Chapter 9. Economic Transformation and Continuity, 1818-1860s
9.1 Introduction

The Napoleonic Wars ended French hegemony in Europe and provided Britain with newfound elbow room in an evolving world economy. British North America, too, could afford to relax a little: American expansionists along the eastern seaboard turned their hungry eyes from the North to the West. The wars of the early 19th century were fought on battlefields and at sea, but they were also in the new workplaces that would come to be known as “industrial manufactories.” The half century that followed 1818 would see the spread of new ideas and practices, some of them associated with empire, others with the scientific and technological enlightenment that would lead into economic and industrial revolution.

While there were many significant changes in the economies of British North America, continuity still existed. Agriculture was a leading force in the economy, as was the fishery. These were joined by other staple production activities that gave shape to the colonies and their societies just as the fur trade informed much of life in New France.

What most distinctly marks the period from 1818 to 1860 is British North America’s changing relationship with the world marketplace. The loss of preferential tariffs in Britain changed the economic stakes, but it also changed the psychology of trade. If the empire wasn’t the raison d’être for the colonial economies, what was? Even if industrialization and social change took place slowly in British North America, that wasn’t the case in Britain. There, British North Americans could see from a distance a future comprising densely populated cities whose purpose was not commerce but production of goods. They could see, too, changes in infrastructure and sources of energy: wood and wind would give way to coal and steam by Confederation. The colonial economies of 1818 would either evolve significantly by 1860 or they would be on the precipice of enormous change. Either way, in both the United Kingdom and the United States, British North Americans had examples to which they could turn. These models were both physical and intellectual: this was an era of changing economies and changing minds.

Learning Objectives

- Describe the broad economic trends of the era.
- Account for important changes in the British North American economy.
- Demonstrate a rudimentary understanding of how economic structures pertain to social and political change.
- Correlate changing economic times with emergent economic policies.
- Identify the economic ideologies and ideas of the era and how they informed debate and direction in the economy of British North America.
9.2 The Dismal Science

The late 18th century was a period of unprecedented intellectual excitement. Revolutions associated with political power structures were driven by new ideas that were themselves revolutionary. Political ideas like democracy and those set out in Thomas Paine's Rights of Man proposed to overturn the fundamental relationships between social classes and centuries-old notions of both deference and noblesse oblige. At the same time, new fields of study were emerging that would challenge the power of older institutions. Geology threatened the Christian belief in a world that was a mere 4,000 years old; three centuries of refining navigational tools had produced the equipment necessary to look into space and into individual cells. The world was about to become much older, much newer, much larger, and much smaller at the same time.

Economics, as well, was about to emerge as an arena of serious study and debate as early practitioners searched for overarching principles and values that would help them formulate the right questions before rushing off in search of the right answers. Two influential British figures in this respect deserve mention: Thomas Malthus and Adam Smith.

Malthus and the Agricultural Revolution

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) was a smalltown vicar concerned with the relationship between famine and population growth. In 1798 he published An Essay on the Principle of Population, in which he argued that population growth would always be reined in by positive restraints that raise the death rate and negative checks that lower the birth
rate. It is thanks to Malthus that economics acquired the title “the dismal science,” because he could see no morally defensible way around a cycle of increased food production followed by population booms and then by famine and collapse. (As a vicar, he could not entertain the notion of birth control, although he did advocate for personal sexual restraint.)

Malthus was proved wrong, at least for two centuries. Food production could increase more rapidly than he anticipated and fertility rates would, simultaneously and against all predictions, drop significantly in the industrializing world. But Malthus provides an important window into how people in the late 18th and early 19th centuries understood the world around them. Famines had wracked Europe for centuries and Malthus’s generation bore witness to them. And the last major famine in the British Isles — the Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s — was yet to come. People who thought about economies understood shortages not as mere inconveniences that might run the price up a bit, but as terrible events they had seen in their lifetimes, the kind of thing that led to violence, starvation, and mass die-offs. Malthus posited a scientific system for understanding why this was so, why prosperity and growth seemed always to be followed by starvation, war, and mortality.

There was something else that Malthus observed without necessarily realizing it. When he wrote about increases in agricultural output he did so in the context of the agricultural revolution. Food productivity had been climbing steadily in Europe and North America since about 1700. More effective farming techniques and different landhold patterns lay behind these changes, as did improved infrastructure and thus better communication between markets and farmers. Whether he knew it or not, the rate of agricultural increase that he described as a fact was, in reality, part of his own historical context. Earlier generations simply could not have imagined the rate of food production growth that lay at the heart of Malthus’s model.

Malthus and many of his contemporaries were keenly aware of one other truth: Britain’s population was surging. It had nearly doubled in the 18th century; more than 4 million people had been added. It was this growth that would spur enormous economic changes in Britain and provide the fuel for an explosion of immigration to British North America and other colonies.

*An Economic Revolution*

In short, ideas about the economy were evolving at a time when the economy itself was transforming. In our own era, we are accustomed to the idea of change, not least because we can look back on a record of nearly 300 years of significant change. But in the late 18th century change was still rather frightening. Centuries of feudal relations and food
production were only just beginning to face challenges. Absolutism was, until the 1780s, impregnable across Europe. Colonies followed the direction of empires and both France and Britain were very conservative in this respect. The vast majority of humans lived on the land. With the exception of small numbers of emigrants to the colonies, farming people stayed put; people mostly lived, married, and died in the village of their birth. It was rare for Europeans to travel far unless they were wealthy or in an army.

North America changed all of that. Revolution in the British colonies was both stimulated by and responsible for emergent ideas about government and citizenship. What followed in France was more than an echo in that it rocked to its foundations the very idea of absolutist government and an aristocracy. Additionally, the Americas were the scene of widespread experimentation with non-feudal landholding systems that produced dramatically higher surpluses. The modest family farm of New England and Upper Canada would be a conceptual force strong enough to topple whole regimes in Europe. The mass production possible in slave colonies, moreover, created a need for bigger and better freight shipping, warehousing, and processing. In the 1770s and 1790s important technological changes in the processing of raw cotton and the weaving of cotton cloth transformed overnight the plantations of the American South, causing an explosion in technology that would lead ultimately to wholesale industrialization around the North Atlantic.

The principal beneficiaries of all this activity were the advocates of mercantilism. The merchants and shipowners of Europe’s westward-facing ports had enjoyed 200 years of accumulating wealth in trade between North America and the empire. Their money — their capital — was now substantial, and they were beginning to invest in projects that had nothing to do with fishing boats or beaver pelts. What British historian Eric Hobsbawm called “the age of revolution” that began in the second half of the 18th century would, thus, have many and widespread ramifications, not the least of which were economic.¹

![Figure 9.3 Adam Smith, author of The Wealth of Nations and a severe critic of mercantilism.](image)

Classical Liberal Economics

Adam Smith (1723-1790) had a thing or two to say on these topics. His 1776 book, generally known by the shortened title The Wealth of Nations, argued for the free movement of investment. Removing constraints and allowing capital to be invested where profits are likely to be greatest would produce economic growth for the greater good of the nation, he argued. This was a revolutionary proposition in a world governed by tariffs and Navigation Acts; it was revolutionary, too, in that it called for the betterment of “the nation” rather than the Crown. To much of the European and even the North American establishment, wealth rightly belonged to those of good birth and royal favour. Handing power over the economy to mere merchants and capitalists was akin to handing them a loaded gun. Nevertheless, new schools of economic thought advocating a liberal approach were on the rise and they challenged efforts to conserve the old order of economic power.

The wars in Europe arising from the French Revolution and then the Napoleonic era postponed the peacetime necessary to test some of the theories of Malthus and Smith, but it was during this 30-year period of instability that many of the key economic changes took root. As is often the case, the wars presented opportunities to build capacity for production because the state reliably demanded large quantities of goods for its troops. Wool production increased in Europe; cotton production increased in the American South; timber, shipping, and fisheries production increased dramatically in British North America. Then, in 1818, it all collapsed.

The 19th century opened, then, with a flurry of new ideas. The United States was a democracy, a republic, and a nation state. There was no crown to enrich or serve, no suggestion that the president was infallible due to the kind of divine right enjoyed by Louis XIV in France. Britain might be known as the United Kingdom, but the power of its kings had never been more compromised than it was under George III. France, of course, had become a republic and would spend the next hundred years reinventing itself as a secular democracy and, again, a nation state. What then was the purpose of the economy in a colony? How might it grow and to what end?

Key Points

- The 19th century arrived on the heels of challenging new ideas about the nature of the economy, the relationship between the individual and the state, and how best to meet the needs of growing populations.
- Merchants in Europe and North America were in a position to provide investment capital that could finance independent and state projects without the involvement of the Crown.
- There was growing interest in eliminating tariffs so that British producers could compete more aggressively in global markets.

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An Essay on the Principle of Population by Lupo is in the public domain.

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AdamSmith by Protonk is in the public domain.
9.3 British North America between the Wars

The war in Europe and the War of 1812 were over in 1815. British North America would not face another external threat to its survival until the American Civil War in the 1860s. It is worth remembering that a generation had been raised in Europe in the shadow of the French Revolution and war, followed by Napoleon’s expansionism. And a generation of British North Americans had found jobs building ships, stitching sails, winding ropes, casting cannons, and supplying food to huge armies and fleets abroad. Suddenly that came to an end. As the armies of Europe demobilized, the economies of the North Atlantic adjusted to peacetime. For the most part, it was a very uncomfortable transition.

What most of British North America had in common was an ample supply of available land. Not all of it was of the same quality. Newfoundland’s agricultural potential was very limited and so it never experienced that “farming frontier” settlement boom found in other colonies. Nova Scotia, too, was limited by thin soil outside of the valleys along the Bay of Fundy. Population poured into Lower Canada’s Eastern Townships but the limits of that territory were reached in a few decades. The big winner was Upper Canada, whose population grew almost entirely on the strength of new farm settlement, rising from 14,000 in 1791 to 95,000 at the end of the War of 1812. By 1824 it had grown again by 50%, and by 1840 there were more than 430,000 people in the colony. Immigration dominated the engines of population growth in the colony and the few thousand Loyalists who founded the colony were quickly and severely outnumbered.

Until the War of 1812, however, the ability of British North American farmers to make much economic headway was limited by landscape. Clearing heavily treed land was difficult work. One estimate reckons that a single farmer (perhaps making use of some extended family labour) could clear 1.5 to 3 acres a year and that a minimum of 3 acres was needed to achieve subsistence. This produced a colony of subsistence farming right down to the end of the war, by which time the colony began to round a corner.

The Economic Impact of 1812

Several aspects of the economy changed with the War of 1812. First, the war was itself a dissuasive force when it came to continued American immigration into British North America. The Late Loyalists were American migrants who reached the limits of upstate New York and simply crossed into the Niagara Peninsula. After 1812 that traffic slowed significantly. The fall of Tecumseh’s forces opened up lands in the Ohio and farther west for Americans and, of course, the border now meant more than it did before the war. The colonial administration of Upper Canada, feeling insecure and vengeful, cut off land grants to Americans, effectively freezing economic growth in the Niagara for a generation. Immigration sources would have to change. Britain offered up new possibilities: in this new post-war age, however, they would arrive by the boatload and not as individual migrants or families. The population boom of the 18th century—which had seemed at the time like a huge increase in national wealth and power, insofar as it provided an enormous number of troops to fight against France—was now a liability. The British government decided to direct the outflow of population to reduce unemployment and suffering at home and to increase the economic capacity of its colonies abroad. For a decade waves of state-sponsored emigrants departed Britain and wound up in British North America.

Secondly, the British economy was badly beaten up by the conflict in Europe and the North American theatre of combat. Certainly there had been growth sponsored by the war itself and there was already evidence of the coming

industrial revolution. But, beginning in 1815, a recession settled in. Unemployment spread throughout the British Isles and demand for British North American exports declined sharply. Recovery was in the near future, but the post-war crash was a foretaste of the kind of economic volatility that the new industrial economy had in store for the whole Atlantic rim.

**Key Points**

- The end of the Napoleonic Wars witnessed a significant downturn in the North Atlantic economy.
- British North America’s agricultural sector was marked by subsistence farming through the War of 1812 and thereafter grew only slowly.
- British North America’s recovery would depend on Britain’s recovery.
9.4 The Lower Canadian Economy

As the oldest settlement colony in British North America, Lower Canada had certain advantages. The infrastructure of banks, warehouses, shipping capacity, merchant houses, schools and hospitals, and the military were all much more evolved than in any of the other colonies. Against that, much of the best arable land was spoken for by 1818, some farmland was in need of rest and fertilizing, and the demographic model of large, often extended farm families meant that greater resources had to be dedicated to subsistence than was the case with smaller families in the English Protestant colonies.

Although wheat remained an important share of Lower Canadian farm production throughout the first half of the 19th century, the colony never developed the same degree of dependence on grain as did Upper Canada. Nor did it achieve the same surpluses for export. By the 1830s Lower Canada was a net importer of wheat (overwhelmingly from Upper Canada). This reflects three things: a move to mixed farming geared to feeding Lower Canada first, a rising population that effectively ate up the surplus, and soil exhaustion. It has to be said, too, that Lower Canada’s farm belt was less well suited to wheat than was Upper Canada’s.

Growth in the colony’s economy was stimulated by the trade in timber. The Napoleonic Wars, as we have seen elsewhere, stimulated growth in logging camps and the squaring of timbers. This trend continued into the 1820s and 1830s. The tributaries of the St. Lawrence — including the Ottawa River Valley — hummed with activity as logging camps spread along the fringe of colonial settlement. It has been observed that farming in Lower Canada took place at the heart of the colony, the fur trade far beyond its limits, and logging right at its edge. Each of these sectors was organized differently: from the family farm, to the far-ranging fur trade in which voyageurs and coureurs de bois predominated, to the typically all-male logging camp in which wage labour was the norm. This last mode of production — wage labour with a large number of semi-skilled workers — would emerge as a characteristic of British North America as a whole in the 19th century.

Agriculture remained at the heart of the economy in Lower Canada throughout the 19th century because culturally and socially there were pressures to stay on the land. The clergy and the state alike were heavily invested in the administrative and confessional units bound up in the seigneuries, as were, of course, the seigneurs. The question then arises, why was the Lower Canadian farming sector seemingly stagnant?

One school of thought places the blame on cultural timidity, a mentalité among farmers that was unprogressive. This was the stand taken by Fernand Ouellet in a study published in 1980. Historical geographer Cole Harris took the same view, saying that by the 1820s, “French-Canadian agriculture, inflexible, uncompetitive, and largely subsistent, was incapable of supporting a growing population.” Harris has since changed his view and has joined the ranks of historians who argue that the pre-1850 farm economy in Lower Canada was, in fact, diversifying, that there is evidence of experimentation and growth. The issue arises as to whether stagnation (or growth, come to that) was related to the “peasant” condition of Canadien farmers. Their farms were much more organized around subsistence than commercial sales, so breaking out of that pattern (one that dates back to the 1660s) was a unique challenge. The rise of larger cities

2. Fernand Ouellet, Economic and Social History of Quebec: 1760-1850 (Ottawa: Gage, 1980).
5. See also Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century Quebec (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1989). I am grateful to Frank Abbott for his insights into this debate.
and concentrated lumber industries meant new growing markets for farm surpluses, and this was no doubt critical in the move to a commercialized agricultural sector. The archetypal rural cash crop in Lower Canada — maple syrup — would clearly benefit from an urban or working-class marketplace.

Regardless of the historical forces that abetted or obstructed change on the seigneuries, there remained the critical shortfall of the farming sector in Lower Canada: the colony was unable to support its rapidly increasing population. The principal results would be movement within the colony — mostly to the towns and cities but also to more marginal, newly opened seigneurial lands — and emigration. They found a welcome of sorts in New England. By the 1830s industrialization was underway in Massachusetts and demand for labour in the state’s textile mills was expanding more rapidly than could be met by the local labour supply. Rather than move to more marginal farm land in, say, the Saguenay Valley or off to a farming frontier in another part of British North America — that is, to an anglophone, Protestant colony — Canadiens found it easier to sojourn in New England where wage labour was good.

The limits of Lower Canadian agriculture and its ongoing vulnerabilities were issues in the political unrest of the 1830s. So too was the outmigration to New England and the movement off the land into the towns of Lower Canada. From a cultural perspective, economic worries and depopulation of the countryside looked like a threat to the survival of the Canadien fact. Together these social issues would produce political tensions that came to a head in 1837-38.

### Key Points

- The transition out of a subsistence-oriented farming economy into a commercialized agricultural sector was more complex in Lower Canada than elsewhere in British North America because of well-established practices and conditions.
- The growth of the timber economy provided an outlet for surplus labour and a market for farm products.
- Constraint in the farming sector was a catalyst for migration to cities and towns and to New England mills.
9.5 Building the Wheat Economy in Upper Canada

Upper Canada was the principal beneficiary of British emigration in these years — the destination of choice. One consequence was that the sale of lands (and the speculation in land values) was a major source of wealth. Immigrants with a bit of money could buy ready-cleared properties or better located farms facing water routes that positioned them to realize success either in farming or in land resale. Against this setting, the market for British North American grain had taken a tumble after the end of the war, especially in 1820, and prices fell badly. Up to about 1816 the rapid growth in the British population discussed earlier needed feeding and had been the source of wealth for anyone who could produce a surplus of wheat. After two generations of slow pioneering farm expansion, Upper Canadians were finally in a position to do well on that market. The post-war economic crisis, coupled with increased production of wheat in the colony (much of it coming from post-war immigrants) made for increased competition in a shrinking market and, therefore, economic uncertainty.

Colonial Grain in Imperial Markets

Things were made more complex by the Corn Laws, which were protective tariffs put in place as part of the mercantilist system that channelled colonial products to imperial ports and limited colonial imports from non-imperial sources. The Corn Laws were introduced in 1815 and, for five years, British North American grain enjoyed the same privileged status on the British market as homegrown grain. Then, in 1820, British grain output improved and Upper Canadian wheat growers found their product reduced to the same status as “foreign” grain. For the next seven years farmers in British North America struggled along until their privileged status was restored. A wheat boom followed that lasted into the 1850s.

These developments further encouraged people to move into farming. The number of larger farms increased, and the number of acres under plough nearly doubled from 1826 to 1832. Farmers, too, stretched their productive capacity to take advantage of their place in the British market, which could mean going into debt.

Related to the growing farm economy was the rise of a colonial merchant class in Upper Canada that specialized in the wheat business. Their profits were tied to bulk shipping, so these merchants were inclined to support infrastructure improvements that benefitted the movement of bulk freight. Mostly this meant storage facilities, docks, shipping capacity, and eventually canals. Farmers, however, were more likely to want improvements in local roads. Some of the merchants discovered, too, that there was money to be made in transshipping American wheat and flour. Once the foreign product was in British North America it was treated as though it were covered favourably by the Corn Laws. When it came to raising revenues for government, business merchants (through the dominant political oligarchy) invariably supported property taxes and taxes on land sales while farmers (who were most hard hit by taxes) preferred duties charged on trade (which was anathema to merchants). These developments resulted in tensions between farmers in Upper Canada and merchants.

The staple theory, already discussed in terms of how it applied to resources like fish and furs, can be used to understand the wheat economy as well. The lack of diversification in the Upper Canadian farming economy is a symptom of the limits of a staple-dominated system. Tobacco was a popular crop in the 1820s, as was dairy production, but neither came close to wheat as a principal product. Wheat, unlike fur, is not a luxury product: a lot of wheat is needed to turn a profit. It is what economists refer to as a high-bulk, low-value product. It requires larger ships to move a greater volume, and that investment in specialized shipping does not necessarily support the movement of any other goods. In other words, grain ships are grain ships, not container ships that can carry a multitude of different products. Nor are they smaller, faster vessels designed to transport textile products. Further, any shipping requires the infrastructure of waterfront docks, warehouses dedicated to stockpiling grain, and improvements in shipping routes. Since the vast majority of British North American grain originated in Upper Canada, the priority was building canals in order to load up barges on Lake Ontario or even Lake Erie and send them downriver to Montreal or, better still, put the grain onto ships that could head straight out into the Atlantic.

The Upper Canadian wheat economy comprised, therefore, several elements: profitable and speculative land sales; the business of land clearing (forestry) and preparing for farming (or sale); farming itself; and shipping. Given the privileged
character of land grants in Upper Canada and the obvious fact that shipping is not something in which farmers are typically involved, most of the money in the wheat economy was made by people who did not actually work the land. Farmers did well and some did very well, but not so well as those who owned the infrastructure and the merchant houses responsible for the movement and sale of wheat.

It has to be added, too, that not all farmers were beneficiaries of the wheat economy. It has been observed that the self-sufficient farm in pre-Confederation British North America is something of a myth: farmers everywhere turned from time to time to other sources of income or revenue. In Upper Canada it was the larger and better capitalized farms that could afford to specialize in grain sufficiently to profit by the wheat economy. Rather than “mining wheat,” as it has been called, Upper Canadian farmers more often grew a variety of crops destined for the growing townships nearby with their expanding non-farming populations. Obviously, for the multitude of smaller farming households, the construction of canals was of little value: they needed roads to transport their wheat to town markets.

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<td>• The Upper Canadian economy was based on a combination of wheat farming and land sales, which had a reciprocal relationship.</td>
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<td>• The wheat economy was highly vulnerable to changes in the trade environment with Britain, and this was beyond the control of the colonials.</td>
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<td>• Buying and selling land, along with marketing wheat in the Atlantic, generated a merchant and financial elite in the colony.</td>
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<td>• The character of the wheat economy determined where resources would be spent to build up infrastructure.</td>
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| Figure 9.4  
Canada West by BotMultichillIT is in the public domain. |
| Figure 9.5  
Province of Upper-Canada land deed by BrianJGraham is used under a CC-BY-SA 3.0 license. |

9.6 The Atlantic Colonies

As was the case with the Canadas, the Maritimes and Newfoundland also enjoyed an economic boom during the war years. After the war, they staggered and struggled until eventually entering an unparalleled period of prosperity. Expanding Atlantic markets would, overall, usher in an age of wind, wood, and water for the four colonies, even as steam-driven shipping was chugging across the ocean.

Wood

Various imperial tariff policies favoured wood products from British North America, most of which came from New Brunswick. Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland profited as well in the short run, but New Brunswick enjoyed two key advantages over the other colonies in this regard. First, it had better and bigger forests; second, it was criss-crossed by rivers that allowed logging camps to move deep into the interior in search of more trees.

While all four Atlantic colonies engaged in the lumber trade, they did so in different ways. Prince Edward Islanders depleted their own forests and then shipped out to New Brunswick in large numbers to work as seasonal labourers in the mainland logging camps. As well, Prince Edward Island manufactured some of the largest and most diverse ships associated with the forest industry. Newfoundland, too, produced large numbers of ships from its own forest supplies, but these were overwhelmingly in service of the fisheries industry and not meant to serve other exports. Newfoundland’s forest industry would grow on the Avalon Peninsula in particular in the 19th century but, like Nova Scotia, it faced limitations based on access. With few rivers that reached deep into either colony’s interior, the forests along the foreshore were denuded and the industry’s advance slowed until new investment and technology made inland tree stands more accessible.

![Figure 9.6 The Miramichi and Saint John River systems alone provided access to most of New Brunswick’s forests.](image-url)
In New Brunswick logging and sawmilling became year-round activities, spawning smaller milltowns along the Saint John River in particular. Demand for New Brunswick lumber was so great that the port towns (St. Andrews and Saint John especially, but also the settlements at the mouth of the Miramichi) began to produce ships designed specifically to carry squared timber. On arrival in British ports, these boats were either sold as shipping capacity or for their timber. With the exception of some brief market downturns (including, in 1821, a fire that burned across the middle of the province from the Miramichi through Fredericton) and some uncertainty from time to time about tariffs, the forest sector as a whole grew until 1860.

Imperial tariffs and other protectionist measures ensured privileged access to West Indian markets for Maritimers. During these years the links between the Atlantic colonies and British (and Spanish) Caribbean colonies strengthened. With New England frozen out of the British West Indies, the opportunity arose for Maritimers to stock them with fish, farm surpluses, and shipping capacity. Prince Edward Island benefited mainly from the market for farm products as none of the other three colonies had the same agricultural potential. Charlottetown in particular benefited from the need for more shipping capacity.

Wind and Water

Shipbuilding throughout the region was a leading sector, supported heavily, of course, by the timber industry. Saint John was home to the largest fleet and Charlottetown was second. Both ports built, registered, and chartered out their vessels. Some of these ships were bound for distant parts of the world such as the eastern Mediterranean and the west coast of South America. There, they would carry freight from one port to the next under the command of notoriously tough “bluenose” (Maritimer) skippers whose reputation for cutting costs was eclipsed only by that of their ship owners.

Wealth accumulated in Yarmouth, Halifax, Charlottetown, and Saint John, especially in the pockets of shipbuilders and owners. Their view of the world was not narrow and parochial: they were shipping in very distant waters and trafficking in exotic goods. More than that, their ships were themselves products for market. At mid-century ship built in Charlottetown was being sold to buyers in Britain and the West Indies; more often than not island shipbuilders sold their output to Canadians and Newfoundlanders.

Newfoundland began to tap more into the fisheries and seal colonies of Labrador as well and provided most of the fish that was traded abroad. Markets in Britain continued to be strong, although French competition returned to the Grand Banks from their base on St. Pierre and Miquelon. Tariff changes badly undermined Newfoundland cod exports to Spain (formerly its major marketplace) and forced a reorientation toward Portugal and the Italian states. Even Brazil, a Portuguese colony with Portuguese tastes, emerged in the early 19th century as a viable market for Newfoundland salt cod.

The internal workings of this industry changed in the first quarter of the century when the truck system arose. St. John’s merchants provided fishermen with credit to purchase nets and other essentials of the codfishing trade in exchange for their catch. The merchants bore the bulk of risk if the market failed, but the fishermen faced comparable risks if they borrowed too much and/or the catch was not big enough to settle accounts. On the face of it, this may seem to be a symbiotic relationship, one in which the success of one side depends ultimately on the success of the other. In practice, merchants and codfish buyers, or cullers, often took advantage of their knowledge of the marketplace to fix a lower price for the catch so that they could maximize profit. Fishermen were thus faced with two threats: the size of the catch might fall short and, even in good years, it might fetch a lower price than usual. Indebtedness and merchant financial worries became ongoing themes in the St. John’s and Newfoundland economies.

By mid-century all of the colonies had their own postal systems. An 1851 Nova Scotia one shilling stamp.

Overall, the Atlantic colonies experienced the first half of the 19th century as years of growth and relative prosperity. Merchants in the main towns took on many of the aspects of the old Bristol merchants of early mercantilist days. They wanted to work in protected markets, they saw themselves benefiting from their colonial/imperial connection with the Crown, and they engaged in a kind of triangular trade involving the Caribbean plantation colonies. They also had a growing influence over colonial and imperial policy and came to form a powerful political force. These connections enabled the establishment, too, of financial institutions in the Maritimes, including the Bank of New Brunswick (founded in 1820 as the first chartered bank in British North America), the Bank of Nova Scotia (1832), and the Newfoundland Savings Bank (1834). These institutions facilitated the accumulation of colonial capital and its reinvestment in public and private enterprises.

Exercise: Documents

France in America, 1852

Victor Levasseur was part of a generation of cartographers whose work was meant to stimulate the mind in several ways. On the map in Figure 9.E1 he shows what little is left of the French presence in the Americas, including St. Pierre and Miquelon, the little island chain south of Newfoundland that enables France to remain a presence in the Grand Banks and the Gulf of St. Lawrence to this day. Apart from the rather abashed looking tiger (embarrassed, perhaps, because he’s meant to be on a different map), what does Levasseur want you to take away from his document?

Attributions

Figure 9.6
New Brunswick map general by Qyd is used under a CC-BY-SA 3.0 license.
Key Points

- The Atlantic colonies enjoyed certain advantages in the timber trade and were able to parlay these into an expanded shipping and shipbuilding sector.
- New Brunswick was the leading timber exporter from the region, providing jobs for migrant seasonal workers from Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.
- The interconnectedness of the Atlantic colonies with Britain, the West Indies, and farther afield were features of the colonial economies that distinguished them from the Canadas.
The first Canadian canal was built at Lachine, toward the western end of the island of Montreal. It opened in 1825, bypassing the Lachine rapids, long a barrier to navigation and the site of a now-ancient portage. The Lachine Canal had an important impact on the economy of Montreal: it changed the city from being the westernmost head of navigation in Lower Canada to being the port of exit for goods coming out of Upper Canada, a way station at the mid-point between southern Upper Canada and the Atlantic. Because the canal joined the higher levels above Lachine to the lower levels to the east of Montreal, the water flow was fast enough to generate power through water wheels. Industries relocated from the old town centre of Montreal and even Quebec to take advantage of the power supply that could be used to run sawmills and flour mills.

The Lachine Canal served the towns and ports of Lake Ontario. The expanding frontier of farms along Lake Erie, however, had to deal with the Niagara River and the famous cataract there. American investors first found a way to evade Niagara Falls by building the Erie Canal, completed in 1825 — the same year as the Lachine Canal. They followed up with the Oswego Canal four years later, and the American system then connected Lake Ontario and Lake Erie to the ice-free port of New York.

Meanwhile, Canadian investors did not stand still. The Welland Canal opened in 1829, linking Lakes Erie and Ontario, although it was plagued by problems with both route and financing. But as the 1830s opened the Canadians could claim to have kept pace with the Americans during what might be called the “canal race.”

The more defence-oriented Rideau Canal, completed in 1826, was built by the British government as a public venture and was an early indicator of the close link between infrastructure and public funding in British North America. Other Canadian canals soon shifted from private hands to government control.¹

The canals were technological and engineering marvels in their time but they had real limitations. Although shipping bulk goods by water was much cheaper and faster than by road, that was only true when the water was not frozen. Only so much grain could be moved at the end of one autumn harvest before the ice set in; after that, this harvest had

to wait until the following spring before making it to market. Consequently, storage and credit became increasingly important considerations. As well, the three Canadian canals were built by different companies and, not surprisingly, their specifics varied greatly. The Rideau Canal, for example was only half as deep as the Welland, which limited the ships that could use it and their ability to survive commercially — or even just to stay afloat in Lake Ontario. Canal-related debt was considerable and, given the involvement of the colonial administration, it left the government of Upper Canada unable to fund ancillary projects like road construction. Pro-canal merchants proposed more taxes on property to address the situation; anti-canal farmers responded that these big projects benefited merchants principally, so trade should be taxed instead to cover the debt.

However much debt the Canadian canals might have acquired, none was as disastrous as Nova Scotia’s Shubenacadie Canal. Construction began in 1826 and ceased abruptly in 1831 when the Shubenacadie Canal Company collapsed in bankruptcy. Twenty-three years passed before the project could be renewed, and it took seven more years to complete the route between Halifax and the Bay of Fundy. The canal was used for a decade and then shut for good in 1871. By then, railways and even roadways had overtaken canals as the most viable infrastructure in eastern and central British North America.

As a final note on the golden age of canal-building, it is no surprise that they had unintended environmental consequences. The four western Great Lakes flow into one another but they are blocked from Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence, and the sea by Niagara Falls. The opening of the Welland Canal joined the two ecosystems and the Lachine Canal similarly circumvented the rapids at Lachine. This allowed different species of fish and parasites to mingle for the first time. Developments in shipping — especially in bilge systems — and the rise of industrial pollution would worsen this situation in the 20th century, but the process began in the early 19th century.

Key Points

- The era of canal-building in British North America ran from 1825 to the 1830s.
- Canals facilitated the movement of bulk goods on shipping. Opponents of canals argued that this served shippers' interests but not necessarily those of farmers.
- All of the canals built in British North America acquired significant debt and thus put a hold on other infrastructural experiments.

Attributions

Figure 9.8
Canada Marine Works by Soul scanner is in the public domain.

Figure 9.9
Welland Canal – First Canal Stage One by Qviri is in the public domain.
9.8 Economic and Social Change

Building the canals required two things of critical importance to the economic, social, and political history of Upper and Lower Canada: money and a workforce.

**Banks and Locks**

First, banks were required because all that debt had to reside somewhere. An agency was needed to both store the growing amounts of capital in the colonies and to act as a lender to entrepreneurs and governments. These early banks also coined the local currency. The Bank of Montreal appeared first, in 1817, followed by the Bank of Quebec and the Bank of Canada (also in Montreal), and then the Bank of Upper Canada. All were chartered in the years between 1819 and 1822, and other banks would be established — a flurry of them in the 1830s — though not all lasted more than a few years. The Bank of Upper Canada held a monopoly position in the colony for nearly a generation, and it was very much an instrument of the Family Compact: the bank’s directorship was dominated by members of the colony’s executive council.¹

The interests of the bank were thus indistinguishable from those of the political elite in the colony and the colonial elite was very interested in canals. The bank’s inaugural president, William Allan, was also an active investor in and a director of the Welland Canal Company. Allan was not alone in this regard. The interlocking directorships between the bank, the government’s executive council (which overlapped, too, into the legislative council), and the Church of England under

the leadership of the Reverend John Strachan became the source of the Family Compact’s unquestionable authority in
the colony and a target for critics in the 1830s.\footnote{2} As a consequence of this effective strategy on the part of the Family
Compact, the Bank of Upper Canada was instantly a force with which to reckon in colonial policy making.

Second, the canal-building projects required a large workforce, more than could be mustered in the colonies. The arrival
of several hundred Irish Catholic canal builders or navvies, some of them veterans of similar projects in the British Isles,
changed the demographics of Montreal for generations. The 500 or so employees of the Lachine Canal Company were
the largest non-military workforce ever assembled in Canada. The conditions under which they worked were appalling
(see Chapter 10); they represented, however, a small army of wage earners whose survival depended on the emergence
of a service economy in Montreal and Lachine.

New immigrants are always a convenient target for blame when economic conditions tumble and competition for jobs
intensifies. When the canal projects were completed by 1830 (setting aside various expansions and improvements in the
years to come) hundreds of economically vulnerable Irish navvies found themselves out of work. This happened at a
time when wheat prices in Britain were falling and sales of farmland in Upper Canada were in decline.

In the years between 1800 and the 1830s there had arisen, predictably, an array of businesses associated with the
production of lumber for houses and fences, nail-makers, and importers of cotton textiles, rope, and furniture — all of
whom serviced the growing farm population. Blacksmithing generally was of critical importance. When immigration
slowed all of those secondary industries and services were affected. And, of course, farmers who had staked their
property on the future of wheat were hardest hit.

The second wave of immigrants in the 1830s, which followed the navvies from Ireland, was doomed to travel in
atrocious conditions aboard lumber boats (known at the time as coffin ships) and in the company of cholera. This
proved to be the worst possible time for these immigrants to arrive, as the 1830s generally was a time of economic
struggles in Lower and Upper Canada alike. By 1837 — a fateful year in the Canadas politically — Upper Canada’s debt


\textit{Figure 9.11 The Bank of Upper Canada issued its own currency (minted in England) in the 1850s.}
was so great that the colony was nearly bankrupt.3 (For more on the social and political impacts of this time, see Chapters 10 and 11.)

Britain’s response to this debt crisis (and to the political crisis of which it was a part) was to unite the two Canadas (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11). Naturally, Lower Canadians, who inherited Upper Canada’s debt, were none too pleased. Britain also appointed as governor of the united colony Charles Poulet Thomson, the first governor with significant financial experience and an understanding of the emerging industrial world.4

Colonial Cities

Changes in the Corn Laws in the 1840s restored Canada’s superior position in relation to the United States, and as American cities began to grow, there were even markets south of the border for Canadian wheat. Overall the decade witnessed a dramatic recovery in exports and immigration: the population of Upper Canada (called Canada West after the joining of Upper and Lower Canada) nearly doubled and a significant presence at Toronto was inevitable.

Urbanization generally in British North America changed the rhythm of the economy. Generations of Canadiens had successfully mixed farming with the fur trade: ploughing and planting before heading off into the North and the West before late spring. This pattern of seasonal labour persisted well into the 19th century. Logging camps operated during the winter months even while the rivers — their supply line and highway — were frozen. Farmers often undertook construction work on roads or jobs in sawmills while they waited for their crops to mature; fishing was very seasonal and sometimes augmented with seal hunting (in Newfoundland); wherever there was logging there was squaring of timbers and the need to build ships in which to transport the lumber. Cities provided another market for surplus labour. As farming became more economically marginal in Lower Canada in particular, where growing families pressed against the limits of farm productivity, more and more young men and women moved into the towns and cities.

The social aspects of this urbanization are considered in Chapter 10. It is worth noting here, though, that Lower Canada’s cities appeared where the Anglo-Protestant community was most heavily concentrated and in such numbers and with such wealth as to represent a powerful economic, political, and social elite. Montreal caught up with and finally passed Quebec City in population size only in the 1820s. Government, the garrison, the lumber trade, and (relatedly) shipbuilding dominated the economy of Quebec City. Montreal, on the other hand, began to diversify with the completion of the Lachine Canal. And, of course, it had always been an important seat of commercial power for the interior of the continent (more lately for Upper Canada). As Upper Canada grew, so too did the role played by Montreal merchants in provisioning frontier settlers.

Key Points

- The ability to mount major infrastructural crusades required new financial instruments, including banks.
- The arrival of Irish labourers for canal projects was pivotal in the development of the Canadian working class.
- The growth of cities in these years reflects adjustments in the economic order of the colonies.

4. Ibid., 195.
Attributions

Figure 9.10

Figure 9.11
CANADA, BANK OF UPPER CANADA 1857 —ONE PENNY by Geo Swan is used under a CC-BY-SA 2.0 license.
9.9 Manufacturing, Railways, and Industry: Early Days

Manufacturing — the process of adding value to raw materials by turning them into something else — was limited in British North America by continued mercantilist attitudes in Britain and by American restrictions. Nonetheless, there were examples of manufacturing to be found, such as rope making in Halifax, hat making in Quebec City, and shipbuilding in almost every port town. The canal excitement of the 1830s fed demand for locally produced tools like shovels and wheelbarrows, some of them made in workshops that would become agricultural implement factories.¹

But the markets were small in British North America so the growth of local manufacturing depended on access to external markets. Britain didn't need much of what British North America had to offer apart from raw materials. And in 1828 the United States introduced a system of tariffs that was meant to protect embryonic industries in the northern states (New England was a particular beneficiary). Most of the industrial manufacturers that were targeted came from Britain; British North American exports suffered as well.

For the first 50 years or so of the 19th century, therefore, manufacturing growth took place principally in areas of production that served the British North American market itself. One example was the cotton mill established in Sherbrooke (the first joint-stock company to be incorporated in Canada) in 1845, but the biggest driver of economic change was railway development.²

Railways were to the mid-19th century what freeways and airports were to the 20th. That is, they were potentially very efficient means of moving goods and people, they were enormously expensive to construct and typically required government involvement (whether directly or indirectly through loans), and they were the mark of an up-to-date economy and country (or colony). As well, railways didn't suffer from cold weather as waterways did — they offered the potential of year-round service and they could, theoretically, go wherever they were needed, unlike canal systems which depended on water routes.

The first railways in Canada were temporary structures, usually made of wooden rails and used to move quarried rock. One such railway was built at Louisbourg in the early 18th century and another — more like a steam-winch-powered cable car — was used to build the new Quebec Citadel in 1820. The first true railway, however, appeared in the 1830s, running about 36 kilometres from La Prairie (across the St. Lawrence from Montreal) to the head of Lake Champlain. From there water transportation took over as goods were transferred to boats and sailed downriver to New York. The second railway built in British North America was shorter still: a 9.5 kilometre line from Albion Mines to Pictou, Nova Scotia.

Much more significant was the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad, which opened in 1853. It was important for three reasons: first, it was broad gauge (rather than standard) and thus set the standard for future railroads in Canada until the 1870s; second, it addressed the centuries-old irritant of Montreal merchants who longed for an ice-free port by joining the largest Canadian city with Portland, Maine; third, it was an international railroad, the first in the world.

The Great Western Railway (1855) subsequently linked Windsor and Detroit to Toronto, Hamilton, and the Niagara district, while the Toronto, Simcoe, and Lake Huron Railway (also 1855) further locked in Toronto as Canada West's hub city. The largest and most ambitious of the pre-Confederation railroad projects, however, was the Grand Trunk

Railway, which eventually connected Montreal and Toronto, in part by leasing or otherwise absorbing these smaller independent railways. Fortunes were invested in these projects and a whole generation of British North American capitalists and banks made even larger fortunes back. Land and material sales were key to profits, most of which appear to have been made before the first train chugged down the line.

![Figure 9.12 The Victoria Bridge was part of the Grand Trunk Railway's infrastructure and, at the time of its completion in 1857, the longest span on Earth.](image)

The value of railways in Canadian economic history is often misunderstood. Railways in many respects duplicated what had already been accomplished by canals and added little to the economy that was truly new. Some of the earliest experiments were, in fact, referred to as “canal railways” because they paralleled existing water routes. This was certainly the case with the 12-kilometre Montreal and Lachine Railroad, built in 1847. In British North America, the first railways have been described as a duplication and extension of the Empire of the St. Lawrence, corridors of trade that echoed, rather unimaginatively, the trade routes first developed under New France (if not under the Wendat and Haudenosaunee). It was for this reason that railways were perilous investments: in British North America they were necessarily very long, they competed with existing water transportation routes, and they offered little to emerging manufacturers.

### Exercise: Documents

**Canada South**

It may be west of Montreal and Old Canada, but Canada West is very definitely farther south than much of the rest of the country, including all of what is now Western Canada. These two maps (Figures 9.E2 and 9.E3) show the same region in the 1850s.

They are, however, profoundly different representations of southern Ontario.

What changes can you see? What is being emphasized in the first that was not so important or interesting to the cartographer and artist who produced the second?

**Beginning an Industrial Revolution**

What railways did offer (and what is easy to overlook) is a stimulus to heavy industry, to say nothing of demand for squared timber for ties and trestles. Steel for rails, rolling stock, and engines represented a major new demand factor in the economy. Iron and steel foundries appeared and gradually diversified. The availability of surplus iron and steel stimulated growth in other kinds of manufacturing, principally associated with working implements. Shovels, axes, and
pickaxes — the trademark tools of the farmer, the logger, and the miner — were beneficiaries of the railway industry. They were needed in such enormous quantities that investment in metal-bashing shops became very attractive and tools became more generally available.

The Newcastle Foundry and Machine Manufactory provides a useful example of how industries complemented each other. Established in 1847 in Newcastle, Canada West, by Daniel Massey, this was the chrysalis from which Massey Manufacturing and then Massey-Harris and, in the 20th century, Massey-Ferguson would emerge. Massey began by pioneering the production of mechanical threshing machines, which was possible only because of the availability of all kinds of metal products, everything from iron ingots to nails. From Newcastle, Massey could ship up and down Lake Ontario, but there was limited roadway access to the interior of the colony. By the mid-1850s the company relocated to Toronto where it had improved access to raw materials, nearby foundries, and farmers to whom it could sell its products. This small industrial revolution, so intimately related to the agricultural well-being of the colony, had an almost immediately perceptible effect. One observer in 1860 commented that “an American machine is now as great a rarity as a Canadian one was a few years ago.”
This focus on, and success in, the manufacturing of agricultural implements followed on the continued Upper Canadian belief in an expanding farm frontier as an engine of growth and the wheat economy. Implement manufacturing, then, was something of an advance in terms of industrialization, but it ultimately preserved the staples orientation of the wheat economy and did not lead to agricultural diversification. That is to say, a threshing machine does nothing to push a farm economy from monoculture to robust self-sufficiency and, say, wool production.

Creating a Working Class

The rise of farm implement production had an unintended impact on the Canadian economy: it reduced the need for farm labour. In doing so it freed up younger members of farm families, specifically those who were not in line to inherit the farm. Some of these men and women looked west to new farming opportunities in Upper Canada while others moved to the towns and cities to pursue wage labour. Put less charitably, perhaps, farm machinery created circumstances in which the big farm family was not needed; some families had to shed a few members, sending them off to take their chances, perhaps working for Massey in Toronto. This change marked the emergence of a locally produced market of free labour: “free” in the sense of being removed from other obligations and free to move to wherever the jobs and opportunities arise.

Whatever factories came into existence in British North America before Confederation were not, to be sure, very large. One study claims that “the average Upper Canadian manufactory employed less than five workers.” The railway companies were the largest employers — some of them marked by the vertical integration of foundries, equipment manufacturing, line construction and maintenance, connections with ports and shippers, and even the housing of their workers. By 1871, nearly 3,000 British North Americans worked for the principal railway firms.

Environmental Costs

These numbers hint at the scale and breadth of production necessary to keep these industries moving. As railways extended the reach of industry deeper into rural areas, new resources could be tapped. Logging for the manufacture of railway ties accelerated, and with it came soil erosion and stream damage. Fish spawning grounds were impacted as rivers silted up. Even the production of sawdust in industrial quantities affected water quality. As well, iron and steel production required a mining industry to supply the key ingredients: iron ore and coking coal. Iron mines opened around Lower Canada and coal mines in Cape Breton. By mid-century hundreds were employed as wage labourers underground and in iron forges.

The production of coke — coal from which impurities have been removed — began in earnest in Canada in these years and augmented the production of charcoal (coke is much better in the smelting process but the tar residue is much greater and much more toxic, as 20th century Nova Scotians would discover to their sorrow). Steam engines, whether on rails or on the water or in mills, increasingly required coal as well. The needs of the Royal Navy often determined the location and success (or failure) of coal mines, as was the case in Cape Breton and on Vancouver Island. Coal tips (piles of waste earth, stone, and unmarketable small pieces of coal), began to grow on the landscapes abutting Sydney, Nova Scotia, and Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island. Dust from the tips and from the coal heaped on the docks was in the air where everyone — even those who never ventured underground — would breathe it in. Many from those communities were exposed to the toxins, and at risk for developing — and dying from — silicosis.

No one at the start of British North America’s industrial revolution could have imagined the millions of tons of material that would be won from under Earth’s surface in the decades ahead, nor could they know the full environmental consequences of their actions. By 1860, however, the purity of water and soil and cellular matter was already being severely compromised in areas of early industrialization.

Key Points

- Lack of access to larger markets limited the scale of manufacturing experiments in British North America before the mid-19th century.
- Railways became the key to unlocking industrial potential, linking producers to markets, and creating demand for heavy industrial output.
- Agricultural implement production otherwise dominated industrial output and helped advance the farming sector.
- Industrialization and the improvement of farming technology led to a migration from farms to cities in search of seasonal and then full-time employment in wage labour.

Attributions

Figure 9.12
Grand Trunk Railway of Canada, Victoria Bridge, now constructing across the St. Lawrence River at Montreal by Skeezix1000 is in the public domain.

Figure 9.E2
West Canada by BotMultichill is in the public domain.
Figure 9.E3
Canada West or Upper Canada by BotMultichill is in the public domain.

Figure 9.13
Toronto Rolling Mills by Skeezi1000 is in the public domain.
9.10 Reciprocity and Free Trade

By the middle of the 19th century Britain was well established as the leading industrial economy on Earth. An alignment of domestic resources (especially iron and coal), innovations in harnessing new energy sources (from hydraulics through to steam), developments in the mechanization of looms, access to raw materials from colonies and non-colonial suppliers, an abundance of local free labour, and the extent to which British merchants as well as naval fleets ruled the waves produced and perpetuated a high-speed transformation of the economy of the British Isles. Western Europe as a whole played catch-up (some countries better than others) while the United States exploited its own natural advantages and ploughed ahead at a dramatic pace. The days of rough equality with France were well within living memory for many British leaders and capitalists; they could recall a time when mercantilism made sense. By the 1840s they and their younger counterparts were wondering whether it should continue. After all, British goods were in demand everywhere, and Britain had the economic and military muscle to impose commercial arrangements where needed. Increasingly influenced, as well, by free market economic theories that held to the view that one should always buy in the lowest market and sell in the highest, capitalists in particular thought that preferential tariffs interfered with the natural workings of the marketplace. What became as laissez-faire capitalism was coming into fashion.

This was, of course, terrible news for a British North American economy that had been finely crafted to work within the comfort zone of protectionism. Under mercantilism (French and English alike) there were direct and indirect disincentives to diversification: some kinds of production were simply not allowed or not worth attempting. A thriving market in Britain for unprocessed products from the sea or the forests gave settlement and society its shape; the smart money went after those opportunities and little investment was sunk into manufacturing.

The staple theory describes how the pursuit of natural resources both expands and restricts an economy, both spatially and structurally. Whether they were chasing beaver pelts or trees, British North Americans followed rivers deeper into the interior rather than building up market towns with a healthy surplus of labour that could be used in small, artisanal factories of five to 20 people, the sort of operation that might expand to 50 or 100 employees one day. Staples, moreover, tend to favour what are called backward linkages: harbours, warehouses, some shipping capacity. These are things that are useful in any economy but they don’t propel it forward. A dock is a dock; it cannot be redeployed into the production of new kinds of goods. Forward linkages are more likely to arise from basic manufacturing: iron production begets iron tools, tools lead to machinery, machinery leads to manufacturing of shoes or clothing. In each of those steps value is added to the product as is the potential for movement into entirely different economic activities (e.g., the iron foundry becomes the parent of the cotton textiles industry). By mid-century, the colonies of British North America were breaking out of the staple economy, but only tentatively. The end of British protectionism would necessitate accelerated change.

**Exercise: History Around You**

Staple Theory

Does the staple theory still have anything to tell us about our current economic order?
Look up your province’s or territory’s most recent economic information (if you live outside Canada, pick a province or territory). What’s the principal export? Which sector employs the greatest number of people? From what sector does the economy derive the greatest income?

If a staple or two haven’t leapt to the top of your list, identify a classic staple that your area exports. Just pick one. Now follow its economic implications: What does that staple require? Mills? Railways? Ports? Smelters? Pipelines? Is there any processing done here or is it mostly done abroad? Is the real value added done elsewhere?

Sudden Adjustments

The end came quickly. In 1842 the tariff on squared timber was amended and exports fell by 25% the very next year. In 1846 Britain abolished the Corn Laws; now grain and flour produced in the United States competed toe-to-toe with the British North American (more specifically, Upper Canadian) wheat economy. Fears grew across the colonies that farmers, shipping interests, dockworkers, freight handlers, and millworkers would all suffer.

The difficulty at the time facing policymakers in British North America was twofold. First, they needed to decide how to respond to changes in tariffs when the legislative power to do so still resided mainly with the mother country. Second, they needed to determine with some certainty whether free trade was a bad thing or a good thing. British North America was a world leader in the production of squared timber: would it not benefit from a more open market? As well, it was easy to confuse the causes for economic troubles: did sales of staples fall because of free trade or because of falling demand? To what extent were those factors related? In the 1840s and 1850s, political and financial leaders in the colonies didn’t have the statistical information to guide them (or mislead them). What they did know was that tariffs were falling away and everything had to be considered in light of that fact.

Overall, despite a few setbacks, the British North American economies performed well after the shock of tariff removals. From the late 1840s through to the 1860s shipping production continued to grow in the Atlantic colonies (serving American demand for additional capacity) and wheat exports from Canada West increased. Demand for grain in famine-stricken Ireland helped matters after 1847, as did British military needs during the Crimean War of 1854-56 and American requirements during the Civil War in the early 1860s.

The First Free Trade Agreement

Although British North America was not an early adopter of industrial processes, the United States was, and demand for raw materials accelerated there by mid-century. The forests of New England were badly depleted, agricultural lands were no longer sufficient to supply the rapidly growing manufacturing towns and the major cities, and the British North American colonies could provide both timber and food. As well, the British North American ports were a good source of materials derived from British markets and other British colonies. This made the northern colonies very attractive partners to the Americans and it made the American marketplace more attractive to British North America’s leading capitalists. In return, the Americans could provide agricultural implements, textile products, and other goods that were less conveniently sourced from Britain. And often they could do so much more cheaply. The Reciprocity Treaty signed by Britain and the United States in 1854 thus opened up trade between the colonies and the Americans while constituting a further step in Britain’s efforts to create a world without trade barriers. This was, however, a short-lived experiment.

Protectionist interests in the United States, combined with anti-British feeling at the end of the Civil War, led to the treaty being terminated in 1866. For 12 years, however, Canadian products enjoyed unprecedented access to American markets.

It is worth underlining again that, whatever the inherent benefits of reciprocity, the context is critical. Had it not been for the additional and dramatic demand created by the Civil War south of the border, it is unlikely that British North America would have benefited as much as it did. After Confederation until the Great War (1914-1918) there would be nostalgia for reciprocity in some Canadian political circles but it would tend to ignore that important piece of the equation.

**Key Points**

- The rise of laissez-faire capitalism threatened the tariff-dependent economies of British North America.
- Despite short-term panic, exports recovered quickly.
- Increased familiarity with the American market led to a reciprocity agreement with the United States and a consequent continental reorientation of the British North American economy.

**Attributions**

**Figure 9.14**

Philip V Coin by Coinman62 is in the public domain.
9.11 Summary

By the 1840s industrial capitalists in Britain and the United States were a force with which to be reckoned. Along with their merchant and investment allies, they demanded a liberation of trade, an elimination of tariffs, and an opening of new markets, whether the markets and suppliers in question wanted it or not. For British North America, this meant an end to automatic support from Britain, a reduction in imperial governmental investment, loss of protected markets, and an opportunity to pursue new challenges.

Across Canada and the Maritimes the economic response was both entrepreneurial and innovative, and also sluggish and conventional. The establishment of financial institutions and embryonic industries helped transition the economy into a new capitalist stage of production. At the same time, staple industries remained at the core of the economy for years to come.

Key Terms

**backward linkages:** Economic inputs (often infrastructure) that support the production of the principal staple. In the case of the fur trade, backward linkages include warehouses, docks, and fur trade posts. In the case of the wheat economy, the linkages include silos, means of transporting grain, seed, and farm implements. Compare with **forward linkages.**

**capital, capitalism, capitalists:** Capital is the portable wealth that can be applied to the economy in the form of investment. Prior to capitalism, wealth was manifested almost entirely in land and agricultural production. Investment was, in effect, reinvestment of output. Outsiders did not generally invest their wealth in the farms of others, certainly not in the pre-modern, feudal era. The mercantile era created a merchant class with excess capital (money, wealth), which was stored, invested, and made available for borrowing for investment. Capitalism is the system in which the means of production (farms, factories, etc.) are privately owned and capable of being bought and sold. It generally depends on wage labour. Capitalism is, too, a system of social relations based on the right of the individual to move capital to wherever it will generate the greatest benefits. A capitalist is someone who works within the capitalist system, whose wealth is based not on inherited and immovable property but on the ability to move wealth from one investment to another.

**Civil War:** The war between the southern and northern American states from 1861 to 1865. Seven southern slave states seceded from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America. The continuance of slavery and “states’ rights” were the key catalysts to the crisis. The number of war dead totalled more than 100,000, and at the end of the war the United States had the largest standing army on Earth.

**coffin ships:** Lumber boats that carried immigrants from Ireland to Canada in the 1830s. Many died during this trip as hygiene and overcrowded conditions aboard the boats were atrocious.

**Corn Laws:** Regulations governing the import and export of grain in Britain. A system of tariffs that benefited colonial and domestic producers and disadvantaged foreign producers in the British marketplace.
Crimean War: A multinational conflict centred on the Crimean Peninsula and the city of Sevastopol on the Black Sea. The war pitted Britain, France, and Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) against Russia. Noteworthy are the magnitude of deaths (roughly half a million) and the beginnings of the military field hospital (under Florence Nightingale), which produced important innovations in battlefield medicine.

cullers: Codfish buyers in Newfoundland ports, especially St. John’s.

democracy: A form of government translated roughly from its Greek roots as “rule by the people.” The complicating factor is that “the people” is a slippery concept that is historically contextualized, and the extent of “rule” is also negotiable. Democracy was long associated with cities and towns, but not with nation states or empires, over which monarchies and oligarchies ruled. The emergence of representative democracy at a national level in the late 18th century — first in the United States, then in France — constituted a revolutionary change in organizing “the people’s” voice. In British North America, legislative assemblies might be elected but they did not rule, not until the 1840s. The majority of adults were “enfranchised” or legally able to participate in a democratic election only in the 20th century. It is still the case, of course, that people under the age of 18 years are not able to participate in democracy, so the vote is not “universal” by any stretch.

Empire of the St. Lawrence: A phrase coined by historian Donald Creighton in the 1930s, it refers to the economic and political influence of Quebec and Montreal merchants and colonial governments over a region that extended, at its peak, across the whole of North America to the Pacific Ocean.

extended family: Generally refers to three generations or more of one family. Another form, the consanguineal family, includes adult siblings.

forward linkages: Secondary developments in an economy arising from the production of a staple or other goods. For example, while cotton requires backward linkages like farm equipment, a labour force (possibly a slave trade), and warehouses, it might generate forward linkages like cotton mills and a textile industry. Lumber — a classic Canadian staple — requires many backward linkages but it can feed into the development of mills, the paper sector, furniture making, and so on.

free labour: Working people who are free of feudal or other similar bonds.

Grand Trunk Railway: A rail system that linked Canada West (Ontario) and Canada East (Quebec) in the 1850s. It was extended through spur lines and the purchase of other railways to Portland, Maine.

industrial revolution: A transition in systems of production associated with the rise of machine-assisted labour, non-organic sources of energy (water power, steam power, electricity), and large manufacturing and mining settings. Occurred first in the British Isles beginning in the late 18th century, spreading to most countries in the North Atlantic by the mid-19th century. Is “revolutionary” in that it supplanted older systems of production and the social relations on which they were based. It also changed the focus of Western economies from agricultural and craft production to industrial production of (mainly) textiles, metal products, and energy.

Irish Potato Famine: A four-year famine (1845-1849) in Ireland brought on by the heavy reliance on potatoes as a core element of the diet. When blight (a plant disease that affects potatoes) struck, food stocks were quickly exhausted. During this famine, perhaps as many as 2 million Irish emigrated, mostly to the United States but also to British North America, Australia, and elsewhere.
Lachine Canal: The canal built at the rapids at Lachine; first attempted in 1689 but it wasn’t until 1825 that a functioning system of locks was in place. The name, Lachine, references French hopes of a waterway across North America to China (la Chine). Lachine confirmed Montreal’s position as a leading port in and out of the interior of North America and Lachine itself became an important focus of industrial growth in the mid-19th century.

laissez-faire: A philosophy and/or system of policies that minimizes government management of the economy. In practical terms it means elimination of tariff barriers, duties, taxes, and regulations beyond the minimum required to protect property.

Massey, Massey-Harris, Massey-Ferguson: Founded in 1847 by Daniel Massey, as the Newcastle Foundry and Machine Factory, it merged in 1891 with A. Harris, Son & Company, and then with the Ferguson Company in 1953, becoming Massey-Harris-Ferguson, which was shortened a few years later to Massey-Ferguson. The various incarnations of the Massey industrial project have been global leaders in the production of farm equipment and a major employer of industrial labour in central Canada.

navvies: The men who laboured on the earliest British navigation canals. Many were Irish and, subsequently, Irish Catholic labourers on large projects (canals, railways) were referred to indiscriminately as navvies.


Rideau Canal: Completed in 1826, an Upper Canadian canal linking Bytown (Ottawa) with Kingston. Unlike the Welland and Lachine Canals, the principal purpose of the Rideau Canal was colonial defence. In the event of an American invasion of the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes, troops could be moved between Montreal and the Kingston area via the canal.

seasonal labour, seasonal labourers: Agricultural and resource extraction industries in particular depend on the seasonal availability of labour. Spring for planting, autumn for harvesting on farms; winter for the seal hunt and for logging in the 19th century; summer for salmon runs. Pre-industrial societies often depend on the seasonal work but it continued to be a feature of life in the industrial era.

squared timber: Logs that have been “squared” so that they can be stacked more tightly for shipping. During the Napoleonic Wars the usual sources of lumber (needed especially for naval shipbuilding) were closed to Britain by French blockades. Timber producers in British North America were called upon to rapidly increase production, and stacking them tightly maximized the number of logs that could be shipped to Britain.

staple theory: Or “staple thesis,” argues that an economy based on natural resources or other simple, unprocessed goods will develop along certain lines. In the case of New France and British North America, the dominant economic activities were obtaining and exporting a limited number of staples: furs, fish, timber, and some minerals. None of these required a significant population in the colony; none were processed in North America; all value added occurred in Europe, as did most consumption. The Canadian economic historian Harold Innis argued in the 1930s that the staple focus of the economy constrained colonial and national development, held back industrialization and diversification, and shaped government and social relations.

subsistence farming: The style of farming that provided enough quantity and a sufficient variety of crops to sustain its operators (typically, the farming family). Because it does not produce a surplus (beyond, perhaps,
enough to engage in barter with other farms), the farm owner does not have anything to sell. The ability to add capacity through capital investment is thus highly limited.

**tariff policies**: A tax imposed on imported goods. Generally this is done to make the purchase of domestically produced goods more attractive.

**threshing machine**: Mechanism for separating grain from straw and chaff. First developed in the late 18th century, threshing machines became more effective in the second quarter of the 19th century. They were usually powered by horses, sometimes by wind. Mechanization of threshing significantly reduced the amount of labour needed per acre of wheat at harvest time. It also created a specialist, itinerant workforce: the threshing crew.

**truck system**: A system of credit extended to workers by employers or buyers. Sometimes company stores would extend credit to company employees, deducting the amount owing from the next payday. In the Newfoundland fisheries, merchants would provide fishing crews with credit for nets and other necessities for which they would be reimbursed with a share of the catch. Like all credit systems, the truck system worked better for the creditor than the debtor.

**vertical integration**: A production model in which the various stages in a supply chain are owned by the same individual or company. For example, 19th century railway companies sometimes owned iron and coal mines, foundries where steel was produced and cast, machine shops that manufactured the rolling stock (all of which was owned by the railway — and not just the tracks), and warehouses, grain elevators, and hotels at all the major stations along the route.

**Welland Canal**: Opened in 1829, linking Lakes Erie and Ontario.

**wheat boom, wheat economy**: The appearance of a widespread monoculture in farm output, in this case the rise of wheat as the principal crop or staple that dominated the economy, including exports and economic policy making.

**wind, wood, and water**: A shorthand term for the Maritime economy of the 19th century, which was dominated by timber production, (wooden) shipbuilding, and the export sector, which was based on sailing vessels.

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**Short Answer Exercises**

1. In what ways were economic ideas undergoing change in this period? Why?
2. How did the Napoleonic Wars and their end impact British North America?
3. In what ways were the economies of Upper and Lower Canada similar? Distinct?
4. What aspects of the Atlantic colonies’ economies dominated and grew in this era?
5. What was the impact of infrastructural development on the colonies?
6. How did early industrialization impact British North America?
7. In what ways were political elites associated with the dominant economic agenda?
8. What was the relationship between agricultural expansion and industrial growth?
9. What is the staple theory and why does it matter to Canadian history?
10. How did tariffs and free trade impact British North America?
11. How was the physical environment impacted by the emerging proto-industrial economy of British North America?

**Suggested Readings**

Chapter 10. Societies of British North America to 1860
10.1 Introduction

Changing economic conditions contributed to and worked in tandem with changing social relations and experiences. Even in those places in British North America where lives continued along paths that had existed for centuries — in fishing communities, on farms, and among bison hunters — social changes were taking place. Technological innovations arose and a population explosion was underway around the North Atlantic. Some of these changes came so fast that people caught in their midst could not see them. Take William Lyon Mackenzie, for example. In the 1830s he was fighting on the streets of Toronto for greater democratic rights. Mackenzie’s city — a commercial centre typical of British North America’s major towns, if a bit larger than most — was undergoing a messy and complex rebirth. Cities were looking up the hill of a long growth curve that would continue for more than a century and would transform city dwellers into a constituency that Mackenzie would hardly recognize. Just as his political career reached its peak, the oppressed majority he spoke for were in the process of becoming a minority in their own towns.

This new era of urbanization was fed by immigration and rural abandonment and was fired by coal and steam. The ideal member of society, which was held to be the independent landowner and the yeoman farmer, was being overtaken by events and a new society.

This chapter considers some of the major social changes taking place in the middle of the 19th century. This period — the dawn of the age of steam — was also the proving ground for 20th century modernity. Cities, working-class neighbourhoods, labour organizations, gender issues, environmental decay, and public health and welfare were all topics of conversation and concern, especially as the 1860s approached. This chapter offers an introduction to some of the concerns of social historians looking at the 19th century. It also introduces some of the approaches taken in scholarly histories.
• Identify the underlying economic and human factors driving social change in the period 1818-1860.
• Describe the main social classes and their relationship to one another.
• Outline the main cities of British North America in the 19th century and why they were growing.
• Sketch the ways in which gender roles and the experiences of children were changing.

Attributions

Figure 10.1
The Port of Halifax (1830 – 1840) by Tetraktys is in the public domain.
10.2 Demographics

Detailed records pertaining to population characteristics and behaviour were kept under the ancien régime, but it was during the 19th century that the bureaucratic machinery necessary to running a regular census appeared. Aggregate totals generated in these years (as today) reflect the ability and competence of the census takers and the registration machinery. Births and deaths were often registered only at the parish level, census takers had to do their work on foot and were not always welcomed by local residents (for fear that being surveyed meant being taxed), and people sometimes just lied.

Broadly speaking, however, we know that between the 1820s and the early 1850s the population of every colony except those on the West Coast rose significantly. Newfoundland’s and Lower Canada’s doubled; Nova Scotia’s did slightly better than that. New Brunswick and PEI posted a trebling and Upper Canada (Canada West) grew sixfold. Within each of these colonies there were more men than women living in areas of resource extraction, but otherwise the sex ratio was relatively even. (This was not the case in British Columbia from 1858 on, when the gold rush transformed demographics.) See Table 10.1 for details of the earliest census counts, by region.

Table 10.1 Census counts, by region, 1820s-1850s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>First Census</th>
<th>Second Census</th>
<th>Third Census</th>
<th>Fourth Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Canada</td>
<td>150,066 (1824)</td>
<td>213,156 (1830)</td>
<td>432,159 (1840)</td>
<td>952,004 (1851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Canada</td>
<td>427,465 (1822)</td>
<td>553,134 (1831)</td>
<td>650,000 (1841)</td>
<td>890,261 (1851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>74,176 (1824)</td>
<td>119,457 (1834)</td>
<td>156,162 (1841)</td>
<td>193,800 (1851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>123,630 (1827)</td>
<td>199,906 (1837)</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td>276,854 (1851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>24,600 (1824)</td>
<td>32,292 (1833)</td>
<td>47,042 (1841)</td>
<td>71,490 (1855)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>55,719 (1825)</td>
<td>73,705 (1836)</td>
<td>96,295 (1845)</td>
<td>101,600 (1851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assiniboia*</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td>3,356 (1834)</td>
<td>4,871 (1846)</td>
<td>6,691 (1856)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC and Vancouver Island</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55,000 (1851)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures for Assiniboia (a.k.a. Northwest Territories) reflect only the settler populations. There were at least another 30,000 Aboriginal people on the northern Plains and in Rupert’s Land in the first half of the century.

**Of this number, perhaps 4,000 were non-Aboriginals.

Details from the early part of the 19th century are difficult to access and assess, but we know that 1851 British North America was dominated by those under 19 years of age (56%). In the absence of more precise numbers, we can only guess the distribution of the young population itself, but it is entirely reasonable to imagine that three-quarters were under the age of 15, which means that the dependent population (which includes the 2.7% over the age of 65 years) made up about 45% of the total.7 (Keep these figures in mind when considering the ubiquity of child labour in these years, as discussed in Chapter 12.)

**Mortality**

Fertility, migration, and mortality are the three elements that govern population growth or shrinkage. Beginning in the early 19th century, mortality rates around the North Atlantic began a long-term decline. This was not immediately evident in British North America where the crude death rate (CDR) moved downward only irregularly. This contrary trend was likely because it was a period of urbanization, and mortality rates are generally higher in cities. The evidence suggests that rural Lower Canada, for example, was experiencing an improvement in life expectancy while Montreal’s numbers distorted the pattern for the colony as a whole. In 1821-30 the CDR for Lower Canada was 25.86 per thousand; for Montreal it was 44.30. Twenty years later the figures were 22.99 and 51.1 respectively. Matters improved somewhat in the 1850s, but the CDR rebounded in the first decade after Confederation.

Mortality rates in the 19th century owed much to the difficulty of surviving infancy. The first five years of life were perilous. In places where the water supply was inconsistently safe — which is to say, in most towns and cities — infants were vulnerable to catching the various bugs in circulation and to suffer (often mortally) from diarrhoea. For a child born in 1851, life expectancy at birth was 43 years (that is, roughly half of what it is today). But if he or she could make it to 15 years of age, there was greater likelihood of living longer.

