The Old Chieftain’s New Image:  
Shaping the Public Memory of Sir John A. Macdonald  
in Ontario and Quebec, 1891-1967

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of History  
in conformity with the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
December 2010

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Abstract

Sir John A. Macdonald has been a political figure frequently referenced in Canadian history. Yet no study has explored the evolution of his public memory. This study provides a focused examination of the attempts by Canada’s federal political parties to shape Macdonald’s public memory. The period of study began immediately following the death of Sir John A. Macdonald on June 6, 1891 and continued until the Centennial Celebrations of Confederation in 1967. The study first aims to identify and analyze events and activities organized or supported by Canada’s federal political class which provide opportunities to shape Macdonald’s public memory. The study then explores through the lens of official memory their motivation to engage in his commemoration and to shape his memory in specific ways. The objective of this study is to answer two specific research questions. The first asks if Canada’s federal political leaders were interested and successful in shaping Macdonald’s public memory during the period of study to allow the emergence of a seemingly national hegemonic figure acceptable to both political parties. The second asks if the federal political parties’ attempts to depict Macdonald as a unifying national symbol were picked up in the media in Ontario and Quebec and in both official languages, thereby reinforcing his hegemonic status for the federal political class.

This study is divided into seven chapters, each exploring the efforts of various federal political leaders to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald. Chapter One provides an introductory overview. Chapter Two focuses on the role of the governing Liberal-Conservative Party in shaping Macdonald’s public memory through the unveiling of Macdonald memorials in four Canadian cities in the 1890s. Chapter Three explores the efforts of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal Party to offer a different interpretation of Macdonald’s public memory. Chapter Four explores the public memory of Sir John A.
Macdonald which emerged from the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations. Chapter Five focuses on the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death in 1941. Chapter Six explores the efforts of Prime Ministers Lester B. Pearson and John Diefenbaker in shaping Macdonald’s public memory in the 1960s. Finally, chapter Seven offers a summary of the conclusions reached by this thesis. The study argues that Macdonald became on a single occasion a seemingly national hegemonic figure acceptable to both political parties and to the media in both official language communities in Ontario and Quebec.
**Acknowledgements**

The writing of a doctoral thesis is a lengthy and solitary process. Its completion, however, rests on a number of interactions with key individuals and institutions. First and foremost, I want to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Caroline-Isabelle Caron, who helped me refine what started off as a broad and unending project. She provided me with the freedom to explore the topic, the wisdom to guide my thoughts, the tools to ensure its development and the time to find my own voice. *Je vous serais toujours très reconnaissant. Merci mille fois.* I also wanted to acknowledge the other members of my thesis committee – Queen’s University Professors Ian McKay, Peter Campbell and Brian Osborne and University of Toronto’s Cecilia Morgan – for their interest in my work and the incredible value of their feedback. Their comments helped refine many arguments. I am very grateful to them all.

Many friends stood by me as I embarked on the writing of this thesis. I thank them all. Among them, a few deserve particular recognition. Boris Stipernitz, PhD, was my source of confidence, my sounding board and my motivator during this long process, made longer by embarking on the PhD as a part-time student. James (Jamie) Trepanier helped to refine my thinking, my argumentation and my writing. I hope to be able to provide him the same level of support and encouragement as he embarks on his own PhD thesis in history at York University. Boris and Jamie filled the gap of the traditional peers within the PhD program, an opportunity I did not get by living hundreds of kilometres away from campus. Beyond the Queen’s University faculty, my main attachment to Queen’s came through my colleague Kathryn (Kate) Muller, PhD, whose friendship I will always cherish.

The completion of this thesis required countless visits to many research centres and libraries. I appreciated the high level of professionalism and assistance I received from the
staff of the following organizations: Library and Archives Canada, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Diefenbaker Canada Centre, Queen’s University Archives, Queen’s University Library, Hamilton Public Library, McGill University Library, Archives of Ontario, Houghton Library at Harvard University, Napanee Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

I am also indebted to the now dissolved Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation for its financial support in furthering my education during my six-year period of employment. A special acknowledgement is due to my then colleagues Norman Riddell, Jocelyn Charron, Anne Motte, Joseph Berger, Andrew Parkin and John Stubbs for their interest in my academic success and for listening to my research findings and my never-ending Sir John A. Macdonald stories. In addition, Margie Layden-Oreto and Fiona Bain-Greenwood were constant sources of encouragement and motivation. They were always eager to read the final draft of each chapter, and to share their thoughts of my work. I am glad to call all these individuals friends.

L’appui de ma famille au cours de mes nombreuses années d’études universitaires doit également être souligné. À mon père, feu Yvon Pelletier, pour son désir de me voir réussir. À ma mère, Nicole Leclair, et à son conjoint, Ronald Leclair, pour leurs mots d’encouragement afin que je puisse réaliser ce projet d’envergure. À mes sœurs, Michelle Pelletier-Proulx et Ginette Matthews, qui ont reconnu l’importance de ce projet pour moi et qui m’ont aussi accompagné durant ce long cheminement. Elles ont reconnues la raison que j’ai dû m’isoler plutôt que passer plus de temps avec eux; leurs conjoints Denis Proulx et Kevin Matthews, et mes neveux et mes nièces – Myriam, Justin, Zachary et Danika – que j’aimerais toujours inconditionnellement.

Finalement, je veux souligner deux enseignants qui ont su développer mon intérêt pour l’histoire politique canadienne à un jeune âge. François Tregonning m’a enseigné plusieurs cours d’histoire à l’École
secondaire catholique l'Héritage. Il m'a permis de découvrir ma passion pour l'histoire par l'entremise de la sienne. Rand Dyck, politicologue à l'Université Laurentienne m'a enseigné mon premier cours universitaire en sciences politiques et m'a encouragé à poursuivre des études dans ce domaine. Ces deux hommes ont influencés mon parcours universitaire et professionnel. Merci.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The strength and the vitality of nations ultimately lie in the ability to advance and sustain unifying national memories. Historian Daniel J. Sherman has argued: “the inability to confront or master certain kinds of memory can haunt nation-states, exposing the fragility of their construction, crippling their politics, even destroying them entirely.”¹ The efforts of creating unifying national memories are both increasingly important and complicated in culturally diverse nations due to their evolving political arrangements. In Canada, the art of commemoration has served as an effort to unite citizens through the development of a mutually acceptable understanding of the past. For example, the presence of two linguistic communities within Canada was a consideration in the preparation of both the Prince of Wales’ visit to the Province of Canada in 1860 and the tercentenary celebrations of Quebec City in 1908.² On both occasions, attempts were made to fashion these events into hegemonic nation-building moments. Both organizing committees faced challenges in their efforts. Nevertheless, historian H. V. Nelles has concluded that Quebec’s tercentenary celebrations resulted in a relatively brief hegemonic moment for English- and French-Canadians.

The creation of imagined communities also requires the efforts of shaping the public memory of historic figures that can unite citizens and build a common understanding of the past. The presence of two linguistic communities in Canada renders yet again the adoption of historical figures as national symbols more complicated. Such national symbols are important, argues the then Dominion Institute executive director Rudyard Griffiths in 2001. He indicates that “the strength of a nation’s identity rests on its citizens sharing a

common body of factual knowledge.” Such factual knowledge could be based on either myths or misrepresentations. Historians Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan have demonstrated that Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord became hegemonic figures for French-Canadians and English-Canadians, respectively, for a short period of time. At the same time, these ‘heroines’ remain relatively unknown beyond their respective linguistic community. Thus, these figures did not result in the development of national symbols.

A 2001 Dominion Institute survey exploring Americans’ level of knowledge of political history found that 89% of participants could identify George Washington as their first president. The public memory of Washington has been utilized by elite members of American society as a seemingly effective tool for national-building as well as a symbol of hegemony among Americans. Despite their ethnically diverse population, Americans continued to be familiar with Washington’s legacy more than two centuries after his death, as reflected in the Dominion Institute poll. Washington would surely be described by French sociologist Emile Durkheim as a totemic entity: an individual raised above others by a society who finds in this individual the principal aspirations that move it but whose apotheosis may not have taken place if left to his or her own merit.

Washington as an American example of a totemic entity leads to the following question: has Canada attempted to transform the public memory of a federal political leader in a way that is acceptable to both linguistic communities for the explicit purpose of nation-building? The objective of this research project is to explore the interest and the success of

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4 Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan, Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002).
selected members of Canada’s elite, notably Canada’s federal political class, in shaping the public memory of Canada’s first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. At the same time, the research explores if the proposed depiction of Macdonald as a unifying national symbol became acceptable to both national political parties and to Ontarians and Quebeckers, as reflected by the media coverage in both official languages. This study builds on previous scholarly research originating both from within and beyond Canada’s borders, and which touches on a variety of important conceptual frameworks, from theories of hegemony and public memory to commemorative events and invented traditions.

**Conceptual Framework**

The process by which attempts are made to render an individual into a hegemonic figure is one of the core pillars of this study. Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci argued that hegemony is generated by means of political and ideological leadership of the dominant class and through a relation of consent as opposed to domination by force. As such, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony differs from previous Marxist scholars that had singled out the need for the political leadership of subordinate classes in a social and economic revolution while ignoring the importance of a hegemonic culture. Political and ideological leadership, argues Gramscian scholar Roger Simon, is “exercised in civil society by persuading the subordinate classes to accept the values and ideas which the dominant class has itself adopted, and by building a network of alliances based on these values.”7 A hegemonic culture is therefore dependent on the ideology of the dominant class being accepted directly or through a consensus-building process among classes.

This process of consensus-building can take on multiple forms, Gramsci suggests. For example, hegemony can be achieved through the control of power of the state and civil

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society (which Gramsci labels the ‘nature of power’) or through re-establishing a dominant class’s hegemony through the extreme reorganization of the state (passive revolution). Hegemony can also be achieved in more subtle ways, especially when dealing with representations of historical figures or identities. For example, hegemony can be achieved through ‘relations of force’ where the dominant class takes into account the interests of other classes and social forces. Thus, a new hegemonic discourse is generated, which differs from the dominant class’s original standpoint. In a similar manner, Gramscian hegemony can result from a ‘national-popular’ approach, which recognizes that a national leadership is impossible to achieve if restricted to one class or political group. Thus popular or democratic ideas are taken into consideration in forming a new hegemonic culture. Finally, Gramsci explores hegemony through ‘common sense’ values. These values, suggests Gramsci, are based on the dominant class’s ideological, political and economic leadership and are accepted by subordinate classes partly unconsciously and without criticism. As such, these ‘common sense’ values offer citizens a lens through which to perceive the world.8 Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony—at once complex and straightforward—provide a new conceptual framework for examining political struggles and national events. However, it will always be difficult to assert at what point hegemony was attained, as hegemony is “never a once-and-for-all achievement of some (unverifiable) majority consensus.”9

The appropriation of an individual by a dominant class is most often linked to the purpose of nation-building and to attenuate political struggles. Obviously hegemonic culture is not static and must constantly take into account the interest of other classes and social forces. Through the application of social and cultural theories, argues Queen’s University

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9 Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Perspective for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 81, no. 3 (September 2000), 638.
historian Ian McKay, scholars can rethink “Canada-as-project” beyond the traditional nationalist and socio-cultural history narratives—the two traditional paradigms in the study of Canadian history—which has tended to focus on fragments of Canadian historical scholarship.10 This ‘third paradigm’ approach will allow us to examine political struggles among imagined communities within the Canadian nation. This research contributes, in all modesty, to the study of the liberal order framework, by examining how the mythical character of a national hegemonic figure has broadened its representations to include those who may not have been compelled by the myth making process of public memory.

In addition to the concept of hegemony, this study’s second conceptual pillar focuses on the theories of collective memory. As we have seen, consensus-building through ‘relations of force,’ ‘national-popular’ approach and ‘common sense’ values can easily be applied to representations of political actors in an attempt to transform them into national hegemonic figures. As we will see, theories of collective memory examine how social groups are able to confirm or refute the content of their memories, thus bringing confidence in their depictions of the past.

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, a student of Emile Durkheim, examined how individuals remember the past in relation to and in interaction with the memories of others. His theoretical work on memory has concluded that memories are shared, passed on, and constructed by social groups—families, religious groups, social classes, for example.11 Through their interactions, their ‘conversations’, social groups confirm or refute the content

of their memories, thus bringing confidence in their depictions of the past.\textsuperscript{12} Within a nation encompassing a heterogeneous population, different groups may adhere to different depictions of the past, thus hindering the formation of one hegemony. Such fragmented visions of the past limit the possibility of creating a Durkheimian totemic entity for the explicit effort of nation-building.

When social groups hold collective memories of the past that separate individuals or that might distance groups from each other, Halbwachs argues that their collective memories will be rearranged. He writes: “we reconstruct (the past) through an effort of reasoning, what happens is that we distort the past, because we wish to introduce greater coherence. It is then reason or intelligence that chooses among the store of recollections, eliminates some of them, and arranges the others according to an order conforming [to] our ideas of the moment.”\textsuperscript{13} As such, Halbwachs asserts that the collective memory of social groups is essentially a reconstruction of the past which seeks to achieve hegemony by adapting historical facts depending on society’s circumstances at any given point in time. Thus some collective memories vanish or become transformed, Halbwachs explains, when they cease to be relevant to current experience. As such, similar patterns emerge in the shaping of collective memories and in the forging of hegemony.

Halbwachs’ pioneering work on collective memory has captured the interest and the imagination of countless disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology and history since the 1980s.\textsuperscript{14} The intensive examination of collective memory has also resulted in more pointed Halbwachsian-based analytical frameworks. For example, British social


\textsuperscript{13} Lewis A. Coser, ed., \textit{Maurice Halbwachs: On Collective Memory}, 183.

\textsuperscript{14} American historian Michael Kammen notes that it was the declaration by the British, French and Brazilian governments of 1980 as the year of national heritage, independently of each other, that sparked interest in connections between collective memory and national identity. See Michael Kammen, \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture} (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 3.
anthropologist Mary Douglas has helped to further define the concept of official memory from the vantage point of institutions. Douglas argues that institutions—governments, private sector, civil society, for example—attempt to shape individual memories for their own benefit, which she labels as official memory, including hiding their influence to gain legitimacy. To achieve this goal, institutions must provide a means to explore the world, to channel citizens’ perceptions into forms comparable with the relations they authorize. Through such actions, Douglas argues, an institution “then starts to control the memory of its members; it causes them to forget experiences incompatible with its righteous image, and it brings to their minds events which sustain the view of nature that is complimentary to itself.” In essence, the theory of official memory focuses on institutions’ efforts to shape collective memory to ensure these memories are complimentary to themselves. As such, these memories focus more on what is being achieved through the institutions’ use of the past than on the historical validity of these official and vernacular memories.

While the use of the past can be used by institutions to generate memories that are complimentary to themselves, representations of the past can also be rearranged specifically to address current political struggles, most frequently through commemorative events or historical references. Halbwachs had also argued that societies choose from the store of recollections to create and reinvent hegemonic symbols while arranging others to conform to ideas of the moment. As such, this additional Halbwachsian-based conceptual framework is often referred to as the theory of the politics of memory. The popularization of the battle of Masada for the Israelis is but one example among many others. American scholars Barry Schwartz, Yael Zerubavel and Bernice M. Barnett concluded that the existence of this battle, which took place in 73 A.D., had been dormant in the collective memory of the region’s

16 Ibid., 112.
Jewish citizens until the rise of Zionism in the 20th century.\(^{17}\) The battle was reintroduced into this imagined community’s collective memory through political rallies and commemorative events as an example of Jewish resistance and resilience. Soldiers who took part in the battle became idealized resistance fighters for the cause of a Jewish state. The revival of the battle of Masada within the Israeli collective memory has since served as a source of inspiration in the continued Jewish struggles.

Through the theories of hegemony and collective memory we have explored so far, the consensus-building process attempts to render acceptable to more subordinate classes the ideological, political and economic leadership of the dominant class. We also know that collective memories undergo a reconstructive process to be acceptable and relevant to a society in constant evolution. Both of these elements, however, work best if confined to a single Andersonian imagined community. Within the Canadian nation, it is clear that there is more than one imagined community. In fact, Benedict Anderson expresses his surprise that English-speaking Canada was not integrated within the English-speaking imagined community south of the border, which emerged in the original thirteen colonies through mass media and trade.\(^{18}\) The efforts to unite the British North American colonies was a more complex task than simply forging a political alliance for the purpose of avoiding American expansionism and ensuring economic survival. Nevertheless, the presence of at least two imagined communities within the Canadian nation, each with its own dominant ideological, political and economic classes, can influence the acceptance of any national hegemonic figure.


There are many monographs and articles that focus on the process and the motivation to shape collective memories of national hegemonic figures in cultural pluralistic societies, examples that will provide insight into the process by which a national hegemonic figure can emerge. As we will see, the creation and the shaping of national hegemonic figures were influenced by the ideological, political or social environments in which they were needed, developed and transmitted.

The popularity of some national hegemonic figures increases over the centuries, notes American sociologist Barry Schwartz, not because citizens discover new facts about them, but because they “regard (this individual) as the perfect vehicle for giving these tangible expressions.”19 For example, Jan Van Riebeeck’s arrival to Cape Town, South Africa in 1652 had remained a footnote in that nation’s history until the “ideological frenzy … in 1952 resurrected Van Riebeeck from obscurity and historical amnesia to become the leading actor on South Africa’s public history stage.”20 The 300th commemorative anniversary of Jan Van Riebeeck’s arrival to South Africa was constructed to validate the European settler nationalist ideology within the country, strengthen ties among South Africans of European descent and assert ideological and political control over the state’s Black population at a time when White rule was being publicly contested. As a result, for white South Africans in 1952, Van Riebeeck became the spirit of apartheid; for the Non-European Unity Movement and the African National Congress, he became the originator of white domination in the country.

Van Riebeeck is not the only example of creating almost overnight a hegemonic figure, albeit limited to South Africans of European descent. The emergence of a national hegemonic figure is as much a reflection of a society’s needs as the historical character of a

former leader. In his monograph on the memory of memories, Michael Kammen offers a chronological approach to how memories were used and shaped during four periods in American history.\textsuperscript{21} Focusing on official and vernacular memories, Kammen concludes that memories at the beginning of the nineteenth century were shaped for the purpose of strengthening civil order and defining national character. In the post-Second World War period, collective memories were shaped by society’s evolving understanding of its past in an era of redistributing political, economic and social powers, thus giving a greater place to minority groups in the nation’s collective memory. Thus, \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory} is a useful tool to understand cultural identity and collective memory in historical terms.

The era of cultural pluralism also affects the collective memories of hegemonic figures and cannot be overlooked in this type of research project. For example, the figure of American president Abraham Lincoln as emancipator emerged during the second half of the twentieth century when civil rights organizations, including the March on Washington organized by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People held in 1963 and the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Freedom in 1993, reinvented Lincoln in their desired image.\textsuperscript{22} University of Virginia historian Merrill D. Peterson argues that elements of Lincoln’s life served as the vehicle to transform Lincoln into the perfect icon for such groups to promote their cause in a period of increasing acceptance of cultural pluralism.\textsuperscript{23} During this same period, national commemorative events often highlighted cultural diversity both in the narrative and in the use of imagery. Australia-born University of Notre-Dame sociologist Lyn Spillman discovered that the theme of

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cultural pluralism and the contribution of non-Anglo-Saxon populations to the development of Australia and the United States were absent during the centennial ceremonies while strongly represented in the bicentennial commemorative events.\(^{24}\)

The acceptance of new social and cultural values has enabled national hegemonic figures with versatile representations to remain relevant in a nation’s collective memory. Other hegemonic figures without this versatility of meaning will fade from the public memory. For example, the upcoming section on the Canadian context provides a description of three Canadian hegemonic figures that have faded from public memory because of changing societal values: Dollard des Ormeaux, Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord.

Similarly, the political context also plays an important role in the emergence and the representations of national hegemonic figures. Despite his often forgotten unpopular tenure as president and commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, General George Washington served as a unifying American figure in times of two national crises: the aftermath of the American War of Independence and that of the Civil War. After the American War of Independence, the task of nation-building became essential, and within this context, the myth of Washington assumed critical importance, one of finding a national hero to unite the American population. From the 1790s to the 1820s (the so-called “heroic generation of founders”), however, Washington received little commemorative attention from political leaders, who showed themselves less likely to worship one of their colleagues.\(^{25}\)

By the mid-1840s, however, Congress had finally agreed to organize a public-subscription campaign to erect a proper monument to Washington in the nation’s capital. It


took more than forty years for the monument to be built, due to political infighting and lack of public financial support for the monument’s construction. In the aftermath of the Civil War, President Ulysses S. Grant agreed to pay the remaining costs to erect the monument, whose dedication ceremony in 1885 revolved around a single theme: national unity. The notion of national unity was an enduring theme surrounding the political legacy of George Washington, replacing the once familiar theme of moral righteousness.\textsuperscript{26} In marking Washington’s bicentenary celebrations in 1932, President Hebert C. Hoover said: “Beyond any other monument built by the hand of man out of clay and stone, this shaft is a thing of the spirit. … It is a pledge in the sight of all mankind, given by Washington’s countrymen, to carry forward the continuing fulfillment of his vision of America.”\textsuperscript{27} Sociologist Barry Schwartz argues that if Washington would not have existed or not become president, “the names of other notable Americans might have been invoked successfully to mobilize support for the new federal system.”\textsuperscript{28} As such, American political leaders found in Washington, exactly as Durkheim described, a man society built up to meet their aspirations, whose vision for the country satisfied them. One way to describe the principal objective of this study is to document if, how and when an historical figure became a Durkheimian totemic entity built up to meet the aspirations of Canadians, and which Canadians at that.

As such, the process by which official memory attempted to make an historical figure a national hegemonic figure will require the analysis of the ideological, social and political environment of commemorative events. These previously outlined case studies provide important insights to the process and the motivation to shape public memories. In most cases, public memories of national hegemonic figures, like Washington, Lincoln and

Van Riebeeck, were influenced by the political, social and ideological environment. Through this process, these individuals became largely mythical persons that differ from their historical character.

While the establishment of national hegemonic figures is linked to efforts of nation-building, it is also linked more broadly to national memory. As such, it is important to incorporate the public memory of a hegemonic figure within national public memory. In the absence of a central government agency responsible for promoting national memory, this task of hegemonic commemorative policies and national myths is often left to political actors and the media, and thus the focus becomes on official memory as defined by Mary Douglas. Pierre Nora would add that historiography as representation of historical events and individuals over time also strengthens and consolidates national memory.29

For some societies, hegemonic national memories are often created by implying that traditions are well-established, even if recently created. British Marxist historian Raphael Samuel was surprised by the Thatcher government’s ability to successfully promote British patriotism during the Falklands War (April-June 1982) by appealing to a glorious national past. Samuel embarked on a quest to demonstrate the mythical idea of nations.30 Samuel and his fellow contributors to a three-volume edited collection confirmed three key themes relative to British national identity. First they found that British national identity has been continuously redrawn since the thirteenth century. Second is the unspoken premise of a continuous national history. Third is the relative newness of patriotism manufactured by

political actors. Thus Samuel argues that the “myth of unchanging national identity … is one which it would be more profitable for historians to subvert than legitimate and endorse.”

Despite efforts to end the myth of unchanging national identity, Samuel needed to compete with the creation of commemorative events seemingly rooted in history. Such is the case for invented traditions, which Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger define as “responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.” From their research, Hobsbawm and Ranger have noted three main functions to invented traditions: to create social cohesion and public identity; to legitimatize institutions or relations of authority; and to socialize people into particular social contexts. Once again, Hobsbawm and Ranger encompass in their definition of invented traditions elements reflective of the theories of public memory and hegemony.

One institution that has benefited from invented traditions throughout the twentieth century has been the British royal family. Historian David Cannadine notes the popular belief that the British Royal family has always excelled in showcasing royal events to capture the interest of its subjects. This perception, Cannadine shows, is a modern fabrication. In comparing royal events from the 1820s to the beginning of Queen Elizabeth II’s reign, David Cannadine concludes that a weakened monarchy, following the adoption as a constitutional monarchy form of government, benefited from government-approved invented royal traditions portraying the monarch as a national hegemonic figure, such as coronations, silver and diamond jubilees. Once very private affairs, royal events such as

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weddings, funerals and coronations were reconceived in the post-First World War period as public events, filled with pomp and pageantry, increasingly commercialized and accessible to the public. Through such state-sanctioned events, the British monarchy became an endearing hegemonic symbol for British subjects, at home and abroad, since the twentieth century.34

Invented traditions, Hobsbawm and Ranger argue, must be repeated to socialize people into a particular context and to become engrained in the public memory. British social anthropologist Paul Connerton helps to comprehend how societies remember, and more importantly how such public memories are transferred to future generations. Using Halbwachs’ work as a starting point, Connerton argues that memory is embodied in social practice, ‘characteristic acts’ that make remembering and transferring common collective memories from one generation to another possible. Such social practices need to be formalized into repetitive acts, which enable social groups to preserve the past. Any event, then, can be deemed to be a founding moment in a nation’s history, and the multiplication and repetition of commemorative events serve to remind society of important moments in history or ideology. Connerton elaborates on a specific example of invented and repetitive commemorative events used by Germany’s National Socialist Party each year, starting with Adolf Hitler’s accession to political power in 1933, to successfully promote the Party’s ideology. Through such commemorative ceremonies, societies “are reminded of (their) identity as represented by and told in a master narrative,” argues Connerton.35 However, the nature of that identity can shift significantly over time, depending on the social, political and economic context of these commemorations.

In addition to Connerton’s helpful reminders of the process by which societies remember, Pierre Nora maps out the trends regarding commemorative events throughout the twentieth century. Nora argues that starting in the mid-1970s, a series of events took place, which have and will continue to influence France’s collective consciousness. Among the cited factors, Nora lists the democratization of access to institutions of higher education, and the growth of a new working class interested in documenting the contributions of all citizens to France’s heritage, including recent immigrants. French national collective memory, once the exclusive domain of the French government, is now being altered by civil society. The French government may have preferred a renaissance of national commemorative events with hegemonic objectives rather than observing a growth of commemorative events celebrating local events and local heroes. Nora writes: “The authorities had no choice but to encourage and thereby attempt to influence the new wave of commemorative laïcisation to which, however alien it may have been to the authoritative reflexes of government, the ideology of the left obliged it to adapt.”

Clearly, the dynamics of commemorations have been profoundly altered since the 1970s, making the development of a hegemonic, national consciousness difficult to achieve and sustain for any institution. While Nora’s analysis is based on the evolution of commemorations in France, there is no reason to expect that similar phenomena did not take place in other countries, including Canada.

