to emigrate

## The Fenian Raids

When the American Civil War ended in 1865, an Irish society known as the “Fenians” planned to harm Britain by striking at Canada. Britain had occupied Ireland for centuries, but most Irish deeply resented their British rulers. Many of the Irish who emigrated to the United States carried their anger with them, particularly since it seemed that the **Potato Famine** had been caused by Britain.

Many Fenians had been soldiers in the army of the northern states—and they were eager to invade the British colonies. In May 1866, the Fenians captured Fort Erie but turned back to Buffalo when back-up troops failed to arrive. That same year, they crossed into Quebec, remaining there for two days, and also launched an

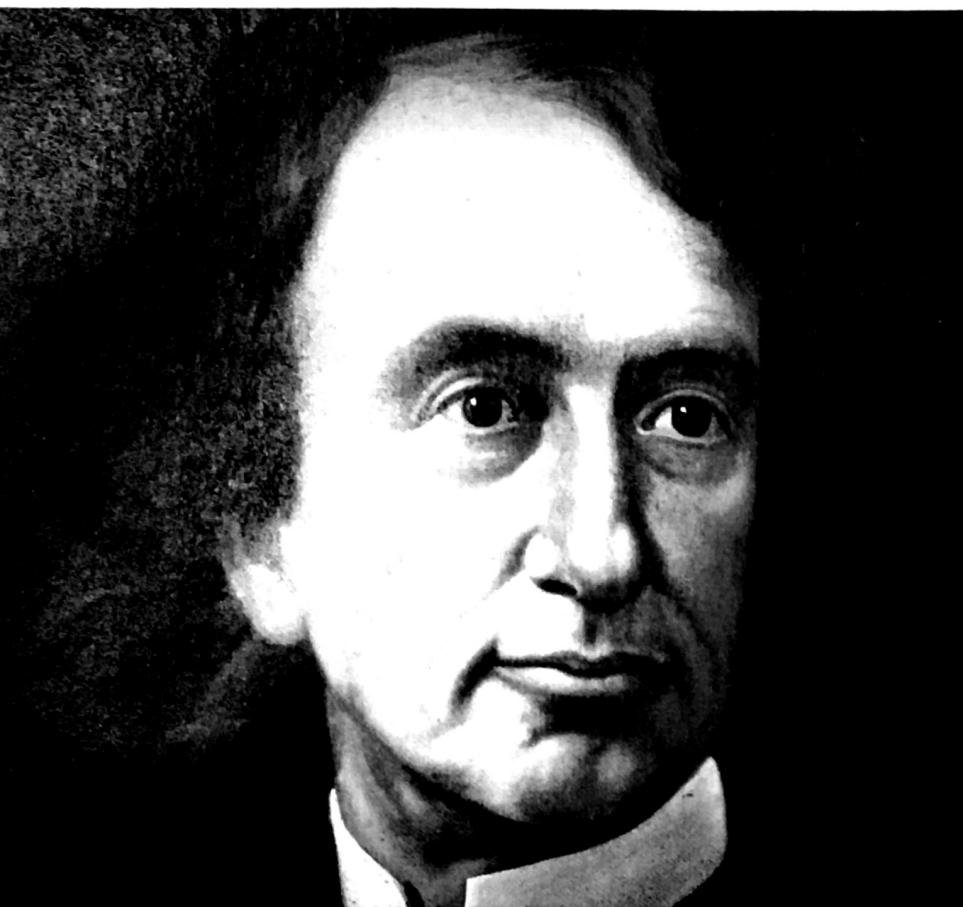


**Figure 2-28** This modern wall mural depicts the Irish Potato Famine of the nineteenth century.

unsuccessful raid against the New Brunswick border.

The Fenian attacks convinced many people, including Maritimers, that the US threat to Canada was real. John A.

Macdonald, acutely aware of the significance of this turn of events, was able to turn the raids to his political advantage in developing support for his dream of Confederation.



**Figure 2–29** John A. Macdonald, our first prime minister, was born in Scotland, like many other early Canadians. His politics were conservative, and he was part of the militia unit that fought against the rebels at Montgomery's Tavern. As a lawyer, however, he defended the rebels in court. He also had ties to the Family Compact. As a leader of the Conservative, or Tory, party, he built an alliance with George-Étienne Cartier of Canada East. MacDonal'd's strengths included his energy, vision, and public-speaking skills.

many powers. This made the nation a federation. The country would not have the strong national government that Macdonald had envisioned, but he had to compromise, just like the other delegates. In the end, the Quebec Conference produced seventy-two resolutions—statements on government—and a blueprint for Confederation.