The risks associated with childbirth also affected female mortality rates. Two-thirds of girls born in 1801 reached adulthood but fewer than half of the original cohort made it to 45 years and the greatest risk they faced in those intervening 25 years was pregnancy.4

There were several mortality spikes in the 19th century arising from highly infectious and contagious disease epidemics. Of these the foremost was cholera. The Canadas experienced epidemics in 1832, 1834, 1849, 1851, and 1854. Each of these began in Quebec City, where immigrant ships carrying cholera first put into port; most of the epidemics made their way upriver and into the Great Lakes. The worst year — 1832 — witnessed about 2,000 deaths in Montreal, a city of roughly 32,000 individuals at the time. That is to say, one out of every 16 Montrealers succumbed to cholera.

The numbers are horrifying enough, but the disease itself was far more so. Michael Bliss, a historian of disease epidemics in Canada, describes the disease:

> When the cholera struck a community, nightmarish events occurred. Apparently normal and healthy people would start vomiting and defecating uncontrollably, sometimes at work or in the street. Putrid liquids poured from bodies racked by spasms and cramps. Dehydration caused eyes to sink into their sockets, skin to wrinkle and wizen, the voice to become low and husky. The body turned black and blue as capillaries ruptured. For more than half the victims death came in one or two days, sometimes in only a few hours. Sometimes bodies spurted poisons, aged, withered, and died, seemingly in minutes, the way they do in horror movies today.5

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In the first half of the century no one knew with any certainty what caused epidemics. As a consequence there seemed to be little urgency to attend to open sewers, contaminated water supplies, the large number of horses in any colonial city (and their manure and urine), and the slaughtering of beef cattle and other animals in the streets by butchers (and thus the flow of blood everywhere). Public health was a concern but not yet a policy area. People were left with a fear of the unknown, a certainty that cholera or some other nasty epidemic would return, and a belief that it would be brought in all likelihood by immigrants — and no one was doing much about it.

**Fertility and Nuptiality**

Fertility rates across the colonies were, by 21st century standards, very high. Anecdotally, one finds accounts of many families with eight to a dozen children. Certainly it was not unusual for women to marry young and carry to full term six or more pregnancies. Infant mortality rates, however, were also high. A comparative study of two leading Victorian-era families (one in Red River, the other on Prince Edward Island) reveals that the former produced “at least thirteen children” and the latter eight, of whom only four made it out of childhood. For farming families, of course, children were a source of labour and security: they constituted the workforce from an early age and they were depended upon to provide for aging parents in an era when pensions and social welfare did not exist. In the early towns, too, children played a role in building up the household wage. On the mid-century Vancouver Island coalfield, a skilled miner with two or three sons over the age of eight years could double his income by taking them into the mines.

But the pattern was more complex than this. In mid-19th century Hamilton, for example, the average age at first marriage for women was about 22 years. Only one-quarter of the female population married before the age of 20, though nearly three-quarters were married by the time they turned 25. This represents a significant delay in the onset of marital fertility, so much so that the fertility rate (the number of children under 15 years of age divided by the number of women aged 15 to 45 years) was a modest 2.3 to 2.9. Irish Catholic women, defying stereotypes of high fertility, occupied the middle range: around 2.5 children per woman. Catholic women did tend to marry younger and therefore had more of their children at an earlier age than their Protestant contemporaries.

Across British North America, however, one pattern that leaps out is the universality of marriage: in a population where there were about 96 men for every 100 females, nuptiality (the incidence of marriage) for women born between 1832 and 1866 was in the range of 88% to 91%. This matters to the story of fertility because colonial laws were especially punitive of sex outside of marriage.

Less consequential to fertility but indicative of how long it took for males to secure their economic footing, the age at first marriage for men was high and getting higher. In 1851 it was about 26 years in the Province of Canada and 10 years later it was closer to 27 (and 28.8 years in Nova Scotia). Just after Confederation the average age at marriage for men was 29.4 in Nova Scotia, 28.8 in New Brunswick, 26.9 in Quebec, and 28.4 in Ontario. A trend toward postponing marriage is apparent from these figures.

Larger patterns of fertility are worth noting. The population of French Canada in the century before Confederation doubled every 25 years, which follows the Malthusian model of natural population growth exactly. Keep in mind that this growth occurred in the absence of significant immigration into the French-speaking community — and considerable migration out, especially to New England. This growth was sustained by a high rate of marriage, at least

until 1820. At that time the crisis in land availability dampened the possibility of marriage for many young people in Lower Canada. ¹⁰

**Voluntary family size limitation**, or what we refer to colloquially as birth control, had only a minor impact on population growth before Confederation and only much later still in French Canada. In 1851 the total fertility rate (TFR) per woman was 7.02 and there were 120.3 children under the age of five years for every 100 women between the ages of 20 and 44. (By the late 20th century this last ratio had dropped to 40 per 100.) We know that women’s mean age at first birth was 25.4 years and that the mean age of last birth was 35 years. With six to seven births per married woman, these figures tell us that women spent those years between their mid-twenties and their mid-thirties either pregnant or wrestling with newborns. ¹¹

Over the longer term the high fertility rates can be seen to be in retreat. The crude birth rate (CBR) in Lower Canada was close to 60 per 1,000 population in 1811 and fell to about 45 by 1861. At mid-century this might seem like a significant decline, but with the benefit of hindsight we can see that British North America was marching in step with the fertility transition underway across Western Europe and in the United States. The Canadian CBR would continue to fall with very few reversals (although there were more in Quebec than in English Canada) until the 1930s. In fact, Canada’s current below-replacement-level fertility is nothing less than an outcome of this two-century-old trend. ¹²

**Key Points**

- The first half of the 19th century saw substantial population growth in eastern British North America, driven by a combination of births and immigration, both of which had to compete with a high mortality rate.
- The population at mid-century was divided roughly evenly between dependants and adult providers.
- Nuptiality rates were very high: marriage was the common experience of almost all women.

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10.3 Immigration

From 1783 until 1812 the most important source of immigrants to British North America was the United States. Movement across the border was easy and the host community was, outside of Lower Canada, overwhelmingly and increasingly North American in its accents and values. That ended with the War of 1812. After 1815 British North America became much more British than it had ever been before.

Emigration from the British Isles was the single greatest source of settlers in the Atlantic colonies, a fact that distinguishes their society from that of the Canadas in these years. Scottish settlers under the guidance of Lord Selkirk descended upon Prince Edward Island to take up farms in the early days of the century, and they were followed in the years to come by many others. Mostly these were Highland Scots, removed from their ancestral farmlands by the process known as the "clearances." They were followed by Irish immigrants who came to represent a significant share of colonial population by 1850.

Irish Immigrants

Ireland produced the largest waves of emigration of any European country during the 19th century. This phenomenon is often associated exclusively with the Famine Irish, the millions of refugees from the potato famine that wracked their homeland in the late 1840s. Irish migration to British North America, however, began in earnest much earlier. In the dying days of the Napoleonic Wars, Irish immigrants began arriving in east coast ports in large numbers. The towns of Newcastle, Chatham, and Miramichi saw hundreds arrive before 1820. Not all were Catholics but almost all were economically on the margin. Sectarian hostility between the Irish Protestants and Catholics who arrived around the same time soon spread to the larger host population.

Further Irish immigration tended to be badly timed, and the reception of the host communities was predictably muted at best, hostile at worst. The post-Napoleonic War years witnessed economic downturns in many parts of the British Isles, including Ireland. In the 1820s, as the farming frontier was growing in Upper Canada and in Lower Canada’s Eastern Townships, Irish immigrants arrived. Some of these had enough money to make a go of it. They were followed in the 1830s, however, by less prosperous countrymen and women who were fleeing more severe hardship at home.
Overwhelmingly Catholic, they arrived in large numbers in the St. Lawrence, and the mortality among passengers was severe.

In June 1832, Irish immigrants brought with them a hidden passenger onboard the Carrick: cholera. Having killed tens of thousands in Britain, the disease came ashore at Quebec City and spread rapidly to Montreal and then Upper Canada. More than 9,000 Canadians — Upper and Lower — died, the largest concentration being in Montreal.

Cholera is associated with human waste, and at the time, sewers in the towns were very poorly developed; it was common practice to dump buckets of sewage into the streets where it mixed with an abundant supply of horse manure. The Irish — poor and almost immediately shunned by the locals — found themselves in shantytowns with even worse drainage or in quarantine facilities (specifically on Grosse Isle) where sanitation was appalling. As a result, the Irish immigrants themselves died in huge numbers. (This was a near-global epidemic, one that originated in India and by 1835 had made landfall on the northwest coast. There, cholera joined measles, mumps, and other exotic diseases that easily claimed 25% to 35% of the Aboriginal communities they infected.)

Another consequence of the cholera epidemic was social and political turmoil, which was especially acute in Lower Canada where fear of a British plot to eradicate the Catholic Canadien population survived from generation to generation. Were the Irish merely instruments of British contempt for the Canadiens? Many thought so at the time. The Irish were, therefore, ostracized and discriminated against while the clergy and other spokesmen for the Canadiens whipped up feeling against the British generally. The cholera epidemic was, then, one factor among several in the 1830s that led to growing support for a rebellion.

Irish immigration in the 1840s must be placed in this context. Fear of cholera and diseased immigrants was a reality. As well, the Irish Canadians had moved into fields of work such as canal construction, which were generally regarded dimly by most English and French Canadians, and this increased the anti-Irish sentiment. The independent farmer was the antithesis of the low-wage-earning, work-camp-dwelling proletarian. “Townies” viewed the Irish navies as rough and uncivilized and a danger to their safety. Worse still, the land boom in Upper Canada that had sustained the economy alongside the wheat boom was in a trough in the late 1840s. Immigration had been much sought after when there was a lot of land available and when it fetched a good price; when the Famine Irish arrived they were too poor to buy land, the market was depressed anyway, and no one was enthusiastic about more competition. Things, of course, were much worse for the Irish themselves. Those who were quarantined on Grosse Isle and on Partridge Island in the Bay of Fundy in 1847 had to further contend with an outbreak of typhus. Thousands died.

Even in Upper Canada voices could be heard criticizing the British government for shovelling out its poor into British North America. Immigration from Ireland transformed Toronto from an essentially anglophone and Protestant city to one of pluralities: by 1860 there were comparable numbers of Catholics and Anglicans, followed by smaller numbers of Presbyterians, Methodists, and still smaller denominations. Almost all of these Catholics were Irish. Their presence gave purpose to the Orange Order, whose lodges stood as expressions of Protestant authority and xenophobic reaction to the immigrant masses. This arose, in large part, because the Irish tended to settle in urban areas, though not necessarily in tight ethnic enclaves. In Montreal they dominated St. Anne’s Ward, but in Toronto they were spread throughout the east and west ends, wherever affordable housing could be found.

Figure 10.3 The scale of St. Patrick’s Cathedral hints at the size of the Irish population in Montreal by 1854.

Key Points

- The British Isles contributed the largest number of immigrants to British North America between 1818 and 1867, the Irish constituting a major share.
- Many of the 19th century immigrants were refugees from landlessness, and poverty, and/or famine.
- Conditions for immigrants were typically poor and worsened by the presence of epidemic diseases.
- The Irish, Scots, Welsh, and English immigrants of these years contributed to the diversification of cultural institutions as well as sectarian hostilities.

Attributions

**Figure 10.2**
British Immigration to BNA, 1815-1860, by John Belshaw is used under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

**Figure 10.3**
View of Montreal 1852 by Skeezix1000 is in the public domain.
10.4 Country Life

Figure 10.4 Water-powered grist mills like this one near Waterloo, Ontario, were common features in the countryside.

Life on the land in the 19th century was not insulated entirely from changes occurring elsewhere. In fact, the countryside was often where change originated. It was also where intensely conservative impulses could be found.

In a study of seigneury communities near Trois-Rivières, historian Colin Coates reveals the connections between landscape, community, social relations, and economic transformation. At Batiscan attempts were made at the beginning of the century to establish an ironworks, something which would have provided seasonal, part-time, and full-time/year-round work for locals. This was an attractive proposition in part because the habitants’ farmlands had been so severely divided across generations that their productivity was quickly diminishing. These conditions were a product of rising human fertility and family size in the Lower Canadian countryside; in a Malthusian sense the growth that food production had made possible could not now keep pace with the population it produced.

Young men found it more and more difficult to establish the kind of economic security that would allow them to marry, which forced some to leave the land for opportunities in the woods or in the towns, ideally to find land grants elsewhere, perhaps nearby, but these options were increasingly unlikely. Some of the seigneuries thus became densely packed rural enclaves in which community members were heavily dependent on one another while also quite competitive. The Batiscan ironworks held out the hope of wealth from something other than the finite resource represented by land. The failure of the ironworks project wasn’t a disaster, but it set back the hopes of the seigneury for a while.

All this happened in less than a single generation, and the result was country life returning to its agricultural focus. The countryside continued to generate food but it was increasingly focused on subsistence. In a sense, it became even more intensively agricultural than it had been during the days of the fur trade. An outsider visiting for the first time in the 1830s might mistake it for a very traditional agrarian landscape. In truth, the “tradition” only went a generation or so deep. In 1790 there were fewer than a thousand people in Saint-Anne and 1,281 in Batiscan; in 1825 the numbers were 2,175 and 2,454 respectively. The two communities were doubling in size at a roughly Malthusian rate. They were, as well, shedding large numbers: nearly 500 people left Batiscan between 1790 and 1825 — a fifth of the total population.
in 1825. What is more, household sizes were rising. At Batiscan in 1784 the average family size was about five; in 1825 it was around six.

Coates identifies one of the consequences of these changes: “As households grew larger and young men and women remained dependent on their parents for longer periods, hierarchical relations within the family were strengthened.” This hints at the changes in the status of elders and the roles of mothers and fathers. Rather than being viewed as a place in a state of stasis, these seigneuries (and they are probably exemplary of many more) were undergoing profound changes.

**Class in the Countryside**

Class relations were also under pressure. As Cole Harris observes, land shortages played into the hands of seigneurs. Too many people and too little land meant that labour costs fell, making it more feasible for seigneurs to hire workers to improve their own lands. Between 1791 and the 1830s, seigneurs were more likely to insist on payments of debts, which they lacked the leverage to do in previous decades. They even increased the *cens et rentes*, something they were unable to do under the *ancien régime’s* regulating hand. One effect was the rise of a seigneurial class that was more aristocratic (at least in its wealth and its manorial lifestyle) in the 19th century than it had been in the days of New France.

Harris notes that Lower Canada was, perhaps perversely, becoming more rural than urban in the 19th century. At the end of the French regime, one-fifth to one-quarter of the population of the St. Lawrence Valley lived in the towns, a figure that dropped to one-twentieth “of the French-Canadians” by 1815. This change took place in an era where the population as a whole jumped from 70,000 to more than 300,000. The main cities were becoming more English and less welcoming to francophones, but that doesn’t mean that the Canadien population retreated into the countryside. In order for those numbers to work, they only had to stay put on the land, have more babies, and stay out of the cities, which is exactly what happened. Small wonder that Canadiens saw the institutions of the countryside (the parish church and the parish priest, the seigneur and the manor house, the *Coutume de Paris* with its focus on family rather than individual) as fundamental to their way of life, even if each of those was at one time or another exploitative of their rural existence.

The situation in the English-speaking world was quite different. While the economic model of the family farm was found throughout all of British North America, it meant something different in the patrilineal nuclear family households of the anglophones. The availability of land in the western stretches of Upper Canada ensured that competition for inheritances would not produce painfully small subdivisions of farms. Communities stood in for families when it came time to depend on group labour for harvests, threshing, road building, and barn raising. The same was not always true in the Atlantic colonies, where poorer soil conditions and limited availability of arable land created pressures on locals to find other sources of income. In Prince Edward Island farming was an easier proposition, but often Maritime farming families looked to sawmills and mines to provide part-time and seasonal work. The family farm and the small market towns persisted, but they were rapidly becoming less typical of Maritime social organization.

Some of the changes occurring at the urban level diffused to rural areas, so much so that the clear cultural boundaries between town and country began to blur. Large edifices appeared, many of them made of brick and stone, to house new industries and institutions. In the early 19th century industry went to where there was water power: hydraulics were key to driving early factories. Once again, the river courses — especially the most difficult portage sites because that’s where the water power was to be found — were determining the shape of Canadian life.

Key Points

- Social relations in rural British North America were directly impacted by the availability of land and competition for space.
- Land shortages in Lower Canada reinforced and enhanced the authority and wealth of seigneurs.
- The countryside was not impervious to industrial life.

Attributions

Figure 10.4
Erb's Grist Mill at Sunset by Russ Gordon is used under a CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0 license.
At the start of the post-Napoleonic era cities in British North America were mostly large towns. They were small in population and area, they served very local markets, and their people consisted mainly of merchants, artisans, physicians and lawyers, government and military officials, clergy, and not much more. Until the 1840s, Halifax, for example, was essentially a city built of wood; in the generation that followed, its centre would be largely rebuilt in stone and brick. By the 1860s, the most dynamic cities had grown significantly and were much more complex places.

The Modern City

Civic buildings became common and were a source of pride for the citizens. There was confidence and ambition in a young city that invested in stone buildings; the resident merchants and professionals located their mansions near the centre of town where they could be pointed to as evidence of community wealth; infrastructure like waterworks, board sidewalks, and a firehall were indicators of a commitment to the future and an enterprising attitude. The optimism of the age — the belief that a community's citizens were building a glorious society with a long life expectancy — was embodied in the move to neoclassical design in these new public and civic spaces that suggested (not very modestly) a common and timeless connection with ancient Greece and Rome.

Few of these small cities had rows of shops just yet — they typically had public markets where grocers, butchers, fishmongers, and bakers hawked their wares. There was space as well for farmers from the nearby countryside to sell cash crops to the growing town population.

Michael Katz studied the people and patterns of life in mid-century Hamilton and he closely observed the transition that was underway there (and in many other cities):

By 1861 some men could see that the future lay not only in trade but even more in manufacturing. By that time advocates of industry had begun a campaign to persuade the entrepreneurs of the city that the future lay in the factory as much, or more than, in the countinghouse. At first their successes remained modest. In 1861 the Wanzers moved their sewing-machine factory to Hamilton from Buffalo; someone partially manufactured shoes which were finished by hand; there were a prosperous factory that made pianos, one
that manufactured hats, and, of course, the yards of the Great Western Railway and the construction of locomotives. Overall, in 1861 Hamilton remained a commercial city, though the future already was clear to anyone who read the signs. The ambitious little city would become the Birmingham [England] of Canada.¹

By mid-century some cities were ready to leave behind Katz’s “commercial city.” For less than a century they had developed as nodes of commerce and local trade, sometimes tentatively reaching out into a larger global economy but (with the exception of Montreal and perhaps Quebec and Saint John), as commercial towns they had reached their upward limits: Toronto held about 40,000 and Hamilton a little more than 10,000; Halifax was creeping up above 20,000 and Charlottetown 7,000. Montreal was the giant with a population around 90,000 and was thus an example of where the future might lie.

Industrialization in these days, however, meant consolidation of some producers, heavy secondary manufacturing like an iron foundry, and other similar operations that might hire a few dozen employees at best. Full-on industrialization would come later in the century and, with it, massive growth in city size and a complete overhaul in what it meant in practical terms to be a citizen.

It is worth noting, however, that from 1851 to 1861 about 13% of British North Americans lived in cities of 20,000 or more, which put the emergent confederacy above the world average of 5%. The proportions in New Brunswick and the Province of Canada were highest, at around 14% living in cities in 1851, with Canada West accelerating to 18.5% in 1861. These numbers show that more British North Americans were moving to a handful of large centres and, simultaneously, more centres were passing the 20,000 threshold to qualify as cities. Some people, in other words, “urbanized” by sitting still.²

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Sin City

The emergence and growth of cities brought to light many social problems — crime, poverty, and alcoholism being the most obvious. There were, as well, so-called moral issues like unwed motherhood, gambling, and prostitution (the last of these was not always regarded as a criminal activity in the 19th century). The response was the creation of institutions such as prisons, insane asylums, orphanages, and shelters for the poor. The protection of property (manifest in police stations, courts, and jails) and care for the weakest members of society (in asylums and hospitals) was part of a continuum of middle-class values that patrolled deviance and enforced the emerging standards. The wide support for these values was evident by the sometimes-competitive frenzy of funding and building the institutions that would mark a city as a “go-ahead” place. In the 1850s alone Halifax added to its list of government buildings the Lunatic Asylum, the City Hospital, Rockhead Prison, the Halifax Court House, and the County Jail.3

The mid-19th century witnessed the emergence of philanthropy as a social phenomenon in British North America. To be wealthy was one thing; to be a philanthropist was something else altogether. Philanthropy had deeper roots in England where money had accumulated in the cities a century or two earlier. It was informed by Protestant values that placed a premium on doing good deeds as a means of achieving personal spiritual growth. And where one or two philanthropists could not make a project come together, an organization might. The Ladies Benevolent Society and the Hamilton Orphan Society, for example, addressed a constellation of concerns and were backed by middle-class Protestant women in Hamilton, Canada West. Their projects included a home for elderly women and an orphanage as well as a social work visitors initiative.4

In Montreal and Quebec, most of these institutions were Catholic, but there were Protestant operations as well. As Montreal grew, so did the Catholic institutional presence; the Protestants had to play catch-up. Civic leaders faced issues like poverty with mixed feelings: charity and care were needed but leading Protestants were fearful that their efforts would lead to more poverty and less individual effort on the part of vulnerable populations. But also, “the Montreal Protestant community was torn between the need to create its own relief network to alleviate destitution, in order to avoid forcing Protestants to compromise their souls by using the Roman Catholic system, and the prevalent ideology against making relief too easily available or too abundant.”5 The result was a House of Industry in the 1860s that distinguished between the “deserving poor” (such as the elderly) and the able-bodied poor who could work for their keep. The division in Canada East between Catholic social work institutions and privately funded Protestant

institutions kept the state out of the system for the most part (unlike in Canada West and the rest of English-speaking British North America), a fact that would come to have some bearing on the shape of Canadian federalism in the years to come.

**Key Points**

- British North American cities were taking on the trappings of bourgeois towns the world over, including investment in substantial civic buildings.
- Manufacturing — and the desire to have more factories — was a feature of the emerging early Victorian city.
- British North American society was, overall, more urban than most countries, even though it was very rural.
- Social problems and how to address them were the focus of attention from many urban leaders.

**Attributions**

**Figure 10.5**  
Provincial Asylum Toronto by Skeezix1000 is in the public domain.

**Figure 10.6**  
Toronto from the top of the Rossin House Hotel by Skeezix1000 is in the public domain.

**Figure 10.7**  
North side of King Street East, from Toronto to Church Streets by Skeezix1000 is in the public domain.
10.6 Social Classes

The social classes of British North America at mid-century were a mix of old and new elements. The seigneurs of New France survived into the 19th century, their ranks inflated by the arrival of British gentry who bought up seigneurial titles and lands. And, of course, seigneuries depended utterly on the perpetuation of feudal relations with censitaires. It wasn’t until 1854, with the passage of An Act for the Abolition of Feudal Rights and Duties in Lower Canada by the now-united Province of Canada, that the system truly began to disappear. It would take another 80 years before it was wound up completely, but 1854 marks the beginning of the end of feudalism in British North America.

The seigneurs and censitaires had roots that ran deep into the history of New France, as did the merchants (or burghers or bourgeois) whose claims to legitimacy might go as deep as the fur trade. The seigneurs retained importance politically and socially, but it was the merchants who emerged in the 19th century as the leading social class. By the 1820s, liberal professionals were beginning to make a significant appearance (especially in the towns and cities), and throughout this period the clergy were effectively a social class in their own right, one with considerable clout in all colonies.

Farmers and artisans remained, by far, the largest social category, but by the mid-19th century their numbers were being challenged by a growing working class, or proletariat. (The latter became more organized and significant in size only after Confederation.)

Self-awareness or class consciousness is what makes social classes matter. Not all of these social classes were able to act with a singular will, although their interests were often quite clearly distinct.

### Exercise: Documents

**Fashion plates**

One of the features of vernacular (or folk) culture is that it is slow to change. Below are five visual records of the clothing styles of Canadien men and women in the 19th century (Figures 10.E1 – 10.E5).

To what extent are they durable? What changes do you notice? What elements stand out?

All of these illustrations were made by Anglo-Canadians or British army personnel. What do you think they saw when they looked at their subjects?

**The Clergy**

While it is the case that the clergy shared a common identity, this identity was fractured by denominations. There was much more solidarity in Lower Canada (Canada East) where the Catholic clergy was tightly organized, engaged in a wide range of social and educational services that went far beyond the saving of souls, and — perhaps most importantly — was aware that their sect existed at the sufferance of the British-Anglican imperial establishment. Belonging to an organization that had these qualities was attractive to many Canadiens, not just as members of congregations but as people seeking a career. Whether in nursing or education, ministering to the poor, serving as missionaries among the Aboriginal population, or working as far afield as the Prairies or the West Coast, the Catholic church offered career...
opportunities for men and women alike that offered social status, influence, a community of peers, a sense of inclusion, security from cradle to grave, a chance to travel, and a role in protecting and advancing the culture of the Canadiens. In this respect Lower Canada was distinct from France: there, the nobility and the clergy had lost much of their influence during the Revolution, while in Canada they still enjoyed prominence and respect.

The situation for clergy in the Anglo-Protestant colonies was different. Sectarianism was loaded with meaning and sometimes vitriol. The Anglican establishment in Toronto, led by the Reverend (Bishop from 1839) John Strachan, represented the elite, the English, the Crown, and Toryism and took the form of the Family Compact. They regarded Methodists with suspicion and the Presbyterians hardly less so. In 1820 the Family Compact was able to
institute a body for managing the Clergy Reserves, one-seventh of the public land. All of this land and the profits from its sale was claimed by the Church of England. Opposition to this arrangement grew through the mid-19th century, and in 1824 the Church of Scotland (the Presbyterians) won a share of the Clergy Reserves, but it remained outside of the local power structure and was a factor in the 1837-38 Rebellions.
William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861), a Presbyterian, aligned in his legislative career with Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882), a prominent Methodist minister in Toronto, in pursuing equity of the Clergy Reserves. Mackenzie was reputedly strongly influenced by the anti-clerical views of his mother, Elizabeth Mackenzie, and he was a lifelong advocate of the separation of church and state as a result.¹

Competitiveness among the various sects was evident in some of the other colonies as well. In Newfoundland, outports were generally defined by the presence of one or two churches to the exclusion of other denominations, but in Prince Edward Island, rivalries between denominations appeared within individual villages. Island Presbyterians, Anglicans, Catholics, and Methodists found themselves squaring off against Congregationalists and Baptists. Each sect offered up larger and larger village churches as a sign of their competitive strength. By mid-century, the Tories on Prince Edward Island had become the party of Protestantism while the Liberal opposition spoke for Catholics and some of the smaller denominations.²

Elsewhere in the Maritimes sectarian distribution reflected waves of immigration and movement. Catholicism followed the Acadians back to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and it was reinforced by the arrival in Cape Breton of Highland Scots and everywhere by Irish immigrants. Presbyterianism came with the Lowland Scots, and Congregationalism — a vestige of the New England Planter migration in the 18th century — was a minority sect in the 19th century mostly found in New Brunswick.

The end effect of this plurality in Atlantic Canada was to weaken claims of primacy by any one sect. This made it impossible, however, for the colonies to avoid sectarian disputes such as those associated with the funding of schools. And sectarian education, of course, made the imposition of a single curriculum impossible.

Generally, the clergy enjoyed significant social status and influence, in both the French and English areas. The Catholic establishment in Lower Canada had an infrastructure that must have been the envy of other denominations. But religious identity was just as important to Anglo-British North Americans. Sometimes this was tied to ethnicity — such as Scottishness and Presbyterianism or Welshness and Methodism — but more broadly denominational commitment was associational. That is, it was akin to belonging to an exclusive club, one that had its own history and heroes and took care of its members in this life and the next. Robert Barry (ca. 1759-1843) provides one example: press-ganged into the British Navy at no more than 15 years of age, he jumped ship in New York, joined a local Methodist chapel, and was part of the Loyalist migration to Nova Scotia in 1783 where, as one biography has it, “his promotion of Methodism…aided his integration into the pre-existing mercantile structure through select business ties.”

The Capitalist Class

The merchant elite of the Canadas and the Maritimes may have been competitive in their business dealings but they soon recognized a common cause in many aspects of business. And, of course, they were united by Anglicanism, Toryism, and language (English). As early as the 1820s, capitalists had achieved a degree of hegemony in the English-speaking colonies. Being Tory, Loyalist, patriarchal, and hierarchical were the dominant values, largely by default. There was no nobility (other than the governors) or local aristocracy to challenge them from above, the Presbyterians were increasingly onsite, and there was not yet a large enough class of artisans or industrial workers who might generate a viable critique of emergent Canadian capitalism. Farmers, smaller entrepreneurs, and urban professionals (discussed below) had something to say about this situation, as did some journalists, but there was a line to be toed and it was drawn by the well-to-do bourgeoisie of Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, Halifax, and Saint John.

The leading spokesmen of this class were, of course, men. However, their web of connections points firmly at female networks that were every bit as important and sometimes gave the men upper-class pretensions. For example, James McGill (an Ayrshire-born son of a metalworker) arrived in post-Conquest/pre-Revolutionary Montreal, entered the fur trade, and promptly married Marie-Charlotte Guillimin (1747-1818), whose father had been a member of the Sovereign Council of New France and a judge in the Courts of Admiralty, and whose maternal grandfather was a giant among the seigneurial class. Sarah Vaughan (1751-1829) fell on very hard times at the end of the Revolution and fled to Montreal as a propertyless Loyalist, where she met, cohabited with (for 15 years), and finally married the brewing magnate, John

Molson. Molson himself came from gentry stock in England but Vaughan’s family included the 1st Earl of Lisburne and the Duke of Atholl. Another example from Montreal is Marie-Marguerite Chaboillez (1775-?), the daughter of a leading fur trade marchand who was a founder of the exclusive Beaver Club and who married the Scottish fur trader Simon McTavish. Insulated by wealth and borrowing some of the glow from relatives’ titles and accomplishments, the capitalist elite formed an almost impregnable leadership class in the main towns of the colonies.

Figure 10.9 Charlotte Trottier Desrivières, sister-in-law of Marie-Charlotte Guillimin McGill.

However much the merchants and leading manufacturers wished to cast themselves in the mould of “old money,” they were North Americans as well and they endorsed hard work and determination. As one study puts it, “Profit, loss, extensive growth, efficiency, and a myth of individualism pervaded the Canadian economy and the Canadian political scene….” There were enough examples of self-made men in the ranks of leading capitalists — Alexander Keith (a brewer), John Redpath (construction and sugar), McTavish and McGill (fur traders) — to give substance to the notion of individual accomplishment through hard work. These values became deeply embedded in the Canadian culture, reinforced by Britain’s turn to laissez-faire capitalism, the rise of American capitalism south of the border, and a Protestant clergy whose views were not wholly dissimilar.

The Agrarians and Artisans

Farming was the bedrock of the colonial economies of the Canadas, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. Farming mattered in Nova Scotia as well, but as was the case in Newfoundland, the fisheries continued to exert more power there.

The relationship of farmers to the rest of society was complex. Under the model of the independent farm, a household invested labour and its capital in order to maximize production, making the most of an environment in which winters arrived earlier and left later than in American grain belts. In Upper Canada and in New Brunswick, the farming frontier was organized around townships, which became places of interaction, commerce, stockpiling grain output, and combining to improve infrastructure. The surrounding towns were also where artisans associated with agrarian society

located: shoemakers and dressmakers served basic consumer needs, and ironmongers and blacksmiths contributed to the success of farming. In the agricultural monoculture of wheat that existed in Upper Canada (Canada West), competition with other producers was largely meaningless: when everyone grows wheat, everyone hopes for the same rising tide.

For artisans, being a member of a craft signified a degree of structured and regulated training. Stonemasons, for example, were part of a tradition of builders arising out of the Middle Ages who trained as child apprentices, became journeymen, and eventually achieved the status of master craftsmen. They might belong to a guild or an association that limited the number of craftsmen in the market at any time, thereby assuring a reasonably good income. They were mostly independent workers, hiring themselves out on contracts, not as wage labourers. They often had their own shops although some were itinerant.

Shoemakers are among the best studied artisans of the time. They had a strong collective identity, celebrated annually on October 25 during marches for St. Crispin, the shoemakers’ patron saint. As early as 1830 the shoemakers of York (Toronto) organized and went on strike for higher prices, which were locally regulated. According to one study by Greg Kealey, there were 68 shoemakers in the city in 1833 and 49 shoe shops (which may have combined retail with the manufacturing processes) in 1846; by 1851 there were two “shoe factories.” Montreal shoemakers, however, dominated the trade for many decades and were the first to see their work broken into components: women assembled the leather from home, and men added the soles in small shops. Eventually the process was brought under one roof where the newly invented sewing machine was introduced. Again, this part was women’s work: less skilled, lower paid, and more aggressively supervised.

The 1861 census of Canada West tells us that there were 221 boot- and shoemakers in the eastern districts of the colony. Of those, 141 were independent, typically working from their homes or a nearby shop. The work was slow and hard: a single shoemaker was unlikely to complete more than 150 pairs in a year. As the population grew at mid-century, so too did demand for shoes. The factories responded by expanding output which, at the same time, increased pressure on the producer-artisan in the small towns. An advertisement in the Halifax Citizen newspaper of February 20, 1864, called for “20 Workmen on Pegged Work” for the Truro Boot & Shoe Factory.

The effects of industrialization were being felt by the crafts far beyond the big cities. One of the factors necessary for this change was the rise of the dairy industry and beef cattle farming. A shortage of cowhide and tanneries would doom the shoemaking business, so an ecology of supply and demand had to evolve to sustain both the early and the industrialized operations. (In this way, shoemaking also encouraged the cheese business.) Of course, advancements in transportation meant that shoe leather could be obtained from American sources too, especially at mid-century under the terms of reciprocity. With supplies secured and a post-reciprocity market guaranteed, one of the largest operations in British North America, Sessions, Carpenter and Company in Toronto, employed 250 men, women, and children on the eve of Confederation.

In this way, craftsmen’s work became proletarianized. Even if skilled artisans were needed to complete the final product, the division of labour now included children and women, with as much as a third of the workforce in the largest factories being made up of women. Unionization would follow early in the post-Confederation era in an attempt to win back what had been lost in terms of control of work and incomes by the shift from craft to industry.

The transition from craft to unskilled sweated labour was even more rapid in the production of textiles. Montreal was the centre of clothing production business by the 1820s and 1830s. A business that had been dominated formerly by tailors and seamstresses became centralized in early factories where ready-made clothing was produced in large quantities. This entailed, again, a division of labour that supplanted skilled artisans with lower-paid women, men, and

children. And according to one study, it did more than disrupt the existing generation of artisans: by dismantling the system that sustained the apprenticeship and journeyman system, it severely impacted the survival prospects for the trade as a whole.6

The Middle Classes

As farm families accumulated money from land speculation and wheat production, some were able to advance their position in society. Likewise, some artisans shifted from being independent producers of goods or services to hiring others to play that role: shoemakers grew from being small-shop cloggers to running small- or medium-sized shoe factories; blacksmiths produced a range of agricultural tools, not just horseshoes. As well, a generation of fur traders who, if they had survived the fur trade wars, settled into communities across British North America as people of comfortable means.

As colonial administrative structures became more complex to meet the needs of growing and changing populations, there were opportunities in a very broadly defined civil service. Similarly, as financial institutions became larger they produced opportunities for regional and branch managers. And there also emerged a class of liberal professionals: lawyers, physicians, notaries, journalists, printers and publishers, surveyors, and engineers.

Together these categories made up an emerging middle class that occupied a socioeconomic and cultural space between the old elites of the Loyalist Family Compacts, the military leadership, and the vice-regal governors on the one side, and the agrarian and working classes on the other. Shared values of the middle class included enthusiasm for literacy and schooling, moral advancement, the primacy of the individual as the key unit in society, the growth and spread of institutions, democratic principles, patriarchy, and the separation of public and private spheres.

In some ways, these values mimicked the upper class, but the middle class also believed in social mobility and the fluidity of social structures, a position that Tories detested. For the upper classes, everyone had a more-or-less fixed, assigned role to play in the social order. For the middle classes, education and (adult male) equality were the keys to advancement and a better society as a whole. As one historian writes of the middle class emerging in Halifax in the second quarter of the century, “growing in absolute numbers, increasingly literate, with ever more disposable income and leisure time, members of these strata tended to become, over time, increasingly self-conscious and ambitious.”7

One example was the Red River patriarch Alexander Ross, who started out as an amateur schoolmaster in Lower Canada, rising through the fur trade to become sheriff of Assiniboia. His son James attended university in Toronto and became a journalist, while another son, William, became a postmaster (a bureaucratic position that only came into existence with the invention of the organized postal system). A contemporary in Prince Edward Island, Edward Jarvis, trained as a lawyer in New Brunswick and London and ascended to the post of chief justice on the island colony. His sons Munson, Henry, and William were destined for careers in law, medicine, and the clergy, respectively.8

The British North American middle classes left a definite fingerprint on the mid-19th century. The houses they lived in displayed a scaled-down architecture from those of the elites: they were designed with the nuclear family in mind and included “transition zones” from the public space — the parlour — to the private spaces in the rest of the structure. As one study describes the situation, “Middle-class family life in the Victorian era was characterized by two related developments. The first is generally referred to as the ‘domesticization’ of the household, a clear separation of work-life

and home-life and the withdrawal of the various household members into the privacy of the home, which became the central social unit for ‘the transmission of culture, the maintenance of social stability, and the pursuit of happiness.’ The house gave form to the lives of its inhabitants and was both the academy and the factory floor on which girls learned domestic skills. The role of hostess was held by the matriarch until age and/or health compromised her ability to be the public face of the family in the private space of the home. The eldest daughter would then typically step into that position, thus playing a role in the oversight of household accounts, any servants the household might employ (e.g., cooks, nannies, governesses), and entertaining guests. The scale of these duties should not be minimized as they were often physically demanding and usually unceasing. Many young Canadian women could not escape these roles and faced spinsterhood rather than abandon the responsibilities of the patriarch’s hearth and home.

Key Points

- Old social classes survived into Victorian British North America while entirely new social categories appeared.
- Differences in social class became more widely felt, especially with the middle class and the upper class.
- Sectarian loyalties and rivalries marked life across British North America as did growing anti-clericalism.
- The growing trend toward proletarianization increasingly challenged the position of artisans and craftsmen/women.
- A middle class with common features emerged, and it was increasingly critical of the power appropriated by the well-off merchant classes and Loyalist elites.

Attributions

Figure 10.E1
Canadian Man and Woman in their Winter Dress by Victuallers is in the public domain.

Figure 10.E2
A French Canadian Lady in her Winter Dress and a Roman Catholic Priest by Metilsteiner is in the public domain.

Figure 10.E3
Habitans in their Summer Dress by Metilsteiner is in the public domain.

Figure 10.E4
Canadian Habitants by Jeangagnon is in the public domain.

Figure 10.E5
Canadian Habitant in Winter by P199 is in the public domain.

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Ravenscrag by Jbarta is in the public domain.

Figure 10.9
Charlotte Trottier Desrivieres by shootmathers is used under a CC-BY-SA 2.5 license.

9. Ibid., 15.
10.7 Gender Roles

Patriarchal authority was the norm in the colonies, less so among some Aboriginal communities, but even there missionaries were making changes. Property ownership in Upper Canada and the Atlantic colonies favoured men and, given the link between property ownership and the franchise, it favoured them politically as well.

Women and Girls

The role of women in the first half of the 19th century was diverse, ranging from life in a religious order to working in a logging camp.

Even though many industries at the time were very male oriented, women helped in woodlot management and harvesting on their family farms. Even in the logging camps, women might find work as cooks, laundresses, and boarding-house keepers. Villages like Bytown (Ottawa), however rowdy and dangerous they were at their worst, contained a substantial female population. Similarly, mining towns were heavily male enclaves but not entirely bereft of women. It was rare to find females working in underground coal mines in British North America, even though in England women laboured in pits until prohibited by law in 1842, and in Belgium for decades after that. Women did, however, find work in haulage and at the pithead; Aboriginal women in particular played a role in Vancouver Island’s coal industry loading the ore from the minehead in cedar baskets and then down the long hill to the waterfront and onto ships.

In the days before factories, fine work associated with textiles and shoe manufacture was often performed by women. Since most artisanal operations were independent — that is, run by families or small employers — the living and working spaces were often closely connected if not overlapping. The manufacture of wool — carding, spinning, and weaving — was cottage industry work in which both men and women participated, but in which women predominated. Likewise the manufacture of dairy products (milk, butter, cheese) was an important component of female farmwork, as was canning preserves. Women made these products not simply for themselves but for sale. Fall fairs presented opportunities for women to show off their products under the scrutiny of their peers; a coveted blue ribbon would mean orders from local grocers and thus were an important source of cash. Because farm produce was often sold under a system of credit, any cash a woman brought in might be a household’s chief source of hard currency. The household was, therefore, much more than a place of domesticity: it was a site of production.

There is an interesting parallel to be drawn between the impact the fur trade had on pre-contact Aboriginal skillsets and the industrialization of “women’s work” in the 19th century. During the fur trade, copper pots made handwoven cedar baskets obsolete; in the era of industrialization, textile mills dealt a fatal blow to homespun clothes-making. (Indeed, the term homespun changed in meaning from denoting artisanal skill to a derisory adjective meaning unsophisticated and unlovely.) In both cases, manufactured goods were substituted for time-consuming crafts and the one gradually squeezed out the other.

But women’s work remained significant to the social economy of early British North America, particularly in farming, logging, and fishing. New farmland in many cases had to be carved out of the forests, so while the men did the hard work of clearing the land, the women tended to the early planting, weeding, and some animal rearing. If logging was lucrative, men might carry on with that seasonally or over a longer term to accumulate money for the farm. The frontier farm women thus perpetuated the near-independence experienced by habitant women married to fur traders in New France:
their men were off elsewhere earning money so the farm was the woman’s domain. Even after the farms matured into more stable economic propositions, women’s work was critical to their success.

Many other women during this time operated boarding houses and laundries. In communities centred on resource-extraction, generally dominated by men, there was high demand for good accommodations, a daily meal or two, and clean clothes. Women who provided these services brought in cash to contribute to the household economy. In single-industry and/or company towns from Cape Breton to Vancouver Island where workers were paid with scrip or credits to be spent at the company store, a woman’s income might be critical. Where possible, women opened and operated saloons (perhaps capitalized by their wage-earning husbands) and small stores. Sometimes these were temporary measures, part of a plan calculated to provide an income when the husband could no longer manage heavy work. Amanda (Gough) Norris’s experience illustrates a similar cross-generational experience: she was one of the first English immigrants to Vancouver Island in the 1850s and she worked alongside her husband in his print shop until their sons were old enough to take her place.¹

In other cases, women raised chickens, pigs, and even cows on very small urban properties. Taking in boarders, even in cramped little homes and tenements, was another possibility, one for which women were usually responsible. These were all financial survival strategies that reduced costs and provided hard-to-come-by cash.

As support grew in the early 19th century for formal education, the need arose for teachers. Although the Catholic tradition in French Canada provided generations of educator development, there was nothing in the way of formal training for English-speakers in British North America. Women took on many of the early teaching responsibilities in Upper Canada, most seizing on it as an opportunity to improve their incomes. Teaching typically took place in the teacher’s home, although small academies also appeared, especially after 1820. For these “lady teachers,” expertise came with experience, although many — perhaps most — never intended to teach for more than a few years until they were married. Widows and lifelong spinsters, to take a different life-course view, came to teaching as a survival strategy and a means to attain financial security.

By the 1840s education was becoming more regulated, so the setting of the independent teacher-proprietor working out of her home declined. Female teachers were generally restricted to teaching girls and boys below the age of puberty. Older boys were the responsibility of male teachers. To be clear, however, most boys and girls did not proceed very far in formal education: the advantages of literacy and numeracy were not appreciated by many agricultural and/or industrial families. The emergent middle classes, however, placed a high value on literacy. Their growing wealth made the business of opening a small school a worthwhile venture.

As ideals of womanhood changed mid-century, middle-class parents wanted their daughters to be educated and provide some “refinement” and a domestic sensibility. Middle-class families demonstrated their success by sending their daughters to school, and girls who turned into literate, organized, respectable young women were more likely to marry good middle-class lads, thereby ensuring the family’s security for another generation. As more girls received this kind of education, demands grew for more specialized skills that moved beyond literacy and behaviour. Musical and artistic education was added to the mix, making daughters even more attractive as prospective brides. An education that extended into the girl’s mid- to late teens might prepare her for a career as a teacher-proprietor.²

The Catholic French-Canadian experience offered different opportunities to women. Despite its strict hierarchical structure and gender roles, the Catholic Church nevertheless contained room in which a woman could manoeuvre. Whether it was in health care or education, a number of full-time and lifelong career paths were available to women of

all social classes. Almost entirely, these positions involved taking religious orders, vows of celibacy, and possibly poverty as well. Certainly women who “took the veil” gave up much, but they also gained security within the largest corporate organization in the colonies and the possibility of making independent and consequential decisions on a daily basis.3

Women also found work on the legal margins of society. The sex trade was alive and well, usually concentrated in brothels somewhere near the docks. Dancehall girls — women who were paid for a dance — blurred the edges between the suggestion and the provision of sex as a business proposition. In gold rush towns of the Cariboo, the acrobatic “hurdy gurdy girls” charged a dollar a dance, which mainly involved being thrown into the air, sometimes upside down. Clearly the prospect of spending time with and being in physical if not sexual contact with a woman had a great appeal to the multitude of men working in resource towns. Dancehall owners exploited this to the point that dance girls were often and very wrongly equated with prostitutes. In Victoria these roles were often filled by Aboriginal women, so they faced the double opprobrium of the moral and, inevitably, racial prejudices held by crusading journalists, politicians, and clerics alike.4

More generally, the experiences of Aboriginal women were different from those of non-Aboriginal women. On the West Coast they traditionally worked in food preparation: fishing and hunting was usually done by the men, but the women were responsible for dressing and preparing the food. The skills developed propelled Aboriginal women into the multitude of salmon canneries that appeared on the West Coast in the late 19th century.

These women also worked in horticulture and were quick to seize on earning opportunities in the fields of settler-farmers. Aboriginal women on the coast had a long-established claim to their earnings, which were not necessarily shared with the men in their lives. As well, child-rearing and care responsibilities were often the lot of “the infirm,” to use one historian’s phrase. This was particularly the case when traditional work became industrialized, such as when Aboriginal women (and mothers) worked in the canneries.5 While child-minding might not always be available to non-Aboriginals at least it was sometimes enjoyed by First Nations women.

Indeed, the responsibility of reproduction fell to women in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies. In households containing extended families, mothers might receive assistance raising their children; women in nuclear family households fared less well. Daughters were trained into motherhood by taking on responsibilities for younger siblings, which, given the fertility rates of the period, they were likely to have. From the filles du roi to Confederation, there were significant social and economic pressures on women to marry and have children. In rural areas, children contributed significantly to the business of farming; primogeniture left a widow vulnerable to the prospect of expulsion from her home, so having children with whom she could live in old age was a practical strategy.

**Men and Boys**

In a study of manliness in 19th century Nova Scotia, Janet Guildford identifies three ideals of masculinity. These rose sequentially though they overlapped significantly, existed concurrently, were in conflict with one another, and sometimes even blended together.

The first is the “masculine achiever,” a character who subscribes to the view that by hard work and ambition he would be rewarded with wealth and success. This ideal keeps his feelings to himself for the most part, is driven, and believes very much in the value of individual autonomy. The second is the “Christian gentleman,” a variant that appears around the mid-century and is more likely to display sympathy and even empathy, less likely to measure his manliness by his

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wealth, and more concerned with proprieties (as he understands them). No less hard working, he is the embodiment of “evangelical Christianity,” a movement that took root after the 1830s across the English-speaking world. Finally, there is the “masculine primitive,” the muscular and physically powerful male who represents the success of the “race.” It is not a coincidence that the masculine primitive appears around the same time as Darwinian theories about the survival of the fittest.

These were types favoured and promoted and dissected in middle-class literature, in the pulpit, in newspapers, and in theatre. And they had their uses for the emerging colonies. Missionary zeal augmented and tempered mercantile muscle while physical prowess made for a strong militia in a strong empire. While each might critique the weaknesses of the other, they were distinctively 19th century creations. In the dominant heterosexual narrative of the day, each one had to be able to turn his abilities into the sort of earnings that would win him a bride and a family — the twin pillars of Victorian society.

Men often walked away from this domestic ideal. After all, ideals of personal autonomy were not necessarily compatible with the binding role of patriarch. This was part of the appeal of heading off to goldfields and forest frontiers. When the American writer Mark Twain had his character Huck Finn say that he’s going to “light out for the territories,” he was speaking of this chance to escape the grasp of “sivilization” and routine. If one considers a boy being born in the 1820s when the farming and logging frontiers were expanding rapidly, then reaching adulthood in the 1840s and 1850s, by which time towns and cities were growing and opportunities for independent action shrinking, it is easy to imagine him wishing for a life he knew second-hand from his elders. As the number and size of farms available to homestead or to buy in the Canadas and the Maritimes shrank, the western frontier on the Plains became more attractive.

And economic and demographic factors often forced their hand. Opportunities to marry are closely tied to the ratio of men to women: where there is an imbalance (and there was a radically stark imbalance in British Columbia among the newcomer population after 1858, running as high as 200 men to every non-Aboriginal woman), lifelong bachelorhood was likely for some. Very local economic conditions also affected men’s options in these years. In Lower Canada in the 1820s, as the availability of new farmland for young families diminished and as prosperity on existing seigneuries slipped, the nuptiality rate dropped as well. If there was a pioneering option nearby, regardless of how poor the soil might be, marriage numbers rebounded. And, perhaps most significantly, if there existed a reliable source of part-time — perhaps seasonal — labour for men, possibly in logging or fishing, then marriage once again became a possibility.

In something like a mirror image of women’s experiences, men were also expected to follow certain gender roles in work and other socioeconomic activities. The commercial seal hunt in Newfoundland and Labrador provides one example. In the 1700s this was an activity that involved both men and women. Seals were hunted near to shore and whole families participated. Then, in the late 18th century, the work became organized on a larger scale. Vessels set out in the spring to hunt seals in more commercially viable numbers, in part because of rising demand for seal oil. At this point, women were excluded from the process and it became “men’s work.” By the middle of the 1800s, according to historian Willeen Keough,

the dominant cultural understanding of the seal fishery [was] an exclusively masculine space — where men and boys tested themselves in a harsh, frozen landscape; where cruel sealing masters drove their crews to exhaustion while greedy merchants urged on their fleets with the toast “Bloody decks and a bumper crop”; where countless ships were crushed in the ice and thousands of men lost their lives.


There was a huge appeal, nonetheless, in the machismo, heroic, mythic features of this business, and males young and old competed for a chance to join the fleet. Most importantly, there was money to be made and sealing was as good a way to do so as any along Newfoundland’s northeast coast. Being gendered into the role of seal hunter meant, conversely, being gendered out of other possibilities. The individualistic striver, risking life and limb for a good catch so as to cover the family’s costs, was never objectively the best of all possible options.

Boys had to make choices from an early age. Apprenticeships, as we have seen, and labouring jobs as well often began by age seven or eight. Boys pursuing a trade were usually “apprenticed out” to another household where they were trained and, for all intents and purposes, raised.

As the overwhelming majority of British North Americans either lived on the land or in fishing villages, the typical boyhood involved hard labour that followed the hours of daylight rather than a clock on the wall. Until the 1870s, working people in towns had only one day of rest a week: Sunday. This left little time to recharge small bodies which they badly needed, given the beatings regularly administered by overseers in some of the colonies’ truly Dickensian-like workplaces. The physical demands of boyhood were high in this period, possibly higher than they had been at any time before in human history outside of plantation slavery. Formal schooling, moreover, offered little in the way of relief.

**Marriage and Divorce**

English common law was used throughout anglophone British North America, although not always uniformly. The Maritime colonies’ traditions were heavily influenced by those of New England and New York, from where so many Loyalists had come, whereas Upper Canada tended to follow British traditions. The effect was to produce a patchwork quilt of civil law legislation across British North America, which was reflected in the divorce laws of the day.

Nova Scotia, for example, established parameters for divorce in the late 1750s that were more generous than those in place in English law. Divorce could be pursued because of adultery under both legal realms, but in Nova Scotia wives and husbands could also file for divorce on the basis of impotence, physical abuse, and too close a familial connection (also called “consanguinity”). In New Brunswick “cruelty” was replaced by “frigidity” in 1791 legislation. Prince Edward Island copied the New Brunswick legislation in 1833, making a few changes of its own, including allowing wives to retain a “common law right to a life interest in one-third of the real property at the death of their husband,” even after divorce. All of the Atlantic colonies sought to punish “fornication” (heterosexual relations outside of marriage) and adultery, and on the whole they were all relatively even-handed in the treatment of men and women.

Upper Canada followed a path more consistent with English law, which made divorce a matter for Parliament itself to decide on a case-by-case basis; for all intents and purposes, divorce was an impossibility in Upper Canada. In Lower Canada the hostility of the Catholic clergy to the concept of divorce was seemingly unchanged from the pre-Conquest era; it was simply illegal and immoral. It was possible after 1839 to dissolve individual marriages in Lower Canada by statute, which drew the two Canadas closer together in practice.

In 1857 Parliament in London introduced the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, and the colonies of British North America spent some of the next 20 years struggling with how they might conform to this single model. It proved impossible and, although Canada West finally allowed for the possibility of divorce, it was even more cumbersome than was the case in Britain. The British legislation, moreover, introduced the “notorious double standard for cause,” which made it so much easier for husbands to secure relief from an adulterous wife than vice versa. Long after Confederation

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the responsibility for divorce remained a provincial matter and an artifact of the distinctive experiences of the individual colonies.\textsuperscript{10}

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\textbf{Key Points}  \\
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- Notwithstanding the core patriarchal values of the era, mid-19th century women played important economic roles.  \\
- Changes in the production of food and cloth impacted women by reducing the value of their domestic output. Some women turned instead to providing services like lodging, meals, or laundry.  \\
- The roles of men and boys were equally gendered and the expectation was every bit as great that they would marry and produce other colonists.  \\
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Ethnicity became a common dividing line in British North American society in the mid-19th century. This was associated most acutely with the Irish immigrants, who were viewed by established settlers as competing for jobs, compromised by cholera, heavily addicted to alcohol, inclined to brawling, and mostly Catholic. Take out the specifics and one has the outlines of nativist responses to newcomers for generations: economic threat, health threat, moral threat, physical threat, and spiritual threat. Nativists — that is, British North Americans whose claim to precedence might go back generations or only a matter of years — repeatedly stirred up panic about new immigrants, most of whom were unskilled and badly connected to the local society.

Of course the living conditions and hygiene were poor (although hardly different from the rest of the working population), but all of these prejudices combined to keep newcomers in generations of poverty. In Saint John, New Brunswick, in the late 1840s, this situation provoked violence when Catholic Irish descended on the town, fleeing poverty during the Great Famine. The Orange Order, a local branch of an international organization that fought Catholicism in Europe (but especially in the largely Protestant counties of northern Ireland), spoke for nativist interests by trying to drive out Irish immigrants.1

Similar confrontations occurred along the Ottawa Valley, where the Irish Catholics turned on the host society. In a running battle that lasted from 1835 to 1845, Irish Catholic logging camp workers were incited by one employer, Peter Aylen (1799-1868), to attack Canadien loggers and logging operations. Using violence as a tactic to gain advantage, Aylen and the Irish asserted their authority over the whole of Bytown in what was known as the Shiners’ War. The reign of terror lasted only two years, but the violence took another eight years to end.2

Ethnic bias could be found in other circumstances, too. Certainly French Canadians often found themselves at the sharp end of prejudice in English Canada. This played out in any number of venues, not the least of which was the legislature of the united colony of Canada after 1841. Acadians, too, faced anglophone hostility in the Atlantic colonies. The Jewish population of Lower Canada faced a kind of double discrimination as British law forbade their entering political life unless they took an oath to the Christian god, and the Catholic church was actively hostile. Ezekial Hart’s case illustrates the situation. A seigneur at Trois-Rivières, Hart and his family were active in the fur trade and local life for many years before he was elected to the Lower Canada assembly in 1807. He was repeatedly blocked in his attempt to take his seat because of the aforementioned oath. Among those opposed to his presence in the assembly was a young Louis-Joseph Papineau. Hart left politics but embittered his opponents by serving as a lieutenant at the Battle of Chateauguay in 1813. Twenty years later Papineau, as Speaker of the Assembly, would demonstrate a change of attitude toward Hart and championed an Emancipation Act (1832), the first of its kind in the British Empire. This Act expanded Jewish rights significantly, though it did not by any means put an end to anti-Semitism.

There is a line between ethnic, sectarian, and racial division that is often unclear. Were Franco-Catholics targeted by Anglo-Protestants because of language, culture, or creed?3 Or a combination of all three? Certainly Lord Durham claimed that he found “two nations warring in the bosom of a single state,” a phrase that has long outlived the man but which complicated the discussion by juxtaposing “nation” and “state.” For people like Durham, nation equated with race

3. This was never a one-way street. In 1853 Catholic crowds in Montréal responded to the visit of a prominent anti-Catholic speaker with violent protest. See Dan Horner, “Shame upon you as men!: Contesting Authority in the Aftermath of Montreal’s Gavazzi Riot,” *histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 44, no.1 (2011): 29-52.
and state with an administrative unit. "Nations," in Durham's time were identifiable peoples with distinctive cultural qualities and beliefs and inclinations, not a great leap from the essentials of "race." Durham's use of the terms "nation" and "state" reflects the rise in his lifetime of the idea of the "nation state," a political and geographic unit that supersedes the old absolutist arrangements that might have Bourbon monarchs ruling over disparate parts of Europe.

The values associated with these terms changed dramatically in the next century. Between 1800 and Confederation, attitudes about the inferiority of certain "races" became popular, even among scholars. What became known as **scientific racism** postulated measurable differences in intelligence, barbarity, and morality (although spirituality had by this time slipped off the agenda). It also argued that the more numerous and less valuable "races" needed managing by superior peoples, lest their near-subhuman characteristics spread across continents and undermine civilization itself. In this respect, "racism" is not merely a set of discriminatory attitudes or a belief in the inferiority of certain identifiable groups of humans: it is a call to action, to resist at every turn the possibility of inferior people destroying the accomplishments of superior people.

This attitude prevailed at the time for a number reasons. First, it was the age of Britain's Second Empire. Expansion into Africa and Asia was helped along by a theory of the human race that legitimizes conquest and subjugation. Just as Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries were armed with their Christian beliefs to strengthen their assault on people in the Americas, the British, French, German, Belgian, Dutch, and American expeditions abroad in the 19th century used racism. Second, the Darwinian theory of natural selection that explained the diversity of species within a population was misapplied to humans — using skin pigment, physique, and place of origin to establish a hierarchy of humanity among human races. Dislike of foreigners — xenophobia — was given a scientific veneer, whether that was Darwin's intention or not. And, of course Darwin was not the only celebrity scientist of his age whose ideas were brought to bear on the issue.

While racism was used in New Brunswick and elsewhere to lend legitimacy to attacks on Irish immigrants, it flourished most fully on the West Coast. In retrospect, the era of the HBC monopoly looks like an age of tolerance and mutual respect (although geographers like Cole Harris have characterized it as one of brutality and efforts at subjugation of employees and Aboriginal peoples alike by HBC traders). Beginning in the 1840s and the start of colonization, White attitudes toward other peoples in the region started to shift. At first the prejudices that emerged had much more to do with religion and spiritual issues. Missionaries who arrived in those years were quick to point out the heathen state of the locals, but they were also in conflict with one another. Oblate (Catholic) missions were among the earliest, arriving from the Oregon Territory at mid-century and extending to the central coast and the Cariboo Plateau before 1870. The Anglicans were an established presence under the HBC and the Crown colony regime. Other Protestant denominations showed up along with the gold rush, so that by 1860 in Victoria there were Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians. The plurality of sects had the effect of sapping any one faith of sufficient adherents to become the leading church in the new colonies. By the 1860s this situation produced a political compromise in which secularism and non-denominationalism in education and other activities guided the thinking of government officials.

The gold rush itself, however, produced a distinctive human landscape. The arrival of many Chinese miners, along with smaller numbers of people from other parts of Asia, significant numbers of African-Americans, Mexicans, and others elevated the issue of race locally. Arriving in the colonies from San Francisco, the original Chinese were followed by immigrants from Guangzhou (a.k.a. Canton) and Taishan counties. Initially Vancouver Island and British Columbia (united in 1866) were inclusive in their democratic institutions. By the 1870s, however, almost all non-Whites had lost the right to vote. As well, Chinese settlers were discouraged from owning property or residing outside of demarcated quarters known as **Chinatown**.

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The Chinese immigrants were overwhelmingly male and motivated to make money in a hurry and return to China. Discrimination and hostility impeded some of their efforts, although Chinese miners left a distinctive mark on the gold rush landscape. Thoroughly washing off every rock they lifted from the gold-bearing streams, they stacked them in huge piles along the riverbanks; evidence of this practice may be seen in many old gold rush towns. The Chinese needed to be meticulous because they were regularly challenged over their claims. Numbers came to matter in the goldfield, however, and roughly half of the population of Barkerville at its height was Chinese. Some of this population, particularly the Taishan immigrants, would make their way to Nanaimo and Wellington on Vancouver Island where they would later find work in the coal mines.

Racism was articulated within the context of a discourse tied to evolutionary theory, but it had a longer pedigree. African slavery did not require 19th century science to produce laws and behaviours that spoke to ideas like superiority and inferiority. Imperialism had, for more than two centuries, reinforced those ideas as was clear from the marginalization of African Nova Scotians on poorer land or in underserviced urban enclaves.\(^5\) However, the mid-19th century iteration of racism was different in that it became a generalized way of looking at the world. The age of steam power had something to do with this: more peoples were crossing paths with one another than had been the case in the past. Asia, too, was breaking out of its long, self-imposed isolation. The distinctions were sometimes subtle.

There were important contradictions here as in all social relations. At the very moment that racism was on the rise, the anti-slavery movement was as well. At the same instant that British North American middle classes were agitated over the future of the British “race,” they were condemning slavery in the United States, backing the Underground Railroad, and in some cases publicly endorsing African-Canadian involvement in the body politic. The career of Mary Ann Shadd (1823-1893) offers an example. She and her brother fled the United States after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (1850), taking up residence in Windsor, Canada West. There she published *The Provincial Freeman* and built a base of support for racial integration and the exodus of African-Americans to Canada and Vancouver Island. In the West Coast colony, some of these immigrants formed the all-Black Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps, and one of their number (Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, 1823-1915) became a highly influential merchant and political broker in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Gibbs’s counting house, however, was only a few metres away from Victoria’s Chinatown and a stone’s throw from the Songhees reserve, neither of whose occupants were invited to participate in the new democratic civilization.

One place in British North America where the nuances and contradictions of racism could be seen — and mattered greatly — was in Aboriginal relations with the expanding settler communities. This theme is pursued in Chapters 11 and 13.

Key Points

- Ethnic and sectarian intolerance divided many communities in Upper Canada and the Maritimes following the arrival of Irish immigrants.
- Religious intolerance was widespread.
- British North Americans invoked the language of race to disadvantage minority groups and Aboriginal peoples.
- The diversity of the immigrant community continued to expand through the 19th century provoking further instances of systemic and formalized racism.
- At the same time, there were strange contradictions, the most outstanding being White British North American attitudes toward African-Americans, which were generally much more tolerant than for any other group.
10.9 Education

Formal education has a complicated history in Canada. Loyalists and other American immigrants brought with them a stronger tradition of education than what existed in New France (outside of the main towns), which much of British North America inherited. This was evident in the West during the first two decades of the 19th century when the HBC established schools at Red River for the mixed-blood offspring of its employees and when North West Company men lobbied for a school at Fort William or Rainy Lake for the education of their métis children. A basic education was regarded by these men as a critical and fair demand; they valued fundamental reading and writing skills in particular.\(^1\)

*Parochial, Private, Public*

In contrast, illiteracy was the norm in rural Lower Canada. Many Canadiens saw little value in formal education. Farm life was trying, subsistence farming even more so, and all hands were required to work. Even children worked at farm labour from a very young age.

In 1846 the united Province of Canada passed the Common School Act, which took education out of private hands for the most part, but the legislation had little impact in smaller, poorer districts. The law called for a tax assessment on residents to cover school construction, and the execution of the policy was to be guided by locally elected school commissioners. Poor farmers greeted the new levy with resentment and the commissions attracted the few literate residents in a community, individuals who weren’t always typical of the larger population. Suspicion of education as a tool for assimilation of French speakers by the dominant English regime was rampant (and, in Lower Canada in the aftermath of the Durham Report, that was a reasonable response).\(^2\)

In the growing towns of the Canadas, formal education remained something only a minority enjoyed at mid-century. In Hamilton, for example, it is estimated that barely half the population between the ages of 5 and 16 attended school. The share only crept above 40% between the ages of 7 and 13.\(^3\) Education could, of course, be delivered by private tutors in the homes of the better-off citizens, and being schooled abroad was an option for the children of the elites. Throughout the 19th century, the children of the more senior HBC traders and their Aboriginal wives were often sent to Britain for their education.

*Educational Reform*

The rise of widespread, publicly supported schooling in mid-century was one more expression of a growing democratic sentiment, one that linked education to individual accomplishment and social improvement. A better educated society was better equipped to handle democratic responsibilities and promised to be more economically dynamic. As well, it was believed that schooling could address in some measure the perceived problems associated with unemployed, disruptive, perhaps criminal, and possibly pauper children on the streets of the growing towns and cities. In the same way, too, public schooling was wielded as a weapon against social disorder that might follow in the wake of immigration.

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These motivations reflect a particular urban, Anglo-Saxon, and moralistic perspective on both childhood and Irish immigration.

Not everyone subscribed to the view that either concern was significant, but enough did together that they shaped the language and legislation around schools. That said, what education most boys in British North America received prior to mid-century was informal and limited. “Sunday schools” became highly popular in England in the 18th century and soon spread to British North America: these were the only educational venues many boys and girls would ever see, despite the changing views in support of formal learning.

In the 1840s growing interest in a common project of secular education raised questions about teacher training. Normal schools began to appear across the colonies and the colonial administrations began to take an active role in developing curriculum and education systems. This process should be viewed in the context of the broader ethos of reform as it was emerging in the mid-century. As we shall see in Chapter 11, reform took a particular shape when it came to formal politics, but more generally it called for the betterment of a broader slice of society. Old social relations were being tested. Demands were rising for greater opportunities to improve those things thought to be essential to personal achievement. Education certainly fell into this category. But, as historian and social scientist Bruce Curtis has indicated, it was a potentially divisive if not explosive issue:

Educational reform … was inextricably connected to questions of the form of the colonial state. All the fundamental questions concerning educational organization — who needed to be taught, who could educate them, what they needed to know, how they should learn it, who should pay for it — these and other questions were answered only by answering at the same time questions concerning the state: who would rule, how, of what would rule consist, how would it be financed. The struggle over education was at once a struggle over political rule.

Tories, of course, wanted an education system that taught deference and loyalty. Reformers preferred a locally controlled model headed by school trustees elected by parents, and it was this model that succeeded and thrived across British North America. Its purposes were different from colony to colony, but at its heart it sought to create a commonality of experience and thus a citizenship. As Curtis points out, this kind of policy-making wasn't imposed on the public: it "constructed a public." It had a strong moral undercurrent that resonated with Protestants, elements of deference to

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authority that appealed to Tories, and a step toward universality that spoke to Reformers. The state, as Curtis indicates, was in the process of making civil society.

Colleges and Universities

Higher education expanded dramatically in these years. Before 1818 there existed, in addition to the Séminaire de Québec (later Laval University), only the University of New Brunswick and King’s College (established first in Windsor, Nova Scotia, and then moved to Halifax). Over the next 40 years, several more institutions were established, of which nine were full universities from the start. Nearly all of them were initially associated with a single denomination:

- Catholic: Laval, St. Mary’s, Ottawa, Saint Francis Xavier, Windsor College (much later the University of Windsor), and Collège de Saint-Boniface (very recently renamed the Université de Saint-Boniface)
- Church of England: King’s College (in Halifax), UNB, King’s College (later the University of Toronto), and Bishop’s University
- Baptist: Acadia
- Methodist: Mount Allison
- Presbyterian: Queen’s

Only two universities in this period, McGill and Dalhousie, were non-sectarian or non-denominational, although in the case of McGill, an English-language institution in a largely francophone city, “non-denominational” may be read as “Protestant.” Half of this list comes from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, where denominationalism was a powerful force in the 19th century, one that had a significant claim on a person’s identity and opportunities.