**The Canadian Context**

Like many of the examples provided above that served as tools or reflective pieces in the development of this study, there are also many parallels in the Canadian context. The

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study of historical figures as symbols of hegemony is a relatively well researched topic in Canadian historical scholarship. For example, Patrice Groulx examined the evolution of the hero cult surrounding Dollard des Ormeaux by analyzing more than 250 depictions of the Battle of Long Sault between 1660 and 1997 to determine how des Ormeaux evolved as a historical figure with each subsequent representation. It is important to note that the myth of des Ormeaux’s heroic efforts were forgotten during more than 150 years, with the exception of Dollier de Casson, a Sulpician leader, who wrote about des Ormeaux’s perceived struggles against Aboriginal groups as part of his strategy to ensure a greater military presence in New France. It was not until 1918, with the efforts of Abbé Lionel Groulx, that des Ormeaux became a vehicle for French Canadians to demonstrate their territorial roots, their inseparable ties to the French language and to the Catholic faith, and their resistance to liberalism, materialism and modernity. As the Quebec francophone society became less pious and more liberal, political leaders sought new hegemonic figures that reflected the society’s newfound values, and des Ormeaux was set aside.

Historians Fernande Roy, Colin Coates, Cecilia Morgan and Alan Gordon have also explored the making and unmaking of other possible hegemonic figures within Canada’s borders. Roy’s interest in the popular rise and fall of the founders of Montreal has led her to analyze commemorative events. During the peak period of the cult of Canadian religious heroes during the second half of the nineteenth century, largely developed by French historian Étienne-Michel Faillon (1800-1870), de Maisonneuve became the Catholic hero of French-Canadians, which modern times have largely forgotten. Coates and Morgan also

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38 Patrice Groulx, Pièges de la mémoire. Dollard des Ormeaux, les Amérindiens et nous (Gatineau, Vents d’Ouest, 1997), 9-17.
39 Patrice Groulx, Pièges de la mémoire, 373-383.
demonstrated that Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord became hegemonic figures for French-Canadians and English-Canadians, respectively, and that their cult of heroes was shaped by historical context, notably the rise of nationalism and feminism. Rumours of Verchères’ questionable sexual character in addition to the perceived negative impact of gender role reversals brought an end to this cult of heroes by the 1970s. For her part, Secord became a symbol of latent anti-Americanism and whiteness at the beginning of the twentieth century, but that symbol sustained itself with difficulty in a multicultural society increasingly interdependent with the United States. In the end, Secord’s historical longevity rested on the work of a candy company and school textbooks, rather than on the efforts of the state. The popularity of Verchères and Secord never expanded beyond their respective imagined community, even when their hero myth was at their strongest. For his part, Alan Gordon’s work on a Canadian historical hero – Jacques Cartier – demonstrated that the celebrations of Cartier evolved over the decades based on the respective needs and aspirations of French- and English-Canadians. This shared interest in Cartier did not serve, however, as a point of contact to unite Canada’s two official languages communities.

H. V. Nelles, in his seminal study of the commemorative events marking the 300th anniversary of Champlain’s founding of Quebec City, provides an example where both French-Canadians and English-Canadians contributed to a commemorative event serving a hegemonic purpose. The main impresario of the event, Governor General Earl Grey, wanted to highlight through these events the strength of the British Empire, the Anglo-Saxon manifest destiny. Mediating a plausible version of history that would be favourably received by French- and English-Canadians, by Aboriginal groups, by Catholics and

41 Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan, Heroinies and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002).
Protestants, by the elites and the commoners was another challenge. To present the Conquest of 1759 without offending French-Canadians, the historical pageant also depicted France’s victory during the Battle of Sainte-Foy in 1760. The result of such compromises in organizing a large-scale historic pageant was a perceived consensus building process. Ultimately, a consensual depiction of the past acceptable to both founding nations had been developed, according to which Canada could continue to grow as a single nation. However, if “a master narrative for a nation can be glimpsed in performance, … it was not echoed in belief and in behaviour,” writes Nelles.43 The sustainability of this master narrative was short-lived, as the divisive debates surrounding the conscription crisis of 1917 demonstrated. Nevertheless, Nelles provides us an example of how Canada’s linguistic communities have actively participated in a project, based on the history of both groups, to achieve hegemony.

Similarly, University of Toronto historian Ian Radforth examined the Prince of Wales’ visit to North America in 1860, where French- and English-Canadian political leaders attempted to showcase all Canadians as loyal British subjects. However, attempts to portray Canada as a hegemonic, harmonious, progressive, modern society failed, as gender, class, religion and race came into play during the visit. Religious and linguistic differences ultimately were more difficult to unite than organizers had anticipated.44

While cultural historians have examined issues of collective memory and commemorative events, the focus on commemoration and public memory of Canada’s political history, or its actors, remains scarce. Louis Riel has been the subject of two scholarly works on his evolving public memory. Doug Owram’s scholarly article explores the myth of Louis Riel. He shows that it was the awareness of the dangers of social injustice

after the Second World War that allowed Riel to gain popular support. Since the 1960s, the myth of Riel has been expanded to depict Riel as a defender of Aboriginal rights and a symbol of injustice towards French-Canadians. Owram writes, “English Canada’s concern with cultural diversity has tended to make Riel more of an English-Canadian hero than a French one.”  

Ironically, the myth of Riel has served as a divisive symbol to Canadians, rather than a national hegemonic figure. For her part, Jennifer Reid analyzes the constant reinterpretation of Louis Riel emerging from various mediums. This process has led Riel to become a foundational figure in the Canadian nation.

In addition to works on Louis Riel, Brian S. Osborne analyzes the George-Étienne Cartier monument complex in Montreal in which he examines how the appropriation of public space for an official view of history of Canada’s two founding nations was eventually changed to celebrate imperial and monarchic linkages. Osborne also examined the use of landscape and monuments in identity formation processes by the erection of various statues on Parliament Hill and around Ottawa.

The majority of Canadian political historians focus their scholarship on the actions of political leaders or on political biographies. For example, Robert Wardhaugh analyzes the views and treatment of the Canadian Prairies by William Lyon Mackenzie King during his 22 years as prime minister. For their part, John English and Denis Smith have focussed on the political careers of prime ministers. In regards to Sir John A. Macdonald, half a dozen

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46 Jennifer Reid, Louis Riel and the Creation of a Modern Canada (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).
biographies have been written about Macdonald, but most were written before Macdonald’s papers were made available to scholars in the 1920s. The first two rather hagiographic biographies were written by Macdonald’s nephew and by his private secretary shortly after his death. University of Toronto historian Donald Creighton produced in the 1950s the most authoritative biography of Macdonald’s life to date, and he received accolades and prizes, including two Governor General’s Literary Awards, for his important contribution to Canadian scholarship. His biography can be positioned as one which marks the culmination of the myth of Macdonald as the founder of the country. Despite revealing more detailed and fully researched information about Canada’s first prime minister, this biography is not without flaws. It is a near-hagiographical (but well-realized) opus broadly read across the country. In reading Creighton’s biography, Hilda Neatby wondered whose voice, Macdonald’s or Creighton’s, was narrating this book in light of many sections describing Macdonald’s emotions and thoughts, which she felt were not supported by primary sources. George Stanley, a lifetime scholar of Louis Riel, disagreed with Creighton’s interpretation of the latter, including Creighton’s use of qualifiers “preposterous” and “incredible” to depict Riel’s demands for land for his fellow citizens. For Stanley, Riel was a victim of Sir John A. Macdonald’s western expansionism. Finally, Frank H. Underhill used the terms “intellectually deficient and morally delinquent” to describe how Creighton depicted

49 Lady Macdonald, through Sir Joseph Pope, contacted Prime Minister Borden regarding transferring Macdonald’s papers to the government in 1913. They were later made available to scholars. See Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Sir Robert Laird Borden Fonds, MG 26-H, vol. 27, Lady Macdonald to Borden, 12 September 1913, 10435.


Macdonald’s opponents, leading to the argument that the book was written from a politically partisan perspective.\textsuperscript{53} It is hard to disagree with these assessments. However, in the absence of more theoretical and less ideologically-driven examinations of Macdonald’s political career and legacy, Creighton’s two-volume biography of Macdonald remains the seminal work on his life. In recent years, journalist Richard Gwyn has undertaken a new biographical analysis of Macdonald, with the first volume published in 2008 and the second volume expected in 2011.\textsuperscript{54} This possibly new interpretation of Macdonald’s life may come and influence how the current and future generation of Canadians view the legacy of Canada’s first Prime Minister. Despite the efforts of Creighton, Gwyn and others, Macdonald remains an understudied political leader in Canadian historical scholarship.

\textbf{Sir John A. Macdonald as an Object of Study of Public Memory}

While some scholarship has examined the challenges of creating hegemony through pageants and myth of heroes, there is no existing study examining the commemoration of a member of Canada’s federal political class. The leaders of Canada’s federal political parties must appeal to voters within both linguistic communities in order to win a majority of seats in the House of Commons. Their policies must thus garner the support of and build bridges between Canada’s official language communities. Can the public memory of members of Canada’s federal political class be transformed and sustained into a seemingly national hegemonic symbol for Canadians? That question forms the core of this study.

The selection of Sir John A. Macdonald as the subject of this study resulted from the delineation of several criteria. The first required the tenure of a senior federal political office, with a preference given to former Prime Ministers of Canada. The second required the

\textsuperscript{53} P.B. Waite, “Donald Creighton: Casting the net of his Macdonald,” \textit{The Beaver}, vol. 78, no. 1 (February-March 1998), 30-34.

ability of this individual and his political party to win a considerable number of seats in the House of Commons from Ontario and Quebec. The third required a time in political life sufficiently lengthy to contribute to policy initiatives that marked Canadian history. The fourth required examples of commemorative events that explicitly shaped the public memory of this individual over a certain period of time. The fifth required examples of the commemoration of this individual in Ontario and in Quebec, and in front of members of both linguistic communities.

Sir John A. Macdonald met all of the requirements. Macdonald governed Canada as its first Prime Minister for nearly 19 years. His Liberal-Conservative Party formed a large majority government in the House of Commons throughout his years as Prime Minister, including a majority of seats from the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec. His political career is linked to Canada’s evolution through the adoption of the British North America Act, the creation and the admission of new provinces into Confederation and the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway among others. Macdonald has been the object of commemoration by the federal government since his death. For example, Macdonald memorials were erected in five Canadian cities: Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Kingston. The erection of a Macdonald memorial in Canada’s largest French-speaking city met the final selection criterion.

Macdonald may have been admired by some, but he was also disliked by others. The latter reasons may render his hegemonic status more difficult to achieve and, if successful, maintain. For example, the caricatures of Macdonald produced by cartoonist John Wilson Bengough in The Grip illustrated Canada’s first Prime Minister with a penchant for booze.

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and corruption.\textsuperscript{56} As such, these traits were entrenched in the public mind during his lifetime and afterwards, due to the continued popularity of Bengough’s work. Macdonald alienated many French-Canadian voters because of his government’s handling of the North-West Rebellion, and especially for allowing the hanging death of Louis Riel in 1885. The popular rise of Louis Riel during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century is dialectically related to the fall of Macdonald. At the same time, the growing inclusion in Canada of the ‘Other’ – First Nations population, for example – renders more improbable the broad public support for a man whose positions welcomed the extinction of ‘Indians’ and the ‘Indian Problem’ at times during his career.

Macdonald’s reputation was also tarnished by the Pacific Scandal, where Macdonald and other prominent Conservatives requested donations from those given the monopoly to build the railway to finance their upcoming election campaign, and whose aftermath forced Macdonald’s resignation as prime minister. His control of the country’s patronage system ensured long-term business and political loyalty in many regions of the country, but also resulted in partisan conflict in many communities. Macdonald could thus be viewed as a supporter of an elitist government, one which sheltered the ‘minority’ of rich men in the Senate and through other patronage appointments. He was also a staunchly pro-capitalist politician, making his memory more difficult to use in the context of the rising welfare state in Canada.

Macdonald also never backed down from opposition members’ politically-motivated attacks. His control of the Liberal-Conservative Party machinery, and the animosity he

\textsuperscript{56} The Grip was published between 1873 and 1894. Bengough felt his lifetime support of the Liberal Party should be rewarded by a Senate appointment from Sir Wilfrid Laurier, which Laurier “gently rebuffed.” See: DCB, Vol. XV: 1921 – 1930, biographical entry for John Wilson Bengough by Ramsey Cook, available online and accessed on February 23, 2008, \url{http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BiId=42029&query=bengough}. Regarding the quality of his work, Cumming argues that Bengough’s sketches of leading political figures “have a force that prints them on our brains, obliterating the more static images from the early days of photography.”\textsuperscript{56} Because of their artistic qualities, Bengough’s work is frequently reprinted in history books, without reference to Bengough’s open hostility toward Sir John A. Macdonald or his party’s successors, thus making his portrayal of Macdonald biased.
demonstrated towards the main opposition party, led to a fostering of strong political parties in Canada. Macdonald remained a divisive figure at the time of his passing. The leader of the Liberal Party, Wilfrid Laurier, commented that his party “did not believe in (Macdonald’s) policies, nor in his methods of government.”\footnote{Ibid., 885.}

As such, Macdonald was not a unifying figure at the time of his death on June 6, 1891. In addition, it is difficult to think that Macdonald could ever function as a truly hegemonic figure in light of the aforementioned divisive elements of Macdonald’s political career and his personal life. Nevertheless, Macdonald’s role in founding the Dominion of Canada and his longevity in office make him a difficult figure to omit in official ceremonies. His memory became the object of multiple commemorative events since his death in 1891. As such, this research explores the efforts of Canada’s political leaders to shape Macdonald’s public memory, perhaps as a seemingly national hegemonic figure, despite the innate challenges of using his historical character to unite Canadians.

**Methodology**

The study spans the period between the death of Sir John A. Macdonald on June 6, 1891 and Canada’s Centenary celebrations in 1967. This longitudinal approach allows us to analyze how Canada’s federal political class shaped Macdonald’s public memory during this period. The study first aims to identify and analyze events and activities organized or supported by Canada’s federal political class which allowed them opportunities to shape Macdonald’s public memory. The study then explores through the lens of official memory their motivation to engage in his commemoration and to shape his memory in specific ways. The objective of this study is to answer two specific research questions. The first asks if Canada’s federal political leaders were interested and successful in shaping Macdonald’s
public memory during the period of study to allow the emergence of a seemingly national hegemonic figure acceptable to both political parties. The second asks if the federal political parties’ attempts to depict Macdonald as a unifying national symbol were picked up in the media in Ontario and Quebec and in both official languages, thereby reinforcing his hegemonic status for the federal political class.

The study analyzes four types of textual documents: ministerial correspondence, commemorative event programs and speeches, newspaper articles, and parliamentary debates. Ministerial correspondence from Prime Ministers Sir John Abbott to Lester B. Pearson and their cabinet colleagues will provide a range of valuable insights relating to the role played by the federal government in commemorating Sir John A. Macdonald. This correspondence will provide insights into the motivation behind commemorating Macdonald.

Commemorative speeches will be another important source of information. These speeches allow an analysis of the representations of Macdonald used by various speakers in different political, social and ideological conditions. For events organized on behalf of the federal government or where the prime minister was invited to deliver a speech on Macdonald, the membership of the organizing committee will also be analyzed to determine three important factors: who were the members of the organizing committees; what motivations did this group have in organizing the event; and what impact was sought as a result of this event.

The analysis of newspaper articles and editorials will provide the range of interpretation of Sir John A. Macdonald’s legacy and its impact on a community’s evolving public memory of Canada’s first prime minister. Due to the large number of newspapers available throughout Canada, this study will analyze newspapers from six communities in
Ontario and Quebec. These communities—Toronto, Hamilton, Kingston, Montreal, Quebec City and Ottawa—provide a variety of views through conservative- and liberal-leaning newspapers. The reason for this self-imposed limitation is simple: all known Sir John A. Macdonald commemorative events organized by or on behalf of the federal government have taken place in Ontario and Quebec. In addition, these are the two provinces most closely linked to Sir John A. Macdonald, and were until the 1980s, the only provinces where a monument to Sir John A. Macdonald was erected.

The final source will be parliamentary debates collected in Hansard, published by the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada for the entire period of study. The parliamentary debates will help identify critical moments in Parliament where representations of Sir John A. Macdonald were used. The speeches will be analyzed to determine which representations of Macdonald were being advanced.

**Research themes**

As previously stated, this study will focus on the conceptual framework of official memory for the analysis of the aforementioned sources. Through this analytical framework, the outlined sources will be examined to determine the depiction and the evolution of eight different themes relevant to Sir John A. Macdonald the Politician and Sir John A. Macdonald the Man.

1) **Sir John A. Macdonald the Politician**

   *Macdonald as the Leading Father of Confederation:* During a 2001 House of Commons debate on adopting a Senate motion to recognize Bill S-14, an *Act respecting Sir John A.*

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58 Each of these communities, with the exception of Quebec City, embarked on commemorative events organized by federal government representatives immediately after Macdonald’s death. The inclusion of Quebec City provides a second city with Quebec to analyze the evolving public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald.

59 The Sir John A. Macdonald Society of Victoria, British Columbia erected a monument in Macdonald’s honour in 1982. The statue is located in front of that city’s city hall.
Macdonald Day, Liberal MP Mr. Pat O’Brien of London, Ontario, stated: “Sir John was of course the leading Father of Confederation and did a masterful job of cobbling together the kind of compromises that made the country necessary, and that was no mean feat trying to get together peoples of different nationalities and religions, many of whom had bitterly opposed each other on many fundamental points.”\(^{60}\) O’Brien was certainly not the first politician to refer to Sir John A. Macdonald as the leading Father of Confederation. As such, this theme will be analyzed throughout the period of study to determine when and how this representation was used.

Macdonald as a Symbol of Canadian unity. “Let us be English or let us be French, but let us always be loyal and above all, let us be Canadians,” stated Sir John A. Macdonald.\(^{61}\) Through this quote, Sir John A. Macdonald portrays himself as a conciliator, bridging the religious and linguistic tensions that were present in Canada during his 19-year mandate as prime minister. Macdonald reaffirmed in the House of Commons in 1890 that “There is no paramount race in this country; there is no conquered race in this country.”\(^{62}\) As such, this theme will examine depictions of Macdonald as a symbol of Canadian unity, a bridge-builder between French- and English-Canadians. The study will profile how these representations of Macdonald have changed over time.

Macdonald: Nation-Builder. This is the title used by J. H. Aitchison in his scholarly review of Creighton’s two-volume biography in 1956. Aitchison writes: “The measure and uniqueness of Macdonald’s contribution to the making of Canada are now not only better understood, they are more widely understood, and for the present generation of Canadians

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\(^{60}\) Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: House of Commons, 2001), September 24, 2001, 5464.


\(^{62}\) Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlain, 1890), 745.
Macdonald has begun to play in the national tradition that is so obviously his.”63 Many of Macdonald’s policies, from western expansionism to the Canadian Pacific Railway, through to Macdonald’s economic National Policy, were elements of nation-building, and this theme will allow me to examine the variability in the use of this theme by prime ministers.

Macdonald’s Strong Central Government: “The provinces were just as subordinate to Ottawa as they had once been to London,” believed Sir John A. Macdonald after the passage of the BNA Act.64 In the Act, the federal government and the lieutenant-governors were granted important controls over provincial legislation. Macdonald has also ensured through section 91 of the Act, that the federal government was responsible for such things as defence, banking, criminal law and economic policy. Meanwhile, section 92, which resulted from long discussions between Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier resulted in provincial responsibility for education, social services, municipalities and property and civil rights. From Macdonald’s perspective, the BNA Act had given the central government the strongest position in the administration of the country as a whole. Important judicial decisions from the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (Canada’s last court of appeal until 1949) altered the political balance between the federal and provincial government. Nevertheless, the representation of Macdonald’s desire for a strong, central government will be another important theme to analyze.

2) Sir John A. Macdonald the Man

Macdonald as a Self-Made Man. In his 1914 biography of Sir John A. Macdonald, Sir Joseph Pope describes his former employer through the theme of rags-to-fame vernacular liberalism: “Sir John Macdonald began the world at fifteen (sic), with but a grammar-school

64 Donald Creighton, Sir John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain, 19.
education; and possessing neither means nor influence of any kind, rose by his own exertions to a high place on the roll of British statesmen.”

This quote fits well within the context of a period when the multi-volume *Makers of Canada* series provide histories of political actors like Sir John A. Macdonald and George Brown whose humble beginnings could not restrict talent and ambition. Allan Smith successfully argued in 1978 that it is a complete fiction to present Canada as an individualist society where anyone can strike it rich. Rather, he argues that collectivism, through education, was the social norm. As such, the presence and the modifications of this representation of Sir John A. Macdonald will be analyzed in political discourse and as part of commemorative events.

*Macdonald as a British Subject:* During a visit to Queen Victoria during the British Parliament’s debates regarding the ratification of the *British North America Act*, Macdonald is quoted as saying: “We have declared (through this new constitution of Canada) in the most solemn and emphatic manner our resolve to be under the Sovereignty of Your Majesty and your family for ever.” This was neither the first nor the last time that Macdonald would firmly articulate his support for the British Empire. Macdonald also felt that “through the British alliance alone Canada could build up its own north-west and consolidate its transcontinental dominions.” As Canada continued to evolve economically and politically it will be interesting to note if and how this theme is used by other Canadian prime ministers.

*Sir John A. Macdonald as a Partisan Politician:* Political affiliation naturally renders each political figure into a partisan figure, which has many merits in a multi-party political system.

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In the context of this study, this theme of Macdonald as a partisan politician focuses strictly on the negative connotations of partisanship. As such, the focus is more on the use of Macdonald’s public memory as a symbol of the politics of division. The presence of such representations of Macdonald during events could render his transformation into a national hegemonic figure by the federal political class more difficult. As such, this theme will analyze the possible use of the negative connotations of Macdonald as a partisan politician during the period of study.

The Macdonald-Cartier Partnership: In describing the death of Sir George-Étienne Cartier, Donald Creighton writes: “(Macdonald) was alone now—for there would never again be anybody like Cartier—alone at a time when the burdens of solitary responsibility seemed heavier than ever.”70 Clearly, the friendship between Macdonald and Cartier resulted in cooperation in the governing of the Dominion of Canada. However, a dominant hegemonic figure can hardly emerge if his contributions to Canada’s evolution are interlinked with another historical figure. As such, this theme will allow me to analyze how the relationship between Macdonald and Cartier is represented in commemorative events.

Thesis Outline

This study is divided into five chapters, each exploring in a chronological manner the efforts of various federal political leaders to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald. Chapter Two focuses on the role of the Liberal-Conservative Party in shaping Macdonald’s public memory through the unveiling of Macdonald memorials in four Canadian cities (Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal and Kingston) between 1893 and 1896. The chapter explores who was responsible for the financing of these monuments and how senior members of the Liberal-Conservative Party shaped the public memory of Sir John A.

Chapter Three explores the efforts of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal Party to offer a different interpretation of Macdonald’s public memory. The chapter contrasts the efforts of the Liberal Party during their years in opposition following Macdonald’s death as well as their years in government, between 1896 and 1911. Chapter Four explores the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald which emerged from the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations. The focus is on the commemorative activities focusing on the Fathers of Confederation approved by the bipartisan federal organizing committee. Chapter Five focuses on the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death in 1941. Senior members of Canada’s federal political class gathered in Kingston on June 7, 1941 to mark this anniversary, the first time both parties stood on the same podium to honour explicitly the memory of Canada’s first prime minister. Chapter Six explores the efforts of Prime Ministers Lester B. Pearson and John Diefenbaker in shaping Macdonald’s public memory in the 1960s. The chapter analyzes the possible motive of the repetitive commemoration of Macdonald by two different political parties in a relatively short period of time. Finally, the concluding Chapter Seven synthesizes the findings from this study.
If that statue of bronze could speak … it would tell you that, however grateful it might be, it would be much more so if the people of Canada would erect to his memory a greater monument by continuing his work and following his example.

Sir Adolphe Caron

Introduction

Late in the evening of June 6, 1891, a Saturday, Joseph Pope, Sir John A. Macdonald’s private secretary, walked up to the gates of Earnscliffe, his employer’s residence on the banks of the Ottawa River. He announced to reporters, “Gentlemen, Sir John Macdonald is dead. … He died at 10:15 without pain and in peace.” This declaration was not entirely unexpected, as Macdonald had been seriously ill for nearly two weeks. The news of the death of Canada’s Prime Minister was reported in most if not all newspapers across Canada the following day with bold black stripes between columns or large front-page headlines. While official Ottawa was busy planning a state funeral for Canada’s first Prime Minister, several communities in Ontario and Quebec embarked on spontaneous commemorative efforts to honour his memory. More specifically, they launched public

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1 Macdonald Memorial Committee, The Proceedings at the Unveiling of the Statue of the Late Sir John Alexander Macdonald in Hamilton on the first day of November 1893 (Hamilton, Macdonald Memorial Committee, 1893), 22.


4 Bold black stripes between columns were mainly in the three Hamilton newspapers (Herald, Spectator and Evening Times). In the first few decades after Confederation, the term “premier” was used to designate Canada’s head of government. There is no clear period when the term “prime minister” replaced “premier.” For many years, the terms were used interchangeably. For simplicity, the term “prime minister of Canada” is used throughout this thesis.
subscription campaigns to amass the funds required to erect a bronze statue of Macdonald in their respective downtown cores.\(^5\) Within four years of Macdonald’s passing, four communities in Central Canada – three in Ontario, one in Quebec – erected Sir John A. Macdonald memorials. In addition, the Parliament of Canada commissioned its own Macdonald statue as a national memorial, which was unveiled in Ottawa on July 1, 1895.

The present chapter analyzes, in chronological order, the four commemorative efforts to honour Sir John A. Macdonald with the unveiling of a publicly-funded memorial. These memorials were unveiled in quick succession in four communities: Hamilton (November 1, 1893); Toronto (October 13, 1894); Montreal (June 6, 1895); and Kingston (October 23, 1895). The fifth statue was erected using funds approved by the federal Parliament, and is not included in this analysis.\(^6\) For each of these commemorative efforts, the present chapter examines the composition of members of the respective organizing committees, their possible motives for assisting in erecting this Macdonald memorial, and their financial contribution to the costs of the statue. This chapter will then analyze the content of the tributes to Macdonald delivered by 13 different members of Canada’s federal political class – 10 Liberal-Conservatives and three Liberals. It focuses on eight themes that form the content analysis for this thesis, as described in chapter 1. The thesis will also examine the speeches delivered by Prime Ministers Sir John Thompson and Sir Mackenzie Bowell through the lens of the theory of official memory to demonstrate how they reflected the speakers’ intentions beyond commemorating Sir John A. Macdonald. Finally, the chapter

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\(^5\) The city of Regina as part of Canada’s centenary celebrations erected a memorial to Sir John A. Macdonald. The statue was unveiled by John G. Diefenbaker in Regina on December 21, 1967. The Sir John A. Macdonald Society of British Columbia unveiled a statue in Macdonald’s memory outside Victoria’s city hall on July 1, 1982.

\(^6\) This fifth monument was funded through an appropriations bill in the Parliament of Canada. The context of that parliamentary debate is featured in Chapter 2.
will focus on the level of citizen participation in the various unveiling ceremonies as well as analyze the media’s coverage.