It was not enough for the delegates to meet and decide the fate of Canada amongst themselves. Each of the colonies had responsible government, and the proposal had to be debated and approved by each legislature. Opposition greeted almost every point—whether the issue was railway-building or the powers of Ottawa, the proposed new capital. Powerful speakers such as A. A. Dorion, of Quebec, and Joseph Howe, of Nova Scotia, spoke against Confederation. One of the most

inspiring speakers for union, Thomas D'Arcy McGee was eventually assassinated, probably by a Fenian (see *The Fenian Raids*, on page 83).

Although all the delegates to the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences were men, they were accompanied by their families. Unofficial activities included banquets and parties (a painting of a Charlottetown Conference ball is shown on page 54). Only recently have historians begun to write about the influence of the women present at these events who were, in a typically Victorian arrangement, relegated to the background. Certainly they played a role. As one historian has put it, they were a force that helped to build a "sense of communal solidarity" among participants who were divided by language, region, and political beliefs. Native peoples were absent from both conferences—an omission that can never happen again.

In the end, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Canada decided to join together as one nation, and to ask Britain for permission to do so. This event took place in London, England, in 1866, after which the British Parliament passed the British North America Act, creating the Dominion of Canada.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Build three-point arguments both for and against Confederation. For example, use the point-of-view of a citizen of the colonies and of a Native person. Consider political, economic, and social costs and benefits.
2. In a brief report, describe how technological changes and trade developments with the US and Britain affected the colonies' economic prospects. Describe how these set the stage for the Confederation Conferences.
3. Did Macdonald succeed in getting the kind of Confederation he had hoped for? Explain your answer.
4. In what ways did the Conferences reflect Victorian social values and beliefs? In your answer, consider the roles that women and Native people were allowed to play in the negotiations.

# THE BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT: CANADA'S CONSTITUTION

Canada became a country because the parliament of Britain passed an act, the British North America Act, making it a country. This was in sharp contrast to the United States, which had declared itself a nation, fought a revolution, defeated the British, and formulated its own rules. Because the BNA Act was based on the Quebec Resolutions, most of it was written by Canadians, in Canada, and it became the **constitution** of the new Dominion. However, the BNA Act recognized the supreme authority of the monarch in these sections:



3. It shall be lawful for the Queen, by and with the Advice of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, to declare by Proclamation that, on a Day herein appointed—the Provinces of Canada, Nova

Scotia, and New Brunswick shall form and be One Dominion under the Name of Canada

4. Canada shall be divided into Four Provinces named Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.

Because Canada emerged as the result of negotiations between equal partners, the BNA Act is full of compromise. By reading it carefully, you can almost imagine delegates sitting around the table until dawn, thrashing out details of issues large and small—ferry services, for example. Try to see beyond the legal language as you read the following sections of the BNA Act. Remember that Canada has a federal, or national, government—the Parliament of Canada—and a government in each of the provinces—the provincial legislatures.

**constitution:** the laws that set forth the powers and responsibilities of the government and guarantee the rights of the people



## The Powers of the National Government

Authority of the Parliament of Canada extends to all Matters coming within the Classes of Subjects next hereinafter enumerated: that is to say,

- 1 a. The Public Debt and Property.
2. The Regulation of Trade and Commerce.
- 2a. Unemployment insurance.
3. The raising of Money by any Mode or System of Taxation.
4. The borrowing of Money on the Public Credit.
5. Postal Service.
6. The Census and Statistics.
7. Militia, Military and Naval Service, and Defence.
8. The fixing of and providing for the Salaries and Allowances of Civil and other Officers of the Government of Canada.
9. Beacons, Buoys, Lighthouses, and Sable Island.
10. Navigation and Shipping.
11. Quarantine and the Establishment and Maintenance of Marine Hospitals.
12. Sea Coast and Inland Fisheries.
13. Ferries between a Province and any British or Foreign Country or between Two Provinces.
14. Currency and Coinage.
15. Banking, Incorporation of Banks, and the Issue of Paper Money.
16. Savings Banks.
17. Weights and Measures.
18. Bills of Exchange and Promissory Notes.
19. Interest.
20. Legal Tender.
21. Bankruptcy and Insolvency.
22. Patents of Invention and Discovery.
23. Copyrights.
24. Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians.
25. Naturalization and Aliens.
26. Marriage and Divorce.
27. The Criminal Law, except the Constitution of Courts of Criminal Jurisdiction, but including the Procedure in Criminal Matters.
28. The Establishment, Maintenance, and Management of Penitentiaries.
29. Such Classes of Subjects as are expressly excepted in the Enumeration of the Classes of Subjects by this Act assigned exclusively to the Legislatures of the Provinces.

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And any Matter coming within any of the Classes of Subjects enumerated in this Section shall not be deemed to come within the Class of Matters of a local or private Nature comprised in the Enumeration of the Classes of Subjects by this Act assigned exclusively to the Legislatures of the Provinces.