These early universities emphasized the liberal arts and theology as fields of study. Mathematics was a speciality at the Séminaire de Québec from the days of New France. Some, including Queen’s and Dalhousie, modelled themselves on the Scottish universities where sciences were a key part of the curriculum. However tolerant they might be in terms of denominationalism, the Protestant universities in particular were finishing schools for the colonial elite. These were not institutions designed to advance the opportunities of the common man and particularly not the common
woman. The Catholic institutions were, of course, training centres that prepared seminarians for careers in the Catholic establishment: clerics, nuns, social workers, and teachers alike all came out of the Séminaire de Québec, for example.

**Key Points**

- Formal education was transitioning in the mid-19th century from being run by the clergy or offered privately by untrained women or men to being increasingly standardized and professionalized.
- Educational reforms reflected changing social values, which included growing support for widespread literacy.

**Attributions**

**Figure 10.10**
Normal School on Gould Street by Finavon is in the public domain.

**Figure 10.11**
McGill College, Sherbrooke Street, Montreal, QC, about 1859 by Jeangagnon is in the public domain.
10.10 Leisure and Recreation

One social historian, Bonnie Huskins, has shown how public feasts became opportunities to link the middle-class element with a larger world while, at the same time, instructing citizens in the rules of good behaviour. After the French Revolution and the dispersal to other capitals of Parisian chefs, cuisine became a novel matter. The upper classes promoted its diffusion but it was really the middle classes, with their dense networks between cities in North America and Europe, who were best positioned to adopt and promote the styles associated with high-style feasting. Multi-course meals, the paring of wines with meats and fish, and even the banqueting halls themselves — not to mention the embryonic beginnings of something truly new, the restaurant — were standard features, and they were reproduced faithfully from one city to the next. A banquet of community leaders in Saint John was purposely as similar to one in Toronto or Bristol as possible so as to demonstrate a belonging to the Victorian bourgeoisie.1 Conformity was a good thing.

The notion of leisure time took on new meaning in the 19th century. “Old money” — the wealth that used to be the monopoly of the very powerful — always enjoyed leisure, but the people of the cities and towns and farms expected very little leisure time. The middle classes experienced increased leisure first, as they found themselves in a position to hire others to do tasks that freed them up to indulge in interests outside of work.

A Night at the Opera

Middle-class British North America was, in some regards, an extension of new middle-class values spiralling outward from Europe in the late 18th century on. One can chart, for example, the spread of opera houses around the Atlantic rim in these years as an indicator of how high culture or high style was emerging from palaces and manor houses and into public facilities (usually operated with a profit in mind). Theatres and music halls are further examples of this expression of bourgeois values.

These venues provided opportunities to people to show off their disposable wealth and the availability of leisure time; they were also a way to promote civic and cultural values. Halifax’s two Grand Theatres first appeared in the 1780s and were known for their productions of West End farces from London, only tending toward more serious stuff 50 years later. In 1825 a grocer and a merchant in Montreal convinced John Molson to join them in building the city’s first theatre, the Theatre Royal, where Shakespearean drama predominated.2

Similarly, public museums began to appear. Abraham Gesner (a physician, geologist, New Brunswick’s first provincial geologist, and the inventor of kerosene) established the Museum of Natural History, now the New Brunswick Museum, in Saint John in 1842. It was, significantly, part of the Mechanics’ Institute building, a landmark in most British North American towns of any size, one dedicated to the educational uplift of skilled working men.3

2. Owen Klein, ‘The Opening of Montreal’s Theatre Royal, 1825,’ Theatre Research in Canada/Recherches Théâtrales au Canada 1, issue 1 (Spring 1980).
http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7539/8598
A Day at the Races

Working class or proletarian tastes were different. While the middle and upper classes frequented classical theatres and parlour performances of music, those who were poorer were drawn to circuses, competitions featuring feats of strength, and races between humans, animals, and boats. Gambling was widespread and gained popularity through the century both as a kind of skill but also as a means of improving one's financial situation in an instant. Rural people in particular competed with and through their livestock and pets for reputation and money: everything from horse races to cockfights, dogfights, and bear-baiting endured in the countryside and even in some lower-class urban saloons.

Two features united these working-class leisure activities and the historical processes working on them. First, they were principally about individual skills, abilities, or fortune. They were not team sports, which was a style of recreation that was introduced with vigour in the 1870s and 1880s by middle-class reformers disturbed by working-class and agrarian pastimes. Second, industrial capitalism reduced the time available for leisure activities from 1818 on. The post-Confederation battle to reduce the length of the work day in industrial settings — the nine-hour day movement — arose because employers in the early decades of the century felt entitled to keep people at work for as much as 14 hours a day for six days a week. Leisure time, in this context, was often regarded by employers and the middle classes as subversive. Its visibility receded to the physical margins of towns and cities, out of sight and out of mind. When it reappeared in town settings, it became heavily critiqued and policed and in some instances banned. This was nowhere more clear than in the regulation of drinking and gambling.

Public houses, or pubs, were an important part of town life from the 18th century but as evangelical Christianity gained more strength, drinking establishments fell afoul of emerging ideas of respectability. From the mid-19th century, pubs became increasingly a working-class or plebeian phenomenon. They also had an important role to play for travellers as these were among the first hotels in British North America. The "Mile Houses" of the Cariboo Wagon Road in British Columbia that ran from the Fraser Canyon to the goldfields were hotels and "watering holes," as were the great many inns along the main roads of the older colonies.

The battle against drink itself became an important leisure time activity in the 19th century. Temperance movements appeared throughout British North American but rose first in the Maritimes. Amherst, Nova Scotia, contends for

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the title of cradle of temperance, because its Baptist congregation took up the cause as early as 1829. The appeal of temperance resided in the opportunities it presented for civic engagement by people often on the margin (like members of minority sects), a chance to criticize the moral laxity of the snobbish wealthy (who were both hefty consumers and commercial producers of liquor), and an opening for Christian proselytizing of the poor, Aboriginal peoples, and working men and women.

The popularity of drinking in some communities could be explained in its own right by the appalling state of water supplies. As suspicion of foul water as a source of disease spread so did preference for beer and liquors. Temperance was also a kind of self-policing in the absence of anything like a police force. If drinking lay behind domestic and public violence, vandalism, and disorder, and if there was no one to round up the drunks, then persuading people to give up drink seemed like a good strategy.

The Sporting Life

Organized sports was another expression of leisure in the 19th century, although most of the organized sports familiar to us now appeared after Confederation. The wilderness sports (canoeing, snowshoeing), the more bucolic sports (curling, horse racing), and some inherited British sports (cricket, some of the Highland sports), and one sport readily associated with Aboriginal people (lacrosse) dominated. Wrestling and other forms of hand-to-hand battle were also popular. Logging camps, of course, begat logging competitions. Any structured, spectator-oriented event was typically also a drinking and gambling event. If a fight or foot race was staged, it would draw a crowd for miles and a substantial purse, perhaps as much as a week’s wages. Less-structured pastimes included fishing and hunting, recreational activities that doubled as a source of food and perhaps income. In colonial society women were discouraged from participating in many of these activities; mid-century organized sports in particular were male-only propositions. Women’s presence as spectators at competitions was criticized by middle-class reformers who regarded the ubiquity of gambling as corrosive to morality generally.

Class and ethnic divisions were also apparent. For example, the Montreal Curling Club was established in 1807 by and for the local Scots, and membership fees and vetting ensured the club remained exclusive. Efforts were made, as well, to make organized tournaments like horse racing a private and better-class affair but, as one historian notes wryly, “attempts to enclose race courses had only mixed results since the working class was as capable of climbing as it was

of drinking." Racial as well as class boundaries were patrolled by the organizers of sporting and recreational events. Afro-British North Americans faced a "colour line" in a variety of sports: in 1835 a Niagara horse racing club specified that "no Black shall be permitted to ride on any pretext whatsoever." Historian Frank Cosentino points out that there are different ways of reading that prohibition as it could have arisen from a broad racist prejudice, or it could have been aimed at one particularly good rider; likewise it might have stemmed from a class prejudice, as all African-Canadian riders would have been drawn from a working or servant (or even former slave) class and would therefore have been unwelcome in a race made up of "gentlemen" and their grooms. Attempts to bar William Berry (a.k.a. Bob, Black Bob, "the coloured giant") from rowing competitions in 1860s Toronto seems to have stemmed more from his social class (which, of course, was informed by race) than by his skin pigment.

There were other instances in which sport worked as an expression of racial and imperial values. The development of lacrosse in mid-century is an example. The modern game was appropriated from Aboriginal traditions by the non-Aboriginal community and modified significantly. The Montreal Olympic Club — a gentlemen's recreational association — began promoting the newly structured game in 1844. The Montreal Lacrosse Club was established in 1856 and produced the first set of written rules of the game a decade later. These all-White, all-male, all-gentlemen's clubs and teams would, from time to time, play against Iroquois teams from Kahnawake and Akwasasne — and typically lose. However, Victorian society took poorly to the idea of White gentlemen failing to overcome Aboriginal teams, so the results were sometimes fiddled to the disadvantage of the more skilled Aboriginal sides.

![Figure 10.14 The Montreal Lacrosse Club in 1867, made up entirely of non-working-class men whose wealth afforded them the privilege of play.](image)

Recreational Travel

Tourism as a popular recreational activity developed in the 1820s, principally at Niagara Falls. The early canals and railways made it possible for large numbers of people to make their way to either the American or the Canadian side of the Falls. Beginning in the 1820s, daredevils made an appearance and by the 1830s whole ships were sent over the

7. Ibid., 6-7.
8. Ibid., 15.
edge of the falls and smashed to pieces on the rocks below to entertain large crowds. In some instances animals — some local and domestic, others exotic — crammed these doomed vessels, a feature that somehow made the spectacle more exciting.

Social Life

The rise of cities and towns made it possible for people to come together behind common causes and interests. In the larger cities, men mimicked their British and American counterparts by establishing gentlemen’s clubs, which were usually housed in elegant buildings near the centre of the business district. Membership was exclusive and selective. The Beaver Club in Montreal was the gathering place of leading figures in the post-Conquest fur trade who wanted to socialize, dine, and conduct business. The Toronto Club was established 50 years later, in 1837, as the commercial capital of Upper Canada began to consolidate its power, and the Halifax Club was established in 1862 in a grand building a block from the waterfront.

If gentlemen’s clubs were bastions of patriarchal upper-class maleness, other voluntary associations were far less so. The first half of the century saw the spread of Mechanics’ Institutes: centres for adult literacy education, debate, and access to reading materials. Many of these subsequently became British North America’s earliest public libraries. They were established in the major centres of the eastern colonies, and they even appeared across British Columbia in the 1860s. Generally the objective of the Mechanics’ Institutes was to “ensure that men’s leisure hours were spent in sober self-improvement rather than ‘the morbid attractions of billiard tables, and saloons.’” In some communities, Halifax for example, the Mechanics’ Institute “welcomed anyone, male or female, who could pay an annual membership fee of 10 [shillings].”

Other voluntary associations vied for popularity. Freemasonry (a.k.a. the Masonic Lodge) had deep roots in North America and attracted, by the early 19th century, a constituency that was more professional than skilled labour. Other similarly semi-secret benevolent societies also gained ground: the Oddfellows and Foresters grew in popularity from mid-century. According to one source, “more than one-third of the Orange Lodges that existed in the nineteenth century were established during the 1850s, when approximately 550 were formed.” Given the population of British North America at the time, it is likely that there wasn’t a town with more than 1,000 people in it that didn’t include an Orange Lodge and other societies as well.

Part of the popularity of these organizations lay in the rapid rate of urban growth at mid-century: so many people were newcomers and strangers that voluntary associations offered a ready-made community. They also offered links across the country. When George Walkem (1834-1908), a future premier of British Columbia, first arrived from the east in Kamloops, he walked straight from the train station to the Masonic Lodge. There he found connections who could help him find lodgings and work. Walkem wasn’t the only Mason who would parlay his association life into political success. Alexander Keith (1795-1873), the Nova Scotian brewer, rose to the rank of Grand Master of Halifax Freemasonry, a position that put him at the head of parades, in front of crowds, and made him a spokesman for his brethren in the temple. Even if the Masons did not conspire to promote Keith politically, his connections across the whole of middle-class Halifax via the Lodge put him in a good position: only property owners could vote and that constituency was the same as the Masons.

A further advantage of being attached to a social group was financial: many of the benevolent societies maintained cooperative insurance funds that covered the cost of funerals, widows’ pensions, and the like. Of course one key attraction was simply the opportunity to socialize with other men in a convivial environment.

Most of these associations were open to men only. Their position on the spectrum of class awareness is more complex. Some nurtured — intentionally or otherwise — a growing consciousness among workers that their interests were not always aligned with those of their employers. The men’s groups were also critical in the development of a sense of respectability as part of a civic-minded men’s organization, a trend that impacted mid- and late-19th century ideals of masculinity. Most were self-consciously Christian and, at the same time, mostly anti-clerical. The Masons were, for this reason, a target of the Lower Canadian Catholic clergy’s criticisms through the 19th century. The Orange Lodge, of course, was based on a strident anti-Catholicism that was the enmity of the Catholic clergy. Some of the values of these organizations eventually migrated to the embryonic labour associations of the era.

Artisans had long organized in guilds, some of which dated back to the Middle Ages, and these served as social supports as well. The tradition of the guild travelled to the European settlements across the Americas, but faced challenges in the 19th century with the beginnings of industrialization. Nevertheless, some guilds enjoyed boom times. Urban population and commercial growth fed the construction trades, especially carpenters whose services were in such high demand that planing and moulding mills sprang up to prefabricate some of what carpenters had been doing by hand.

As cities grew more densely packed, moreover, the risk of fire expanded. This was addressed by civic ordinances calling for more stone and brick construction. Effectively, the carpenters’ success was their undoing, but stonemasons and bricklayers saw their numbers increase dramatically. In Halifax, for example, the number of carpenters quadrupled from a little over a hundred in 1838 to 408 in 1861; in the same years, the number of stonemasons grew from 50 to 223. Organizations that advocated for the stonemasons kept pace.

Women’s associations tell a somewhat different story. In the absence of professional and public roles for women in the early 19th century cities and towns, there was little demand for associations that promoted and nurtured women’s enterprise. Women’s public engagement in voluntary associations was, therefore, frequently aligned with community and self-betterment and generally in a Protestant context. The temperance movement, already mentioned, provided an important early outlet for middle-class women’s public spirit. In 1844, Halifax was home to a Female Temperance and Benevolent Society. Organizations like this one were pivotal in developing a civic sensibility.

Just as the men’s associations welded mutual interest and urban respectability, the women’s organizations (small though they were in number) were an opportunity to promote women’s roles as nurturers within a patriarchal context and to do so within the relatively new context of city dwelling. These early female associations would bloom into more politically focused movements after Confederation.

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**Key Points**

- The wealth of the merchant elite and the urban middle-classes supported the creation of cultural institutions like theatres and museums.
- Plebian recreations like drinking and gambling fit within the context of limited leisure time and attracted criticism from other social classes.
- Associations and clubs were important agencies of social welfare, sites of networking, and instruments of political engagement.

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Attributions

Figure 10.12
Theatre Royal Montreal 1825 by Jeangagnon is in the public domain.

Figure 10.13
Curling on the Don River by Skeezix1000 is in the public domain.

Figure 10.14
Montreal Lacrosse Club 1867 by Jeangagnon is in the public domain.
10.11 Summary

In 1815 the agricultural economy in British North America was just beginning to take off. The colonies had had a good war, on the whole. The Napoleonic years had, too, confirmed the primacy of the Tory oligarchies in each colony. While some of the old guard had been born into or fallen into their privileged positions, some — particularly the merchants and traders involved with the NWC and the HBC — had got there by hard graft and dangerous labour. Their sense of entitlement and the rightness of their leadership was palpable. And they felt threatened: the tide of history was against them (as seen in one revolution after the next), America was clearly a menace, and in Lower Canada there was always the French majority to fear. The Anglo elite sought to create social orders that would ease their concerns and enable their expansion.

By 1860 the Georgian Tory towns had been replaced (and in one important case, renamed). The urbanization of North America was still only in its early years but the rise of the city and town was underway. Middle-class men and women were beginning to impose their values and visions on the country from their seats in the media-rich port towns along the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence, around the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and in Victoria, and New Westminster.

Even as this class of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists was finding its voice, another population was pushing its way forward. The demographics of British North America were as dynamic in the second quarter of the century as they would be in the years between 1891 and 1914. The population was more diverse and sometimes conflicted. Issues of who belonged and how to treat those who did not arise in different venues and with varying degrees of force. Irish and Chinese alike would feel the limits of British North American generosity and welcome. Working people were another new variable: never before had there been so many people fully or at least heavily dependent on wages. Aboriginal people, too, found themselves exposed to the controlling impulses of middle-class and elite British North Americans who faced the future with both excitement and dread.

At the same time, the emerging middle classes sought conformity among their social inferiors and even the local aristocracy. The cities they were building and everything from their institutions (jails, schools, asylums) to the layout and naming of the streets reflected a growing middle-class consensus in British North America as to what citizenship looked like. The old bonds of deference to the gentry were giving way to a different order. The evolution of this tension from 1818 to 1860 is the subject of the next chapter.

### Key Terms

**anti-clerical**: Associated with the secularist movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, anti-clericals took the position that the role of the church was the saving of souls and not schools and other institutions and certainly not politics.

**benevolent societies**: Also called “friendly societies” or “mutual societies,” a kind of cooperative organization in which the members pay subscriptions as insurance against illness, injury, widowhood, etc. Benevolent societies still exist but many have been supplanted by insurance companies and state welfare systems.
Chinatown: Urban areas dedicated to the housing and businesses of Chinese immigrants and their families. Some Chinatowns appeared spontaneously and were built by the Chinese community; others were imposed by the dominant Euro-Canadian regime as a means of containing the Chinese population.

civic buildings: In the 19th century, usually refers to city halls, local jails, and courthouses. Art galleries and museums as public facilities appear later. The erection of impressive civic buildings was a statement of civic pride, a means of promoting the community, and a statement regarding the growing power of municipalities.

civil service: Employees of the state/colonies/municipalities. Includes surveyors, land officers, postmasters, and a few other positions in the 19th century. The number and types of civil servants expanded with the size of the state in mid-century.

class consciousness: Awareness of one’s socioeconomic status (or “class”) and how it (a) creates and limits opportunities, and (b) is experienced by others as well and constitutes a set of common interests.

company store, company towns: Many 19th and 20th century resource-extraction and construction industries were situated outside of established communities; under those circumstances a great many provided housing, supplies, groceries, work clothes, fuel, churches, and any number of other services so as to attract, retain, and (when necessary) discipline their workforce.

cottage industry: A manufacturing process in which all or component parts of a product are assembled in a worker’s home. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries this was particularly associated with textile and clothing production.

crude birth rate (CBR): The number of births per 1,000 population.

crude death rate (CDR): The number of deaths per 1,000 population.

dependent population: The share of population under the age of 15 years and over the age of 60 or 65. The notion of “elderly” dependant varies over time depending on life expectancies and population health generally.

division of labour: In a system of production, the isolation of certain tasks that are assigned to individuals working cooperatively to generate a certain product. In shoe production, for example, one person may be responsible for the uppers and someone else for the soles and a third for stitching them together.

Famine Irish: Emigrants from Ireland who fled the Great Famine of 1845-52.

Foresters: The Ancient Order of Foresters (AOF), a benevolent society founded in England with branches globally and a focus on members’ insurance.

freemasonry: A fraternal organization dating from the 14th century, which serves principally as a network system between communities. It is a secret society with rituals derived from the medieval guild system. Freemasonry experienced rising popularity in English America from the 18th century and has always been regarded with suspicion and hostility by the Catholic Church and some other denominations, but not by the English Church.

gentlemen’s clubs: Organizations and facilities designed to support networking between business and society leaders. These were usually housed in elegant buildings near the centre of the business district. Until the late
20th century virtually none admitted women and most had sanctions against members of ethnic and religious minorities.

**Grosse Isle:** A small island in the mid-St. Lawrence River, about 50 kilometres downstream of Quebec City. Synonymous with quarantine of immigrants and epidemic mortalities.

**guilds:** Medieval institutions mostly organized at the local level around crafts, professions, and commerce. Merchants’ guilds often functioned as the civic authority while artisans’ guilds were a kind of trade union that defined the requisite skill levels for each craft and established controls on who and how many might be allowed to practise the craft. Increasingly criticized in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as being at odds with free trade.

**hegemony:** Control by one empire, class, faction, or religion over all others.

**high culture, high style:** Terms referring to the development of elite cultural activities, fashions, tastes, and practices in contrast with “folk,” “vernacular,” or “popular” culture. Examples include opera and classical music, baroque architectural styles, formal clothing, and elaborate culinary practices. High culture and style are typically enjoyed by a select number of people across a large — even global — expanse and the styles tend to change frequently; low culture or “vernacular,” by contrast is long-lasting and experienced by large numbers of people but typically in a small area. The cultural practices of Highland Scots, defined by durability and plainness of cooking and art, provide an example of a folk culture with limited external appeal.

**higher education:** College or university education. In the 20th century some vocational and trades training is included as well.

**homespun:** Originally referred to wools or other fabrics produced in the home but extends to full textile products also produced in the home. Synonymous with plain and simple, the term went from being a signal of artisanal skill to a derisory adjective meaning unsophisticated and unlovely.

**House of Industry:** First established under the British Poor Law as a refuge for the impoverished and/or bankrupt. The ideal of hard work even while receiving charity is reflected in the name. These were, as well, referred to as “workhouses.”

**household wage:** The combined income of all individuals residing as a household. Typically does not include unrelated boarders but does include servants.

**ideals of womanhood:** The dominant values in any given society pertaining to the most acceptable ways in which women should behave, the sort of character they should develop, etc. What falls outside of the ideal was often defined as deviant.

**leisure time:** Time left over after work obligations are completed. In 18th and 19th century agricultural societies, leisure time was associated with seasonal lulls between harvest and seeding, and sometimes between seeding and harvest. In early urban societies working people were assumed to have little leisure time outside of Sundays, which was officially or ideally given over as a day for prayer and reflection.

**liberal professionals:** Typically lawyers, physicians, notaries, accountants, journalists, printers and publishers, surveyors, and engineers. A cadre of urban skilled workers who were neither wage labourers nor members of the merchant elite or landed gentry (like the seigneurs).
**Life-course:** A way of understanding and studying the lives of people in history by highlighting changing contexts, needs, abilities, and roles at different points in life.

**Mechanics' Institutes:** Centres for adult literacy education, debate, and access to reading materials.

**Middle class:** Also called the bourgeoisie. Ranks include liberal professionals, small merchants, and educators. Distinct from the working class (who subsist on wages) and the upper class (whose wealth derives mainly from property and position).

**Nativism, nativist:** The privileging of established residents over newcomers. Nativists take the position that their own rights are greater than that of immigrants because they have been resident longer (though sometimes not for very much longer).

**Normal schools:** Teacher training institutions.

**Nuptiality:** The incidence of marriage in a population.

**Oddfellows:** One of the oldest benevolent or friendly societies. May have sprung out of the guild movement. The Oddfellows developed personal and medical insurance schemes for their members.

**Orange Lodges, Orange Order:** Founded in the 1790s in Northern Ireland, a severely anti-Catholic fraternal society that advances the privileges of Protestants. Characterized as well by its loyalty to the Crown.

**Philanthropist, philanthropy:** Equates very closely to charity, though on a significant scale. A philanthropist is someone with sufficient wealth to engage in charitable works.

**Proletarianized:** The deskilling of work and work processes.

**Public houses, pubs:** Facilities providing food, drink, and often a place to stay.

**Public markets:** A space — sometimes a structure — built by the local municipality to provide for the sale of farm and food products.

**Respectability:** A notion of moral character. As new social class structures took shape in the 19th century the ideal of respectability gained importance as a way of offsetting snobbery.

**Scientific racism:** A form of racism that relies on categorization of racialized qualities/trait and measures physiological and genetic features as a means of demonstrating inherent differences in intelligence, morality, and ability. Distinct from earlier forms of racism based on religious belief, for example, scientific racism gained popularity from the mid-19th century on.

**Single-industry towns:** Often also company towns, communities in which one industry predominates and is even exclusive. Mining and other resource-extraction communities are often single-industry towns, but a concentration of productive capacity around textiles or metal manufacturing might also manifest the qualities of a single-industry town.

**Sweated labour:** An industrial workplace in which the labour is hard, the hours long, and the wages low. Sometimes associated with piecework that might be completed at home and not in the factory itself.
temperance movement: A crusade to reduce or even end the consumption of alcohol. Became a widespread phenomenon during the 19th century with the increase of visible urban drunkenness. The movement was characteristically championed by middle- and upper-class women.

total fertility rate (TFR): The number of births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 45 per year.

voluntary family size limitation: Also referred to as “birth control.” The attraction of building smaller families grew in the 19th century as the wage-earning potential or economic potential of children declined.

voluntary associations: See benevolent societies.

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Short Answer Exercises

1. How did economic change impact British North American society?
2. What were some of the main features of the demography of British North America?
3. What were the main sources of immigration? What impact did newcomers have on British North American society?
4. In what ways did life in rural British North America change?
5. What were some of the new features of 19th century cities? What were their principal challenges considered to be?
6. Why did the mid-19th century see a sudden increase in the creation of institutions like universities, asylums, orphanages, and prisons?
7. What were the principal social classes and groups to be found in British North America at mid-century?
8. In what ways were social and economic roles gendered?
9. How did sectarian violence and racism become part of the fabric of British North American culture and life?
10. What was the role of formal education in the mid-century? What were its goals?
11. How was leisure time understood at mid-century? How did organizations and associations figure into recreation?

Suggested Readings


Chapter 11. Politics to 1860
Admiral Horatio Nelson, the victor of the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, was memorialized shortly after his death by pedestal columns erected around the empire. The Nelson Monument in Montreal was the first in British North America and elicited different reactions from the Anglo-Protestants and the French Catholics. Completed in 1809, the column provides Nelson with a good view over the city, is visible for miles, and functions as a daily reminder of the triumph of British naval (and commercial) power both across the Atlantic and in North America. At 69 feet tall, it is not the tallest of the Napoleonic Columns (the one in Trafalgar Square in London stands 170 feet high), and Brock’s Monument is taller still.

The first memorial to General Isaac Brock was erected on the Niagara River at Queenston Heights in the 1820s, when the War of 1812 was still very much a recent memory. It originally stood 135 feet tall and was easily visible from the American side of the Niagara gorge. The column — with a viewing platform at the top — became a pilgrimage site for Upper Canadians. For Tories it had a special meaning as the place where, at the cost of Brock’s life, the American
invaders were repelled. In the budding myth of English Canadian nationhood it would mark the spot where the new nation bloodied its neighbour’s nose. The fact that the Canadian militia was a tiny and reluctant fraction of the troops involved was neither here nor there; growing the legend of loyalism and duty was the point of the exercise. This narrative was perpetuated in song in 1867 by Alexander Muir (1830-1906) in “The Maple Leaf Forever,” often regarded as Canada’s first national anthem. In the second verse, Muir wrote:

At Queenston Heights and Lundy’s Lane,
Our brave fathers, side by side,
For freedom, homes and loved ones dear,
Firmly stood and nobly died;
And those dear rights which they maintained,
We swear to yield them never!
Our watchword evermore shall be
“The Maple Leaf forever!”

Muir was a Scottish immigrant whose father could not possibly have stood firmly or any other way alongside Brock. Setting that literary exaggeration aside, what Muir wished to convey is that Canadians in 1812 had fought for freedom from American republicanism while protecting their families from a savage Yankee attack.

In part, Muir was reflecting his own experiences. At 45 or 46 years of age, he was a member of the Queen’s Own Rifles, a Toronto regiment that served in 1866 at the Battle of Ridgeway, the year before both Confederation and his writing of “The Maple Leaf Forever.” Ridgeway is barely a day’s march south of Queenston Heights, on the same Niagara frontier that Brock defended successfully 50 years earlier. For Muir, a loyal Orangeman and a proud Scot, fighting the Fenian Invasion of 1866 was a matter of saving Canada from the barbarian Irish and Irish-Americans, and as far as he was concerned Brock had done nothing less in 1812.

Not everyone felt the same way. To some, Brock was representative of the haughty and corrupt Family Compact, the Tory cabal that wrapped itself in the flag of loyalism and exploited an extensive system of patronage for its own gain. Repeated efforts were made to achieve political reform through peaceful means, but they failed on every occasion. Opponents of the regime were expelled from the colony; some were imprisoned. In the 1830s republican sentiment in the colony was growing and exploded in a brief and doomed rebellion. The rebels who weren’t captured, imprisoned, or hanged were driven across the border into the United States. In 1837 some made their way to Navy Island in the Niagara River, in Canadian waters. They declared a provisional Canadian Republic and plotted, unsuccessfully, an invasion. One of the armed exiles was an Irish-Canadian named Benjamin Lett (1813-1858). As the rebel movement lost steam in 1840, someone — many believed it was Lett — set off an explosion that tore the top off of Brock’s Monument.

The decapitated and ruined tower was transformed in an instant into a very different memorial. Its shattered profile became a powerful testament to the tensions that existed in Upper Canadian society between those whose history was bound up in anti-revolutionary Loyalism, oligarchical authority, and the power of the local garrisons on the one hand, and those colonists who saw themselves as North Americans first, heirs to a tradition of relative colonial autonomy, advocates for democracy, and even foes of the monarchy.

A new monument to Brock was completed in 1860. At 184 feet, it is comfortably taller than Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square, making it the tallest of all the Napoleonic Wars towers. It would have been six years old during the Battle of Ridgeway, and there’s some possibility that Alexander Muir passed within view of it as his regiment marched south to face the Fenians. Perhaps he saw it again as his unit retreated in haste after the first volleys near Fort Erie. The Queen’s Own Rifles were mocked by their peers as the “Quickest Out of Ridgeway,” but they faced a force of Irish-American nationalists hardened by three years of Civil War service. The battle cost the lives of 32 Canadians and was an embarrassment for the authorities in Canada West, even though the Fenians abandoned the attack. In other words, it was no Queenston Heights and there were no retroactive attempts to mythologize it.
Among the embarrassed parties after Ridgeway was the Minister of the Militia, none other than John A. Macdonald (1815-1891). Macdonald was then a young and inexperienced militiaman (not unlike the composer Muir). He was visiting Toronto from Kingston and was called up to disperse the rebels led by the radical reformer William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861). It is possible that the future prime minister even exchanged fire with Benjamin Lett, who may have been present among the rebels during the Battle of Montgomery’s Tavern.\footnote{The fact that Macdonald was exchanging fire with the grandfather of future prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King is worth considering as well.}

In the 20th century Canada acquired the epithet, "the peaceable kingdom." As we’ve seen, the period up to 1820 was marked by anything but peace. The historical record bulges with accounts of inter-empire warfare, ongoing battles between the Aboriginal occupants of North America and newcomers everywhere from Newfoundland to the West Coast, and struggles between settler societies. There were also violent conflicts between British North Americans, such as the fur trade wars and anti-Irish riots. If we think of the Niagara River as the sharp edge of Canadian-American relations, there were three occasions when blood was shed there in the half-century between 1812 and Confederation — once for each of three generations. What happened along the Niagara frontier consistently involved questions about Britain’s relationship with its colonies and where power resided in the colony itself. And, of course, each struggle pointed to the challenges inherent in British North America’s relationship with the United States, one of many important issues that drove political debate in the 19th century.

This chapter places the critique of the established oligarchy in the context of larger political changes taking place across the Atlantic world. The protests that led to rebellion, bloodshed, the Durham Report, the Act of Union, and a nascent Canadian political culture are examined, as are the changes and continuities to be found in the Atlantic colonies.

**Learning Objectives**

- Learn about the political culture and climate in British North America from 1818 to 1860.
• Identify the major ideological threads running through British North American political culture.
• Describe the principal institutions of power in this period.
• Describe what “reform” meant in the context of the 1820s and the 1830s, and how it changed.
• Detail the main features of the constitutions of the colonies.
• Comment on the changed political role of Aboriginal peoples and how they were perceived by Euro-Canadians.
• Explain the goal and meaning of responsible government.
• Illustrate how ostensibly non-political factors — immigration, cholera, urbanization, debt, sectarianism, etc. — contributed to rising calls for rebellion and an overthrow of the old oligarchical order.
• Critically assess the external forces affecting the political climate.

Attributions

Figure 11.1
Monument Nelson Montreal by Jeangagnon is in the public domain.

Figure 11.2
Brocks Monument by YUL89YYZ is in the public domain.

Figure 11.3
1st Brock’s Monument damaged by pload Bot (Magnus Manske) is in the public domain.
11.2 Politics 1818-1860

The history of politics is like a sausage that can be sliced several different ways. One way is to look at the politicians of the day, the prominent figures who led the debates around policy and strategy. Personality matters as a force in history and we cannot know the contexts of decisions made without knowing something about the players.

Another way is to look at power itself, which is ultimately the business of politics. Where did power reside in this society and why? What forces were being mobilized that would raise or ruin the likelihood of this group or that having more agency in making their own history? It’s not enough to say, for example, that women had little political power because they couldn’t vote; they couldn’t vote because their power itself was limited, and we need to understand why.

There is, as well, the question of ideology to address. What ideas and values drove people in their struggles for power? This relates, too, to the language of politics: words like democracy and freedom clearly have meanings that change over time. As heirs to a long tradition of liberal democracy, we need to appreciate that its practices came into being as part of a movement, and that those who advocated greater democracy in one generation might have been appalled at where those changes went in the next.

Finally (and this is not an exhaustive list of topics), there is the media to consider. As the colonies became larger and more complex, the influence of the press also grew. It isn’t just the case that we should pay attention to what journalists had to say; we need to know what it was that newspapers were trying to be in the 19th century.

With economic and social change after 1818 came demands for political transformation. An oligarchy with roots deep in the pre-Conquest soil of Canada and New England was at odds with a rising bourgeois class in the towns and cities. In an age defined by new theories of social relations and power, by the rise of democratic and socialist ideas in England, and

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1. The German militarist and politician Otto von Bismarck famously made the connection between politics and ground meats when he said, "Laws are like sausages, it is better not to see them being made."
by technological advances that sped up communications, people across British North America debated change: should it come and, if so, how much and how fast?

**Governments and Constitutions**

Not all of the colonies of British North America were governed similarly. It is true that their constitutions derived from a combination of American traditions and practices, on the one hand, and British parliamentary models on the other. Loyalist refugees brought with them a powerful expectation of continuity of American practices in the Maritimes as British colonies appeared there after 1713, and many believed the absence of a local assembly in Nova Scotia deterred some potential migrants from New England, at least until 1758. Cape Breton (independent of Nova Scotia until 1820) never had its own representative assembly, nor did Newfoundland until 1832. Tension between Catholics and Protestants in Newfoundland reached such a pitch mid-century that half of the seats in the colonial assembly were stripped from the electorate and filled with appointees. Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick both inherited much of their administrative structure from Nova Scotia, to which they were both for a time attached. Prince Edward Island’s assembly was made problematic by the landholding system on the island: most of the landowners were absentee. This and tenant-farmer unhappiness put their assembly at jeopardy on several occasions.

Nova Scotia got its first elected assembly in 1758, but its ability to control government expenditures — money bills — was limited. The legislative council, an appointed body, was able to alter or amend legislation arising in the assembly, a practice that was unusual by British American standards and offensive to the New England element in the colony. It was, as well, out of step with Westminster’s ability to control expenditures. Nova Scotia in the late 18th century thus became a testing ground for all the constitutional issues that would face the rest of British North America in the years ahead.

By 1808 the Nova Scotia Assembly controlled much of the government’s spending. Executives, however, retained control of external revenue sources and that allowed them to spend money outside of the assembly’s purview. Political appointments and rewards were commonly used to secure support for the regime and for advancing the interests of the Church of England. These appointments were paid for through the “civil lists” — public appointments — over which all the British North American assemblies desired control. Governors and executive councils realized that assembly control of the civil lists would put an end to patronage and would undermine paternalism. In the 1830s a compromise was struck peacefully in the Maritimes in which the assemblies gained control over money bills (that is, legislation that involved expenditures) with the exception of the civil list.

Unlike the Canadas (which are considered in the next section), the Maritimes had no formal constitution until the 19th century. Reflecting the military orientation of the Atlantic outposts, the governors of these colonies were simply supplied with “instructions” from the Crown for the term of their appointment. Of course, these could be renewed or changed or rescinded over the course of a term in office.

**Political Vocabulary**

**Elected assembly**

All of the assemblies in British North America were elected. The extent of their authority varied over time and between colonies. The electorate also varied. Only property owners could vote and, since Catholics could not own property outside of a special dispensation, Acadians and Canadiens were initially not enfranchised. This soon changed in Lower Canada, but the law would stay in place in Nova Scotia until the 1820s. Further, elections were not conducted by secret ballot: they occurred in public view, providing opportunities for opposing sides to sway electors by means of drink, bribes, threats, and beatings. Only a small fraction of the adult population
was able to vote in the pre-Confederation period and, outside of Lower Canada, the electorate was entirely male. Assemblies were sometimes split between advocates and opponents of deference to the governor. At times in the 19th century, individuals who wished to change the relationship between the governor and the assembly dominated the House; these individuals were called Reformers.

Legislative council: In Nova Scotia prior to 1758, the council was created as a committee to devise legislation for the governor. Its members were appointed from a network of local elites. More like Britain’s appointed and hereditary House of Lords than the House of Commons, the legislative council constituted the political upper class in the colony. With the introduction of assemblies, the council’s role changed to proposing and revising legislation that was debated by the assembly. It was this power of revision that some members of the assemblies most disliked, specifically as it applied to money bills.

**Executive council**

While governors might be inclined from time to time to appoint into the legislative council someone drawn from outside the Anglican Tory elite, the executive was consistently an appointed body of the highest Tories and Loyalists. In Lower Canada their number were increasingly dominated by the Montreal fur-trading establishment and early capitalists. The executive was responsible only to the governor, but that didn’t stop them from biting the hand that fed them. Sir George Prevost (1767-1816), the governor of Lower Canada during the War of 1812, was effectively hounded from office by his own appointees.

**Governor**

The title of this position varies between governor, governor general, and lieutenant-governor. Defending Nova Scotia against the French or Upper Canada against the Americans was part of the job description. To deal with civil matters — everything from road construction to education, from civil order to land titles — governors appointed an executive council to provide oversight and a legislative council to write the laws. Governors were appointed by the Crown (in practical terms, the British cabinet). They came from three sources: most in the 18th century were high-ranking military men with battle experience; some of the early governors and more in the 19th century were from the British aristocracy; a few in the late 18th century were North Americans who cut their administrative teeth as governors in the Thirteen Colonies. All of them were Anglicans. Sir John Sherbrooke (ca. 1764-1830), the lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia from 1811 to 1816 and governor general of British North America from 1816 to 1818, for example, rose to the rank of Lieutenant General in the British Army. He was first sent to Nova Scotia to improve its defences and, later, to mount an attack on American territory. (Ironically, he was better as a civic administrator than as a military figure and made peace between difficult factions in Lower Canada in only two years.) Lord Durham and Lord Sydenham provide mid-century contrasts: the former was an aristocrat sent to British North America to referee the conflicts of 1837-38, and the latter was acommoner who had risen to political and bureaucratic prominence as treasurer of the Royal Navy (he lasted in Canada from 1839 to 1841).

**Key Points**

- The political conflicts and transformations of the mid-19th century reflect changing social relations and economic conditions.
- Not all of the colonies of British North America were governed similarly.
Figure 11.4
The Government House in Halifax by WayeMason is in the public domain.
11.3 Upper and Lower Canada

The Constitutional Act of 1791 created two colonies — Upper and Lower Canada — that were intimately linked. Notwithstanding American canals and, later, railways, the reality was that almost everything that was shipped out of Upper Canada had to pass through Lower Canada. Likewise everything coming into Upper Canada from Britain — including a great many immigrants — did so by sailing up the St. Lawrence first. Much of the investment capital available to Upper Canadians came from banks in Montreal, and much of the wealth of the Lower Canadian merchant elite was derived from activities in Upper Canada or even farther west. In terms of government, the two Canadas were separate and autonomous; in practical terms their relationship was close and complicated.

British-American immigrants who came to Canada after the Conquest advocated for the kind of representative institutions they had left behind in the Thirteen Colonies. But an elected assembly of any kind would have been an entirely new experience for the Canadiens, and Governor Carleton delayed. Whether the British thought this was a bad idea in 1765 or not hardly mattered: within a decade they were fighting revolutionaries whose elected institutions were calling for an end to British rule in the Americas. In that context they were loath to extend the right to representative institutions. In 1791 the British changed their mind. Revolutions continued to ring around them, but they nevertheless decided that it was time to introduce representative bodies to Canada.

The new administrations in each of the two newly separated colonies reflected practices developed in Nova Scotia. There was an elected assembly, an appointed legislative council comprising property owners (who were, in practice, men of wealth), and an appointed executive council to advise the governor. The governor general occupied this top tier in Lower Canada, while the lieutenant-governor performed the same task in Upper Canada. While the assemblies were permitted to introduce money bills, nothing could be enacted without the agreement of the governor.

The assemblies soon found themselves in a difficult situation: if they were ineffective they could be voted out by the electorate, but they lacked access to the levers of power to become effective. By contrast, both the councils were populated by men appointed for life. They could not be dismissed by anyone other than the governor himself. The executive council, which advised the governor directly, was for all intents and purposes the real local authority.

Opposition to this arrangement was not slow in coming but it was for many years easily repressed.

**Key Point**

- Despite being separate colonies, Upper and Lower Canada were closely linked economically and politically.
11.4 The Tory Oligarchy

The Château Clique

In Lower Canada the political elite that controlled the executive and legislative councils met at the governor's château and were known as the Château Clique. Their other label, the "British Party," reveals a second distinguishing feature. In a colony dominated demographically by French-speaking Catholics, the Tory leadership was drawn with few exceptions from the anglophone and Anglican population. A few francophone seigneurs rounded out the councils, but otherwise the voice of the Canadien majority was heard only in the assembly. As well, the councils controlled appointments to the judiciary and the civil service so they were in a good position to reward friends and punish opponents.

The most prominent members of the Clique were John Molson and James McGill, although McGill (a key player in the NWC) died in 1813. Their influence was powerful and typical of the Tory leadership. Even when Britain seemed likely to make concessions to the assembly, the Clique stood in its way. As merchants based mainly in Montreal, this tight network of friends and relations sought to perpetuate and expand their influence in the colony. They regarded the Catholic Church with suspicion (as did perhaps most Protestants), and they were continually concerned that the French culture represented a weakness, the soft underbelly of British North America. Keeping in mind that these Tories came of age in the years when France was supporting the American Revolution and throughout the Napoleonic Wars, it is easy to see how they might fear a reassertion of French power in Lower Canada. Their ongoing attempts after 1791 to undermine French and Catholic culture must be viewed in that context.

Supported by the governors, the Clique was able to deflect opposition from the assembly. Delay tactics by the elected members could only hold things up so long, and Britain's interests were best served by the Clique. While the reformers were building momentum in the 1820s and 1830s, it was the Clique that would emerge intact and its assimilationist plans evidently realized in the Act of Union (1841).

The Family Compact

The situation was different in Upper Canada. There, the same instruments of government were in place: assembly, two councils, and (reporting to the governor general) a lieutenant-governor. The newness of Upper Canada ensured that there was nothing like a seigneurial class that might act as a lightening rod in opposition to the councils. Nor, of course, was there a linguistic/cultural divide across the colony to match the gulf between the anglophone Protestant elites and the francophone Catholics in Lower Canada. There were, however, important class, denominational, and geographic divisions.

The political elite in Upper Canada was strong on loyalty and fearful of change. Governor John Graves Simcoe brought together a group of leaders made up of Loyalists whom he knew were solidly Church of England men of wealth and aristocratic aspirations if not actual breeding. With these individuals he populated the executive and legislative councils. Simcoe's successors went one step further: they used bullying and fear tactics to ensure that the assembly, as well, was dominated by their people. All four levels of the Upper Canadian government, then, was part of what would come to be called the Family Compact. They weren't concerned about a return of French power, but they shared a collective dread of American republicanism and expansionism. This anxiety was matched by a fierce loyalty to the Crown and the ideals of a hierarchical society.
The institutions they built in these years were mainly geared to perpetuating their privilege while strengthening the colonial economy. The Bank of Upper Canada, the canal companies, King’s College (later the University of Toronto), and Upper Canada College were instruments for economic growth and the preservation of the Anglican ethos of the Family Compact. Under Bishop Strachan of Toronto, the Family Compact consolidated its authority through the Church, the judiciary, the government, and the support of those Upper Canadians for whom loyalism became a watchword after the War of 1812. These initiatives were part of a strategy and were not incremental or coincidental. An education system that perpetuated Tory values among an elite of young men, a patronage system that rewarded loyalism, and an economic strategy that reinforced consistently the central authority of Toronto and Kingston met the needs of the Family Compact first and foremost. Consider where their budgets and initiatives did not go: they avoided investment in education for the general public, there were no educational institutions for women, and they purposefully neglected the road system so as to force wheat traffic into the Great Lakes and canals corridor. These strategies were clearly meant to reinforce the status and authority of the colony’s elite and simultaneously stifle opposition. On this latter point, vandalism and assaults on critics of the regime were further instruments of Tory power.

In some respects both the Château Clique and the Compact could not resist the liberal trends of the day. These were men who might like to see themselves as part of a Canadian aristocracy, but they were mostly merchants and investors – capitalists and entrepreneurs – who mostly made their fortunes through commerce, finance, and shipping. Few belonged to the emergent professional classes and fewer still were Methodists or Presbyterians. Their Tory ideals attracted sufficient support because of their commitment to a hierarchy that was meant to look after the weak (noblesse oblige) while expecting deference in return. These leading families were, after all, at the forefront of philanthropy. And yet there was a “best-before date” on Toryism. Larger towns and a more complex judiciary necessitated the creation of a professional class of lawyers, surveyors, engineers, journalists, etc. However indebted to Toryism these professionals might have been for their income, they would come to represent an alternative voice, even for conservatism in Upper Canada.

**Key Points**

- The Family Compact and the Château Clique were cabals of the most powerful figures in the colonies outside of imperial administrators.
- Governors might come and go but the oligarchs were an element of continuity in the colonies.
- The Tory elites depended on and developed a class of liberal professionals whose services they needed and whose loyalty they often commanded, but this middle-class cohort was also the most vocal source of criticism of the oligarchies.

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11.5 Ultramontanism and Secularism

Beginning with the Revolution in France in the 19th century, there arose a division between the Catholicism of Canada and that of France. In Europe, the Church that recovered from the French Revolution was a much weaker organization, one that had been removed (along with the French monarchy) from the principal corridors of power. Catholic clergymen in Canada struggled with this situation. Some were inclined to support and take their lead from the more liberal and politically progressive Gallican church in post-revolutionary France. The majority of Canadien clergy, however, despised the Revolution and its anti-clerical bias; for them, the true source of power was in Rome, at the Vatican, in the hands of the Pope. These clerics looked beyond Alps to the Holy Father for both spiritual and political guidance. For this reason they were called ultramontanists. They entered political life convinced that whatever form government might take in the Canadas, it had to include the Catholic hierarchy.

The ultramontane element was not exclusive to the Church. There were many laymen and laywomen who supported these ideals as key to preserving Canadien institutions and values. But secularism was on the rise, even in Lower Canada (Canada East). The ultramontanes were suspicious enough of the anglophone Protestant politicians who advocated a more modern sensibility and a compromise on the power of the Church. The Church found it easier in many instances to deal with British governors and the Château Clique, who appreciated the role of the Church in containing dissent, than with the francophone liberal professionals who were secularists, like Louis-Joseph Papineau.

Key Points

- Despite the apparent unity of the Catholic Church in Quebec, there were factions with closer allegiances to Rome than to France, let alone Britain.
- The interests of the Catholic Church were, from time to time, best served by working collaboratively with the British regime, rather than with anti-clerical/secularist Canadiens.

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11.6 Republicanism in Canada

The depth of authentic loyalist feeling in the Canadas is difficult to measure. Even the most radical reformers were known to preface their demands for change with a reassuring statement of their affection for the king. Republicanism as a movement that aimed to topple the monarch seemed to have had limited appeal in political circles; republicanism as a system of democratic rule, however, seemed to be more effective at delivering growth and political unity. Canadian merchants and professionals regularly travelled to the United States, and there they could see a growing and prospering economy in which freedom of speech seemed (for their social equivalents anyway) much more generous. The War of 1812 and predictable demands at the time for intensified loyalism in the colonies would stifle demands for reform until the post-war years. The bottled-up envy of merchants, republicans, reformers, and other critics of the oligarchies would bubble forth in peacetime after 1818.

In the 1820s and 1830s, the call for more civil liberties was heard in many countries, including France and Britain. Colonies in the Americas broke with their imperial motherlands. The American revolution was followed by Haiti’s break with France in 1804. Hardly a decade later, the Spanish Empire in South America was collapsing. Mexico declared its independence in 1821. Continent-wide revolutions led or inspired by Simón Bolívar culminated in the 1830s in the emergence of post-colonial regimes. In July 1830 the streets of Paris were the scene of a three-day uprising. The July Revolution deposed Charles X and established the principle of a constitutional monarchy.

The reform movement in Britain was very different. It drew its strength from both the middle class and the emerging working class. The Reform Act of 1832 was meant to extend the vote very broadly, but a cautious British government allowed only half-measures: middle-class males got the vote but not the lower classes. Poor and working-class Britons reacted with further protest and quickly suppressed risings. This movement rallied around a charter of rights; the goals of the Chartists included universal male suffrage, annual elections, secret ballots, and no property restrictions on candidates. For the most part, the early Chartists took the position that parliamentary democracy was essentially sound but that it needed upgrading, not toppling.1

The position and experiences of the British Chartists were not entirely different from those of the reformers in the Canadas. And it is clear that the former influenced the latter. Claims made on the Family Compact and the Château Clique for greater democratic rights echoed global movements. Of course, it was precisely against these worldwide trends that the Tory elites proposed to stand immovable.

Key Points

- The early 19th century saw anti-monarchical and anti-imperial movements spread through the Americas and Western Europe, some of which enjoyed a degree of success.
- Even in Britain there were growing calls for greater democratic government.
- These trends and intellectual developments influenced and contextualized protests against oligarchy in British North America.

Newspapers and their earlier incarnations as pamphlets (produced by “pamphleteers”) can only thrive in a particular environment. To state the most obvious requirement, they need readers. That means they do well in large towns or urban centres or, possibly, across a rural area where distribution is manageable. A printing press and someone with the skill necessary to operate it are also required. Printers in the 18th and 19th century were a guild and a craft unto themselves, highly regarded and very conscious of their artisanal expertise.

Newspapers also require something worth reading about. Typically newspapers emerge where there exists an educated, literate middle class who are interested and engaged in civic debate. The pages of the press become a forum in which government policy, moral issues, and local developments are debated. They are, one might say, a means of policing power and community behaviour by creating a common language and a shared conversation. In this respect, the press lends itself well to critiques of established authority.

In colonial times, such critique was not always easy. The earliest post-Conquest newspapermen in British North America were often persecuted by representatives of British power and Loyalism.

![Le Canadien](image)

*Figure 11.5 Le Canadien was the mouthpiece of the Parti Canadien from 1806 to 1810. It's motto was “Nos institutions, notre langue et nos droits” (Our institutions and our language, our laws). It exemplifies the professional, middle-class values that were at odds with anglo-Toryism and the oligarchy.*
The Fifth Estate

In all of the colonies the press provided an effective platform for dissent and criticism. Newspapers were easily and widely distributed. Robert Gourlay (1778–1863) used the Niagara Spectator as an instrument of political opposition. Haligonian Joseph Howe (1804–1873) was more Tory than Reformer when he took over the Novascotian in 1827, but it served him well when he became a critic of the colony’s Family Compact. The Parti Canadien — the opposition to the ruling British Party — used the newspaper Le Canadien beginning in 1806 to speak on its behalf; some 20 years later Papineau’s more militant Parti Patriote acquired La Minerve as a mouthpiece for its issues and its critique of the Château Clique. In Upper Canada, Francis Hincks (1807–1885) published the Toronto Examiner with the masthead, “Responsible Government,” William Lyon Mackenzie’s Colonial Advocate was a pulpit for radical-reform sentiment, and their near-contemporary George Brown (1818–1880) was the brains and drive behind the very ambitious Globe and the leader of the Clear Grits. These three newspapermen were instrumental in creating the language of opposition to the Tory establishment and, importantly, to the less radical elements on the Reform spectrum.

At the tender age of 19 years, Edward Whelan (1824–1867), an Irish-Catholic immigrant and former apprentice to Joseph Howe, started the first of his several newspapers and journals on Prince Edward Island. Whelan’s declared goal was “to investigate and assail, if not remedy, the evils which have grown out of the Landocracy System, a system whose principle is ‘monopoly,’ whose effect is oppression.” He, like Howe and Brown, would become a Father of Confederation.

Similarly, on the West Coast, Nova Scotian Amor de Cosmos (born William Alexander Smith, 1825–1897) established Victoria’s Daily British Colonist in 1858, and John Robson (1824–1892), an Upper Canadian on the mainland colony, took charge of New Westminster’s British Columbian in 1861. Both men launched withering attacks on Governor James Douglas and other members of what they identified as British Columbia’s own Family Compact. Both were early advocates, too, of responsible government and a continent-wide union of British North American colonies. Both eventually became premiers in British Columbia.

The importance of the press as a political instrument was lost on no one. In 1864–65 John Schultz (1840–1896) took over the Nor’Wester, Red River’s first newspaper, using it as a bully-pulpit against the HBC. By 1869, however, he had switched directions and became a spokesman for Canadian interests on the Prairies. Schultz played politics with bare knuckles and his sleeves rolled up, but his understanding of what the press could accomplish was perhaps of unparalleled importance in Canadian history. Some editions of the Nor’wester reputedly never made it to the streets of Red River: he sold the lot in the political hothouse of Toronto, cynically cultivating interest in annexing Rupert’s Land and whipping up opposition to the provisional government led by Louis Riel.

Newspapers in the first half of the century tended to be small, running to no more than eight pages. The first successful news-focused newspaper was Brown’s Globe. His objective was to produce a document containing the freshest and most important developments from everywhere, and in this way expand his readership. He was so far ahead of his competition that even his political enemies had to read the Globe. News became easier to gather with the availability of telegraph technology; mass production of the Globe raced ahead with the early application of steam-powered presses in the 1860s. Brown’s predecessors and smaller competitors had more in common with 18th-century pamphleteers than with the newspapermen of the late 19th century.


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Key Points

- Newspapers reflected, created, shaped, and mobilized opposition to the oligarchical regimes.
- Journalists and publishers were part of an emerging middle class that advocated greater individual rights and freedoms.
- The distance from the printing press to an active career in politics was often a short one.

Attributions

Figure 11.5
Le Canadien Nov 22, 1806 by BeatrixBelibaste is in the public domain.
11.8 Labour and Its Discontents

We have seen in Chapters 9 and 10 how work processes were changing with the economy in the 19th century and the impact this had on social relations. By the 1820s, old artisanal traditions of apprenticing as a child to the household of a master, being raised as part of that family, and eventually moving on as a journeyman were weakening. The British Master and Servants Acts were enforced in British North America and reinforced by local legislation in both Nova Scotia (1765) and Canada West (1847); these laws made clear the duty owed by an apprentice to his master and ensured that wage-labour employees could not simply abandon their jobs. That these laws were passed suggests that apprentices and wage earners were, in fact, eager to enjoy the freedom to leave a bad employer or pursue better opportunities.

In some situations, such as logging camps, the employer might provide everything from housing to company stores and schools, and the “boss” stood at the top of a social pyramid built around notions of paternalism. In the best circumstances, paternalistic artisanal masters or major employers could create a good environment for their workers. But, as labour historian Craig Heron indicates, “It was a system ripe for cruelty and abuse.”1 Heron points out that it wasn’t until the 1860s and 1870s that organized labour became widespread; before that, what historians describe as “the crowd” was the main expression of working people’s power and frustration. These were inclusive events in which women and children participated, calling on mine or mill owners to change their policies, improve pay, or show more equity in their treatment of their employees. This was particularly the case in company towns like Albion Mines, Nova Scotia, or Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, where there was effectively one industry, one employer, and one workforce.

The Genesis of Unions

The changing economy created a new social order made up increasingly of men, women, and children who worked for wages year-round. This move away from seasonal work eventually presented an opportunity for labour to organize and find a political voice. Working people, of course, had no entitlement to the vote at any level, not unless (in the rare case) they were also property owners.

It is striking, when looking at this period between 1818 and 1860, to note the extent to which employers scrupulously ensured that their employees would not find a voice. The company towns could cut off credit, and evict and exile troublemakers at will. The early textile mill owners in Montreal brutalized their workforces of women and children with beatings and fines. It could not be said for a moment that the early capitalist elite’s vision of a British North American democracy included their workers.

For some workers, the friendly societies were the answer; for others nothing short of organization would suffice. Early workers’ associations first arose in skilled, town-based industries. As already noted, there was hardly a town in British North America without a shoemaker, a printer, a tailor, and carpenters and joiners. Each of these crafts depended on a master’s ability to employ steady journeymen. As towns increased in size so did the aspirations of some masters, resulting in deskilling the jobs and lowering wages. Embryonic unions thus appeared in all of these crafts.

The printers were among the first to organize, and a particularly well-known dispute occurred in Toronto in 1836. There, the printshop owners — led by the publisher William Lyon Mackenzie — confronted and defeated the printers’ demands for better wages and guarantees for apprentices. The intolerance for the discontent of workers was echoed a decade later by Mackenzie’s Grit/Reformer nemesis, George Brown, at the Globe.2 Brown fulminated against the


2. Brown fulminated against the
organization of labour while, at the same time, championing the Printing Employers Association in Toronto. On this point as on so many others, John A. Macdonald and George Brown disagreed: after Confederation Macdonald introduced legislation to legalize unions. In the meantime pressures were growing for some kind of representative organization in the workplace or in communities.

Craft unions began to appear in the 1850s. By this time some work in the craft sector had been routinized but mechanization had not progressed very far. Craft members became increasingly concerned about the the internationalization of industrial work. They had grown up in a world where, for the most part, labour stayed close to home and prices were determined locally. Now skilled labour was on the move across North America, looking for a better wage and using the new transportation technologies to expand their search. Employers were in a better position to fix wages beyond their immediate vicinity. Locals were buying manufactured goods that were made in British and American factories hundreds of miles away. British and American workers were ahead of most British North American craftsmen on this issue, so the earliest unions were — in English British North America at least — extensions of British and American organizations.

As industrialization grew so too did the size of the proletariat: people dependent on wage-paying jobs to survive. This expanding common experience would prove to have greater impact after Confederation than before. It is worth noting, however, that the advocates for greater democracy in 1830s Upper and Lower Canada in no way envisioned a day when the vote would be extended to a Canadian working class.

### Key Points

- The emergence of larger workplaces — mines, mills, logging camps, and factories — in different ways stimulated the growth of organization among working people.
- Craft unions were the first to appear, building on the specificity of artisanal skills and the workers’ ability to control the supply of skills.
- Working people’s political engagement occurred, but outside of the ballot box.

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2. Ibid., 7.
11.9 Early Reformism and Reformers

Several attempts were made to expand the influence of the Lower Canadian assembly before and during the War of 1812. As Canadien assemblymen became more adroit at using their legislative powers to block and delay bills, they sought trade-offs that would at the very least limit the authority of the executive. Pierre Bédard (1762-1829), a leading francophone lawyer and co-founder of the opposition Parti Canadien, called for Colonial Office oversight of the executive. Bédard’s request indicated that the assembly was not calling for an end to British rule, and that it trusted London more than it trusted the governor and his clique. That recommendation went nowhere, and the second decade of the 19th century witnessed a hardening of positions in the government of Lower Canada. A handful of dominant personalities emerged at that time who would be influential in government politics for the next generation or two.

Parti Canadien

Louis-Joseph Papineau (1786-1871), a seigneur and lawyer, began his rise to leadership of the Canadien cause in the assembly around 1815. His father, Joseph Papineau (1752-1841), had been a member of the assembly and a notary as well. An exploration of their two lives and trajectories reveals some of the profound changes that were underway in Lower Canadian society.

Joseph was a monarchist, a position that was consistent with anti-revolutionary sentiment in Canada. The murder of Louis XVI was an affront to many in Canada, as the king of France had occupied the position of protector of the colony, was the undisputed head of state, and was thought to rule by the will of God (divine right). Men like Papineau Sr. found it easier to transfer loyalty to a British monarch (who was, in any event, a Hanoverian with deep roots in Germany) than to be sentimental about France after the Revolution. Joseph did, however, break with the ancien régime in one respect: he renounced his Catholicism, something that should have made him a favourite of the assimilationist Château Clique. But Papineau Sr. was ideologically the enemy of the executive. His philosophy was increasingly liberal, meaning that he favoured opportunity for individual Canadiens to prosper and thus to challenge established elites.

Louis-Joseph carried these attitudes forward. (In at least one respect, however, he circled back on Joseph: Papineau Jr. embraced seigneurial feudalism as being in the best interest of Canadien culture.) He entered politics in 1810, just as French-Canadian nationalism was beginning to take shape, and he campaigned for the preservation of traditional Canadien institutions. Of these, the Catholic Church occupied a conflicted position. Louis-Joseph was educated in the Séminaire de Québec but he followed his father’s path of renouncing the faith. The ideals of the Church were by this time seen as too conservative and reactionary to sit well with the liberal professionals. Also, reformers viewed the Lower Canadian Church as a buttress to the Château Clique. By 1815 Papineau’s popularity in the Parti Canadien was enough to see him elected Speaker of the Assembly, a position that came with a nice salary. Without real authority beyond the assembly, the Parti did what it could to thwart the assimilationist urges of the Clique; in turn, this obstructionism hardened the resolve of British Party (a.k.a. the Château Clique, the Lower Canadian Tories) to achieve the elimination of French-Catholic culture.

In 1822 members of the Château Clique proposed the union of Upper and Lower Canada. This was clearly another try at assimilation that would weaken the French-Canadian hold on the assembly and thus on the laws around culture, education, and language. Papineau and an anglophone ally, John Neilson (1776-1848), travelled to London to persuade

the House of Commons to reject the union. The Clique’s initiative failed and Papineau was able to take credit for this setback. The idea of union as a means to achieve the end of French-Catholic culture did not, however, go away. Through the 1820s and the 1830s the Château Clique advocated for a reunification of the Canadas. The separation imposed by the Constitutional Act had cost Montreal its western hinterland, so there was an economic issue, but principally the goal of the Clique was to swamp the francophone population with the rapidly expanding number of anglophones to the west.

Robert Gourlay

Reformers in Upper Canada faced similarly obdurate opponents in the Family Compact. One of the first to challenge the Tory elite was Robert Gourlay. Not long after he arrived in Upper Canada from Scotland in 1817, Gourlay began building a coherent reform movement. Gourlay was an early statistician (Malthus used his work on British farmers), and his innovative survey of farmers in the Niagara district revealed that Tory economic and political priorities were holding back land sales, farm development, and general prosperity. By banning American settlers from the region they were cutting off Canadian landowners from prospective buyers. Land that should be in production, therefore, was not. Gourlay’s strident criticisms of the Family Compact and his many efforts to effect political change were unsuccessful. After spending some time in jail and in exile, he became a spent force in Upper Canadian affairs. His technique in confronting authority was never especially pretty: “Through the columns of the Niagara Spectator he poured out an extraordinary torrent of abuse against ‘the vile, loathsome and lazy vermin of Little York,’ and others hostile to him.”

Still, he opened the floodgates of criticism in the colony and they would not be shut again for several decades.

**Key Points**

- Reformers in Lower Canada sought to empower Canadiens and vouchsafe their culture while taking a secularist position in opposition to the clergy.
- The leading reformers in Lower Canada were drawn from the liberal professionals and the seigneurial class.
- Reform in Upper Canada began as a critique of Toryism and its efforts to manipulate the land market.

11.10 Rebellions, 1837-38

Lower Canada

Figure 11.6 A Lower Canadian one penny (or deux sous) coin issued in 1837 and showing a Habitant in traditional dress.

Papineau’s continued attempts to reconcile the interests of Canadiens with those of the empire were doomed to fail. Partly as a mark of the Parti Canadien’s frustration with the Château Clique, the organization changed its name to the Parti Patriote. This was something of a red rag to a bull. To be a “patriot” is to be loyal to the land of one’s birth first and foremost; the American revolutionaries had branded themselves “patriots” knowingly and so too did Papineau’s group. Dropping “Canadien” was also a sign of growing inclusiveness. The Parti became home to Irish and American immigrants, the Canadien peasantry and seigneurs, the liberal professionals, and those smaller anglophone merchants whose interests were not best served by the Clique. It was in this context, too, that Papineau introduced the Emancipation Act of 1834 that extended new rights to the Jewish population in the colony. This broadening of the movement’s reach was also felt at an ideological level.

Radical reformers within the Parti Patriote increasingly called for a more revolutionary approach. After all, Papineau and company had been fighting the same battle against the Clique for 20 or more years, with little to show for it. Despite having a majority in the assembly for years (and a landslide victory in 1834), they were unable to press their case. Papineau’s popularity was at an all-time high, but his defence of the French civil law, the seigneurial system, and the importance of the Church in the preservation of Canadien culture put him increasingly at odds with those who wished to see an overhaul of the entire social order. For those rivals within the Parti, the seigneurial system was an offensive holdover from a feudal system with which even much of Europe had dispensed, the clergy’s loyalties were to themselves and to Rome, and the Coutume de Paris was what undergirded the lot.

As a political figure, Papineau is elusive. He seems to have stood firmly against compromise of any kind, but by 1830 he was a fan of Jacksonian democracy. He was, as one biographer describes him, “violently anti-clerical” and a staunch critic of the Church’s powers and privileges, yet he defended the Church against what he saw as attacks aimed at reducing the cultural integrity of the Canadiens. He seems, as well, to have been tugged by contrary and momentary winds. If popularity lay in that direction, then off he went in search of it. While it is true that he had some authority as Speaker, Papineau and his fellow members of the assembly had little real power. They could afford to posture while the Château Clique attempted to govern.
In 1834 the **Patriotes** compiled the **Ninety-Two Resolutions**, an extensive shopping list of reforms that they put before the British government, along with a petition of nearly 90,000 signatures. Its tone was one of frustration and growing anger; it contained pledges of loyalty coupled with not-very-veiled threats of rebellion. The British had other matters before them, so they delayed and then brushed the petition off in March 1837 with Lord John Russell’s much more succinct **Ten Resolutions**. These countermeasures hardened the divisions in Lower Canada’s government by giving the executive more power over revenues and turning back any reforms that would increase the authority of the assembly.

The British response outraged the more radical elements in the **Parti Patriote**. While other reformers considered legal options, the radical part of the movement steeled itself for a confrontation with the governor and his forces. Meetings across the colony in 1837 whipped up support for the cause. At the largest of these, the Assembly of the Six Counties at Saint-Charles, some 4,000 to 6,000 people gathered to hear Papineau and the **Parti’s** other leaders. Although Papineau invoked Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* and called for an uprising, he had feet of clay. His indecisiveness may have reflected disappointment at the size of the rally at Saint-Charles (he had evidently hoped for more). Regardless of why he hesitated, it cost the movement some of its momentum. Rather than face the British forces in Montreal or Quebec, Papineau and his supporters fled into the countryside south of the St. Lawrence to avoid arrest.

The response of the authorities was to suspend the constitution, declare martial law, and send British troops into the region in November 1837. Their first battle, at Saint-Denis, cost the British and the rebels (under the leadership of Dr. Wolfdred Nelson) a dozen dead apiece. Subsequently, the rebel tactics became more desperate and the British response more bloody. Rebels at Saint-Charles were executed on the spot when they bluffed a surrender; buildings throughout the Richelieu Valley were burned to the ground. In December the battle turned north to Saint-Eustache where a force of roughly 200 rebels were defeated by a superior British force augmented by Loyalist volunteers. Nearly half the rebels died at Saint-Eustache, some of them burned alive in the church after it was set ablaze by the British troops.
Papineau and other leaders fled to the United States. Papineau in particular was fleet of foot, having run out of Saint-Denis within minutes of the first volleys being fired. His quick retreat was to cost him followers and credibility in exile. There was talk of launching a second rising from the United States, but this came to nothing apart from two minor skirmishes near the border. In November 1838, rebellion sparked again on the south shore, this time at Beauharnois. An imprudent rebel attack on the Iroquois community at Kahnawake (a.k.a. Sault du Saint-Louis and Caughnawaga) ended in the capture of 60 rebels who were then handed over to the British.