This chapter demonstrates that business leaders associated directly with the Liberal-Conservative Party or who benefited from their economic policies were endeared to the project as means of framing the positive legacy of Macdonald’s policies and thus ensuring the continuity of such policies by future governments. These business leaders were assisted by Liberal-Conservative party officials and supporters who were eager to use a variety of mechanisms to enshrine their former leader in the mind of Canadians as a national icon. Finally, Macdonald’s successors – Sir John Thompson and Sir Mackenzie Bowell – and their ministers recognized the benefits of using the importance of their offices to bring national attention to their interpretation of Sir John A. Macdonald’s political record, a record they hoped would serve the party well in the next federal general election. Together, these highly partisan events allowed business leaders and party officials to work together to create commemorative events aiming to build a national hero myth around Sir John A. Macdonald while insuring his public memory was beneficial to their respective goals.

1) The Promoters of Macdonald’s Public Memory

There were four communities that carried out their interest in erecting a memorial to Sir John A. Macdonald in the days and months following his death. This first section of this chapter analyzes the driving force behind the monument in each of the four communities: Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal and Kingston. It also explores the principal motives of the organizers and the communities in pushing forward with the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald.
A) Hamilton: Wednesday, November 1, 1893

One day after the newspaper publication of Sir John’s death, Hamilton’s Board of Trade considered the question of a Macdonald memorial in the city. Most Hamiltonians welcomed this spontaneous call to commemorate the late Prime Minister. Even the Hamilton Herald, a newspaper that often favoured the Liberal Party, praised the idea: “Hamilton would be quite right in resolving to erect a monument to Sir John Macdonald on her own account, leaving other cities so disposed to do likewise [...] there is enough admiration of Macdonald among all classes of our people.”

Before the Board could make its final recommendation to follow this suggestion, Hamilton’s civic and business leaders were delayed by efforts from the city of Kingston to erect a national Macdonald memorial. Kingston’s efforts in this regard relied on a political strategy and a fundraising strategy. On the political front, Sir John’s successor as Prime Minister, Sir John Abbott, received a petition on July 8, 1891 signed by 122 federal parliamentarians – 87 MPs and 35 Senators – which urged him to publicly declare that “the most suitable place for the erection of the said National Memorial is the City of Kingston where the deceased statesman began his brilliant career and which place he represented in Parliament for upwards of forty years.” As part of its fundraising strategy, Kingston approached as its Hamiltonian emissary a powerful local businessman with strong ties to the

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8 Hamilton Herald, June 7, 1891, 4; Ibid., June 9, 1891, 2.
Liberal-Conservative Party - Senator William Eli Sanford.\(^{10}\) These strategies seemed to have been a very successful move by the city of Kingston. During a meeting with leading Hamiltonians in early December 1891, Alexander McKay, the then Liberal-Conservative MP for Hamilton, acknowledged an emerging consensus of opinion in favour of Kingston. This assertion rested in part on the belief by some Hamiltonians that they would not be able to raise the funds required to erect the statue in that city. As such, it appeared to be “a wise and patriotic movement for the citizens of Hamilton to send their donations to Kingston.”\(^{11}\)

While Sanford was selected to promote Kingston’s objective of erecting the single national memorial in Macdonald’s honour, the Senator’s actions reveal that he preferred Hamilton to honour Macdonald with its own distinct statue of the late leader. Prior to a meeting in March 1892 to make a final decision, Sanford made inquiries as to the estimated cost of a fitting memorial, with the statue in either bronze or marble, and the pedestal in a variety of stones. He informed his fellow residents that the total cost would be in the neighbourhood of $7,000, about as much as it cost to erect the George Brown monument in Toronto. Fortunately, Sanford had already secured a $500 contribution from his wealthy friend, local business leader George Elias Tuckett.\(^{12}\) After Sanford’s presentation about the appropriateness and the financial viability of this undertaking, the city’s mayor, Peter Campbell Blaicher,\(^{13}\) also supported a Hamilton-specific monument. “If the citizens of Hamilton were asked to contribute to a monument at all[,] it should be to [contribute to] one


\(^{11}\) *Hamilton Evening Times*, December 4, 1891, 4.


to be erected here,” argued Blaicher. In the end, the community leaders in attendance adopted a resolution calling for “a memorial monument to late Hon. Sir John A. Macdonald [to] be erected in Hamilton and [for] a committee be appointed by this meeting to carry out the wishes of the city, to raise the necessary amount and to proceed at the earliest moment to build a suitable monument.” The eastern edge of Gore Park, a central park in downtown Hamilton, was secured for the statue in light of the centrality of the park and the greater visibility to the statue the park offered.

Following this resolution, Hamilton’s Board of Trade quickly established a Macdonald Memorial Committee to implement this project. The chairmanship of this 17-member Committee was entrusted to Sanford, not surprisingly in light of his business influence in the community in general and his efforts to research the anticipated cost of the project in particular. Sanford was a wealthy local businessman who pioneered the manufacturing of ready-to-wear clothes and who had astutely aligned his business with political parties. Once a Liberal supporter, Sanford had thrown his political clout behind Sir John A. Macdonald and the Liberal-Conservative Party in 1876 when the Liberal government of Alexander Mackenzie pushed forward with its free-trade policies. Sanford was not alone in changing his political alliance from the Liberals to the Liberal-Conservatives as a result of tariff policies. Another Hamilton business leader who did the same was George

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14 *Hamilton Evening Times*, March 4, 1892, 2.
15 *Hamilton Evening Times*, March 4, 1892, 2.
16 *Hamilton Spectator*, April 25, 1893, 5. Some citizens feared that its placement near the intersection of King and John streets would impede traffic. The statue was erected there. On the rather chequered past of Gore Park, see the informative website of the Hamilton Public Library, specifically [http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/LibraryServices/Localhistory/Gore+Park.htm](http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/LibraryServices/Localhistory/Gore+Park.htm), [http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/LibraryServices/Localhistory/Gore+Park+5.htm](http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/LibraryServices/Localhistory/Gore+Park+5.htm), [http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/LibraryServices/Localhistory/Gore+Park+6.htm](http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/LibraryServices/Localhistory/Gore+Park+6.htm) - all accessed on January 19, 2008.
17 The author has been unable to find evidence about the process by which this committee was formed or about how its chairmanship was decided.
Elias Tuckett. For Sanford, Tuckett and others, this switch in political affiliation seems to have been motivated by business considerations: “two years after the Conservatives returned to power in 1878,” and after the adoption of tariff protection for Canadian manufacturers, known as the National Policy, “Sanford’s sales doubled, as did the number of his employees (from 1,000 to 2,000).”\(^\text{19}\) In recognition of his wealth and wide business contacts, Macdonald appointed Sanford to the Senate in 1885.\(^\text{20}\) In return, Sanford supported the Liberal-Conservative Party through a variety of means, including forming a consortium to purchase the \textit{Toronto Empire} newspaper in 1894 to help spread the party’s viewpoint.

Other members of Hamilton’s Macdonald Memorial Committee included influential businessmen who had also benefited from Macdonald’s National Policy or his infrastructure policies and projects: George Elias Tuckett\(^\text{21}\) (tobacco, glass, cigars), James Murray Lottridge\(^\text{22}\) (ale), George Roach\(^\text{23}\) (hotels, restaurants), and William Hendrie\(^\text{24}\) (railways). Furthermore, key members or supporters of the Liberal-Conservative Party from Hamilton and the surrounding area sat on the Committee, including: Adam Brown (a former Conservative MP in Hamilton and president of the Hamilton Board of Trade)\(^\text{25}\); John Jackson Scott\(^\text{26}\) and John C. Milne\(^\text{27}\) (two former presidents of the Hamilton Liberal-
Conservative Association); as well as Charles Robinson Smith and Francis Joseph Fitzgerald (two former secretaries of the Hamilton Liberal-Conservative Association). Furthermore, many members on the organizing committee shared an additional bond. More than half of the 17 members were either born in Scotland or had Scottish ancestry, which may have motivated them to honour another Scotsman, Sir John himself. At the inaugural meeting in March 1892, members of the Committee pledged $2,000 to the cause of the Macdonald memorial. In addition to the $500 donation of George Elias Tuckett, Senator Sanford contributed $500 and William Hendrie $250. The members of the Committee became the largest contributors to the memorial’s cost, thus communicating their endorsement of Macdonald, and the political and economic benefits of keeping his memory alive.

At the unveiling, Sanford expounded to the assembled crowd on the motivation in erecting the first Sir John A. Macdonald memorial in Canada: “In the completion of our work, we are the first in Canada to erect a monument, creditable alike to the memory of the great statesman and to our city.” Through his leadership of this project, he attempted to strengthen Liberal-Conservative Party favours by solidifying the recognition of Macdonald’s legacy on the part of Hamiltonians, and thus helping to ensure the re-election of the Liberal-Conservative Party to federal office. He sought to distinguish Hamilton from other industrialized cities in Central Canada, especially Toronto. More important, as a direct

online and accessed on October 8, 2007 at

28 Information on C.R. Smith and F.J. Fitzgerald gleaned from informal index cards held within the archives division of the Hamilton Public Library, and seemed to originate from their obituaries (without attribution to date of death or source of the article).

29 For a complete list of members of the Macdonald Memorial Committee, see Macdonald Memorial Committee, The Proceedings at the Unveiling of the Statue of the Late Sir John Alexander Macdonald in Hamilton on the first day of November 1893 (Hamilton, Macdonald Memorial Committee, 1893), 11.

30 Unlike other cities, a full list of donors to the Hamilton Macdonald memorial was not printed in newspapers. Thus it is possible that the committee itself paid even a larger share of the memorial’s costs.

31 Macdonald Memorial Committee, The Proceedings at the Unveiling, 10-12.
benefactor of Canada’s National Policy, he sought the continuation of the same policies, regardless of parties or politicians at the helm.

![Macdonald Memorial in Hamilton](image)

Figure 2.1: Macdonald Memorial in Hamilton. Cast in bronze, the 8 feet 3 inches statue of Sir John A. Macdonald tops an 11-foot high pyramidal-shaped grey granite stone in a small park near Hamilton’s downtown commercial core. Dressed in a closely-button frock coat, Macdonald stands in a relaxed posture with his right arm slightly extended. Inscribed on the pedestal are the names of the Canadian provinces as of 1893. Also inscribed are the list of dates of elected office and the following phrase: “A Canadian statesman who valued British institutions as the true basis of the strength and prosperity of the Dominion.”

Credit: Hamilton Public Library Archives

**B) Toronto: Saturday, October 13, 1894**

It was on the occasion of the 83rd anniversary of the battle of Queenston Heights during the War of 1812 that the second statue of Sir John A. Macdonald was unveiled, this time on the south grounds of Queen’s Park, Ontario’s Legislative Assembly, in Toronto. For many late-Victorian Canadians, the battle of Queenston Heights was a source of patriotic pride, although its public commemoration focusing on the loyalist myth was a relatively recently invented tradition.32 In the 1880s and 1890s, for instance, the focus of the loyalist myth was on defining a loyalist past as a “unifying national past that could surmount the

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32 Historian Carl Berger has argued that the loyalist myth emerged in the 1880s and focused specifically on the victory of General Brock’s militia regiment at Queenston Heights. Since the 1880s, this battle was at the heart of the loyalist view of Canada and is often referenced in the “literary formulation of loyalist hagiography.” See: Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 90-92
regional, racial and linguistic tensions that engulfed the country.” Viewed from this perspective, unveiling the statue of Macdonald on this day was a direct effort by loyalist Torontonians, notably event organizers John Beverly Robinson, a former Ontario lieutenant-governor and Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Charles Denison, to make Sir John A. Macdonald’s political career an integral part of this unifying national past, a career they felt strove to unite Canadians of all religions and languages.

While Hamilton’s committee consisted of members of that city’s Board of Trade alongside representatives from the local Liberal-Conservative riding association, the Toronto committee was, almost without exception, a *Who’s Who* of Toronto conservative politics, both at the federal and provincial levels. The chairman, Edward Frederick Clarke, was a well-known conservative in Toronto, serving first in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario (1886 – 1894), and then the House of Commons (1896 – 1905). Assisting Clarke were one federal cabinet minister (Senator Frank Smith), one past and one future lieutenant-governor of Ontario (John Beverly Robinson and Sir Casimir Gzowski respectively), three Liberal-Conservative MPs from Toronto (Frederick Charles Denison, George Cockburn and Emerson Coatsworth), one Liberal-Conservative MP from York (William Maclean), and conservative journalists like John Castell Hopkins and David Creighton of the strongly

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imperial and conservative newspaper, the *Toronto Empire*.\(^{36}\) It is perhaps not surprising that such a high-powered organizing committee would be able to attract a large number of Liberal-Conservative Party officials to attend the unveiling ceremony: 10 federal cabinet ministers (out of a total of 14), 18 MPs, and four Conservative-appointed Senators.

The Toronto organizing committee held considerable political influence, yet its members lacked the deep pockets of the Hamilton organizers. In launching its campaign for the Toronto Macdonald memorial, the committee opted for a more grassroots approach than Hamilton by soliciting ordinary citizens to subscribe to the campaign and setting the maximum donation at $10. In so doing, this subscription campaign followed perhaps not deliberately an approach similar to that used by the George Washington National Monument Society. In 1833, the Society had believed that, relying on Washington’s enduring popularity as a means of encouraging individual donations of $1 per person, the necessary funding would be amassed without difficulty.\(^{37}\) Perhaps unbeknownst to the Toronto organizers, the fundraising efforts did not lead to Americans lining up to donate their dollar to help commemorate Washington. A similar phenomenon seems to have taken place in Toronto. The *Globe* commented sarcastically that “the office-seeking crowd would rather give a testimonial to a living Minister than a statue to the memory of a dead one” as a rationale for the lack of subscriptions.\(^{38}\) Although some names were published as being contributors to this memorial fund, the individual sums of money donated were relatively small (under $100). In addition, no complete list of donors seems to have been published (or to have

\(^{36}\) See *The Globe*, October 13, 1894, 17. The *Toronto Mail* and the *Toronto Empire* were both Conservative papers, which merged in 1895 as the *Toronto Mail and Empire*. The new *Toronto Mail and Empire* would in turn merge with liberal-leaning *The Globe* in 1936 to form *The Globe and Mail*. J. Castell Hopkins authored a biography of Sir John Thompson, entitled *Life and Work of Sir John Thompson, Prime Minister of Canada* (Toronto: United Pub. Houses, 1895).


\(^{38}\) *The Globe*, August 8, 1891, 12.
survived). It is thus difficult to establish the sources of funding or the total cost of the memorial. Nevertheless, given that the size, the style and the materials of the monument were similar to Hamilton’s, the estimated cost for the Toronto memorial would roughly be in the neighbourhood of $7,000.

The Liberal-Conservative organizers of the Toronto Macdonald memorial were interested in preserving in bronze the life of Sir John A. Macdonald, their leader for the past three decades. At the same time, many party members wished to celebrate his life, his policies and his legacy. The art of commemorating Macdonald by the Liberal-Conservative Party would provide Torontonians and Canadians as a whole a positive lens through which to understand and appreciate Macdonald, and the merits of continuing his policies through the continued electoral success of their party.

Figure 2.2: Macdonald Memorial in Toronto. Located in front of the Ontario Legislative Assembly, the statue looks down Queen’s Avenue (later renamed University Avenue). Standing on a granite base, which has the word “Macdonald” written on its front, the total statue stands over twenty feet tall and depicts Sir John A. Macdonald in oratorical discourse. The statue is the work of Hamilton McCarthy.
Credit: The Globe, October 15, 1894
C) Montreal: Thursday, June 6, 1895

The Montreal memorial was the result of four years of work on the part of the fundraising and organizing committee, which was led by Scottish-born Sir Donald Smith (the future Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal), who served as MP for Montreal-West since 1887. A former commissioner of the Hudson’s Bay Company, Smith was an executive with the Canadian Pacific Railway, a company that benefited greatly from Macdonald’s efforts to build a railway linking British Columbia to the eastern provinces. As an independent conservative MP for Selkirk (Manitoba) in the 1870s, Smith voted to defeat Macdonald’s government as a result of the Canadian Pacific Scandal, which gave rise to considerable tensions between Sir John and Sir Donald. Nevertheless, as Donald Creighton noted in his biography of Macdonald, “the partnership of Donald Smith, John A. Macdonald and himself (George Stephen, 1st Baron Mount Stephen), had triumphed (by 1884). They were all Scotsmen, all Highlanders, all, ultimately, sons of the same river valley.” Despite their shaky truce, the Hamilton Herald published an editorial reminding its readers in 1895 that “[i]t was Sir John Macdonald who once said of Donald Smith that he was ‘the d---dest liar that ever lived on earth.’ It is hardly likely that Sir Donald Smith has forgotten the remark, but perhaps he is bent on heaping coal of fire (sic) on the dead man’s head.” The Herald, which had often been critical of efforts to commemorate Macdonald, used the past division between both men to question Smith’s motives.

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41 Donald Creighton, John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 397.
42 Hamilton Herald, June 7, 1895, 1.
In heading this memorial committee, Smith surrounded himself with men of equal importance within the Montreal business community, including senior executives from railway industries, many of whom would become the most substantive donors to the subscription campaign. The president of the subscribers’ committee was Col. Frederick Clarence Henshaw, a former military officer who became director of the Molson’s Bank and the Dominion Textile Company. Originally from England, Sir Joseph Hickson had a long-standing business relationship with Smith, developing the Grand Truck Railway and other railway projects. Scottish-born R. B. Angus was part of the original syndicate responsible for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. James George Ross was president of the Montreal Association of Chartered Accounts. Finally, Hugh Graham, another Scottish immigrant, published the conservative newspaper, the Montreal Star. The largest contributors to the subscription fund came from the seven members of the organizing committee.

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43 Colonel Frederick Clarence Henshaw (1851-1907), president of the subscribers’ committee, was born in Montreal. A career military officer with the Victoria Rifles Regiment, he later involved himself in the shipping and commission business. He became a director of Molson’s Bank, the Richelieu and Ontario navigation and the Dominion Textile Company. He was a staunch protectionist and a one-time president of the Junior Conservative Club. See: Charles G.D. Roberts and Arthur L. Tunnel, A Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography. Vol. 1. Toronto: Trans-Canada Press, 1934, 256-7.


46 James George Ross was born in 1861 in Montreal. He was a Conservative and a Protestant. He became president of the Montreal Association of Chartered Accountants, and served in similar positions nationally. He was an officer in the Victoria Rifles Regiment (alongside Henshaw). He was a life governor of the Montreal Western Hospital. Dr. C.W. Parker, ed. Who’s Who and Why: A Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of Canada and Newfoundland. Vol. 5: 1914. Toronto: International Press Ltd, 1914, 805.

47 Hugh Graham (1848-1938), the future Baron Atholstan, started to work for the Montreal Daily Telegraph in 1863 and, by 1869, became a partner in Montreal’s new evening paper, the Star. He went on to transform the Star into Canada’s largest and most profitable daily, in part due to technical innovations such as its overseas cable service and in part due to its commercially profitable loyalty to the British imperialist ideal. Dr. C.W. Parker, ed. Who’s Who and Why: A Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of Canada and Newfoundland. Vol. 5: 1914. Toronto: International Press Ltd, 1914, 286.
committee themselves, who collectively donated $3,500 of the required $20,000 budget. Other substantive donations came from Smith’s close associates, including Lord Mount Stephen ($1,000) and Hugh Allan ($1,000), who both had made their fortunes in the development of Canada’s railways through federal government incentives. Other substantive donations came from Smith’s close associates, including Lord Mount Stephen ($1,000) and Hugh Allan ($1,000), who both had made their fortunes in the development of Canada’s railways through federal government incentives. The work of the committee and the organization of the actual unveiling were to a large part entrusted to Joseph Jacob. Because both Smith and Jacob also served on the executive of the Sir John A. Macdonald Club of Montreal, which had been created in 1890 to promote the Liberal-Conservative Party, the activities of this Club and the organizing committee became largely intertwined and indivisible.

The first and most important task of the committee was to amass the funds required to honour Sir John with a suitable monument. During his opening remarks at the unveiling ceremony, Smith noted that Montrealers gave a “spontaneous and hearty response” to the public subscription campaign. The Montreal Herald reported that more than $20,000 had been amassed in less than two weeks, representing the total sum required. The response of Montrealers may have been spontaneous and hearty, but it principally came from a very small but significant sector of Montreal society - rich Anglophone business leaders. The final monument, with its imposing height of 18 metres, its canopy, and its ornamentation, was erected in Dominion Square, which historian Alan Gordon described as one of many

48 The Globe, June 7, 1895, 2.
49 Jacob was the secretary of the Sir John A. Macdonald Club in Montreal during the 1890s and twice was acknowledged by speakers at the unveiling ceremony. See Archives nationales du Québec (hereafter, ANQ), Sir John A. Macdonald Club papers, M-656, Minutes of the Organization Minutes, dated March 14, 1891, 3; Montreal Herald, June 7, 1895, 2. The committee recognized Jacob’s organizational efforts on its behalf with a generous gift - a life-size bronze figure of Neptune. See La Minerve, June 29, 1895, 4; Montreal Star, June 28, 1895, 6.
50 ANQ, Montreal, Sir John A. Macdonald Club papers, M-656, P6, S1, D1, Minutes of the Sir John A. Macdonald Club, 1.
51 Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1895, 2.
52 Montreal Herald, June 7, 1895, 7.
symbols of anglophone power in Montreal. The Montreal organizing committee undoubtedly opted for a much more expensive statue than Hamilton to demonstrate not only the economic weight of Canada’s financial capital but also the economic strength of the organizers.

In addition to their detailed descriptions of the event, newspapers published lists of all benefactors, whose donations to the monument ranged from $1 to $1,000. In this connection, it is quite revealing to look at the ethno-linguistic background of donors in light of the bicultural character of Montreal. The 1901 census recorded the ethno-linguistic background of Montrealers as being 64% of French-Canadian and 32% of English-Canadian origins. Despite the bicultural nature of Montreal, the committee lacked any French-Canadian representation. Among the donors, using the family name as an albeit imperfect proxy, the donor list included only 12 out of a total of 134 individual or corporate donors, whose family name indicated a French-Canadian origin. Among these 12 were well-known conservative politicians such as the former Conservative premier of Quebec (Charles Boucher de Boucherville), two former federal cabinet ministers (Sir Hector-Louis Langevin and Sir Joseph-Adolphe Chapleau), and the mayor of Montreal (Joseph-Octave Villeneuve).

Fewer in number, but more present among Montreal’s economic elite, English-Canadians in Montreal were more willing than their French-Canadian compatriots to contribute to the subscription campaign for a Macdonald memorial. French-Canadians may have abstained from contributing to the Macdonald campaign due to negative views of Macdonald following the hanging of Louis Riel and perhaps other priorities. During the

53 Alan Gordon, Making Public Past: The Contested Terrain of Montreal’s Public Memories, 1891-1930 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 182. Other symbols of Anglophone power in Montreal included the Queen Elizabeth Hotel and the Sun Life Building, both bordering on Dominion Square.
planning for a Macdonald memorial in Montreal, for instance, a committee made up almost exclusively of French-Canadians was able to amass $25,000 (or $5,000 more than the cost of the Macdonald statue) for a memorial to the city’s founder, Paul Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, whose statue was unveiled on July 1, 1895, only three weeks after the Macdonald statue. As such, the decision not to help finance the Macdonald memorial goes beyond the traditionally lower economic status of French-Canadians during this era. They may have seen de Maisonneuve, a Francophone, as a stronger symbol of their own sense of identity.

Figure 2.3: Macdonald Memorial in Montreal. The most elaborate Macdonald statue in existence, the statue of 59 feet (18 metres) in height located in Montreal’s Dominion Square. Resting on a grey granite base of 11 feet 6 inches is a golden bronze statue of Sir John A. Macdonald, measuring 10 feet 6 inches in height, wearing his Imperial Privy Councillor’s uniform. One hand holds a scroll. The statue is the work of English sculptor George E. Wade. Above the statue is a canopy supported by columns of 11 feet in height. At each corner, upon the dome of the canopy rest four bronze, life-size lions supporting on their backs a large bronze pedestal, around which are grouped seven boys linked arm in arm, representing and bearing the seven shields of the Provinces. On the top of this pedestal stands the figure of Canada, six feet high, crowned with maple leaves, resting on a shield, consisting of the Dominion arms, and bearing a horn of plenty. On the pilaster, at the foot of the columns, are grouped together the various mining, engineering, fishing and agricultural implements of the country. Credit: Montreal Daily Star, June 6, 1895.

55 La Minerve, July 2, 1895, 2.
56 The Globe, June 7, 1895, 1.
D) Kingston: Wednesday, October 23, 1895

Shortly after Macdonald’s death, many Kingstonians felt strongly that the honour of housing the national Sir John A. Macdonald memorial should be theirs. Despite efforts such as identifying spokespersons for their cause in other industrial cities and submitting a petition to Prime Minister Abbott signed by 122 parliamentarians, Kingston sought national recognition for Sir John A. Macdonald as the son of Kingston. In the end, they joined three other cities in an effort to erect a Macdonald memorial. Some Kingstonians expressed regret that their home town was not the first but rather the last city to unveil a Macdonald monument.57 It was not Kingston’s fault, argued the conservative Daily Mail, because it had to rely principally on the comparatively small number of its own inhabitants (roughly 20,000 in 1891) and those from surrounding Eastern Ontario towns to amass the necessary funds. Soliciting funds in larger centres such as Toronto, Montreal and Hamilton, which had their own fundraising campaigns underway, was no longer an option.58

Kingston’s Macdonald memorial committee was socially broader in membership than the organizing committees in Hamilton, Toronto and Montreal, where committee membership was determined by particular economic or political profiles. The broader membership also reflected the limited number of political and financial elites who called Kingston home. Yet the local boosters of Kingston may have seen the financial potential for a smaller centre like Kingston by tapping into the business of tourism. In Kingston, Captain J. Gaskin, a former alderman of Kingston, who served as county master of the Orange

57 Two other Macdonald memorials exist in Canada: Regina unveiled its statue in December 1967 and Victoria in July 1982.
Order in South Frontenac, presided over the organizing committee. Gaskin had also been president of both the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society and the Protestant Protective Society, as well as vice-president of the Liberal-Conservative Association of Kingston. 59 Joining Gaskin were Dr. Michael Sullivan, who Macdonald appointed to the Senate in 1885, Mayor C. W. Wright, Principal George Grant of Queen’s University, James H. Metcalfe, the new Conservative MP for Kingston, and local artist, Forshaw Day. While this list of Kingstonians included but also extended beyond the business (Hamilton and Montreal) or the party elite (Hamilton and Toronto), it nevertheless reflected the dominant class, which aimed to shape ‘common sense’ values regarding Macdonald in an effort to impress the subordinate classes in Kingston.