The underlying causes of the Lower Canadian Rebellion are complicated, which is why it is worth considering Papineau’s own perspectives. As a seigneur he had a vested interest in stability and continuity, as a notary he had an interest in the preservation of the French civil law, and as an educated francophone he acknowledged a debt of gratitude to the institutions of the Catholic church. At the same time, he viewed representative government as the best guarantee of cultural survival, he opposed the modernizing economy (mostly because it was in the hands of the British Canadians), he railed against clericalism, and he took steps to create a state-funded education system. Papineau broke down barriers that had stood against Jewish people in European societies for centuries and in this he was progressive; he also took steps to strip the vote from those female property owners in Lower Canada who were entitled to the franchise.

For the general population this was a time of economic uncertainty and fear of change. The arrival of large numbers of Irish immigrants threatened the demographic integrity of the Canadians; the fact that the Irish inadvertently brought cholera with them did far worse. Some speculated that the Irish immigrants and cholera were both sent to Lower Canada to destroy Canadien society. Many of the rebels simply wanted a bigger slice of the pie. The fact that the Rebellion manifested elements of ethno-linguistic division along with sectarianism should not blind us to the fact that it consisted of many more factors as well.

**Upper Canada**

The rebellion in Upper Canada had similar roots to that in Lower Canada. It sprang out of dissatisfaction with the same constitution. It featured an oligarchy of wealth and privilege and a populist reform movement inspired by liberal principles. It was influenced by current events in Europe and the Americas that were pointing toward greater democracy and anti-imperialism. These underlying causes were furthered by specific grievances associated with the Family Compact’s economic strategy (which benefited Toronto but not necessarily the farming community) and division between the Church of England establishment and adherents of other denominations.

As in Lower Canada, the little power that the assembly might exert on the councils was limited by revenue sources over which the elected representatives had no control, which came from the sale of Crown lands, the revenues from which were at the disposal of the lieutenant-governor and the executive council. These monies were used in part to further the government’s canal-building strategy, a plan that did little to help inland farmers who would have preferred an aggressive road-building program. Many of these settlers were, moreover, adherents of Methodism and some of them were Presbyterians. These two denominations were the principal challengers to Family Compact efforts to see the Church of England become the established church. Armed with the Clergy Reserves as well as Crown lands, however, the Compact was in an excellent position to further the interests of the Anglican Church to the exclusion of the smaller denominations.

William Lyon Mackenzie was the leader of the cause in Upper Canada. His newspaper, the *Colonial Advocate*, was both a vent for radical-reformer positions and a target of Tory opponents. In 1826 a gang of Tories descended on Mackenzie’s offices in York, grabbed his printing presses and threw them into Lake Ontario. Intimidation was part of the Family Compact’s stock in trade, but events like this only served to legitimize the more radical positions offered by Mackenzie and his allies.
Not everyone in the reform movement shared Mackenzie’s position. The moderate wing continued to advocate a pro-monarchical position and was alienated by the radical side’s increasingly republican and pro-American language. Although the Reformers were able to control the assembly through most of the decade before the rebellion, they were viewed as ineffectual by Radicals (by then emerging as a separate camp entirely). The tension between the two factions grew as the 1830s witnessed insincere concessions by the lieutenant-governor, Sir Francis Bond Head (1793-1875). His strategy was to admit onto the executive two prominent Reformers — Robert Baldwin (1804-1858) and John Rolph (1793-1870) — and then to ignore their advice. Resignations followed, the assembly tightened its limited grip on the colony’s finances, and in 1836 Bond Head dissolved the assembly and called an election.

This was a turning point. Governors to this point had stood aloof in election campaigns, even if the Family Compact had not. But Bond Head waded in, describing the Reformer and Radical elements as American in their sentiments and loyalties. These were strong words from the Crown’s representative: he was accusing Mackenzie and company (the moderate Baldwin included) of treasonous ideals. Bond Head’s tactics were regarded, even in Britain, as excessive, but he succeeded in mobilizing the vote among recently arrived British immigrants who joined with the Loyalist establishment in defeating the Reform element.

Mackenzie, presumably tired of being called a republican, decided to publicly embrace the values of the United States and call for the overthrow of the regime. In early 1837 this was all still talk but then events in Lower Canada forced everyone’s hand. Bond Head sent his troops east to participate in the suppression of the rebellion there, leaving Upper Canada vulnerable. Rebels gathered in London and in York with an eye to striking while the opportunity presented itself.

The events that followed were profoundly anticlimactic. Mackenzie’s group mustered at Montgomery’s Tavern, about seven kilometres north of Toronto’s waterfront on Yonge Street. Over the next two days they would engage Loyalist volunteers twice and would collapse both times. Along with John A. Macdonald, the militia units included the retired fur trader and explorer Simon Fraser, heading up a regiment of the Stormont Militia. The troops captured several rebels and torched the inn. Mackenzie fled to the United States, as did most of the rebel party in London.

Figure 11.9 By December 7, 1837, a very large bounty was posted for the capture of William Lyon Mackenzie and four other rebels.
There was one last battle in the Upper Canadian Rebellion. Near Prescott, roughly midway between Montreal and Kingston and across the river from Ogdensburg, a force of exiled rebels and American sympathizers (together known as Hunter Patriots or the Hunter Lodges) attempted an assault on Fort Wellington. Although they held their position for four days, holed up in a stone windmill, the attack failed.

In the aftermath of the Upper Canadian Rebellion, the Family Compact had an opportunity to bare its teeth. Nine of the Toronto rebels were hanged along with 11 from the Battle of the Windmill. Prison sentences awaited over 1,000 of the rebels and exile (or “transportation”) to Australia awaited 100 more.

The Atlantic Colonies

Curiously, the Maritime colonies received much of what reformers in the Canadas demanded without mounting so much as a protest march. In 1837 Britain conceded to the colonial assemblies the right to control money bills with the proviso that the civil list — the very heart of the patronage machinery — remain in the hands of the executive. New Brunswick took up the offer first and Nova Scotia followed soon after; Prince Edward Island had it imposed on them in 1841. Settlements of this kind served to legitimize rather than marginalize the Reformers in Maritime society. The case may be made that Nova Scotia and New Brunswick achieved responsible government in large measure because of what happened in the Canadas. But change was already taking place in the Maritime assemblies before the rebellions; they were marching to a different beat. And for people like Joseph Howe, that meant greater credibility and a wider audience for his demands for an assembly that governed the executive branch.

Howe presents an interesting case because he changed his views on government. Until the 1830s he regarded it as a consensus-based process in which goodwill and commonsense would prevail. In this he was not greatly different from many other Reformers. But this was an age of ideologies and increasingly it was becoming clear that Old Tory privilege and hierarchy was at odds with the emergent liberal, middle-class views of individual opportunity and equality. In the pages of the Nova Scotian he lambasted assembly members he thought weak, and civic officials and a judiciary that he regarded as corrupt and venal. In 1835 he was charged with libel and celebrated his victory in the courtroom with the proclamation that “the press of Nova Scotia is free.” And indeed it was: free to criticize the regime without fear of reprisals.

Thereafter Howe ramped up his attacks on Nova Scotia’s oligarchy and sought elected office himself. In the wake of the Durham Report he wrote to the Colonial Office, “the Colonial Governors must be commanded to govern by the aid of those who … are supported by a majority of the representative branch.” Throughout these years, however, Howe was distrustful of party politics, which he believed tended toward narrow factions. Nonetheless Howe gets credit for so significantly changing the political culture of Nova Scotia that Reform majorities were elected in 1836 and 1840. This last victory prompted what may have been the only act of violence in Nova Scotia’s march to responsible government. According to Howe’s biographer, “His success so antagonized the official faction that [Howe] was forced to fight a duel with John Halliburton, son of the chief justice, on 14 March 1840; Halliburton missed and Howe fired his pistol into the air.”

Howe was not the first to do so, but he articulated as well as any other British North American leader in his generation the shift to an ideologically informed position and plan for the future. While ideology did exist in the pre-1830 period, afterwards it became clearer in the colonies that visions for the future were at odds.

Key Points

- The 1830s saw the Parti Canadien rebrand itself as the Parti Patriote and launch an increasingly broad-based campaign against the oligarchy under the leadership of Louis-Joseph Papineau.
- Refusal on the part of the oligarchies to make concessions to assembly demands for more authority pushed reform elements toward radical republicanism.
- The rebellions of 1837 and 1838 failed to either attract widespread support or mount effective battle plans. They failed badly and were violently suppressed.
- Reform arrived in the Maritimes with only one shot being fired.

Attributions

Figure 11.6
Lower (Bas) Canada City Bank One Penny (Deux Sous) Bank Token 1837 by Centpacrr is used under a CC BY SA 3.0 license.

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Assemblée des six-comtés painting by Jeangagnon is in the public domain.

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Battle of Saint-Eustache by Scorpius59 is in the public domain.

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1837 Proclamation by YUL89YYZ is in the public domain.
11.11 Durham and Union

What had the rebellions accomplished? On the face of it, not much. The old order seemed as powerful as ever, reformism had been shown to have neither the guts nor the guile to effect change, and popular support for the rebels failed to materialize. Within a decade, however, the reformers would see the tide of history pull in their direction.

Britain’s response to Lower Canada’s Ninety-Two Resolutions had been a perfunctory, 10-point refusal. Parliament’s reply to the 1837 rebellions was a little more ambiguous. It took the form of John Lambton, 1st Earl of Durham (1792-1840). Nicknamed “Radical Jack” for his support of the British Reform movement, Lord Durham was nonetheless an aristocrat and an ostentatious one at that. When he came ashore at Quebec City to take up his new responsibilities as governor general of all of British North America, it was in full regalia and on the back of a white horse. Durham’s remit was to explore the causes of the rebellions and recommend solutions. He spent almost all of his time in Lower Canada and only briefly visited Upper Canada. He met with some of the leaders of the moderate reform movements, specifically Robert Baldwin in Upper Canada and Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine (1807-1864) in Lower Canada. His two aids, Charles Bulmer and Edward Gibbon Wakefield, played a significant role in writing Durham’s final report to Parliament, and Wakefield would go on to become a leading figure in colonization theory.

Buller, Wakefield, and Durham shared the same response to Lower Canada, and it was a negative one. They saw the Canadiens as a backward people, opposed to economic progress, and blinded by their Catholic faith. Durham distilled the rebellion in Lower Canada into a simple English versus French dichotomy. In a famous line from the Durham Report, he claimed, “I found two nations warring in the bosom of a single state.” Baldwin’s brand of reformism he found acceptable, but that of Papineau and Lafontaine he did not. He was not persuaded by the oligarchical claims of the Château Clique, but he gave them something for which they had been clamouring: union of the two colonies. With the other hand, he recommended responsible government.

Union would settle Upper Canada’s crushing debts and, with an equal number of seats from what would thereafter be Canada West and Canada East, the balance in the assembly would be tipped definitively toward the anglophone side. The endgame was to put an end to French-Catholic culture in North America by means of an anglophone-dominated regime and to double-up on that by increasing immigration from the British Isles. Swamped and politically marginalized, the institutions that sustained Canadien culture (which Durham described as one without history and thus no legitimate claim on survival) would be erased. And that, he thought, would put an end once and for all to unrest in the Canadas.

Then Durham blotted his own copybook by sending into exile in Bermuda eight Lower Canadian rebels just released from prison. Also, he put a sentence of death on any of the rebels in exile in the United States (including Papineau) should they return to Canada. This was a move calculated to inflame opinion in Lower Canada, and, perhaps surprisingly, it was accepted by the locals. But it was regarded in London as stepping beyond his powers and Durham’s enemies closed on him. He resigned his commission in the autumn of 1838, only months after reaching Canada and before the battles at Prescott and Beauharnois.

Union

The British Parliament agreed to reunite the colonies and made it official in 1840 with the Act of Union. But it demurred on responsible government. Looked at from the position of the Château Clique, this was decidedly two points in the win column: the western frontier had been restored and, with it, a far stronger English presence in the united colony, one that could take real steps toward eliminating the French fact. The Family Compact was less happy because they had
lost their pre-eminent position or, at least, would have to share it with the Tories of Montreal. What’s more, Durham’s call for responsible government was interpreted by the Upper Canadian elite as a criticism of their regime. The fact that London refused to allow it must have comforted them somewhat, as did the fact that Lower Canada (with a better treasury) was obliged to absorb the debts that the Family Compact had run up in building their canal system.¹

In Nova Scotia, Joseph Howe read the Durham Report with interest and corresponded with the minister for the colonies on the subject. Howe enthusiastically supported the idea of responsible government and hoped that it would be extended to the Maritimes. The British cabinet, however, feared that responsible government would lead to imperial disintegration, whether in tumultuous Canada or placid Nova Scotia.

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**Key Points**

- Lord Durham was dispatched to the Canadas to act as governor and to investigate the causes of the rebellions, for which he was to prepare a report.
- His two principal recommendations — union of the two colonies and the introduction of responsible government — aimed to advance attempts to assimilate the French-Catholic population into the growing Anglo-Protestant culture.
- Britain agreed to union but not to responsible government.

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11.12 Responsible Government

Durham’s perspective on the goal of eradicating the Canadien culture was presented very clearly in his report. There was nothing subtle about it. But to what were they to be assimilated? As a liberal parliamentarian, what Durham saw in the Canadas was an anglophone middle class in Quebec City and Montreal that was being held back from a natural economic leadership role by a peasant sub-stratum. The three pillars of *la survivance* — Catholicism, language, and an agrarian tradition that included seigneurialism — had to be swept away to put Canadiens on the path to a liberal democratic society.

The principal mechanism of this strategy was to be government. The executive for the united Province of Canada was, as before, drawn from the colonial elite although now its members could be dismissed by the governor. The same was true of the legislative council, which now had two dozen members. The assembly, of course, increased substantially to include elected representatives from what was referred to as Canada West and Canada East. Each received 42 seats in the assembly. Given the presence of a sizable propertied anglophone electorate in Canada East (especially in Montreal), anglophones would instantly dominate the elected body.

At first this seemed to work as planned. Charles Poulett Thomson (later Lord Sydenham) replaced Durham as governor general and moved quickly to achieve assimilationist goals. He relocated the seat of government from Quebec to Kingston, an anglophone town with strong Loyalist roots, safe from Canadien agitation. English was decreed the only language of debate and government business. He created additional safe seats for English-speaking candidates and encouraged immigration from Britain. He didn’t flinch at the use of violence against French voters and candidates where needed to secure a favourable (i.e., English-speaking) outcome. The assembly seemed destined to function along English versus French, Protestant versus Catholic lines with the Anglo-Protestants in the metaphorical driver’s seat.

*Fractures and Alliances*

This arrangement began to fracture quickly under the weight of ideologies. Toryism had always been present in the assemblies of the Canadas and its power under the new constitution appeared to be growing. It was, however, changing. Conservatives like John A. Macdonald were different. His conservatism borrowed elements of liberalism and he regarded the Tory element as “old fogeys.” The Anglican core of the party reciprocated by viewing the marginally successful Kingston lawyer as a Presbyterian outsider and unwelcome social climber. It is for these reasons that one of Macdonald’s biographers has said that he had to “gatecrash [the] local elite.” Fissures like these — cracks that ran along the lines of ideological, sectarian, and social class difference — were opening up on the Tory side of the assembly.

On the Reformer side, matters were hardly better. For every pro-parliamentary moderate Reformer like Robert Baldwin, there seemed to be a pro-American-republicanism Radical. Recognizing these divisions, astute Canadien politicians like Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine agreed to build bridges across the linguistic divide to shore up Reform numbers and to obtain the support needed to achieve responsible government. More conservative elements on the Canada East side of the assembly of course objected, although they found it hard to find in their ideological cousins — the anglophone Tories — much that would work to their advantage.

In 1842 Francis Hincks (another leading Reformer in Toronto) achieved his goal of building an alliance between French and English Reformers. With Lafontaine and Baldwin he was appointed to the executive council. This was a pivotal

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moment in the political history of Canada: English and French politicians collaborating to achieve a greater degree of democratic accountability. Durham had been unimpressed by Lafontaine, which was clearly an error on his part. Faced with Westminster’s assimilationist policy and its refusal of responsible government, the Canadien reformer found the means to subvert plans for the former and to advance the cause for the latter. Lafontaine was bringing responsible government within reach.

The governor at the time, Sir Charles Bagot (1781-1843), was in some respects acting as though responsible government was a done deal. He and his Conservative advisors feared that the assembly’s increasingly Reform-oriented membership would censure his administration. Bowing to pressure from Lafontaine and Baldwin he appointed an executive that was dominated by Reformers from Canada East and Canada West but in which no single political party held a majority. The Colonial Office was shocked by what it regarded as too great a concession to the colonialists and especially by Bagot’s admission that “whether the doctrine of responsible government is openly acknowledged, or is only tacitly acquiesced in, virtually it exists.” The new administration, led by Baldwin and LaFontaine but consisting of a mix of moderates, French, English, and Tories, continued in office under Bagot’s successor.

These events constituted a turning point because they indicate how far the project of isolating and assimilating the French had failed, the extent to which political parties governed by ideologies were emerging (something the British had also wanted to avoid), and the effective arrival in fact if not in law of responsible government. There would be attempts in the 1840s to roll back these changes, none of which had any lasting impact.

In the winter of 1848, formal and official responsible government finally arrived — in Nova Scotia. In the spring it was proclaimed in New Brunswick. In the following year it was no longer deniable: the Province of Canada had responsible government. Prince Edward Island followed in 1851 and Newfoundland in 1855. Manitoba and British Columbia would only achieve this benchmark when they joined Confederation.

And what makes responsible government a benchmark? The prospect of an executive that is responsible to the assembly rather than the governor reversed the natural flow of power in a colonial regime. Authority no longer derived from the Crown, but from the voters (however small or large the electorate might be). It was a model with roots in the British parliamentary system and so it might be considered an obvious outcome (as it was by Lord Elgin at the time), but imperial power was weakened once colonies claimed to be self-governing. Under responsible government, the empire might retain its power over international negotiations and defence issues and the appointment of governors, but suddenly the rest was up for grabs.

Historical Explanations

It might be argued that Britain could not resist the increasing pressure to allow responsible government, in which case it becomes an achievement of Canadian politicians. But Nova Scotia and New Brunswick had the same privileges sooner, and the pressure there was not nearly so intense. The case has been made that Britain grew fearful that it would lose what remained of its North American empire if concessions were not made: Britain, in this scenario, blinked first.

Some historians take a more economic approach. They argue that Britain’s willingness to grant a significantly greater degree of colonial authority — and to perform an about-face on the imperial position announced after Durham — arose not in the colonial legislatures but in British trade policy. The move to laissez-faire capitalism and the end of the Navigation Acts together signalled a change in attitudes about the colonies. In this interpretation, colonial demands worked to the advantage of the empire and events in Canada were merely allowed to unfold. Certainly the Colonial Office was displeased with Bagot for conceding a share of authority to the partisan Baldwin-Lafontaine Reform administration, but they didn’t recall him. Nor was his successor instructed to reverse the situation and apply a firm

hand to the opposition. It was, in fact, the Colonial Office that had introduced, as early as 1841, the principle that the executive council be subject to the approval of a majority of the assembly. For all intents and purposes, this was the no-frills model of responsible government. The further refinements of a cabinet composed entirely of elected officials drawn from the assembly is really all that was added in 1848-49.

Read in any of these ways, responsible government — the principle that the executive serves at the pleasure of the majority of the elected assembly — had serious implications in a colonial setting. Were they self-governing colonies secure within the embrace of the world's largest empire or had they been cut adrift? Was British North America finding its feet or about to fall on its face? The 1850s suggested the latter.

**Key Points**

- Union was meant to pit a larger number of Anglo-Protestant members of the assembly against a smaller number of Franco-Catholic Members. The ideological fractures in the Anglo-Protestant side undermined that alignment.
- Reformers from Canada West and Canada East found they had goals in common and built effective alliances.
- Conservative elements in French Canada knew how to work with Anglophones from Montreal, but the Anglo-Tories from Canada West were a different matter.
When reform-minded movements have a limited set of reforms on their agenda, the question arises: what happens when those reforms are achieved? In the case of single-issue reformers the answer is usually not much. Having achieved the reform they were after — responsible government — some of the Reformers turned out to be quite conservative. For some, clearly, responsible government was a panacea, a cure-all, the key to better and more effective government and the endgame. For others, it meant pushing aside the existing Family Compact/Château Clique elites so that the Reformers could have their own turn at the trough of power and privilege. For still others, it was a first step along a path of more extensive changes to the political structure and culture of British North America.

A Compromise on the Capital

Kingston was the seat of government until 1843, when it was moved to Montreal. This would prove to be a fateful decision. It took several more years — and a few other locations — before Ottawa was finally settled on as the capital.

The achievement of responsible government in 1848 primed the Tories in the assembly to be outraged by the power now in the hands of their Canadien rivals and the Reformers from Upper Canada. They were further enraged by the passing of the Rebellion Losses Bill, which proposed to compensate financially those whose property was destroyed or damaged by British troops during the suppression of the Lower Canada rebellions. LaFontaine’s bill was based on a report accepted by the government nearly three years earlier, and his aim was to defuse growing radical support for the Papineau wing of the Reform movement in Canada East. At the same time, the bill was a clear demonstration of the power now at the disposal of a block of Canadien votes in the assembly. Lord Elgin (1811-1863), the governor, signed the bill into law on April 25, 1849, and two days of rioting began. Elgin’s carriage and home were attacked and windows were smashed at the homes of Reformers from Canada East and Canada West as thousands of Anglo-Montrealers took to the streets. The Parliament Building in Montreal was torched and completely gutted. The whole of the libraries from both Upper and Lower Canada had only recently been gathered there and now they were reduced to ashes.

![Figure 11.10 Burning of the Parliament in Montreal, a painting attributed to Joseph Légaré, ca. 1849.](image)

If the only significance of the Montreal riot had been the burning of the Parliament Building, it would have been enough. But what the Rebellion Losses crisis flushed out was the negotiable loyalty of “Loyalists.” The Montreal Gazette was especially hostile to the bill and called for Elgin’s dismissal, recall, or overthrow. There was a great deal of talk among the

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Tories of abandoning the British connection altogether. John Redpath, who built a fortune around canal construction, the industrialization of Lachine, and shipping (though not yet sugar), was among the wealthy Mount Royal Tories calling for a break with Britain. In his case — and probably in others — his Scottish roots made a difference: his affection for the English ruling class was muted and he was genuinely unimpressed by the way Britain treated the colonies. The local elite’s loss of influence in government and the decision to compensate people they regarded as enemies of the state and the Crown pushed the colony’s wealthiest cohort into an unusual stance: some began calling for a new association with the United States. The Montreal Annexation Manifesto appeared in the autumn of 1849, signed by more than 300 blue-ribbon entrepreneurs in the city; subsequently — and ironically — it was endorsed by Papineau and his followers. For the first time there was in the Canadas a declared and open movement in favour of secession from Britain and union with the United States.

The response was to move the seat of government away from potentially disloyal Montreal. For the next decade, it was shuttled between Quebec City and Toronto, but that proved to be an unworkable solution. In 1857 it was decided to make Ottawa (until 1855 known as Bytown) the new and permanent capital of the province. The reasons for this choice say a great deal about the concerns of the day: Ottawa was small enough to be managed and/or policed; it was fractious and even rowdy, but arguably less explosive than Montreal; it was defensible against an American attack, given that it was farther upstream and north of the border, and there was a resident regiment and a military canal that could speed reinforcements along if necessary; and it was the only community of any size located on or near the boundary between Canada West and Canada East.

Kingston was disappointed. A hotbed of Loyalism and the constituency of Conservative Party leader John A. Macdonald, it was, however, even more exposed to potential American attacks than Montreal. The more hardline Reform element in Toronto made demands for the right to host the colonial administration but this option was, predictably, unacceptable to everyone in Canada East from Montreal down the St. Lawrence. And, of course, Kingstonians objected to it as well. The final candidate was Quebec City: fortified, facing the Atlantic, close to the rest of British North American, and the seat of government for Canada since Tadoussac ceased to be the leading trading post in New France. This option fell afoul of the numbers: the bulk of the population of the province was now much farther inland.

**Representation by Population**

As the 1850s opened, it became clear that the population of Canada West was outstripping Canada East. The former had doubled from about 400,000 in 1840 to more that 950,000 in 1851; Canada East had gone from an estimated 717,000 to just 890,261. Anglophone politicians in the western half of the colony who formerly didn’t pay any attention to these figures began a long agitation for **representation by population**. If the campaign succeeded, the bulk of the colony’s legislators would come from Canada West. More than that, they would be mainly from southern Canada West, in a triangle marked roughly by Hamilton, Windsor, and Georgian Bay. As capitals go, Quebec City was too remote (and too French and too Catholic) for Upper Canadian tastes. If not Toronto, then certainly not Quebec.

Insofar as Ottawa has since become symbolic of Confederation and the Parliament Buildings are part of the nationalist baggage of Canada, it is worth remembering that the choice was unpopular with just about everyone at the time. George Brown’s *Globe* deserves the last word: the Toronto newspaper predicted that Ottawa would fail and would soon be “abandoned to the moles and the bats.”

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Key Points

- The Rebellion Losses Bill generated a lot of heat and it also sheds light on the authentic loyalties of some members of the colonial elite. For all their talk of Loyalism and Toryism, a significant number were prepared to make a break with Britain and join the United States.
- In a strange reversal of roles, reformers stepped forward as champions of the imperial connection.
- The relocation of the capital to Ottawa was an act of compromise, but it was also strategic.

Attributions

Figure 11.10
Incendie Parlement Montreal by Jeangagnon is in the public domain.
11.14 The 1850s

Tories on an arson rampage in Montreal, annexationists popping up in what had hitherto been Tory circles, and responsible government breaking out in three — soon all five — British North America colonies in the east. It was on this note that the 1850s opened. In the history of formal politics in Canada, no decade has such a record of discord, frustration, and dysfunction. It was also one that witnessed innovation, invention, and growing political sophistication.

The Act of Union was the Province of Canada’s constitution for only 26 years, only half as long as the Constitutional Act of 1791. Many historians have viewed this as a period of stalemates and failures, one that led via a chain of crises to Confederation. This perspective held sway down to the 1980s, by which time historians were observing that the constitution also presented opportunities and in some cases forced opportunities upon politicians.

Three issues stand out in the political history of the Canadas in the 1850s. First is the emergence of political parties and coalitions. Second is the stymied attempts at the cultural assimilation of French Canada, and third is the rise of railway politics.

Party Lines

Several issues animated political discourse in this decade, but annexationism wasn’t really one of them. It peaked in 1849-50 and thereafter remained a fringe movement, even if that fringe did include some of the most powerful people in Montreal and Toronto. Part of the anger in the late 1840s stemmed from disappointing and frightening economic times, which many associated with Britain’s move to free trade. As the economy improved, so did Tory support for the new political situation. Besides, fractures in the Reform movement were starting to show.

Radicals from Canada West were once again led by William Lyon Mackenzie. Like Louis-Joseph Papineau, Mackenzie had returned from exile and leapt back into politics. He still commanded a following but it was quickly commandeered by others on the radical wing of Reform, most notably by George Brown. Their position was one of continued opposition to the Family Compact (now more-or-less repackaged as the Tory Party) and to the Montreal merchant Tories as well.

Radicals found it hard to stomach the moderate reformers who found their economic plans (and personal interests) increasingly aligned with the old enemies. Brown made clear what he thought the Reformers lacked when he called for a party of “men who are Clear Grit,” meaning morally upstanding and firm. This was a strangle anti-materialistic movement that reflected rural suspicion of the cities and towns, Anglicanism, Catholicism, big business, and Montreal as a whole. The Grits, moreover, remained a bastion of anti-French feeling, a position that would be expressed most clearly in their position on the composition of the Assembly.

One of the challenges of studying this decade of colonial politics is the speed with which political leopards changed their spots. Take John A. Macdonald, for example. In 1849 the 34-year old lawyer from Kingston and Conservative member of the legislature supported the call for “no French domination;” six years later he was forging a coalition with George-Etienne Cartier (1814-1873) and his moderate-reform party, the Parti Bleu. This is the same Macdonald who, as we know, carried a rifle against the rebels in Upper Canada, now going into political partnership with a man who had fought his way out of the siege of Saint-Denis, laid low for a year, and fled into exile with Durham’s death sentence hanging over his head. More than that, Macdonald was able to co-opt much of the Reform Party from Canada West and bring them into his party. By 1851, even the bulk of Papineau’s adherents had become more comfortable with the
establishment and they built their own coalition with (formerly despised) Reformers. The saying that politics makes strange bedfellows certainly applies to Canada in this decade.¹

By the end of the decade these swirling factions had coalesced around two party banners: Liberals (made up mostly of Grits and disaffected Reformers from Canada West, and the Parti rouge from Canada East) and Conservatives (the Macdonald-Cartier group). The order that arose from what was essentially a chaotic decade proved durable: these two parties have dominated Canadian politics with few rivals to the present day, and no other party has formed government at the national level.

It is remarkable how quickly politicians in the two Canadas came to an understanding on how they might best proceed. United though the two colonies were, they retained sufficient internal differences and distinctions that one could identify three parties in each of Canada West and Canada East. No single party could hope to achieve a clear majority outside of a coalition. Even two-way partnerships were not enough: a healthy plurality was the best any party alliance could hope for and what a stable government required. The ability to broker deals was critical to a ministry staying in office, and few could pull it off. Macdonald’s palpable talent in this regard is what most suited him for success in Canadian politics across more than a generation.

Assimilation

Nothing underlines the loss of absolute certainties in Canadian politics like the issue of assimilation. In 1838 Durham laid down a goal and a game plan for the assimilation of French Canada into what he viewed as the more aggressive, forward-looking, and democratic English Canada. The assembly itself was to be the most important instrument of this assimilation process. As we’ve seen, the ability of the Canadien members to close ranks against assimilation was greater than the ability of Canadian members to mount a united front against French Catholicism. Partly this was a numbers game: when Union began in 1841, the two halves of the Province of Canada had the same number of seats, which meant, despite larger numbers of anglophone-dominated ridings, it was a close thing.

At the time, anglophone politicians were deaf to complaints from Canada East that its population was larger and so deserved more representation, particularly in the French-speaking regions. The 1851 census — the first coordinated census of the united colony — revealed that Canada West’s numbers were significantly higher and, as we’ve seen, the Grits responded with a call for representation by population. More seats in anglophone Canada West would enable the assembly to do what Durham designed it to do: drown out the Canadiens, strip them of their current political advantage, and impose the measures necessary for assimilation. It would also improve the possibility of Radical control of the government because it would inevitably create additional seats in Reform- and Grit-friendly areas, not in Tory hotbeds. This is, presumably, one reason why the Anglo-Tory elements were not enthusiastic supporters of representation by population. And without the support of members of the assembly from Canada East — who were not prepared to endorse their own political disaster — representation by population was a non-starter and the Grits were relegated to the governmental sidelines.

The political heirs of the Parti Patriote — the Parti rouge — did, however, share Grit concerns regarding the emergence of railway politics, a phenomenon involving conservatives and reformers alike. The Rouges remained fearful of anything that threatened Canadien culture and in this the Grits and Rouges were obviously at odds. But they shared some other interests and goals. The Rouges were supporters of republicanism (which echoed Grit sentiments), and they were anti-clerical/secularist (which, when aimed at the Catholic Church, appealed to Orange feeling among the Grits). Mostly they shared a lack of confidence in the moderate Reformers led by Baldwin. Consequently, alliances that spoke to common issues were forged across the linguistic divide between these two parties while, for the moment, guaranteeing that truly offensive legislation would be kept off the table.

This was the furthest thing from what was intended in the Act of Union. The proposition that anglophones would find more in common with francophones based on political goals and values was essentially unthinkable. These developments, however, raise the question again: assimilation into what? If the goal of Durham and Britain was to extinguish French language, habitant culture, and Catholicism in Canada, then clearly they had failed. And one might
reasonably wonder whether the Anglo-Canadians and their British governors ever had the right tools to accomplish that task. But if we look again at Durham’s critique of Canadien feudalism as the principal obstacle to economic and political progress in the colony, how then does the Act of Union measure up? What becomes of Canadien quasi-feudalism?

In 1854 the assembly passed An Act for the Abolition of Feudal Rights and Duties in Lower Canada. This occurred with the support of assembly members who had rallied at the Six Counties in 1837 and who saw the institutions of the Canadien countryside as critical in the preservation of culture. Through the 1850s francophones in the assembly were key to making coalitions succeed. As we shall see, their engagement in industrial enterprises was second to none. In these ways the Canadiens were, indeed, assimilated by 1860, not in terms of language or religion (although the anti-clericalism of the Rouges/Liberals was never understated), but in terms of a reorientation away from feudal values to those of a modern, commercial, industrial, and democratic polity.3

3. This is the position argued by Janet Ajzenstat, The Political Thought of Lord Durham (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 4-12.
The profile of the city (at the bottom of the map in Figure 11.E1) gives you a sense of the skyline. Toronto in 1842 may have been the largest city in Upper Canada (a.k.a. Canada West) but it was really just a village. The offices of Mackenzie’s *Colonial Advocate* were located a block in from Front Street on Frederick Street. It was from there that Tory vandals dragged his printing press and threw it into the lake. In later years, the former mayor of Toronto was provided with a home for his retirement at 82 Bond Street, between Yonge and Church, just north from Shutter Street — on land which in 1842 was only just surveyed (and which is reputed, by the Toronto tourism industry, to be intensely haunted). Otherwise, what does this map reveal about the people and place of Toronto at mid-century?

![Figure 11.E2 Coat of arms at top of Toronto map by James Cane.](image)

**Railways**

These newly minted perspectives found their clearest expression in railways. The 1850s, as seen in Chapter 9, was the decade in which railway-mania first exploded across British North America. Railroads were about economic development and diversification, a make-work project, a brilliant way to win votes in the communities through which they might pass, and a stick with which to beat opponents. The rivalries between Montreal and Quebec, Toronto and Kingston, meant that the Grand Trunk Railway went around Kingston and never reached Quebec. That was neither an accident nor oversight. In an age where the notion of conflict of interests was not fully tested, leaders like Cartier and Alexander Galt (1817-1893) were fully invested in the colonial railway projects. The public showed more concern when evidence arose of payoffs to Canadian politicians by railway promoters, a trend that would continue after Confederation.

The railways and the possibility of obtaining additional railway charters would dominate much of public discourse in these years. While they were, in a sense, a licence to print money, they were also enormous sinkholes of debt. They could make or break a community and, it was feared, even a whole colony. Their costs and possibilities would continue to inform political life in British North America for the rest of the century.

**Election Day**

Democracy in these years was a limited thing. Property ownership was the price of entry and, outside of Lower Canada, maleness a condition of membership. The franchise extended only to permanent residents in a community so transient workers and people who rented or were tenant farmers or owned only small amounts of land were excluded from
the electorate. With the exception of Lower Canada, where women could own property, there was no female suffrage. Broadly speaking, across British North America, this kind of democracy was more akin to shareholders voting on a company directorate.

The conduct of public voting revealed further limitations in British North America’s democratic culture, wherein the small number of electors were always and vastly outnumbered by other adults who were not eligible to vote. Consider this scenario. In 1863 the coal mining town of Nanaimo had a population of about 500, making it the second largest city in the colony of Vancouver Island; the local electorate consisted of seven men and none of them were coal miners. On election day that year only five of the electors voted (in a public meeting with a show of hands) and the outcome was a near thing: a 3-2 win for Charles Bayley. The successful candidate reported subsequently that, within minutes, “the usual festivities commenced and being duly cheered by the people [I] was carried to my residence.” The “people” — the miners and their neighbours and families — were present and involved, but not as voters. It is fair to ask in this context whether this kind of politics mattered much to them, or whether other struggles for power and/or survival took precedence.

Engagement in political events was limited in other ways as well. When we look at the rebellions, it is their failure as popular uprisings that leaps out. Papineau rallied 4,000 or more at the Six Counties but there were never that many involved in the sieges at Saint-Denis or Saint-Eustache. The countryside did not rise up to support the rebels. Nor did Upper Canada’s independent farmers turn out in numbers to support Mackenzie. Contrast this with the hundreds who participated in Orange Riots aimed against Irish Catholic immigrants in New Brunswick in the late 1840s. Certainly the rebels of 1837-38 were fighting the established authority while the Orange Lodges in Saint John were not, but the Tory arsonists of Montreal in 1849 were heating rocks at the governor himself. The extent to which British North Americans were enthusiastic about orthodox and constitutional politics remains in question.

Perhaps the stakes were too low. Whether as voters or as members of a legislative assembly or an executive council, there was only so much British North American political participants could do. Responsibility for formal education and health care — the critical elements of today’s provincial administrations — was small because publicly funded schools and hospitals were few and far between (although that was just starting to change in this period). Foreign policy and defence were both very much in the hands of Britain. The colonial administrations were responsible for two things that mattered a great deal to colonists: the nature of land ownership and taxation. And the colonial regimes were not very good at either of these. Complaints ran throughout this period regarding the inefficiencies of land registration — a key element of any agrarian economy and a source of conflict in the mining sector. Taxes were highly divisive and the greatest source of recurrent political tensions. In Canada, a tax on trade was anathema to merchants while a tax on land was repugnant to farmers; and if the latter were taxed to pay for canals that benefited the former, the political heat was instantly dialled up. This was briefly a lightning rod for political energies but it became dulled by changes in the economy.

In other words, democracy was something directly experienced by a minority, and it produced governments with limited powers whose ability to do what mattered to colonists was limited. What mattered more were jobs and investment, something in which governments participated sparingly. Infrastructure projects were the clearest manifestation of public spending but these were sporadic and Britain could be turned to for support (sometimes with success). The kind of political rivalries that existed in the 1840s to 1860s led to the “spoils system” becoming a trademark of Canadian (though not Maritime) politics. Holding office and being part of an administration meant securing contracts for construction in one’s constituency and appointing supporters to the few public offices available. This would become a more powerful feature of Canadian political culture after Confederation.

Key Points

- The emergence of political parties complicated the possibility of an English-French dichotomy in the assembly.
- Ideological commonalities came to play a greater role, as did pragmatism about potential alliances.
- Despite its significant shortcomings, the Act of Union forced Canada’s politicians to seek out partnerships across old barriers.
- The goals of linguistic and spiritual assimilation were never met, but a modernization of Canadien economic and political life did occur within less than a decade.
- As Aboriginal peoples were pushed off of highly desirable farmland, confrontations shifted to the mineral and timber resource sectors.
- The declining living and economic conditions of Aboriginal peoples that arose from colonialism became the newcomer societies’ rationale for limiting investment in the welfare of First Nations.

Attributions

Figure 11.11
William Lyon Mackenzie by Mortadelo2005 is in the public domain.

Figure 11.12
John A Macdonald in 1858 by Jbarta is in the public domain.

Figure 11.E1
Toronto Cane map by Schrauwers is in the public domain.

Figure 11.E2
Revised from Toronto Cane map by Schrauwers is in the public domain. This version is released under a CC-BY 4.0 International license.
11.15 Aboriginal Politics at Mid-Century

Important changes in the relationship between Aboriginal and colonial peoples began in the 1830s. As early as the mid-18th century there was an appetite in Britain and in some of the North American colonies for the abolition of slavery, but not much came of it. We have seen how Governor John Graves Simcoe made some modest moves in this direction in the 1790s. In 1807 Parliament in London passed the Slave Trade Act, which put an end to the legal trafficking in slaves across the empire. In 1833 Britain passed the Slavery Abolition Act.

**Improvement**

The rise in support for abolitionism in the 1830s pertains to Aboriginal people because it was a landmark in a movement that came to be known as humanitarianism. Generally, British opinion shapers and political leaders were in the process of developing a more egalitarian perspective generally.¹ In part this sprang from the acceptance of individualism as an ideal. The link between individualism and humanitarianism may seem like a contradiction, but the connection was simple: Enlightenment-era individualism stressed the autonomy and value of the individual. If everyone had an equal moral significance then, regardless of race or culture, colour or religion, they were entitled to equivalent treatment or at least respect. This principle played out in many different ways when it came to Aboriginal people globally, but in British North America it mostly took on the flavour of “improvement” and “civilization” of Native societies, one individual at a time.

After the War of 1812 and the end of Aboriginal power around the Great Lakes, there appeared growing enthusiasm on the part of Euro-Canadians to “improve” Aboriginal peoples by settling them in colonial-style villages, modifying their housing styles, teaching them farming and animal husbandry, setting up European-style schools, and enforcing Euro-Canadian-style gender relations. Missionary activity in British North America had been largely neglected since the Conquest, Protestants being evidently less interested in the task than were the Catholics. But from the 1820s on Protestant missionary activity accelerated in Upper Canada and the Maritimes, as it did throughout the rest of the British Empire. By the 1840s the missionary movement had made it all the way to the West Coast.

Set in that context of humanitarian thinking and expanding missionary interest in Aboriginal societies, the timing of Britain’s mid-decade Select Committee on Aborigines is important. The Select Committee conducted a study of the treatment and condition of Aboriginal peoples around the empire. What it found, of course, was that settler societies everywhere dispossessed Aboriginal peoples of their lands and their means of making a living. Where Aboriginal lands were at the disposal of indigenous individuals or the community as a whole, there were also sales and further alienation of lands being made.

This created a potential contradiction. On the one hand Euro-Canadian reformers and Tories alike favoured private ownership of land and implicitly the ability of a landowner to sell whenever they got a good price; on the other hand, the loss of tribal lands in this manner stood to undermine the economic self-sufficiency of Aboriginal communities and so should be stopped.

The urge to protect Aboriginal peoples from what (imperialist authorities took to be) their own irresponsibility won out. The Crown Lands Protection Act (1839) was thus an important step along the road to converting Aboriginal peoples from neighbours and sovereign peoples into disempowered subjects whose affairs were held in trust by the state as a guardian. This marked the arrival of a new kind of paternalism, one in which Aboriginal peoples had much the same rights as children and usually fewer than Euro-Canadian women.

The Act prevented Aboriginal landowners from selling off property to newcomers by effectively stripping Aboriginal communities of their title. And people without land in this era were people without citizenship. The colonial authorities had decided to act in what they thought were the best interests of Aboriginal people, who would be guided into citizenship via assimilation. But colonial officials were never certain in these years as to whether and how they could act.

**Administrative Opacity**

Until 1860, responsibility for Aboriginal affairs resided with the British government assisted by personnel on the ground in the colonies to advise and administer matters directly. In other words, the responsibility was in Britain but practical authority was in the field. Funding lines were, moreover, confused and complicated. Aboriginal influence, too, was at a low ebb. Key decisions were being made far away, in London, while day-to-day decisions were being made locally in the colonies for which the imperial regime might not take ownership. Under these circumstances it is easy to see how Aboriginal issues became disregarded or poorly addressed by British North America’s mid-century generation of politicians: it was neither their responsibility nor was it made pressing.

Olive Dickason, a historian of the First Nations in Canada, made these observations about the situation across the colonies and in London:

> Herman Merivale, permanent undersecretary of the Colonial Office in London, 1847–60, developed the concept of regional approaches rather than an overarching policy applying to all. This meant almost as many policies as there were colonies: in the Maritimes, it was one of ‘insulation’ of the Amerindians; in the Canadas, ‘amalgamation’; in Rupert’s Land and on the Northwest Coast, support of HBC administration, which in the latter case was tempered by [Governor James] Douglas’ concern for Amerindian rights. In other words, in spite of good intentions, centralized imperial administration was not coping very well with the myriad local problems of colonial government. Neither did goals always synchronize: where the Colonial Office was concerned with rationalizing imperial administration in economic terms, in the colonies it was all too evident that Indians no longer fitted into imperial plans and that programs to ameliorate their situations would be costly. Attempts at enforced change were not getting very far, and the voices of the Natives themselves either were not being heard or were being ignored.

These conditions were well understood in British North America. The Bagot Commission of 1842-44 looked at the situation through a humanitarian lens and called for a unified Indian policy, reminded government of its obligations under the Proclamation Act of 1763 regarding the integrity of Aboriginal land title, identified the need for more thorough and proper land surveys, and advocated for a program of economic cultural change that would see Aboriginal peoples become successful ranchers and farmers. There was more, as well, but little of it got funded so the point soon became moot.

There were two forces at work within newcomer society that pulled in opposite directions. First, there was an administrative and fiduciary obligation to Aboriginal communities and individuals to protect their interests, and also a vested interest in reducing Aboriginal dependence on government resources. Chronic poverty would be a burden on both Aboriginal and newcomer communities. Second, however, was the mindset of a developing colonial frontier, the belief that land and resources were there to be developed and that development and settlement of newcomer families produced revenues and wealth for all. There was, too, a bias in the marketplace: competition was good, but not competition between Aboriginal peoples and newcomers, not competition that the Aboriginal participants might win.

The outcome was poor for Aboriginal peoples. Increasingly their numbers were too small to set a limit on Euro-Canadian expansion. They were pushed to the side or sent elsewhere. The Mi'kmaq fell on particularly hard times as traditional resources were either depleted, negatively impacted by the timber industry frenzy, or no longer accessible because of newcomer intrusion. On Prince Edward Island, the 1767 lottery of lands had neglected to include any provision for Aboriginal residence. In a blink, all indigenous peoples on the island were rendered landless. The patchy and inefficient efforts to settle Prince Edward Island bought the Mi'kmaq some time, but it wasn't until 1859 that anything like a reserve was established.

Generally, the response of the Maritime colonies to Aboriginal hardship was to treat the Mi'kmaq much as they would paupers, with handouts. Nova Scotian and New Brunswick lands that were notionally allocated to the Mi'kmaq were not properly surveyed and, therefore, never registered; squatters moved in time and again. Efforts to take up farming were a failure; moreover, newcomer efforts to force the Mi'kmaq to become farmers were culturally insensitive, unrealistic given the land situation, and oblivious to the costs entailed in starting a community agricultural enterprise (as opposed to a family farm). In the 1840s the Mi'kmaq chief and elder Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet (1755-1843) made a direct approach by correspondence to a young Queen Victoria. Joseph Howe played a leading role in producing the Nova Scotia Indian Act of 1842 thereafter, the thrust of which was guardianship of a "helpless race." At this time there were thought to be fewer than 1,500 Mi'kmaq and Howe was predicting their extinction within two generations. Successive administrations took the view that to invest in schools or economic salvation of the Mi'kmaq was to throw good money after bad.

From the 1820s and accelerating in the 1830s, similar processes were underway in the Canadas. Mohawk claims to the whole Ottawa Valley were brushed aside as incompatible with the goal of building a thriving farming colony. Setting aside lands for hunting grounds — as opposed to ploughing them up for wheat — was antithetical to the dominant colonialist views of the day. Although governors and colonial administrations made an effort to observe the principles of the Proclamation Act of 1763, they did so without enthusiasm. Extinguishing Aboriginal title was often a matter of imposing the outcome on the Native communities effected, not negotiating a sale or rent.

Lands set aside for Aboriginal communities — known as “reserves” — begin to show up at this time. The immigrant and fertility explosions among the colonial peoples in the Canadas finally caught up to more remote arable lands. Resistance by Aboriginal peoples was difficult because of continuing population declines among Natives, successive loss of land title (which left Natives with little in the way of bargaining chips), and the elimination of historic allies in the face of American westward expansion. That’s not to say resistance did not occur. The Mica Bay War on Lake Superior in

4. Ibid., 147.
1848 stands out as an example. The territory in question was entirely owned by the Ojibwe and none of it had been surrendered. Heedless of this fact, the government issued mining licences to non-Aboriginals. The Ojibwe responded by burning down a mining operation.

Aboriginal leaders argued for annuities and royalties on resources tapped in their territories; the Province of Canada was only prepared to pay for land cession. The outcome was the Robinson Treaties of 1850 — one on Lake Huron and the other on Lake Superior — which included a purchase payment plus annuities in exchange for the entire foreshore of Lakes Superior and Huron. Aboriginal people would enjoy unfettered Aboriginal access to hunting and fishing in the region, which was thought to be reasonable given the limited agricultural potential at the edge of the Canadian Shield. Manitoulin Island emerged as settlement hub for native peoples as a result. It is important to add that Métis peoples who made claims at this time (and whose claims were supported by the Ojibwe leadership) were disregarded by the Canadians. It is also worth noting that Aboriginal interest in farming was regarded as marginal, regardless of what plans and ambitions Native peoples themselves might have.

Aboriginal people in the Maritimes and the Canadas complained that they were being characterized as “lazy” and dependent but that they couldn’t cut a tree on their lands without the permission of a bureaucrat. Worse, no one seemed interested in stopping colonists from taking timber from native lands. Half-hearted attempts were made to address this question. Legislation in the 1850s tried, with mixed results, to protect timber stands on Aboriginal reserves from the incursion of logging camps. The logging industry, however, was something of a wild free-for-all and this initiative was badly policed. The laws lacked teeth.

Another act that aimed to further protect the property of Aboriginal peoples in Canada East in 1851 would come to have very important long-term ramifications. The legislation attempted to define who could be regarded as an “Indian.” Initially very broad and inclusive, it was revised soon after to include categories like status and non-status, and to limit the extent to which Aboriginal communities could identify who qualified for membership. The patrilineal traditions common in European societies were impressed on Aboriginal identity so that the offspring of a registered Indian father inherited status while the children of a non-Aboriginal male married to an Aboriginal woman were, simply put, not Indians. Humanitarianism had become much more paternalistic, protective, and assimilationist, a trend that is most clear in the Province of Canada’s An Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes of the Canadas (1857). The goal was to enfranchise adult Native males one at a time, thereby removing their Indian status; monitor their moral character (as part of a Christianization initiative); and turn them into independent landowners (at the expense of reserve land). In the 20 years that followed only one Aboriginal person in the united colony took up this offer.

At the heart of this there were different goals. Aboriginal peoples generally wanted to adapt to new circumstances. In some quarters — among the Mississaugas, for example — there was real interest in farming and a willingness to indulge the newcomers’ enthusiasm for “model villages” made of European-style houses on reserves. Other Aboriginal groups like the Lenape (Delaware) had an ancient agricultural tradition of their own; they didn’t need to become farmers, they needed land. This was not, however, about assimilation into newcomer norms; this was about adapting as Aboriginal people to changing circumstances. But Euro-Canadians and Nova Scotians wanted Aboriginal peoples to assimilate. Schooling and farm education were never, thus, about equipping Aboriginal peoples with the tools they wanted. These initiatives were meant to stop them from being Aboriginals.

Unable to gain much ground in either political or cultural inclusion, the state began a long campaign of legislating against behaviours. The fact that this coincided with the rise of racist thinking in the Western world is probably not a coincidence. Restrictions on the sale of liquor to Aboriginal peoples, for example, revealed a belief in Aboriginal susceptibility and then rooted that in “Indian-ness” rather than proximate causes like tragedy, trauma, economic dislocation, etc. (This law remained in effect until 1951.)

5. Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 212-13, 229-30.
The 1860s would witness further changes in the relationship between British North America and the Aboriginal peoples of the northern half of the continent, most of which could be characterized as intensified neglect. The humanitarian moment had passed; belief in the impending disappearance of “the Indian” was becoming more general.

**Key Points**

- There was confusion regarding Euro-Canadian responsibility to Aboriginal peoples, which arose from the belief that this was a matter for Britain to address.
- Modification of Aboriginal behaviour and living conditions — addressing visible issues — became the main thrust of “Indian” policy.
- Newcomer interest in Aboriginal land intersected with concerns that Aboriginal people might become landless through individual alienation of territory. The policy solution may have accelerated the process it intended to stop.

**Attributions**

**Figure 11.13**

Micmac camp by Achim Raschka is in the public domain.
Politics between 1818 and 1860 was very much like the economy. It was fluid and evolving while remaining deeply unchanged. Some Tory values, which included a deep dislike for republicanism, survived and percolated out to influence groups that were their dedicated foes. Papineau, for example, embraced loyalty to the Crown for most of his career and Lafontaine did so as well. The Tories themselves were not a fixed point: they changed from being the landed gentry in most colonies into a commercial class with heavy investments in infrastructure, distilleries, and breweries. They required the support of a professional class of lawyers and notaries who, in turn, challenged the various Family Compacts around British North America.

The commercial and capitalist orientation of the Haligonian and Montreal elites became obsessions of this new liberal professional class as well. There is much to be learned about the nature of British North American society through a close study of the life of someone like John A. Macdonald, and nothing is as revealing as his pilgrimage from the periphery of Toryism as a francophobic Scottish Presbyterian lawyer in deepest Loyalist Kingston to the leadership of a dualist Conservative Party. A contrary tide took many of the most staunchly Tory elements in Montreal into the arms of republicanism in the late 1840s as, feeling abandoned by Britain, they nearly turned their back on the monarchy to seek a future exclusively in North America. One expects positions to change; the speed with which British North American political leaders dramatically adjusted their thinking and their priorities in these years makes the 20th century look static by contrast.

At least one other feature of this period deserves careful thought, because it is so often dismissed in a cavalier way. The Constitutional Act of 1791 may have had structural weaknesses that provoked and hardened opposition and demands for reform, but it lasted for 50 years. There wasn’t a single constitution in France that lasted that long before the 20th century. The Act of Union had a lifespan of 26 years. As historians we must ask what features of the Constitutional Act created conflict; we must also ask what features made it so durable under the circumstances.
These are questions to keep in mind as we consider the steps taken to achieve Confederation in 1867. What values lay behind the movement to bring together the colonies and what external forces played a role? What was happening and what did people believe was happening? What was the level of public engagement in this process? How did this take place in the utter absence of any Aboriginal presence? Who were the disenfranchised of this period and how was their status reflected in the constitutional arrangements worked out in Charlottetown, Quebec City, and London?

**Key Terms**

**Act of Union, 1841:** The constitutional arrangement for the Canadas that replaced the Constitutional Act of 1791. Its main features were union of Lower and Upper Canada, creating one colony and one colonial government and an identical number of assembly seats for both partner colonies, with an eye to subsuming the French-Catholic community. The Province of Canada retained some regional divisions, and the old colonies perpetuated their separate identities as Canada East and Canada West.

**Chartists:** A movement for political reform in Britain during the 1830s; the supporters of the People’s Charter of 1838 — the Chartists — called for universal adult male suffrage, equitable constituencies, and other innovations, which would radically broaden British democracy.

**Clear Grits:** Reformers in Canada West who coalesced in 1850 behind a platform of universal adult male suffrage and attacks on privilege. Principally rural at first, it became more urban under the leadership of George Brown in the late 1850s. Its founders called for men who were morally incorruptible, “all sand and no dirt, clear grit all the way through.” The Clear Grits joined with the Reformers and subsequently became the Liberal Party.

**Durham Report:** The Report on the Affairs of British North America of 1839 was the product of Lord Durham’s investigation in 1838 into the causes of the crisis in Canadian politics.

**established church:** The single official institutionalized religion of a state or nation. In the case of France prior to the Revolution and New France prior to the Conquest, it was unquestionably the Catholic Church; in Britain and its colonies, it was the Anglican Church (or Church of England). Post-Conquest attempts to impose the Anglican Church on the Canadas as the established church failed.

**guardian:** In the case of Aboriginal affairs, the Crown (effectively, the Government of Canada) acts as the caretaker of Aboriginal lands and property in a capacity roughly comparable to that of a parent or guardian of a child. The process of creating this role began in 1839 with the Crown Lands Protection Act and was fleshed out after Confederation in the Indian Act of 1876.

**humanitarianism:** A movement and philosophy that enjoyed particular support in the first half of the 19th century. Humanists argued that every individual shared a common moral significance. It was, as a movement, opposed to slavery and advanced the cause of working-class rights. It also sparked a renewed interest in the condition of Aboriginal peoples.

**Hunter Lodges, Hunter Patriots:** Lodges formed by 1837-38 rebels who sought sanctuary in the United States and proposed to launch attacks on the Province of Canada from across the border. Members of the Lodges were called Hunter Patriots.

**Master and Servants Acts:** A suite of laws dating from the 18th and 19th centuries that sought to regulate the relationships between employers and employees. Formed the bedrock of industrial relations law, although these
Acts were heavily weighted to the advantage of employers and were designed to minimize the ability of labour organizations to interfere with the ability of business to act freely.

**Montgomery’s Tavern**: The site of the main confrontation between Radical-Reform rebels and colonial troops in Upper Canada in 1837.

**Ninety-Two Resolutions**: A list of demands put forward by Louis-Joseph Papineau and the *Parti patriote* in 1834 calling for extensive political reforms. Britain replied with the **Ten Resolutions**.

**patrilineal**: Lines of inheritance that descend through fathers to their children. Compare with **matrilineal**.

**representation by population**: A series of demands assembled by the *Parti patriote* under the leadership of Louis-Joseph Papineau in 1834.

**republicanism**: In British North America, a pro-democracy movement; anti-monarchical and modelled on the American republic and, to a lesser degree, the French republic.

**responsible government**: The principle that the executive council should be subject to the approval of the elected assembly and that, should it lose that approval, the executive council can be dismissed by the elected assembly. Under the Constitutional Act of 1791, the executive council was entirely appointed; under the Act of Union of 1840-41, the executive was in practice elected.

**status**: In the context of laws affecting Aboriginal peoples from the mid-19th century on, the notion that some Aboriginal people have official standing as Aboriginal peoples and that the criteria behind this “status” is determined not by the Aboriginal community but by the state.

**telegraph**: Communications technology that permits the transmission of a message electronically across significant distances. Characterized in the Victorian era by the use of lengths of telegraph wire, which ran on posts parallel to the railroads and thus kept stations in touch with one another.

**Ten Resolutions**: In response to the *Parti patriote’s* Ninety-Two Resolutions, the British Colonial Secretary, John Russell, submitted to Parliament a counter-proposal that ignored all of the *Patriotes*’ demands.

**ultramontanism, ultramontanists**: In British North America, Catholic clergy who took their institutional, spiritual, and political leadership from the Vatican.
6. What were the objectives of the rebellions of 1837-38? How did Lord Durham understand these events?
7. What were the goals of the Act of Union?
8. What is “responsible government” in the context of 19th century politics?
9. How did the forces of Toryism respond to the new constitutional conditions in the Act of Union years?
10. What was the role of political parties in these years?
11. How did working people, Aboriginal peoples, and women figure into the political culture?
12. What weaknesses were built into the Act of Union? What strengths?

Suggested Readings


Attributions

**Figure 11.14**
*Canal locks and Major's Hill 1860* by Skeezix1000 is in the public domain.
Chapter 12. Children and Childhood
12.1 Introduction

Histories of childhood present special challenges. First, assuming that one is fortunate enough to pass through childhood and not succumb to the many dangerous diseases, it is a transitional phase in life. However much it might define one, it will only do so for a certain period of time and then it is left behind. One may be a female or an Aboriginal person or a farmer for the entirety of one’s life, but no one is a child for more than the first few years.

The second challenge is how to define childhood. Clearly there’s the period of utter dependency that most societies would agree constitute infancy and that usually lasts four to six years. After that, what distinctions does a society and culture make between a seven-year-old, for example, and a 14-year-old? What criteria are used to define the qualities of childhood and its end? Across the many cultures of British North America and Aboriginal Canada and across many centuries, the definition of childhood has been both diverse and fluid.

Third, the history of childhood is limited by the lack of personal records. Most children in the past were insufficiently literate and rarely self-reflective enough to provide first-hand accounts of their lives. This changed somewhat in the 19th century when institutionalized education emerges as a shared aspect of child development, one that taught children how to give voice to their experiences. Nevertheless, the record in past centuries is patchy at best. And our own values and prejudices about childhood come to bear. As historian Robert Mcintosh recently wrote:

The history of childhood has been reconstructed through studies of adults and their activities – and children’s responses to these. Only rarely is the agency of children recognized in the historical literature: children tend to be portrayed as passive beings who are the objects of welfare and educational strategies. The history of childhood becomes the history of the efforts of others on children’s behalf.  

Figure 12.1 Tla-o-qui-aht (Clayoquot) girl, Vancouver Island, ca. 1915.
What becomes clear in a study of childhood over even a relatively brief stretch of historical time is how the experience is historically contextualized. Childhood, probably more than adulthood, reveals the extent to which we are shaped less by biology and family and more by historical forces. Nature and nurture are important but it is history’s hand that rocks the cradle.

Learning Objectives

- Describe what defined childhood in the past.
- Identify possible sources of information on historical experiences of childhood.
- Demonstrate awareness of different historic experiences in New France and British North America.
- Describe the role of education and schooling in the lives of children.
- Explain the relationship between childhood and work in different economic and social contexts.

Attributions

Figure 12.1
Clayoquot girl by BotMultichillT is in the public domain.

12.2 Childhood in a Dangerous Time

It has been estimated that a quarter of all infants in 18th century New France failed to make it to their first birthday and that nearly half died before they were 10 years old.1 Matters were no better a century later: mid-19th century Montreal witnessed infant mortality rates of 250 per thousand live births. The rate was even higher on the other side of the continent; in Victoria, Kamloops, and Nanaimo near the end of the century the rate was almost 300 per thousand.2 (In comparison, the Canadian rate is now below five per thousand live births.) Conditions varied sharply from place to place but it is likely that childhood mortality (that is, dying between one’s first and fifth birthday) was nearly as bad. In short, it is possible — and certainly plausible — that a third to a half of all live births in late 19th century British North America ended in death before the age of five.

Historians of childhood have struggled with these figures. What were the implications of such a high death rate for relationships and the experience of childhood? Some historians have taken the view that the high incidence of infant death (along with stillbirths and miscarriages) impacted the development of strong emotional bonds between parents and children. As one study claims,

Parents resisted making large emotional investments in their children until they demonstrated their ability to survive. The delay in naming infants and the practice of giving the name of a child who had died to a subsequent child are cited as practices which demonstrate this relative lack of attachment. Thus, a situation of high infant mortality is in a sense a vicious circle, with children valued less because they are less likely to survive, and with the lower emotional investment in children reducing their survival chances.3

Not everyone agrees with this perspective. Anecdotal accounts do not reveal emotional stinginess on the part of bereaved parents; quite the contrary. John A. and Isabella Macdonald lost their first born — John Jr. — just after his first birthday. As John A.’s biographer writes, “Of course, his parents never fully overcame their grief. Moving house in Ottawa in 1883, Macdonald’s second wife discovered a mysterious box of toys: her husband quietly identified them as ‘little John A.’s.” Isabella, who had given birth at 37 years of age after a difficult pregnancy made tolerable by opium, was pushed by her grief into depression and addiction; she died eight years later.4 Now, it might be countered that middle- and upper-middle class couples had fewer children on the whole and so experienced infant loss differently from, say, farmers who had to be more dispassionate about tragedy. This presumption remains to be proved, and it assumes a lot about the stereotype of stolid farmers.

Clearly material well-being was an important consideration in the lives of children. In societies based on subsistence agriculture, horticulture, hunting and gathering, or the harvest of food from the sea, the line between success and failure was thin, and children were especially vulnerable.

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The Threshold to Adulthood

Despite the persistent belief by many that the average age of marriage — one indicator of achieving “adulthood” — was much lower in past generations, the evidence points in the opposite direction. Historical demographer Jacques Henripin found that the mean age at first marriage for women in 1700-1730 Canada was 22.4 years (26.9 for men). The age of marriage was even later in the 19th century. The median age at first marriage for women born in the 1830s was 25.1 years, and girls born in the 1840s married later still, at 26.0 years. Thereafter the age at first marriage would drop, almost steadily so that women born in the 1930s married at 21.1 years.

To be sure, there is a good likelihood that more 14-year-olds married in the 1850s than in the 1950s, but those were — then, as now — exceptions. Youthful marriage, in any event, ought not be mistaken for early physical maturation, which in fact was often delayed by poor or inconsistent diets. And some marriages involving children were arranged, being more about diplomacy than intimacy. Samuel de Champlain married Hélène Boullé when she was just 12 years old. Boullé’s marriage contract stipulated that the marriage would not be consummated for two years; the fact that the couple never had any children suggests that perhaps it never was.

In New France the most important threshold in childhood appears to have been around the age of 15 or 16. This was a demographic watershed as well, as nearly half the population was under the age of 16 years. In Acadia in 1698, nearly 400 of a total population of 789 colonists were under 16. It is no surprise, then, that 16-year-olds were made into militiamen. Nevertheless, the age of maturity in the ancien régime was 25, and people as old as 20 were often (and officially) considered to be children. Parents thus had a continuing and ongoing responsibility for their children well into what we would consider adulthood today.

Indeed, this responsibility could run quite deep. The patriarchal model of French colonial society was firmly and formally established, and men were entitled to physically discipline both their children and their spouse providing it was not outright brutality. The checks on domestic violence included the judiciary and the clergy, both of which upheld the necessity and the sanctity of marriage, and neither of which recognized wives as anything other than dependants. Gossip was probably a more powerful instrument of social control in these situations, because social censure could hamper the survival chances of a whole family. Essays in the History of Canadian Law, vol.V, Crime and Criminal Justice, eds. Jim Phillips, Tina Loo, and Susan Lewthwaite (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1994), 143-173. Parents performed a critical role in the colonial marriage market because, in New France, a new son- or daughter-in-law (and their offspring) could become dependants with a legal claim on family property. A poor reputation in these circumstances was something to avoid and something to watch out for.


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Key Points

- High rates of infant and childhood mortality meant that childhoods were abbreviated in at least a quarter of all cases.
- The threshold between childhood and adulthood was delayed in New France, even though children could marry at a young age.
12.3 Childhood in New France and Lower Canada

As we have seen, the French colonies of Acadia and Canada developed along rather different geographical lines. Acadia’s salt marsh farms along the Bay of Fundy provided small nodes of population, genuine communities in which children would be raised surrounded by an extended family, although the communities themselves were relatively isolated, accessible principally by water. This was an environment in which agricultural work in a family setting was a powerful defining feature of life for young people. On reaching maturity they would generally try to find a place to live near their family and few would head out to the frontier of Acadia, wherever that might be.

In Canada, the long corridor of the St. Lawrence worked against “the formation of villages [so] community life did not develop strongly along the valley, and the festivals and communal work patterns of Old France did not become entrenched.” Here, too, kin became the focus and locus of childhood. And the seigneurial system — until about 1820 — offered young adults the possibility of obtaining their own land close to their parents’ home. Historian Peter Moogk has shown how this environment of propinquity impacted parenting, which tended toward less disciplinarian paternalism than was found in Old France; by the 1700s, evidently, this was another way in which Canadiens were distinct from the French of France. The irony is that early French visitors to North America commented critically on Aboriginal parenting styles, which they regarded as far too lenient and soft.

In both Acadia and Canada children were rarely sent off to apprentice in another household from a young age. While the youth of France were testing the rules in the homes of strangers, the children of the two colonies were both supported by and contained within a network of relatives. It was only when the availability of nearby land dried up that this pattern of growing up in a multi-generational kin-based community began to fracture. From the early 19th century, children were raised knowing that they would have to move away from the familial enclaves and try to develop kin networks of

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their own. This change signified a break with nearly 200 years of Canadien culture. It gave external, non-familial entities like the Church or the employer more authority and influence, extending to the youngest members of the community.

**Church and Childhood**

This connection between clergy and child-raising was most obvious in education. In 1642 Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1799) established a teaching order in Montreal for the education of girls — both Aboriginal and Canadien. A separate school appeared in 1664 for boys (only colonists, though). In both institutions the clergy either provided the instruction themselves or selected lay people to do so. Social class lines were observed, and fees were charged that put the best education beyond the reach of most children. Those pupils who came from poorer households were more likely to be taught domestic skills or trades than reading and writing.

A greater focus on basic literacy for both boys and girls arose in the first half of the 18th century. Girls continued to be taught needlework and domestic skills, but they were also more likely to learn how to read and write. Some critics at this time expressed the concern that this “expanded” education would turn good farm girls into fine ladies who would shirk their role in building up the agrarian colony. However, the rates of nuptiality and fertility in the colony certainly don’t suggest that happened. The marriage rates show that there was a population of spinsters, but their status as “never married” can be explained in part by the number of girls who opted to join the Canadien nuns, a career path that was both respected and sought after. There were few similar opportunities for boys to be trained into the clergy. The Sulpicians, for example, recruited in France, but not Canada.

For the earliest generations of Canadien children, there is evidence to suggest a strong generational cohort. The arrival of the filles du roi between 1663 and 1673 resulted in a rash of marriages and births. Thus there was a decade in which a large number of first borns arrived on the scene. Twenty years later demographic historians have found evidence of a population boom echo: “Montreal had been peopled almost at one stroke … so that practically all the immigrants’ daughters reached the age of marriage and the period of highest fertility at the same time.” Surrounding by numerous peers, the children of the children of immigrants would be responsible for forging some of the most distinctive features of Canadien culture.

**Key Points**

- Childhood was spent surrounded by near relatives in Acadia and Canada.
- These arrangements changed in the post-Conquest period when apprenticeships and servitude in other households became more commonplace.
- The clergy in New France played an important role in raising and educating colonial and Aboriginal children and were a strong influence on notions of ideal childhood, girlhood, and womanhood.

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Figure 12.2
Louis-Joseph Papineau 10 years old by BeatrixBelibaste is in the public domain.
12.4 Childhood in the West

Historian of childhood Jennifer Brown pointed out years ago that the fur trade society brought together people who had experienced highly different childhoods. Many of the officers of the HBC were themselves orphans “recruited through the Grey Coat charity schools” of London.¹ Their connections with their peers in the company were strong, as were their relationships with Aboriginal women and wives. The HBC officers who settled at Red River did so with an eye to establishing a society near The Forks, an intergenerational community at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers. They insisted that the company set aside resources for schooling, and when that was not forthcoming, they exercised what patriarchal authority they had in a strange land and had their métis sons shipped off to Britain for their education. Daughters stayed closer to home where they spent their childhood in a more Aboriginal-inflected environment.

The NWC traders did something similar. Those with connections to Montreal sent their sons and daughters alike to the St. Lawrence towns at a relatively young age. The work of Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer Brown on this topic suggests that Aboriginal mothers were highly critical of packing off children to remote educational institutions, which were, in any case, alien to their own experiences.² There was, however, the expectation that the children would return, not least so they could provide for their parents in retirement in the Red River Colony. Although the history of the fur trade in the West provides many examples of traders on fixed-term contracts who arrived, had relationships, and then departed, perhaps leaving their wives and children in the care of Aboriginal in-laws or a freshly appointed Euro-Canadian trader

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(a process sometimes called "turning off"), the record is also clear that many of these relationships (husband/wife; father/children) were anything but casual.

Aboriginal women approached parenting differently. First, the evidence suggests that they were accustomed to rearing fewer children. As Brown writes, Aboriginal families "were usually small, and children were commonly born three, four, or more years apart, owing to long periods of nursing that reduced the mothers' fecundity and sometimes to post-partum taboos on sexual relations." Under these circumstances an Aboriginal child could expect something close to undivided maternal attention (certainly compared to the lot of their European contemporaries). Second, Aboriginal women engaged in co-mothering, at least outside of fur trade society. Once they were brought into the fold of the European posts and forts, Aboriginal mothers often found themselves caring singlehandedly for their young while the pressures to have more children in closer succession increased.

Fertility rates in the fur trade society were by all indications closer to the habitant model than to traditional practices among, say, the Anishinaabe. For children of the fur trade this meant having many siblings, and likely a good supply of uncles, aunts, and cousins as well. Some, usually the boys, identified more strongly with their European ancestry and culture, while others, particularly the girls, viewed themselves more as Aboriginal, although it is important to underline that no one rule applied.

One can only imagine the cultural and linguistic complexity of many of these communities as they became intersections not only for European and Aboriginal relationships but Scots and Anishinaabe, French and Cree, Assiniboine and Sioux, English and Hawaiian, Iroquois and Secwepemc. By contrast, life in Toronto, Quebec, or Halifax may seem two-dimensional.

Childhood was critical to the formation of the Métis nation. French fathers commonly deserted their Aboriginal wives and children, as their understanding of marriages à la façon du pays was that they were not permanent and that the women might one day return to their families. This was, according to historians, the pattern, and for Aboriginal communities that recognized matrilineal descent, this was not (theoretically at least) a problem. In French fur trade communities like Fort Detroit, Michilimackinac, or Green Bay, however, there were other elements of European culture present: specifically, the clergy remained there for the long haul. The Church missions helped with housing, education, and culturally orienting significant numbers of Métis children of these marriages, which grounded them in a common vocabulary of Catholicism. Economically they were traders and hunters. Socially and culturally they were linked by very long tendrils to Montreal, pre-revolutionary France, and Rome.

Key Points

- In the 19th century fur trade society put a greater emphasis on formal schooling, a sign of the influence of European participants.
- Marriages between European men and Aboriginal women tended to produce larger families, which had an important impact on the experience of childhood.

Attributions

Figure 12.3
YoungLouisRiel by Ras67 is in the public domain.

3. Ibid., 48.
4. Ibid., 56.
12.5 Children at Work

In almost all parts of colonial British North America, children began to work at a very young age, whether officially for an employer or to help support the family. In fact, children passed from a period of dependence and into active engagement as early as six years of age. Puberty, when it came, was a dividing line between childhood and adulthood, though not necessarily the first one crossed.

Young Labourers

Examples abound, in the 18th and 19th centuries, of children engaging early in economic activities. Some straightforward jobs were assigned to the very young. Aboriginal children were introduced to artisanal crafts and traditions from the moment they were able to participate in the simplest productive process, which is to say as young as four years. The same was true of most farm children in settler society: in New France very young children on farms were tasked with scaring birds away from crops.

However, a child’s social and family circumstances or their environment often required that more complex work be taken on. Splitting fish was often the task of six year olds in outport Newfoundland during the 18th and 19th centuries. Processing fish was a wage-earning job undertaken by girls of 10 years, as was domestic labour. Orphaned children under the age of six years were bound or indentured to non-relatives where they became household labour or servants. The loss of a parent in these cases necessitated an early start to a labouring life.

Seven-year olds in the anglophone British North America colonies were subject to English common law, which treated them as adults as far as work was concerned until later in the 19th century. This often meant difficult and potentially dangerous labour for working children. For example, eight-year-old boys (and sometimes younger) were considered old enough to work underground in British North America’s coal mines. By 1866 there were, conservatively, 450 boys working in the mining pits of Cape Breton and Vancouver Island.

In a colonial world that depended heavily on seagoing transportation and in which almost every town of any size was effectively a port town, it is inevitable that we would find boys were put to sea on fishing boats, in merchant ships, and in naval vessels. They did so at 10 or 12 years of age. Although most of the working children from this period are unknown to us, some we know by name. George Vancouver went to sea when he was 13 and José María Narváez at 14 years of age. Both were born into comfortably well-off families and so began their careers in their early teens; children of less privilege joined up younger. David Thompson, the son of a poor Welsh couple in London, was apprenticed (more correctly, indentured) to the Hudson’s Bay Company at 14 years of age. Thompson’s experience was not entirely extraordinary: the HBC was London-based, orphans were plentiful in 18th and 19th century London, and the company’s patriarchal ethos was consistent with the role of guardian.

Farm families were large because child labour was useful and necessary. Artisanal families, too, made use of all members of the household, although typically at lower levels of reproduction. The rise of industrial workplaces and urbanization changed some of these familial relationships, some of which were very old indeed. Factories and growing towns placed working families into situations where more and more members had to go out to find work. The home was no longer also the workplace. This applied to children as well as adults.

What do we know of child labour in these years and how do we know it? Individual and anecdotal accounts of childhood work and life tend to provide more evidence than official records, especially as regards the youngest workers. In later years — in the mid-Victorian era — this would be because employers were reluctant to reveal how many extremely young or officially “underage” children they had working for them. Before then, however, it was more likely the case that very young children were not reported (or under-reported) because their contribution was necessarily small. A child whose tasks consisted of stacking wood, for example, might not be considered to be in an apprenticeship, even if that was what it was, in the early stages of unfolding. A further — and more direct — deception involved girls in what was technically boys’ work; this comes through very clearly in reports from navies and merchant fleets where girls disguised themselves as boys in order to hold onto jobs at sea.

Many of these areas of employment carried huge risks. Handling domestic animals on the farm and horses in towns presented a constant hazard; many boys died underground in mines in the 19th century; children drowned or were murdered in battles at sea; slave raids or hostage-taking during Aboriginal warfare posed a millennia-old threat to indigenous children. In the mid-19th century the emergence of factory labour put children in completely new and unfamiliar environments where they were subject to mechanical hazards and oppressive supervision.

One study shows that a third of boys in a Montreal working-class ward in 1861 were employed. On the whole, boys were likely to earn more — from mine, mill, or factory work — than girls and so were sent out to work more often than their sisters:

The enlistment of thousands of children as workers in Montreal businesses reveals an aspect of industrial society that has nearly vanished today, but was fundamental to 19th century manufacturing. For many working families, basic survival was a daily challenge. Supplementary income was needed as families grew and more mouths had to be fed. Children’s wages provided an important second income. And for sons of working-class families, joining their fathers in the factories was the only option. Limited schooling would have to suffice for children whose horizons were limited to urban factories. Accordingly, the Industrial Revolution expanded the industrial enslavement of children. Montreal, no less than any other industrial city of the day, did not escape this reality.

It was a short step from agricultural labour that included all members of a family to industrial labour in which children would participate. But in this setting they were no longer being supervised by a parent or relative, nor were they part of an apprenticeship relationship in which their master fed and clothed them. The imposition of disciplinary regimes, however subtle, were part of life in every factory, even if fines and beatings were not. Children were being moulded into industrial workers by their employers; they were expected to be punctual, focused, efficient, and deferential. In this setting, employers were shaping not merely their workforce for the day but their workers for the future. At the end of the pre-Confederation period, factories were, in truth, manufacturing workers from children.

There were, too, independent or near-independent jobs to be had. Running errands, selling newspapers, helping in a small grocery — these were low-skill jobs that were available in a number of towns. Other children engaged in “penny capitalist” enterprises like selling fruit or household fuel. Girls who went into domestic service — and their number was enormous in Victorian Canada — sometimes did so on a part-time basis in several households at once, as laundress’s assistants, for example.

**Childhood without Parents**

What is less often considered is the almost universal alienation of children from their parents. Orphanhood — whether marked by the loss of one or both parents before the child reached puberty — was extremely common. Peter Moogk suggests that nearly half of all adolescents in New France had only one parent. In the early Victorian era, when women on average had about six children before they themselves reached 35 years of age, life expectancy for adults was barely half what it is today, so it was almost certain that the youngest children would not have left home before the death of at least one parent. In some cases orphaned children under the age of six years were bound or indentured to non-relatives where they became household labour/servants.

This pattern helps to explain the rise of the orphanage as a major urban and social institution in the 19th century. There was a long tradition in French Canada of such facilities run by the Catholic Church, but during the period from 1820 to 1860 there was a wave of purpose-built facilities for orphans. Many of these were the work of Ladies’ Aid Societies, which established Protestant Orphans’ Homes. As one study clarifies, ‘the name ‘orphan home’ is misleading insofar as most housed more non-orphans than orphans. Children were commonly temporarily consigned to an institution by a single parent unable to manage, or by a family undergoing a short-term crisis.’ For a child consigned to an orphanage, whether temporarily or permanently, this marked a significant break with family life and probably the beginning of a highly structured existence. It may have been the first and only opportunity to obtain some formal schooling.

That is, however, to put a gloss on the larger social history of the orphan experience. Dr. Barnardo’s Homes were first established in 1866 in London by the Irish physician, Thomas John Barnardo, with the founder advocating what he called “philanthropic abduction” of the children of the poor. In some instances British children whose parents had entrusted them to the care of an orphanage were shipped off to the colonies (including British North America) where they became essentially indentured servants to foster families. Children in Canadian cities were likewise “plucked” from the streets by early social reformers who were more distressed at social decay than they were by the welfare of the children themselves.

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**Key Points**

- Child labour took a multitude of forms and it was not unusual to find very young children engaged in demanding labour.
- Farm children worked from an early age; apprentices took on responsibilities from about the age of eight years. Children working in industrial circumstances, however, marked a significant break from past practices.
- Children were statistically at risk of being orphaned.

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12.6 Childhood under Attack

The mid-19th century witnessed a moral panic over the condition of, and the perceived threat posed by, children in the streets of British North America's major cities. The same situation existed in British and American cities at the time, sparking campaigns to improve the lives of children. (Charles Dickens' novel, The Adventures of Oliver Twist, published in serial form from 1838 through 1839 served as an inspiration for increasing policing and philanthropy alike.)

Street arabs or urchins, as impoverished children were known, were viewed as criminals or criminals-in-the-making. They fell below contemporary hygiene standards (which were, by all accounts, pretty low to begin with) and were perceived as unsupervised. Many "child-savers" believed a solution was to put them to work; better to have them spend long days in a factory or be fostered out to a household, even if they would be exploited and ill-treated, rather than let them remain on the streets, or so the thinking went at the time. As one review of the literature put it:

The child-savers … made proper parenting in a natural family setting the central precept of their endeavours; yet, in practice, their programmes seldom allowed such a relationship. In the final analysis they expected the regeneration of children to take place through work: for the evangelicals hard, manual labour shaped appropriate personal discipline and morality, and for the child-savers, it turned aimless street arabs into productive workers.

Initiatives to improve the lives of children included the promotion of education and concern for public health. In the third quarter of the 19th century the child's body became a battleground for imperial fitness. Generations of weak urban children, it was feared, would produce equally enfeebled national armies. This concern percolated out of Britain and into British North America. The reshaping and policing of childhood in the early Victorian era (a movement that would persist for the next century or more) arose out of these concerns and created much of the framework on which we continue to mount our own measure of life before adulthood.

Key Point

- Social movements in the Victorian era, including the spread of formal education, were manifestations of a moral panic about unsupervised children, particularly in urban areas.

12.7 Children as Historic Actors

To what extent is it possible to think of children in past centuries as having agency in their own lives? Feminist historians have corrected the widespread misconception that women were mere shadows in the past; historians of First Nations have likewise shown that Aboriginal people were actors and not merely acted upon. Post-colonial and feminist critiques have moved those goal posts — can the same be done for the history of childhood?

Certainly children faced constraints in past societies. Paternal authority in law was unquestioned in both French and English civil and common law; children had no independent rights whatsoever. What’s more, as property, they were able to be reassigned to other owners, whether temporarily (as in the custodial care of an orphanage) or permanently (as in “binding” as an apprentice to a master or to the navy). Children who had become impoverished and thus dependent on the state or parish could be bound by either to an employer/master. In instances like these the permission of parents wasn’t needed. For the least fortunate in Upper Canada, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland, the British Poor Laws applied. Boys and girls were mixed in with adults of all ages in circumstances that provided them little in the way of safety from harm. An 1832 inquiry into the Halifax Poor Asylum revealed “that the seventy-four orphan children in the institution slept with adults ‘without any regard to fitness of health or morals.’” Conditions did not improve in a hurry: in 1849 it was discovered that boys and girls — some as young as eight years old — were regularly whipped with rawhide while incarcerated at the Kingston Penitentiary.1 There is no doubt, then, that children were vulnerable and frequently exploited and harmed.

But that is not the same thing as being powerless or without influence. The discourse around the rise of “street arabs” is clear about one thing: urban adults felt menaced by children. That is not to say that street children were a force for chaos and danger, but that they resisted the self-appointed moral authority of the state and adults. Faced with dangers themselves, children often found strength in groups of peers and they resisted institutionalization. They fled and taunted; they spoke up for one another. Solidarity occasionally occurred.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of childhood agency comes not from the emerging cities of the early Victorian era but from Wendat society before the Confederacy’s disruption in 1649-50. Ceramics was an important part of

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the cultural and artistic life of the Wendat. As a non-nomadic farming people, the Wendat had both the capacity to store large numbers of ceramics and had many uses for containers. Ceramic production was, therefore, a central part of village life. An archeological study from 2006 demonstrates that children were involved in the making of pottery variously known to scholars as “juvenile,” “baby,” or “toy” ceramics. “These small ceramic vessels are … categorically different, in formation and design from the typical, widespread ‘adult’ pots.” What a careful examination of these artifacts reveals is that children were not merely learning the art of ceramics: they were introducing stylistic change. Childhood creativity, invention, and innovation were forces for change within pre-contact Wendat societies and, we can safely assume, in all those societies that followed.

**Attributions**

**Figure 12.4**

Curling on the lake, near Halifax, Nova Scotia by Library and Archives Canada is used under a CC-BY 2.0 license. This image is available from Library and Archives Canada under the reproduction reference number C-041092.

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12.8 Summary

It is in the nature of childhood to be a part of the life course that is subject to external forces. Infants are nursed into childhood proper with no say as to how that should happen. Behaviours and expectations, rewards and punishments are administered in such a way that children quickly misperceive their world as the only possible way in which childhood might be constructed; it is a period of socialization into adulthood but first into childhood. These are features that make childhood in the past a challenge to research and also an extremely important subject to pursue.

The experiences of children in pre-Confederation Canada varied from one region to the other, from one century to the next, and from one cultural group to another. Just defining the period known as “childhood” and the experience of “childhood” thus becomes a slippery business. What we can say for sure is that childhood was fraught with health hazards and cluttered with work obligations. The family — particularly in rural areas — was the forge in which children were fashioned. In New France the clergy played an important role as well and in the 19th century institutions like orphanages, schools, and prisons began to challenge the primacy of kin in moulding young minds and bodies.

It is easy, however, to underestimate the role that children play in the making of these societies. Their numbers are crucial to their military histories. The loss of children in the 1630s smallpox epidemics, as we have seen in earlier chapters, was crippling for Wendat society when it needed warriors to fight against the Haudenosaunee in 1649. As the nation-state emerges in British North America and as the Empire relinquishes both control and obligations, young people are where armies will come from. Increasingly they become viewed as assets that must be managed by the state in some way or another. The story of modernity — which has its roots in the late 18th century and its foundation in the institutional structures erected in the 19th century — is in many important ways the story of childhood.

**Key Term**

**street arab:** An impoverished and underprivileged child who survives by means of begging or stealing.

**Short Answer Exercises**

1. What are some of the constraints faced by historians in their study of children?
2. Why were rates of infant mortality in the 18th and 19th centuries consistently high?
3. How did pre-Confederation societies define “childhood”?
4. What role(s) did the clergy play in shaping childhood?
5. To what extent were children “property”?
6. In what ways was childhood in New France different from the experience of childhood in 19th century British North America and the West?
7. What role did the state play in the lives of children?
8. To what extent were schools a response to moral panics?
Suggested Readings


Chapter 13. The Farthest West
13.1 Introduction

Historical approaches to British Columbia follow imperial avenues. From a Canadian perspective, we approach it along the routes of the North West Company (NWC), through the northern Rockies and along valleys and passes to Bella Coola or the Columbia River. From a British or Spanish perspective, we come at it from the sea and from warmer waters to the south, perhaps via Hawaii. Had Russia successfully annexed everything on the West Coast, the historical approach would reflect that northern intrusion — a story of Siberian traders from Kamchatkan ports, incrementally working their way from Alaska to California. An American imperial approach focuses on the mainland, specifically on the Oregon Trail, though it should make room as well for the multitude of entrepreneurial Bostonian captains sailing around Cape Horn on long-haul trade expeditions. The American view would also observe the enormity of Washington, D.C.’s claim on the territory and the impact of Americans throughout the gold rush years.

Once it was determined to the satisfaction of Europeans and Euro-North Americans that there was no water passage through the territory, they started to think of it in terms of ports, coves, forts, and corridors. What is missing from these competing imperialist views is an appreciation of the region as a human space, a dense patchwork of cultural territories for which “getting in” and “getting out” are irrelevant concepts.

Historian Jean Barman coined the phrase “the West beyond the West” to describe the territories that would eventually coalesce into British Columbia by 1871. Other terms that have been used include Trans-Mountain West, the Cordillera, New Caledonia, New Albion, the Pacific Northwest, and Cascadia (this last one lumps together British Columbia with the American states of Washington and Oregon). None of these labels are perfect, not least because British Columbia covers such a vast territory, one that includes the prairie lands of the Peace River District in the northeast, the rolling and almost pastoral Cariboo plateau, and the desert and semi-desert terrain of the Okanagan and Thompson Valleys, as well as the mountainous landscape throughout and the fjords and islands of the coastlands. Much of the region is as unlike the “Pacific Northwest” as can be imagined. More to the point, British Columbia is, with the exception of the Peace District, utterly separate from the Prairies. For that reason, Barman’s “West beyond the West” works nicely to remind us that there is a whole world of regions within a region that lies outside the more easily conceptualized prairie landscape we refer to simply as “the West.”
The period from 1740 to 1874 in the farthest west was a time of Aboriginal cultures adapting and adopting European and Asian technologies and *matériel* successfully. It also encapsulates a catastrophic loss in populations brought on by epidemics of exotic diseases. While European and American merchants struggled to find the sweet spot in a fur trade with potentially enormous profits but very high costs, Aboriginal communities found themselves confronting internal competition and conflict as well as *gunboat diplomacy*. European impact on the region was, nevertheless, limited until the 1858 gold rush, at which point the local contact period accelerated very suddenly and in ways unseen elsewhere in British North America. Combined with the arrival of an industrial revolution, these changes drove significant political changes at a record pace. There was no “pioneer stage” in the West, just a race to industrial scales of production that began in the Victorian era and overshadowed nearly a century of regional commerce. Toward the end of this period, a single colonial regime had emerged along with many familiar themes associated with power and elitism. Throughout it all, Aboriginal people took a stand against the newcomer populations and cultures (in the 1860s in particular), and many of the issues they addressed then remain unresolved in the 21st century.

### Learning Objectives

- Broadly describe regional Aboriginal cultures and their differences.
- Explain outsider interest in the region from 1740 to Confederation.
- Describe some of the advantages and disadvantages held by, respectively, the Russians, the Spanish, the British, and the Americans.
- Demonstrate an understanding of Aboriginal autonomy and resistance from the 18th century through the 1860s.
- Explain the colonial administrations’ approach to Aboriginal peoples.
- Describe the economies of the two West Coast colonies.
- Account for and describe the social and political fracture lines in the region.
- Describe and comment on the gold rush and its effects.

### Attributions

**Figure 13.1**

*Plano del Archipelago de Clayocuat 1791* by *Pfly* is in the public domain.
Simon Fraser’s arrival at Camchin (Lytton), at the confluence of the Thompson and Fraser Rivers was foretold. Among the Nlaka’pamux around the end of the 18th century there was a prophecy that foreigners would arrive from the east — although in some respects, they had already arrived.

**The Proto-Contact Years**

The fur trade on the Plains and the intrusion of Spanish goods — including horses — impacted Aboriginal peoples in the northern reaches of the Columbia basin (the Okanagan and Thompson Valleys) and in the Kootenay valleys. Knowing this, it is possible — indeed, probable — that smallpox arrived in the Cordillera long before the first European appeared. Epidemics in the 1730s and 1760s could have been passed along trade or raid routes, especially once so many of the neighbours to the south and east were able to travel on horseback. The 1780s smallpox epidemic definitely made an appearance. And when Fraser arrived in 1808 he found evidence of European trade commodities among the Nlaka’pamux, proof that there was no such thing as total isolation in this region. It remains uncertain as to when the proto-contact period precisely began in the Interior of what is now British Columbia, but we can be confident that the world encountered by Euro-North Americans from the 1770s on was one undergoing great change.

Notwithstanding the proto-contact experience, Aboriginal societies in the Pacific Northwest enjoyed prolonged isolation from the European invasion taking place in Mexico, the Mississippi, the parklands of the North, and the eastern woodlands. From 1500 to the 1740s, indigenous cultures and populations continued to thrive. There is nothing in the written, oral, archaeological, or geological record to suggest any catastrophes to rival the volcanic explosions of about 2,000 and 1,000 years earlier; nothing that would force a massive migration wave. (It is the case, to be sure, that seismic issues are a fact of life in the region. One local traditional understanding of their cause conveys a very usable image of what contemporary science believes occurs: "According to the Nuxalk ... a giant supernatural being held the earth in ropes. When he adjusted his grip, or when the rope slipped in his hands, the Nuxalk could feel the tremors and performed a ceremonial earthquake dance.")¹ The southward movement of Athabaskan speakers appears to have been

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complete by 1400. After this time the pattern of culture groups seems to have coalesced into the form that enters the European record from the 1740s on.

There are three culture areas in what is now British Columbia: Subarctic, Northwest Coast, and Interior Plateau. Each of these extends beyond the province’s boundaries to, respectively, the East and North, the Columbia Basin, and from California to Alaska. Each group made use of winter villages, which tended to be larger concentrations of population that combined food and fuel resources to make it through the season. Most, too, had summer villages or summer ranges where resources of all kinds would be gathered or harvested. This pattern implies the regular migration of significant numbers of people to sites of economic and cultural importance. A large range of land- and seascapes could be utilized without establishing permanence in any of them. Even the huge cedar longhouses that are the trademark of coastal cultures could be dismantled almost entirely and the heavy planks floated to another site. Records from the contact era of what appear to be abandoned villages continue to provoke debate among scholars and in the courtroom: were they truly abandoned, just swapped out temporarily for a second location, or ruined by war and/or disease?

Figure 13.3 Despite efforts to rehouse Aboriginal people in Euro-Canadian structures, longhouses were still be built in the 20th century. This one is under construction in the Vancouver area around 1912.

**Village Cultures**

The longhouse was a defining feature of Aboriginal coastal life. Great numbers of people associated with distinct clans occupied these buildings that could be the size of a modern football field. As storehouses, homes, and theatres for celebrations and performances, longhouses were among the largest and grandest structures in North America into the 19th century. The Northwest Coast culture developed along stratified, hierarchical lines that included a nobility, a commoner class, and slaves; their relative status was reflected in their living space in the longhouse.

The complexity and sophistication of longhouse decoration was also important. Population health and size was almost guaranteed by the wealth of food sources available along the coast — including whales on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Over time, large and prosperous populations developed a culture reflected in arts, sculpture, dance, storytelling, and specialized roles in hunting, fishing, and warfare. Village populations often grew to be more than 1,000 people, and the larger ethnic zones might include 10,000 to 20,000 individuals. Opitsaht in 1792 was said to contain “200 houses, generally well built” with an estimated population of 2,500.2

Subarctic culture groups were much smaller and tended toward an egalitarian model. Families constituted the basic social unit and the favourable seasons were devoted to a wide-ranging hunting-gathering routine. Recent research has

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demonstrated that Subarctic peoples also engaged in horticulture, refashioning the landscape with fire to encourage the growth of berry patches and roots.

Interior Plateau peoples focused on riverine resources, particularly the salmon runs. In the winter, they lived in the *kekuli* or pithouse. Populations were never as high as those on the coast, but winter villages were substantial and numbers were higher than among the Subarctic peoples. Access to the Columbia River system put this group into closer contact with peoples of the Plains tradition and with cultures deep in the American southwest.

Trade across these three culture regions was extensive and regular, and they shared both linguistic and political connections: Interior peoples like the Nlaka’pamux had connections with Stó:lō peoples in the lower Fraser Valley, commercial and military alliances that were facilitated by their common language group (Salishan). In other instances, common language was no more a guarantee against rivalry than being part of the Iroquoian language pool protected the Wendat from the Haudenosaunee. And alliances crossed linguistic and culture zones: the Tsilhqot’ín (Athabaskan speakers) and the Nuxalk (Salishan speakers) brought together Northwest Coast, Subarctic, and Interior Plateau traditions when they gathered for trade and support.3

What marks the region as a whole is diversity of peoples and languages and a similarity of economies and food traditions. Almost everyone harvested salmon from the rivers and hunted for large land mammals. And everyone traded.

On the coast in particular the accumulation of wealth was especially important because it served the ceremony known as the *potlatch*. Principally, the potlatch involved gift-giving to mark a key event, such as a succession, a coming of age, or a political anniversary. The scale of the gift-giving — the magnitude of generosity and hospitality — reflected the status of the host. These events also served as a means to announce changes or events of some importance, and the guests as recipients of gifts would be expected to bear witness. The potlatch was also a means of redistributing wealth. When the

salmon runs were strong (at least once every four years), canyon peoples built up substantial surpluses; when the runs failed, as they did from time to time, coastal peoples were better positioned. Potlatching in this context was a kind of mutual support system.  

4. A useful discussion of potlatching can be found in Turkel, *The Archive of Place*, 131.
The Contact Era

The arrival of the trans-Pacific sea otter trade, which opened up the West Coast to intercontinental commerce, had a significant impact on Aboriginal societies, not least of which was the introduction of exotic diseases. Although most if not all of these nations were impacted by smallpox (beginning probably in the 1780s, perhaps earlier), the magnitude of the mortality is both unknown and likely uneven. In some cases it was disastrous. (The Sinixt people of the Arrow Lakes are thought to have been reduced by 80% in the 1781 smallpox epidemic, for example.) As well, recovery rates are completely a mystery. Further and cataclysmic epidemics occurred in the 1830s and the 1860s, some of which are considered later in this chapter.

Scholars, Aboriginal peoples, and the courts debate the probable pre-contact numbers west of the Rockies. Some estimates are modest, ranging from 80,000 to 100,000. Others are as high as 350,000, and there are outlier estimates in excess of 1 million. The matter is complicated by eyewitness accounts like those of George Vancouver, who saw abandoned villages, half disassembled, and assumed they indicated a disaster involving loss of life. But the business of seasonal movements between village and resource sites can account for some of the empty lands that were reported. Archaeological research has yet to provide a reliable means of estimating the pre-contact numbers. Nor can we be sure when smallpox first struck, partly because it doesn’t leave a “fingerprint” on the victim the way some skeletal diseases or bone trauma from combat might.

What we know for sure is that wherever Europeans went on the coast, they reported the existence of large villages with equally impressive longhouses. Communities may have been farther apart in the Interior, but some were, according to NWC reports, nodes of 1,000 or more. We can also be confident that, given what we know about virgin soil diseases, those well-developed village communities with their high densities and even the kekuli pits of the Interior were a good environment for highly contagious diseases to thrive in. Around 1860 there were maybe 80,000 Aboriginal peoples in the region; not only did they outnumber the newcomers, they outnumbered all the other Aboriginal peoples in British North America combined. Their number at the time of contact could only have been larger.

These numbers and the complexity of the Aboriginal world west of the Rockies would insulate indigenous cultures from externally imposed change for a while. Historians disagree on this point, but it is safe to say that much of the cultural change that occurred along the Pacific Northwest coast until the 1840s was controlled mainly by the Aboriginal peoples and not by the Europeans.

Key Points

- Aboriginal societies west of the Rockies faced little to no direct exposure to Europeans prior to the 1740s.
- Indigenous cultures can be grouped into three broad categories: Subarctic, Northwest Coast, and Interior Plateau.
- While each share some common features, there are important distinctions as well.
- Trade between Aboriginal communities and nations was extensive both in terms of the distances travelled and the commodities exchanged.
- The potlatch is an important feature of the regional economy, political and social order, and wider cultural life on the West Coast, into which newcomer goods fit very well.
- Populations west of the Rockies and especially on the northwest coast were larger than anywhere else in North America.
Attributions

Figure 13.2
*Haida* by Albert P. Niblack is from the [Canadian Museum of History](https://www.history.museum) and cannot be used for commercial purposes.

Figure 13.3
*Interior of longhouse under construction* by Matthews, James Skitt, Major is in the [public domain](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Public_domain). This image is available from [City of Vancouver Archives](https://archive.cityvancouver.ca) under item: In P105.2.

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*Nakoaktok* by Para is in the [public domain](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Public_domain).

Figure 13.5
*Stolo with dipnets* by Themightyquill is in the [public domain](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Public_domain).

Figure 13.6
*Speaker Figure, 19th century* was uploaded as a donation by the [Brooklyn Museum](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org), and is considered to have no known copyright restrictions by the institutions of the Brooklyn Museum.
13.3 Fur Trade and Empires

The catalyst for European interest in the Pacific Northwest in the 18th century was Russian exploration. The *Sv. Petr*, under the command of Vitus Bering (1681-1741) arrived in the Aleutian Islands in 1741 as part of an exploratory expedition. The ship was wrecked, Bering died, and just enough of his crew survived to get home in a makeshift boat cobbled together from what was left of the *Sv. Petr*. They went back with sufficient sea otter pelts to win a small fortune. Russian entrepreneurs and shipowners were soon following in Bering's path. Enslaving much of the indigenous Aleut (a.k.a. Unangan) population and terrorizing much of the rest, the Russian traders established a presence that eventually stretched south to California. These events occurred against a backdrop of growing Russian expansionism. Under Elizabeth of Russia and her successor, Catherine the Great, Russia's imperial ambitions and aggressive posture grew. All this alarmed the Spanish (see below), who first heard of the move into Alaska in the imperial Russian court.

Bering and his successors may have had the blessings of the empresses, but they also faced great challenges, the first of which was supply lines. The huge cost of running their operation out of Okhotsk limited the Russians, which is one reason why they were largely uninterested in settlement until the 1780s and 1790s. The agricultural potential of Alaska, with its short growing season, was another impediment to self-sufficiency. The Russians faced further disadvantages in the marketplace. They were denied access to Guangzhou and had to carry their pelts across Siberia to Kyakhta, south of Lake Baikal, where they could cross the border into China. This added further costs.¹

Some of the competitive elements of the Russian trade began to consolidate by the 1780s. In 1799 Czar Paul I decreed a Russian-American border at 55°N (near the southern limit of the Alaskan panhandle) and chartered a joint stock company to take monopolistic control of the fur trade: the **Russian American Company** (RAC). Almost immediately the company’s chief manager, Alexander Andreyevich Baranov (1746-1819), adopted a policy of contracting out to American ships in the region. In 1803 two Russians and some 40 Aleuts and Alutiiq otter hunters sailed to Baja California on board an American ship. Over the next decade, it is believed that tens of thousands of otters were captured

along the California coast by Alaskan Aboriginals in the employ of — or, more typically, enslaved by — the RAC and working from American ships.

The first permanent Russian (and thus the first European) settlement in Alaska was established at Novo-Arkhangelsk (New Archangel, or Sitka) in 1804, which hardened Russian claims to the territory. As well, in 1812 the Russians were able to leapfrog their British and American competition and establish Fort Ross (a.k.a. Fortress Ross) in what is now northern California. All of these events coloured the Russians as something of a wildcard on the coast: the vulnerabilities to RAC’s supply line sustained independent and sometimes reckless traders; Russian relations with the Lingít (Tlingit) were terrible and poisoned Aboriginal-newcomer relations south of the panhandle; and the Russians never entirely lost sight of the possibility of a Californian colony — Fort Ross remained in Russian hands until 1841.

The Spanish

In 1774 a Spanish naval expedition under Juan Pérez (ca. 1725-1775) worked its way north from California in an effort to assess the threat posed by the Russian presence in Alaska. According to the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the whole
of the West Coast was Spain’s to lose. The Portuguese honoured the treaty but the rest of Europe did not. Nor did the Aboriginal people of the northwest coast. And why should they? Spain had not ventured north of California, apart from the disputed 1592 voyage of Juan de Fuca in search of the legendary Strait of Anian.

Word of the Russian intrusion worried the Spanish sufficiently that in 1767 they established a naval station at San Blas and posts at San Diego and San Francisco two years later. Five years after that, the Spanish mustered Perez’s small expedition to chart and claim the North Pacific. Although the Spanish made their way as far north as Alaska and erected a cross there, they made no other landfall north of what is now Washington State. The Spanish were satisfied that there was no Russian presence between Mexico and 57°N.

A second expedition set out in 1779 under the Peruvian-born Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra (1744-1794), sailing north again to Alaska. On this occasion the Spanish were looking for the outlet of a “northwest passage” that would lead to the Arctic Ocean or perhaps to the Saskatchewan or the Missouri Rivers. They sailed to 61°N and went ashore to ritually claim the territory, then returned home, assuming the job was done and that they could now relax or at least focus on the freshly announced war with Britain.

Having run up the flag on the northwest coast in 1774 and 1779, the Spanish were surprised to find they needed to monitor and perhaps defend their position, though not, as they might have expected, against Russia. Britain’s appearance in 1778 in the form of James Cook’s third expedition alerted the Spanish to the need to establish a fixed position on the north coast. In 1788 a pair of Spanish ships made another voyage to Alaska, this time finding the Russians and discovering that they had plans to establish a post on Nootka Sound in the territory of the Mowachaht. Returning to Mexico, the Spanish launched yet another expedition, intent on claiming Nootka Sound for their own. When they arrived they found two American ships and one British; the Spanish banished the latter and then seized the North West America, a vessel owned by the British independent trader, John Meares, and built on Nootka Sound by a crew of Chinese workers brought to Yuquot by Meares — the first Chinese arrivals in British Columbia. The Spanish put the Chinese to work building Fort San Miguel, thereby creating a physical statement of sovereignty. These aggressive efforts to assert Spanish sovereignty provoked what became known as the Nootka Crisis, which began in 1789 and lasted five years.

In terms of developing Aboriginal-European interaction, the Spanish had one advantage over their contemporaries: they alone of the European and North American visitors to the North Pacific had an interest in territory first and commercial ventures second. Once the British were disabused of the existence of a northwest passage their only concern was furs. The same was true, only more so, of the Russians and Americans. In contrast, Bodega y Quadra was looking at the long term, and therefore thinking about building lasting relationships with the Aboriginal people. This was what he hoped to do at Fort Miguel in 1791-93.

Bodega y Quadra was, by all accounts — and certainly by George Vancouver’s account — charming, curious, and smart. The leading figure among the Mowachat, Maquinna (ca. 1795), was particularly impressed with Bodega y Quadra’s ability to assimilate local customs and to show respect to the local leaders. And Bodega y Quadra’s reports on matters in Nootka Sound from 1790 to 1793 were insightful. These include his belief that Euro-American traders cynically stirred up trouble in order to improve the market for guns and ammunition; that syphilis was spreading unchecked from British and American ships to the indigenous population; that traders from abroad were never above plundering the Nuu-chah-nulth villages if they didn’t get what they wanted under terms that they wanted; and that the European responses to minor thefts or single murders by the Aboriginal population was typically a violent overreaction. Bodega y Quadra spent two years repairing relations after Callicum, one of the Nuu-chah-nulth leaders and a close relation of Maquinna, was shot dead by the Spanish (under circumstances that remain unclear).

Like the Russians, the Spanish operated under several important disadvantages. While they could trade into Chinese seaports (unlike the Russians) their objective was to obtain Asian mercury to support their gold and silver processing
operations in Mexico. The sea otter trade was, for the British, Americans, and Russians, about selling cheaply acquired pelts and obtaining highly desirable Chinese products — tea, silk, porcelain — for sale at a further profit in Europe. For the Spanish, it was about enhancing gold production in Mexico. The “Mercury Fleet,” as it was known, from Europe, however, could deliver materials more cheaply than the Spanish could in the Pacific.

As well, the Spanish could hardly muster sufficient resources to blast British, American, and Russian competition off the coast. For that reason, and because they sensed that Mexico’s security might be compromised by Britain and/or America, they retreated. As one historian has put it,

The Spanish regime lacked the motivation or the population to maintain its sovereign claims to the coastline and ocean north of California. Other than the northwest coast Natives sent to Mexico and perhaps a few mestizos born at Nootka Sound, the Spanish efforts left little impact upon the Native societies. […] Even before [the last of the Spanish and British ships left Yuquot in 1795], Maquinna’s people were hard at work erecting house posts for their summer village.

The Nuu-chah-nulth would continue to trade with Europeans for decades, but they did not permit the outsiders to re-establish themselves anywhere on their coast. Fort San Miguel would be the last European toehold on Vancouver Island until the 1840s.


The British

European claims to a territory could have the most tenuous foundation. In 1577 Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596) sailed from Plymouth Harbour in England with orders from Queen Elizabeth I to terrorize and pillage the Spanish gold fleet in the Pacific Ocean. The mission evolved into England’s first circumnavigation of the globe but, more importantly for the history of the Pacific Northwest, it allowed Britain to lay claim to lands north of Mexico. Drake’s account puts him just north of San Francisco Bay in 1579, which he named Nova Albion (New Albion). Scholars continue to debate whether Drake ventured farther north, but this 16th century interlude was the basis on which Britain built its claim 200 years later. When he mapped a place on the northwest coast in the 1790s, Captain George Vancouver’s notations would include the phrase “from that part of New Albion.”

In 1774, James Cook (1728-1779) led a British expedition into the Pacific Northwest. Cook’s ships rounded South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, set out for Hawaii, then reached the Americas at Alta California. Sailing north, he narrowly missed both the Columbia River and Juan de Fuca Strait but found his way to Yuquot (Friendly Cove).

Cook spent a month there enjoying the hospitality of the Nuu-chah-nulth and becoming acquainted with their self-confident and sharp trading practices. The people of Yuquot and Tahsis weren’t satisfied with the cheaper goods that had been traded with the Hawaiians, and they controlled the terms of trade throughout. When they were done, Cook’s two vessels continued north and successfully rounded the North Pacific before heading back to Hawaii, where the captain was killed by the locals. The Resolution and the Discovery continued the voyage home, stopping in Guangzhou (Canton). There they discovered what the Russians already knew: the sea otter pelt market in China was extremely lucrative. British and American interest in the region was thereafter stimulated.

Cook’s voyages provoked the Spanish to press their regional claims. The British pressed right back. The two countries nearly went to war over the question of whose claim was the stronger. Captain George Vancouver (1757-1798), was the British representative on the scene at Yuquot; Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra represented the Spanish. Various accounts of this meeting have been written, at least one fictionalizing the encounter. What they have in common is Vancouver’s moodiness and obstinace compared with Bodega y Quadra’s smoothly seductive hospitality. Events in Europe were to overtake them: in 1792 the French Revolution was threatening to spread beyond the borders of France, and the Spanish decided to sacrifice their northwest coast claim in exchange for British goodwill. As a result, the British gained nominal control of everything between Alta California and Russian Alaska. The negotiators at Yuquot agreed to mark the event by naming the island after themselves. For many years it appeared on European and American maps as “Bodega y Quadra and Vancouver’s Island” (shortened later to Vancouver’s Island, and finally Vancouver Island).

In the Navy

James Cook and his contemporaries were some of the most remarkable cartographers of all time. Their maps are still reliable today, and Cook’s 1760s maps of Newfoundland were the gold standard into the 20th century. Their careers intersect with the stories of British North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii. Cook was at Louisbourg when it fell in 1755 and commanded a ship under Wolfe at the Battle of Quebec four years later. George Vancouver joined the Royal Navy at 13 and served with Cook from the age of 14. William Bligh was only seven when he was signed up with the navy and his career would see more than the usual amount of drama.

Cook once declared that his goal was to go “farther than any man has been before me, but as far as I think it is possible for a man to go.” Both Vancouver and Bligh had a chance to study under Cook and were with him on the last of his three voyages. They all kept their pencils pressed against map paper constantly. They were together on the Resolution in Hawaii when Cook made the fatal choice to go ashore one time too many. Vancouver’s career was just starting. He was barely 20 years old when he was given command of the Discovery, a four-year mission to explore the Pacific in greater detail, and a mandate to settle the practical terms of the Nootka Convention. Along with two Spanish captains, Dionisio Alcalá Galiano and Cayetano Valdés y Flores, he charted the Strait of Georgia (the Salish Sea) and passed within sight of the peninsula on which the city bearing his name was later built. Bligh, for his part, has an island bearing his name in Nootka Sound. He would take command of the Bounty in 1787, a ship irretrievably associated with mutiny.

Having sovereignty on paper, however, did nothing to enhance the British position. They continued to engage in trade, but that didn’t stop other parties from arriving on the coast. Like Quadra, Vancouver had little use for the travelling fur traders, particularly those who were selling guns. He regarded their tactics as deplorable and wrote to his superiors:

I am extremely concerned to be compelled to state here, that many of the traders from the civilised world have not only pursued a line of conduct, diametrically opposite to the true principles of justice in their commercial dealings, but have fomented discords, and stirred up contentions, between the different tribes,
in order to increase the demand for these destructive engines... They have been likewise eager to instruct the natives in the use of European arms of all descriptions...

In terms of imperial diplomacy, the British had come out ahead, but the Americans (see below) had the whip in hand when it came to trade. The British would have to change their strategy dramatically and the incentive to do so would come from Canada. By 1830 British traders were back in the game, supported by forts on the Columbia River and at Langley. It would be another 10 years before they could claim real regional domination over the other intruder traders. Authority over the Aboriginal population would take longer still.

**The Americans**

Even as the American Revolution was raging it was clear to shipowners in East Coast ports that their access to British markets might be in danger. Britain took steps to prohibit American access to the West Indies market, a move that favoured the new British North American colonies and that left American ship captains looking farther afield. Necessity took them out of the North Atlantic and into the Mediterranean and North Africa, down the east coast of South America and round Cape Horn into the Pacific. It found them trading in the South China Sea and, almost inevitably, along the northwest coast.

![Figure 13.13 "Winter Quarters." by George Davidson (ca. 1793), depicts the American Captain Robert Gray and the crew of the Columbia Rediviva on Clayoquot Sound.](image)

There were two aspects to the American trade in the region. The first was its maritime face. The Americans put more ships into the region than any other nation. Although British ships dominated from 1785 to 1792, they were increasingly competing with American vessels (one-to-one in 1791 and 1792), as well as the occasional French or Portuguese ship. In the two decades that followed, the British presence slipped well behind that of the Americans. In 1801 more than 20 American vessels found their way to the Pacific Northwest; in the same year only three British ships and one Russian ship were in the area. Soon the British were down to one ship a year, although it was usually the same ship making repeat visits. The American fleet, by contrast, was made up of competing traders; often their name appears only once

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in the register. Continuity was an issue because one-timers tended to behave in ways that were not necessarily in the best interest of long-term trade relations. The sales of guns and alcohol were a particular problem.\(^8\)

In short, as far as the maritime trade was concerned, the Americans had the edge. It was, however, an uncoordinated edge. The independent ships from Boston and other New England ports had no imperial mandate, nor were they acting on behalf of the new republic. Later American claims to the territory might invoke some of the earliest expeditions in the region, but the fur trade fleets were of little value in this regard.

The land-based trade posed different advantages and liabilities. John Jacob Astor (1763-1848), a German immigrant to the United States who saw an opportunity in shipping Canadian furs through New York to Europe in the 1790s, amassed a substantial fortune in just a few years and was eager to involve himself more directly in the fur trade. He developed a multi-pronged strategy, one part of which was the Pacific Fur Company (PFC) and the prospect of a fort on the Columbia River, which he named for himself. Astor’s company seemed fated from the outset. The *Tonquin* disaster (see *Identity Crisis*) was the worst of it, but another of the PFC’s ships proved to be not seaworthy, a third was badly beat up by a storm, and a fourth was wrecked off the coast of Maui. One study estimates that the PFC lost 61 men in less than two years. The trade conducted from Fort Astor was negligible. Astor’s own employees were quickly turning against him, and war had broken out between the Americans and the British in North America.\(^9\) A quick sale to the NWC in 1813 was the outcome.

One legacy of Astor’s expeditions was picked up by several American traders — that of provisioning other fur trading outposts, regardless of who owned them. The cost of establishing, maintaining, and provisioning a trading post in the region was all but prohibitive, but American suppliers offered a solution. Every post in the Pacific Northwest at some point took advantage of the opportunity to restock with American goods, even though doing so was essentially underwriting the costs of the competition. Severing this link between American suppliers and the Russian traders in particular was key to British success in the region, but that goal was only achieved in the 1830s. Thereafter the prohibitively high costs of trade in the region combined with sharply declining sea otter stocks to reduce American shipping to no more than a couple of ships a year.

![Figure 13.14](https://example.com/figure13.14.jpg)

*Figure 13.14* A Russian stamp commemorates the 200th anniversary of the establishment of Fort Ross.

### The Imperial Coast

At some point, Spain, Russia, Britain, and the United States all claimed the Pacific Northwest. Spain dropped its interests with the Nootka Convention of 1793. Russia’s RAC reinforced its positions from Sitka north and west, marking a boundary at 54°40’N latitude in disagreements with the United States and Britain in 1824 and 1825 respectively. American claims to the “Columbia Department” — which included New Caledonia (that is, most of modern British Columbia) along with the future states of Washington and Oregon — were to prove a problem in the 1840s, but otherwise

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\(^8\) Ibid.

American interest in the region was made up of individual merchant ships. British claims were based on prior discovery, exploration, and treaty rights. As is explored in the next section, the most important imperial agency was the Hudson's Bay Company, which built on a foundation established by the NWC and engaged in active trade from the Lower Columbia River north to the Arctic Ocean. From 1816 through to the 1840s, few Americans and Europeans settled in the region and it remained — for these outsiders at least — a venue for trade and they had aspirations to do little more. The Canadians were a different matter.

**Key Points**

- European interest in the Pacific Northwest increased in the mid-18th century with the arrival of Russian sea otter traders in Alaska.
- Russian ambitions in the region included the establishment of permanent posts, subjugating much of the Native population and extending their reach to California.
- The Spanish were spurred into action in the northwest by the Russian presence and were far more interested in sovereignty than commerce.
- Nootka Sound (Mowachaht) was the intersection of commercial and diplomatic interests including the host Mowachaht/Nuu-chah-nulth people of Yuquot (Friendly Cove), the Spanish, the British, and nominally independent traders.
- The resolution of the Nootka Crisis gave Britain the pre-eminent European claim to Vancouver Island and the mainland coast from California to Alaska, but it would be nearly 40 years before they established a post in what is now British Columbia.
- American traders were the dominant force in the maritime fur trade into the 1830s and their supply lines sustained the Russian presence, making it difficult for the British to turn a profit.
- The American Pacific Fur Company was the first to establish a fixed presence on the mainland, at Fort Astoria, although this soon fell to the Canadians.
- The establishment of British forts from Fort Vancouver north to Fort Stikine was a response to the mobile American fur trade.

**Attributions**

**Figure 13.7**

Sea Otter by Trycatch is in the public domain.

**Figure 13.8**

Choris, Saint Paul by Triggerhappy is in the public domain.

**Figure 13.9**

1827 illustration of Castle Hill by File Upload Bot (Magnus Manske) is in the public domain.

**Figure 13.10**

Callicum und Maquinna by Hans-Jürgen Hübner is in the public domain.

**Figure 13.11**

Spanish fort San Miguel at Nootka in 1793 by Onofre Bouvila is in the public domain.
Figure 13.12
The launch of the North West America at Nootka Sound by PawelMM is in the public domain.

Figure 13.13
Columbia Winter Quarters by Pfly is in the public domain.

Figure 13.14
Stamp of Russia 2012 No 1633 Fort Ross by Dmitry Ivanov is not an object of copyright.
13.4 The Canadian Cordillera

David Thompson (1770-1857) is famous for two accomplishments: his work as an explorer and surveyor (which includes crossing the continent and descending the Columbia River to its mouth, as well as mapping a prodigious amount of North America) and for having the longest marriage on record in the history of pre-Confederation Canada (58 years).

Thompson was raised in poverty in London, indentured to the HBC at 14 years, and spent much of the rest of his life in the fur trade. In 1797 he literally walked away from his job with the HBC, trudging 80 miles in the snow from one trading post to another where he took up work with the NWC. It was in his capacity as a surveyor for the Montrealers that he was dispatched to the far west in 1806 in order to block American plans to exploit the route mapped by Lewis and Clark, and to access the sea otter resources that had been enriching fur traders from other nations.

Thompson arrived at the mouth of the Columbia on July 14, 1811, only to find Astor’s crew of Americans and defected Nor’westers already on the scene, building Fort Astoria. Their arrival preceded Thompson’s by a few months, but events in the east were to catch up with the Astorians. The War of 1812 would result in the loss of much of Astor’s operations in the Great Lakes and in the far west, to the benefit of the NWC.

The NWC in the Interior

The Montrealers purchased Astoria and its tributary posts in 1813 and changed the name to Fort George. They then renewed and extended a chain of forts up the Columbia with one branch heading east through the Arrow Lakes to the southern Prairies and the other through the Okanagan Valley to Tk’emlúps (aka Kamloops), where they established Thompson Rivers Post in place of the PFC’s Fort Cumcloups. This early land-based fur trade was, thus, linked back to Canada and not to Britain. On the ground the NWC in the farthest west was mostly Canadien, not Canadian, with a large and growing share of Métis women as well. Regardless of its Laurentian links, it was very much a British claim nevertheless.

One of Thompson's contemporaries in the NWC, Simon Fraser (1776-1862), made a comparable assault on the far west in 1803-1808. Fraser came to Canada from New York as a child in the Loyalist diaspora, but he was conscious of his ancestral Scottish roots. While in the north he applied the name “New Caledonia” to the region, which later would have a broader use, covering much of what is now British Columbia. Before descending the river that now bears his name, Fraser’s expedition, made up of mostly Canadiens, Métis, and some Iroquois, established a chain of posts that included Fort St. James and Fort George (later Prince George). In 1808 the voyageurs took on the river, stopping briefly at Camchin (Lytton) where the Nlaka’pamux impressed them with their hospitality, their string of about 1,000 ponies, and a robust human population of roughly 1,200. Fraser and his crew carried on to near the mouth of the river where they irritated the Musqueam (a.k.a. Xwméthkwiyem or xʷməθkʷəy̓əm), who chased them back up the river. Regardless of Fraser’s failure to complete his mission, he had laid the groundwork for the northern leg of a chain of forts that would complete the link between Fort George of the north and Fort George of the south (formerly Fort Astoria) and British North America. This was the setup that the HBC inherited in 1821.

Fur trade society in New Caledonia and the Columbia District was consistent in many respects with personnel and practices east of the Rockies: Canadiens and Iroquois provided much of the muscle while direction was in the hands of a closely connected set of Anglo-Scots-Canadians and their métis or native wives. After the merger in 1821, the HBC’s structure made these distinctions even more apparent: the chief traders and factors were all drawn from
the Anglo-Protestant side of the house while the voyageurs and traders were overwhelmingly Canadien, Métis, and Iroquois. Hierarchical social stations were reinforced through a dress code, the layout of the forts, and the size and state of employee accommodations. This sort of physical display of paternalistic rank was intended to impress upon the “servants” of the HBC their relative position; it was also ritualized in ways to impress the Aboriginal trading partners.

The Interior posts were remarkably fragile. At the far end of supply lines originating in Montreal or perhaps even London, they were vulnerable to any number of events that might delay or prevent the arrival of food, gunpowder, clothing, and trade goods. Every one of the inland forts at some time or another depended heavily on local salmon fisheries, all of which were zealously controlled by Aboriginal peoples. And they were isolated from one another: boats could make it down the Columbia from the lower Okanagan (south of the 49th parallel) to the sea and canoe travel that was possible between Alexandria in the Cariboo to Stuart’s Lake in the north, but all of the rest required packhorses. Famine was common, as was the consequent eating of horses and dogs. According to one historian,

New Caledonia (mainland British Columbia) was particularly despised for its “misery and privation” and “poverty of fare.” Chief Factor John Tod recalled that in HBC Governor George Simpson’s Day (1820-1860) the district was “looked on in the light of another Botany Bay Australia; the men were in dread of being send there.”

Fines, beatings, and jailings were part of life in the forts of the far west. Relations with the Aboriginal neighbours and trading partners were also often characterized by brutality. 

Obviously the Interior trade was not concerned with sea otters. Whatever was brought in at the Columbia River posts was part of the package sent northeast to Hudson Bay each spring, but beaver, wolf, wolverine, muskrat, and a great variety of other hides came from the inland posts. As for imported goods from European and Euro-North American sources, there was the usual stock of rifles and shot, blankets and axe heads. There was also a thriving trade in leather: whether for ecological reasons or due to overhunting, the Interior Plateau was home to few large mammals, so the import of moose, deer, elk, and bison hide was quickly regarded as essential. As one study states, “in the 1827-28 outfit year, New Caledonia required two thousand fathoms [3650 metres] of pack cords, seventy bounds of babiche [string], and thirty pounds of sinews.”

The HBC on the Coast

The newly unified HBC after 1821 had growing concerns regarding the leakage of furs from the Interior to the coast, where they fetched higher prices. As well, the company under the leadership of George Simpson wanted to improve its position on the coastal market. So long as First Nations trading villages were prepared to wait for two or more competing vessels to arrive in port before initiating trade, they would be able to play off the newcomers against one another and drive up prices. American ships in particular were prepared to pay premium prices for furs, a practice that was hurting the HBC bottom line.

The solution to this was the establishment of land-based trade in centres that would entail a shift from a maritime-based trade strategy. The HBC established regional headquarters at Fort Vancouver in 1824-25 and at Fort Langley among the Stó:lō and Kwantlen in 1827. Two successive forts, both named Fort Simpson, were erected in Ts’msyan territory in 1831 and 1834, Fort McLoughlin was built on Heiltsuk lands in 1833, and Fort Taku (a.k.a. Fort Durham) in 1830 and Fort Skikine in 1840 were both in Lingit (Tlingit) territory. The north coast posts were intended to provide a permanent trading presence in the hope that a deeper commitment to the locale, better intelligence on the

2. Ibid.
marketplace and supply lines, and lowered costs (due to an end to wandering trading vessels) would result in higher profits. By the late 1830s the strategy was deemed a success. American shipping and competition in the region declined sharply.

This had two collateral effects. First, the Russians in Alaska were affected. The Lingit nation of what is often referred to as the Alaska panhandle resented Russian posts and resisted their presence in a long-running war. In the absence of friendly local suppliers and faced with intolerably long supply lines back to Russia, the Russian American Company purchased foodstuffs from American captains. Second, the Americans, for their part, could only afford to pay high prices for sea otter and beaver if their costs were covered by Russian purchases of groceries. The new forts were intended to be self-sufficient and to produce a food surplus that could be sold to the Russian forts cheaply. This cut directly into the American coasters' trade, removed them from the northwest coast equation, and made the Russians dependent on the HBC.

Whatever the forts may or may not have become over time, the agenda of the HBC was never colonization. That was something forced upon them by the Colonial Office in the 1850s; the HBC was simply interested in business on the coast. However much fur trade society might have been evolving within the walls of the forts along the coast, there is no denying that they were little citadels. A description of Fort Simpson from 1850 provides a sense of the traders living uncomfortably in Aboriginal territory:

The gates were massive structures about six or seven inches thick, studded with large nails, to guard against their being cut down by the natives. There were small doors within so as to admit only one person at a time. The pickets surrounding the establishment were of cedar, about twenty-two feet long by nine to twelve inches thick; they were square internally, to prevent bullets from passing between. An inside gallery ran around the whole enclosure of pickets at about four feet from the top, and afforded a capital promenade and a means of seeing everything. A regular watch was kept all night in a small turret, surrounded by the flagstaff, over the gate.

Fort Simpson was conceptualized by HBC Governor George Simpson as a means of starving out Russian and American traders in the region. Even if the returns on investment were not especially good, at least the furs traded at Lax Kw'alaams and from upcountry sources were not finding their way into the hands of competitors. Certainly the size of the traffic at the fort suggests the strategy was working: in 1841 roughly 14,000 Aboriginal people — mostly Ts'msyen but also Haida — came to Fort Simpson, and about 800 Ts'msyen formed the homeguard.

While Governor Simpson played a very direct role in choosing a direction for British trade on the coast, the day-to-day operations and initiatives came from officers, Canadiens, and Métis. These were the people who forged relationships with the local people, and whose marriages to indigenous women changed their circumstances. As Cole Harris points out, "As time went on, they learned Native languages and had kin in Native villages." Fur trade society on the coast and in the Interior was invariably made up of women and men who had travelled across great distances, who had witnessed incredible landscapes and hardship, whose mothers may have spoken Cree, and whose fathers may have lived in stone houses in Montreal. The local women drawn into these relationships were often part of the local nobility and so came from backgrounds of some privilege. The company might object from time to time — after all, more marriages with Native women meant more profitless gift-giving to their families — but even Simpson perceived these arrangements as loss leaders, a cost that would be repaid with security and a guarantee of trade.

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Innovation and adaptation spread to business as well. Trade on the West Coast presented opportunities to handle different goods in different markets. Salmon, flour, and lumber were wanted in Hawaii and furs had markets in Guangzhou and London. The profits from the fur trade amassed in London and Montreal, not in the HBC’s trading posts on the Pacific; what they needed in return for their exports included sugar, molasses, tobacco, and salt in particular. The sustainability of any of the northwest coast forts was a stretch until the 1840s, certainly were it not for the support of Aboriginal traders.

An Account of Trading at Fort Simpson in the 1830s

The Indians coming from distant parts to this fort, have large canoes, from thirty to fifty feet long…. Besides containing numerous Indians, their canoes are piled up with goods for barter. They remain mustered here for some weeks, making the fort a complete fair. It requires strict and good management, at this time, by the companies of officers, to protect the fort. On landing at the fort, their canoes are piled up in large heaps, covered over with mats, to keep the sun from cracking them. They bring provisions with them, to last during their stay and journey home. Feasts are given by the chiefs; and invitations sent regularly round to the different guests. Should any of the officers of the fort be invited, stools are placed by the side of the fire, covered over with cloth and fine calico; and they are introduced with great ceremony – the chiefs standing to receive them. Skins are given, as presents, to the officers; and in the course of a day or two, the trader returns the compliment, by making them presents of British manufactured clothing.


Key Points

- The NWC’s presence in New Caledonia and events in the War of 1812 led to the temporary elimination of American interests from the Columbia District and the Canadianizing of a chain of fur trade posts from the mouth of the Columbia north through the Okanagan, the Cariboo, and the Peace District as well as through the Arrow Lakes.
- New Caledonia was considered by many in the NWC/HBC as a hardship post.
- The HBC’s post-1821 strategy of building trading posts on the coast was intended to intercept furs headed from the Interior to the maritime-based trade for higher prices.
- The HBC’s land-based coastal trade strategy broke the back of American seaborne trade and crippled the Russian traders’ business model.
- Fur trade society west of the Rockies witnessed extensive intermarriage in the context of an often marginal trade. The HBC diversified in the 1830s and 1840s and did more to connect the peoples of the Pacific Northwest with those of Hawaii and China.

10. Quoted in Ibid., 130-1.
13.5 Aboriginal Traders

Aboriginal trade leaders who would do much to set the tone and character of trade through the first half of the 19th century emerged across the region. The Legaic (or Ligeex) lineage in the Ts’msyan (Tsimshian) territories in the northwest, Kw’eh (or Kwah, ca. 1755-1840) of the Dakelh (Carrier) whose lands surrounded Fraser’s posts, and N’kwala (a.k.a. Hwistesmetxe’qen, ca. 1780-1865) in the Okanagan, Thompson, and Nicola Valleys dictated the location and circumstances under which fur trade posts could be established. In the case of the Legaics, they used marriage between daughters of the lineage to European traders (for example, between Sudaal and Dr. John Kennedy of the HBC in 1832) to secure long-term advantage and monopolies. This strategy of co-opting or adopting into a network of relations was coupled with tactics of bluster and power. Fort Simpson, near present-day Prince Rupert, provides another example. The HBC’s original plan was to build a fort on the Nass River, and while this might meet British trade objectives, it wasn’t satisfactory to the Ts’msyan who insisted that the first iteration be moved a substantial distance south to Lax Kw’alaams, a territory they preferred. 1 Clarence Bolt, *Thomas Crosby and the Tsimshian: Small Shoes for Feet Too Large* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992): 15.

**Regional Powerhouses**

Mostly these Aboriginal trade strategies reflected centuries-old commercial practices. The arrival of European goods, however, created a new kind of wealth that brought the possibility of cultural and political innovations. Regional political relationships were certainly in flux. Competition for primacy in the the new global commerce prompted the consolidation and sometimes the growth of alliances and areas of sovereignty. Mowachaht domination of northern Vancouver Island under the leadership of Maquinna extended east from Yuquot from the 1790s through the 1820s to incorporate the Kwakwaka’wakw peoples, the ’Namgis (Nimpkish), mostly by means of commercial and diplomatic agreement. By contrast, Maquinna’s cousin Wikaninnish launched a violent campaign that created a tribute zone through the Broken Group Islands and across Clayoquot Sound. This bloody campaign, which is referred to as the Long War, predates direct contact and continued almost unobserved by Europeans through the 1840s. In the second decade of

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1.
the 19th century the focus of the fur trade had moved along, but the Mowachaht and Tla-o-qui-aht (Clayoquot) systems continued to evolve, driven not by European directives but by their own agendas.

Similarly, regional power in the Interior was not static. In 1823 N’kwala, the hereditary leader of the Okanagan-Tk’emlups alliance, stormed across the southern valleys into Stl’atl’imc (Lillooet) territory at the head of what was reported to be a mounted cavalry of 500. The goals of the Okanagan were only partly informed by competition for fur trade primacy; the issues behind these conflicts had longer personal, diplomatic, and commercial histories. When the dust settled, N’kwala was confirmed by conquest and heredity as the head man of four nations with lands stretching from the Fraser River into the Rockies and from Soda Creek (Xats’ull) to Okanagan lands below the 49th parallel. All of these developments have in common the utilization of introduced assets: horses in the Interior, European vessels on the coast, and rifles at both places.

By the 1820s the fur trade was shifting away from the coast. So long as the trade was conducted seasonally by visiting ships from Britain or the United States, the Aboriginal annual routine remained largely unchanged. The same was true at the few trading posts in the Interior when supplies arrived via the Columbia Express or Brigade Trails each spring. The threats and opportunities presented to the Aboriginal peoples by immediate neighbours remained more constant than the traders and, therefore, more important. Political influence and economic power could be exerted as before but now with greater force — and not entirely in the service of maximizing profit in the fur trade. Aboriginal agendas remained vital and somewhat aloof from Euro-North American concerns. At the same time, Aboriginal peoples found ways to turn the newcomers’ trade strategies against the foreigners.

Aboriginal traders recognized that fur fetched higher prices on the coast than in the Interior if there was competition by two or more trading ships in port. The price differential was sufficient to make it worthwhile for Interior traders to redirect their pelts down the grease trails to coastal markets. Coastal Aboriginal traders were thus positioned to gain more in this relationship, and they sought access to inland fur resources from the early 19th century. This had two effects. First, it rather obviously reduced the amount of furs available for trade to the NWC and HBC in the Interior. Second, it accelerated a process of what has been called “coastalization” among inland cultures. Coastal crests and clan systems were adopted as were potlatches and the labret. Interior NWC and HBC traders, if they wanted to recover their position, would be obliged to offer more for furs.

Conditions for the fur trade were different in the Interior. There the societies were more egalitarian, and there was less likelihood of just one leader monopolizing the Aboriginal side of the trade. Euro-Canadian numbers were insignificant, so the newcomers had to either acquiesce to local practices or demonstrate absolute intolerance of transgressions. There was certainly no hope of a gunboat sailing up the saltchuck, let alone a cavalry unit coming over the nearest hill to bail out troubled Euro-Canadians on the upper Columbia River, along the Thompson River, or north of the Cariboo Plateau. And while life in Interior Aboriginal communities might have been marked by egalitarianism, that was not the case in the HBC establishments. There, hierarchies prevailed and working conditions were demanding. Interior Aboriginal traders had to work within these constraints and were exposed to risks that were rare on the coast.

The HBC’s transition to a coastal, land-based trade began in the 1820s and expanded in the 1830s. As we have seen, this served HBC interests, but it also worked to the advantage of Aboriginal trade leaders. Instead of allowing the HBC to select sites based on its priorities and needs, Aboriginal influence was exerted so that the setting for trade maximized Aboriginal control over the Europeans. Aboriginal clans established homesteads around the forts, ensuring that any furs that arrived from other Native groups had to pass through local middlemen. In this way leaders like Legaic were able to filter trade in and out of locations like Fort Simpson to ensure their continued prosperity and authority.


Cultural Change

The focus of the HBC west of the Rockies was, perhaps not surprisingly, the fur trade. The number of personnel in the field was small, their familiarity with local conditions was patchy, and they were often placed in locations that were inhospitable. In places like Boat Encampment on Kinbasket Lake, on the York/Columbia Express route, the spring came late and the autumns were short: the Company’s business obviated the possibility of raising sheep or planting hayfields. Coastal fort sites, by contrast, were chosen on the basis of defensibility, harbour depth and shelter, and proximity to trading partners; gigantic Douglas Firs and rocky terrain were clear impediments to agriculture. In short, the intruders lacked the time, knowledge, and resources to raise their own food. This was a constant lament into the 1840s. For these reasons the regional traders depended heavily on food resources provided by Aboriginal peoples. Salmon (fresh and dried), roots, and berries were an essential part of the fur trade, albeit one that literally ate into the profits.4

Faced with supply-line issues similar to those that were breaking the Russian American Company (RAC), the HBC encouraged local agriculture. The Fort Simpson Ts’msyan and even the Haida across Hecate Strait began growing potatoes, which they traded with fort personnel. Similarly, around Fort Langley the local population began raising chickens and European vegetables in the late 1820s. In this way, as much as was possible, Aboriginal merchants/chieftains sought to establish, maintain, and — when needed — re-establish Euro-Canadian dependence.