The committee also sought advice from influential citizens regarding the statue’s design, including then Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario (1887 - 1892) and Kingston-native Sir Alexander Campbell, to whom Grant wrote:

I called on Saturday to tell you that I went to see the [Egerton] Ryerson statue. It is not as good as the [Colonel Arthur] Williams one [in Port Hope, Ontario]. But, with regards to site, sculptor, etc., we are all willing to be guided by you, and nothing will be done till we have some idea of the amount of money that we are likely to receive. 60

The Williams statue, with its left arm raised above its head holding in his hand a sword pointing straight to the heavens, portrayed the former Liberal-Conservative MP and the “hero of Batoche” during the northwest campaign of 1885 as a victorious military hero. 61


60 Archives of Ontario (hereafter AoO), Sir Alexander Campbell papers, MU479, F23, Letter from Principal George Grant to Lieutenant-Governor Sir Alexander Campbell, dated “Tuesday 1891.”

the end, Campbell’s preference for a statue depicting Macdonald in a heroic stance, as opposed to simply wearing an Imperial Councillor uniform or a Prince Albert coat, did not sway the committee’s choice. The committee contracted George Wade, the English sculptor of the Macdonald statue in Montreal, to make an exact replica of that statue for Kingston, minus the elaborate base and canopy, possibly as a means of reducing costs. The organizers and the City of Kingston selected City Park as the location of the statue. Located in historic Kingston, within a block of Queen’s University, the General Hospital, the Superior Court of Justice for the Eastern District of Frontenac and Lake Ontario, City Park is also near to some of the homes Macdonald rented or owned in Kingston.

Figure 2.4: Macdonald Memorial in Kingston. The Macdonald Monument stands at the entrance of City Park, near Queen’s University. The statue is an exact replica of the Montreal Macdonald memorial, both done by George Wade, with Macdonald wearing his Imperial Privy Councillor uniform. The statue stands on a granite stone of 15 feet in height. On the stone are written three elements: Macdonald’s name, the year of his birth (1815) and his death (1891), and the following saying: “A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die.”62
Credit: Queen’s University Archives

2) The Speakers

During the course of the four Macdonald memorial unveiling ceremonies, thirteen members of Canada’s federal political class were invited to deliver speeches. On each occasion, the Prime Minister of Canada – Sir John Thompson\(^{63}\) in Hamilton and Toronto, and following his death, Sir Mackenzie Bowell\(^{64}\) in Montreal and Kingston – was in attendance and addressed the crowds. As a very senior minister of the Crown and then as Prime Minister, Bowell was thus the only speaker to deliver a speech on all four occasions. Sir Adolphe Caron was the second most common speaker at the events, delivering speeches in each city with the exception of Kingston, although his name appeared on a very long initial list of speakers.\(^{65}\) Among the 13 speakers, eight addressed the crowds only once. In addition, the speakers included ten senior members of the Liberal-Conservative Party and three members of the Liberal Party. Table 2.1 provides a complete list of the speakers, by event. The following section analyzes the speeches delivered during the four events using the eight representations of Macdonald described in the introduction of this thesis. The analysis will then turn to the representations of Sir John A. Macdonald delivered by the members of the Liberal Party during these events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Hamilton</th>
<th>Toronto</th>
<th>Montreal (deceased)</th>
<th>Kingston</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sir John Thompson</td>
<td>Lib.-Cons.</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>(deceased)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Mackenzie Bowell</td>
<td>Lib.-Cons.</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{65}\) *Kingston Daily News*, October 21, 1895, 4; *Ottawa Citizen*, October 23, 1895, 4. It is not clear as to why Caron (and Tupper) did not speak at this occasion in the end.
Sir Adolphe Caron  Lib.-Cons.  √  √  √
N. Clarke Wallace 66  Lib.-Cons.  √
Sir Oliver Mowat 67  Liberal  √
George Ross 68  Liberal  √  √
Sir Charles H. Tupper 69  Lib.-Cons.  √
Sir George Eulas Foster 70  Lib.-Cons.  √  √
Sir Joseph-Adolphe Chapleau 71  Lib.-Cons.  √
Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière 72  Liberal  √
Sir Joseph-Aldéric Ouimet 73  Lib.-Cons.  √
Walter Humphries Montague 74  Lib.-Cons.  √
Sir George Kirkpatrick 75  Lib.-Cons.  √

66 Wallace's biographer, Brian P. Clarke, argued that the MP's political fortunes were tied to his rise within the Orange Order, becoming a cabinet minister at the same time as he was a grand master within the Order. See DCB, Vol. XII: 1891 – 1900, biographical entry for N. Clarke Wallace by Brian P. Clarke, available on-line and accessed on January 10, 2008 at http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=41249&query=wallace.


68 George William Ross was premier of Ontario between 1899 and 1906. He was invited to become a Liberal cabinet minister in 1896. See Rand Dyck, Provincial Politics in Canada (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1991), 306, 349.

69 Tupper was the son of future Prime Minister Sir Charles Tupper. Tupper (son) was a federal cabinet minister in the 1880s and 1890s. See DCB, Vol. XV: 1921 – 1930, biographical entry for Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper by Peter B. Waite, available online and accessed on October 8, 2007, at http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=42008&query=Tupper.

70 Foster was Macdonald's and Bowell's finance minister. Information and data regarding the political career of George Eulas Foster, website of the Parliament of Canada, Members of the House of Commons: Historical Information Since 1867 Provided by the Library of Parliament (George Eulas Foster), available on-line and accessed on September 14, 2007, at http://www2.parl.gc.ca/ParlInfo/Files/Parliamentarian.aspx?Item=2cf93f16-ac02-4963-ae74-f74b1cb23251&Language=E.


74 Montague was Bowell's Secretary of State and the MP for the Ontario riding of Haldimand. Information and data on Walter Humphries Montague, website of the Parliament of Canada, Members of the House of Commons: Historical Information Since 1867 Provided by the Library of Parliament, available online and accessed on October 15, 2007, at http://www2.parl.gc.ca/ParlInfo/Files/Parliamentarian.aspx?Item=5c3e28ae-1e3c-4d71-85b7-908ab98713a1&Language=E.

75 Kirkpatrick was a long-time associate of Macdonald in the House of Commons. He was appointed by Prime Minister Abbott as the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario in 1892. See DCB, vol. XII: 1891 - 1900, biographical
A) The Liberal-Conservatives

The speeches delivered by the ten senior representatives of the Liberal-Conservative Party provide a rich source of information to analyze the representations of Sir John A. Macdonald advanced by his former party. The following section will explore seven out of the eight themes outlined in the introduction. All Liberal-Conservative speakers were silent on the theme of Macdonald and the preference for a strong central government, preferring to discuss other elements of Macdonald’s life and political career.

A) Macdonald as a Loyal British Subject

Macdonald as a loyal British subject who contributed to the British Empire was a constant theme during these unveiling ceremonies. After unveiling the Macdonald memorial in Hamilton, Prime Minister Thompson claimed he had just unveiled “the image of one of the most illustrious men of our generation,” a man of equal worth to Wellington and Nelson.  

He also described Macdonald as faithful a servant of the Crown as ever lived within the realm of England, a fact that even Queen Victoria was said to have acknowledged. Finally, he also claimed that this new memorial represented “a new milestone reached in the history of the British Empire.” Subsequent speakers echoed the same theme. Bowell described Macdonald’s overall political objectives as follows: to “establish upon a solid foundation British power on the greater half of the North American continent.” As such, he stressed the importance of the British connection for Canada’s prosperity. Finally, Foster, a New Brunswick Liberal-Conservative MP who served as Minister of Finance between 1888

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76 Macdonald Memorial Committee, *The Proceedings at the Unveiling*, 12. The recent unveiling of a bust of Sir John A. Macdonald inside St. Paul’s Cathedral in London in November 1892, only steps away from the tomb of these two decorated British war generals, facilitated the imagery. See *The Globe*, November 29, 1892, 4.

77 Macdonald Memorial Committee, *The Proceedings at the Unveiling*, 12.

and 1896, noted that one of main lessons future generations of Canadians could learn from Macdonald related to imperialism, including pride in being a British subject. Their speeches represented Macdonald as the loyal British subject of equal importance to the Empire as British war generals.

Beyond a loyal British subject, many of the speakers used Macdonald to highlight their perception of Canada’s pre-eminence within the British Empire. For example, Foster used his speech to define Canada as the “premier colony of that great Empire at whose undying altar fires (Macdonald) prayed and watched for more than half a century.”79 For his part, Sir Charles H. Tupper – son of future Prime Minister Sir Charles Tupper who had been an MP since 1882 and a federal cabinet minister since 1888 – noted that Macdonald’s political career was known throughout the British Empire. He asserted: “[O]ur colonial brethren from almost every quarter of the globe were … familiar with his career.”80 As such, many speakers used this theme to paint Macdonald as the man who made Canada the greatest British colony.

While many speakers addressed Macdonald’s interest in building Canada on a solid British foundation, Kirkpatrick – a seven-term MP who was appointed as Ontario’s Lieutenant-Governor in 1891 – provided a variation on an already common theme. He argued that Macdonald, as a skilful negotiator, was able to ensure the defence of Canada’s rights. He provided the example of Macdonald’s role as an intermediary between Great Britain and the United States in connection with the Treaty of Washington (1871). Kirkpatrick described Macdonald’s ability to influence the British commissioners, and thus ensure better terms for Canada in this treaty. However, Macdonald’s biographer, Donald Creighton, later argued that Sir John thought the British Commissioners ignored his

79 Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1895, 5.
80 The Globe, October 15, 1894, 5.
comments and signed away important fishing rights in Canada’s Atlantic waters: “[Macdonald] was only too well aware that something that he did not want, but could not prevent, was about to be done, and done irrevocably. … He did not return to Ottawa as a conqueror.” Kirkpatrick attempted to illustrate how Macdonald placed Canada’s interests first - a theme that 20th century politicians explored further in their own attempts to shape the public memory of Canada’s first Prime Minister.

Economic and political ties to Great Britain remained strong and important for many of these Liberal-Conservative speakers during this period in Canadian history. The Liberal Party’s discussions of possible reciprocity and greater economic integration with the United States may have been at the source of these strong and repetitive representations of Macdonald as a loyal British subject. Macdonald was clearly described through these excerpts as the man responsible for constructing Canada’s political foundations on solid British principles and through British-modeled institutions. He was credited with ensuring the territorial integrity of the British Empire, to the same rank and importance of decorated British war icons Wellington and Nelson.

B) Macdonald as a Symbol of Canada

Almost all Liberal-Conservative speakers represented Macdonald as a conciliator of the two founding races and as a symbol of national unity. In one of his many speeches, Sir Adolphe-Philippe Caron, Minister of Militia and Defence and one of the few Quebec Liberal-Conservatives to support Macdonald after the Riel hanging, noted that Macdonald and Cartier had “s[u]nk their differences in a common effort for the unity and material prosperity of the country that a great and powerful Canadian Dominion … was made

possible."\(^{82}\) In light of ongoing strife throughout Canada following the hanging of Métis leader Louis Riel in 1885, national unity was a particularly important political theme developed by nearly all of the speakers. For Caron, the country needed to come together now more than ever.\(^{83}\) Caron had supported Macdonald since 1873, and his loyalty to the goals of bringing Canadians of all races and languages together remained unwavering:

If that statue of bronze could speak, and express an opinion, it would tell you that, however grateful it might be, it would be much more so if the people of Canada would erect to his memory a greater monument by continuing his work and following his example. It would be a monument that would do him honor, and if we would follow his footsteps, let us work together, shoulder to shoulder, in consolidating the great Canadian people.\(^{84}\)

As a French-Canadian, Caron sought to reach out to Anglophones in Ontario, emphasizing the importance of consolidation and compromise on both sides if the new Dominion of Canada would retain its political viability.

Other speakers also touched upon this theme in slightly different ways. Foster spoke admiringly of “the finesse, the spirit with which [Macdonald] met strife of creed, strife of race, strife of sectionalism,” each of which he attempted to settle through “prudent compromise.”\(^{85}\) Bowell also focused on Macdonald as a conciliator of Canada’s two founding races, for “[i]n Sir John Macdonald’s mind bigotry and intolerance had ‘no’

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\(^{84}\) Macdonald Memorial Committee, *The Proceedings at the Unveiling*, 22.

\(^{85}\) *Montreal Gazette*, June 7, 1895, 5.
place.” As such, he highlighted Macdonald’s ability to unite the two founding races and two main religious creeds. For his part, Thompson argued that Macdonald was able to resolve many of the questions which dealt with “rivalries of race.” He also suggested that, by looking at Macdonald’s statue, Canadians would be inspired to do more for the interests of Canada as a whole. Respect for citizens of a different creed was one of the most important ways, Thompson suggested, by which Canadians could put Canada above their own personal interests. Such sentiments were important as his government would likely be divided again, perhaps regarding the Manitoba School Questions, among Canadians and within his own cabinet.

During his speech, Ouimet as the new leader of Quebec’s Liberal-Conservatives argued that it was Montreal’s duty to honour Macdonald’s memory in perpetuity, as the previous speakers “n’ont pas trop vanté son génie politique. Non plus que son succès dans la grande tâche qu’il avait entrepris de lier ensemble les diverses provinces de l’Amérique Britannique du Nord et d’en unir dans une même communauté d’intérêt national les éléments si divers qui constituent le peuple de notre immense pays.” Ouimet’s remarks seriously downplayed the religious and linguistic struggles that had erupted in Canada since Confederation. As such, Ouimet was motivated by the notion that a single community of national interest could ensure the further political and economic progress of Canada.

The lessons of Macdonald as a conciliator of the two founding races and as a symbol of national unity were legendary, some speakers suggested. For example, Tupper stressed the importance of a necessary greater rapprochement of the races, and the importance of rallying Canadians into a single community. According to him, Sir John accomplished this task so well that British subjects all over the world benefited from Macdonald’s wisdom:

86 *The Globe*, October 24, 1895, 2.
87 *La Presse*, June 6, 1895, 6.
Our colonial brethren from almost every quarter of the globe were not only familiar with his career but with the study of how to apply to their own circumstances and their own time that wisdom which had enabled that great statesman to consolidate the varied interest of half a continent.88

Overall, Tupper noted that Macdonald had helped to shape not only Canada’s political evolution but possibly that of other nations.

In the end, the image of Macdonald as the main conciliator between Canada’s two founding races was used by Liberal-Conservatives to encourage French- and English-Canadians to work together more often to achieve the common goal of a brighter, more prosperous future for Canada. Macdonald was also credited with preserving national unity through his efforts of conciliation and compromise. As such, they elevated him above others as a symbol of Canada.

C) Macdonald as the Leading Father of Confederation

The theme of Macdonald as the leading Father of Confederation was omnipresent throughout the unveiling ceremonies. Through the use of different words, many speakers spoke of Macdonald’s leadership in achieving Confederation. Macdonald’s efforts to consolidate the British colonies into a new dominion made Sir John Thompson conclude that: “Of no man of any period can it be more truly said that he was the father and the founder of his country.”89 Thompson was thus one of the first political leaders to define Macdonald as the father and the founder of Canada, despite Canada’s limited political independence from Westminster. Beyond his role in Confederation, Thompson argued that Macdonald’s legacy was significant, as he was “one of the most illustrious men of our generation.”90 Senator Sanford’s comments referred to Canadians mourning Macdonald’s

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88 The Globe, October 15, 1894, 5.
90 Ibid.
loss, for “we who mourn the loss of the great premier, as for a father, or a dear friend, with a keen sense of personal loss.”\textsuperscript{91} Rather than clinging to the simple notion of Macdonald as the originator of the idea of Confederation, Montague, who briefly served in cabinet as Secretary of State and Minister of Agriculture, argued that “the rest of his work was the superstructure of Confederation.”\textsuperscript{92} He enumerated examples such as the provision of “highways of commerce,” the purchase of the Hudson Bay territory, the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the alliance with Quebec through Cartier and Thomas D’Arcy McGee, and the adoption of the famed National Policy.\textsuperscript{93}

Francophone speakers also raised Macdonald above other political figures. Chapleau, who served as Macdonald’s Secretary of State for 10 years prior to becoming Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec, clearly placed Macdonald’s role in bringing about Confederation above anyone else, a fact strengthened by his use of the phrase father of our country to describe Macdonald. For his part, Adolphe Caron also labelled Macdonald as “le père de notre pays, le fondateur de notre pays.”\textsuperscript{94} He noted: “Comme il serait heureux, car il réaliserait, comme nous le réalisons tous, qu’il a vécu pour son pays et que son pays a grandement apprécié son travail et qu’il honore glorieusement son défunt.”\textsuperscript{95} As such, French- and English-Canadian Liberal-Conservative speakers sought to elevate Macdonald above other national political figures.

In general, Macdonald was no longer seen as one among many Fathers of Confederation - he became the Father of Confederation, even the father and the founder of Canada. Macdonald’s liberal and conservative allies in achieving this Confederation objective

\textsuperscript{91} Macdonald Memorial Committee, \textit{The Proceedings at the Unveiling}, 10-12.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{The Globe}, October 24, 1895, 2.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{La Presse}, June 7, 1895, 1.
\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Ibid}. 
– Sir George-Étienne Cartier, George Brown, Sir Charles Tupper and Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley among others – were largely forgotten during the three unveiling ceremonies in Ontario. In Montreal, however, commemoration speakers listed another man as Macdonald’s equal in achieving the Confederation dream - Sir George-Étienne Cartier, the long-time political leader of many French-Canadians.

D) The Macdonald-Cartier Partnership

During the unveiling of the Macdonald memorial in Montreal, a new element was introduced in the commemoration of Macdonald. The event was not only the official commemoration of Macdonald but rather the commemoration of the joint effort of Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier in achieving Confederation. Cartier’s memory had been completely ignored during the Hamilton event. Cartier’s name was mentioned in passing during the Toronto and Kingston ceremonies. In Toronto, Caron spoke about Macdonald and Cartier “sink(ing) their differences in a common effort for the unity and material prosperity of the country.”

Chapleau’s speech marked a major shift in the previous commemoration of Macdonald. He argued that the commemoration of Macdonald should also be the commemoration of Sir George-Étienne Cartier. After all, Chapleau concluded that Cartier and Macdonald deserved equal praise for the achievement of the union of British North America colonies. The Montreal unveiling ceremony was, therefore, not only a commemoration of Macdonald but also served to strengthen the public memory of Sir George-Étienne Cartier. The unveiling of the Macdonald memorial in Montreal marked the

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start of the campaign to raise funds to erect an even larger Cartier monument, which would finally be erected on Montreal’s Mount Royal in 1919.

The equal positioning of Macdonald and Cartier during the Montreal unveiling ceremony was also supported by English-Canadian speakers. For example, New Brunswick MP and Finance Minister George Eulas Foster portrayed French- and English-Canadians as being on an equal footing – something which none of the speakers at the previous unveiling ceremonies in Hamilton and Toronto had done. He compared Montcalm and Wolfe as being “equal in bravery … though the fortunes of war were unequal.” He compared the need for statues for both Macdonald and Cartier. As such, some members of the Liberal-Conservative party, both English- and French-Canadians, had stressed the importance of equal status for both official language communities and had thus put the careers and the legacies of Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier at par.

The equal importance of Macdonald and Cartier in Chapleau’s remarks was designed to appeal to French-Canadians by elevating one of their own to the same heights as Macdonald. In light of the decreasing political fortune of the Liberal-Conservative Party in Quebec, motivated in part by, for example, Macdonald’s role in the Louis Riel affair, the Liberal-Conservative Party sought to reclaim its Quebec support through an appeal to national unity. As such, the equal partnership between Macdonald and Cartier was used only in Montreal as a strategy to reach out to French-Canadian voters.

E) Macdonald: Nation-BUILDER

The representations of Macdonald as a nation-builder were also very common through these memorial unveiling ceremonies. Many of the speakers noted that Macdonald’s political life was inextricably linked to Canada’s progress through nation-building and

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97 Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1895, 5.
technological advancement. Many of the examples supporting this representation included: Confederation, the entry and the creation of new provinces, and the development of infrastructure projects, including railways and canals. Wallace, the advocate for Protestants within Thompson’s cabinet, described the force of character of Macdonald as a nation-builder, the trait that he felt led to Sir John’s greatness:

When other men less courageous would have faltered and gone back, he always stood determined, never faltered, never turned back, when he had a purpose in view, and his indomitable pluck carried him through all his great undertakings and achievements, built up this Dominion and made it a country. 98

Wallace’s remarks thus further solidified the emerging theme of Macdonald’s political career being inseparably intertwined with Canada’s economic and political development, which echoed remarks of previous speakers.

Macdonald’s support for protectionist tariffs through the National Policy was another example of Macdonald as a nation-builder. Having entered federal politics in 1878, Wallace successfully fought his first election battle campaigning in support of Macdonald’s newly introduced National Policy. Not surprisingly therefore, he stressed the importance of the National Policy to the economic development of Hamilton: “[F]rom the [National] policy which the late Sir John Macdonald inaugurated, combined with the courage and enterprise and skills of your citizens[,] you have benefited very largely.” 99 Thus Wallace was very complimentary to both Macdonald’s legacy of the right economic policies at the right time and to the entrepreneurial spirit and work ethic of Hamiltonians. Because of its economic growth, Canada should appropriately continue to commemorate Macdonald and the force of his character.

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F) Macdonald as a Self-Made Man.

The theme of Macdonald as a self-made man was one of the focuses of Foster’s address during the unveiling of the Macdonald memorial in Montreal. Yet it was an entirely new one in the context of these unveiling ceremonies. Foster described Macdonald as the personification of the upwardly-mobile immigrant: “The immigrant boy who landed, wide-eyed and open mouthed, on the shores of this country at six years spent a few years of life, climbed rapidly to the highest public position, became the confidential adviser of his Sovereign.”100 The theme of Macdonald as a self-made man was used again by Bowell who encouraged Canada’s youth to follow in the footsteps of Sir John. He commented that Macdonald was born without wealth and still managed to reach the pinnacle of Canadian politics. As such, he encouraged Canada’s youth to reach higher.101 With this description of Sir John, Foster and Bowell used a notion quite popular during the late nineteenth century, which historian Allan Smith would expose as a myth nearly a century later.102 The life of Sir John A. Macdonald, who arrived as an immigrant boy to eventually hold the office of Prime Minister of Canada for 18 years, renders itself appropriately to the invocation of this theme. While this theme could have been explored further, the other speakers focused on other themes.

H) Sir John A. Macdonald as a Partisan Politician

In their depictions of Macdonald, many Liberal-Conservative speakers were careful not to represent Macdonald in ways that could make him less acceptable to Canadians, especially those who were not supporters of the Liberal-Conservative Party. Despite their tributes to Macdonald, the sense that Macdonald was a partisan politician, who used tactics

100 Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1895, 5.
101 The Globe, October 24, 1895, 2.
to mobilize his supporters at the cost of dividing some Canadians, was present. For example, the chairman of Montreal’s Macdonald memorial organizing committee acknowledged that Macdonald was a very partisan politician. He observed that “there was perhaps no more rigid party man in the public life of Canada.”\footnote{Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1895, 2.} Since Macdonald’s death, however, he argued that his image as a strict partisan was beginning to dissipate: “[H]is political opponents vied with his political friends in their expression of the great loss the Dominion had sustained, and their sense of the ardent loyalty and personal integrity which characterized Sir John Macdonald’s whole life.”\footnote{Ibid.}

For his part, Montague remarked how appropriate it was to see “old-time opponents joining with old-time party friends in such substantial and lasting recognition of his greatness and his worth,” despite the old chieftain’s inclination to use “party warfare” tactics.\footnote{The Globe, October 24, 1895, 2.} In sum, Montague did not avoid the question of Macdonald’s partisanship during his time as Prime Minister. Rather he rejoiced in the observation that, in death, all Canadians could pay tribute to this nation-builder, the politician who deserves Canada’s highest regards for his realisations. Macdonald’s well-known partisanship (in the negative sense) was acknowledged by two members of the Liberal-Conservative Party. However, in both examples, Smith and Montague were able to use their example to illustrate that Macdonald’s death had eliminated these divisions. They hoped that all Canadians could unite around Macdonald.

**B) The Liberals**

The Liberal Party was not excluded from participating in the unveiling of the Sir John A. Macdonald memorials, although its presence on the speakers’ podium was always limited. In Hamilton, for example, Sanford wrote to Thompson to indicate that the Liberal
Premier of Ontario, Sir Oliver Mowat, had insisted on speaking at the unveiling ceremony.\textsuperscript{106} Although a childhood friend of Macdonald who had also briefly articled in his Kingston law practice, Mowat had been a long-time political opponent. In particular, he challenged Macdonald’s concept of a highly centralized Confederation through a variety of legal battles that aimed at strengthening provincial powers. “[B]eing known to his friends here, we could not ignore (Mowat’s) request,” Sanford observed. “I am sure you will appreciate the position in which we are placed.”\textsuperscript{107} Sanford’s discomfort with the addition of the Liberal Mowat and a previous reference to ensuring a strong Conservative audience suggest that the Hamilton event at least was planned from a mostly partisan perspective. Publicly, Prime Minister Thompson warmly recognized Mowat’s participation in the ceremony notwithstanding the latter’s long-standing political opposition to Macdonald’s policies.

Mowat’s presence at Hamilton’s Macdonald unveiling ceremony created a precedent. In Toronto, on the grounds of the Legislative Assembly, the Toronto organizing committee invited a representative of the governing Ontario Liberal Party to speak at the event. Although in attendance himself, Mowat designated his Minister of Education, George Ross, to speak on behalf of the Liberal Party of Ontario.\textsuperscript{108} In Montreal, an invitation was extended to Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, the former Liberal Premier of Quebec, who would win a seat in the House of Commons under Laurier’s banner in 1896.\textsuperscript{109} Finally, in Kingston,
Ross was yet again a speaker at the Kingston unveiling ceremony, although the process of his selection was not uncovered. As such, the Liberal Party was represented at each of the Macdonald unveiling events.

Right from the beginning, Mowat announced that he, unlike Laurier’s speech in the House of Commons after the announcement of Macdonald’s death, would not deliver an “unbounded eulogy as came fittingly from the deceased Premier’s colleagues and successor, Sir John Thompson.” While acknowledging that a “continual war” over constitutional and territorial issues had existed between them, Mowat conceded that “death minimizes where it does not cancel personal antagonisms. … Survivors are glad to recognize all that was good or great or commendable in an opponent who has passed away.” He acknowledged that Sir John had enjoyed the support of a majority of electors most of his life, as well as the affection of his party and many friends outside of the Liberal-Conservative Party. This affection, concluded Mowat, was the result of “rare and valuable gifts”: humour, wit, courteousness, practicality, uncommon courage, uncommon perseverance, unsurpassed common sense and tact. “There are doubtless other things which would have to be taken into account if I were professing to draw … a full portrait of the late [prime minister] from the standpoint of a political opponent,” he claimed. However, Mowat chose to share some cherished memories of the old chieftain – that of a popular and cordial classroom friend, that of a partner in the coalition government of Sir Étienne Taché and in the securing of Confederation, and that of a friend, who offered him an appointment to the Chancery Bench. Finally, the Ontario Premier reflected how history would offer two different perspectives and interpretations of Macdonald’s political career: “[I]t will tell that he

contemplated with hope and expectation the future greatness of this dear Canada of ours, and that he appreciated meantime and desired to maintain its British connection.”\textsuperscript{113} This long-time opponent of Macdonald was thus supportive of the efforts of Liberal-Conservatives to transform Macdonald into a dominating national figure.