As new farming practices emerged among Aboriginal peoples, so did new cultural practices. The shift to different tools of labour that had to be either manufactured or obtained and to new ways of working had a ripple effect on food preparation, diet, and the approach to land use and proprietorship. More immediately visible cultural changes were also occurring, particularly regarding the potlatch.

Potlatches grew to become spectacles by the second decade of the 19th century. This occurred for several reasons. European implements enhanced the output of traditional goods for redistribution. Iron tools enabled more rapid

production of elaborate wood carvings like house-poles and finer metalwork, resulting in greater art production and creativity generally. Weaving of blankets — a currency in the traditional economy — increased, too. Styles modified to include new elements as coastal and interior artisans took advantage of what some scholars have identified as an efflorescence of regional artistic expression.

As well, exotic goods quickly worked their way into the heart of the potlatching culture. Maquinna’s 1803 potlatch, for example, “dispensed 400 yards of cloth, 100 looking-glasses, 100 muskets, and 20 kegs of gunpowder.”

Massive displays of material wealth (and exotic material wealth at that) enhanced the status of the host.

But the potlatch was changing due to local demographic conditions as well. The loss of population and particularly leaders through fur trade violence and disease created something of a scramble for position. Rivals tried to outdo one another, and village loyalties were divided by various claims to some chiefly status. Potlatches became larger occasions with vast amounts of exotic goods being distributed to guests and delegations. These events became competitions: more material wealth, whether manufactured locally or abroad, led to more ostentatious potlatches and “fighting with property.”

The coastal fur trade impacted local cultures in other less obvious ways. For example, Maquinna’s brother Hannape and his four sons all learned both Spanish and English at the time of the Nootka Crisis. The speed with which they achieved facility in two foreign languages is remarkable. Elements of European languages were incorporated into the Chinook trade jargon but it is easy to overlook the widespread Aboriginal accomplishment of learning the newcomers’ tongues.

As well, new ideas about technologies and the wider world worked their way into communities. Wickaninnish of the Tla-o-qui-aht and Tatoosh of the Makah at Neah Bay conspired (unsuccessfully) to seize a European vessel. One study speculates that their intention was to establish direct trade between the peoples of the northwest coast and the Chinese markets. And why not? They had heard a great deal about China from the Europeans and Americans and were sharp enough traders to realize where they stood in the larger economic relationship. What’s more, the rogue trader John Meares introduced the Nuu-chah-nulth to about 130 Chinese labourers in 1788. Contact between the Nuu-chah-nulth and China was, in this sense, an established fact.

Contact with the outsiders and the diplomatic attentions of the British and Spanish in particular had the additional effect of challenging leadership norms in the region. Maquinna emerged as a powerful and popular leader.

5. Gibson, Otter Skins, 270.
6. Ibid., 270-1.
because he headed a confederacy of partners who may, from time to time, have challenged his primacy but who generally approved of his consensus-based approach. Wickaninish, on the other hand, was an oligarch whose regime was much more centralized and, thus, more vulnerable. The Europeans’ dealings with Wickaninish were generally less predictable and less mutually satisfying, which worked to the advantage of Maquinna’s federation. Strategies of governance were in this way questioned and destabilized.

Probably the key factor influencing the pace of change was the impact of exotic diseases, especially smallpox and measles. Epidemics caused by exotic viruses may have occurred as early as the 1780s. There is no evidence to suggest these were all-encompassing, so some communities and sub-regions were weakened more than others. Venereal diseases may or may not have been indigenous to the Pacific Northwest but the presence of fur traders and sailors certainly didn’t help matters. It is thought that the establishment of Fort Langley (and, by extension, any fort) resulted in a local epidemic of sexually transmitted infections.

Loss of life to disease created instabilities in leadership and military preparedness. It could reduce the fertility of a population and therefore oblige some consolidations of communities. Epidemic mortalities may also explain the apparent rise in slave-raiding from Lekwitok territory in the upper Strait of Georgia into the Juan de Fuca Strait and the Fraser Valley. On southern Vancouver Island in 1839 it was reckoned that slaves nearly outnumbered nobles and commoners among the Lekwungen, an indication perhaps that slaves were filling in gaps left by disease. At the very least it shows that slavery was not the exception to the rule. In each of these cases, cultural change or adaptation was necessary. These were, however, changes that were guided by Aboriginal principles and priorities, not by missionaries or colonial officials. Circumstances in this regard would begin to change in the 1840s.

### Key Points

- Aboriginal communities and leaders used a variety of strategies to exert control over the fur trade and over the foreign traders.
- Power structures in Native communities were continually evolving, though now with assets derived through trade with the newcomers.
- Aboriginal peoples largely controlled the cultural changes that arose because of contact.
- The potlatch, which was at the centre of economic, political, and social life on the coast, intensified and changed as a result of contact and trade.

### Attributions

Figure 13.15
Fort Simpson, B.C. in 1857. – NARA by US National Archives bot is in the public domain.

Figure 13.16
Voyage autour du monde by Spinster is in the public domain.


Figure 13.17
H. B. Co. Fort Langley, left bank of Fraser River by US National Archives bot is in the public domain.
13.6 Boundary Disputes and Manifest Destiny

Beginning in the early 1840s, “Oregon Fever” gripped the United States. Oregon was touted as a land of pleasant climates and fertile soil. Several thousand American settlers began a westward migration over the Oregon Trail. By the mid-1840s, some 5,000 Americans had populated the southern half of the Columbia Department, thus strengthening the U.S. claim to Oregon, and in 1843 the Americans declared a provisional government. The HBC’s James Douglas wrote to his superiors that “An American population will never willingly submit to British domination.” Britain’s tenuous hold on the whole region was in danger of slipping away. Oregon Fever, moreover, fuelled the idea of Manifest Destiny in America, popularizing the notion that it was God’s will that the republic should control the whole of the continent.

**Fifty-Four Forty**

American territorial expansion became one of the paramount issues of the U.S. election of 1844. Democrat James K. Polk, a protege of the expansionist Andrew Jackson (president, 1829-37), won office in an election that revolved largely around the issues of the possible annexation of Texas and acquiring some or all of the HBC-administered Columbia Department, which the Americans referred to as the Oregon Territory. Polk won the election by a narrow majority, but the Democrats took both houses of Congress, causing many to read the result as a mandate for expansionism.

Many Americans, Polk among them, set their sights on taking the Mexican provinces of New Mexico and California in addition to the Oregon Territory, which at that stage constituted most of the territory between California and the Alaska panhandle — that is, almost all of what is now British Columbia. Polk’s priority, however, was the Mexican territories and so he needed to quickly settle with the British on the issue of the Columbia Department in order to have the military strength for a war against Mexico. The process was further complicated by signs that Britain was considering an alliance with the Mexicans in Texas, so getting the British out of the picture was a priority.

On taking office, Polk initiated talks with Britain. The president quickly found himself a prisoner of his own expansionist rhetoric: public opinion over the Oregon Territory had grown increasingly heated with expansionists demanding nothing less than the whole package and threatening war in the far northwest in order to achieve their ends. The slogan Fifty-Four Forty or Fight! was coined at this time, referring to the northernmost latitude of the territory that America might claim, some 30 kilometres north of present-day Prince Rupert.

49th Parallel

British enthusiasm for war in the Pacific Northwest was understandably tepid. In 1845 and 1846 the fur trade was becoming less profitable and alternative economic engines were slow to emerge. Few politicians in Britain were prepared to go to bat for the monopolistic HBC, which was widely regarded as a bloated artifact of a pre-free trade era. There was little sign — not along the Fraser River or even in California — of the gold rushes that would transform the West Coast. Nor was there any indication of the potential coal mines of Vancouver Island. In this light it is not surprising that the British were prepared to concede as much as they did. Conveniently for the British, President Polk was more than willing to accept a boundary line along the 49th parallel.

In terms of the British interest, as represented in the field by the HBC, the circumstances had changed since the Treaty of 1818, paving the way for joint occupation of the Columbia District. The fur trade in the whole region was in decline and the corridor that ran from York Factory to Fort Vancouver at the mouth of the Columbia had lost much of its significance. In its place, as historian Richard Mackie notes, the HBC had built a network of deep-sea trade that linked ports in Hawaii, Alaska, Guangzhou, and California to Fort Victoria. The mouth of the Columbia was treacherous with shifting sands and channels; Fort Victoria was better suited for this new kind of commerce under Britain’s growing philosophy of free trade. Holding the line at the 49th parallel and keeping Vancouver Island was sufficient to the needs of the British and, if it could be done through diplomacy rather than at gunpoint, a peaceful outcome was preferable to war.

Two important results of the Oregon Treaty of 1846 were not committed to any legal document. First, the principles by which Europeans had sorted out who owned what in the New World shifted. The British claim was based on commerce and, indeed, every expression of British policy in the region from the 1780s to the 1870s hinged on commerce. When the British laid claim to the region based on occupation, they were using the word to mean “business”; in other words, they were occupied with commerce in the region. For the Americans occupation meant settlement, and sending in thousands of squatters to take up land was a precursor to annexation. With that American interpretation in mind, the HBC moved in the late 1840s toward a policy of building settlements on Vancouver Island to forestall any American forays into the region. It was, as well, a lesson that James Douglas would remember at the right moment in 1858 and one that would focus Canadian minds when it came to holding Rupert’s Land against American intrusion from 1869 on. The map in Figure 13.19 shows those areas where American expansion in the West was a source of concern for British and Canadian interests.

The other result of the Oregon Treaty was a severely changed political landscape for Aboriginal nations. The 49th parallel cut through Native communities like a knife, effectively trapping populations on either side within rapidly emergent imperialist administrative structures. The change was not immediately apparent: the swoop of a pen 4,000 miles away makes little noise. By the late 19th century, however, both the American and the British-Canadian governments in the region were aggressively managing border peoples, some of whom found their societies divided.

**Key Points**

- American imperial aspirations in the second quarter of the 19th century included annexation of the whole Pacific Northwest.
- The Oregon Treaty of 1846 resolved the potential conflict between Britain and the United States by continuing the border with British North America all the way to the West Coast and throwing in all of Vancouver Island on the British side.
- The HBC and the Colonial Office had to develop new strategies to continue exploiting and claiming the territory between the American and Russian territories.

**Attributions**

Figure 13.18
Oregon Country by Kmusser is used under a CC-BY-SA 2.5 license.

Figure 13.19
United States Expansion by Peteforsyth is in the public domain.
13.7 Identity Crisis

National histories tend to draw straight and uncomplicated lines. If one of the functions of a national history is to
define or distill a national identity, then simplicity is of the first order. Loyalties ought to point in one direction, though
occasionally a character in the past may be torn somewhat. But we have come to think of national and ethnic loyalties
as instinctive and not all that negotiable. This is part of a tendency to essentialize people in the past: they behave as they
do because of what they are in essence.

One of the virtues of West Coast history is the ease with which those narratives may be broken up and thrown aside.
People from around the globe collected on the West Coast in the 18th and 19th centuries, in assortments that were,
for their time, unique. What’s more, the individuals themselves reveal interestingly complex backgrounds. The ways in
which their lives bump up against those of others and then ricochet off in an unexpected direction remind us that stories
are not highways but threads that bind and fray.

Take the example of Marguerite Waddens (1775-1860) who was born in Montreal. Her father, Jean Étienne
Waddens, was Swiss and a founding member of the NWC; her mother, Marie Josephe DeGuire, was Cree. Marguerite
was a product of a fur trade marriage à la façon du pays, a late-18th century métis born in the East.¹ Two of the men
in Marguerite’s life would meet their ends in spectacularly violent ways. Her father died at the hands of fellow NWC
trader and cartographer Peter Pond when an argument overheated. Marguerite’s first husband, Alexander MacKay
(1770-1811) died under even more exceptional circumstances.

MacKay was a child when his Loyalist parents became refugees in the Canadas. Entering the fur trade as a youth, he
joined Alexander Mackenzie’s expedition to the Pacific coast (and was thus one of the first Euro-North Americans to
cross the continent). MacKay amassed a fortune in the service of the NWC, married Marguerite, and retired to Montreal
at 38 a wealthy man — probably without Marguerite. In 1810 the American fur trader and entrepreneur John Jacob
Astor (1763-1848) signed MacKay to work with the Pacific Fur Company — an emergent American rival to the British
HBC and the Canadian NWC. Sailing on the Tonquin to the West Coast, MacKay was killed along with all but two of
the ship’s crew when it stumbled into a political stew in Clayoquot Sound in 1811. Wikaninnish’s fleet made short work of
the American crew, killing as many as they could lay their hands on. This may have been one of Wikaninnish’s attempts
to obtain a European-style vessel. If so, it failed: perhaps as many as a hundred of the Tla-o-qui-aht raiders perished
when a Tonquin crew member detonated the ship’s gunpowder.

Marguerite and Alexander’s son, Thomas, narrowly missed sharing the horrors of the Tonquin because his father
chose to leave him behind for a few days at the PFC’s new fort on the Columbia.² The widow Marguerite remarried
around 1810, which suggests that she had been abandoned by MacKay (a common enough experience for “country
wives”). Her new husband was another fur trader, John McLoughlin (1784-1857). Born Jean-Baptiste in Trois-Rivières
in 1784, McLoughlin came from Irish immigrant stock (his father) and Canadien ancestry (his mother). Raised by his
Scottish uncle, McLoughlin’s spiritual life charted a course from Catholicism to Anglicanism and back. His marriage to
Marguerite was not McLoughlin’s first: he was himself a widower, having been married briefly to a Chippewa woman
who died giving birth to their son Joseph in 1809.

¹. One of Marguerite’s sisters, Veronique, would marry the Rev. John Bethune; two of their descendants are Dr. Norman Bethune (the Canadian physician
who achieved legendary status in the Chinese Revolution) and the accomplished actor, Christopher Plummer.

Within a year of marriage (again, a la façon du pays), Marguerite and John had a son, John Jr. The family continued to grow while they were stationed just west of Lake Superior. During this period McLoughlin senior's relationship with his stepson Thomas deepened. Indeed both men were at Selkirk in the employ of the NWC during the Battle of Seven Oaks. McLoughlin was even implicated in the killing of Governor Semple, although the charges were later dismissed. He was a key player for the NWC side at the negotiations that led to the merger of the two fur trade giants in 1821.

About seven years later, Marguerite Waddens MacKay McLoughlin relocated with her husband and both sons to the Columbia District where McLoughlin built Fort Vancouver, across the river from Fort Astoria (the PFC base in
which Alexander MacKay played a small role). Fort Vancouver was as cosmopolitan as any HBC post and then some. Trade between the Columbia and the Hawaiian (or Sandwich) Islands brought Kanakas (Hawaiians) to Fort Vancouver in large numbers. Trade with Guangzhou occasionally brought Chinese men as crew to the West Coast, and Marguerite’s nephew, Angus Bethune, travelled to China on behalf of the HBC. Marguerite would have been on hand in 1834 when news of three shipwrecked Japanese sailors on the Olympic Peninsula reached Fort Vancouver. Enslaved by the Makah on Juan de Fuca Strait, the three men included a 15-year-old named Otokichi, who — thanks to the intervention of McLoughlin — was brought to Fort Vancouver. Otokichi would go on to play a small part in diplomatic efforts to open Japan to Western trade. (And, like Marguerite, Otokichi’s wide-ranging life would be marked by complete disregard for racial or national categories: his first wife was English, his second Malay.)

Marguerite was well acquainted with James Douglas, McLoughlin’s junior at Fort Vancouver. Born in the British colony of Demerara (Guyana), Douglas had both Scottish and African ancestors. He worked his way through the NWC into the HBC and at 25 years of age he married Amelia Connolly, a métis woman. Shortly after the Douglasses were reassigned to Fort Vancouver where James worked under McLoughlin. Douglas observed in these years on the “respect and affection” that McLoughlin held for Marguerite. 3 Douglas grew fiercely loyal to McLoughlin, even against Governor Simpson right up until 1846 at which point their paths diverged. McLoughlin decided to stay put on the Columbia and thus become an American after partition of the Oregon Territory.

John Jr. carried on the family tradition for travel, moving to Paris to take up medical studies. In later years he would acquire a reputation for drunkenness and violence (John Sr. had a temper as well, according to Governor Simpson), which might provide a clue to why he left Paris under a cloud. Difficult to place in the HBC system, he found his way to Fort Vancouver for a spell, then to Fort McLoughlin (on the central coast and named for his father). Finally he was sent to Fort Stikine in the north. There, it was reported, he so terrified his colleagues that one of them shot him through the throat. He died from his wounds at barely 30 years of age.

Thomas MacKay, for his part, had a better record, of sorts. Marguerite's son by Alexander McKay married well in the Columbia District, partnering with Timmee, the daughter of Chinook chieftain Comcomly. He played a key role in realizing Governor Simpson's vision of a "fur desert" south of Fort Vancouver, a landscape completely denuded of commercial wildlife so as to block American trade in the region. This war against nature was for naught, as it simply made it easier for American settlers (rather than fur traders) to move into the region.

Not much is known of David, Marguerite's second son by John McLoughlin, except that he received some training in Paris as an engineer, spent much of his life in the Columbia District, and married a Kutenai woman named Anne Grizzly. Less still is known about John McLoughlin's son from his first marriage, Joseph, and Marguerite's three daughters by Alexander MacKay. Marguerite and John's daughter Marie Eloisa McLoughlin, however, attained some prominence at Fort Vancouver. Born in 1817 at Fort William, Eloisa was educated in Canada and headed west in the 1830s. Young and energetic she took on many of the hostessing tasks that typically would have belonged to her mother. She and her husband opened Fort Stikine around 1841 and narrowly missed overlapping with her ill-fated brother John Jr. at that same location in 1842.

The loss of British sovereignty south of the 49th parallel in 1846 was overseen by McLoughlin, the French-Irish-Scots Catholic-Anglican Canadian who went on to become an American and is celebrated in the United States as the "Father of Oregon." Marguerite's final public role was that of mayor's wife in Oregon City, where the couple are buried side-by-side. The Swiss-Cree Protestant-Catholic mother of seven children and stepmother to another (some of them, like their fathers, Scots-Irish or French or Loyalist), mother-in-law to women drawn from Aboriginal nations from the north coast to Idaho, and aunt to members of the Family Compact in Upper Canada, Marguerite's life took place on a stage of enormous distances and great risks, one that involved a multitude of actors from across the globe. Tug on any one thread and any number of narratives unfold.

**Attributions**

Figure 13.20
Oregon Historical Society (OHS) #bb006496. This photo has been released under a CC-BY 4.0 International license by the OHS for this textbook.

Key Points

- The notion of national or ethnic identities of individuals in the Cordilleran fur trade prior to the 1850s is inherently problematic.
- Canadiens — who were often simultaneously métis — played a key role in what is often mislabelled the British fur trade in the farthest West.
- Remote posts were often connected by the presence of family members and within post communities themselves there was often a dense network of relationships between Euro-North Americans and Aboriginal peoples.

Figure 13.21
Fort George by Cropbot is in the public domain.

Figure 13.22
Otokichi by Liftarn is in the public domain.

Figure 13.23
Oregon Territory Centennial 3c 1948 issue by Gwillhickers is in the public domain.
13.8 The Island Colony

The loss of the Oregon Territory was a blow to the HBC but not necessarily to British ambitions in the region. The former remained resilient while the latter remained modest. The HBC had experimented with commercial diversification for years, expanding its network across the Pacific. The arrival and employment of Kanakas throughout the Pacific Northwest reflected the diversity of marketplaces into which the HBC reached.\(^1\) It was clearly about much more than beaver and sea otter pelts.

One noteworthy (if Pyrrhic) victory in this regard was the Puget Sound Agricultural Company (PSAC), a barely-at-arm’s-length subsidiary of the HBC created in 1840 and centred at Port Nisqually (Tacoma) in what is now Washington State. The PSAC had several goals, including the establishment of a loyal British settler community in the face of American intrusion into the Oregon Territory, improved self-sufficiency in terms of food supply to the northern forts, and an experiment in settler colonialism. Like Lord Selkirk’s project at Red River, the HBC conceived PSAC in part as an attractive retreat for retired employees and their families. The Oregon Treaty ended the PSAC experiment but its objectives were to continue to the north, on Vancouver Island.

**Fort Victoria**

Fort Camosun opened in 1843 and its name changed to Fort Victoria in 1846 in honour of the new queen. This was the first settlement of Europeans on the island since the Spanish abandoned Fort San Miguel at Yuquot in 1795. The HBC feared the Lekwungen (Songhees) and their neighbours, and there was little confidence that even a simple landfall would succeed. The priorities of the Lekwungen, however, included incorporating the British operations into their own. Some 300 to 400 Aboriginal men took on the task of building the fort and the band provided all the lumber required for the task. Historian John Lutz argues that this apparent welcome was a kind of appropriation by the Lekwungen. In their society, housebuilding was a communal activity and it was one that signified, importantly, community ownership of the structure. Building the HBC fort, therefore, signified a Lekwungen stake in the affair.\(^2\)

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Relations between Aboriginal peoples and the HBC entered a new phase after the construction of Fort Victoria. There were confrontations, some of which involved what Barry Gough describes as gunboat diplomacy. Often the source of irritation was cultural differences. Many northwest coast peoples were horticulturists, though not farmers in a sense that newcomers instantly recognized. Europeans often witnessed them clearing the land with fire in order to create meadows, so the newcomers knew that land management was underway. For example, the West Coast camas bulb was an important source of food for Aboriginal peoples and a trade good in its own right. But the camas bulb is one of many indigenous foodstuffs that did not gain admittance to the Columbian Exchange: Europeans never really came to like its flavour. If they had, they might have done more to protect camas patches against the newly introduced cattle and pigs. Of course, a cleared patch of land is more attractive to a farming settler than a stand of towering Douglas firs: the gardens of northwest coast peoples were much sought after and were quickly seized by newcomers. Aboriginal peoples, for their part, regarded anything on four legs as potential game, which was predictably bad news for livestock and for the newcomer-Native relationship, but good news for the banquet table.

Figure 13.25 The gun deck of the steam-powered vessel, the HMS Sutlej. Along with the aptly named Devastation, the Sutlej razed nine native villages in one mission during the 1860s.

The Colony of Vancouver Island

In 1849 the British extended to the HBC a 10-year lease on the proprietary colony of Vancouver Island, conditional on its settlement by newcomers. The new colonial paradigm was difficult for the HBC to accept. Settlers and furs and Natives were not viewed as a good mix, not by the HBC’s officers and not by the Aboriginal populations. The Whitman Massacre of 1847 was still at the forefront of everyone’s minds. Aware of the possibility of foot-dragging on the settlement front, the Colonial Office dispatched Richard Blanshard (1817-1894) to serve as governor.

Blanshard was probably the only non-indigenous person on the whole island who did not work for the HBC and, as he was soon to discover, the company did not work for him. In the space of 10 years the HBC had experienced an enormous shift, one that had seen the end of their Oregon and Californian enterprises along with the loss of Fort Vancouver and the York Factory Express route. The company’s local operations were headed by Chief Factor James Douglas but he now had to take orders from London and the Colonial Office. What’s more, Westminster instructed the HBC to bring in significant numbers of non-company personnel to become settlers; it was likely that the newcomers’ relationship with the Aboriginals would be different from — which is to say, at odds with — that of the fur trading company. It is hardly any wonder, then, that Governor Blanshard found himself isolated and frustrated. If that weren’t enough, his timing was spectacularly bad.

Gold fever had erupted in California in 1848. By 1849 eager prospectors were streaming into San Francisco, some of them from Fort Victoria. At around the same time, the HBC decided to pursue more aggressively a coal mining possibility at the northern tip of the island. The company established Fort Rupert in the late 1830s at Beaver Harbour, a Kwagu’l (Kwakiutl) village site called ?ax?is. This was the company’s only fort that existed for purposes other than trading furs or growing food. Kwagu’l men and women dug out the coal or gathered it along the beach and traded it to the HBC, thus expanding their range of commerce. By 1848, however, the company was preparing to lurch into the industrial age by bringing out a party of experienced Scottish coal miners. The experiment was a disaster. It outraged the Kwagu’l and they made common cause with the miners against the HBC. In 1850 the Scots were either chained up in the fort’s bastion or preparing to make a run for it.

As this drama unfolded, another came into view. Two British sailors who hoped to hitch a ride to San Francisco and the riches of the Californian El Dorado jumped ship in Victoria and then, mistakenly, onto a vessel headed north. Arriving in a troubled Fort Rupert, they fled into the forest where they were murdered by parties unknown. Blanshard’s response was to sail a gunboat into Beaver Harbour and shell the nearby Nahwitti village as he pursued the killers. Fed up with his low wages, poor living conditions, and lack of real authority, he returned to Fort Victoria and submitted his resignation — which London was happy to accept, given his rampage at Nahwitti.

Douglas was now governor of the colony with orders to take material steps to settle the island with colonists loyal to the Crown. Recruitment efforts were modest, not least because the prospect of new settlers was viewed as inconsistent with diplomatic and commercial relations with the Aboriginal peoples. There was a veneer of theory applied to this hesitance. In the early 1850s the colonial theories of Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1769-1862) — one of members of Lord Durham’s expedition to the Canadas — gained wider support. Wakefield’s views resonated nicely with the HBC establishment on the island: he thought it was better to reproduce in colonies the kind of social relations found in Britain’s hierarchical culture than to open up the land to homesteading and an influx of commoners. As a result, land prices were set at a level that was seen as attractively exclusive. Only a certain class of settler would, in effect, be admitted. In the face of free land policies south of the border, the Wakefieldian approach on Vancouver Island failed. The number of land sales

was acceptable, but the number of settlers was never great. What’s more, those HBC servants who might have had it in mind to achieve some independence on the land were kept in their social class by this expense, thus preserving a pool of labourers. Finally, the hierarchical society that Wakefield (and James Douglas) had in mind for Vancouver Island led to the creation of the “squirearchy,” an HBC-connected elite that occupied all the key appointed positions in the colony, including the whole of the judiciary.

The Crown had been reluctant to hand authority to Douglas for fear that he was in a conflict of interest. Indeed he was. Douglas was mistrustful of settlers and defensive of Aboriginal rights as he saw them. He negotiated a suite of 14 agreements, known as the Douglas treaties. These were initiated under Blanshard’s watch and Douglas continued pulling treaties together through the decade. Each aimed at obtaining lands deemed suitable for settlement or HBC enterprise. The treaties preserved First Nations village sites intact and allowed for one-time compensation payments. Some First Nations actively sought treaties from the HBC but Douglas had a limited budget at his disposal and no interest in obtaining territory where there was no immediate likelihood of use by newcomers. These treaties stand as the only ones negotiated west of the Rockies until very recently.

West Coast Industrialization

The experiment in coal mining at Fort Rupert was a disappointment. The Kwagu’l claimed ownership of the coal and obstructed the use of Scottish miners. The immigrant coal miners — who constitute the first group of foreigners delivered to the region for the purpose of settling or doing a particular job since Meares’s Chinese shipbuilders — objected to the way the work was organized, the conditions under which they were mining, and the whole culture of HBC fort life. The operation was wound down and a promising coal seam to the south was explored. Many of the miners subsequently wound up at Fort Nanaimo in the Sneneymuxw territory. Douglas signed a treaty with the Aboriginal community in 1854 and in that year a shipload of English miners from Staffordshire arrived, along with their families. In total, the HBC sponsored the immigration of 435 individuals for the coal mining projects until 1855, 85 of which were children. These immigrants and those who followed them were exceptional in the history of Canadian population: they were working-class people drawn from isolated communities in Britain and their voyage west by sea took them around
the southern tip of South America, to Hawaii, and then to the island colony. There was effectively no going back. In a colony where the “squirearchy” looked down its nose at agricultural labour, the status of the miners and their families was lower still.

The success of the coal mining enterprise was slow in coming. It was helped along, indirectly, by the Russians. The island’s proximity to Russian waters pulled the colony briefly into the orbit of the Crimean War (1854). A joint British-French assault on the Russian Pacific port of Petropavlovsk ended in disaster and the injured troops were evacuated to Fort Victoria. These events advanced the case for a Royal Navy base and one was established next to Victoria Harbour at Esquimalt in 1865. Naval officers subsequently developed close links with the coal mining operations around Nanaimo. As more steam-powered naval vessels arrived in the Pacific, the coal resources became more important; as the coal mines grew in strategic significance so too did the value of having a naval base nearby to protect them.

![Figure 13.28 Coal miners at the Nanaimo mine pithead, ca. 1870.](image)

The gold rush on the mainland also helped the coal mines, as did the growing demand for household fuel in San Francisco and Victoria. In the early 1860s the HBC sold its interest in Nanaimo to a London-based company and the chartered company gave way to industrial capitalism. A former HBC employee, Robert Dunsmuir, found his own coal seam nearby in 1869 and began building an industrial empire and dynasty. Two years earlier the first Chinese mine workers arrived at Nanaimo, the beginning of a migration wave that would continue through the rest of the century. By the third quarter of the century Nanaimo and environs was one of the largest industrial nodes in British North America.

**Christianizers**

Missionary activity on the coast also began at the mid-century. William Duncan (1832-1918), a controversial and mercurial representative of the Church of England’s **Church Missionary Society (CMS)**, arrived in 1857. He set up shop at Fort Simpson (also known as Lax Kw’alaams and Port Simpson, near current-day Prince Rupert) and subsequently relocated hundreds of Ts’msyan to a mission town of his creation: Metlakatla. “Duncan shaped a landscaped place,” at Metlakatla, according to one source, “with rows of identical, single-family dwellings. Each house had a small garden, glass windows, sash curtains, and was fitted with beds and clocks. The church and other public offices were Metlakatla’s largest and most imposing buildings.” The overall effect was that of a European community built around ideals of individualism, the nuclear family, and “slum clearance.” Duncan aimed to change people by changing their environment first: notably his idea of appropriate housing, individualism, and patrilineal inheritance.

was a direct critique of local Aboriginal culture. Duncan took the view that good Christians came out of nuclear households with a strong patriarchal legal and belief system in place. While cultural change among Aboriginal people on the northwest coast had been occurring throughout the fur trade period, the arrival of missionaries like Duncan and his successor at Fort Simpson, the Methodist Thomas Crosby (1840-1914), witnessed the first concerted efforts by newcomers to transform Aboriginal societies and beliefs on the West Coast.

![Figure 13.29 St. Paul's the Anglican church at Metlakatla, n.d.](image)

The 1850s were marked, then, by a rising colonial administrative presence, the beginnings of cultural assaults, some increase in newcomer settlement, and further decline in the fur economy counterbalanced somewhat by increased diversification of HBC activities. Where Fort Rupert failed as a mining operation, Fort Nanaimo succeeded and new arrivals from British coal fields continued the process of industrial resource extraction. The decade also witnessed diversification of Aboriginal economies, a greater number of Aboriginal peoples trading their labour for goods, and significant instances of resistance to newcomer transgressions. All of this change would be very suddenly eclipsed by events in 1858.

**Attributions**

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Fort Victoria watercolour by Bonas is in the public domain.

**Figure 13.25**
HMS Sutlej gun deck LAC by Rcbutcher is in the public domain.

**Figure 13.26**
Blanshard by Fishhead64 is in the public domain.

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Key Points

- The HBC established the Colony of Vancouver’s Island to replace Fort Vancouver and as a starting point for a joint HBC-Colonial Office settlement project.
- The presence of newcomers in their midst both enriched and endangered Aboriginal peoples of the island and the central coast.
- Agriculture, harvesting coal, and other economic activities were undertaken to further trade with the foreigners and also to increase their dependence.
- Settlement in the colony took two forms: a patriarchal and pastoral echo of the relationship between British gentry and commoners, and an industrial, proletarian townscape.
- The industrial revolution arrived on Vancouver Island in the late 1840s and spread in the 1850s to the mid- and south island.
- Missionary efforts on the West Coast accelerated in the 1840s, richly funded in the first instance by the CMS.

Figure 13.27
Edward Gennys Fanshawe, Indians at Fort Rupert, Vancouver’s Island, July 1851 (Canada) by KAVEBEAR is in the public domain.

Figure 13.28
Nanaimo Mine Explosion-1 by Drovosekk is used under a CC-BY-SA 3.0 license.

Figure 13.29
William Duncan’s church, Metlakahtla, B.C. is in the public domain. This image is available from the holdings of the National Archives and Records Administration, cataloged under the ARC Identifier (National Archives Identifier) 297830.
13.9 The Gold Colony

Tranquille Creek pours into Kamloops Lake about 15 kilometres west of the HBC’s fort at the confluence of the two branches of the Thompson River. In the 1850s the Tk’emlúps people retrieved small quantities of gold from the creek and canyon and offered it in trade at Fort Kamloops. After amassing a considerable nest egg’s worth of minerals, the HBC traders became concerned that it might be nothing more than fool’s gold. James Douglas (who still played the role of leading trader on the mainland, as well as governor of Vancouver Island) quietly shipped out a sample to the mint at San Francisco for assaying. Word of the gold’s quality leaked out of the mint within hours of testing and the Fraser River gold rush was underway.

The Rush

The earliest phase of the Fraser gold rush included production of gold by Aboriginal labour on a commodity-trade basis from 1856, if not earlier. The Nlaka’pamux in particular were industriously pulling gold ore from their river (which appeared on European maps as the Thompson beginning in the 19th century) in 1857 and were already fighting off Americans from the old Oregon Territory who had followed rumours of gold in the north. What happened in 1858, however, was of a different order of magnitude.

No other event in Canadian history so transformed a region and its people in such a short period of time. This story goes well beyond the 15,000 to 20,000 who sailed out of San Francisco to Victoria and the mainland in the summer of 1858. It is much more than the administrative and political changes entailed in the creation of the new Crown colony of British Columbia, the appointment of Douglas as its first governor, and the establishment of a capital at New Westminster. And it goes well beyond the thousands of newcomers who added to the existing non-Aboriginal community as permanent residents.

The gold rush had severe environmental implications. Miners compromised salmon runs by flushing sand and silt into the spawning grounds as they tried to extract gold. They stripped hillsides of trees needed for mine posts, flumes, and
houses; erosion followed. Extensive and sterile rock piles throughout the interior even now indicate where Chinese miners painstakingly piled river rocks after they had been carefully washed clean of gold dust.

There was, too, bloodshed in the Okanagan by American prospectors accustomed to killing off Aboriginal people who got in their way, and that was followed by warfare in the Fraser Canyon as the Nlaka’pamux resisted foreign incursions. The Fraser Canyon War was instigated by French miners who allegedly raped a Nlaka’pamux girl; their bodies were subsequently found downstream, decapitated. Claims at the time of huge mortalities must be taken with a grain of salt, but it is clear that skirmishes did take place, lives were lost, and the event could have easily cost Britain its new colony.

Douglas could not afford to wait for the Colonial Office to send instructions. He raced a gunboat to the mouth of the Fraser and imposed a licensing system on the incoming miners, a way of demonstrating British sovereignty and gathering revenues. Shortly thereafter the Colonial Office made Douglas governor of the new colony of British Columbia and insisted he cut his ties with the HBC. A new capital was established at New Westminster (at the Kwantlen village of Sxwoyimelth) and Fort Langley enjoyed a brief renaissance. A corps of Royal Engineers were introduced and acted as a kind of police force throughout the colony. Steamboats were soon plying the river to the height of navigation at Yale.

The Cariboo

The gold frontier rapidly spread north, one arm diverting east to reincorporate Tranquille Canyon and the main part headed into the Cariboo Plateau. Barkerville emerged in these years as the largest centre of population in both British Columbia and Vancouver Island with numbers in excess of 10,000 (Victoria held barely 6,000 in 1863). The boombomtowns of Likely, Richfield, and Quesnel also appeared at this time, many of them heavily populated by Chinese miners from Taishan.

Few of the gold prospectors made the fortunes they’d hope to. The cost of supplies was grotesquely inflated, the miners chased off much of the game they might have lived off, and Aboriginal communities tended to give them a wide berth. Survival became the chief preoccupation of many prospectors. Shopkeepers and saloon keepers, however, did quite well, though never well enough to pay for the infrastructure needed to sustain the gold rush. The Cariboo Wagon Road was the major government initiative of the day, connecting Lillooet and Lytton (Camchin) with Barkerville. Way stations

appeared (the many Mile Houses of the interior) and the whole was policed by a regiment of British Royal Engineers, called the Sappers.

The Fraser and Cariboo gold rushes peaked in 1863 and were in decline by 1865. Thousands of newcomers drawn from dozens of countries remained in its wake, some continuing to prospect in the area of Likely and Quesnel Forks. There are two noteworthy aspects of this population influx. First, despite the appearance of a map of newly named locales, very few of the gold rush towns were, in fact, new human settlements. New Westminster (the capital of the new mainland colony), Hope, Yale, Port Douglas, and Lillooet were — like Kamloops — Aboriginal village sites before they were newcomer villages and towns. Barkerville and its neighbour Richfield were exceptions, being two of very few entirely new settlements. Second, this population infusion was overwhelmingly young and male, a foretaste of life in a resource-extraction and industrial frontier. The pattern would be reinforced by smaller gold rushes in the Boundary District in 1860, on the Stikine River in 1861-62 (which briefly produced the separate administrative district, Stikine Territory), and in a few smaller pockets in 1871.

Exercise: History Around You

Invasive Species

Thanks to the widely circulated photograph in Figure 13.E1, Frank Laumeister has the unfortunate distinction as the man remembered for bringing camels into the Cariboo in the 1860s. He was, no doubt, thinking of their ability to handle freight, their durability in hot climates (which describes the Interior Plateau in the summertime), and the fact that miners used them in California before the B.C. goldrush. The soil, however, was too rocky for their soft feet, the winters were hard on them, and they terrified the horses and mules. These “Cariboo Camels” did not, however, leave much of an impression on the B.C. environment: the last one died around 1905. Thinking of where you are or where you’ve been in Canada, what other “introduced” species of animals and plants might one encounter regularly? Which, if any, have had a serious impact on the local ecology?

Gum Shan, the Gold Mountain

This was, too, the most international community that would be seen in any part of British North America for a century. Thousands of Taishanese could be found in the Cariboo, the two colonial capitals, and the coal mines of Nanaimo. Kanakas were working and living everywhere and increasingly in concentrations on the Gulf Islands. African-
Americans fleeing slavery and its possible extension to California arrived in large numbers, some establishing a volunteer rifle regiment in Victoria. Continental Europeans, Scandinavians, and even Australians fleshed out the population made up mostly of British, Americans, and even Canadians and Maritimers.

The majority of the gold rush influx, however, exited. For colonists and colonial political figures, the loss of the newcomers meant that the colony was bankrupt and teetering once again on the brink of annexation by the United States. The feeling that British Columbia’s days as a Crown Colony were numbered was particularly strong after the Americans purchased Alaska in 1868. The trappings of imperial power — a few officers of the judiciary (including Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie, who was unafraid of applying gallows law), a Royal Navy base at Esquimalt, and a small legislative council in Victoria — were not entirely reassuring. Voices in the Colonial Office suggested that it was time to cut their losses and hand over the region to the Americans. The Asian population found itself increasingly marginalized physically in the towns and cities as “Chinatowns” appeared, reflecting Euro-North American policies of containment and exclusion. Indeed, as discussion over the wisdom of “confederating” with other British North American colonies and provinces developed, the peoples of British Columbia were roughly a third each of Aboriginal, Asian, and European (with Kanakas and Blacks mostly counted among the Whites).

After the Gold Rush

By the mid-1860s, the Aboriginal world was in the midst of seismic transformation. The whirlwind of the gold rush years changed much in the region. Newcomer towns appeared and newcomer institutions arose. Newspapermen arrived with their printing presses: the *New Westminster British Columbian* and the *Victoria Daily British Colonist* gave voice to familiar Euro-North American ways of understanding law, order, civilization, politics, and power. Catering to a newcomer population, they had little or nothing to say to the majority of people in the region who were Aboriginal. According to a study of the impact of colonization on one Aboriginal nation,

> The most enduring effect of the gold rush was the entrenchment in language and thought of two categories of people, “shama” (seme?) and “Indian.” Within a short time the Nlaka’pamux language also had specific terms for Chinese, African American, and Jewish people, but all were shama. Before the arrival of Europeans, the concept of “Indian” simply did not exist. People were simply seyknmx.  

The colonial regime certainly distinguished the groups of people under its watch. It was suspicious of Americans, contemptuous of the Chinese, dismissive of Canadians, and uncertain about what it should do with or to the Aboriginal population. Douglas did not bring his treaty process to the mainland colony. Historians have theorized that he lacked the budget to do so, needed a larger bureaucracy to manage the time-consuming negotiations (the Nanaimo Treaty took two years to work out), and determined that drawing up generous reserves was a better and more effective way to address the problem than treaties. In 1864 Douglas retired, leaving the outlines of a Native policy but little more. Joseph Trutch (1826-1904) was appointed chief commissioner of Lands and Works and worked under Douglas’s successor on the mainland, Frederick Seymour (1820-1869), to move Aboriginal peoples out of the way of settlers and ranchers. When Seymour died, Anthony Musgrave (1828-1888) was appointed to the office of governor, with a mandate to unify the colonies. Musgrave married Trutch’s sister and the brothers-in-law worked to minimize Aboriginal title, a process that carried over into the Confederation era.

Almost overnight, Aboriginal people lost a variety of liberties and freedom of movement. Douglas had promised to protect their villages, farms, and homes; Trutch actively sought to dispossess them. How could this happen only a few short years after the Nlaka’pamux, the Secwepemc, and the Okanagan demonstrated considerable military ability and capacity? The answer is a familiar one: smallpox.

**Key Points**

- The British Columbia gold rush consists of distinct phases including the pre-1858 mining of gold by Aboriginal people, the 1858-59 stampede into the Fraser Canyon, and the 1860-63 Cariboo phenomenon.
- The gold rush brought roughly 20,000 newcomers into the mainland colony. This population comprised people from around the world.
- The presence of large numbers of Americans posed a threat to British sovereignty, and the Colonial Office responded with strategies aimed at entrenching British power.
- New colonial institutions and the physical disruption entailed in the gold rush had severe repercussions for Aboriginal peoples in south and central British Columbia.

**Attributions**

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**BC-New_Eldorado** by **DarkEvil** is in the public domain.

Figure 13.31  
**Chinese man washing gold** by **LibraryArchives** is used under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

Figure 13.32  
**Barnards Express at Yale** by **Ras67** is in the public domain.

Figure 13.E1  
**Cariboo camel** by **Magnus Manske** is in the public domain.

13.10 A Shrinking Aboriginal Landscape in the 1860s

We begin this chapter with a photograph (Figure 13.33) by well known "Native" photographer, Edward Curtis. His work has attracted controversy and criticism because of the way in which he staged each shot to create, in his view, a sense of "timelessness" and lack of progress.¹

Smallpox, 1862-63

In the spring of 1862 “patient zero” stepped off a ship from San Francisco and into the streets of Victoria, the capital and trademart of the Colony of Vancouver Island. He was carrying smallpox and the harbour was crowded with Aboriginal traders. Rather than quarantine that community and apply the kinds of practices modelled 80 years earlier at Cumberland House (see Chapter 5), the colonial administration ordered the encampments cleared. They sent traders home to their villages up the coast, which proved to be a lethal error. Smallpox travelled with them and claimed about 20,000 lives, virtually all of them Aboriginal. A third to two-thirds of the Aboriginal population was gone almost overnight.

This isn't merely a statistical note: the psychological trauma can barely be imagined. Kekulis (pithouses) piled high with the dead were simply abandoned and allowed to collapse on themselves; above-ground houses and whole villages were torched in the hope that doing so would halt the march of smallpox. Survivors, particularly children, starved to death

with no one left to feed them. There were literally bodies everywhere. One account from the Cariboo gold district describes seeing canoes floating past on the Fraser River, filled with bloated corpses. This was near-extinction for many communities and some of them have never recovered.

Smallpox made subsequent appearances in British North America and post-Confederation Canada, but they were minor events by comparison. The 1860s epidemic was, for once, well documented by newcomers and as a result historians have a good sense of its enormity, particularly for those who survived. In the Pentlatch village on Vancouver Island, there was one survivor. That individual was adopted into the K’ómoks (Comox), a Kwakwak’wakw band that moved south into the vacuum left behind by smallpox. But the K’ómoks themselves were badly reduced. There was no Aboriginal community in the Comox Valley strong enough to resist the intrusion of newcomers in the decade that followed. The colonists stripped the hillsides of cedars and firs, they opened up the ground and its seams of coal, they claimed the fisheries, and confined the indigenous people to a postage-stamp sized reserve.

The experience of the K’ómoks was fairly typical of events as they unfolded on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia. Smallpox made space. The newcomers were themselves fewer in number than they had been at the height of the gold rush but some were optimistic about colonialism.

The Chilcotin War

The smallpox story continued with the Bute Inlet crisis (also known as the Chilcotin War or Bute Inlet Massacre). Thinking that a road to the Cariboo goldfields from the central coast would save both time and money and would open up new areas for resource extraction, a party of surveyors was sent up Bute Inlet in 1864 with an eye to exploring possible routes. When they encountered some resistance from the Tsilhqot’in (Chilcotin) people, the White surveyors threatened to introduce smallpox. Given the recent plague, this was both a cruel and stupid strategy. The Tsilhqot’in responded by killing 14 road workers and two other Whites in the region. In the colonial capital of New Westminster there was outrage, but it was tempered with concern that “civilized” people should respond to “savagery” with justice, not blind vengeance.

With this event, as historian Tina Loo has demonstrated, the colonialists were defining themselves as representatives of British (not American) values and as bearing the responsibility to create what they regarded as a better society atop what they saw as a declining, irredeemable, and doomed Aboriginal world. The White response to the incident was largely ineffectual until the leader of the Tsilhqot’in party, Klatsassin, and his immediate followers voluntarily surrendered themselves to the commissioner at Quesnel Forks on the understanding they would be treated as prisoners of war. Presumably they hoped to move to a diplomatic phase in the disagreement, but this did not occur. The colonial power arrested the eight men, charged most of them with murder, and hanged Klatsassin, his son, and three others.

These two events — the smallpox epidemic of 1862-63 and the Chilcotin War of 1864 — point to a severe and abrupt reduction in Aboriginal power in the farthest West. But they also point to continued resistance to newcomer authority and newcomer willingness to exert authority through violence. From the perspective of the Tsilhqot’in, a people whose system of justice was traditionally more personal and whose system of government was kin-based, the very concept of a state that would seek out and execute people in their own territory who were, in their minds, guilty only of protecting that territory, could hardly have seemed more alien. The repressive laws that followed — restrictions on where Aboriginal peoples might live and what land they might own (the reserve system) — was only possible because of the epidemic. And it was made necessary (as the colonialists saw it) by the potential for violence and disorder on the part of the people whose lands were being seized.

In the 1850s the colonial regime in British Columbia started carving out reserves and reducing the mobility of Aboriginal people like the St’at’imc of the Lillooet area. In the next decade the colony would reduce many of the reserves and then happily hand over responsibility for Aboriginal affairs to a distant and underinformed bureaucracy in Ottawa.

The execution of Klatassin and his son Pierre, is conspicuously inconsistent with the character of Aboriginal-newcomer relations in the early part of the century. There were, to be sure, instances of gunboat diplomacy in earlier decades but the colonists’ discourse surrounding the Chilcotin War was one of conquest, not co-existence. Newcomers took full advantage of the space cleared by smallpox and reserves in the late 1860s. The colony, however, remained a nervous place. For Aboriginal people the fear of smallpox, measles, whooping cough, and other diseases, as well as the armed might of the newcomers, made them more receptive to the blandishments and promises of missionaries and government officials.

Missionaries on the Mainland

Missionary work across most of British North America until the mid-19th century was conducted by Catholics. The rise of the “non-conformist” denominations changed the landscape in Canadian and Maritime towns. In British Columbia, however, there was a missionary stampede to compete with the gold rush.

Unofficially, the HBC regime favoured the Anglican Church and it was clearly preferred among the colonists. In the missionary field, however, the Anglicans faced the forces of the Oblate (Catholic), Methodist, Presbyterian, and even Salvation Army missionaries (although this last group did not arrive on the scene until after Confederation). The governors who succeeded Douglas — Seymour for the mainland, Arthur Edward Kennedy (1809-1883) for the island, and Musgrave for the united colony — were tolerant of all sects in terms of their mission activity. Their reasoning was that more missionaries meant a greater likelihood of “peace and order among the colony’s Natives.”

3. Brett Christophers,
version of Christianity after the next. In more than a few instances, however, Aboriginal peoples sought out missionary support.

Oblates set up chapels throughout the interior of the colony but, in most locations, priests came by only infrequently. Enthusiasm for the latest missionary was, therefore, easily dissipated. In the case of the Nlaka’pamux at Lytton, their relationship with the Oblates soured when the itinerant Catholic clergy demanded control over the chapel; the Nlaka’pamux believed it was their property. The Oblate neglect of Lytton and their misunderstanding of Nlaka’pamux notions of ownership resulted in the band rejecting one set of missionaries and seeking out an Anglican alternative.  

As was the case with Duncan and Crosby on the island and on the north coast, Interior missionary activity was usually predicated on an Aboriginal welcome. Those looking for explanations for the cataclysmic experiences they were witnessing turned to ministers who claimed to have answers. Aboriginal spirituality, moreover, was not monotheistic, so a European belief system (or elements of it) could be grafted on to traditional ideas. Missionaries, perhaps more than anything else, could function as cultural intermediaries. Throughout the fur trade era Aboriginal protocols applied; almost overnight British civil and criminal law was being enforced across British Columbia and up and down the coast as well. A resident cultural interpreter who might also provide some English language training was viewed in many communities as an asset.

These were transformational days indeed. The naval base at Esquimalt tilted the power balance definitively toward the newcomers, at least on the coast. In the Interior, “Hanging Judge” Begbie was able to stifle Aboriginal resistance and enforce conformity to colonial law. As the populations thinned, these executions had greater and greater impact. One historian, Jean Barman, has described the policing of Aboriginal women’s morality on the streets of Victoria in the 1860s. Viewed as sexually “transgressive,” they were characterized as prostitutes and treated as such by the colonial legal system. More than that, their reputation (earned or not) made them useful bait in newcomer-run dance halls (where miners and dockworkers could be parted from their money) and in the pulpit (where clergymen could rail on about the moral dangers of frontier life).  

The 1860s saw, as well, continuing decline in the acceptance among non-Aboriginals of intermarriage. Prominent women like Lady Amelia Douglas, who grew up speaking Cree (her mother’s language) and Canadien French (her father’s), was only 16 when she married a rising HBC trader. In her dotage she would be exposed to the pearl-clutching racist snobbery and outright racism of settler society, despite being the late governor’s widow. The advent of prejudices of this kind paved the way for the marginalization of Aboriginal people generally in the last quarter of the 19th century.

### Key Points

- The 1862-63 smallpox epidemic claimed one- to two-thirds of the Aboriginal population in British Columbia and Vancouver Island, significantly reducing the ability of the indigenous peoples to resist further colonial intrusion.
- Efforts at resistance continued, as in the Chilcotin, but these were met with executions of the leadership.
- The process of cultural change imposed by the colonial regime took many forms, including missionary Christianization, Western-style education, new land-ownership strategies, stripping of resources, and the application of a foreign judicial system.

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4. Ibid.

Attributions

Figure 13.33
A Kwakwaka’wakw girl wearing abalone earrings and a cedar bark cloak by Magnus Manske is in the public domain.

Figure 13.34
Charles Gentile-Lillooet Indians by Themightyquill is in the public domain. This image cannot be used for commercial purposes. It is available from Library and Archives Canada under the reproduction reference number C-088930.
The territory that became British Columbia joined the Canadian federation in 1871. Until that time, however, Canada was very distant and rather foreign and mostly irrelevant. The orientations of the Pacific Northwest were toward Asia, the Pacific Islands, Mexico and Chile, and round Cape Horn to England. For the many Aboriginal peoples and cultures in the region, Canada was a country with which they had effectively no contact and hardly more knowledge. The challenge, then, is to understand these pre-Confederation years as an era in which other priorities and possibilities presented themselves.

The colonies of British Columbia and Vancouver Island were expensive to maintain, especially as the gold rush ended and the population diminished. From a peak of 10,000 the Cariboo population fell to about 1,000 by 1870. It is estimated that there were only about 2,000 Chinese left in the colony. The Cariboo Wagon Road had cost the mainland colony dearly and pitched it into debt. The capital at New Westminster — dominated by merchant houses, a colonial elite, and a Royal Engineers’ community ensconced at Sapperton — was desperate to hold onto its administrative role.

In 1866 the mainland and the island colonies were consolidated. Bits and pieces of New Caledonia, the Stikeen Territory, the Colony of the Queen Charlotte Islands, and the post-Rupert’s Land North-Western Territory had been gradually grafted onto British Columbia and this was the final piece. And — much like Lower Canada in 1841 — Vancouver Island inherited British Columbia’s debt.

The political culture that developed west of the Rockies was, like the population, multifaceted. There were powerful British themes promoted by the Colonial Office alongside Canadian traditions brought west by Upper Canadians like the reformer John Robson. There was a democratic tradition that can be ascribed, in part, to the Americans and Nova Scotians, such as Amor de Cosmos, a harsh critic of the squirearchy in Victoria. The HBC’s tradition of hierarchy and discipline was increasingly caricatured as a West Coast variant of the Family Compact. It was in some respects — in terms of the close bonds between the chief administrator and the members of the Victoria elite — even more of a family compact than ever existed in Upper Canada. Well-positioned individuals like Joseph Trutch were vitriolic in their opposition to democratic reforms. The four years after Confederation in the East would see the colonists in British Columbia pulled in different directions.
While that debate was underway, Aboriginal communities continued to stagger from hardship to hardship. As early as 1852 Douglas had witnessed privation and perhaps starvation among the Lekwungen with whom he had signed an early treaty. They were no longer at the centre of the local economy, a change that had taken place in a matter of 10 years.

It is possible to argue that the fur trade on the West Coast was a period of mutual benefit. This is the position taken by Robin Fisher in his landmark book Contact and Conflict, in 1977. He argues that both sides profited from the trade and whatever cultural change occurred in Aboriginal societies was mediated and controlled by Aboriginal peoples themselves. The absence of missionaries and/or imperial power until the 1840s is at the heart of this argument. Other historians have taken the position that the epidemic waves beginning in the 1780s, if not earlier, meant that the odds were stacked against Aboriginal ability to adapt. Still others point to the extent of Aboriginal authority in the fur trade, the extent to which indigenous people were able to exploit newcomer dependence, and the ways in which Aboriginal peoples managed newcomer behaviours as a sign of ongoing autonomy.

The gold rush of 1858 and the smallpox epidemic of 1862 rendered much of this moot. A territory over which Britain and Spain were once prepared to go to war had so fallen off the European radar that the events of 1858-63 threw it all up in the air again. As Douglas and his colleagues in the HBC retired from public life and passed away, links with the pre-gold rush past evaporated. For the British Columbians of 1858-1871 there was not much in the way of a history to their colony, and what history they saw they generally didn’t like. The future was the thing, and they would sacrifice much to get there.

### Key Terms

**Cariboo Wagon Road:** A road constructed from 1860 to 1885 to connect the Lower Mainland of British Columbia with the Cariboo goldfields. The original 1860-63 road ran from Port Douglas at the north end of Harrison Lake via Lillooet to Clinton and then north across the Cariboo Plateau to Alexandria. An amended version in 1865 connected Yale to Ashcroft and then Clinton and the older road, having passed through the Fraser Canyon.

**Chilcotin War:** Also referred to as the Chilcotin Massacre, Chilcotin Uprising, and Bute Inlet Massacre. Occurred in 1864 when Tsilhqot’in people asserted their control of their ancestral territory by murdering several members of a road-building crew and some colonists. The colonial authorities responded with a fruitless and expensive campaign that only ended when several of the Tsilhqot’in leaders presented themselves for negotiations and were summarily arrested and subsequently hanged.

**Church Missionary Society (CMS):** Established in London, England, in 1799. Began sending Anglican missionaries to Rupert’s Land in the 1820s. In 1857 William Duncan was dispatched to the northwest coast on behalf of the CMS.

**Douglas treaties:** Also known as the Fort Victoria Treaties, 14 agreements between the Colony of Vancouver Island (under the leadership of James Douglas) and Aboriginal communities. These were one-time land purchase treaties that protected Aboriginal village sites and fields, as well as access to resources.

**Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!** Slogan coined in 1844 or 1845 by American expansionists eager to claim the whole of the Oregon Territory to the Alaska panhandle (54°40’N).

**Fort George:** The name of two forts in the Pacific northwest. The first replaced the American Fort Astoria near the mouth of the Columbia River (at what is now Astoria, Oregon), and the second was established in 1807 by Simon Fraser at the site of what is now the city of Prince George, British Columbia.

**Fort Rupert:** Located at the north end of Vancouver Island near modern-day Port Hardy. Established by the HBC as a coal harvesting/mining experiment. It is an important Kwagu’l community today and should not be confused with the city of Prince Rupert, much farther north on the mainland, nor with Waskaganish in northern Quebec, which was formerly called Fort Rupert.

**Fort Vancouver:** An HBC fort established in 1824-25 about 60 kilometres up the Columbia River from Fort George (formerly Fort Astoria). Now the site of the city of Vancouver, Washington. The city of Vancouver, British Columbia, was never a fort and there is no relation between the two other than the name.

**Fraser River gold rush:** A mining boom beginning in 1858 characterized by large numbers of independent prospectors using simple mining technologies to extract gold flakes, dust, and nuggets from the Fraser River. This gold rush was superseded by better finds in the Cariboo in the 1860s.

**gold fever:** Term used to describe the opportunistic individualism found in gold rushes. Gold was discovered and mined by independent prospectors around the Pacific Rim beginning in Australia from the 1840s, California from 1848, a brief flurry in Haida Gwaii in the 1850s followed by the British Columbia rush from 1858-63, and New Zealand in the 1860s. After Confederation there were smaller rushes in British Columbia and these were surpassed by the Klondike/Alaska gold rush of 1896-1909. The close succession of gold rushes meant that many
of the personnel in the goldfields had experience in other gold rushes and many of the gold field institutions followed in their wake.

**gunboat diplomacy**: The achievement of colonial political goals in dealings with Aboriginal communities by means of superior naval firepower.

**land-based fur trade**: Refers to the HBC’s strategy in the 1830s to establish permanent fur-trading establishments on land, rather than rely on ships cruising the coast looking for trade. (See **maritime-based fur trade**.)

**Manifest Destiny**: Widespread belief in the United States during the 19th century that America was destined — that is, intended by God — to conquer and occupy most if not all of North America.

**maritime-based fur trade**: The European and American practice dating from the 1770s of trading up and down the coast from ships, rather than establishing fixed positions on land.

**Nootka Crisis**: A diplomatic incident due to conflicting between Spanish and British claims to sovereignty and the right to trade along the Pacific northwest coast. The disagreement was resolved in the Nootka Conventions of 1790-1794. Despite the negotiations taking place at Yuquot, Mowachat interests and claims to sovereignty were disregarded.

**Oregon Treaty, 1846**: Settled the boundary between the United States and the British territories west of the Rockies at 49°N.

**potlatch**: An Aboriginal ceremonial event common across the Pacific Northwest. Involves the giving of gifts by the host to mark a life event like an inheritance or succession.

**Puget Sound Agricultural Company (PSAC)**: Established in 1838-39 by the HBC to provide food for its posts and surpluses for sale to the Russian American Company.

**Russian American Company (RAC)**: Chartered in 1799, the RAC was principally focused on the sea otter fur trade and also established outposts in Alta California and Hawaii.

**sea otter pelts**: On the West Coast the principal fur traded by Aboriginal communities to European and American buyers for sale in the Chinese marketplace.

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### Short Answer Exercises

1. How did Aboriginal peoples on the northwest coast and on the mainland respond to contact with Europeans from the 1740s to the 1840s?
2. What impacts did the sea otter trade have on northwest coast cultures?
3. How did Britain emerge as the leading imperialist presence on the West Coast north of the Columbia River and south of Alaska?
4. In what ways was the fur trade west of the Rockies different from what occurred to the east?
5. How was the maritime fur trade on the northwest coast different from the land-based trade (both on the coast and in the Interior)?

6. What were some of the demographic impacts of contact on the northwest coast from the 1780s to the 1860s?

7. Why did the HBC move its operations to Fort Victoria and what were the expectations of both London and the local indigenous communities?

8. In what ways did the HBC diversify its activities on the northwest coast after the 1830s?

9. Why was there a coal industry on Vancouver Island in the 1850s and 1860s?

10. How did Aboriginal societies resist colonialism?

11. How did the gold rush impact colonial development?

12. What was the demographic character of the gold rush?

13. What was the character of local colonial government from the 1840s to 1870?

14. How did Native-newcomer relations change from the 1830s to the 1860s?

Suggested Readings


Attributions

Figure 13.35
Showing of masks at Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch by User:Deadstar is in the public domain.

Figure 13.36
Portrait de John Robson by Digging.holes is in the public domain.
Chapter 14. The 1860s: Confederation and Its Discontents
In the 1850s and 1860s, cracks began to appear in the relationship between British North America and Britain. The 1859 New Brunswick stamp shown in Figure 14.1 makes two revealing breaks with imperial norms. First, its value is shown in cents, not British pence. Currency issues had plagued colonies in the West Indies and the rest of the British Empire for centuries, and there was no unity on this subject even among the colonies of British North America at mid-century. Second, the new postmaster for New Brunswick, Charles Connell, unsure of the shifting protocols, scandalously chose to put his own face on the stamp, rather than Queen Victoria’s. This was too much change far too soon, and Connell demonstrated remorse by buying up as many of the stamps as could be found and burning them on his front lawn.

Connell wasn’t the only one receiving mixed signals from Britain. The Colonial Office was increasingly demanding loyalty while services and benefits were being systematically withdrawn. Free trade and greater political autonomy obliged the colonial leadership in British North America to think more strategically about their future, including alternative political structures. But it would be a mistake to think that Confederation was the only outcome being considered, or that it was an inevitability. It was neither.

Several options presented themselves, the foremost being joining the United States. Together or separately, by the 1860s all of the colonies at some point considered annexation. Barely a decade had passed since the campaign for annexation had been at the height of popular discourse and held its widest appeal. Since then, the idea had lost much of its support, but there were still many enthusiasts for the idea. As we shall see, it was an option considered very seriously in the
Red River Colony as the prospect of union with the Americans held the allure of better access to large and expanding markets. Even in Canada it was easy to see that union with, say, Prince Edward Island would never have the same economic impact as closer trade ties with the United States.

Another option was the status quo, which was the choice Newfoundland made for another 80 years. Carrying on without change in the Province of Canada would mean thrashing through some pernicious constitutional and operational difficulties, but couldn’t be ruled out. Those who supported this option looked to other jurisdictions — Italy comes to mind — that had survived and even thrived under governments made of fragile coalitions. Many of Confederation’s critics, Nova Scotia’s Joseph Howe for one, argued for this: “Now my proposition is very simple,” he said, “It is to let well enough alone.”

Smaller unions were also considered. Maritime union was, briefly, a very real prospect, one that would have created a single colony out of three (four if Newfoundland joined in). Union was thrust on the two West Coast colonies in 1866: Vancouver Island became just another region in the colony of British Columbia, although it did win the capital away from the mainland. And in Canada proper, George Brown made it clear that the minimal change he would accept in exchange for his cooperation was a federal reorganization of Canada West and East. This would have necessitated the dissolution of the Act of Union only to create a voluntary union of equal partners with separate legislatures and a central administration. From eight separate colonies in 1865, four could have coalesced by 1867.

One must ask, too, if any of these solutions really addressed the question at hand. If the issue was replacing British trade and/or American reciprocity, then the colonies could have pursued a customs union (sometimes called by the German term, zollverein). If it was the business of getting a loan to build a railway, then better finances, not a constitutional change, would do the job. If the issue was the defence of British North America against the Americans, who housed a huge post-Civil War army, then the only conceivable answer was closer ties with Britain, not semi-independence.

In short, under these alternative scenarios, the 1870s could have opened with a federal Canada stretching from Lake Huron to the Gaspé, a reunited Acadia on the East Coast, and Red River (or perhaps Assiniboia) added on to the U.S. Midwest. British Columbia could well have vanished into what, in the 20th century, was promoted as Cascadia, a region stretching from California to Alaska. Or the colonies might have clung more tightly to the hem of Mother Britain’s skirt in an imperial federation and eschewed any kind of union at all.

Every one of these options was serious considered in the 1860s. The solution at which political leaders arrived was influenced mainly by external factors and specific ambitions. This chapter surveys those elements and the implications of the new constitutional configuration. It also explores the emerging relationship between Canada and the West, without which the proposal for a union of colonies might not have proceeded. (Turning it on its head, if there had been no colonial union, there would likely have been no Canadian annexation of the West either.) Finally, this chapter pays some attention to the changes underway in the economy among Aboriginal peoples and culturally in British North America as the 1860s drew to a close. It is important to realize that while this decade is usually dominated in Canadian history by the achievement of a new constitutional arrangement, it was also a springboard for vast, sweeping changes in social and economic life. By the 1880s, Canada as a whole was experiencing a full-blown industrial revolution while Aboriginal peoples on the Plains faced famine and landlessness. These and other critical moments in Canada’s history have their roots in the 1860s.

William Raphael’s Behind Bonsecours Market, Montreal (ca. 1866) shows women and children in a public space, ships under sail and steam, farm products, and a sense of both busy-ness and leisure.

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe the alternatives available to British North America’s politicians on the eve of Confederation.
- Critically assess the internal and external forces leading to a new constitution.
- Identify the processes involved in achieving Confederation.
- Identify the attractions and limits of Confederation in the Canadas, the Maritimes, and the West, respectively.
- Position Confederation as a solution to historically specific issues and as a vision of what the future might hold.

**Attributions**

**Figure 14.1**
Charles Connel by Сдобников А. is in the public domain.

**Figure 14.2**
Behind Bonsecours Market by File Upload Bot (Magnus Manske) is in the public domain.
As we saw in Chapter 11, political life in the united Province of Canada in the 1850s was marked by frustration and stalemate. No single party commanded enough seats to enjoy a majority in the assembly. There were divisions along ideological lines, principally between liberal urban professionals and the wealthy merchant class in the Reform, Grit, Radical (and sometimes Rouge) parties and those Conservative-Tory-Blue members whose support was located among the colonial elites. There were those who advocated extending democratic rights to the greatest number (of adult males) and others who argued that such innovations would only lead to mob rule. There were others — specifically the Grits — who eschewed compromise, a position that arose from their very principled outlook on political and economic life but which also made them extremely difficult to work with. The British Parliament had enjoyed centuries in which to develop a common language of political discourse; in the Canadas this had not yet happened and the factions presented in the assembly only served to intensify some of the dividing lines.

Another important fracture, one that was embedded in the mission of the Act of Union, was sectarianism. Durham and many of his predecessors regarded the Catholic Church in the St. Lawrence Valley as an impediment to progress, democracy, and good government. Every such pronouncement, of course, had the effect of reinforcing the belief among Catholics that the Protestant denominations wished to to destroy one of the key institutions of Canadien life. The fact that the powerful Orange Lodge said so regularly made it impossible for even the most inclusive Canadian leaders to shrug off the Canadiens’ concerns.

The achievement of Confederation in 1867 can be seen as the culmination of effort on the part of colonial leaders and elites to find a way forward past substantial obstacles. It might also be understood as simply following British marching orders, the logical outcome of free trade, and the withdrawal of a British military presence. What can be said for certain is that the three founding colonies, along with Prince Edward Island whose representatives did much to give the conversation its shape, were able to do something extraordinary in the context of their colonial status: they designed their own constitution. Until 1867 every constitution in British North America since 1774 had been imposed by Britain. Here, then, was an instance where the colonials took charge. They were given permission to do so, but the result still constitutes a landmark.

**The Great Coalition and Union**

In 1862, when faced with yet another possible stalemate in the Canadian assembly, George-Étienne Cartier turned to his nemesis, George Brown, with an appeal for support. The Cartier government (in which John A. Macdonald was attorney general) was made up of the Parti Bleu and the Conservatives but was incapable of mustering a majority without drawing in another party caucus. Brown’s Clear Grits, however, had been virulently critical of the administration and there was little love lost between them.

Four years earlier Brown’s own administration had fallen on a technicality. When sitting members of the assembly were appointed to the executive as cabinet members, they were obliged to resign their seats and stand in a by-election. Brown’s new government did so and Macdonald pounced on the diminished Grit caucus in the House with a successful vote of non-confidence. Brown was out; Macdonald was in. The Conservative Party then exploited a loophole that allowed formerly appointed cabinet ministers to be appointed to new ministries without a by-election. Macdonald shuffled his cabinet in one direction for 48 hours, then shuffled them back to their old offices: this was called, for obvious reasons, the **double shuffle**. In this way he avoided having to call the by-elections that would have put his administration in peril, but at the same time he earned the lasting enmity of Brown.