While Mowat had explored his personal connection with Macdonald during his Hamilton speech, Ross limited himself to Macdonald’s policies and political decisions in Toronto and Kingston. During more than a decade, Ross had opposed Macdonald and his Liberal-Conservative Party when he had served as the Liberal MP for Middlesex (Ontario) between 1872 and 1883.\textsuperscript{114} Despite his explicit recognition of a political career interwoven with history and characterized by force of will and purpose, Ross’ remarks revealed criticism of Macdonald. These were sufficiently subtle as to not upset the presumably largely pro-Macdonald audience. Ross’ first criticism of Macdonald centered on the former Prime Minister’s preference for Canada to be governed through legislative union where provincial legislatures would be subordinate to a strong central government. Ross argued that, although a federal model had been adopted for Canada’s constitution, Macdonald “spent his whole energies to retain for the House of Commons that large jurisdiction which afterwards gave him such a free hand in legislation.”\textsuperscript{115} Ross argued against the federal efforts to dominate provincial legislative initiatives and the use of the federal powers to disallow provincial laws. Such grave constitutional and jurisdictional disagreements, which characterized Macdonald’s tenure as Prime Minister, sometimes had to be adjudicated by Canada’s then final court of appeal, the Judicial Committee of the British Privy Council. However, Ross did not confine his criticism to constitutional and jurisdictional matters. He also criticized Macdonald for

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Ibid.}


\textsuperscript{115} \textit{The Globe}, October 15, 1894, 5.
various other sins: his use of the public treasury to fund substantive public works projects; his unwillingness to launch a public consultation process about how to form the Dominion of Canada; and his allegedly preferential treatment of Nova Scotia to avoid that province’s separation from the new federation of British North American colonies. Although he clearly indicated that his party would have done things differently Ross provided, in each instance, the positive aspects of Macdonald’s stances for citizens: the improved internal communications through a network of railways and canals; and the avoidance of Nova Scotia’s secession from the new Dominion. Ross maintained this rather sweetened partisan tone until the conclusion of his address:

Now that [Macdonald] has gone, while still believing that[,] in many respects a different policy on some questions would have been better for the country, still I am free to say, at least speaking for myself, that no Canadian of his century ever filled a larger place in the history of Canada than he has filled. […] Whatever was good in his life[,] let us imitate; whatever was faulty, for human nature, in the best of men has its frailties, let us forget.116

The audience applauded Ross’ speech, but it is uncertain whether everybody fully appreciated the subtleties of his criticism of Macdonald, in particular the push for more provincial rights. His serious criticism of Macdonald and his political actions notwithstanding, Ross delivered a speech that, like Mowat in Hamilton, built on Liberal-Conservative efforts of transforming Macdonald into a national larger-than-life figure.

Finally, Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière argued that even those who felt it their duty to oppose Macdonald had come to appreciate him: “Croyez-moi, quand je vous dis que nous, qui avons cru de notre devoir de lui faire opposition, nous aussi avons appris à l’admirer, et ce qui est plus est, à l’aimer.”117 A senior member of the Liberal Party, especially

116 Ibid.
117 La Presse, June 7, 1895, 1.
one from Quebec and closely associated with Wilfrid Laurier, Sir Henri-Gustave indicated that Macdonald in life as in death was a beloved man, one that his party learned to admire. Such remarks clearly prepared the ground for Macdonald’s elevation to a symbol of national unity beyond partisan politics. Finally, Joly de Lotbinière expressed his hope that former Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie, who died on April 17, 1892, would one day be honoured like Macdonald.\footnote{Ibid. For a full biography of Alexander Mackenzie, see DCB, Vol. XII: 1891 - 1900, biographical entry for Alexander Mackenzie by Ben Forster, available online and accessed on January 19, 2008 at http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=40374&query=alexander%20AND%20mackenzie.} In so doing, Joly de Lotbinière attempted to ensure an equal treatment in the commemoration of all those who hold the highest elected political office in Canada.

3) Official Memory: Case Studies of Sir John Thompson and Sir Mackenzie Bowell

The art of commemoration is often more about the intent of the speaker than the object of the commemoration. This strategy was used by most speakers during the unveiling of the Sir John A. Macdonald memorials. This section focuses on the speeches delivered by Prime Ministers Sir John Thompson and Sir Mackenzie Bowell through the lens of the theory of official memory.

to Hamilton, and perhaps reflecting the organizing committee’s own preference, Hon. N. Clarke Wallace was added to the speakers’ list alongside Thompson, who delivered the keynote address.

Beyond the major themes analyzed previously, Thompson’s speech also contained a very different, underlying message, i.e., that Canada was a very difficult country to govern. In reflecting on history, Thompson mentioned that, in the past, half the population had taken arms against the other half in order to deal with what he called the “burning questions.” Many of these questions resulted from the “rivalries of race,” and, according to Thompson, Macdonald resolved many of these questions. He foreshadowed that the Manitoba Schools Question would be a very divisive issue between Canadians of various faiths and languages. The Prime Minister also suggested that, by looking at Macdonald’s statue, Canadians would be inspired to do more for the interests of Canada as a whole. With such reasoning, Thompson attempted to reach out to and build support among Protestant Ontarians, an important constituency within Canada. Because Thompson’s Catholicism had been a source of concern since Macdonald’s death, his introduction and use of the themes of conciliation and respect were beneficial to his own leadership.

Thompson’s death left the Liberal-Conservative Party in considerable disarray. Governor General Lord Aberdeen called upon a cabinet minister and close friend of Macdonald, Senator Sir Mackenzie Bowell, to form the next government. Bowell was the only senior member of the Liberal-Conservative Party to speak during all four of the


121 Prime Minister Thompson passed away in December 1894 while staying at Windsor Castle for his own swearing-in ceremony as an Imperial Privy Councillor by Queen Victoria. Bowell served in Parliament for 50 years: 25 years in the House of Commons, and 25 years in the Senate. See information and data on the political career of Sir Mackenzie Bowell, website of the Parliament of Canada, Members of the House of Commons: Historical Information Since 1867 Provided by the Library of Parliament, available online and accessed on October 15, 2007 at http://www2.parl.gc.ca/ParlInfo/Files/Parliamentarian.aspx?Item=1871e43c-bda4-464a-949f-e820fed0d673&Language=E.
Macdonald unveiling ceremonies. Prior to becoming Prime Minister, Bowell focused on the themes of seeking to “establish upon a solid foundation British power on the greater half of the North American continent”; 122 Macdonald’s close collaborations with others; Macdonald’s acknowledgement of the values of diverging opinion; and Macdonald’s role as a conciliator of races. 123

In his new role as Prime Minister, Bowell emphasized his political links with Macdonald’s legacy, arguing that he assisted Sir John in taking decisions and determining directions. 124 He also highlighted Macdonald’s ability to unite the two founding races and two main religious creeds. In addition, Bowell implored the younger generation in the audience to follow in Sir John’s footsteps so that they would contribute to Canada’s greatness: “[Macdonald’s] life-work was a more enduring monument than bronze or marble … and history [will] show that he was the brightest star that ever shone in the visible constellation of this country, which he loved so much.” 125 Thus this new Prime Minister tried to increase the party’s membership by encouraging Canada’s youth to follow Macdonald’s Liberal-Conservative Party path. He also portrayed himself as a natural successor to Macdonald, who supported and shaped his policies and who would follow the same course of action as Prime Minister.

4) Citizen Participation in Memorial Unveilings

The unveiling of the Macdonald memorials in Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal and Kingston were public events organized to favour citizen participation. In Hamilton, Toronto

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122 The Globe, October 15, 1894, 5.
123 Ibid.
124 Prime Minister Sir John Thompson had been invited to deliver the keynote address during the Macdonald memorial in Hamilton and Toronto. The Montreal organizers did not invite Bowell to deliver the keynote, although he was invited to speak. The Montreal keynote address was delivered by Sir Georges Eulas Foster, who served as Minister of Finance to Macdonald, Thompson and Bowell. Foster resigned from cabinet in December 1895 because of Bowell’s leadership. Like Bowell, Foster was a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant and a unilingual English speaker.
125 Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1895, 2.
and Kingston, for example, the local mayors decreed a half-day civic holiday to encourage the attendance of a large number of citizens, including school children. In addition, the ceremony began at 3 p.m., in Hamilton for example, to ensure that the “workingmen” would have the opportunity to attend. In Toronto, the organizers selected to unveil the memorial on a Saturday, when many citizens could more easily attend. Some guests may have travelled great distances, no doubt encouraged by the special discount train fares offered by the Grand Trunk Railway, a beneficiary of financial support from the Macdonald government.

In all four examples, a sizable number of citizens participated in the event, filling up streets and parks near the memorials (Table 2.2). Two cities – Hamilton and Kingston - received an astonishingly high (by today’s standards) participation rate of up to 42% of the city’s total population. The attendance level at the Toronto ceremony was either equal to or greater than the Hamilton event. However, the event reflected a lower share of that city’s population. Even in Montreal, 20,000 citizens attended. Beyond a possible interest in commemorating Macdonald, the total number of participants suggests a high level of curiosity regarding the proceedings and perhaps an interest in participating in the monument’s unveiling and in listening to members of Canada’s federal political class deliver remarks.

126 LAC, Sir John Thompson papers, MG26-D, Reel C-10535, Letter from Sanford to Thompson, dated October 20, 1893, 23559; The Globe, October 19, 1893, 2; La Presse, May 30, 1895, 6.

127 For references to special rates offered by the Grand Trunk Railway to attend the event, see The Globe, October 19, 1893, 2.
Table 2.2: Number of attendees at the unveiling of each city’s Macdonald memorial in comparison to total population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Attendees</th>
<th>Total Population (Census of 1891)</th>
<th>Percentage of population in attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>10,000 – 20,000$^{129}$</td>
<td>47,245</td>
<td>21% - 42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>20,000 – 30,000$^{130}$</td>
<td>144,023</td>
<td>14% - 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreal</td>
<td>20,000$^{131}$</td>
<td>182,695</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>7,000 – 8,000$^{132}$</td>
<td>19,263</td>
<td>36% - 41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lowest participation rate was in Montreal. Montreal was the only city with a majority French-language population to unveil a Macdonald memorial. In fact, the French-speaking population of Montreal was 64% in 1891, as referenced earlier, representing roughly 117,000 citizens. By 1895, French-Canadians continued to express their displeasure with Confederation. On Dominion Day, only a few weeks after the unveiling, *La Patrie* published the following editorial:

La Confédération telle qu’elle fonctionne, telle que l’ont pratiqué les chefs du parti conservateur qui ont détenu et détienne encore le pouvoir, n’a rien qui soit cher au cœur des Canadiens-français. Entre les mains de la majorité,

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129 The 20,000 number is based on estimates of the Macdonald Memorial Committee, *The Proceedings at the Unveiling*, 5-6; *Montreal Star*, November 1, 1893, 6; and *The Globe*, October 19, 1893, 2. The author settled upon this estimate because it was provided from varied sources, including the organizing committee, one Conservative newspaper, and one Liberal newspaper. However, reporters covering the event for the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Québec Morning Chronicle* thought the crowd numbered only about 10,000 spectators. See *Montreal Gazette*, November 2, 1893, 1; and *Québec Morning Chronicle*, November 2, 1893, 2.

130 *La Patrie* estimated the crowd at 20,000, while the *Hamilton Spectator* reported 30,000 people in attendance. See *La Patrie*, October 15, 1894, 4; *Hamilton Spectator*, October 15, 1894, 7.

131 *La Minerve* and *La Presse* report 20,000 participants. See *La Minerve*, June 7, 1895, 4 and *La Presse*, June 6, 1895, 1. *La Patrie*, *The Globe*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Montreal Herald* do not present a fixed number. The *Montreal Star* reported a participation level of 10,000. The author has gone with a participation level quoted in two separate sources.

132 There is general consensus in the contemporary press that between 7,000 and 8,000 spectators participated in the unveiling ceremony. See: *British Whig*, October 24, 1895, 1; *Montreal Gazette*, October 24, 1895, 1; and *La Minerve*, October 24, 1895, 1.
elle est devenue un instrument de coercition contre ceux de notre race qui n’ont pas trouvé ni justice ni bon vouloir de la part de leurs confédérés.133

If the editorial in *La Patrie* really reflected the mood of the French-Canadian population of Montreal at the time, one could indeed assume that the number of French-Canadians attending the unveiling of a Macdonald statue might be limited.

5) Newspaper Coverage

Ontario and Quebec newspapers largely echoed the overwhelmingly positive interpretation of Macdonald’s character and political actions during the unveiling of the four Macdonald memorials. Most Central Canadian newspapers, but not all, covered the event in a respectful or admiring fashion, reviewing Sir John’s political career in predominantly favourable terms. These stories were published under positive front page headlines like “Dead, but not forgotten,” “illustrious statesman,” “speeches of a eulogistic nature.”134 The conservative-leaning *Hamilton Spectator’s* headline described one of the unveiling events as “[a] brilliant gathering to see the effigy of the dead chieftain.”135 A *Montreal Gazette* editorial indicated: “[B]y gathering in their thousands[,] they will testify their gratitude for the deeds by which the Father of Confederation won the hearts of the Canadian people.”136 It also added: “No other statesman Canada has been deemed worthy of such a tribute, and in all likelihood it will be many years before another arises to merit it.”137 The *Montreal Star*, owned by one of the Montreal event organizers, used fulsome imagery to describe Sir John A. Macdonald’s life and legacy: “One never appreciates the magnitude of a mountain when near it, even it one be resting on its strengths. It is only as we travel away from it on the level

133 *La Patrie*, July 1, 1895, 1.
134 *Montreal Gazette*, November 2, 1893, 1; *Ottawa Citizen*, November 1, 1893, 1; *Montreal Herald*, November 2, 1893, 1.
135 *Hamilton Spectator*, November 1, 1893, 1.
136 *Montreal Gazette*, June 6, 1895, 5.
plain that it rises from among the foot hills and we see how great it really was.” 138 The Montreal Herald commented briefly on the following generous remarks on Sir John by George Ross: “Whatever was good in his life, let us imitate, whatever was faulty, let us forget.” 139 For its part, the Quebec Chronicle lamented that “we have no monument in honor of the dead and mighty statesman, for here too, he made his mark. [...] It would be a thousand pities if old Quebec, a Capital town of the Dominion, failed in her duty in this respect, by one who served his country so loyally and so well.” 140 Finally, an editorial in Kingston’s liberal British Whig eulogized that Macdonald “filled a place which was the heritage of a long and varied public service, a place which has so far been unfilled because no one has yet risen who commands, as he had.” 141

Quebec’s francophone press also covered the events in considerable detail. La Presse and La Minerve, two newspapers loyal to the Liberal-Conservative Party, praised these events as “une cérémonie imposante” 142 and provided transcripts – sometimes complete, sometimes partial – of these speeches. 143 Montreal’s La Minerve also painted the unveiling ceremonies in great and flattering details for their readers, describing Sir John as a “grand patriote” and referring to the “œuvres immortelles” of his political career. 144 La Minerve praised the ceremony as “un déploiement extraordinaire de pompe et de solennité” et “tous se prêtait au

138 Montreal Star, June 6, 1895, 3.
139 Montreal Herald, October 15, 1894, 1.
140 Quebec Chronicle, October 17, 1894, 2. Despite this plea, Quebec City would not erect a monument of Macdonald. See also: Quebec Chronicle, June 7, 1895, 2.
141 British Whig, June 7, 1895, 2.
142 La Presse, October 15, 1894, 1; La Presse, June 6, 1895, 4; La Presse, October 23, 1895, 6. La Presse was owned by Liberal-Conservative federal cabinet minister Sir Joseph-Adolphe Chapleau.
144 La Minerve, November 2, 1893, 3; Ibid., October 24, 1895, 1.
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cès complet.” Finally, La Minerve went as far as claiming that marble or bronze statues were not necessary for Macdonald’s legacy will live though the ages.

The Globe, the voice of the Liberal Party in Toronto, demonstrated through its actions its support of the Conservatives’ attempts to positively frame Macdonald’s public memory. It dedicated the first two pages of its daily edition of November 2, 1893, to the Macdonald memorial unveiling in Hamilton, and commented that the event had “all the impressiveness which fitted the occasion.” It also reprinted many excerpts of speeches celebrating the legacy of Macdonald. An editorial in the Globe the Monday following the unveiling of Toronto’s Macdonald memorial noted:

[W]e must see in the great gathering in the Queen’s Park on Saturday a fact the significance of which cannot be overlooked. After eliminating the desire for mere sightseeing, we have remaining the evidence of a very strong interest in the man and the institutions and events with which he was connected. We are told that the imperial verdict of history upon his character, his policy and its results cannot be rendered for a generation at least. But the historian cannot afford to ignore the judgment of his contemporaries, and especially that sort of judgment which takes the form of the free, spontaneous action of a large body of people in all walks and conditions of life.

While there was limited negative coverage about the Hamilton, Toronto and Kingston unveilings, the liberal press formulated negative attacks after the Montreal ceremony, with the harshest criticism coming from the Hamilton Evening Times, the Montreal Herald and La Patrie. The Hamilton Evening Times and Montreal Herald published many editorials about these events taking exception, for example, to statements emanating from these events. Regarding the representation of Macdonald as a Nation-Builder through his support of the National Policy, the paper writes:

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145 Ibid., June 7, 1895, 4.
146 Ibid., October 15, 1894, 2.
147 The Globe, November 2, 1893, 1.
148 Ibid., October 15, 1894, 4.
The city has not grown more rapidly under the high tariff than it grew more rapidly under the low tariff. … [O]ur sewing machine factories have been closed, our engines works greatly curtailed, two large foundries have gone into bankruptcy, and another has been coaxed away from us by a bonus.149

Regarding the comments that Canada’s youth should emulate the former Prime Minister, the Hamilton Evening Times fired a salvo at their former Liberal-Conservative foe:

How many men, Conservatives and Liberals, who knew Sir John Macdonald for thirty or forty years, and were familiar with his private life and his public actions, would wish their sons to take him as a model? His career was successful: he died in office; he got what his ambition craved. … But one John A. Macdonald in a century is as many as any country can stand. Canada will do much better in the twentieth century without double shuffles, Pacific scandals, protective tariffs, gerrymandering, milked contractors and fraudulent franchise act. The death of one man does not make wrong right, nor black white.150

The liberal paper in Montreal, the Montreal Herald, aimed its criticism at the organizing committee and the speakers as by “their political complexion, and their partisan enthusiasm, we shall be reluctantly forced to the conclusion that there is much vanity and vexation of spirit in the make-up of Tory hero worship – after the hero is dead.”151 The erection of four statues also led the Hamilton Herald to sarcastically editorialize that, with the rapidly growing number of statues in Macdonald’s honour, “[t]here will soon be enough of them to give a dinner party.”152

Montreal’s liberal-leaning La Patrie often ignored the unveiling of these four Macdonald statues, or only very briefly referenced them.153

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149 Hamilton Evening Times, November 2, 1893, 4; see also “The NP must go. The Great Fraud on Business, Manufacturing and Labor,” Hamilton Spectator, November 7, 1893, 1; see also “The National Policy fails,” Montreal Herald, November 8, 1893, 4.

150 Hamilton Evening Times, June 7, 1895, 4. This argument was also presented by a Montreal Herald editorial on June 13, 1895, 4.

151 Montreal Herald, June 10, 1895, 4.

152 Hamilton Herald, October 24, 1895, 2.

153 La Patrie, October 15, 1894, 4.
“brave Canayen.” This unidentified writer used details of the statue of “Johnny” as inspiration for another barrage of serious criticism against the old chieftain:

On a couronné l’œuvre d’une statue de l’abondance ou de la richesse – reposant sur des lions – soit la richesse et la force; c’est très bien, grâce à sir John qui les auraient introduites dans le pays. Mais, il y a un mais … que viennent faire autours ces six ou sept enfants, maigres et décharnés, soulevant les armes des provinces canadiennes pour cacher leurs squelettes? Ne disent-ils pas bien haut que la richesse que sir John a apportée au pays il l’a gardée pour lui seul sans en faire profiter les enfants du pays qui ont des corps de crève faim!154

This letter to the editor contended that the distribution of wealth which had come from Canada’s continuous economic and infrastructural development was not shared equally among all social classes. In addition, the letter-writer argued that Macdonald enriched himself through his political actions, leaving the lower socio-economic classes, especially French-Canadians, in poverty. A few days later, La Patrie verbally defaced the Macdonald memorial in Montreal. Reviewing the Macdonald statue recently finished in the national capital by sculptor Philippe Hébert, the editors noted that the base of the Ottawa construction did not resemble a vespasienne (or a French public urinal) as was the case for the Montreal monument in Dominion Square.155

Despite the unveiling of four Macdonald memorials in a relatively short period of time, the events with repetitive themes continued to receive significant print coverage throughout Ontario and Quebec. Overall, the press coverage was favourable to the event. Several conservative-leaning newspapers were unanimous in their praise for Macdonald, printing supporting excerpts to elevate Macdonald above other national figures. Some members of the liberal-leaning press, notably The Globe and British Whig, were supportive of the efforts of the communities in Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal and Kingston to raise the

154 La Patrie, June 7, 1895, 4.
155 Ibid., June 11, 1895, 1.
profile of Sir John A. Macdonald. Nevertheless, other members of the liberal-leaning press continued to view Macdonald, and consequently the efforts to commemorate his memory, negatively. This was the strategy used by the Hamilton Evening Times, the Montreal Herald and La Patrie. Montreal’s La Patrie and Quebec City’s L’Éclaireur were silent on these events, a strategy which would help diminish Macdonald’s public memory in the French-Canadian liberal-leaning public consciousness.

6) Conclusion

Between 1893 and 1895, four communities offered, through their local commemorative efforts, the Liberal-Conservative administration in Ottawa the opportunity to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald. In each case, Macdonald’s successors as Prime Minister and several of their cabinet colleagues willingly participated in local efforts to construct a national myth around Sir John A. Macdonald. In general, Macdonald was no longer seen as one of among many Fathers of Confederation - he became the Father of Confederation, even the father and the founder of Canada. Macdonald’s liberal and conservative allies in achieving this Confederation objective – Sir George-Étienne Cartier, George Brown, Sir Charles Tupper and Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley among others – were largely forgotten during the three unveiling ceremonies in Ontario. In Montreal, however, commemoration speakers listed Sir George-Étienne Cartier as Macdonald’s equal in achieving the Confederation dream. Despite this unofficial joint Macdonald-Cartier commemoration, some speakers in Montreal referred to Macdonald as the father of Canada. For most speakers (Ross notwithstanding), Macdonald was no longer primus inter pares. He was seen as the man who, regardless of the numerous cabinet ministers surrounding him, shaped Canada’s political evolution and technological progress almost exclusively by himself. The eagerness of contemporary political leaders to participate in the ceremonies reflected
their goal of raising Macdonald above other political contributors. They attempted to develop a national myth around the historical person of Sir John A. Macdonald to inspire Canadians and to start to instil support for their party’s objectives in subsequent elections.

The myth of Macdonald advanced during the four unveiling ceremonies focused on many aspects of Macdonald’s career. In light of his longevity as Prime Minister of Canada, such statements were comparatively easy to make. He was described as the man responsible for constructing Canada’s political foundations on solid British principles and through British-modeled institutions. He was credited with ensuring the territorial integrity of the British Empire, even as much as decorated British war heroes Wellington and Nelson. Macdonald was also deemed responsible for preserving national unity through his efforts of conciliation and compromise. He was recognized as the man responsible for Canada’s economic progress through the adoption of the National Policy. All of these tasks, argued the Liberal-Conservative speakers, were accomplished because of Macdonald’s boundless personal quantities, including devotion to duty, self-sacrifice, openness to the judgment of others, and unselfishness. While the historical validity of these official and vernacular memories would not be supported by documented history, Thompson, Bowell and their ministers nevertheless participated in this process because they recognized the benefits to themselves.

However, the myth-making around Sir John by his successors was also met with a few touches of realism, both historical and contemporary, as well as partisan disdain. In Toronto, the organizing committee believed that a grassroots campaign would amass quickly the required funds for the monument. However, it seems that Torontonians did not exactly line up to make donations for the commemoration of Macdonald. Similarly, in Montreal, French-Canadians did not make donations in significant numbers nor did many of them
seem to attend the unveiling ceremony. The very few Liberal Party speakers at the event introduced the first criticisms of Macdonald’s political legacy. The Ontario and Quebec liberal press also reintroduced critical comments countering the myth-making efforts of the Liberal-Conservatives. These papers questioned the real achievements of the National Policy, which tended to benefit manufacturers in Ontario more than buyers in Western Canada. They suggested that Macdonald’s economic policies favoured the rich and provided little redistribution of wealth to the lower socio-economic classes. Despite these criticisms, the liberal press was not always adverse to the unveiling ceremonies, in one case noting that the participation of 30,000 citizens in Toronto reflected a genuine interest in the man and his political career.

While examples exist of political contemporaries of other world leaders hesitating to honour one of their own during their lifetime, Macdonald’s colleagues and associates started a commemorative movement immediately upon his death.\textsuperscript{156} They launched efforts of myth-making around the historical person of Sir John A. Macdonald, portraying him as a symbol of unity and social cohesion. Despite these one-sided Liberal-Conservative Party efforts, the myth-making around Macdonald was not exclusively in their control. Other political actors, notably from Canada’s other national party, introduced their own efforts of shaping the public memory of Sir John that would be beneficial to them. While the Conservative Party was building up the myth of the national hero surrounding Macdonald, other senior members of the Liberal Party not present during these four Macdonald memorial unveiling ceremonies attempted to counteract such efforts by reintroducing perceived contentious elements of his past. Would their efforts be successful in the years leading up to the 1896

\textsuperscript{156} For example, the unveiling of the Washington memorial in Washington, DC took place in 1885, nearly 90 years after his death. See Marcus Cunliffe, \textit{George Washington: Man and Monument} (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958).
federal general election and after that party formed the government? That question is the focus of the following chapter.
Chapter Three: The Liberal Party’s Response, 1891-1911

His loss overwhelms me …Sir John Macdonald now belongs to the ages, and it can be said with certainty, that the career which has just closed is one of the most remarkable careers of this century.¹

Sir Wilfrid Laurier

Introduction

In the five years following the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, the governing Liberal-Conservative Party actively engaged in commemorative events relating to Sir John A. Macdonald. During these events, the new leaders of Macdonald’s old party actively praised his accomplishments and pressed the need to continue his policies. Despite prominent efforts, the Liberal-Conservative Party never held a monopoly in shaping Macdonald’s public memory. In fact, the Liberal Party also attempted to influence the public memory of Canada’s first prime minister. As such, this chapter explores the efforts of the federal Liberal Party to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald from the time of his death to the 1911 federal general election.

This chapter examines events between 1891 and 1911 where representations of Macdonald were advanced by senior members of the Liberal Party, including Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The representations of Sir John A. Macdonald will be analyzed during two distinctive time periods. The first period examines the representations of Sir John A. Macdonald delivered by members of the Liberal Party during their final years in opposition, from 1891 to 1896. Three events fall under this time period. The first event is the solemn occasion of tributes to Macdonald only two days after his death. Laurier was among the parliamentarians who shared their thoughts about Macdonald’s political legacy.² The second

¹ Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlain, 1891), June 8, 1891, 885.
² The House of Commons paid tribute to Macdonald on its first sitting following Macdonald’s death. The
event is the 1892 debate in the House of Commons regarding the erection of a Macdonald memorial on Parliament Hill. The event provides an opportunity to study a partisan debate in the House of Commons focusing specifically on the merits of commemorating Canada’s first prime minister. The third event provides an examination of representations of Sir John A. Macdonald during the 1893 Liberal Party policy convention. This highly partisan event united roughly 2,500 party delegates from across Canada in order to adopt policy resolutions and to galvanize the Liberal Party for the coming federal election. The second period allows for the examination of the representations of Sir John A. Macdonald delivered by members of the Liberal Party during their years in government, from 1896 to 1911. Two events fall under this time period. The first event allows an analysis of the various representations of Macdonald made during the 1905 parliamentary debate regarding the creation of new provinces out of portions of the North-West Territories. The second event is the public debate prior to the 1911 federal general election regarding reciprocity with the United States. This policy debate fuelled partisanship during the 1891 federal general election, and had the possibility of having similar outcomes during the 1911 federal general election. Together, they allow an analysis of the ways in which possible representations of Macdonald shifted during the Liberal Party’s time in opposition and in government.

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official announcement of Macdonald’s death and the eulogies paid to Macdonald’s memory are captured in: Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlain, 1891), June 8, 1891, 883-891.

3 On April 4, 1892, Justice Minister Sir John Thompson indicating that, as “soon as a vote in Parliament is obtained,” the government would erect a statue honouring Macdonald on Parliament Hill. The discussion on the allotment of funds – a maximum of $10,000 in 1892 dollars – took place on June 30, 1892. See: Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1891), April 4, 1892, 918; *Ibid.*, June 30, 1892, 4458.

4 The policy convention was convened by Wilfrid Laurier in 1893 to prepare the party for the next federal general election. More than 2,500 Liberals attended the event. See: John R. MacNicol, ed., *National Liberal-Conservative Convention*, held at Winnipeg, Manitoba, October 10-12, 1927 (Toronto: Southam Press, 1930).

This chapter argues that, before 1896, senior members of the Liberal Party fostered a negative image of Macdonald’s political legacy, an election-focused counteroffensive to the Liberal-Conservative Party’s efforts to raise Macdonald above other politicians. This counteroffensive sought to portray Macdonald – the uncontested leader of the Liberal-Conservative Party for nearly 25 years after Confederation – in death as in life as a partisan politician with malign motives and ineffective and self-serving policies. These criticisms were meant to attack politically their opponents – the Liberal-Conservative Party as well as the legacy and the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald. Throughout Laurier’s tenure as prime minister, the legacy and the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald was rarely invoked by senior members of the Liberal Party. Nevertheless, from time to time, senior members of the Liberal Party did (re)introduce self-serving representations of Macdonald. Overall, they pitched a largely negative representation of Macdonald throughout this 20-year period in an attempt to destroy his personal memory and sell voters on the idea of a better and more prosperous future under a Liberal government. In the absence of a hegemonic discourse acceptable to the governing class and to both national political parties, this chapter argues that Macdonald’s iconic status remained limited to the supporters of the Liberal-Conservative Party between 1891 and 1911.

A) During the Years as the Opposition Party (1891-1896)

The Liberal-Conservative Party’s effort to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald was intertwined with the narrative emerging from other members of the federal political class, notably members of the Liberal Party. In the days following Macdonald’s death until the 1896 federal general election, some senior members of the Liberal Party had several opportunities to frame the political legacy of Macdonald. The following section will explore three distinct events during the period 1891-1896 to determine the representations
of Macdonald being advanced by the Liberal Party. They are: Laurier’s tribute to Macdonald in the House of Commons following Macdonald’s death on June 6, 1891; the policy debate regarding the state-funding of a Macdonald memorial on Parliament Hill in 1892; and the highly partisan Liberal Party policy convention in 1893. Throughout the following sections, the representations of Sir John A. Macdonald advanced by senior members of the Liberal Party will be contrasted with those of the Liberal-Conservative Party.

1. Macdonald as a Great Canadian

The Liberal-Conservative Party’s references to Macdonald as one of the greatest Canadians abound during the unveiling ceremonies of Macdonald memorials. They represent the effort by members of the Liberal-Conservative Party to elevate Macdonald above other Canadian political figures. During this period of study, senior members of the Liberal Party also had an opportunity to shape the legacy of Macdonald as a great Canadian. Laurier’s first speech about Macdonald took place on June 8, 1891, the Monday following Macdonald’s death. In his tribute to Macdonald in the House of Commons, Laurier described him as “Canada’s most illustrious son, and in every sense Canada’s foremost citizen and statesman.”

Laurier also defined “the place of Sir John Macdonald in this country (as being) so large and so absorbing, that it is almost impossible to conceive that the political life of this country, the fate of this country, can continue without him.” In a later section, Laurier returns to the same theme, noting that Canadians “deplore the loss of him who, we all unite in saying, was the foremost Canadian of his time, and who filled the largest place in Canadian history.” Finally, Laurier concludes that “without any exaggeration whatever, that

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6 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlain, 1891), June 8, 1891, 884.
7 Ibid., 885.
8 Ibid., 886.
the life of Sir John Macdonald, from the date he entered Parliament, is the history of Canada.”

Beyond these lofty words of praise, Laurier also took the opportunity to express to fellow MPs his personal sense of loss. He stated:

I say with all trust, his loss overwhelms me, and it also overwhelms this Parliament, as if indeed one of the institutions of the land has given way. Sir John Macdonald now belongs to the ages, and it can be said with certainty, that the career which has just closed is one of the most remarkable careers of this century.

In this statement, Laurier links his personal sense of loss and the loss of Macdonald for Canada and for Canadians with Macdonald's political career, which he defined as 'remarkable.' Despite knowing that Macdonald was no more, Laurier mentions that it is “almost impossible to convince the willing mind, that it is true, that Sir John Macdonald is no more, that the chair which we now see vacant shall remain forever vacant.” He went one step further, noting that Macdonald’s death was “in every respect a great national loss.”

Laurier’s recognition of Macdonald’s greatness coupled with his sense of loss suggests that he was ready, at least in that moment, to elevate Macdonald’s status amongst other political leaders in Canada.

Laurier’s recognition of Macdonald’s greatness was influenced by the context in which he delivered his remarks. For example, Laurier’s tribute to Macdonald was given only a few days following the former prime minister’s death. The speech was delivered on the floor of the House of Commons where Laurier stood facing more than 100 Liberal-Conservative MPs and parliamentary colleagues who had lost their long-time leader. Laurier rose from his seat to speak at a time of national mourning and opted, quite naturally, to

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9 Ibid., 885.
10 Ibid., 885.
11 Ibid., 884.
12 Ibid., 884.
deliver mostly conciliatory remarks. Within the press, Laurier’s speech received favourable reviews. Montreal’s liberal paper *La Patrie* was founded to serve the cause of the Liberal Party in Montreal. It gave considerable attention to Laurier’s tribute despite the focus of the article being on Sir John A. Macdonald. *La Patrie* opted to publish, verbatim, Laurier’s speech. It was described as a “brillante improvisation” reflective of his “renowned” oratorical skills. Toronto’s liberal-leaning paper *The Globe* described Laurier’s speech as “feeling and appropriate.” The same sentiments were expressed within conservative-leaning papers in Ontario and Quebec. The press coverage, regardless of the province or the political leaning of the publication, also reflected that Laurier recognized Macdonald as a great Canadian. While Laurier’s tribute won him national attention, it was a singular moment of eloquent and passionate praise followed, as we shall see, by a long string of politically motivated largely negative invocations of Macdonald’s legacy.

2. *Macdonald as a Partisan Politician*

Senior members of the Liberal-Conservative Party provided many references to Sir John A. Macdonald depicting him as a symbol of unity and social cohesion. At the same time, they omitted references to Macdonald that could define him as partisan. In a similar manner, Laurier’s first speech in the House of Commons suggests that Laurier was also ready to downplay Macdonald as a partisan politician. In this speech, Laurier suggests that, upon hearing the news of Macdonald’s deteriorating health, “the surging waves of angry discussion were at once hushed, and every one, friend and foe, realized that this time for a

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14 *La Patrie*, June 9, 1891, 1. The entirety of Laurier’s speech was published the following day, see: *La Patrie*, June 10, 1891, 1.
certainty the angel of death had appeared.” Laurier gives the impression that Macdonald’s death had dismissed the hostility that results from many years of political opposition. This impression is misleading as Laurier did not eliminate all forms of criticism regarding Macdonald as a partisan politician during his eulogy.

There are two examples in Laurier’s eulogy where the Liberal leader was explicitly critical of Macdonald as a partisan politician. In the first example, Laurier says: “We on this side of the House who were his opponents, who did not believe in his policy, nor in his methods of government; we take our full share of their grief. … It is in every respect a great national loss.” This almost-complete dismissal of Macdonald’s politics and policies linked with the subsequent reference to national grief, albeit Liberal-Conservative grief, creates a contradictory sentiment. In the second direct criticism of Macdonald, Laurier states:

Although my political views compel me to say that, in my judgment, his actions were not always the best that could have been taken in the interest of Canada, although my conscience compels me to say that of late he had imputed to his opponents motives as to which I must say in my heart he has misconceived, yet I am only too glad here to sink these differences and to remember only the great services he has performed for our country.

Laurier’s willingness to “sink” his differences with Macdonald did not prevent him, however, from articulating for a second time his well-known opposition to the former prime minister’s political actions. Thus, on two occasions, Laurier’s articulated references to Macdonald as a great Canadian were counterbalanced by Laurier’s own commentary that Macdonald’s actions could have been improper, that his attacks on political opponents reprehensible and that Canada’s own development may have been delayed by his policies. As such, Laurier provided expressions of grief and great service while voicing moderate criticism of

16 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlain, 1891), June 8, 1891, 884.
17 Ibid., 884.
18 Ibid., 885.
Macdonald to satisfy his political base. These criticisms were ignored in the resulting media coverage as most newspapers focused rather on Laurier’s praise of Macdonald. The introduction of negative representations of Macdonald in a moment of reflection of Macdonald’s life and political career reduces the ability to transform Macdonald into a national hegemonic figure.

The representations of Macdonald as a partisan politician persisted beyond Laurier’s eulogy to Macdonald. In fact, the criticism of Macdonald’s partisanship increased as Laurier addressed a large gathering of his own supporters. For example, Laurier’s opening remarks at the Liberal Party’s policy convention in 1893 painted Macdonald in a negative light. He noted to his supporters that the Liberal Party must “relieve a country from a regime of oppression, and to give good government to the people.” In the mind of delegates, the “regime of oppression” was clearly the Liberal-Conservative administration of Sir John A. Macdonald that had governed the country almost continuously since Confederation. Laurier also claimed that the Liberal Party’s “first duty is to arouse the people to a sense of their immediate danger, and the immediate danger is the (National Policy protectionist) tariff which now oppresses Canada.”

Other examples of representations of Macdonald as a partisan politician emerged through the policy resolutions that were approved by the convention. One resolution, for instance, focused on the Liberal-Conservative Party’s use of redrawing electoral districts to gain an electoral advantage. The resolution suggested that modifications to electoral boundaries over the years “produced gross abuses by partisan revising barristers appointed

20 Ibid., 30.
by the Government of the Day.”

Macdonald’s perceived fondness for power had been previously referenced by Laurier while eulogizing Macdonald in 1891: “He was fond of power, and, in my judgement, if I may say so, that may be the turning point of the judgement of history. He was fond of power, and he never made any secret of it.” In the absence of a reference to the merits of retaining power for a variety of motives, including ensuring the well-being of his fellow citizens, Laurier was implying that Macdonald would undertake political actions to ensure his continued electoral success. He also suggested that history may also render a different conclusion as to his political actions. As such, Macdonald’s perceived use of gerrymandering was difficult to reconcile with notions of good government being advanced by the Liberal-Conservative Party. At the same time, Laurier was quick to define the ills of Macdonald’s partisanship. As such, in life as in death, Sir John A. Macdonald continued to be portrayed as a partisan politician. In doing so, the Liberal Party achieved its objective of pitting Macdonald’s legacy against a perceived better future under a Liberal Party banner.

3. Macdonald as a Nation-Builder

The Liberal-Conservative Party’s representations of Sir John A. Macdonald following his death emphasized his role as a nation-builder. For example, Macdonald was heralded by his party members for founding Canada and constructing Canada’s political foundation on solid British principles and through British-modeled institutions. Laurier’s tribute to Macdonald in 1891 also reveals his willingness to commemorate him as a nation-builder. Laurier lauded Macdonald’s skill in transforming Canada from “two small provinces, having nothing in common but a common allegiance, united by a bond of paper, and unity by
nothing else—to the present state of development which Canada has reached.”23 As such, Laurier recognized Macdonald as a nation-builder, a man who united the original provinces under a single nation. In light of such achievements, Laurier noted that he was:

only too glad … to remember only the great services he has performed for our country—to remember that his actions always displayed great originality of views, unbounded fertility of resources, and, above all, a far-reaching vision beyond the events of the day, and still higher, permeating the whole, a broad patriotism—a devotion to Canada’s welfare, Canada’s advancement, and Canada’s glory.24

Meanwhile, outside of the House of Commons, and especially in front of a partisan audience, the Liberal Party did not shy away from strong criticism of Macdonald’s economic policies. In fact, during the 1893 Liberal Party policy convention, Laurier did not mince words. The partisan tone was underscored in the convention’s speeches and policy resolutions. The Liberal Party described the National Policy as:

founded upon an unsound principle, and used, as it has been by the Government, as a corruptive agency wherewith to keep themselves in office, has developed monopolies, trusts and combinations: it has decreased the value of farm and other landed property; its has oppressed the masses to the enrichment of a few; it has checked immigration; it has caused great loss of population; it has impeded commerce; it has discriminated against Great Britain.25

The Liberal Party illustrated through a variety of examples that Macdonald’s National Policy hindered the development of Canada. As such, his representations of Macdonald as a nation-builder counterbalanced those advanced by the Liberal-Conservative Party. Beyond the negative impact on Canada’s economy, the resolution’s enumeration was a clear attempt to reach core stakeholder groups: farmers, workers, Canadians of British stock. These were among the largest voter groups in Canada, and Laurier was appealing directly to them for

23 Ibid., 885.
24 Ibid., 885.
their support in ending the Liberal-Conservative’s time in office. At the same time, the Liberals portrayed the Liberal-Conservative Party as corrupt, with ill-intentions and ready to do anything to retain power. Laurier also highlighted the negative consequence of Macdonald’s actions, including the massive exodus of Canadians to the United States, the decrease in immigration and the stagnation of Canada’s manufacturing sector.

The Liberal-Conservatives’ management of the public treasury was also targeted in one specific resolution. Its preamble reads: “We cannot but view with alarm the large increase of the public debt and of the controllable annual expenditure of the Dominion and the consequent undue taxation of the people under the Government that have been continuously in power since 1878, and we demand the strictest economy in the administration of the government of this country.”26 The year quoted in this passage was not selected by happenstance, as it marks the return of Macdonald’s Liberal-Conservative Party to power after a five-year Liberal Party mandate. Those policies continued over the past 15 years during the Liberal-Conservative administration. However, during the 1893 policy convention, there is no evidence brought to the fore to support some of the claims of undue taxation and lavish spending. The communications exercise aimed to shift public perception against Macdonald and his policies.

Laurier may have been supportive of representations of Macdonald as a nation-builder during his eulogy. However, positive representations of Macdonald as a nation-builder were limited to that single event. In subsequent events, Laurier and the Liberal Party adopted two strategies. The first was to shy away from more factual representations of Macdonald as a nation-builder, among them his role in Confederation, the entry of new provinces and territories and the Canadian Pacific Railway. This was the primary approach

26 Ibid., 105.
used by the Liberal-Conservative Party to portray their former leader as a nation-builder.
The second strategy used by Laurier and the Liberal Party focused on Macdonald’s perceived
mismanagement of the public treasury and the economy. He noted the resulting negative
impact on Canada’s material and technological development as a means of altering
representations of Macdonald as a nation-builder. The Liberal Party’s criticism went beyond
Sir John A. Macdonald to include the Liberal-Conservative Party, its political legacy and its
operational culture. The Liberal Party was thus making a case for its own election, not simply
influencing negatively Macdonald’s personal legacy.

4. Macdonald as a Symbol of Canada

While municipal efforts to commemorate Macdonald as a national figure were
funded by local Liberal-Conservative Party member initiatives and private fundraising, the
federal government also debated whether a physical tribute to Macdonald was appropriate
and if so, who would pay for it. In April 1892, the Chief Government Whip, George Taylor,
asked if his government had the intention of erecting a statue in Macdonald’s memory on
the grounds of the House of Commons. The response from Justice Minister Sir John
Thompson was affirmative: as “soon as a vote in Parliament is obtained.”

27 Information regarding the political career of George Taylor, website of the Parliament of Canada, Members of the
House of Commons: Historical Information Since 1867 Provided by the Library of Parliament (George Taylor), available
28 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1892), April 4, 1892, 918. Information
regarding the political career of George Taylor, website of the Parliament of Canada, Members of the House of
Commons: Historical Information Since 1867 Provided by the Library of Parliament (George Taylor), available on-line and accessed on June 14, 2010, at
29 A similar precedence was set in 1873 by Macdonald who wished to honour the memory of the late Sir
George-Étienne Cartier by erecting a monument on Parliament Hill. See: Canada, Statues of Parliament Hill: An
Illustrated History (Ottawa: National Capital Commission, 1986), 8-15; Canada, Debates from the House of Commons
(Ottawa: Brown Chamberlain, 1891), May 23, 1873, 205.
provided a forum for the Liberal Party to react not only to the allocation of public funds to commemorate a former prime minister, but also to whether he was worthy of the honour in the first place. Two Liberal MPs spoke on behalf of their party on the budgetary provision to erect a Macdonald memorial on Parliament Hill. The first Liberal MP to speak was Laurier. He expressed concerns that public funds were being used for partisan purposes. Laurier argued that monuments in honour of public men “would be better left to private initiatives instead of to pay for it out of the public treasury.” Laurier thus signalled his preference that Liberal-Conservative Party supporters amass the required funds. That was the process which was taking place at the time of this debate in Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal and Kingston. Through this discussion, Laurier clearly demonstrated that Macdonald remained first and foremost the former leader of a political party, and not a national icon as a result of his long tenure as prime minister of Canada. In addition, Laurier did not wish to remove Macdonald as a target for continuing partisan attacks that could be beneficial to the party in the forthcoming federal general election.

The other Liberal MP who spoke on this motion was James McMullen, a veteran MP for Wellington-North (Ontario). As a long-time political opponent of Macdonald, McMullen was uncomfortable with the state funding a Macdonald memorial. As part of the debate, McMullen added:

I do not think it is right that the whole country should be asked to pay for a monument to the deceased leader of half of the people of this Dominion, and I am sure that the other half are of the opinion that it was to their misfortune that he should have governed the country so long …

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30 Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1892), June 30, 1892, 4458.
I do not think it is right that you should, by numerical force, compel the Reformers of this country, who are not disposed to recognize the long reign of Sir John A. Macdonald as having been a blessing to this country, to contribute their money to the erection of his monument.32

Death clearly did not diminish McMullen’s continued opposition to Macdonald’s political legacy. McMullen suggested that not all Canadians were ready to accept Macdonald as a symbol of Canada and as an historical figure worthy of national commemoration. The liberal-leaning *The Globe* reprinted McMullen’s comments, focusing on the claim that half of Canadians, in other words those loyal to the Liberal Party, were opposed to any such taxpayer-funded commemoration.33 By printing McMullen’s comments, the newspaper aimed to influence its readership to agree with McMullen’s views on this issue. Beyond *The Globe*, however, this brief debate in Parliament did not receive media coverage as the other stories focused on larger items within the federal budget.

Though Laurier and McMullen’s criticisms of this budget motion went largely unreported by national media, they did trigger a response in the House of Commons. Following McMullen’s attack, Finance Minister George Foster noted: “I should hope there is no Conservative from one end of this country to the other, who should be ungenerous enough to say of him after his death what the hon. gentleman has said of Sir John Macdonald.”34 Foster argued that, in death, past animosity should be forgotten. He felt a need to defend the memory of his former leader and to build bipartisan support for this motion. In response to Foster’s response, two liberal-leaning newspapers—Montreal’s *La Patrie* and Toronto’s *The Globe*—focused on Foster’s ‘unjustified’ decision of not including funds to erect a memorial on Parliament Hill for former Liberal Prime Minister Alexander

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32 Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1892), June 30, 1892, 4458. Sir John Thompson first noted that the government wished to introduce a vote on this matter on April 4, 1892. See: *Ibid.*, April 4, 1892, 918.
33 *The Globe*, July 1, 1892, 2.
34 Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1892), June 30, 1892, 4458.
Mackenzie, who died two months prior to this debate.\textsuperscript{35} This point had first been raised by Laurier.\textsuperscript{36} Although Laurier did not push this idea forward during the debate, some members of the liberal press argued that the federal government should allocate equivalent funds to erect the first statue of Alexander Mackenzie in Canada.

Laurier and McMullen’s brief statements against a publicly funded Macdonald monument provide additional evidence that the Liberal Party was willing to contest the memory of Macdonald as strongly as they contested Macdonald’s policies and politics. As McMullen had sullenly noted, the fate of the motion to allocate public funds to the Macdonald memorial was a foregone conclusion as Macdonald’s Liberal-Conservative Party held a 31-seat majority in the House of Commons.\textsuperscript{37} The statue was officially unveiled three years later, on July 1, 1895, in front of a large crowd of 7,500, a number equivalent to 20% of the city of Ottawa’s total population.\textsuperscript{38} In the absence of established Dominion Day events taking place on Parliament Hill, like those organized during the second half of the twentieth century, the large crowd on Parliament Hill that day demonstrates a continuing interest in Sir John A. Macdonald among some Canadians. They came to see the memorial’s unveiling and to hear four senior members of the Liberal-Conservative Party pay tribute to Macdonald. These speakers were: Prime Minister Mackenzie Bowell and the lieutenant-governors of

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{La Patrie}, July 1, 1892, 4; \textit{The Globe}, July 1, 1892,
\textsuperscript{36} Canada, \textit{Debates from the House of Commons} (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1892), June 30, 1892, 4458.
\textsuperscript{37} Robert Marleau & Camille Montpetit, \textit{La procédure et les usages de la Chambre des communes} (Ottawa: House of Commons, 1999), 1028.
\textsuperscript{38} Contemporary estimates of the Dominion Day crowd on Parliament Hill varied between 5,000 (\textit{La Minerve}) and 10,000 (\textit{Hamilton Spectator}). \textit{The Globe} and other papers did not present a fixed number. \textit{La Patrie} and the \textit{Montreal Herald} did not report on the ceremony in Ottawa. \textit{La Presse}, \textit{The Globe}, the \textit{Montreal Gazette} and the \textit{Montreal Herald} do not present a fixed number. The author has averaged the two reported participation level for the purpose of this analysis. The city of Ottawa had 37,269 citizens according to the 1891 census. Historical Atlas of Canada, \textit{The Canadian Population, 1891: Growth of Cities}, accessed on August 23, 2008 at http://www.historicalatlas.ca/website/HACOLP/national_perspectives/population/UNIT_20/excel/Growth_of_cities_1825_91.xls
three provinces – Sir George Kirpatrick of Ontario, Sir Malachy Bowes Daly of Nova Scotia and George William Howland of Prince Edward Island. Their speeches reinforced the representations of Macdonald that dominated the unveiling ceremonies described in Chapter Two. The Liberal Party was absent from the event. As such, in Ottawa, Macdonald was presented as a seemingly hegemonic figure as no one expounded on critiques of the former leader. As a result, Macdonald remained a party-specific icon, and not a national figure or an acceptable symbol of Canada during this period in Canada’s history.

5. Macdonald as a British Subject

Despite frequent representations of Macdonald as a British subject by Liberal-Conservatives, Laurier attempted to alter this image on several occasions. During Macdonald’s lifetime, Laurier suggested that Macdonald discriminated against the United Kingdom through his economic policies. For example, during the federal general election of 1891, Laurier characterized Macdonald as anti-British. Macdonald then fired back at Laurier, depicting the Liberal Party’s policy of reciprocity with the United States as the beginning of economic union and eventually, annexation. As such, Macdonald played on the sentiments of Canadians of British ancestry by suggesting that the ‘Old leader’ would pursue the ‘Old Policy’ of protectionism as a means of ensuring strong relations with the ‘Old Flag.’ The message seems to have resonated with many Canadians as Macdonald was re-elected in 1891 with a majority government.

Although unsuccessful in depicting Macdonald as anti-British during the 1891 federal general election, Laurier continued to suggest that Macdonald actively discriminated against the United Kingdom. For example, during the 1893 Liberal Party policy convention, Laurier restated that the United Kingdom’s economic policies were anchored in the principle of freer trade, the very same principle that he wished to introduce in Canada. “The fact that England is free trade and the Canadian Conservatives are protectionists shows that there is … a diversity of interests between England and Canada,” argued Laurier.42 The difference in economic policy between the United Kingdom and Canada under Macdonald’s leadership led Laurier to conclude yet again that Macdonald “discriminated against Great Britain.”43

The depiction of a common economic approach between Great Britain and the Canadian Liberal Party was an attempt by Laurier to depict himself and his party as pro-Britain and staunchly loyal to the Empire. This approach had failed the Liberal Party during the 1891 federal general election where Macdonald shifted the discourse of the Liberal Party’s economic policy as the beginning of the United States’ annexation of Canada. It also introduced one of the most famous election slogans in Canadian politics: The Old Flag, the Old Policy, and the Old Leader. It is difficult to determine Laurier’s success in painting Macdonald with an anti-British brush. Some Canadians during that period may have been influenced by Laurier’s words. More importantly, the Liberal Party suggested to its followers that it, and not the Liberal-Conservative Party, was the party aligned with British economic policies and thus with Great Britain itself. In the end, the representation of Macdonald as a British symbol was not universally accepted as both parties attempted to illustrate that they

42 Official Report of the Liberal Convention: Held in Response to the Call of Hon. Wilfrid Laurier, Ottawa, Tuesday, June 20th, and Wednesday, June 21st, 1893 (Toronto, 1893), 34.
43 Ibid., 71.
were the pro-British party through their respective efforts to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald.