The challenge facing Canada’s co-premiers Macdonald and Cartier in 1862 was the need for a **double majority**, that is, a majority of votes among the representatives of Canada West and Canada East respectively. Patching together
Figure 14.3 Official declarations took the form of posters like this one, announcing the union of three colonies. Note that it says nothing about a federal structure.

a coalition that could perform this trick was one thing; finding a lasting solution was another. Brown’s unlikely cooperation was the key and the Torontonian was prepared to put aside his hostility toward Macdonald on the condition that they pursue a constitutional reform that would undo the handcuffs into which Durham and the Act of Union had locked the Canadian government.

Brown’s cooperation came with further conditions. His personal and political vision of a renewed British North America was bigger than Macdonald and Cartier’s. Brown saw it extending from the western limits of Rupert’s Land through Newfoundland. His newspaper, the Globe, for years sharply criticized the HBC and called for Britain to surrender Rupert’s Land to Canada. In addition to an imperialist agenda, Brown brought to the table the germ of federalism. Brown had chaired a constitutional committee of the legislature that had advocated, in a 17-3 vote, a federal arrangement between Canada East and Canada West. (One of the three opposed was Macdonald.) Brown was also intransigent about representation-by-population. The population of Canada West in 1861 passed the 1.3 million mark and Canada East was trailing by 200,000. Based on these numbers, Brown believed, Canada West should have a significantly greater number of seats in the House. To Canadien politicians like Cartier, this was a warning flag: any central administration in which Canada West easily dominated would be resolutely opposed to the cultural interests of francophone Catholics. Macdonald’s preference for a unitary state: a single province with a single government and one capital could potentially be worse. Representation by population combined with legislative union would give Canada West (soon to be Ontario) utter dominance over Canada East (i.e., Quebec).

The only way everyone was going to get most of what they wanted was through a carefully crafted federal structure. If Ottawa could retain responsibility for areas of common interest while the provinces took charge of matters specific to their respective communities, both sides might be able to live with the deal. The challenge, then, was determining how to parcel out these jurisdictions, which was no small matter. Canada East, or at least the French and Catholic part of Canada East, wanted exclusive authority over education, health care, and social welfare. These were areas over which the Catholic Church had a near monopoly in the lower province and considered necessary to preserving the culture. Fear
of assimilation into an anglophone majority was front and centre in Cartier's calculations. Only by containing schools, hospitals, and welfare within the prerogative of Canada East could politicians like Cartier begin to countenance Brown's demand for representation by population at the central level.

Realizing that the possibility of safeguarding French-Catholic culture was achievable allowed Cartier to consider what had previously been unthinkable: adding more Anglo-Protestants. If francophone Canada's key institutions could be preserved in a federal arrangement, it wouldn't matter how many English-speaking colonies joined the new country. Adding on the Maritimes might, in fact, strengthen the Canadien side, as there were large numbers of Catholics in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, and there were Acadians spread throughout the three colonies as well. Brown, of course, saw the Maritimes as a zone of anglophone Protestantism that would reinforce the cultural agenda and values of Canada West. For Macdonald, by contrast, the principal consideration was the economic prospects of a larger union — such as ice-free ports in the Maritimes.

For their part, the Maritimes approached the whole conversation with skepticism and coolness. There is room to debate their motivation, i.e., did they jump or were they pushed? It is a fact that the Colonial Office in London made it plain that the time had come to consider Maritime union: an amalgamation of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.

A century of separate histories and no small amount of competition, however, made the respective colonial administrations wary of one another. They were different places in many respects, as shown in the 1861 census. New Brunswick's population was 16% British-born and 79% New Brunswickers; Nova Scotia's population was 89% homegrown. Catholics made up 44% of Prince Edward Island's population, about a third of New Brunswick's, and only 27% of Nova Scotia's. Prince Edward Island had little in the way of manufacturing, but nearly a third of Nova Scotians were considered part of the "industrial class," nearly 50% percent more than in New Brunswick.

The export markets were different as well, as statistics from 1865 demonstrate. New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island sent 40% and 68% of their shipping, respectively, to one another and to Nova Scotia, but Nova Scotia was sending barely a third to its Maritime neighbours. More than 50% of Nova Scotian shipping was headed to the United States,
the destination of only 37% of New Brunswick’s exports, and a mere 17% of Prince Edward Island’s. Alone of the three colonies, New Brunswick continued to ship a significant share of its capacity — 15% — to Britain.

The value of shipping out of New Brunswick had grown by a very respectable 83% over 1850-65, but it underperformed Canada (at 162%). Prince Edward Island’s exports, however, nearly quadrupled and Nova Scotia’s grew by 452% over the same 15 years. In dollar terms this meant that in 1865 Canada shipped out $42.5 million in goods while the Maritimes together exported about $16 million, a very favourable comparison from the Atlantic perspective.1

The makeup of the Maritime legislatures was also different: farmers, lumbermen, and shipbuilders dominated in Charlottetown; lawyers and merchants, bankers, and manufacturers held more than 60% of the seats in Fredericton; and shipbuilders combined with lumbermen and lawyers constituted a majority in Halifax.

Overall, the Maritimes were doing better than Canada in terms of economic growth: they had more diversified markets, and they’d achieved a degree of complementarity as revealed in the amount of traffic between the three colonies and their respective market specializations. Culturally they were different, however, and politically they had distinctive issues as well. Whether Maritime union would ever have been possible is a question we now can never answer. As the three colonies prepared to meet in the summer of 1864, they were approached by the Canadians with a request that they be included in the conversation and that the possibility of a larger union be considered.

### Key Points

- Confederation represents in part the outcome of frustrations in the Province of Canada arising from the difficulty of building lasting and stable governments.
- George Brown’s cooperation was both necessary and formative: his conditions included a federal union to replace the unitary union and the annexation of Rupert’s Land.
- Federalism had the potential of preserving Canadien culture against assimilationist tendencies.
- Maritime interests in Confederation were distinct and strongly reflected external pressures.

### Attributions

**Figure 14.3**
Proclamation Canadian Confederation by Voyager is in the public domain.

**Figure 14.4**
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14.3 Confederation as a Cure-All

The late 19th century saw the rise of the patent medicine industry in North America. Backed by anecdote and perhaps some folk-remedy pedigree, the patent medicines promised to cure anything and everything. At best they might have a benign placebo effect. Confederation was a bit like these cure-all medicines. It promised to address everything that was wrong with British North America, but closer examination suggests that it was neither necessary nor effective.

Apart from the political stalemates in Canada, there were three issues that drove the discussion forward — issues that made Confederation seem both imperative and the best solution. First was the concern that the United States threatened the welfare of the colonies. This was mostly a theoretical danger; the Fenian element made it more real. Second was the argument that some effort was needed to replace the recent loss of markets in Britain and, in 1866, the end of freer trade with the United States; might a single colonial marketplace compensate for some of those losses? And third was the issue of infrastructure and, specifically, an intercolonial railway.

America: Threat or Menace?

![Figure 14.5 In the 1840s the Americans gobbled up chunks of New Brunswick, the Columbia District on the West Coast, and an important part of the Red River settlement.](image)

British North Americans had conflicting sentiments about the United States. Their rivalries had historically been with New England and New York, and a little with Virginia. There were plenty of New Brunswickers alive who remembered the Aroostook War (1838-39) and the loss of a substantial western flank to the state of Maine in the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842. They might find a market for their timber products in the United States, but their feelings toward New England were generally cool.
Further, despite its own opposition to slavery, Britain supported the southern Confederate states during the Civil War. This left British North America exposed to the Northern/Union States’ ire. British North Americans might not have agreed with Britain’s actions in this instance, but they recognized that the ability of the empire to set international policy remained unchallenged. There was, for British North America, no diplomatic channels it could pursue directly to defuse the situation.

The American bogeyman was a more real source of fear for British North America in the 1860s than it had been since the 1837-38 rebellions. It posed a threat in three ways: the future of reciprocity, the implications of the Civil War, and the Fenian threat.

**Reciprocity**

The Canadian-American Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 had offset the worst aspects of the loss of preferential treatment in British markets and inevitably drew the British North American economy closer to its neighbour. The treaty was held to be a great success, especially after 1861 when Civil War broke out and demand for goods from south of the border grew.

The northern states, however, viewed British North America as a stalking horse for British manufactures. That is, they feared that less expensive and more competitive British products were being brought into the United States via British North American ports. If this was the case, it would sap the vitality of American industries. (American exporters had pursued an identical strategy earlier in the century, smuggling their grain into Canada and then passing it off as Canadian products in the British market.) Canada managed to put in place a tariff to protect its own manufacturing base and this, too, annoyed the Americans.

**Civil War**

The northern states were emerging as industrialized competitors to Britain in the North Atlantic at the very moment that British cotton mills were relying more and more on the products of southern plantations. Morally, British support was with the Union (the northern states) and against the Confederacy (the South) on the issue of slavery; economically, it supported the Confederacy. Both Britain and British North America were officially neutral, but both jurisdictions were slippery on this point.

The British very nearly leapt into the fray at the very beginning of the Civil War. Two envoys from the South were heading across the Atlantic on the British steamship the Trent in November 1861, bound for diplomatic talks in London. A Northern naval vessel stopped the steamer and seized the envoys, precipitating a crisis that could have plunged British North America into war. Subsequently, the Confederate Navy ship, the CSS Alabama, which had been built in the early days of the war in a shipyard near Liverpool in England, terrorized Northern shipping and drew outrage from Union politicians. Britain, they argued, had taken sides and the prospect of a transatlantic war inched closer. Some Northerners called for the capture of British North America in compensation. Tensions rose again when, in 1864, a small band of pro-Confederates in Canada East ran a raid across the Vermont border on the town of St. Alban’s. They cleaned out the local bank, escaping with what was then the enormous sum of $200,000. They were arrested in Canada, but a Montreal judge freed them on a technicality. Again, the Union states were outraged.

Faced with the threat of an American attack on British North America, the British dispatched some 14,000 troops, the largest contingent since the War of 1812. While this calmed colonial nerves to some extent, it also served to highlight their vulnerabilities. Deploying the troops along the American frontier was difficult and the troops struggled to get from Halifax to Canada. Observers and authorities alike realized that a land route, ideally a railroad, was badly needed. The North rattled sabres but did not attack, at least not militarily. Instead, it cancelled the Reciprocity Treaty.
The U.S. Civil War had benefited British North America economically by increasing demand for raw materials, and the colonies’ balance of payments improved as a consequence. So although the Civil War might have given British North Americans cause for concern when it came to diplomatic crises, it was decidedly good for business. In the United States, as everywhere else, the lobby in favour of freer trade was countered by a protectionist interest. At the end of the Civil War, in 1866, the protectionists joined with those Northerners still irate about the Alabama affair and the St. Alban’s raid to force an end to reciprocity. This happened very late in the development of constitutional proposals in British North America, so it cannot be said to have catalyzed the process. Nevertheless, it served to push public opinion in British North America further toward the view that an inter-colonial economic alliance was in order.

**The Fenians**

The final issue coming out of the United States that influenced the talks on Confederation came from the Irish-American community. There was some talk in the United States after the Civil War, in the spring and summer of 1865, of turning the troops northward and capturing British North America, and one group of war-hardened veterans took up the challenge. Irish-British relations on the other side of the Atlantic were poor, and Irish-American citizens viewed British North America as the soft underbelly of the empire. Known as Fenians, they formed their own regiments and launched their attack in April 1866.

The first invasion came at Campobello Island on the seaward border between New Brunswick and Maine, but it was chased off easily by a Royal Navy response out of Halifax. A more serious threat followed on the Niagara Peninsula in June 1866, marked by the Battles of Ridgeway and Fort Erie. These, too, were repulsed, although the Canadian militia regiments embarrassed themselves against the much better disciplined and tough Irish. A final foray saw Pigeon Hill in Canada East, less than 40 kilometres from St. Alban’s on the Vermont border, captured briefly.

In each instance the American government was quick to denounce the Fenians, whose stated goal was to hold British North America hostage in exchange for Ireland’s liberation from Britain. Nevertheless, British North Americans quite rightly recognized what the Fenians had demonstrated: the American border was porous and that whatever a well-drilled gang of raiders might accomplish would be as nothing compared to a full-blown American invasion.

The Fenian and American threat genuinely troubled British North Americans. The American frontier was an issue regardless of the Fenians and heightened vulnerability during the Civil War was only temporarily offset by increased exports from British North America to the Union and Confederate States. When the first meetings to discuss a union of British North America colonies took place in 1864, no one could know for sure how long the war to the south would persist. At some point it would have to end and demand for colonial products would shrink, unless they were sustained by reciprocity. No one in 1864, too, could have anticipated the Fenian element two years later. What was clear from the outset is that uniting the colonies seemed logical in light of the possibility of an attack from the south. The obvious criticism of that argument is that there were almost as many people enlisted in the Union and Confederate armies in 1866 as there were in the whole of British North America. Defending the Canadian frontier against further Fenian attacks, let alone United States Army depredations would require much more than a few militia movements to turn the tide.

The question of an American threat was a real issue; the proposal of a federal union, however, was not a real answer. That leaves the trade relationship to consider.

**The Balance of Trade**

The most palpable, fundamental, and pressing of the problems facing all the colonies was the loss of protected markets abroad. The introduction by Britain of free trade and the threatened (and eventual) loss of reciprocal access to American markets hurt all of the colonies and the Atlantic colonies especially. Presumably a united single colony would facilitate
expanded intercolonial trade. Freer access to Maritime markets would benefit Canada East (Quebec) in particular; a “national” marketplace that included Ontario and Montreal might, too, galvanize the Atlantic colonies’ economies. Confederation might thus prove to be an economic engine that could substitute for declining markets elsewhere.

This proposition suffered from two principal weaknesses. First, there was the lack of complementarity. Trade, almost by definition, implies that the participants come to the table with goods that the other parties do not have, which was not the case in British North America. Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick all had fisheries, so they were hardly going to trade the same fish back and forth. If New Brunswick was to benefit from access to Canadian markets, it would be in its area of strength: forest products. But the Canadas had their own forest industry and they were, moreover, inclined to protect it. There did exist some areas of specialization, but what is most striking is the lack of differentiation between the colonial economies. And while it is true that Canada produced more manufactured goods than the Maritimes, the addition of the Atlantic colonies could hardly replace the loss of either American or British markets. There were only about 800,000 people in the three Maritime colonies together, a far cry from the millions to whom Upper Canadian grain had once been sold in the United States.

Having to buy from Ontario and Quebec, moreover, might prove to be a liability to the Maritime economies, as Canada was industrializing much faster than the Atlantic colonies. Reciprocity provided a break in tariffs, but the dread remained in Canada that her infant industries would be strangled in their cradle by foreign competition. Maritime farmers and manufacturers who were competing against New England industries would want, naturally, to purchase lower-priced American produce (that is, ploughs or engines) to keep their costs down. Caught behind a Canadian tariff wall they would have to buy higher-priced Canadian products, almost all of which would come from Ontario or Quebec.

The Canadian tendency toward protectionism was countered by the Maritimes’ preference for anything that stimulated trade and traffic. Nova Scotia, for one, wanted freer trade because the colony operated in a larger, ocean-based marketplace. And in Prince Edward Island, as one study has pointed out, colonial revenue came overwhelmingly (75%) from customs duties (compared to Canada, where customs duties contributed only a third of revenues). Confederation was not likely to resolve this problem of shrinking international markets and a stagnant balance of trade.1

was one of these. From the 1850s on he had been fighting for an intercolonial railroad that would connect Canada with an ice-free port in Saint John. In 1861 it became clear that troop movements would be vastly slower than on the other side of the border, should the Americans ever decide to chance an attack on the colonies. With expanded trade and improved security in mind, Tilley had lobbied in London for loan guarantees and had pleaded with banks; the necessary commitment from Canada, however, proved elusive. New Brunswick’s support for Confederation, he believed, could be made conditional on a firm buy-in from the Canadians. And if London really wanted British North America to make its own way in the world, the Crown could guarantee the loans needed.

The appeal of the intercolonial railway was undeniable. An early problem was, however, that there were at least two imagined versions. The first sped along the eastern border of New Brunswick, linking Quebec City and Saint John; the other looped eastward, closer to the coastline near the Mirimachi before heading south. The first was fast and, as it would be significantly shorter, comparatively cheap, but entirely exposed to attack. The second would be more expensive to build and longer (therefore slower in getting goods to market) but far enough inland that it could not be easily cut by American invaders. In short, the alternatives were cheap but vulnerable versus safe but expensive; neither was optimal.

So the railroad might not be a solution at all, but if it was going to be built anyway, Confederation was seen as the answer to the problem of funding, and the colonies had been within a hair of getting that funding in 1862. Guarantees were in hand and the Maritimes were ready to get started. The Canadians, however, backed out for political reasons. In other words, it wasn’t federal union that was needed to secure a railway, it was a firm agreement between partner colonies.

The conventional causal explanations of Confederation, very clearly, can be criticized. Improved defence, expanded markets, and the intercolonial railway were either beyond the ability of colonial union to deliver or could be achieved through other means. This reveals two things: The first is that the psychological importance of issues like defence exercised such a powerful force on public opinion that elites and voters alike overlooked the fact that the colonies could never overpower the United States. The same was true when considering the trade arrangements between the colonies; all parties likely hoped for the best and for improved economic conditions. At least, they had to believe they would not be worse off for having come together (although many anti-Confederationists argued just that point).

The second is that it pays to look at political decisions from different angles. The intercolonial railway might prove to be a white elephant, but its construction would entail much job creation and vast orders for steel. Defending the realm might prove a fool’s errand, but in the interim those garrisons would need feeding. However the leaders of British North America in 1864-67 imagined these problems and their solutions, whether reasonable or not, a host of politicians chose to pursue unification. Their first stop was Charlottetown in the autumn of 1866.

<table>
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<th>Key Points</th>
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<td>• Three issues dominate the march to Confederation: the threat posed by the United States; finding a response to British free trade and the loss of reciprocity with the Americans; and the question of railways.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The American Civil War and the Fenian invasions represented a psychological and material cause for concern in British North American politics.</td>
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<td>• Free trade created both economic and political challenges for British North America.</td>
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<td>• The intercolonial railway must be understood as the material manifestation of Confederation.</td>
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Attributions

Figure 14.5
MaineBoundaryDispute by Magicpiano is in the public domain.

Figure 14.6
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14.4 Crafting a Constitution

The Charlottetown Conference

Two dozen delegates attended the first meeting in Charlottetown to discuss the possibility of a federal union. The fact that the idea of federalism was put on the table at the outset is important. The United States was a federation and its example was obvious and important to consider. But Britain was a legislative union: there was parliament at the top and the next level of government down the chain was municipal. Macdonald, for one, favoured legislative union partly because he was a fan of British institutions generally (like many of his Victorian peers). But also, he distrusted federalism because of where it had led the United States. He had a point: in 1861 the Union had been dissolved in war and, as the conflict raged south of the border, more than 600,000 lives were lost. Every day the meat-grinder of the Civil War churned on, Macdonald could point to it as an argument in favour of a strong central administration rather than the weaker bonds of federalism.

Cartier, however, would not consider anything other than a federal structure which, from the perspective of the Maritimers, was a happy coincidence. The delegates from Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick knew that they were going to be giving up some authority to Canada in any kind of union; better that they should keep some for themselves than to be utterly subsumed beneath an ambitious Canada West and a culturally alien Canada East. Brown, Macdonald, Cartier, and Canadian finance minister (and, 20 years later, Albertan railway magnate) Alexander Galt led the Canadian charge and won agreement in principle to the proposal to “confederate.”

This meeting, known as the Charlottetown Conference, took just over a week, from September 1 to 9, 1864, during which enormous amounts of liquor, food, and cigars were consumed. The wives of the delegates have been credited with smoothing much of the ego-strewn road to agreement and goodwill. It is worth noting that this pivotal meeting in the evolution of a new constitution competed (rather badly) with a travelling circus that was visiting Charlottetown the same week. There was no room for the Canadian delegation in the local hotels, and they were obliged to spend their nights on board their ship.

Figure 14.7 Looking a bit worse for wear, the Fathers of Confederation gather for one of Canada’s first photo-ops. (Note Macdonald, sitting.) Photo by George P. Roberts.

The Quebec Conference

A month later, in October, an expanded delegation met in Quebec City to resolve the finer points of the agreement. These took the form of the Seventy-Two Resolutions (a.k.a. the Quebec Resolutions), 50 of which were believed to have come directly from the pen of John A. Macdonald. Certainly his taste for a more powerful central government worked its way into the resolutions, but he knew better than to alienate Canada East and the Maritimes. The colonies, it was agreed, would become provinces. Canada would be once again severed at the Ottawa River, and Ontario and Quebec would emerge as provinces in their own right.

Also agreed was that the central administration would be responsible for agriculture, the post office, fisheries, criminal law (but not civil law so as to safeguard French-Canada’s distinct tradition in that area), and the final word on immigration. The federal government would retain residual powers that covered everything necessary for the peace, order, and good government of the country.\(^2\) The breadth of the residual powers has been subject to intense legal and political debate ever since.

The provinces received jurisdiction over education (which allowed local authorities to address the incendiary issue of separate schools for Catholics and Protestants on their own terms), health care, and most natural resources. While Ottawa would be able to tax trade through tariffs, the provinces could raise revenues through resource extraction royalties and property taxes. Roads and other infrastructure were nominally a provincial responsibility but in practice any highway or railroad that was of national importance became a federal responsibility.

Two other areas of jurisdiction fell to the federal administration: marriage and divorce, and exclusive responsibility for Aboriginal lands and reserves. As well, Ottawa had the power of “disallowance,” that is, the ability to reverse provincial legislation that it did not like. In this respect, Macdonald and others who valued a strong central state were successful: Ottawa was to be the senior level of government rather than the first among equals.

The elements of the federal government included an elected assembly (the House of Commons) built on the principle of representation by population. As this set-up would leave the Maritimes vastly outnumbered, concessions were made at the level of the appointed (that is, not elected) upper house, the Senate, where each of Ontario, Quebec, and the three Maritime provinces together would have 24 seats. Naturally, the principles of responsible government would prevail and the form of government would thus very closely resemble that in Britain.

From Proposal to Approval

There were two avenues for passing the Seventy-Two Resolutions: via the people and via parliament. The delegates agreed that a popular referendum was a bad idea, given that public support was strong only in Canada West. The parliamentary alternative was to take the package to each colonial legislature for approval before sending it on to London. This strategy had drawbacks, too, because each assembly contained articulate and persuasive opponents to the proposal. Nevertheless, this was the route taken.

In Canada East the prospect of federal disallowance in a House of Commons dominated by Anglo-Protestants (many of them rabid anti-Catholics drawn from the ranks of the Orange Lodge) was like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse. (Canada East’s Protestants, it should be stated plainly, felt the same way about a Quebec provincial legislature dominated by Catholics, and predicted the doom of their own denominations.) Antoine-Aimé Dorion, the leader of the Parti rouge, led the opposition to the scheme, describing it as assimilation by other means. Cartier’s response was to emphasize the extent to which Quebec would have control over its key cultural levers, that bilingualism was going to be official at the federal level (as well as in the Quebec Parliament — though not in any other), and he reminded his colleagues of how the

\(^2\) This phrase, shortened to POGG in discussions among constitutional experts, was plagiarized from the New Zealand constitution.
ongoing stalemate in government that was the principal legacy of the Act of Union was not going to cure itself. If Canada East wanted effective and ethnically fair government, he maintained, it would have to come through Confederation. Cartier received support from the Catholic clergy, which feared the assimilationist possibilities outlined by Dorion but feared the Parti rouge even more. Canada — West and East, English and French — voted in favour of the constitutional agreement, although francophones were the least enthusiastic.

**Key Points**

- Alternative forms of union were considered; a federal state was one.
- The Seventy-Two Resolutions set out that the federal state would divide its powers between the provinces and Ottawa in such a way that culture (education, health care, welfare) would be provincial while trade, fisheries, and common concerns like the post office and defence would belong to Ottawa.
- "Residual powers" were barely defined and were to reside with Ottawa.
- Not everyone agreed that Confederation was a good idea, not even in Canada.

**Attributions**

**Figure 14.7**

Charlottetown Conference Delegates, September 1864 by Skeezix1000 is in the public domain.
Confederation was, very clearly, an idea arising in Canada as a solution to Canadian problems and it was meant to give advantage to Canada first and foremost. It did not derive from the ambitions of Prince Edward Islanders, nor was it an expression of the dreams of Newfoundlanders. Nor too was it a scheme hatched in Fredericton or Halifax. Our understanding of the outcome of the Confederation discussions must begin with that reality, which raises the question, Why did some Atlantic colonies believe the federal union was worth joining while others did not?

There were vested interests in the East that saw a union of colonies as a route to profit. And to some of those leaders who envisioned the possibilities of a larger and more complex and technological political entity, we can confidently ascribe the title "modernizer." Their values became dominant in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as modernization was widely accepted as a goal inseparable from the nation state. It is important, too, to recognize that the decision to join in a federal union was made by politicians and not by referendum. Doing so obliges us to come to grips with contrary interests among political elites and between political elites and the people they nominally represented.

Clearly there were different economic agendas at work. One study of Maritime support for Confederation found it to be strongest among those who envisioned a continental and international industrial economy and weakest among those who were at the heart of the established shipping industries of the region. This apparent dichotomy hides the presence of contrary voices on both sides but it should alert us, too, to one of the hoariest myths of Confederation: that is, Maritime opposition sprang out of conservative, backward-looking parochialism. In fact, the shipping industry was a hotbed of innovation and was highly aggressive in its marketplace. Certainly there was new money going into industrial proposals, but that does not necessarily mean it was characterized by youth and vigour while the established elite was being old and unimaginative.

The Maritime colonies approached Confederation from a position of weakness. Not only were their numbers, economies, and assets a fraction of the size of Canada's, their political vision was not nearly as unified. Canada's "great coalition" existed precisely because a new constitutional arrangement was needed to get beyond the political impasse in Ottawa. Brown, Cartier, and Macdonald had a lot at stake in their mission, and they were motivated, therefore, to speak with something like a single voice in favour of the structure they envisioned. The same was not true for the Maritimers. In each East Coast colonial assembly there was substantial division and no mandate to reconfigure the whole of British North America. Had they first achieved Maritime union, perhaps they might have stood as one. As it was, Prince Edward Island, to take one example, never had the chance to get past feeling dwarfed by Nova Scotia and New Brunswick before being overwhelmed by the Canadas.

**Newfoundland**

Newfoundland, for its part, viewed the whole proposition with bemusement if not outright hostility. After all, there was nothing that an island colony across the St. Lawrence Gulf would get from a federal union: no railway, no bridge, and few economic advantages that it did not already enjoy. And the potential costs — loss of political authority to a centre 1,000 kilometres to the west, paying for a railway between Halifax and Montreal, and being dragged into Canadian-American affairs — were too high. A Newfoundland opponent of Confederation famously warned that if Ontario was again under attack from the United States, the national government would call upon the rest of the unified British North America to assist, and the cream of Newfoundland youth would leave "their bones to bleach in a foreign land." As one historian wrote, "Secure behind a wall of water, the island had its independence guaranteed by the Royal Navy."  

In 1869, after the other colonies had joined as one Canada, pro- and anti-Confederation politicians took their arguments to the electorate. There were other, more immediate, issues before the voters, but the rejection of Confederation was resounding. As the outcome was announced,

"...the fishermen and mechanics of St. John's...put together a large coffin labelled "Confederation," which was placed on a vehicle draped in black, and this was drawn by scores of willing hands through the town, headed by a band playing the Dead March, and escorted by an immense crowd to the head of the harbour, where a grave was dug below high-water mark and the coffin solemnly interred therein...."

Newfoundland continued to seek its destiny in the mid-Atlantic and kept its back turned to Canada.

**Nova Scotia**

In Nova Scotia there was little solidarity on the topic of Confederation. The ability of the proposed federal government to establish tariffs and run the fisheries was a major hurdle for a seagoing community. As well there was Joseph Howe to factor into the equation. A highly popular political figure, writer, and journalist, Howe had long envisioned Nova Scotia's future within a more integrated British Empire. He was, however, a strong advocate for railroad construction and may have undermined his own position by whetting a public appetite for lures like an intercolonial railway. The Nova Scotian premier, Charles Tupper (1821-1915), was exposed on other fronts as well. There were issues before the Halifax assembly that were entirely unrelated to Confederation but which drained his support. Seeing that a protracted debate would likely kill the initiative and certain that he would lose an election on the issue, Tupper forced the resolution through the assembly in April 1866.

3. Quoted in Ibid., 143.
Howe travelled to London to fight the British North America Act but he received a cool reception. The Act was passed into law. Three months later Howe was premier, Tupper was out, and the anti-Confederates began an unsuccessful campaign to reverse the process.

**Prince Edward Island**

The hosts of the Charlottetown Conference proved to be the least amenable to the new union, partly because of the terms on offer and partly because of the peculiar conditions of the smallest colony. Talk of a railroad and the threat of American invasion both played poorly in Charlottetown. Much of the island’s economy was oriented toward the West Indies so even the end of reciprocity mattered less to the population than to others in British North America. Also, and unique among the colonies, Prince Edward Island had a land-tenure arrangement dating back to 1767 that put much of the island in the hands of absentee landlords. The Tenant League, a movement formed in 1864 to end absentee landlordism and to avoid paying rents along the way, carried forward the work of the Escheat Party in this regard. This issue was so important that it overshadowed talk of union. Unless the other colonies could speed up the process of dismantling the proprietor-tenant system, Islanders would remain aloof.

The Fenian threat did, however, have an impact on the island. Prince Edward Island was far from the Maine frontier, farther away from New England ports than the vulnerable harbours of Nova Scotia, and mostly insulated from the outside world by a nearly frozen sea. That didn’t stop a Fenian panic from spreading through the colony. It was alleged by the ruling Conservative Party that the Fenians were an enemy within. Careful not to tar all Catholics with the same brush, or to call out all of the Irish settlers on the island (and nearly half of Charlottetown at the time was Irish), the Conservatives used the opportunity to harden Tory sensibilities at the expense of the more Catholic Liberal Party and the Tenant League. The League was branded as disloyal and sympathetic to the Fenian cause. The Liberals called this cynical fear-mongering: “Stripping the militia of its arms, mobilizing the garrison, mounting a citizens’ guard over the Benevolent Irish Society, and generally giving credence to the St. Patrick’s Day panic: all were portrayed as a studied insult, inviting Protestants to suspect their Irish Catholic neighbours.”

In this way the Tories hoped to marginalize the Tenant League without actually attacking them and to create conditions under which the British might be persuaded to maintain a garrison presence for a little while longer. The effect on Prince Edward Island’s attitude to Confederation was mixed. Some felt that, as the British were making an exit, the new federation could offer up its own military presence; others felt it was more likely that a homegrown militia would be called on to defend more vulnerable border colonies. On balance, the threat of Fenian invasion served to aggravate internal discord on Prince Edward Island while adding little to the colony’s enthusiasm for Confederation.

Prince Edward Islanders’ reluctance to join the new federation, then, reflects a lack of “pushes.” There were, as well, few “pulls” that spoke directly to the colony’s needs. The Canadians were not interested in giving the colony special considerations in the federal structure, and Islanders recognized that a small colony with limited resources would soon lose its voice in a larger nation. Continued colonial status and a direct relationship with Britain had some potential, but only if Nova Scotia and New Brunswick stayed out of the new state as well.

After Confederation in 1867, the Islanders found themselves surrounded by this new Canada and its waters. Reality set in quickly and by 1869 Prince Edward Island had abandoned pounds, shillings, and pence in favour of the Canadian decimal system. Their objections that the Seventy-Two Resolutions did not provide enough guarantees for the smallest colony were an annoyance to the other parties in 1864, but by 1870 the Canadians returned with updated proposals. In 1873, they gave Prince Edward Island much of what it had asked for originally, and the colony became a province in Confederation.

New Brunswick

More than any other colony, New Brunswick was being shoved and dragged into Confederation by the issues of Fenians at its doorstep, the loss of protection in British markets, the end of reciprocity, and the promise of an intercolonial railway. The premier, Leonard Tilley (1818-1896), imagined New Brunswick nicely placed as the keystone colony, the only one bordering on three others and the United States. From this position and with a growing economy in Canada, he hoped to craft a thriving trade and traffic. More than this, Tilley — of all the Fathers of Confederation — probably had the most fixed view of the country as one that reached the West Coast. He maintained that the political leaders of British North America should endeavour “to bind together the Atlantic and Pacific by a continuous chain of settlements and line of communications for that [was] the destiny of this country, and the race which inhabited it.” (Tilley was a devout practising low-church Anglican. It is widely thought that it was he who referenced the passage from Psalm 72:8, “His dominion shall also be from sea to sea,” which led to Canada being called the ‘Dominion.’) Unfortunately for Tilley, New Brunswick voters did not share his vision.

In 1865, in what came as the greatest threat to the Confederation project, Tilley’s government was routed by the anti-Confederation forces in the colony. His opponents seized on the necessary vagaries of the Seventy-Two Resolutions. Where would the railway go? To Saint John, Moncton, or the Miramichi? Or, worse, to Halifax? What would the Ontario Orange Lodge — in the person of George Brown — do to Catholic rights in the federated country? Would New Brunswick manufactures be protected in the new confederated marketplace or swamped by cheap products from Ontario and Quebec? There were other issues that had alienated Tilley’s support; his Liberal party had, after all, been in power for quite a while, his efforts to introduce severe regulation of liquor were divisive, and Albert Smith (formerly an ally, now an adversary and an outspoken opponent of Confederation) was on the ascendant. Tilley lost, Smith won, and the whole Confederation project was in jeopardy. If New Brunswick, the keystone colony, dropped out of the plan, it was doubtful the rest would bind.

Barely a year later, in May 1866, Smith resigned in protest over the highhanded behaviour of Lieutenant-Governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon (who was pressing Britain’s case that Confederation ought to proceed with alacrity). Gordon offered Tilley the government, which he took, another election was called and it served as a referendum on Confederation. Tilley’s restoration was helped along by a timely Fenian raid on the St. Croix River in April and an endorsement from the colony’s Roman Catholic bishop. Even Smith conceded the point. The irony, of course, is that unstable governments were the bane that a changed constitution promised to resolve, but without the instability of the New Brunswick legislature Confederation might not have come to pass at all.

Key Points

- Interest in Confederation in the Atlantic colonies varied and was typically divisive.
- Newfoundlanders and Prince Edward Islanders were not persuaded that Confederation addressed their concerns or that it would in any significant way make them stronger. Indeed, there was a strong sense that Confederation would expose them to new threats.
- Nova Scotia and New Brunswick voters were critical of the proposal.

Attributions

**Figure 14.8**
New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Ids used under a CC BY-NC 2.0

**Figure 14.9**
14.6 Canada and the West

George Brown entered into a coalition government with John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier with a grocery-list of conditions. One of these was that Canada — in whatever form it was to take — would annex Rupert’s Land. There was no talk in 1867 — no serious talk at least — about adding the newly unified colony of British Columbia to the mix. After all, as the crow flies, Victoria was as remote from Toronto as British Honduras; a sea voyage to New Westminster from Halifax could take months. The West, however, had been a part of the Canadian economy since the days of New France. The HBC’s comprehensive monopoly since 1821 had developed something of an administrative structure so that in the mid-19th century Rupert’s Land was conceptually more than a drainage basin: it was a badly underdeveloped political unit. Ontario land was becoming scarce, and the same was true in the Dominion’s other three founding colonies. Adding on the West would mean free land for generations. Ontarians in particular were anxious about this because of trends toward migration out of Canada and into the United States.

Without question, there were long-term Canadian interests in the West. Competition between the NWC and HBC mirrored conflicts between New France and Britain that stretched back to the late 17th century. The principal players, however, changed to such an extent that they were almost unrecognizable. The diversity of nationalities and syncretic cultures arising from fur trade society influenced life in the Canadas. In Montreal, in the parlour rooms of the leading capitalists and merchants in leafy Mount Royal, one regularly found women and men who were themselves of Aboriginal birth or, more often by the mid-19th century, descendants of the Cree, Anishinaabe, Assiniboine, and Chipewyan/Dene. Rich and influential, some of these figures would become vocal supporters for annexation of the West. Keeping in mind the profound connection they had with the lands beyond Lake Superior, it probably looked to them less like annexation and more like reunion or even retention.

In 1857 the British government sent out an exploratory party to perform a reconnaissance of the Prairie West. It was led by John Palliser (1817-1877), an Irish-English aristocrat whose love of travel at the fringes of European influence was matched only by his enthusiasm for shooting things. In the words of his biographer, “The ruling preoccupation of Palliser, and most of his brothers and friends, seems to have been travel ‘in search of adventure and heavy game.'” Palliser had hunted bison on the Plains in 1847-48, returned to Britain, became a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and began gently lobbying for greater British interest in the West. The society took forward the proposal to the Colonial Office, which provided Palliser with a shopping list of goals, one of which was to determine the agricultural potential of the region. To his credit Palliser was clear on one thing: southern Alberta and Saskatchewan suffered from a want of rain and an oversupply of dust. This was the region that would famously carry his name, Palliser’s Triangle.

The Canadians were not to be outdone. They organized their own expedition under the leadership of Henry Youle Hind (1823-1908) in 1857 and 1858 that took in the Red, Assiniboine, and South Saskatchewan River Valleys. Hind’s published report was widely circulated and, combined with his fervour for the idea of Confederation, it played a role in developing the Canadian expansionist agenda. Also, the people of French-Catholic Canada had been told for years by Catholic missionaries that the region was a challenging and even frightening place in which to settle. Hind (without the warnings provided by Palliser) countered that view. Through the 1860s, Anglo-Canadian expansionist ambitions,

then, would inform relations between the West and Canada. At the Charlottetown Conference and again at the Quebec Conference, the prospect of an expansive and clearly imperialist Canada dominating the West was touted. This was clearly a position that Westminster accepted.

Canadian political culture came with its own agenda, mostly distinct from that of the West. Friction between Protestants and Catholics, anglophones and francophones, existed in every colony. The desire of francophobes like Brown to encircle and overwhelm Quebec with Anglo-Protestant populations was no secret. Toronto-based advocates agitated for annexation of the West, many of them with an outspoken assimilationist agenda. Canadiens weren’t opposed to annexation, but they feared that Anglo-Protestants would interfere in what should be a reunion between two branches of the Franco-Catholic family.

Change was upon the Westerners, whether they wanted it or not. London was preparing in 1867 to relieve the HBC of its trade monopoly and administrative role in Rupert’s Land. The Americans were a wild card: they wished to see the territory fall into their own lap and would back whichever side seemed most likely to see that happen and no one could rule out a forced annexation, not after the U.S. Civil War, the American purchase of Russian Alaska in 1867, and the U.S. Cavalry’s running war against Aboriginal resistance in the lands just south of the 49th parallel.

Westerners responded to these plans with skepticism if not hostility. Their future may not be under the rule of the HBC, but in the late 1860s few were satisfied that joining the “Dominion of Canada” — a small cobbled-together country made up of four colonies that struggled to pay its own bills — was worth considering.

**Red River on the Eve of Confederation**

Despite Métis qualms about a post-NWC West after 1821, and regardless of the activities of Métis free-traders, the settlement at Red River continued to grow under the management of the HBC’s **Council of Assiniboia**. The community became increasingly Europeanized, at least outwardly. Churches sprang up and all the principal denominations were represented. Schools appeared as well. There was a growing middle class that included lawyers and journalists, people whose livelihood depended on their ability to speak for others. To the west of the colony the landscape became a cultural checkerboard of Franco-Catholic Métis holdings and Anglo-Protestant country-born properties. Much of the Métis farming occurred on strips of land running perpendicular to the course of the rivers, a pattern that echoed the seigneurial strips of New France. These were lands vulnerable to annual floods.

Historical accounts of relations between the Métis and the country born are sometimes contradictory, no doubt because every attempt to draw a composite picture is complicated by the existence of numerous and compelling exceptions. Sectarian boundaries were probably more critical in the mid-19th century than language, and persistent Scottish-French sympathies complicated things further. Broadly speaking, however, Westerners of Anglo-Protestant heritage viewed themselves as politically on the ascendant, mainly because of increased Anglo-Canadian interest in the region. This led to significant divisions among the métis communities of the Red River. Other historical interpretations have the two communities recognizing more fully their shared interests, being increasingly subject to the rising racist feeling out of Canada West. Certainly this was the dawn of modern racism: increasingly, what Anglo-Canadians saw when they looked at the country born were inferior **“half-breeds”** rather than co-religionists or champions of Anglo-Celtic culture. As for the the Métis in these years, the Anglo-Canadians had only more contempt for them.

The community would, in 1869, resist Canadian annexation and demand provincial status. Red River was, in some respects, daring. It had grown dramatically in the 1860s but only to about 12,000 people (about one-eighth the size of Prince Edward Island). The majority was still Métis, followed by Scots and country born, but many of their

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neighbours were Ontarian Anglo-Protestants drawn by the promise of cheap land and the prospect of being pioneers in the colonization of the West by English Canada.

### The Ross Family of Red River

One family’s story illustrates an example of the difficulties facing the country born and of the relative unity of the entire West in this period. Alexander Ross entered the fur trade via the Pacific Fur Company and established Fort Okanogan in the Columbia District (in what is now Washington State). He married an Okanagan woman, Sally. The Rosses moved to Red River in the 1820s where they produced a large number of children, many of whom died early in adulthood. Raised as strict Presbyterians, the daughters mostly married White men. Of the sons, James was the best educated and the most Canadianized. He spent years in Toronto as a student, a graduate student, a bright and promising young lawyer, and a journalist with George Brown’s Globe. In 1868 James was asked by his employer to return to the West and play a leading role in the annexation process. Like his sister, Jemina (who married the local Presbyterian minister and had to endure taunts from White settlers that her racial inheritance was a moral drag on her husband), James was extremely sensitive to racism.

Historian of fur trade society Sylvia Van Kirk has shown how James’s response to racial discrimination was to be better than his critics and certainly better than their stereotypes. A supporter of Canadian ambitions in the West, he found himself drawn to the side of Louis Riel precisely because he felt more solidarity with the métis peoples of which he was one, than with the Canadians. “At first the ardent champion of the Canadian cause, he ended up as Chief Justice of Riel’s provisional government. Ross was won over by Riel’s appeal to racial unity; the métis were fighting not solely for their own rights, but also for the rights of all the indigenous people of Red River. […] Nothing was worth a civil war against ‘brothers and kindred’.”

### Louis Riel and the Western Resistance

There are two events in the history of the West with which Louis Riel (1844-1885) was associated. The first began in 1869 at the Forks, the heart of the old Red River Colony; the second began in 1885 across a broader canvas — the whole of modern Saskatchewan. Both are referred to as Métis uprisings, rebellions, and even wars; sometimes called the First and Second Riel Rebellions. While it is true that Riel played a pivotal role in both incidents, there is much more to the story than one individual.

The context of Canada’s annexation of Rupert’s Land tells a tale in its own right. Red River was a community in a period of severe and traumatic adjustment. The loss of the bison herds had impacted the Métis and had weakened their power on the Plains; Aboriginal peoples were struggling to adapt to an economy without the fur trade; everyone was brutalized by the cascade of epidemics witnessed since the 1830s; a plague of grasshoppers in 1867-68 had pushed the colony to the edge of famine.

The British proposed to buy out the HBC’s monopoly for the sum of £300,000. Given that the Sayer Trial of 1849 (see Chapter section 8.10) had shot the monopoly full of holes, it can be argued that Britain got nothing for their money. In any event, this enabled the Crown to hand over responsibility for the territory to the new Confederation. The Canadians promptly made four critical errors. The first was appointing a lieutenant-governor, William McDougall (1822-1905), a former Grit who served in Macdonald’s Liberal-Conservative Cabinet, before the deal was closed. The second was McDougall’s precipitate decision to send in land surveyors in July 1869, six months before Canada had any authority in


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the region. (Even the outgoing HBC governor of Assiniboia, William Mactavish (1815-1870), was offended.) Attempts to redraw the land-use maps of Assiniboia into blocks of 160-acre sections threatened to chop up the old seigneurial-style lots of the Métis in particular. Although the HBC had done much to administer British common law after 1821, formal land title was something that had been ignored. The Métis and the country born, along with many of their other neighbours, thus regarded the Canadian surveyors as the advance guard of a civilization antithetical to their own interests, and in August 1869 began chasing them off the land. The third was a failure to address British requirements for treaties with the Aboriginal population on the Plains. Fourth and finally, the Canadians did not consult with any of the colony's residents. When McDougall's party showed up on the 49th parallel south of Fort Garry (he had to cut through American territory to reach Red River) they were met by representatives of the Métis National Committee and turned back.

The Canadians' actions inflamed feeling in the colony. Initially the Métis, anglophone, and country born communities were suspicious of one another's agendas. Louis Riel — a 25-year-old who more or less fell into a leadership role among the Métis — made several demonstrations of the Métis community's resolve (such as seizing Upper Fort Garry) and in November called a convention of the colony that included 12 Métis and the same number of anglophones/country-born. Three weeks later, after suppressing a possible anti-Métis rising among the Canadian settlers in the colony, a provisional government was declared; John Bruce was named its first president and Louis Riel its secretary. The provisional government had a mandate to negotiate terms of entry into Confederation.

Insofar as the Canadians could not claim to have truly annexed the territory yet, the provisional government did not constitute a rebellion per se. There was nothing to rebel against other than an incomplete hostile takeover by a foreign country hardly different from, say, the United States. Negotiations began soon after and, as Riel's position in the provisional government changed from secretary to president, the Red River team's goals became progressively larger. They were no longer bargaining just for Red River: they wanted provincial status for the whole of the northwest, which would include — as with the four charter provinces — control over resource revenues.

The greatest challenge facing the provisional government was the Canadian population. Led by Dr. John Schultz (a physician who ran a prosperous, if ill-regarded, trading and land-sale business), Charles Mair (paymaster to the survey crews and married to Schultz's niece), and Thomas Scott (a 27-year-old road labourer from Northern Ireland), they were able to mobilize a significant number of newcomers from Ontario. Schultz and Scott had in common a connection to the Orange Lodge: Schultz founded the Lodge in Red River and Scott was rabidly anti-Catholic. Efforts to whip up a confrontation between Canadians and the provisional government mobilized a small but easily defeated force. Schultz fled and Scott, with others, found himself jailed at Upper Fort Garry. Riel's administration issued pardons to one Canadian after the next, but Scott's malignant and inflammatory attitude toward the Métis landed him in front of a court martial in 1870. He was subsequently executed by order of a tribunal. Riel might have stayed his sentence but by this time the provisional government felt sufficiently harassed by the Canadian settlers that a message, it was thought, needed to be sent.

The execution of Scott was to prove Riel's undoing. Orange Lodges across British North America howled for Riel's capture. In the spring and summer of 1870 the provisional government and Ottawa were able to hammer out the Manitoba Act (1870), legislation that created the new province and provided for bilingualism and a publicly funded system of separate schools (Catholic and Protestant). What Manitoba did not receive was full control over resource revenues, which placed the province at a serious disadvantage. Nor did the provisional government receive full amnesty for its leadership. Riel fled the colony only days ahead of an Ontarian militia, which had in mind lynching him.

Throughout, Riel maintained his loyalty to the Crown, although the threat of seeking annexation to the United States was a card that everyone knew he could and might play. But, taking him at his word, his goal was the negotiated entry of Red River into a union with the new country. Riel, we need to remember, was a man only in his twenties, playing the role of the prodigal son and peacemaker in a community known for its faultlines and engaging in diplomacy with seasoned Canadian scrappers like Brown and Macdonald.
**Louis Riel**

Louis Riel's personal history is instructive. The son of a Franco-Métis lawyer and leader and Julie Lagimonière, the White daughter of a French-Canadian couple who had settled at Red River, Riel was born and raised in the parish of St. Boniface. His education for the priesthood in Montreal was abandoned shortly after the death of his father in 1864. Riel has been described as a young man of much talent and intellectual brilliance and as a charming personality; he is also described as melancholic, possibly manic-depressive. Certainly he seems to have suffered from depression on several occasions and, at the time of his father's death, he was still reeling from a failed marriage engagement to a Canadienne whose parents withheld their blessing (most likely because of Riel's mixed background). After a couple of years in the American Midwest, Riel returned to Red River where he did not fully fit into the bison-hunting culture of his Métis neighbours. His ability with languages and his intellectual capital, however, made him an obvious figure to play an important role in the National Committee.

**Key Points**

- Canadian interest in the West involved an imperialist urge to annex territory for farmland and an indigenous, Canadien desire to formalize the centuries-old connections between the St. Lawrence and the people beyond the Great Lakes.
- The context of this transaction includes tensions between the Catholic Métis and the Orange Lodge. It also includes a growing racist sentiment.
- Canadian efforts to rush along the annexation led to provocative steps that led to Métis/country-born/Red River resistance and the establishment of a popular provisional government.

14.7 On the Brink of Industrialization

Confederation enabled the creation of a changed investment environment. Like all such environments, it had more to do with subjective confidence than with any objective reality. Nevertheless, the years after 1867 were marked by heavy investment in railroads, the growth and maturation of the banking system, and the rise of an urban-industrial Canada that was only hinted at in mid-century, although the dye had certainly been cast.

The dramatic political/constitutional changes of the 1860s were nothing compared to some of the economic transformations underway. The value of production in agricultural implements — one sector of industrial manufacturing that would be central to the Canadian industrial revolution — exploded in the 1860s from $413,000 in output in 1861 to $2,685,000 in 1871, according to the Canadian census.

In some regions, industrialization overwhelmed old practices and old economic orders. On the face of it, that’s what happened in Atlantic Canada when the age of wind, wood, and water came up against a new generation of larger and steam-powered iron- and steel-hulled ships in the last quarter of the century. It was not the case, however, that shipowners in the region stood still. They adjusted for changes in the economy and changes in demand for their ships by making them more efficient. Innovative adaptations took place right at the moment when capital investment in new modes of production might have been more appropriate. But this was not foolishness on the part of Atlantic Canada’s shipping magnates. One study of the industry puts it this way:

In retrospect the decision to deploy wooden sailing vessels in trades soon to be overwhelmed by iron and steam may seem a short-sighted gamble. But shipowners were businessmen, not economists or social engineers. The were not planning the economic future of the Maritimes within Confederation; they were making profits in a business which they understood thoroughly and in which most had worked for two decades. They continued to make profits and they adjusted the supply of vessels to meet a dwindling demand.  

What would come to matter more in short order was the mining of coal (as a fuel for engines, as a source of household heat, and as a necessary element in the production of strong metals) and iron. British North America was already bookended by collieries in Cape Breton and on Vancouver Island, both of which represented industrial frontiers rather than agrarian frontiers, and both of which involved isolated urbanization and the development of powerful working-class cultures. These were going concerns and their prosperity would be lifted higher by the new constitutional and economic framework of Confederation.

**A Dying Fur Trade**

Ecologically, nothing could be less sustainable than the fur trade. We have already seen how the need to tap fresh beaver populations drew the French and then the British (or at least their influence) farther and farther inland at rates much faster than any settlement frontier made up of homesteading farmers. We have seen, too, how the imprint of the fur trade on the North and the Plains was not always readily apparent: the HBC and its competitors didn’t leave behind a patchwork of farmhouses, barns, roadways, grain mills, and fenceposts the way a farmer-settler society would. They did,


it is true, build some impressive forts, small citadels armed to the teeth with cannons, but these were relatively small and distant footprints, pinpricks on a vast canvas of territory. As we have seen as well, the fur trade rapidly depleted populations of fur-bearing animals, which had consequences for the larger environment.

For Aboriginal hunters and families, the declining sea otter and beaver populations had both direct and indirect consequences. Less fur meant less to trade, which meant limited access to exotic goods and manufactures that had become essential. The collapse of beaver and other mammal populations invited, as well, conflict between Aboriginal hunters over territories. There were other less obvious implications as well. The loss of beaver populations affected water reservoirs on the Plains to such an extent that the Niitsitapi suffered seriously from lack of drinking water in the mid-19th century. It also impacted fish populations and diminished opportunities for species that depended on both: weasels, martens, minks (all commercial fur-bearers). The moose population, which provided a major source of meat across Canada, was also affected.

As conventional fur stocks shrank, American traders increased demand for bison hides (the leather was used for high-quality drive belts in the industrialized centres of New England and Pennsylvania) and wolf skins. This latter trade has been characterized as especially vicious in large measure because it involved whisky traders from below the medicine line. Riots were frequent, the most notorious being that at Cypress Hills in 1873, which resulted in a massacre of Nakoda Sioux (Stoney).

Still other resources were negatively impacted by the fur trade. Large posts exploited local stands of trees for their construction and fuel. By the time of Confederation all of the forests across a radius of 160 kilometres inland from Moose Factory and York Factory were severely reduced. Swampy Cree and country-born foresters had to be employed to head upriver every summer to cut, raft, float, and haul timber into the two forts. This created opportunities for wage labour among the Aboriginal communities but it also — quite obviously — had further ecological impacts on wildlife species in the region.

Falling demand in Europe reoriented business practices in the northwest. By the end of the 1860s the HBC was looking to introduce steamboats on its river systems across the northern woodlands, a move that undercut the high labour costs associated with Aboriginal packers and York Boat crews. All the advantages once enjoyed by the Swampy Cree were swiftly evaporating: first access to European products, the privileged and influential position as homeguard, and the opportunity to pick up seasonal work for the HBC.

A similar situation confronted Aboriginal groups on Vancouver Island from the 1840s to the 1860s: the Kwagu’l of Fort Rupert and the Snuneymuxw of Nanaimo enjoyed a few years as labourers in and around the HBC’s coal mines before being squeezed out of the best paying jobs by imported British colliers. In some sectors, such as freight-handling on waterfronts from Victoria through New Westminster and the emerging commercial fisheries, Aboriginal wage labour was critical. Victorian modes of production offered a transitional opportunity as the fur trade declined, albeit usually a temporary one.

It was in the context of these changes, including starvation among Plains peoples as the bison herds expired, that the Canadians began to exert their influence as an imperialist force. Treaties (negotiated by Ottawa, not London), reserves, and residential schools were on their way.

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5. Ibid.
Key Points

- Confederation was led by a generation accustomed to moderate industrialization and familiar with market towns with roots in the last century.
- The fur trade, which had been the core element of life and economy in the northern half of the continent since the 15th century, was on its last legs.
- The new country came into existence as a new economic order was preparing itself for its debut.
History is a complex dance between continuity and change. Both, however, are deceptive. What appears to be continuity can, from time to time, be the reappearance of a practice or belief, one that had been suspended for a time. A single element of material design might be perpetuated for centuries for reasons that no one recalls except that it works. Historical study teaches that one cannot count on continuity to be anything but slippery, and yet perceptions of the past are more comfortable with simple, slow-moving narratives than fluidity. Keith Matthews, a historian of Atlantic Canada once took his colleagues to task for presenting “Newfoundland’s history as timeless.” He argued that “Although groups changed in characteristics and importance, historians nevertheless perceived eternal and unchanging conflict raging for more than 200 years.”

Who were the people of the new Dominion? Negotiations took place between colonial leaders and ignored Aboriginal peoples entirely, as well as the Métis. As a mechanism for expediting business transactions between colonies/provinces and creating administrative efficiencies, Confederation held out some promise; as a representation of the aspirations of the people across most of the territory to which it laid claim, it must have seemed baffling.

What’s more, the “people” were a moving picture, not a photograph. They were being changed by forces many could not yet see. Industrialization and urbanization were the foremost of these.

In a matter of a few years the typical Canadian life course would include living in growing and industrial cities and working for wages. The majority of Canadians would continue to live on the land for another 60 years, although some provinces would cross the threshold into being principally urban much sooner. In other words, the impression is

Figure 14.11 This mid-19th century representation of a Blackfoot warrior suggests the timelessness of the mounted Plains culture. But that culture was, itself, only a few generations old when this image was created. (Painting by Karl Bodmer, ca. 1840-43).

inescapable that the people for whom Confederation and all its aspects was crafted would soon be overwhelmed by a different society. The extent to which a united British North America would recognize and serve well the interests of those people, those Canadians, is the test that lay ahead in the post-Confederation period.

**Key Terms**

**Charlottetown Conference:** Convened by the leaders of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia for the purpose of discussing Maritime Union on September 1-9, 1864; discussed the possibility of a union that would include the Province of Canada. Laid the groundwork for the Quebec Conference.

**Council of Assiniboia:** An unelected council created by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1835 for the administration of Rupert’s Land.

**double majority:** In the Province of Canada, an attempt to break the gridlock under the 1840 constitution by means of multiple majorities: a majority in the 84-seat assembly was required along with majorities in the Canada West and Canada East segments of the assembly (42 seats each) for a bill to pass into law.

**double shuffle:** The practice under the 1840 constitution that new, incoming cabinet ministers in a government were obliged to resign their seat in Parliament and seek re-election in a by-election. The idea was that electors had a right to acknowledge and approve the change of status in their representative. In 1858 John A. Macdonald took advantage of this rule to vote out George Brown’s temporarily depleted government; he then merely moved his own ministers around — twice — to avoid having to go to by-elections. This cabinet “shuffle” thus became a “double shuffle.”

**half-breeds:** A term that was once descriptive but soon became pejorative to describe individuals whose ancestry includes both European and Aboriginal elements.
House of Commons: The Canadian House of Commons, modelled on the British House of Commons. Its members (referred to as Members of Parliament or MPs) are elected and the principle of representation-by-population generally prevails. Legislation dealing with expenditures or taxes can only be introduced in the House and the House of Commons has, at the end of the day, pre-eminence over the appointed Senate. The government is, in principle, based on the party that has elected the largest number of members. That party is referred to as the "governing party;" ministers — including the first minister, or prime minister — are appointed from the ranks of the majority governing party and constitute the executive council, or cabinet.

imperial federation: A proposal to restructure the British Empire along federal lines, creating a more equal partnership in place of a colonial relationship. This idea gained a significant and influential following in Canada in the 1880s and 1890s.

medicine line: Reputedly a Plains Aboriginal term for the 49th parallel boundary between the British-Canadian Plains and the American west.

peace, order, and good government: A phrase from Section 91 of the British North America Act, 1867, and sometimes abbreviated to POGG. This is the residual powers section of the Act. Section 91 states that, beyond what is clearly allocated as provincial responsibilities and federal responsibilities, anything otherwise necessary to the “peace, order, and good government” of the country is to be handled by Ottawa.

provisional government: Generally, an emergency or interim administration. In the case of Red River (Manitoba) the government established under Louis Riel’s leadership when the Council of Assiniboia dissolved and before the Canadian administration was able to legitimately seize power.

residual powers: Responsibilities not clearly demarcated and described in the constitution. In a federal system the residual powers typically belong to the central government. This was the intent of Section 91 of the British North America Act.

Senate: The appointed upper chamber of the Canadian Parliament, similar to the House of Lords in Britain. Distribution of seats was intended to be unrelated to population so that each province (or at least each region) would have significant representation. The chief role of the Senate is to review legislation and, where needed, suggest refinements. Because senators do not have to report to an electorate they are, theoretically, free to consider laws without bending to local pressures. It is for this reason that the Senate is sometimes referred to as the “house of sober second thought.”

Seventy-Two Resolutions: Also known as the Quebec Resolutions, the proposals drafted (mostly by Macdonald) at the Quebec Conference in 1864. These were forwarded to Britain where they were further refined at the London Conference of 1866. They formed the outlines of the federal constitution as presented in the British North America Act of 1867.

Short Answer Exercises

1. What motivated Canadian politicians to explore a federal arrangement?
2. Why were the premiers of the Atlantic colonies interested?
3. If federalism was the answer, what was the question?
4. What other options were available?
5. To what extent was Confederation a British idea?
6. What was the role of the United States in advancing the cause of colonial union?
7. How did Rupert’s Land figure into the dialogue about Confederation in 1864-67?
8. What were the sources of opposition to Confederation? How were they addressed?
9. Why did Nova Scotia and New Brunswick both eventually agree to join Confederation?
10. Why did Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland elect to stay out of Confederation in 1867?
11. What were some of the main features of the proposed federal union?
12. What was the response of westerners to Canada’s annexationist move?
13. In what ways was Canada in 1867 a society poised on the brink of change?

Suggested Readings


Attributions

Figure 14.10
York Boat by Verne Equinoxis used under a CC-BY 3.0 license.

Figure 14.11
A painting from life by Karl Bodmer by El Comandante is in the public domain.
### Appendix - Glossary

This glossary is a summary of all key terms that appear at the end of each chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>abolition (ch 7):</strong> Refers to the abolition of the institution of slavery. In Britain a single piece of legislation resulted in the abolition of slavery in 1834. Abolition in Upper Canada was initiated by John Graves Simcoe in 1793.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>aboriginal title (ch 7):</strong> Aboriginal ownership of land and/or territory and/or other material resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>absentee landlords (ch 7):</strong> Also called proprietors, the main landowners on Prince Edward Island whose land was allocated to them in a lottery held in London in 1767. Few of them visited the island and few attended to the responsibilities they were given as landlords. Most, however, attempted to charge significant rents to their tenant farmers in the colony. See also escheat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acadian Expulsion (ch 6):</strong> The removal of Acadians and other francophones from Île Royale after 1745, and accelerating after 1755 as the British forcibly removed the larger portion of the colonist population. In French it is called <em>Le Grand Dérangement</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Act of Proclamation (1763) (ch 7):</strong> Also called the Proclamation Act, the legislation that created the Province of Quebec and recognized Aboriginal title in the west. The Act angered American settlers because it hampered westward movement into the Ohio Valley.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Act of Union, 1840–41 (ch 11):</strong> The constitutional arrangement for the Canadas that replaced the Constitutional Act of 1791. Its main features were union of Lower and Upper Canada, creating one colony and one colonial government and an identical number of assembly seats for both partner colonies, with an eye to subsuming the French-Catholic community. The Province of Canada would retain some regional divisions and the old colonies perpetuated their separate identities as Canada East and Canada West.</td>
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<td><strong>African-American slaves (ch 7):</strong> Chattel slaves, principally from Africa, who worked primarily on plantation economies. Slavery occurred throughout North America in both European and Aboriginal communities. Some African-American (as opposed to African-Caribbean) slaves were later freed (see freedmen) pending on their role in the American Revolution.</td>
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<td><strong>agricultural revolution (ch 2):</strong> In the context of the Archaic era, the development of the first farming societies in the Americas.</td>
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<td><strong>Anglican Church (ch 3):</strong> See Church of England.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>anglicization (ch 7):</strong> The British policy of replacing French culture — language, customs, laws, and Catholic religion — with those of Anglican/Protestant Britain.</td>
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Annapolis Royal (ch 6): British name for Port Royal.

anthropogenic (ch 2): Made or modified by humans.

archaeological record (ch 2): Any evidence regarding past societies and civilizations (Aboriginal or otherwise) that derives from the use of archaeological techniques and methods.

Archaic period (ch 2): The era 10,000 – 3,000 years BPE.

Archaic Woodland (ch 2): The era described by archaeologists and anthropologists as roughly 1,000 BCE – 1,000 CE.

archives (ch 1): Collections of original documents, including print-based objects like personal letters, official reports, journals, newspapers, maps, government papers, and so on. Archival collections may also include photographs, music (in a variety of forms), and textiles. Technically, your own collection of original materials is an archive but, for the purposes of history courses, archives are official repositories that may or may not be open to the public.

aristocracy (ch 3): A privileged social class whose power is usually derived from birth, heredity, and almost exclusive ownership of land, close connections with the clergy and government, and with the Crown. As a form of government, a system in which a small and wealthy elite holds power to the exclusion of others.

Assiniboia (ch 8): Synonymous with Selkirk Colony or Red River Colony. The Treaty of 1818 divided it at the 49th parallel, thereby reducing Assiniboia significantly. After Confederation and the creation of the province of Manitoba, the name was applied to a new regional administrative unit in the North West Territories. This District of Assiniboia ran horizontally across the southern Canadian Prairies and was bounded on the east by Manitoba, on the south by the 49th parallel and the United States, on the west by the District of Alberta, and on the north by the District of Saskatchewan.

Attawandaron (ch 5): An Iroquoian people located in the contact and post-contact periods in what is now southwestern Ontario. Also known as the Neutral.

Aztecs (ch 2): A Mesoamerican civilization and polity that collapsed in the early 16th century. The Aztecs developed many agricultural techniques and administrative customs that influenced societies around the Gulf of Mexico. Their influence may have spread up the Mississippi River as well.


backward linkages (ch 9): Describes economic inputs (often infrastructure) that support the production of the principal staple. In the case of the fur trade, backward linkages include warehouses, docks, and fur trade posts. In the case of the wheat economy, they linkages include silos, means of transporting grain, seed, and farm implements. Compare with forward linkages.

Battle of Sainte-Foy (ch 6): Battle on April 28, 1760, near the citadel of Quebec with the French/Canadien forces attacking the British. General Murray repeated many of the errors of Montcalm only months before. The British survived (having suffered more than a thousand casualties) by hunkering in the fortress until British naval reinforcements arrived.
Battle of Seven Oaks (ch 8): On June 19, 1816, two parties made up of HBC employees (including Governor Robert Semple) and Red River settlers against a party of Métis, Canadiens, and Aboriginals connected with the NWC. This was a violent chapter in the Pemmican War and was provoked by a food shortage and the HBC’s consequent attempt to control the movement and sale of pemmican.

Before the Common Era (BCE) (ch 2): This term, along with CE, align exactly with the Christian dating system, dividing time approximately 2,000 years ago.

Before the Present Era (BPE) (ch 2): A dating system based on the use of radiocarbon-dating, which uses January 1, 1950, as its baseline. Therefore, 10,000 years BPE equals 10,000 years before New Year’s Day, 1950.

benevolent societies (ch 10): Also called a “friendly society” or “mutual society.” Benevolent societies are a kind of cooperative organization in which the members subscribe money as insurance against illness, injury, widowhood, etc. Benevolent societies still exist but many have been supplanted by insurance companies and state welfare systems. See voluntary associations.

Bering land bridge (ch 2): The landform, mostly of land that was exposed by falling sea levels, that connected Eurasia and North America between Siberia and Alaska 50,000 to 10,000 years BPE. A possible route for human migration from Asia to the Americas. Also called Beringia.

Beringia (ch 2): The open plain of land and glaciers that once filled the current gap between Siberia and Alaska.

Black Death (ch 3): Also called simply “the plague,” a highly contagious disease reckoned to have reduced the total human population by 25% and as much as half of Europe’s population in the 14th century. In its aftermath there was social and religious upheaval from China to the British Isles.

Blackfoot Confederacy (ch 5): Also known as the Niitsitapi, and alliance centred in the western Plains, in territory that extended from what is now southern Alberta into Montana; consisting of the Piikuni (Piegan), Siksika (Blackfoot), Kanai (Blood), Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee), and A’aninin (Gros Ventre).

bourgeois, bourgeoisie (ch 6): Originally someone who lived in the town (French: bourg; German: burg; English: borough), typically associated with merchants, professionals, etc. By the 18th century the bourgeoisie emerged as a distinct social class, a “middle class.”

brewing (ch 7): The production of beer and the distilling of whisky, this was a means of adding value to surplus grain being grown in Upper and Lower Canada beginning in the 1780s. John Molson of Montreal was an early participant in brewing and, like many Canadians who followed in his footsteps in the liquor production trade, amassed a great fortune.

British North America (BNA) (ch 7): Term used intermittently after 1783 to describe the colonies left to Britain after the Revolution. Initially these included Newfoundland, the Province of Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. Subsequently the list would increase to include new colonies (Cape Breton Island and New Brunswick), a partitioned colony (Upper and Lower Canada), and in very general terms Rupert’s Land (which was not administered by a Crown delegate). Vancouver Island and British Columbia would also be regarded as part of British North America before Confederation.
buffalo jumps (ch 2): Sites on the plains associated with highly coordinated bison hunts conducted by Aboriginal communities.

Bungee (ch 8): Dialect that arose around the English-speaking settlements of Red River, layering elements of Anishinaabe/Ojibwa atop a substantial foundation of English and Gaelic to create what linguists call a creole.

Cahokia (ch 2): Thought to be the largest of the Mississippian towns/cities. Located near present-day St. Louis, it is believed to have crested around 1050 and collapsed around 1350.