6. Macdonald as a Symbol of Canada and as an Equal Partner to Cartier

The Liberal-Conservative Party’s representation of Macdonald as a conciliator of races was difficult for the Liberal Party to attack without generating hostile responses. During the pre-1896 federal general election, Laurier attempted to build a solid electoral base among French- and English-Canadians. He could not alienate either linguistic group by suggesting that Macdonald’s policies showed prejudice or favouritism toward French- or English-Canadians. As the first French-language leader of a federal party since Confederation, Laurier needed to build his support in English-speaking regions, notably within Ontario. In addition, Laurier was campaigning for the position of prime minister of Canada, and not simply the voice of Quebec, the crucial role for Cartier in the earlier Macdonald administration. For these reasons, Laurier avoided any references to Macdonald as a conciliator. After all, political tensions between French- and English-Canadians remained elevated during the 1890s, especially surrounding linguistic or religious questions like the Manitoba Schools Question. As such, Laurier avoided representations of Macdonald as a conciliator of French- and English-Canadians and Macdonald’s association with Cartier.

7. Macdonald as a Supporter of a Strong Central Government

The debates that led to the ratification of the British North America (BNA) Act provide considerable insight as to Macdonald’s preference for a strong, central government. “The provinces were just as subordinate to Ottawa as they had once been to London” believed Sir John A. Macdonald after the passage of the BNA Act.44 During the 1880s and 1890s, there were a number of constitutional cases referred to the Judicial Committee of the

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Accordingly, between 1891 and 1896, the leaders of the Liberal-Conservative Party did not use the unveiling ceremonies to criticize the JCPC for their undue influence in the evolution of Canada or to play a strong unity card.

During this same period, the federal Liberal Party attracted many prominent voices among the provincial rights movement leaders. In a clear overture to the provincial wings of the Liberal Party, Laurier courted the support of Liberal premiers across the country for the 1893 policy convention. Sir Oliver Mowat (Ontario), William Stevens Fielding (Nova Scotia), Andrew G. Blair (New Brunswick), and Frederick Peters (Prince Edward Island) responded to the call and accepted roles of convention chairman and vice-chairmen, respectively. The involvement of these premiers promised a new era in federal-provincial relations if Laurier were to become prime minister. After all, these premiers publicly and constitutionally fought Macdonald’s use of the federal veto power of disallowance over provincial legislation and other constitutional interpretations that centralized powers in Ottawa. As leader of the federal Liberal Party, Laurier could not publicly support more provincial rights that might weaken his ability to govern the country. He could not articulate more centralization in Ottawa as the highest court and the provincial politicians would counter that argument. As such, Laurier and the Liberal Party were silent during these three events on this representation of Sir John A. Macdonald.
The representations of Macdonald introduced by the Liberal Party of Canada between 1891 and 1896 were numerous and complex. Although there were some preliminary representations of Macdonald that were complementary to those used by the Liberal-Conservative Party, both parties used self-serving representations of Macdonald. The Liberal Party’s quest to form the next government of Canada focused significant attention on the professed errors of Sir John A. Macdonald, both in style and in substance. Laurier used his eulogy in the House of Commons to both praise Macdonald and criticize his policies and his partisanship. The Liberal Party opposed the use of public funds to erect a memorial on Parliament Hill. As such, they suggested that Macdonald was not a suitable national symbol. The Liberal Party also formulated its electoral platform in 1893 with policies which reversed the errors of Macdonald’s ways. In doing so, the Liberal Party was arguing that Macdonald was not an appropriate symbol to unite Canadians. They suggested his policies did more to hinder or delay the national development of the country, than to strengthen it. Such rhetoric is common among opposing political parties. Nevertheless, the creation of a national hegemonic figure becomes impossible to achieve in such circumstances.

During this period, there were definitely two Macdonalds emerging from the political battleground that became Macdonald’s public memory. The first, introduced by the Liberal-Conservative Party, was a leader who Canadians should emulate because of his ability to reconcile races and religion, develop Canada on British principles and transform Canada into the most important colony within the British Empire. The other, introduced by the Liberal Party, was a leader who used the machinery of government to keep his party in office, who brought Canada down a dangerous economic path and who introduced policies that delayed Canada’s development. These opposing representations made it difficult for a consistent
image of Macdonald to emerge, as both national parties introduced representations of Macdonald that would be beneficial to their own political brand. In the end, party loyalty played a key role in determining which version of Macdonald one chose to remember.

The Liberal Party countered the representations of Macdonald advanced by the Liberal-Conservative Party. However, through the more formal Macdonald memorial unveiling ceremonies, the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald was being reinforced by the press. These Liberal-Conservative events and the resulting press coverage were largely favourable to positive representations of Macdonald and his political career. The main exception came from editorials from liberal-leaning newspapers that were critical of Macdonald’s legacy. For its part, the Liberal Party was clearly critical of Macdonald and his political legacy. However, Laurier’s criticism of Macdonald during his eulogy of the former prime minister as well as the Liberal Party’s opposition to a state-funded memorial to Macdonald was largely omitted from Canadian newspapers. The Liberal Party policy convention received the most media coverage of all three events, but the criticisms of Macdonald were overshadowed by policy debate, and not political rhetoric. As such, by the end of 1896, the Liberal-Conservative Party had a higher and broader ability to influence the perception of Macdonald held by Canadians through their ability to raise monuments and to ensure the repetitive coverage of these events within Ontario and Quebec newspapers. Nevertheless, within political circles, Macdonald was not transformed into a national hegemonic figure during this period.

B. During the Years as the Governing Party (1896-1911)

On June 23, 1896, the Liberal Party was victorious in its electoral effort. The party elected 117 MPs, providing itself with a 21-seat parliamentary majority. The Liberal Party’s majority status in the House of Commons increased in subsequent federal general elections,
including a 47-seat majority in 1900, a 64-seat majority in 1904, and a 45-seat majority in 1909. As such, the Liberal Party’s parliamentary majority allowed it to frame issues and adopt agendas without the support of other parties, though it did have to keep an eye on balancing its priorities and rhetoric to maintain its electoral majorities. During these years as the governing party, the Liberal Party altered its representations of Macdonald whenever appropriate. This second section of the chapter focuses on the Liberal Party’s use of representations of Sir John A. Macdonald between 1896 and 1911, the mandate of Sir Wilfrid Laurier as prime minister of Canada.

During Laurier’s 15-year mandate as prime minister, Macdonald was not the topic of specific discussions in the House of Commons or in the Senate. As such, Macdonald’s name is not indexed as a specific subject of discussion in *Hansard*, the official published verbatim report of the proceedings of both parliamentary chambers. In addition, Laurier’s government did not plan or support any events to shape the public memory of Macdonald during this period. The decision to omit further efforts to commemorate Sir John A. Macdonald does not mean that Macdonald’s memory was not used by the Liberal Party during this period. An exploration of key policy discussions during Laurier’s tenure as prime minister reveals at least two examples where representations of Macdonald formed part of the debate. The first is the debate in the House of Commons regarding the creation of two new provinces in 1905: Alberta and Saskatchewan. The second is the policy debate in 1910-1911 on the reciprocity agreement with the United States, a debate that began in the House of Commons before becoming the main campaign issue of the 1911 federal general election. These two examples will allow an analysis of the representations of Macdonald advanced by members of the Liberal Party during their years in government.

1. Creating the Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan

After winning three majority governments, Laurier’s government still retained its popularity with Canadians. In light of his success, “Laurier wanted to enhance the reputation he enjoyed as the builder of modern Canada,” acknowledges historian Réal Bélanger.47 As such, he wished to proceed with a promise he had made: the transformation of parts of the North-West Territories into one or more autonomous provinces. In 1905, Laurier introduced the Autonomy Bills which sought the creation of two new provinces – Alberta and Saskatchewan. The debate surrounding these bills provides an interesting context to analyze the representation of Macdonald as a nation-builder during Laurier’s administration.

i. Negative Representations of Macdonald

In his ninth year in office, Laurier wanted to redefine the Canadian landscape by creating new provinces. Laurier articulated that one of the key reasons driving his decision to create new provinces stemmed from the fact that the territories had met a certain level of maturity in regards to the influx of population and the establishment of administrative centres. This slow transformative process from territory to province was heralded by Laurier as a means of avoiding future conflict. He highlighted his approach in light of the conflict which erupted over the establishment of the province of Manitoba. In this regard, he stated:

If we go back to the history of those days, perhaps the opinion will not be unwarranted that it would have been a wiser course, if instead of bringing Manitoba at once into the confederation full fledged and fully equipped as a province, that maturity had been reached by gradual stages extended over a few years. If that course would have been taken, perhaps some mistakes would have been avoided from the effects of which we have not yet completely recovered.48


48 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1905), February 21, 1905, 1423.
Laurier’s quote was a strong denunciation of Macdonald’s political actions in establishing that Canadian province. Among those unidentified “mistakes” were the Red River Rebellion, the North-West Rebellions, the hanging of Louis Riel and the creation of denominational schools similar to the one used in Quebec, which led to the Manitoba Schools Question. Each of these events had an impact in the development of the province, with many of the attached linguistic and religious struggles extending beyond the borders of the province. Laurier does not actually name Macdonald, although it can be inferred from the quote. As such, in a single sentence, Laurier labelled Macdonald’s government as the ineffective catalyst which created the complex political challenges in Manitoba.

Laurier’s criticism of Macdonald’s handling of the creation of Manitoba echoed his previous critiques while in opposition to Liberal-Conservative attempts to build his status as a nation-builder. They were, however, different in content. During his years in opposition, Laurier was critical of Macdonald as a nation-builder through his ineffective economic policies. As prime minister, Laurier controlled Canada’s economic policies, reducing the benefits of criticizing Macdonald’s previous policies. Thus, during his years in government, Laurier used the example of the challenges following the precarious entry of Manitoba as a Canadian province to illustrate a negative representation of Macdonald as a nation-builder. Despite the change of content, Laurier continued to portray Macdonald as an ineffective nation-builder.

ii. Positive Representation of Macdonald

Despite his criticism of Macdonald during the debates over the creation of Alberta and Saskatchewan, Laurier did not exclusively define Macdonald in a negative light during his tenure as prime minister. The drafting of the Autonomy Bills also provides one positive representation of Macdonald. The issue revolved around the ownership of Crown lands
following the creation of new provinces from land previously under the control of the federal government. The Autonomy Bills maintained federal ownership of Crown lands within the two new provinces. This decision was criticized by then Premier of the North-West Territories, F. W. G. Haultain, among others.49 Haultain’s reaction was unsurprising as the new provincial governments would not gain the financial advantage and territorial control that comes with ownership of Crown lands.

Laurier’s defence of this position rested with a precedent set by Sir John A. Macdonald. Macdonald had argued that colonies entering Confederation retained ownership of Crown lands while the federal government retained the Crown lands of provinces being created within lands it once owned. Laurier quoted a long passage from a speech delivered by Macdonald in 1884 which articulated his views in this regard. Laurier quoted the following passage from Macdonald’s speech: “parliament pledged its faith to the world that a large portion of those lands should be set apart for free homesteads to all coming settlers … No transfer could, therefore, be made, without exacting from the province the most ample securities that this pledged policy be maintained.”50 Macdonald’s argument, in short, was that retaining Crown lands would facilitate and ensure the continued success of immigrant settlement efforts. Laurier, who also had great ambitions for prairie settlement by immigrants, used Macdonald’s previous argument to effectively fuse previous Liberal-Conservative policy with the current Liberal position on the issue. More importantly, Laurier provided a representation of Macdonald fighting for sound policies in the nation’s best interest, a representation that suggests Macdonald was indeed a nation-builder. However,

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50 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1905), February 21, 1905, 1434.
Laurier may not have been consciously giving credit to Macdonald as a nation-builder in using his arguments to force the Conservative opposition MPs into acquiescence.

iii. Conclusion

The debate on the admission of two new Canadian provinces in 1905 provides a context to review the representations of Macdonald as a nation-builder. On the one hand, Laurier illustrated that he wished to avoid at all cost the political mistakes made by Macdonald in creating the province of Manitoba. Through such comparisons, he also hoped to demonstrate his superior leadership style, and his superior ability in nation-building. On the other hand, Laurier sought protection from complaints from provincial and territorial leaders regarding maintaining federal control of Crown lands within provinces it created. Laurier found that political cover by reminding opponents that Macdonald had endorsed the same decision during his political career. In both situations, Laurier used selective and self-serving examples from Macdonald’s past to support his decisions.

2. Reciprocity Agreement of 1911

The policy consideration of reciprocity with the United States had been a longstanding divisive issue between Canada’s two national parties. For example, the Liberal Party’s proposed reciprocity agreement with the United States during the 1891 federal election campaign was characterized by Liberal-Conservatives as the first step to Canada’s annexation by the United States. The Liberal-Conservative Party was successful in retaining power during that election, and thus there was no movement on reciprocity at that time. Twenty years later, on January 26, 1911, the governing Liberal government announced a tentative reciprocity agreement between Canada and the United States to the House of Commons. The introduction of this tentative agreement focused on three elements. The first was a “firm conviction” that reciprocity with the United States was a good thing for Canada.
The second was that reciprocity was finally “within reach” after struggling to achieve this goal for more than half a century. The third was that the Liberal Party had “found the psychological moment for dealing with this question.”51 As such, the Liberal Party was convinced that Canadians were secure enough in their national identity to move forward with an economic arrangement with the United States that would be beneficial to the Canadian economy without setting off fears of cultural or political annexation.

In order to firm up their case to Canadians about the need for reciprocity, the Liberal Party evoked the memory of an unlikely political figure as an ally: Sir John A. Macdonald. As the policy debate shifted from the economic merits of the reciprocity agreement to Canada’s very own national existence, references to Sir John A. Macdonald were added to speeches delivered by Liberal MPs. The effort aimed to represent Macdonald as a supporter of reciprocity with the United States. This approach was contrary to the main Liberal-Conservative representation of Macdonald as a nation-builder through sound protectionist policies. Nevertheless, there are historical records that demonstrate Macdonald’s pursuit of reciprocity with the United States through much of the 1870s. The Liberal Party was thus historically accurate in depicting Macdonald as someone who sought reciprocity with Canada’s southern neighbour.

For example, Postmaster General Rodolphe Lemieux,52 a former journalist for Montreal’s liberal paper La Patrie and one of Laurier’s strongest voices in Quebec, reminded one Conservative MP during the debate in the House of Commons about Macdonald’s “real” position on the issue:

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51 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: C. H. Parmelee, 1905), January 26, 1911, 2476.
52 Lemieux was a Liberal MP from 1896 until 1930, and a senator from 1930 to 1937. He was speaker of the House of Commons for eight years, from 1922 to 1930. See: Gary Levy, Présidents de la Chambre des Communes (Ottawa: Library of Parliament, 1988), 56-58.
My hon. friend … was a faithful support of the old chieftain, Sir John A. Macdonald. But has he forgotten that when Sir John A. Macdonald introduced in 1879 the National Policy before this parliament, he inserted a clause in the statute, whereby a reciprocal offer was made to the United States of America?\footnote{Canada, \textit{Debates from the House of Commons} (Ottawa: C. H. Parmelee, 1905), February 21, 1911, 4006.}

Lemieux’s jibe suggests that Macdonald was only a protectionist until he would be able to negotiate reciprocity with the United States. In the same speech, Lemieux also characterized Macdonald as trying to obtain unsuccessfully a similar commercial agreement. As such, Lemieux argued that his party’s actions in proposing this reciprocity agreement would be applauded by Macdonald himself. Finally, Lemieux contended that he had personally heard Macdonald praising the Liberal Party’s economic policy of reciprocity during the 1891 federal general election in many meetings across Quebec. Taken together, Lemieux’s speech was a first effort by the Liberal Party to cast doubt on Macdonald’s image as a protectionist and to revise the public’s memory of Macdonald for its benefit.

Additional cabinet ministers linked Macdonald and support for reciprocity, thus reinforcing the points raised by Lemieux. Agriculture minister Sydney Fisher, for instance, went even further than Lemieux in arguing that what Macdonald had really sought, and failed to secure, was reciprocity with the United States:

\begin{quote}
At the same time when Sir Charles Tupper … and Sir John Macdonald (were) waving that (British) flag, both of them were trying to get from the United States just exactly the arrangement that we have got to-day. They were trying to get it by going on their knees to Washington, while we have Washington coming to us.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, February 28, 1911, 4416. Fisher was Laurier’s English-Canadian organizer in Quebec, and he served in the agriculture portfolio for the entirety of Laurier’s tenure as prime minister. DCB, Vol. XV: 1921 - 1930, biographical entry for \textit{Sydney Arthur Fisher} by Anne Drummond, available online and accessed on October 10, 2008, at \url{http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=8134&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=371c3f96n020udq9y9qq9seic1}.} 
\end{quote}
Beyond raising the Liberal Party above the Liberal-Conservative Party with a disparaging comment on Macdonald’s diplomatic skills, Fisher sought to demonstrate that Macdonald had shared the same policy objective as the Liberals.

Laurier also participated in the effort to shape the history, and consequently, the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald as one committed to reciprocity. Laurier reached into the written parliamentary debates to quote exact portions of Macdonald’s motion introducing the National Policy in 1878-1879: “Canada … will encourage and develop an active interprovincial trade—as it ought to do—in the direction of a reciprocity of tariffs with our neighbours, so far as the varied interests of Canada may demand, will greatly tend to procure for this country, eventually, a reciprocity of trade.” Laurier then added: “What was sought in 1879 we may now have, and yet men there are who doubt and hesitate and falter and who would erase thirty years of our past history from the books.” By resorting to quoting Sir John A. Macdonald and accusing opposition MPs of historical amnesia, Laurier suggested that voting against the motion would counter Liberal-Conservative’s long-term objectives and dishonour Macdonald’s memory at the same time. The prime minister also read excerpts of past speeches by former Prime Minister Sir John Thompson and Liberal-Conservative MP George Eulas Foster praising the merits of reciprocity for Canada as a means of demonstrating a broader appeal to reciprocity among Liberal-Conservatives.

The Liberal-Conservative Party was not silent on the Liberal Party’s efforts to link Macdonald to reciprocity. However, the Party and its leadership did not attempt to define Macdonald as a supporter of reciprocity during this period. The new party leader, Robert Borden, offered his own political jousting by concluding he had not heard a convincing argument for the government’s position on the reciprocity agreement. Laurier’s use of “old”

55 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: C. H. Parmelee, 1905), March 7, 1911, 4743-4744.
56 Ibid., 4744.
speeches to attempt to demonstrate Macdonald's support of reciprocity was met with open disdain by Borden:

A very considerable part of the time of my right hon. friend yesterday was devoted to resuscitating very old speeches of himself and others of twenty years ago. Has the right hon. gentleman been asleep? Must we in future dub him Sir Wilfrid Rip Van Winkle? … [T]his is not 1879.\textsuperscript{57}

The reference to American author Washington Irving's famous fictional character implies that Laurier had been asleep for the past twenty years, and had lost touch with modern economic needs. Borden did not invoke Macdonald by name, as he knew Macdonald had previously attempted to introduce this same policy as the Liberal Party. However, he did quote Canadian Pacific Railway magnate Sir William Van Horne who had stated the proposed agreement would see "the magnificent work of a generation traded away for a vague idea or a childish sentiment."\textsuperscript{58} The work of that generation would indeed be the work of Macdonald’s generation. Van Horne was nevertheless biased in his assessment of reciprocity. Van Horne feared that reciprocity would endanger the very industries which had assured his material success. The National Policy increased east-west trade and thus the use of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Seeing his profits threatened by reciprocity pushed him to campaign aggressively "‘to bust the damn thing.’"\textsuperscript{59} The reciprocity debate in Parliament was front-page news in many of Canada’s newspapers. However there were few articles that provide a focus on representations of Sir John A. Macdonald as part of this broader debate. This suggests that newspapers did not make the connection between policy debates supporting reciprocity and the legacy and public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald. One

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., March 8, 1911, 4832.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., March 8, 1911, 4831.
exception was from the conservative and pro-British newspaper, the *Montreal Daily Star*, which published an expanded front-page editorial entitled “Under which flag.” The unsigned editorial argues: “Now that the storm (regarding the merits of reciprocity) has risen, these (Liberal) men have tried to hide in the grave of Sir John Macdonald. But that grave has been closed for fifteen years; and is closed on a man who fought his last fight against a form of Reciprocity which he feared would rob him of his proudest possession – the privilege of dying ‘a British subject.”60 The editorial clearly reflects the ideological views of its paper, views it had associated with Macdonald during its exclusively favourable media coverage of unveiling ceremonies, as demonstrated in chapter 2. As such, the *Star* challenged the Liberal Party’s attempt to adopt as its leading symbol a man with a public record more closer aligned with protectionism and maintaining British relations than free trade and Americanism.

The criticisms made by Conservative MPs and the *Montreal Star* did not alter the Liberal Party’s position of using Macdonald’s public memory to help support its position during the 1911 federal general election campaign. For example, Justice Minister W. S. Fielding requested that his cabinet colleague George Perry Graham prepare an election pamphlet featuring references from Macdonald and other leading Conservatives in support of reciprocity:

I think it would be well to gather, in good form, extracts, many of which have already been quoted in the debate, from speeches and other utterances of Sir John A. Macdonald, Sir Charles Tupper and others, in favour of reciprocity. The Opposition does not like us to do that. They constantly say the situation is changed (sic). … If Canada was able to stand reciprocity in natural products in 1891, she is much better able to stand it now. I would have a pamphlet devoted to these utterances of former days, showing that reciprocity has been the policy of all parties, from the beginning of Confederation and even before.61

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60 *Montreal Daily Star*, September 16, 1911, 1.
61 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter, LAC), George Perry Graham fonds, MG27-IID8, Letter from Fielding to Graham, dated May 21, 1911.
A copy of this requested electoral pamphlet was not located. Nevertheless, Fielding’s letter provides a clear indication that some senior members of the Liberal Party wished to continue using Macdonald in support of reciprocity.

In addition to prompting his cabinet colleague to prepare this pamphlet, Fielding also used some of these very examples in his own campaign literature. For example, Fielding wrote an essay to his fellow citizens to defend his party’s position on reciprocity. He writes: “The Conservative policy of higher tariffs was only accepted by its own friends because it was declared by Sir John Macdonald himself and by other statesmen of his party to be the best possible road towards obtaining reciprocity with the United States.”62 He then addresses “The Annexation Bogey” charged about his party:

Sir John Macdonald … and other public men of the Conservative Party were not deemed disloyal when they laboured without success to obtain a reciprocal trade agreement with the US. It will be difficult to persuade anyone that the Canadian Ministers of to-day are disloyal when they have carried on reciprocity negotiations which have been crowned with the success that was denied to their predecessors.63

If the Liberal Party could convince Canadians that their actions were in the best economic interest of Canada and would not alter Canada’s loyalty to the British Empire, they realized that they may find electoral success in the plan.

The 1911 election ended Laurier’s prime ministership and the Liberal Party’s fifteen-year consecutive mandate. The issue that motivated Canadians to vote for one party or another is impossible to determine. Some Canadians may have voted specifically on the merits of reciprocity. Others may have voted for a new government and a younger political leader. After all, Sir Wilfrid Laurier was turning 70. Additional issues may have motivated other Canadians. Despite the electoral outcome, the Liberal Party found merit in trying to

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63 Ibid., 13.
reshape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald into that of a free trader. The dominant representation of Macdonald at the time was one devoted to protectionism, through the National Policy which he introduced. As such, the representations of Macdonald as a protectionist advanced by Liberal-Conservatives and as a free trader advanced by the Liberal Party were impossible to reconcile. The representation of Macdonald as a supporter of reciprocity would have been strengthened had the Liberal Party won the 1911 federal general election. The Liberal Party’s electoral defeat allowed the Liberal-Conservatives to continue defining Macdonald as a supporter of protectionism.

3. Conclusion

As the governing party between 1896 and 1911, the Liberals seldom invoked the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald. This strategy was not unique to Laurier and the Liberal Party in Canada. The same trend was observed by General George Washington’s political contemporaries who avoided the commemoration of his public memory. In that example, Washington’s successors as president were also “founding fathers” and thus wished to ensure their equal standing to Washington in American history. When Sir Wilfrid Laurier or other members of the Liberal Party did invoke his memory, they deliberately twisted or revised selective representations of Macdonald to advance party objectives. During the debate on the creation of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, Laurier used Macdonald’s rushed and, he argued, heavy-handed actions to create the province of Manitoba as a contrast to his own self-defined, measured and incremental approach to creating new provinces in order to define himself as a better nation-builder. Laurier also used Macdonald’s stance on reserving Crown lands to the federal government following the

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creation of new provinces as a political shield to defend his government from an unpopular decision. Finally, the Liberal Party attempted to alter the perception of Macdonald’s ultimate support for reciprocity to broaden public and political support for this economic policy. In each instance, a common goal existed: to gain a political advantage for the Liberal Party through its efforts of shaping Macdonald’s public memory. During these years, the Liberal Party introduced some, albeit not exclusively, negative representations of Macdonald. As such, no hegemonic discourse about the political legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald emerged during Laurier’s years as prime minister.

3. Conclusion

Over the years, many political leaders have commented on Laurier’s representations of Sir John A. Macdonald. In 1893, the then Liberal Premier of Ontario Sir Oliver Mowat described Laurier’s eulogy to Macdonald as “an appreciative speech which, for its spirit and eloquence, was commended alike by friends and opponents.” As such, Mowat acknowledged the quality of Laurier’s remarks and the absence of antagonism. In 1941, former Prime Minister Arthur Meighen labelled Laurier’s eulogy to Macdonald as being “so graceful, so memorable and so generous.” As such, Meighen used Laurier’s own words to conclude that Macdonald’s “greatest rival [Sir Wilfrid Laurier], to his credit, has awarded [Macdonald] the primacy among the founders and the builders of our nation.” In 1967, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson reproduced sections of Laurier’s eulogy referenced above, noting that Laurier, a “vigoroue but chivalrous opponent,” had produced a eulogy of

67 Ibid., D39934. Meighen makes this affirmation based on the text of Laurier’s eulogy to Macdonald on the floor of the House of Commons. See Chapter 1 of this thesis for more information.
Macdonald that “history has justified.” Laurier’s tribute to Macdonald has been cited by many others over the decades, leaving a sense that Laurier had dismissed his political antagonism with Macdonald upon his death and was thus ready to elevate Macdonald’s memory above others. Such efforts may be linked to efforts to develop a cult around Laurier beneficial to subsequent generations of Canadian federal political leaders. These were, however, very selective readings of the overall representations of Sir John A. Macdonald developed by Laurier and his Liberal Party.

In reality, Laurier was not ready to elevate Macdonald above other political leaders in Canada. The Liberal Party’s quest to become the governing party of Canada focused significant attention on the professed errors of Sir John A. Macdonald and the Liberal-Conservative Party as a means of differentiating itself from their policies. As such, the Liberal Party depicted mostly negative, but always self-serving, representations of Sir John A. Macdonald during their years in opposition. These representations were always contrary to those of the Liberal-Conservative Party. During this 20-year period, each national party championed a different image of Sir John A. Macdonald. As a result, two very partisan version of Macdonald emerged from this political battleground, with each using Macdonald and his political legacy as a means to advance their party’s objectives. The process of consensus-building to shape public memory, as argued by Antonio Gramsci, is impossible to achieve if restricted to one class or political group. In this case, the competing public memories of Sir John A. Macdonald were difficult to reconcile. The absence of a hegemonic discourse on Sir John A. Macdonald following his death acceptable to both political parties

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ensured that Macdonald remained a figure closely aligned with his Liberal-Conservative Party, not a symbol beyond his party.
Chapter Four – The Diamond Jubilee of Confederation

From this soil, home of the Loyalists,
Sir John Macdonald drew inspiration
to weld together the weak, and scattered colonies
of his day into a strong and ambitious Dominion,
equal partner in the far-flung British commonwealth.