Cajuns (ch 4): Francophone settlers in Louisiana descended mostly from Acadiens.

capital, capitalism, capitalists (ch 9): Capital is the portable wealth that can be applied to the economy in the form of investment. Prior to capitalism, wealth was manifest almost entirely in land and agricultural production. Investment was, in effect, reinvestment of output. Outsiders did not generally invest their wealth in the farms of others, certainly not in the pre-modern, feudal era. The mercantile era created a merchant class with excess capital (money, wealth) which was stored, invested, and made available for borrowing for investment. Capitalism is the system in which the means of production (farms, factories, etc.) are privately owned and capable of being bought and sold. It generally depends on wage labour. Capitalism is, too, a system of social relations based on the right of the individual to move capital to wherever it will generate the greatest benefits. A capitalist is someone who works within the capitalist system, whose wealth is based not on inherited and immovable property but on the ability to move wealth from one investment to another.

Cariboo Wagon Road (ch 13): Constructed from 1860 to 1885 to connect the Lower Mainland of British Columbia with the Cariboo goldfields. The original 1860-63 road ran from Port Douglas at the north end of Harrison Lake via Lillooet to Clinton and then north across the Cariboo Plateau to Alexandria. An amended version in 1865 connected Yale to Ashcroft and then Clinton and the older road, having passed through the Fraser Canyon.

cayooosh, cayuse (ch 5): Regional words for “horse” in the Cordillera and western Plains. Derived from the Cayuse First Nation, who were responsible for significant advances in breeding in the 18th century.

censitaires (ch 4): Also known as habitants; the rent-paying tenants of the seigneurs. The rent is known as the cens.

Charlottetown Conference (ch 14): Convened by the leaders of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia for the purpose of discussing Maritime Union, the 1-9 September meeting agenda was expanded to include discussion of a union that would include the Province of Canada. Laid the groundwork for the Quebec Conference.

Chartists (ch 11): A movement for political reform in Britain during the 1830s, the supporters of the People’s Charter of 1838 – the Chartists – called for universal adult male suffrage, equitable constituencies, and other innovations which would radically broaden British democracy.

chattel slavery (ch 3): Ownership of a human being as a piece of property.

Chateau Clique (ch 7): A highly influential cadre of economic and social leaders who fashioned themselves politically as the British (or Tory) Party in Lower Canada. Their numbers included prominent merchants like
James McGill and John Molson. Their agenda included assimilation of the French Catholic population and perpetuating a hierarchical social and political order.

**Chemin du Roy (ch 6):** The “King’s Road,” built in the 1730s; a major infrastructure project in its time. One of the longest continuous roads in North America, it connected seigneuries on the north shore of the St. Lawrence.

**Chesapeake Affair (ch 7):** During the Napoleonic Wars, a British attempt to reduce American shipping to France by means of capturing US shipping and impressing (forcing sailors) into the British Navy. In 1807 the USS Chesapeake, a warship, was bombarded and captured by the HMS Leopard; four sailors were seized and tried for desertion from the British Navy, one of whom was subsequently hanged. The Americans regarded this as an act of aggression and it fomented war fever in some quarters. See War Hawks.

**chiefdom (ch 2):** A form of organization based on a hierarchy of chiefs that followed the leader of the most important group.

**Chilcotin War (ch 13):** Also referred to as the Chilcotin Massacre, Chilcotin Uprising, and Bute Inlet Massacre. Occurred in 1864 when Tsilqot’in people asserted their control of their ancestral territory by murdering several members of a road-building crew and some colonists. The colonial authorities responded with a fruitless and expensive campaign that only ended when several of the Tsilqot’in leaders presented themselves for negotiations and were summarily arrested and subsequently hanged.

**Chinatown (ch 10):** Urban areas dedicated to the housing and businesses of Chinese immigrants and their families. Some Chinatowns appeared spontaneously and were built by the Chinese community; others were imposed by the dominant Euro-Canadian regime as a means of containing the Chinese population.

**Chinook, chinuk wawa (ch 5):** A trade dialect developed on the west coast comprising elements from several Aboriginal languages and subsequently adopting words from various European languages.

**Church of England (ch 3):** Also known as the Anglican Church, the state church in England established under Henry VIII in opposition to Roman Catholicism.

**Church Missionary Society (CMS) (ch 13):** Established in London, England, in 1799 the CMS began sending Anglican missionaries to Rupert’s Land in the 1820s. In 1857 William Duncan was dispatched to the northwest coast on behalf of the CMS.

**civic buildings (ch 10):** City halls, local jails, and courthouses are the most common “civic buildings” in the 19th century. Art galleries and museums – as public facilities – appear later. The erection of impressive civic buildings was a statement of civic pride, a means of promoting the community, and a statement regarding the growing power of municipalities.

**civil rights movement (ch 1):** In the United States, a movement principally in support of improved legal and civil rights for African-Americans. The movement is regarded as running from 1954 to 1968. It produced other movements associated with demands for rights for other groups that had historically faced prejudice and systemic marginalization.

**civil service (ch 10):** Employees of the state/colonies/municipalities. Includes surveyors, land officers, postmasters, and a few other positions in the 19th century. The number and types of civil servants expanded with the size of the state in mid-century.
Civil War (ch 9): The war between the southern and northern American states from 1861-1865. Seven southern slave states seceded from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America. The continuance of slavery and “states rights” were the key catalysts to the crisis. The number of war dead totalled more than 100,000, and at the end of the war the United States had the largest standing army on Earth.

class consciousness (ch 10): Awareness of one’s socio-economic status (or “class”) and how it (a) creates and limits opportunities, and (b) is experienced by others as well and constitutes as a set of common interests.

Clear Grits (ch 11): Reformers in Canada West who coalesced in 1850 behind a platform of universal adult male suffrage, and attacks on privilege. Principally rural at first, it became more urban under the leadership of George Brown in the late 1850s. Its founders called for men who were morally incorruptible, “all sand and no dirt, clear grit all the way through.” The Clear Grits joined with the Reformers and subsequently became the Liberal Party.

clearances (ch 8): The consolidation of feudal lands to enable the building of greater sheep flocks and thus feed the ravenous woolen industry in industrializing Britain. The Highland Clearances resulted in the displacement of large numbers of Scots, as did the Lowland Clearances, contributing to a massive out-migration in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Clergy Reserves (ch 7): Created by the Constitutional Act (1791), land parcels set aside (one-seventh of all public lands) in Upper Canada for the use of the Church of England (a.k.a. Anglican Church). There were smaller Clergy Reserves in Lower Canada as well.

Clovis (ch 2): Named for the archaeological site in New Mexico where it was first identified, the Clovis tradition is identifiable by the kinds of projectile heads it produced.

coastal migration theory (ch 2): An alternative to the Bering land bridge theory, which posits that the first human arrivals in the Americas arrived by sea, following the arc of the north Pacific icefield and skirting Beringia.

Code Noir (ch 4): Introduced under Louis XIV in 1685, the Code Noir established the ground rules for slavery in the French colonies. This included a prohibition of any religion other than Catholicism, the range of discipline permissible, and the conditions required for manumission (freeing of slaves).

codexes (codices) (ch 2): Scrolls written by Aztec and/or Mayan authors and scribes from the period both before and after the arrival of Europeans.

coffin ships (ch 9): Lumber boats that carried immigrants from Ireland to Canada in the 1830s. Many died during this trip as hygiene and overcrowded conditions aboard the boats were atrocious.

collectivities (ch 1): Groups of people who identify as part of a social body that may or may not correspond to a political unit. For example, First Nations peoples may identify collectively as First Nations, as opposed to (or perhaps in addition to) their identity as Cree or Mi’kmaq. French Canadian identity very often exists independent of (and sometimes in contrast to) a larger bicultural Canadian identity.

Columbian Exchange (ch 5): The traffic of goods, ideas, materiel, foodstuffs, technology, knowledge, and bacteria between Europe and Africa (on the one hand) and the Americas (on the other).
Columbia Express (ch 8): Route connecting York Factory to the mouth of the Columbia River by combining the assets and knowledge of the HBC. Also called the York Factory Express.

Common Era (CE) (ch 2): This term, along with BCE, aligns exactly with the Christian dating system, dividing time approximately 2,000 years ago.

Common law (ch 7): British code of laws dealing with property, contracts, and other civil matters.

Communauté des habitants (ch 4): Also known as the “Compagnie des habitants”; it worked in conjunction with the Compagnie des Cent-Associés in an arrangement that sublet the Cent-Associés’ monopoly to residents in the colony of Canada.

Compagnie des Cent-Associés (ch 4): The Company of One Hundred Associates (sometimes called the Company of New France or Compagnie de la Nouvelle France) was chartered in 1627 to operate the fur trade in Canada and Acadia and establish settlements. It followed two earlier chartered efforts, the Compagnie des Marchands and the Compagnie de Montmorency. The Compagnie des Cent-Associés ceased operating in 1663.

Company store, company towns (ch 10): Many 19th and 20th century resource-extraction and construction industries were situated outside of established communities; under those circumstances a great many provided housing, supplies, groceries, work clothes, fuel, churches, and any number of other services so as to attract, retain, and (when necessary) discipline their workforce.

Conquistadore (ch 3): Term used by the Spanish and Portuguese, meaning conqueror. Covers the military and clergy leaders of the Iberian invasions of the Americas.

Constitutional Act (1791) (ch 7): The legislation that created two colonies out of what was left of the Province of Quebec after the Treaty of Paris, 1783: Upper and Lower Canada. In Upper Canada the British common law was applied while the Coutume de Paris survived in Lower Canada. Both colonies received their own administrative structures.

Contact (ch 2): The first documented encounter between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans. This is a movable date because first encounters occur in different regions at different times. The contact era for some Arctic peoples, for example, only began in the 20th century.

Coparcenary (ch 6): A system of joint/shared inheritance of property.

Corn Laws (ch 9): Regulations governing the import and export of grain in Britain. A system of tariffs that benefited colonial and domestic producers and disadvantaged foreign producers in the British marketplace.

cottage industry (ch 10): A manufacturing process in which all or component parts of a product are assembled in a worker’s home. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries this was particularly associated with textile and clothing production.

Council of Assiniboia (ch 14): An unelected council created by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1835 for the administration of Rupert’s Land.
counting coup (ch 2): The practice, common among many Aboriginal cultures, of attacking rival groups with the objective of inflicting injury but not necessarily fatality and to thereby acquire status commensurate with the humiliation meted out to the foe.

coureurs de bois (ch 4): In English, known as “runners of the woods.” The first coureurs de bois were young men dispatched by Champlain to reside among the Wendat, learn the Wyandot language, and develop an understanding of local trade protocols. Subsequently the coureurs were more likely to be independent or semi-independent traders seeking Aboriginal sources of furs across the interior of North America.

Coutume de Paris (ch 7): A code of civil law developed in and for Paris and extended to New France. Addressed land ownership and use, family relations, and inheritance.

Crimean War (ch 9): A multinational conflict centred on the Crimean Peninsula and the city of Sevastopol on the Black Sea. The war pitted Britain, France, and Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) against Russia. Noteworthy of the magnitude of deaths (roughly half a million) and the beginnings of the military field hospital (under Florence Nightingale) which produced important innovations in battlefield medicine.

crude birth rate (CBR) (ch 10): The number of births per 1000 population.

crude death rate (CDR) (ch 10): The number of deaths per 1000 population.

cullers (ch 9): Codfish buyers in Newfoundland ports, especially St. John’s.

decapitation thesis (ch 7): Historical theory that explains the apparent loss of Canadien leadership in the colony after the Conquest as the result of an exodus of leading commercial, administrative, and social figures to France.

democracy (ch 9): A form of government translated roughly from its Greek roots as “rule by the people.” The complicating factor is that “the people” is a slippery concept that is historically contextualized, and the extent of “rule” is also negotiable. Democracy was long associated with cities and towns, but not with nation states or empires, over which monarchies and oligarchies ruled. The emergence of representative democracy at a national level in the late 18th century – first in the United States, then in France – constituted a revolutionary change in organizing “the people’s” voice. In British North America, legislative assemblies might be elected but they did not rule, not until the 1840s. The majority of adults were “enfranchised” or legally able to participate in a democratic election only in the 20th century. It is still the case, of course, that people under the age of 18 years are not able to participate in democracy, so the vote is not “universal” by any stretch.

demographic historians (ch 1): Historians of population trends and mechanisms.

dependent population (ch 10): The share of population under the age of 15 years and over the age of 60 or 65. Clearly the notion of “elderly” dependant varies over time depending on life expectancies and population health generally.

diffusion (ch 2): The transmission of ideas, practices, or beliefs from one society to another.

disease vectors (ch 5): Viruses and bacteria transferred from one living host to another. Examples include droplets (like those produced in coughing or sneezing), parasites (like fleas or mosquitoes), food, animal bites, and sexual intercourse. May also refer to the territory covered by a disease as it moves through a geographical area.
**divine right of kings (ch 3):** A doctrine based on the belief that the monarch’s power is derived directly from God and not from worldly authorities like a legislature, a council of nobles, or even the Vatican.

**division of labour (ch 10):** In a system of production, the isolation of certain tasks that are assigned to individuals working cooperatively to generate a certain product. In shoe production, for example, one person may be responsible for the uppers and someone else for the soles and a third for stitching them together.

**Dorset (ch 8):** The Paleo-Eskimo culture that existed in the Canadian Arctic from about 500 BCE – 1500 CE. Succeeded by the Inuit Culture.

**double majority (ch 14):** In the Province of Canada an attempt to break the gridlock under the 1840 constitution by means of multiple majorities: a majority in the 84-seat Assembly was required along with majorities in the Canada West and the Canada East segments of the Assembly (42-seats each) for a bill to pass into law.

**Douglas Treaties (ch 13):** Also known as the Fort Victoria Treaties, these are fourteen agreements between the Colony of Vancouver Island (under the leadership of James Douglas) and Aboriginal communities.

**Durham Report (ch 11):** The *Report on the Affairs of British North America* of 1839 was the product of Lord Durham’s investigation in 1838 into the causes of the crisis in Canadian politics.

**East India Company (ch 6):** Established in 1600, the largest of Britain’s chartered trade monopolies. It dominated trade and was an instrument of British imperialism in Asia and was the model on which the Hudson’s Bay Company was based.

**Edict of Nantes (ch 3):** A statement of relative religious tolerance in 1598 that brought an end to the Wars of Religion in France and extended civil rights to Protestants (Huguenots).

**Embargo Act (1807) (ch 7):** In an attempt to force British and French respect for American shipping, federal legislation that was passed in Washington that effectively closed off all exports to foreign ports. The objective was to starve the importing nations of American goods and thus oblige them to cease preying on American shipping. It was repealed in 1809.

**Empire of the St. Lawrence (ch 9):** A phrase coined by historian Donald Creighton in the 1930s, it refers to the economic and political influence of Quebec and Montreal merchants and colonial governments over a region that extended, at its peak, across the whole of North America to the Pacific Ocean.

**English Reformation (ch 3):** Term used to describe several events connected to the English break with Catholic Rome under Henry VIII.
environmental history (ch 1): Charts the history of human interaction with natural and human-made settings. The environment may be a pristine one or an urban context. In some cases it is a study of how human activity impacts the environment (and vice versa); in others it studies the idea of the environment and how that concept changes over time.

environmentalism (ch 1): A philosophical interpretation of human interactions with the environment. May also refer to an activist movement and critique regarding the negative impacts of those interactions.

escheat (ch 7): A movement to force unimproved lands on Prince Edward Island back into the hands of the Crown. The Escheat Party made the land issue the dominant one in the colony in the 19th century.

established church (ch 11): When a state or nation has a single official institutionalized religion, it is referred to as the “established church.” In the case of France prior to the Revolution and New France prior to the Conquest it was unquestionably the Catholic Church; in Britain and its colonies, it was the Anglican Church (or Church of England). Post-Conquest attempts to impose the Anglican Church on the Canadas as the established church failed.

ethnohistory (ch 1): A branch of academic studies that bridges anthropological and historical approaches, ethnohistory is principally concerned with non-European societies.

exotic diseases (ch 2): Infectious and highly contagious viruses introduced in the proto-contact and contact eras. Aboriginal people had little in the way of natural immunities to diseases they had never before encountered.

extended family (ch 9): Generally refers to three generations or more of one family. Another form, the consanguineal family, includes adult siblings.

Family Compact (ch 7): An association of leading individuals and families in Upper Canada devoted to the suppression of republican tendencies in the colony and perpetuating an oligarchy in government.

Famine Irish (ch 10): Emigrants from Ireland who fled the Great Famine of 1845-52.

Father Le Loutre’s War (ch 6): (1749-1755) Also called the Mi’kmaq (or Micmac) War, a conflict that pitted the Mi’kmaq and some of the Acadian communities against the British and New England interests in Nova Scotia.

Father Rale’s War (ch 6): (1722-1725) Known by several other names as well, a conflict provoked by New England expansion into unceded Wabanaki territory in what is now Maine and New Brunswick. The French were allied with the Wabanaki against the British and New England forces.

feminism (ch 1): An analysis of power relations that posits the existence of systemic barriers to equality between humans based on sexual identity. Feminism calls for a program of political and social action aimed at improving the conditions of females.

feudalism (ch 6): An economic and landholding system of social, legal, and military customs based on notions of mutual responsibility. Land ownership was typically by a manorial elite for which a peasantry laboured. The aristocratic landowners, in turn, owed labour to the higher nobility, including the king.

“Fifty-four Forty or fight!” (ch 13): Slogan coined in 1844 or 1845 by American expansionists eager to claim the whole of the Oregon Territory to the Alaska Panhandle (54°40’N).
**filles du roi (ch 4):** In English, known as “the king’s daughters.” Between 1663 and about 1673, this cohort of women (mostly young and many orphans) was recruited by the Crown’s agents (mostly in Paris) for settlement in Canada. Their passage was paid for by the king and they were provided with a dowry as an incentive to marriage.

**Foresters (ch 10):** The Ancient Order of Foresters (AOF), a benevolent society founded in England with branches globally and a focus on members’ insurance.

**Fort Astoria (ch 8):** Established at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1811 by John Jacob Astor’s Pacific Fur Company. Astoria was the first American position on the northwest coast. It was soon thereafter sold to the North-West Company.

**Fort Beausejour (ch 4):** Built by the French in 1751 on the Chignecto Isthmus, which connects modern New Brunswick to Nova Scotia. This was an important land corridor connecting the Fortress of Louisbourg with Acadian settlements and Canada. The fort was also intended to support Mi’kmaq allies during war. Captured by the British in 1755, the name was changed to Fort Cumberland.

**Fort Caroline (ch 3):** Reckoned to be the oldest fortified European settlement in what is now the United States; established by the French in 1564.

**Fort George (ch 13):** There are several Forts George in the history of the Thirteen Colonies, BNA, and the Pacific northwest. In the farthest west there were two: the first replaced the American Fort Astoria near the mouth of the Columbia River (at what is now Astoria, Oregon); the second was established in 1807 by Simon Fraser at the site of what is now the city of Prince George, BC.

**Fortress Louisbourg (ch 6):** Established in 1713 as a fishing village, an important fortified centre of trade and naval activity from the 1720s on. Louisbourg was one of the largest towns in New France by the 1740s and an important asset in French efforts to harass the British in Acadia. Twice captured by the British and New Englanders, it was largely demolished in 1758.

**Fort Pitt (ch 7):** Site of modern-day Pittsburgh. Replaced the French establishment, Fort Duquesne.

**Fort Rupert (ch 13):** Located at the north end of Vancouver Island near modern-day Port Hardy, Fort Rupert was established by the HBC as a coal harvesting/mining experiment. It is an important Kwagu’l community today and should not be confused with the city of Prince Rupert, much further north on the mainland, nor with Waskaganish in northern Québec, which was formerly called Fort Rupert.

**Fort Vancouver (ch 13):** Established by the HBC in 1824-25 about 60 km up the Columbia River from Fort George (formerly Fort Astoria). Now the site of the city of Vancouver, Washington. The city of Vancouver, BC, was never a fort and there is no relation between the two other than the name.

**Fort Victoria Treaties (ch 13):** see Douglas Treaties.

**forward linkages (ch 9):** Secondary developments in an economy arising from the production of a staple or other goods. For example, while cotton requires backward linkages like farm equipment, a labour force (possibly a slave trade), and warehouses, it might generate forward linkages like cotton mills and a textile industry. Lumber – a classic Canadian staple – requires many backward linkages but it can feed into the development of mills, the paper sector, furniture making, and so on.
franchise (ch 7): The ability and right to vote in a democratic society. It is always arbitrarily determined and is defined as much by who it excludes as by who it includes. "Universal adult male suffrage" was never achieved in British North America before Confederation, far less the extension of the franchise to women or to Aboriginal peoples generally.

Fraser River gold rush (ch 13): A mining boom beginning in 1858 characterized by large numbers of independent prospectors using simple mining technologies to extract gold flakes, dust, and nuggets from the Fraser River. This goldrush was superseded by better finds in the Cariboo in the 1860s.

free labour (ch 9): Working people who are free of feudal or other similar bonds.

free trade (ch 6): A philosophy of commerce that calls for limited or no tariffs and protectionism. Free trade is in stark contrast to mercantilism.

freedmen (ch 7): Slaves who, by manumission or by emancipation, were freed from slavery.

freemasonry (ch 10): A fraternal organization dating from the 14th century which serves principally as a network system between communities. It is a "secret society" with rituals derived from the medieval guild system. Freemasonry experienced rising popularity in English-America from the 18th century and has always been regarded with suspicion and hostility by the Catholic Church and some other denominations, but not with the English Church.

Gallican, Gallicanism (ch 4): A perspective widely held in France and its colonies from the 17th century that spiritual authority resides with the Pope but civil authority with the monarch. Because much of what the colonial clergy attended to was essentially "civil" — farming, administering the colony generally, etc. — many of the Catholic clergy looked first to Paris for leadership and not to the Vatican. This position was challenged with some finality at the First Vatican Council of 1868 at which papal infallibility was defined.

gentlemen's clubs (ch 10): Organizations and facilities designed to support networking between business and society leaders. These were and are usually housed in elegant buildings near the centre of the business district. Until the late 20th century virtually none admitted women and most had sanctions against members of ethnic and religious minorities.

gift diplomacy (ch 4): In the context of European-Aboriginal relations, the practice of renewing — annually or otherwise regularly — diplomatic relations and alliances by providing gifts to leadership figures. It includes the practice of "covering the dead," a round of gift-giving following wartime deaths of an ally's soldiers.

gunboat diplomacy (ch 13): The achievement of colonial political goals in dealings with Aboriginal communities by means of superior naval firepower.

gold fever (ch 13): Term used to describe the opportunistic individualism found in goldrushes. Gold was discovered and mined by independent prospectors around the Pacific Rim beginning in Australia from the 1840s, California from 1848, a brief flurry in Haida Gwaii in the 1850s followed by the British Columbia rush from 1858-63, and New Zealand in the 1860s. After Confederation there were smaller rushes in BC and these were surpassed by the Klondike/Alaska gold rush of 1896-1909. The close succession of gold rushes meant that many of the personnel in the goldfields had experience in other goldrushes and many of the gold field institutions followed in their wake.
Grand Couteau (ch 8): Plateau in central North Dakota, the site of a key battle between Métis and Sioux bison-hunting parties.

Grand Trunk Railway (ch 9): A rail system that linked Canada West (Ontario) and Canada East (Quebec) in the 1850s. It was extended through spur lines and the purchase of other railways to Portland, Maine.

grease trails (ch 2): Trade routes that originated in the pre-contact era in what is now British Columbia, used for transporting oolichan grease, an important indigenous commodity.

Great Peace of Montreal, 1701 (ch 6): Also called the Great Peace of Montreal, a treaty struck between New France and 40 Aboriginal nations. The Great Peace drew to an end the long-running war between Canada and the Haudenosaunee Five Nations and what had become known in some circles as the Beaver Wars.

Grosse Isle (ch 10): A small island in the mid-St. Lawrence River, about 50km downstream of Québec City. Synonymous with quarantine of immigrants and epidemic mortalities.

guard hairs (ch 6): The barbed outer hairs found on many mammal pelts, typically longer than the underpelt and more easily shed.

Guardian (ch 11): In the case of Aboriginal affairs, the Crown (effectively, the Government of Canada) acts as the caretaker of Aboriginal lands and property in a capacity roughly comparable to that of a parent or guardian of a child. The process of creating this role begins in 1839 with the Crown Lands Protection Act and is fleshed out after confederation in the Indian Act of 1876.

Guerrilla (ch 6): A form of warfare distinguished by the lack of structure and organization typical of formal warfare. Characterized by ambushes, small units, and lightening raids, guerrilla warfare aims to demoralize and wear down a larger opponent that lacks the same speed and mobility.

guilds (ch 10): Medieval institutions mostly organized at the local level around crafts, professions, and commerce. Merchants’ guilds often functioned as the civic authority while artisans’ guilds were a kind of trade union which defined the requisite skill levels for each craft and established controls on who and how many might be allowed to practice the craft. Increasingly criticized in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as at odds with free trade.

Gulf Stream (ch 6): A strong current that runs from the Caribbean along the east coast of North America and across the Atlantic into northwestern Europe. It accelerates sea traffic heading east and can impede vessels heading west.

Habitants (ch 4): See censitaires.

Half-breeds (ch 14): A term that was once descriptive but soon became pejorative; used to describe individuals whose ancestry includes both European and Aboriginal elements.

Hegemony (ch 10): Control by one empire, class, faction, or religion over all others.

High culture, high style (ch 10): These terms reference the development of elite cultural activities, fashions, tastes, and practices in contrast with “folk” or “vernacular” or “popular” culture. Examples include opera and classical music, baroque architectural styles, formal clothing, and elaborate culinary practices. High culture and
style are typically enjoyed by a small, select number of people across a large — even global — expanse and the styles tend to change frequently; low culture or “vernacular,” by contrast is long-lasting and experienced by large numbers of people but typically in a small area. The cultural practices of Highland Scots provides an example of a folk culture with a limited external appeal and which is defined by its durability and the plainness of its cooking and art.

**higher education** (ch 10): College or university education. In the twentieth century some vocational and trades training is included as well.

**historiography** (ch 1): Historical writing and the study of historical writing.

**hivernants** (ch 8): see *wintering partners*

Hochelaga (ch 3): St. Lawrence Iroquoian fortified town at or near what is now Montreal.

**home guard** (ch 8): Middleman cordon around the HBC forts established by Aboriginal groups that had a prior claim to the territory. Ensured that they enjoyed first access to trade goods.

**homespun** (ch 10): Originally referred to wools or other fabrics produced in the home but extends to full textile products also produced in the home. Synonymous with plain and simple, the term went from being a signal of artisanal skill to a derisory adjective meaning unsophisticated and unlovely.

**Hôtel-Dieu** (ch 4): Or “hostel of God.” In Montréal the Hôtel-Dieu hospital was established and run by the Ursuline Nuns.

**House of Commons** (ch 14): The Canadian House of Commons is modeled on the British House of Commons. Its members (referred to as Members of Parliament or MPs) are elected and the principle of representation-by-population generally prevails. Legislation dealing with expenditures or taxes can only be introduced in the House and the House of Commons has, at the end of the day, pre-eminence over the appointed Senate. The government is, in principle, based on the party that has elected the largest number of Members in its “caucus.” That party is referred to as the “governing party;” Ministers — including the First or “Prime” Minister — are appointed from the ranks of the majority, governing party and constitute the “Government” or “Executive Council” or “Cabinet.”

**House of Industry** (ch 10): First established under the British Poor Law as a refuge for the impoverished and/or bankrupt. The ideal of hard work even while receiving charity is reflected in the name. These were, as well, referred to as “workhouses.”

**household wage** (ch 10): The combined income of all individuals residing as a ‘household’. Typically does not include unrelated boarders but will include servants.

**Hudson’s Bay Company** (HBC) (ch 8): In 1670, a monopolistic charter modelled on the East India Company that was granted to “The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson’s Bay.”

**Huguenots** (ch 3): French Protestants.

**humanitarianism** (ch 11): A movement and philosophy which enjoyed particular support in the first half of the 19th century, humanists argued that every individual shared a common moral significance. It was, as a
movement, opposed to slavery and advanced the cause of working-class rights. It also sparked a renewed interest in the condition of Aboriginal peoples.

**Hundred Years War (ch 3):** A series of conflicts running from 1337 to 1453 related to royal successions in England and France.

**Hunter Lodges, Hunter Patriots (ch 11):** Sometimes pluralized into “Hunters Lodge” (with or without a possessive apostrophe), the lodges were formed by 1837-38 rebels who sought sanctuary in the United States and proposed to launch attacks on the Province of Canada from across the border. Members of the Lodges were called Hunter Patriots.

**hypotheses (plural); hypothesis (singular) (ch 2):** Theories that offer explanation for historical phenomenon, events, or ideas.

**ideals of womanhood (ch 10):** The dominant values in any given society pertaining to the most acceptable ways in which women should behave, the sort of character they should develop, etc. What falls outside of the "ideal" is often defined as deviant.

**ideologies (ch 1):** Ideas and values that guide our understanding of society and economy and which may also drive political and personal agendas.

**Île Royale (ch 4):** Established as a colonial site by the French in 1713, it is the location of the Fortress of Louisbourg. Captured by the British in 1755, it was renamed Cape Breton Island.

**Île Saint-Jean (ch 4):** Part of the French colony of Acadia, it was captured by the British in 1758 and renamed Saint John’s Island and then Prince Edward Island.

**Illicit trade (ch 6):** In the context of mercantilism, unsanctioned trade between colonies.

**imperial federation (ch 14):** A proposal to restructure the British Empire along federal lines, creating a more equal partnership in place of a colonial relationship. This idea gained a significant and influential following in Canada in the 1880s and ’90s.

**Imperialism (ch 1):** A philosophical position that encourages the extension of one nation/empire’s power over other, subject peoples. May take the form of colonization, military conquest, or a campaign of propaganda and ideas.

**indentured servants (ch 6):** Individuals contracted on a multi-year, fixed-term basis to work in the colonies. Usually taken up by young men and women whose passage would be paid by their employer. At the end of the indenture young men would typically receive a new suit. Large numbers of migrants from Britain to the Thirteen Colonies are thought to have started in indentured servitude. This system was regularly abused and, in some circumstances, was barely distinguishable from slavery.

**Industrial Revolution (ch 9):** A transition in systems of production associated with the rise of machine-assisted labour, non-organic sources of energy (water power, steam power, electricity), and large manufacturing and mining settings. Occurred first in the British Isles beginning in the late 18th century, spreading to most countries in the north Atlantic by the mid-19th century. Is “revolutionary” in that it supplanted older systems of production
and the social relations on which they were based. It also changed the focus of Western economies from agricultural and craft production to industrial production of (mainly) textiles, metal products, and energy.

**Inquisition (ch 3):** A process and an institution aimed at ensuring Catholic supremacy and religious integrity in western Europe. In Spain it was geared to eliminating Muslim and Jewish influences at the end of the 15th century and was an important part of the value system carried to the Americas by the *conquistadores*.

**intendant (ch 4):** Beginning in 1663, the administrative officer responsible for civil affairs in New France. The intendant's portfolio included judicial affairs, infrastructure, military preparedness, addressing issues of corruption, and colonial finances. Notionally the most powerful figure in the colony, in practice the intendant was often rivalled by the governor.

**interdisciplinary studies (ch 1):** Academic approaches that combine traditionally separate disciplines, such as biology and history.

**Intolerable Acts (ch 7):** A number of taxes and tariffs introduced by the British government during the Seven Years' War that targeted the American colonies in an effort to recover financial losses. Following on American protests, Parliament passed more laws that gave Britain greater powers in the colonies. It also introduced the Quebec Act, which reattached the Ohio Valley and the northwest to the Province of Quebec and enhanced the rights of the Catholic Church; both provisions were provocative in the Thirteen Colonies. Together, the Intolerable Acts catalyzed the revolutionary movement in the colonies.

**Irish Potato Famine (ch 9):** A four-year family (1845-1849) in Ireland brought on by the heavy reliance on potatoes as a core element of the diet. When blight (a plant disease that affects potatoes) struck, food stocks were quickly exhausted. During this famine, perhaps as many as 2 million Irish emigrated, mostly to the United States but also to British North American, Australia, and elsewhere.

**Jay's Treaty (1794) (ch 7):** A treaty that resolved several issues outstanding from the Treaty of Paris (1783). The Americans were keen to address the continuing British presence and role in the Ohio/Northwest. The British wished to secure American neutrality in the French Revolutionary Wars and to clarify the boundaries with Canada.

**Jesuit Order (ch 4):** The Society of Jesus was established in 1534 and is characterized by its fierce loyalty to papal authority in all matters. Their members first arrived in Canada in 1625 to assist the *Recollets* in missionary work among the Aboriginal population. The Jesuits played a pivotal role in French relations with Wendake.

**Jesuit Relations (ch 4):** Reports from Jesuit missionaries in Canada and an important source of historical and ethnographical material on the Wendat and other First Nations. In part the Relations served as a means to secure more funding from France. They were eventually published for a wider readership and were, thus, a source of revenue for the order.

**Kingdom of the Saguenay (ch 3):** According to Donnacona and other Stadaconans, a wealthy settlement north of the Laurentian Iroquois territories. Perhaps mythical, perhaps meant to distract or deceive the Europeans, the story may have legitimate roots in an oral tradition now disappeared.

**L'Anse aux Meadows (ch 3):** The Viking settlement in northern Newfoundland, established ca. 1000 CE.
l’Ordre de Bon Temps (ch 4): The Order of Good Cheer was suggested by Champlain in 1606 as a means of improving morale among the residents at Port-Royal. It is reckoned that the first meeting of the Order constitutes the first performance of European-style theatre in North America.

Lachine Canal (ch 9): The canal built at the rapids at Lachine; first attempted in 1689 but it wasn’t until 1825 that a functioning system of locks was in place. The name, Lachine, references French hopes of a waterway across North America to China (la Chine). Lachine confirmed Montreal’s position as a leading port in and out of the interior of North America and Lachine itself became an important focus of industrial growth in the mid-19th century.

laissez-faire (ch 9): A philosophy and/or system of policies that minimizes government management of the economy. In practical terms it means elimination of tariff barriers, duties and taxes, and regulation beyond the minimum required to protect property.

land-based fur trade (ch 13): Refers to the HBC’s strategy in the 1830s to establish permanent fur trading establishments on land, rather than rely on ships cruising the coast looking for trade. (See maritime-based fur trade.)

Late Loyalists (ch 7): American immigrants who arrived in British North America in the years after the Revolution, especially in the 1790s and the first decade of the 19th century. Their “loyalism” was never certain and they were often outspoken critics of Toryism.

Le Grand Dérangement (ch 6): See Acadian Expulsion.

leisure time (ch 10): Leisure or “free” time is what is left over after work obligations are completed. In 18th and 19th century agricultural societies leisure time was associated seasonal lulls between harvest and seeding, sometimes between seeding and harvest. In early urban societies working people were assumed to have little leisure time outside of Sundays, which was officially or ideally given over as a day for prayer and reflection.

liberal professionals (ch 10): Typically lawyers, physicians, notaries, accountants, journalists, printers and publishers, surveyors, and engineers. This was a cadre of urban skilled workers who were neither wage labourers nor members of the merchant elite or landed gentry (like the seigneurs).

life-course (ch 10): Refers to a way of understanding and studying the lives of people in history by highlighting changing contexts, needs, abilities, and roles at different points in life.

little ice age (ch 2): The term given to a hemispheric downturn in average temperatures that lasted from the 1600s (earlier in some locales) to the 1820s. Much of North America and northwestern Europe was affected.

longhouse (ch 2): A style of domestic building that typically accommodates an extended family and serves as a storehouse for equipment, food, and other belongings. Longhouses take many forms in Canadian Aboriginal cultures, use different kinds of materials, and may be fixed, movable, or something in-between.

Louisiana Purchase (ch 7): The sale of the Louisiana Territory by Napoleon to the United States. n 1800 France briefly reacquired the territory, which encompassed the western half of the Mississippi drainage (that is, from New Orleans to southern Alberta and Saskatchewan). Less than three years he ater decided to forgo attempts to rebuild New France and sold it back to the United States.
Loyalists (ch 7): British-American colonists who were opposed to the revolutionary position struck by other colonists. At the end of the Revolution, many Loyalists joined an exodus to other parts of British America, particularly Nova Scotia and Quebec.

maize (ch 2): Commonly referred to today as “corn,” a modified crop form of a grass known as teosinte. Maize was first developed by Mesoamerican societies.

Manifest Destiny (ch 13): Widespread belief in the United States during the 19th century that America was destined – that is, intended by God – to conquer and occupy most if not all of North America.

marchands (ch 7): The Canadien merchants of Montreal, as opposed to the post-Conquest British and British-American merchants who arrived to take over the fur trade.

Maritime Archaic (ch 2): A variant on the Archaic tradition. Maritime Archaic cultures were found on the Atlantic coast.

maritime-based fur trade (ch 13): The European and American practice dating from the 1770s of trading up and down the coast from ships, rather than establishing fixed positions on land.

Marxism (ch 1): An ideology and mode of analysis associated with the 19th-century German philosopher, Karl Marx. This body of theory argues that political and social relations in the past and present are determined principally by economic structures. As an ideology it argues for changes to productive relations that will result in greater equity and the end of social class barriers.

Massey, Massey-Harris, Massey-Ferguson (ch 9): Founded in 1847 by Daniel Massey, as the Newcastle Foundry and Machine Factory, it merged in 1891 with A. Harris, Son & Company, and then with the Ferguson Company in 1953, becoming Massey-Harris-Ferguson, which was shortened a few years later to Massey-Ferguson. The various incarnations of the Massey industrial project have been global leaders in the production of farm equipment and a major employer of industrial labour in central Canada.

Master and Servants Acts (ch 11): A suite of laws dating from the 18th and 19th century that sought to regulate the relationships between employers and employees. Formed the bedrock of industrial relations law, although these acts were heavily weighted to the advantage of employers and were designed to minimize the ability of labour organizations to interfere with the ability of business to act freely.

matriarchy (ch 2): A political system in which authority resides with females.

matrilineal, matrilinear (ch 2): Familial relations that focus on the mother’s family, with property, status, and clan affiliation being conferred through the female line.

matrilocal (ch 2): A social system in which married couples reside in or in close proximity to the family/parents of the wife.

Mechanics’ Institutes (ch 10): centres for adult literacy education, debate, and access to reading materials.

medicine line (ch 14): Reputedly a Plains Aboriginal term for the 49th parallel boundary between the British-Canadian plains and the American west.
megafauna (ch 2): Pre-contact animals found globally whose modern descendants are considerably smaller.

Mesoamerica (ch 2): The cultural zone containing some of the largest agricultural and urban civilizations in the Americas prior to contact, Mesoamerica stretches across almost all of Mexico and south through much of Central America.

Métis, métis (ch 8): Capitalized, it refers to people of mixed ancestry (European and Aboriginal) who self-identify with a synthetic culture which evolved mainly around the Great Lakes and on the Plains. Not capitalized, it is sometimes used to refer to people in British North America (and sometimes in the United States) of combined European and Aboriginal ancestry.

Michif (ch 8): A hybrid language used by the Métis.

Michilimackinac (ch 5): An important centre of trade in the pre- and post-contact periods, historically dominated by the Odawa and Ojibwe. Located at the narrows between Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, Michilimackinac was used as a mission centre by the Jesuits and, later, as a trading post site by the North West Company.

middle class (ch 10): Also called the bourgeoisie. Ranks include liberal professionals, small merchants, educators. Distinct from the working-class (who subsist on wages) and the upper class (whose wealth derives mainly from property and position).

Middle Passage (ch 3): Shipping lanes between Africa and the Americas on which the principal cargo was captive humans, enslaved in west Africa. Mortality rates were as high as 20% on the voyage.

Mi'kmaq War (ch 6): See Father Le Loutre’s War.

miscégnation (ch 5): Derived from the Latin verb for “to mix” and the noun for “kind,” the term that has been used for the last two centuries to describe interracial marriage.

Mississippian culture (ch 2): An agricultural, town-centred civilization that thrived from ca. 500-1400 CE. Located at the heart of North America and connected by the river and lakes network to lands from the Rocky Mountains to the Gaspé, the Mississippian culture had a powerful impact on the societies that followed.

Montgomery’s Tavern (ch 11): The site of the main confrontation between Radical-Reform rebels and colonial troops in Upper Canada in 1837.

mound builders (ch 2): One of the distinguishing features of the Hopewellian and Mississippian cultures was the erection of large complexes of earthworks.

Mourning Wars (ch 2): Associated principally with the Haudenosaunee and impacting virtually all their neighbours. The wide-ranging series of conflicts that covered much of what is now southern Ontario and the Ohio Valley. One goal was to acquire captives who would be adopted into the captor’s community so as to replace population lost to epidemics or earlier wars/raids.

multiculturalism (ch 1): Both a phenomenon (that is, the relatively equitable co-existence within a community of people from distinct cultural traditions) and a policy (i.e.: one that embraces diversity). There were, therefore,
multicultural communities in pre-Confederation Canada but *multiculturalism* only became widely supported in the post-World War II era.

**Napoleonic Wars (ch 7):** A series of wars involving France and much of the rest of Europe from 1803-1815. The War of 1812 was a chapter in the larger conflict.

**National School (ch 1):** Sometimes called Nationalist History or National History School. Refers to accounts of the past that emphasize the growth and evolution of the nation-state as the proper focus of historical studies, as opposed to social or economic relations.

**nativism, nativist (ch 10):** Nativism is the privileging of established residents over newcomers. A nativist takes the position that their own rights are greater than that of immigrants by dint of having been resident longer (though sometimes not for very much longer).

**navvies (ch 9):** The men who laboured on the earliest British navigation canals. Many were Irish and, subsequently, Irish Catholic labourers on large projects (canals, railways) were referred to indiscriminately as navvies.

**New Amsterdam (ch 6):** The Dutch colonial settlement at the mouth of the Hudson River in what was called New Netherland. Subsequently renamed New York.

**New Caledonia (ch 8):** Technically the north-central part of what is now mainland British Columbia and an administrative centre at Fort St. James. In practice, "New Caledonia" was used to encompass most of (if not all) of the mainland colony.

**New England (ch 6):** In the pre-Revolutionary years refers to the British colonies of Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, along with the territory roughly described now by the State of Maine.

**New Left (ch 1):** A political movement in the 1960s and 1970s that opposed the U.S. action in the Vietnam War and supported the civil rights movement. Influential on university campuses at mid-century, the New Left had an impact on historical and other academic studies.

**new social history (ch 1):** A school of historical studies that drew attention to race, gender, and social class as defining features of historical experience, new social history developed a view of past societies from the "bottom up."

**New Spain (ch 3):** From 1522 to 1821, a territory stretching, at its peak, from the north coast of South America through Central America and Mexico to California, and what is now the American Southwest. It also included Florida, which was separated from the rest of New Spain by the French possession, Louisiana.

**Ninety-Two Resolutions (ch 11):** A list of demands put forward by Louis-Joseph Papineau and the *Parti patriote* in 1834 calling for extensive political reforms. Westminster replied with the **Ten Resolutions**.

**Nootka Crisis (ch 13):** Conflicting Spanish and British claims to sovereignty and the right to trade along the Pacific northwest coast culminated in a diplomatic incident that was resolved in the Nootka Conventions of 1790-1794. Despite the negotiations taking place at Yuquot, Mowachat interests and claims to sovereignty were disregarded.
Nor’Westers (ch 8): See North West Company.

normal schools (ch 10): Teacher training institutions.

North West Company (NWC) (ch 8): A joint-stock fur trading company established in Montréal after the Conquest, led by British-American and Scottish merchants. The principle competition to the HBC.

Northwest Indian War (ch 7): (1785-1795) Part of an ongoing attempt to insulate the Ohio Valley and what the Americans now referred to as their Northwest Territory against American invasion. Also known as Little Turtle’s War. Followed on Pontiac’s Rebellion and anticipated Tecumseh’s War.

northwest passage (ch 8): A search-for water passage connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific.

North-Western Territories (ch 8): Lands draining into the Arctic Ocean and thus not within the charter of the HBC. Includes much of northern British Columbia and Alberta and what are now called the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Numbered Treaties (ch 8): A total of 11 treaties negotiated between Canada and Aboriginal peoples (principally in the West) in the post-Confederation period.

nuptiality (ch 10): The incidence of marriage in a population.

nursery of the navy (ch 6): The Grand Banks and other fisheries in the northwest Atlantic that were regarded by imperial powers in Europe as training grounds for sailors and recruitment grounds for their respective navies.

Oddfellows (ch 10): One of the oldest benevolent or friendly societies, the Oddfellows (or Odd Fellows) may have sprung out of the guild movement. The Oddfellows developed personal and medical insurance schemes for their members.

oolichan (ch 2): An anadromous fish prized on the west coast for its high oil content.

oral histories (ch 1): Non-written accounts of events in the past. These can be accounts provided by contemporaries of the events they describe or part of an oral tradition, which suggests a multi-generational account that is preserved carefully in the retelling. Oral histories are particularly important in the study of non-literate societies.

oral tradition (ch 2): Generally refers to an account of events that took place in earlier generations and which is transmitted by oral storytelling (as opposed to a written version). Distinctions used to be drawn sharply between oral tradition and oral history, which was regarded as accounts of events within the lifetime of the teller. More recently oral history is equated with oral tradition and has been granted greater respect for its reliability.

Orange Lodges, Orange Order (ch 10): Founded in the 1790s in Northern Ireland, the Orange Order is a severely anti-Catholic fraternal society that advances the privileges of Protestants. Characterized as well by its loyalty to the Crown.

Oregon Treaty, 1846 (ch 13): Settled the boundary between the United States and the British territories west of the Rockies at 49°N.
Pacific Fur Company (PFC) (ch 8): Created by the New York-based entrepreneur, John Jacob Astor, the PFC established Fort Astoria on the northwest coast but lasted for less than three years as competition in the North American fur trade.

Paleo-Indian (ch 2): The peoples occupying parts of the Americas until about 8000 BPE.

Paleolithic (ch 2): The period associated with the concept of “stone-age,” referring to human technological development before extensive use of metals. Dates vary from continent to continent and region to region.

parliament (ch 3): Generally, an elective assembly of representatives engaged for the purpose of governing the whole or advising the Crown. Specifically, the English/British elected assembly in Westminster. After 1867, refers as well to the Canadian elected assembly.

patrilineal (ch 11): Lines of inheritance that descend through fathers to their children. Compare with matrilineal.

Pays d’en Haut (ch 6): A part of New France containing much of what is now Ontario, the whole of the Great Lakes, and notionally all the lands draining into them. Extended as far as the Upper Mississippi and the Missouri. Translates roughly into the “upper country.”

peace, order, and good government (ch 14): Refers to Section 91 of the British North America Act, 1867, and sometimes abbreviated to “POGG.” This is the residual powers section of the act. Section 91 states that, beyond that which is clearly allocated as provincial responsibilities and federal responsibilities, anything that is otherwise necessary to the “peace, order, and good government” of the country is to be handled by Ottawa.

pemmican (ch 8): A food made mainly from bison meat and fat and berries, which was the staff of life for western fur traders and was literally the fuel that drove the fast-moving, long-distance NWC canoe brigades.

Pennmican Proclamation (ch 8): Imposed by the Red River Colony when famine threatened the settlement in mid-winter 1814, issued by Governor Miles Macdonnell (1767-1828). Was meant to stop the export of pemmican to NWC forts in the west and retain it for the HBC’s settlers.

Pennsylvania Dutch (ch 7): German settlers in Pennsylvania, many of whom moved to Nova Scotia shortly after the Conquest.

petroglyphs (ch 2): Images carved into rock.

philanthropist, philanthropy (ch 10): Philanthropy equates very closely to charity, though on a significant scale. A philanthropist is someone with sufficient wealth to engage in charitable works.

pictographs (ch 2): Images painted onto rock and other surfaces.

Plains of Abraham (ch 6): Located near to the Citadel of Quebec, the site of what proved to be a pivotal battle between British and French/Canadian/Aboriginal forces in September 1759.

planters (ch 6): Some 2,000 settlers in Nova Scotia in the period between the Acadian Expulsion and the 1780s drawn from New England.
**polygyny** (ch 5): Describes a plural marriage in which more than one woman share the same husband.

**Pontiac** (ch 5): Also known as Obwandiyag. Pontiac (ca.1720-1769) was an Odawa (Ottawa) leader who launched a campaign against the British at the end of the Seven Years’ War in the region around Fort Detroit.

**potlatch** (ch 2): A ceremonial event mounted by most Northwest Coast peoples and many in the interior of what is now British Columbia. It involves the giving away of property at an event marking, typically, a succession, a marriage, or a death. Accumulating goods for an impressive potlatch was an important mechanism for attaining social status for the host and, also, redistributing wealth through a system of related villages.

**post-contact** (ch 2): The years after documented encounters between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans. Post-contact typically describes a relatively short period: although our current society is technically “post-contact” it makes little sense to use the term that way.

**potlatch** (ch 13): A ceremonial event common across the Pacific northwest. Involves the giving of gifts by the host to mark a life-course event like an inheritance or succession.

**pre-contact** (ch 2): The period before first documented encounters between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans. Pre-contact societies may also be proto-contact societies, depending on circumstances.


**presentist fallacy** (ch 1): The belief that the events of the past are directly responsible for conditions in the present. Presentism often ignores intervening events. It also tends to thank the past for positives (such as current freedoms) while it seldom holds the past accountable for liabilities (such as a lacklustre economy, continuing struggles over equality, etc.).

**primary sources** (ch 1): Original historical resources, such as diaries, letters, and government inquiries.

**primogeniture** (ch 6): System of inheritance that favours the eldest male offspring. Compare with coparcenary.

**proletarianized** (ch 10): The de-skillling of work and work processes.

**proprietors** (ch 7): See absentee landlords.

**Protestant Reformation** (ch 3): Beginning ca. 1517, a movement to reform the Catholic Church and many of its practices. Resulted in a split between reformers and the Papacy and the rise of distinct sects, including the Church of England, the Scottish Presbyterian Church, Methodism, Puritanism, Quakerism, Lutheranism, and many others.

**proto-contact** (ch 2): The period of indirect influence of Europeans on Aboriginal peoples. Some of the effects of contact ran ahead of direct encounters. For example, diseases and/or trade goods might be passed from one Aboriginal community that had experienced face-to-face contact to a great many others that had not.

**Province of Quebec** (ch 7): Created by the Act of Proclamation (1763), included lands from Detroit to the Gaspé but removed the Ohio Valley and the west from Québec’s (Canada’s) control.
provisional government (ch 14): Generally, an emergency or interim administration. In the case of Red River (Manitoba) the government established under Louis Riel’s leadership when the Council of Assiniboia dissolved and before the Canadian administration was able to legitimately seize power.

public houses, pubs (ch 10): Facilities providing food, drink, and often a place to stay.

public markets (ch 10): A space – sometimes a structure – built by the local municipality to provide for the sale of farm and food products.

Puget Sound Agricultural Company (PSAC) (ch 13): Established in 1838-39 by the HBC to provide food for its posts and surpluses for sale to the Russian American Company.

quantitative historical technique (ch 1): Many historical methods take advantage of statistical sources rather than (or in addition to) qualitative sources like diaries and personal letters. Tax ledgers, census manuscripts, land surveys, and many kinds of church records provide enough information for us to work toward aggregate knowledge of people in the past.

Quebec Act (1774) (ch 7): Also called the British North America Act, 1774, not to be confused with the British North America Act of 1867, the legislation that restored the Ohio Valley and the northwestern Pays d’en Haut to the Province of Québec, provided official recognition of the rights of Catholics in the colony, and restored the Coutume de Paris and the ability of the Catholic Church to collect tithes. It recognized the rights of seigneurs and irritated the Thirteen Colonies where it was seen as cheating the Appalachian colonies of their prize in the Ohio and was grouped with the other Intolerable Acts. It is regarded as a partial cause of the American Revolution.

Québec Resolutions (ch 14): See Seventy-two Resolutions.

Quiet Revolution (ch 1): A political and social phenomenon in post-World War II Quebec that saw the power of the clergy and conservative elements eclipsed by a liberal-nationalist movement.


Recollets (ch 4): A Franciscan order whose members were the first missionaries in New France, arriving in 1615. The Recollets are credited with the first batch of beer in New France (1620) and were responsible for recruiting the Jesuit Order into the missionary field in Canada in 1625. Expelled from New France in 1629, they returned in 1670 and served until their numbers were depleted after the Conquest.

reconquista (ch 3): Episodes of Spanish-Christian resistance to Spanish/Moorish-Islamic control of the Iberian peninsula, lasting from the eighth or ninth century CE culminating in the surrender of Granada in 1492.

Red River Colony (ch 8): Selkirk Colony, also called Assiniboia.

Red River cart (ch 8): Two-wheeled vehicle with large spoked and detachable wooden wheels on an axle supporting a flat-bed. Sometimes covered, usually pulled by oxen. Wheels could be removed to enable floating as a raft across rivers and streams. Definitive technology arising from Métis culture.
regicide (ch 6): The murder of a king.

representation-by-population (ch 11): A series of demands assembled by the Parti patriote under the leadership of Louis-Joseph Papineau in 1834.

republicanism (ch 11): In British North America a pro-democracy movement; anti-monarchical and modelled on the American republic and, to a lesser degree, the French republic.

residual powers (ch 14): Responsibilities not clearly demarcated and described in the constitution. In a federal system the residual powers typically belong to the central government. This was the intent of Section 91 of the British North America Act.

respectability (ch 10): As social class structures congealed in the 19th century the notion of “respectability” gained importance as a way of offsetting snobbery with visible demonstrations (through physical appearance, hygiene, etc.) of moral character.

responsible government (ch 11): Responsible government is often misconstrued for ‘government that is responsible to the people;’ it is something significantly different from that. It is the principle that the executive council should be subject to the approval of the elected assembly and that, should it lose that approval, the executive council can be dismissed by the elected assembly. Under the Constitutional Act of 1791, the executive council was entirely appointed; under the Act of Union of 1840-41, the executive was in practice elected.

revisionist (ch 1): Historians who re-evaluate history and revise it based on new understandings. As a critical term, “revisionist” is sometimes used to describe historians who change histories for political purposes.

Rideau Canal (ch 9): Completed in 1826, and Upper Canadian canal linking Bytown (Ottawa) with Kingston. Unlike the Welland and Lachine Canals, the principal purpose of the Rideau was colonial defence. In the event of an American invasion of the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes, troops could be moved between Montreal and the Kingston area via the canal.

Rupert’s Land (ch 8): According to the HBC’s charter of 1670, all the lands draining into Hudson Bay. Includes northwestern Quebec, northern Ontario, most of Manitoba, some of central Saskatchewan and Alberta, as well as southeastern Nunuvat.

Russian American Company (RAC) (ch 13): Chartered in 1799, the RAC was principally focused on the sea otter fur trade and also established outposts in Alta California and Hawai‘i.

Sapa Inca (ch 3): Quechua for “the only Inca,” the monarch of the Incan Empire. Atahualpa was the last person to hold this title.

scientific racism (ch 10): A form of racism that relies on categorization of racialized qualities/traits and measures physiological and genetic features as a means of demonstrating inherent differences in intelligence, morality, and ability. Distinct from earlier forms of racism based on religious belief, for example, scientific racism gained popularity from the mid-19th century on.

sea otter pelts (ch 13): On the west coast the principal fur traded by Aboriginal communities to European and American buyers for sale in the Chinese marketplace.
**seasonal labour, seasonal labourers** (ch 9): Agricultural and resource extraction industries in particular depend on the seasonal availability of labour. Spring for planting, autumn for harvesting on farms; winter for the seal hunt and for logging in the 19th century; summer for salmon runs. Pre-industrial societies often depend on the seasonal work but it continued to be a feature of life in the industrial era.

**second wave feminism** (ch 1): Associated principally with the 1960s and 1970s, second wave feminism focused on systemic discriminations in domestic and public environments, calling for equality in pay/treatment in the workplace, an end to sexism, and legislation to protect women’s reproductive rights.

**secondary sources** (ch 1): Documents that examine primary documents and provide an interpretation. Historical studies of past events are, by definition, secondary sources.

**seigneurs, seigneurie** (ch 4): The seigneurial system in New France and especially in the colony of Canada sought to reproduce elements of the French feudal system. Although some of the seigneurs in Canada were nobles, most were military officers and members of the clergy. Rent values were based on rates set by the Crown, not on the scarcity of land or labour. Seigneurs had to provide their tenants (censitaires, habitants) with a gristmill (the use of which was essentially taxed) and the tenants provided an annual round of labour (corvée), which might involve road building or erecting a chapel.

**Selkirk Colony** (ch 8): Red River Colony, also called Assiniboia.

**Senate** (ch 13): The Senate was conceived as an appointed upper chamber similar to the House of Lords. Distribution of seats was intended to be unrelated to population so that each province (or at least each region) would have significant representation. Members of the Senate are described as senators, not as Members of Parliament, even though the Senate is a part of Parliament. The role of the Senate is to review legislation and, where needed, suggest refinements. Because senators do not have to report to an electorate they are, theoretically, free to consider laws without bending to local pressures. It is for this reason that the Senate is sometimes referred to as the “house of sober second thought.”

**Seventy-Two Resolutions** (ch 14): Also known as the *Québec Resolutions*, these were the proposals drafted (mostly by Macdonald) at the Quebec Conference in 1864. These were forwarded to Westminster where they were further refined at the London Conference of 1866. They formed the outlines of the federal constitution as presented in the *British North America Act* of 1867.

**single-industry towns** (ch 10): Often also company towns, these are communities in which one industry predominates and is even exclusive. Mining and other resource-extraction communities are often single-industry towns but a concentration of productive capacity around textiles or metal manufacturing might also manifest the qualities of a single-industry town.

**Skraelingar** (ch 3): Term used by the Norse/Vikings to describe Aboriginal North American peoples they encountered between Greenland and Newfoundland. Probably applied to Thule and Innu in particular, perhaps to Beothuk as well.

**Southeastern Ceremonial Complex** (ch 2): The religion associated with the Mississippian cultures. Many features of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex were shared with Aboriginal cultures in southern Canada.

**squared timber** (ch 9): Logs that have been “squared” so that they can be stacked more tightly for shipping. During the Napoleonic Wars the usual sources of lumber (needed especially for naval shipbuilding) were closed.
to Britain by French blockades. Timber producers in British North America were called upon to rapidly increase production, and stacking them tightly maximized the number of logs that could be shipped to Britain.

**Stadacona (ch 3):** The village of the St. Lawrence Iroquois at or near the current site of Quebec City.

**staple (ch 6):** A raw material or unprocessed product. Fish and furs were primary staples in the early colonial economies of New France and British America. Lumber and grain were later staple exports from New France and British North America.

**staple theory (ch 9):** Or “staple thesis,” argues that an economy based on natural resources or other simple, unprocessed goods will develop along certain lines. In the case of New France and British North America, the dominant economic activities were obtaining and exporting a limited number of staples: furs, fish, timber, and some minerals. None of these required a significant population in the colony; none were processed in North America; all value-added occurred in Europe, as did most consumption. The Canadian economic historian Harold Innis argued in the 1930s that the staple focus of the economy constrained colonial and national development, held back industrialization and diversification, and shaped government and social relations.

**status (ch 11):** In the context of laws affecting Aboriginal peoples from the mid-19th century on, the notion that some Aboriginal people have official standing as Aboriginal peoples and that the criteria behind this "status" is determined not by the Aboriginal community but by the state.

**status quo ante bellum (ch 6):** A term used in treaty-making meaning a return to how things were before the war.

**street arab (ch 12):** An impoverished and underprivileged child who survives by means of begging or stealing.

**subsistence farming (ch 9):** The style of farming that enough and a sufficient variety of crops to sustain its operators (typically, the farming family). Because it does not produce a surplus (beyond, perhaps, enough to engage in barter with other farms), the farm owners does not have anything to sell. Their ability to add capacity through capital investment is thus highly limited.

**Sulpicians (ch 4):** Operating out of the Parisian parish of Saint-Sulpice (from which their name derives), the Sulpicians were a wealthy order without a vow of poverty. This distinguished them from the more austere Jesuits and Récollets.

**sun dance (ch 2):** A renewal ceremony celebrated by many Plains peoples. It was sponsored by an individual who wished to give to his tribe or to thank or petition the supernatural through an act of self-sacrifice for the good of the group.

**sweated labour (ch 10):** An industrial workplace in which the labour is hard, the hours long, and the wages low. Sometimes associated with piece work that might be completed at home and not in the factory itself.

**tariff policies (ch 9):** A tax imposed on imported goods. Generally this is done to make the purchase of domestically produced goods more attractive.

**<taxation without representation (ch 7):** A principle espoused by American colonists in the 1770s articulating the view that British law forbade the seizing of a citizen's property by the state without his consent (which could
be given by an elected representative in Parliament). As the colonies had no representatives in Parliament, the colonists maintained that they could not be taxed.

telegraph (ch 11): Communications technology that permits the transmission of a message electronically across significant distances. Characterized in the Victorian era by the use of lengths of telegraph wire which ran on posts parallel to the railroads and thus kept stations in touch with one another.

temperance movements (ch 10): A crusade to reduce or even end the consumption of alcohol. Became a widespread phenomenon during the 19th century with the increase of visible urban drunkenness. The movement was characteristically championed by middle- and upper-class women.

Ten Resolutions (ch 11): In response to the Parti patriote’s Ninety-Two Resolutions, the British Colonial Secretary, John Russell, submitted to Parliament a counter-proposal which ignored all of the Patriots’ demands.

teosinte (ch 2): A variety of grass that was modified into maize by Aboriginal peoples of Mesoamerica.

threshing machines (ch 9): Mechanism for separating grain from straw and chaff. First developed in the last 18th century, they became more effective in the second quarter of the 19th century. They were usually powered by horses, sometimes by wind. Mechanization of threshing reduced significantly the amount of labour needed per acre of wheat at harvest time. It also created a specialist, itinerant workforce: the threshing crew.

Thule (ch 8): Arctic culture that evolved into Inuit culture. The Thule migrated across and occupied the Arctic mainland and islands beginning about 1000 CE and reached Labrador and Greenland ca. 1300 CE.

Tories (ch 7): Associated with Loyalists in the American Revolution whose philosophical position was opposed to the Whiggish/republican stance of Thomas Paine and the Patriots.

total fertility rate (TFR) (ch 10): The number of births per 1000 women aged 15-45 per annum.

Treaty of 1818 (ch 8): A treaty signed by Britain and the United States recognizing the 49th parallel from Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains as the boundary between the United States and British North America; also established the Columbia District (a.k.a. Oregon Territory) as an area of joint jurisdiction for a period of 10 years.

Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) (ch 6): Concluded the War of the Austrian Succession. Restored the status quo ante bellum in North America.

Treaty of Ghent (1814-1815) (ch 7): Intended to end the War of 1812 between Britain and the United States. The treaty was agreed to in 1814 but not signed into law by the American Senate until February 1815. The treaty restored the status quo ante bellum between British North America and the United States, which meant that Britain was removed from the American Northwest, leaving the Aboriginal population without an ally to help defend their interests.

Treaty of Paris (1765) (ch 6): Ended the Seven Years’ War. France ceded all of its territory east of the Mississippi (including all of Canada, Acadia, and Île Royale) to Britain and granted Louisiana and lands west of the Mississippi to its ally Spain. Britain returned to France the sugar islands of Guadeloupe. France retained St. Pierre and Miquelon along with fishing rights on the Grand Banks.
**Treaty of Paris (1783) (ch 7):** Ended the American Revolution (War of Independence). Not to be confused with the Treaty of Paris, 1763. Britain recognized the independence and sovereignty of the United States of America. Boundaries were established (and later disputed) between the United States and British North America. The United States was to compensate Loyalists for lost property, which never occurred. See also Jay’s Treaty.

**Treaty of Ryswick (1697) (ch 6):** Terminated the War of the League of Augsburg. Restored the status quo ante bellum in North America.

**Treaty of Tordesillas (ch 3):** The division in 1494 of the Atlantic world between Portugal and Spain. The former acquired Brazil while the latter was acknowledged by the other to have a prior claim to the rest of the Americas.

**Treaty of Utrecht (1713) (ch 6):** Ended the War of the Spanish Succession. French claims on territory in Newfoundland and on Hudson Bay were ceded to Britain as was Acadia (Nova Scotia) except for Île Royale and Île Saint-Jean.

**Triad (ch 2):** Also called the “three sisters,” the crops of maize, beans, and squash, which were developed in Mesoamerica and diffused across the Americas centuries before contact.

**Triangular trade (ch 3):** Commercial traffic beginning with goods from northwestern Europe traded into ports along the west African coast for slaves, ivory, and other commodities, which were then shipped across the Atlantic (the Middle Passage) to colonies in the Americas where they were traded for plantation products, which were subsequently ferried north and east back to northwestern Europe.

**Trip men (ch 8):** See voyageurs.

**Truck system (ch 9):** A system of credit extended to workers by employers or buyers. Sometimes company stores would extend credit to company employees, deducting the amount owing from the next payday. In the Newfoundland fisheries, merchants would provide fishing crews with credit for nets and other necessities for which they would be reimbursed with a share of the catch. Like all credit systems, the truck system worked better for the creditor than the debtor.

**Ultramontanism, ultramontanists (ch 11):** In British North America, Catholic clergy who took their institutional, spiritual, and political leadership from the Vatican.

**United Empire Loyalists (ch 7):** An honorific title taken by Loyalists and their descendants to celebrate their migration to British North America at the end of the Revolution. Typically signals a strong Tory bent.

**Upper Fort Garry (ch 8):** Located near the heart of what is now Winnipeg. Lower Fort Garry and Upper Fort Garry were important administrative and shipping centres along the Red River system.

**Urban professionals (ch 10):** See liberal professions.

**Vertical integration (ch 9):** A production model in which the various stages in a supply chain are owned by the same individual or company. For example, 19th century railway companies sometimes owned iron and coal mines, foundries where steel was produced and cast, machine shops that manufactured the rolling stock (all of which was owned by the railway – and not just the tracks), and warehouses, grain elevators, and hotels at all the major stations along the route.
Vinland (ch 3): The name given by the Norse/Vikings to the east coast of North America.

Virgin Soil Epidemics (ch 5): Attributed to the anthropologist/historian Alfred Crosby, the term describing a situation in which a disease/bacteria/virus discovers a population with no natural immunities arising from previous encounters. Very high mortalities are a typical consequence.

voyageurs (ch 8): Members of fur trade business whose principal task was to move furs, people, and materials across great distances. Some voyageurs were also traders.

voluntary family size limitation (ch 10): Also referred to as “birth-control.” The attraction of building smaller families grew in the 19th century as the wage-earning potential or economic potential of children declined.

voluntary associations (ch 10): See benevolent societies.

War Hawks (ch 7): American politicians mainly from the south and from the west who were angered by British predations on American shipping out of their ports and British-Aboriginal harassment of settlers and American regiments. Their enthusiasm for war finally won out over New England caution in 1812.

Wars of Religion (ch 3): A series of wars fought in Europe arising ostensibly from divisions within Christianity. The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) distracted the Crown from transatlantic enterprises.

Welland Canal (ch 9): Opened in 1829, linking Lakes Erie and Ontario.

wheat boom, wheat economy (ch 9): The appearance of a widespread monoculture in farm output, in this case the rise of wheat as the principal crop or staple that dominated the economy, including exports and economic policy making.

Whig (ch 7): A mutable term associated with the British Whigs (a radical/liberal political party), the American Patriots/Whigs (revolutionaries in 1775-1783), and 19th century Canadian liberals. Common features include a challenge to the prerogatives of the Crown, a suspicion of Catholicism, and belief in individual rights and liberties. In the American colonies it developed into a form of republicanism.

whisky traders (ch 8): Principally independent American fur traders whose principal stock was alcohol.

wind, wood, and water (ch 9): A shorthand term for the Maritime economy of the 19th century, which was dominated by timber production, (wooden) shipbuilding, and the export sector, which was based on sailing vessels.

winter counts (ch 2): A record of events recorded in the form of pictures; associated mainly with Siouan cultures.

wintering partners (ch 8): The prominent NWC employees who spent the year in the West. As part of the decision making process, they would meet annually with the Montreal agents at Fort William where company-wide plans would be made in council. Also called hibernants

XY Company (ch 8): The New North West Company.
**Year Without Summer (ch 8):** The summer of 1816, marked by a very poor growing season caused by the explosion of Mount Tambora in Indonesia.

**York boats (ch 8):** Heavy wide draught wooden dinghies with sails that would travel between Hudson Bay and the foothills of the Rockies along the North Saskatchewan.

**York Factory Express (ch 8):** see Columbia Express.

**anti-clerical:** Associated with the secularist movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, anti-clericals took the position that the role of the church was the saving of souls and not schools and other institutions and certainly not politics.
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