Diamond Jubilee Plaque

Introduction

By the 1920s, a new generation of federal politicians emerged on the national stage, filling up the positions once held by Macdonald and Laurier. As the traditional rivalry between these men and their parties were now one generation removed, one wonders if Macdonald remained a Conservative Party icon or if past animosity has been replaced with a greater acceptance of Macdonald as a national hegemonic figure. The analysis of a national commemorative moment in the 1920s provides the ideal forum to explore the evolving public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald.

In December 1926, the federal government announced its plans to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the British North America Act, an event known as the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.¹ The federal government’s objective in marking this anniversary revolved around two clear goals: to strike a “clear, strong, dominant note of patriotism that will inspire confidence in, love for and devotion to our Country;” and to “encourage the development of a robust, self-reliant National spirit.”² Among the events at the national level, the organizers planned a Parliament Hill celebration featuring a live national radio broadcast, thus helping to further nationalism through the use of new

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¹ Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1926), December 10, 1926, 7.
² Library and Archives Canada (hereafter, LAC), Diamond Jubilee of Confederation (RG6), D3, Vol. 447, File 1, Letter from Senator George Graham, Chairman, National Committee of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation to Prince Edward Island Premier J. D. Stewart, dated March 22, 1927. This same letter was sent to all Premiers.
technology. The organizers’ efforts to foster social and political unity also led to the production of historical sketches, available in English and French, to be printed in newspapers in order to promote a shared history and a sense of national identity. At the community level, the provinces were encouraged to plan activities, inspiring themselves from suggestions made by federal organizers. Prior to the anniversary, Prime Minister King suggested these activities would “lend added inspiration to the patriotic fervour of our people, and afford a clearer vision of our aspirations and ideals, to the end that from sea to sea there may be developed a robust Canadian spirit, and in all things Canadian profounder national unity.” As such, many of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation activities aimed to create a lived experience shared by many Canadians as well as the development of a Canadian national feeling based on bilingualism and multiculturalism.

The Diamond Jubilee of Confederation promoted the importance of the Fathers of Confederation through its activities to strengthen the public’s understanding of Canadian history. As such, this national commemoration provides a forum to explore the efforts of the organizers to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald, one of the Fathers of Confederation. This chapter analyzes four activities featuring the Fathers of Confederation selected by the National Committee for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation: the issuance of commemorative stamps; the commemoration of the grave sites of the Fathers of Confederation; the production of historical sketches; and the commemoration of

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5 Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1926), April 14, 1927, 2500.

Macdonald’s boyhood home. In addition, the speeches delivered by political leaders on Parliament Hill will also be examined. These activities will be analyzed to understand specific efforts to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald by event organizers.

This chapter argues that the organizers of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation aimed to strengthen among Canadians the public memory of the Fathers of Confederation through its commemorative activities. The repetitive references served as a precursor to cultivate a myth surrounding the role of the Fathers of Confederation in shaping Canada’s destiny. The development of this myth was an intentional strategy by Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and the Liberal Party-dominated organizing committee to position Sir John A. Macdonald as one of many figures who played key roles in achieving Confederation. During this period, Macdonald remained an icon of the Conservative Party, not a national symbol acceptable to all members of the federal political class. In telling the story of the Fathers of Confederation, however, the federal organizers could not diminish Macdonald’s role in Confederation and in governing Canada for more than 18 years. As such, Canadians were reminded of Macdonald’s role in shaping Canada’s future to a greater extent than other Fathers of Confederation.

1. The Organizers

The authority to organize the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation was delegated by the Parliament of Canada to a group of 69 prominent Canadians. The bipartisan Corporation of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation operated under the honorary patronage of Governor General Lord Willingdon and Lady Willingdon, the honorary presidency of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and Conservative Party leader Hugh Guthrie and the honorary vice-presidency of the Lieutenant-Governors of the nine provinces. The inclusion of such honorary members representing the highest echelons of Canada’s constitutional
system reflects the importance of the commemoration for the federal government. The leadership of the Corporation’s executive was entrusted to former Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden and former Quebec Premier Sir Lomer Gouin as co-presidents, and Liberal Senator George Graham and Liberal MP Charles Marcil as vice-presidents. Some of the other members included the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, the Speakers of the House of Commons and the Senate, the nine provincial premiers, seven current Liberal Cabinet ministers, seven current or former Liberal MPs, and six Conservative MPs. In addition, the presidents of many organizations were appointed to the organizing committee. The list included, but was not limited to, the presidents of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian National Railway, the Canadian Council of Agriculture, the Trades and Labour Congress, the Teachers’ Federation, the National Council of Women of Canada, the United Farmers of Alberta and the Quebec Council on Public Instruction. The addition of the non-political and non-business members of the Corporation was the result of lobbying efforts by Labour MP (and later Co-operative Commonwealth Federation leader) J. S. Woodsworth to include “representatives of all the different classes of the people of Canada.”

Members of the Corporation held very influential and time-consuming positions within different segments of society. As such, these members were not expected to organize and coordinate the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. At its only official meeting on March 16, 1927, the Corporation created a National Committee that would plan these festivities on its behalf. The vice-presidents of the Corporation, Liberal Senator George Graham and Liberal MP Charles Marcil, were elected as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the National Committee.

8 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1926), February 15, 1927, 350.
Committee. As such, these men played crucial roles in planning the national event and in liaising with provincial organizing committees.

Graham and Marcil were both established figures within the Liberal Party of Canada at the time of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. Graham served in the Ontario legislature from 1896 to 1907, becoming leader of the Ontario Liberal Party prior to Laurier’s invitation to join the federal cabinet as Minister of Railways and Canals. In 1919, Graham ran unsuccessfully against King and Nova Scotia MP William Stevens Fielding for the leadership of the Liberal Party. Defeated during the October 1925 federal election, Graham returned to Parliament following his appointment to the Senate in December 1926. He remained a Senator until his death in 1943. His political career in Toronto and in Ottawa spanned half of his lifetime.10 For his part, Marcil had been a Quebec Liberal MP since 1900. He won re-election to the House of Commons on nine consecutive elections in the same Gaspésie riding, retaining his seat until his death in 1937. He served as Speaker of the House of Commons from 1909 to 1911, the last two years of the Laurier administration. In the 1920s, Marcil served as chair of the Liberal Caucus, an important position within the Party.11

Two other key executive members of the National Committee were Charles George Cowan and Jean Désy. Cowan was Chairman of the Association of Canadian Clubs, one of the organizations pushing for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations.12 The British Columbia native served the National Committee as its English-language secretary. The role of the French-language secretary to the National Committee was entrusted to Jean Désy. Previously a professor of international law and political history at the Université de

Montreal, Désy had been recruited by Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs O. D. Skelton to work in his Department. Both men were thus responsible for the logistical arrangements of the National Committee and the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations.

The National Committee also benefited from the input of 31 additional members. Some members also held a seat in the Corporation. Despite this large committee, 20 members attended fewer than four meetings. At the same time, a few members were constant voices during these meetings. For example, Thomas Ahearn was a successful businessman in Ottawa prior to his appointment as Chairman of the Ottawa Improvement Commission and his election as a Liberal MP for Ottawa in 1930. Ahearn chaired the sub-committee responsible for broadcasting the Dominion Day celebrations on Parliament Hill across Canada. Arthur George Doughty was the head of the Public Archives of Canada and collected many important documents on Canadian History during his career. Doughty was tasked with chairing the Historical Subcommittee. Other frequent attendees who did not chair subcommittees were: Deputy Minister Ernest Henry Scammell of the Department of Soldiers Civil Reestablishment; Mrs. J. A. (Henrietta) Wilson, President of the National Council of Women of Canada; Mr. Tom Moore, President of the Trades and Labour Council; and Mrs. Hugh Howard Rowatt, wife of the Deputy Minister of the Interior.

18 Craig Heron, The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1996), 70.
19 No additional information on Mrs. Rowatt was found. After his term as Deputy Minister, Mr. Rowatt was appointed Commissioner of the Northwest Territories from 1930 to 1934. See: History of the Commissioners
There were also three federal political figures who frequently attended the National Committee’s meetings in addition to Graham and Marcil. The first was former Liberal MP (1922-1925) Herbert Meredith Marler from Montreal who briefly served for four months as minister without portfolio in Prime Minister King’s government in 1925. A close associate of King, he would be appointed in 1929 as Canada’s first ambassador to Japan. The second was Rodolphe Lemieux, a Liberal elected 12 times to the House of Commons between 1896 and 1926 for the region of Gaspé, before serving in the Senate from 1930 to 1937. At the time, Lemieux was the Speaker of the House, a position he held for eight years between 1922 and 1930. Lemieux’s attendance at these meetings was facilitated by the fact that the House of Commons stood adjourned between April 1927 and January 1928. The third was Sir George Hasley Perley, a Conservative MP who represented the Quebec riding of Argenteuil between 1904 and 1938. Perley remained the only frequent representative of the Conservative Party at these meetings while the Liberal Party was most often represented by Graham, Marcil, Marler and Lemieux.

The National Committee’s core group allows two conclusions to be drawn. The first reflects the substantive number of Quebeckers active within the National Committee. The Quebeckers included three French-Canadians (Marcil, Lemieux and Désy) and two English-Canadian political figures (Perley and Marler). The National Committee’s actual composition led to a greater openness to bilingualism, including activities and publications being available of the Northwest Territories, available online and accessed on August 10, 2010 from http://www.commissioner.gov.nt.ca/history/.


in both English and French. In addition, Mrs. Henrietta Wilson would have been supportive to bilingual events and publications, as she was known as a constant advocate for all Canadians “know(ing) both their official languages.” Secondly, the number of Liberal Party supporters who actively participated in the National Committee exceeded the number of Conservative Party supporters. As such, some activities approved by the committee had a partisan undertone, despite the bipartisan nature of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.

The organization of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation led to surprisingly few formal meetings. Only 12 meetings took place between the inception of the National Committee and Dominion Day. In some cases, meetings took place every two weeks, despite a very brief four-month window to plan these commemorative events. Three other meetings took place after Dominion Day focusing on post-event reporting functions. Overall, the National Committee was known for postponing important decisions. For example, the April 21st suggestion to invite the sons and daughters of the Fathers of Confederation was finally approved during the May 26th meeting, after the authority to make the decision was delegated to Graham, Marcil, Cowan and Désy as the National Committee’s executive.

The Diamond Jubilee of Confederation preparations also required frequent interactions among members of the National Committee and interested external parties. The tenor of and decisions taken during these meetings were not part of official records of the committee. As such, it becomes difficult to confirm who influenced certain elements of the celebrations. One of the key individuals who worked behind the scenes with the National Committee was Prime Minister King. King did attend the 11th meeting of the National

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Committee on May 26, 1927. He frequently met privately with Graham and Cowan, however, to discuss various elements of the coming celebrations. Other members of the National Committee, the Corporation as well as external stakeholders may have held similar informal discussions with key organizers. Thus, it is impossible to know who influenced the development of specific elements of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.

2. **Commemorating the Fathers of Confederation**

The Diamond Jubilee of Confederation resolution introduced in the House of Commons by Prime Minister King expressed a “deep appreciation (for) the achievements of the fathers of confederation (sic).” However, the National Committee had to ask itself the following question: who are these Fathers of Confederations? The Quebec Conference had formed the basis for the union of the British North America colonies through the adoption of seventy-two resolutions. Since Confederation, the 33 delegates to the Quebec Conference had been labelled as the ‘Fathers of Confederation.’ However, the National Committee questioned the exclusion of the three additional political leaders who only attended the London Conference. The National Committee decided to add their names to its list of Fathers of Confederation. In addition, the National Committee was lobbied by a senior official in Nova Scotia to add the name of another Canadian who that province felt merited

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26 Canada, *Debates from the House of Commons* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1926), April 14, 1927, 2500.

special decoration as part of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. That individual was former Nova Scotia Premier Joseph Howe, the leading advocate for responsible government within the British North America colonies and an opponent of Confederation. In the spirit of promoting unity and historical interest across the country, the organizers might have added other political leaders who played a key role in the entry or the creation of new provinces. In the end, only Howe’s name stood alongside the Fathers of Confederation as another Canadian meriting his own wreath laying ceremony on Dominion Day.

The National Committee’s decision to include 36 individuals on its list of Fathers of Confederation influenced the course of history in the long-term. By 1927, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, the federal government’s agency responsible for national historic designation, had not yet prepared an official list of the Fathers of Confederation. At its 1938 annual meeting, the Board determined that only delegates to the Quebec Conference merited the title ‘Father of Confederation.’ As such, they excluded the three names added by the National Committee. In 1958, a new Board member, University of Toronto historian Donald Creighton, was asked to prepare the authoritative list of the Fathers of Confederation. With the assistance of the Public Archives of Canada, Creighton prepared this list. He argued that the delegates to the London Conference “were also entitled to the same honours as those usually regarded as the Fathers of Confederation” as they had

31 Minutes of the HSMBC, May 19, 1938, 9. This agenda item was introduced in 1930, and a decision was deferred until the 1938 annual meeting.
been previously designated as Fathers by the National Committee for the Celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.\footnote{Minutes of the HSMBC, May 25-29, 1959, 16-18.}

The list of the Fathers of Confederation was the first of three lists needed by the National Committee for the Celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. The National Committee participated in efforts to locate the grave sites of the Fathers of Confederation. At the same time, the National Committee compiled a list of the surviving sons and daughters of the Fathers of Confederation.\footnote{LAC, Diamond Jubilee of Confederation (RG6), D3, Vol. 445, File 1, Minutes of the First Meeting of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, May 11, 1927, 4. Canada, \textit{Report of the National Diamond Jubilee Executive Committee} (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1928), 5.} The National Committee required this indispensable background research to support various efforts to commemorate the Fathers of Confederation. However, the absence of such lists confirms that, while the efforts of these men had been acknowledged collectively since 1867, the federal government had not taken concerted efforts to commemorate its members individually. As such, the ability to further develop the myth of the Fathers of Confederation through the personification of individual as well as collective contributions in shaping Canada’s destiny remained limited prior to the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.

3. **Commemorative Activities**

The National Committee wished to instil among Canadians an interest in and appreciation for the Fathers of Confederation. As such, they supported specific commemorative activities focusing on their role in shaping Canada’s political destiny. The organizers knew that the development of any myth required the reinforcement of key messages and the use of various mediums to reach the targeted audience. Four National Committee activities will be analyzed to determine the representation of the Fathers of Confederation in general and of Sir John A. Macdonald in particular. These activities include:
the issuance of Diamond Jubilee of Confederation commemorative stamps; the commemoration of the grave sites of the Fathers of Confederation; the authorship of historical sketches; and the commemoration of the boyhood home of Sir John A. Macdonald.

A. Commmemorative Stamps

The use and the frequency of Sir John A. Macdonald’s image on the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation commemorative stamps provides a means to analyze the acceptability of Macdonald as a symbol of Confederation and Canada among the federal political class at the time of these national celebrations. By the beginning of the 20th century, the issuance of commemorative stamps had become a standard element of many major commemorative events in North America and Europe. For example, state-issued philatelic collections commemorated the Quebec Tercentenary in 1908, the Pilgrim Tercentenary in 1920, the Huguenot-Wallon Tercentenary in 1924 and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924. The National Committee’s recommendation regarding the issuance of stamps to commemorate the anniversary was thus naturally amongst its first decisions. At the same time, the National Committee agreed that these stamps would have inscriptions in both official languages to “further … the promotion of unity throughout the Dominion,” a recommendation approved by the federal government. The archives of the Diamond

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35 LAC, Diamond Jubilee of Confederation (RG6), D3, Vol. 447, File 1, Minutes, Minutes of the Second Meeting of the National Committee Stamps for the Celebration of the Jubilee of Confederation held on Tuesday March 22, 1927, 2.

36 LAC, Diamond Jubilee of Confederation (RG6), D3, Vol. 447, File 14, Stamps, Letter from Mr. C. G. Cowan, Honorary Secretary of the National Committee to Prime Minister Mackenzie King, dated March 25, 1927. There are many chain letters highlighting the displeasure of English-speaking residents in the area of Sudbury, Ontario to the presence of French language on stamps, dated late April 1927. They argued that
Jubilee of Confederation and the Annual Report of the Postmaster General do not record the selection process for the visual representations of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. In total, six stamps were issued as part of the ‘Confederation Commemorative Issue of 1927’ (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Images used on the special edition of stamps to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.

The image of Sir John A. Macdonald was reproduced on two stamps issued as part of the ‘Confederation Commemorative Issue of 1927.’ In the first example, a portrait of Macdonald taken by Ottawa photographer William James Topley in November 1883 is the

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Canada was not a bilingual country, and thus stamps should be issued only in English. See: LAC, Diamond Jubilee of Confederation (RG6), D3, Vol. 447, File 14, Stamps, Letter from C. F. Blatchford of Copper Cliff, ON to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, dated April 26, 1927.


Between February and June 1926, the Office of the Postmaster General had prepared three stamps to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. The stamps featured: Robert Baldwin and Sir Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine; Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Wilfrid Laurier; and Thomas D’Arcy McGee. These stamps were issued in 1927. They were excluded from the analysis for two reasons. The first is their origins steams from the Department, not the National Committee of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. The second is that their circulation quantities was low (less than 32 million stamps) compared to the 531 million stamps issued through the National Committee of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. See: Douglas and Mary Patrick, Canada’s Postage Stamps (Toronto: McClelland and Steward Limited, 1968), 51-53.
focus. In this portrait, a 68-year old Macdonald, with receded white hair, is sitting in a chair with his head turned to the left looking into the distance. Macdonald is elegantly dressed, wearing a high-collar white shirt, a full suit and a fur-lined winter overcoat. Although not visible in the stamp, Macdonald is holding a cane in his right hand. The photograph, and the corresponding stamp, depicts Macdonald as a very distinguished gentleman. Robert Harris’ painting of Macdonald and the other Fathers of Confederation was the subject of the second stamp. Harris’s painting had been previously featured on a Canadian stamp to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Confederation in 1917. On that occasion, eight members of the group were “omitted from the stamp for reasons of space and balance in design.” In 1927, the stamp design was configured to ensure that all Fathers of Confederation present in Quebec City were included. Though Macdonald was one of many political leaders in this painting, Harris draws special attention to him. Macdonald is standing up, holding in his hand the resolutions from the Quebec Conference. He is located in the centre of the largest of three windows, a technique that frames and highlights Macdonald’s presence. Other images of the Fathers of Confederation exist which depicts them in equal standing. Instead, the National Committee and the Postmaster General selected a painting which suggests Macdonald was a more influential member among the Fathers of Confederation.

The other political leader featured on a ‘Confederation Commemorative Issue of 1927’

41 Douglas and Mary Patrick, Canada’s Postage Stamps (Toronto: McClelland and Steward Limited, 1968), 48.
42 For example, a photograph of the Fathers of Confederation was taken in Quebec City. In this photograph, entitled “The Delegates of the Provinces at the Quebec Confederation Conference,” some Fathers of Confederation are sitting in chairs placed in a horse-shoe formation, with the remaining Fathers standing behind them. LAC, Photograph of “The Delegates of the Provinces at the Quebec Confederation Conference” (Mikan no. 3206076) by unidentified photographer, available online and accessed on August 10, 2010 at http://collectionscanada.gc.ca.
stamp was Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Laurier was not involved in shaping the origins of Confederation. However, his 15-year tenure as prime minister made him the second longest serving prime minister during this 60-year period. Laurier had led his party to four majority governments, and he remained a popular figure among Canadians. After his death in 1919, Liberals embarked in commemorating Laurier, with Prime Minister King leading many of these efforts. The previous chapters of this study concluded that Macdonald remained popular mainly within Conservative circles. At the same time, the Liberal Party was positioning Laurier as an alternative to Macdonald as a symbol of Canada and of national unity. The Liberal Party members of the National Committee would have encouraged the commemoration of Laurier during the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. A 1906 portrait of 65-year old Laurier taken yet again by Ottawa photographer William James Topley was selected for this stamp. Dressed in an elegant suit with a white high collar, Laurier is gazing into the distance in a pose similar to Macdonald’s.

Three other iconic symbols of Canada were also part of the collection, notably the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, the map of Canada’s territorial expansion in the sixty years since Confederation and the evolution of mail transportation – from horse and ferry to railway. The issuing of a stamp of the Parliament Buildings and the evolution of mail transportation served as examples of technological progress in the areas of construction and transportation. The stamp reflecting the territorial growth of Canada reminded Canadians of the expansiveness of their country. It also features lines depicting the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways, other symbols of technological progress in Canada. These

themes were very important to the National Committee, and thus were depicted in a variety of its activities.

The National Committee and the Office of the Postmaster General agreed to issue these stamps as part of the ‘Confederation Commemorative Issue of 1927’ series. In total, the Office of the Postmaster General printed roughly 532 million stamps from this series. The print run of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation stamps was nine times greater than the ‘Quebec Tercentenary Commemorative Issue of 1908’ series.\(^{45}\) This significantly larger print run reflects an interest from the organizers to raise public awareness of this anniversary across the country and to strengthen unity through common imagery.\(^{46}\)

Beyond the images of Canada’s Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, the cost of mailing influenced the number of stamps required for each face value (Table 4.1). Harris’s painting of the Fathers of Confederation was assigned the 2¢ face value, reflecting the price of mailing a regular letter within Canada and the United States.\(^{47}\) The Office of the Postmaster General requested the printing of 333 million of the 2¢ Fathers of Confederation stamp. As such, roughly 63\% of all the ‘Confederation Commemorative Issue of 1927’ stamps featured the Fathers of Confederation. The 1¢ face value was assigned to the portrait of Sir John A. Macdonald. In total, roughly 150 million stamps were printed with Macdonald’s portrait, representing roughly 28\% of Diamond Jubilee of Confederation stamps. As such, the prevalence of the Macdonald stamp was five times greater than the

\(^{45}\) The Postmaster General issued eight stamps as part of the Quebec Tercentenary, for a total of 62 million copies. The stamp with the highest print run featured King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra (35,100,000 stamps), followed by a stamp featuring portraits of Jacques Cartier and Samuel de Champlain (22,530,000 stamps). See: Douglas and Mary Patrick, *Canada’s Postage Stamps* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward Limited, 1968), 42-45.

\(^{46}\) The Postmaster General would have had access to better printing and distribution technologies in 1927 as opposed to 1908. These new technology could be another possible factor leading organizers to increase the print run.

Laurier stamp, which represented less than 5% of the circulation volume. The mailing of any letter from Canada to Great Britain or any other place within the British Empire would require a Father of Confederation stamp (2¢) and a Sir John A. Macdonald stamp (1¢). In total, Macdonald’s image was found on 90.5% of the stamps issued to Canadians to commemorate the event. As such, Macdonald’s numerical prevalence in this philatelic collection suggests his continuing acceptance as a symbol of Canada by the National Committee during the 1920s.

Table 4.1: List of ‘Confederation Commemorative Issue of 1927’ stamps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currency value</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Printed Quantity</th>
<th>Percentage of total circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2¢</td>
<td>Fathers of Confederation</td>
<td>333 575 000</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1¢</td>
<td>Sir John A. Macdonald</td>
<td>148 034 000</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5¢</td>
<td>Sir Wilfrid Laurier</td>
<td>26 627 000</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3¢</td>
<td>Centre Block of Parliament</td>
<td>15 431 000</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12¢</td>
<td>Map of Canada (1867-1927)</td>
<td>7 492 000</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20¢</td>
<td>Five stages of mail transportation in Canada</td>
<td>671 400</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>531 830 400</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Canadian Postal Archives, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/postal-archives/080608_e.html

B. Grave Site Commemorations

The National Committee’s interest in developing an imagined community led to the production of a booklet providing suggested commemorative activities to community organizers. One of the suggestions made by the National Committee involved commemorating the grave sites of the Fathers of Confederation in their respective communities. In reading this booklet in early May, the Chief Commissioner of the Boy Scouts of Canada, Dr. James W. Robertson, found the inspiration to ensure that his

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48 Ibid.
organization was involved in the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation “in a national way.”\textsuperscript{50} As such, Robertson sought approval from the National Committee to transform their suggestion into a national Boy Scouts of Canada initiative under the auspices of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.

The Boy Scouts of Canada’s offer met with immediate approval from the National Committee for many reasons. First, the Corporation of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation expressed a desire to include the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides and fraternal orders in the carrying out of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations.\textsuperscript{51} Second, Governor General Lord Willingdon was both the honorary patron of the upcoming celebrations and held the honorary title of Chief Scout of Canada.\textsuperscript{52} Third, the Boy Scouts of Canada would lead this initiative with only minimal logistical and financial support from the National Committee. Fourth, the suggestion supported directly Parliament’s resolution to show its appreciation to the Fathers of Confederation and to strengthen Canadians’ understanding of their history. Finally, all Fathers of Confederation, including those lesser known, would receive equal commemoration. The National Committee’s response noted that these grave site tributes would be “one of the most interesting and valuable features of the whole celebration” and that there “was no more appropriate form of service.”\textsuperscript{53} The desire to involve youth in the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation reflected a general concern by governments starting in the 1920s regarding the proper raising of youth to become good citizens.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} LAC, Diamond Jubilee of Confederation (RG6), D3, Vol. 447, File 1, Minutes of the First Meeting of the Corporation of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, dated March 19, 1927, 3.
\textsuperscript{52} Boy Scouts of Canada, \textit{The Scout Leader}, Vol. 4, No. 8, May 1927, 86.
\textsuperscript{54} Cynthia Commachio’s monograph, \textit{The Dominion of Youth}, explores concerns with the proper raising of youth starting in the 1920s. This became a central issue for government. The government suggested that raising good
The Boy Scouts of Canada also trumpeted its leadership role in commemorating the grave sites of the Fathers of Confederation. In their monthly magazine, the *Scout Leader*, the decoration of the Fathers of Confederation’s graves was described as “a national event of first importance, such as will not be duplicated in our generation and the doings in connection with which will be recalled in their later years by the boys and girls of today.”

The article was written to generate interest among scoutmasters and troops to participate in the forthcoming event. After the event, the Boy Scouts of Canada noted tremendous pride in accomplishing this task. Despite soliciting this opportunity, the Boy Scouts of Canada described themselves as “official representatives of the nation. Rarely has so important an act of national remembrance been assigned to a volunteer organization.”

In accepting the Boy Scouts of Canada’s offer, the National Committee became responsible to support efforts to locate the grave sites of all Fathers of Confederation. The initial exchange of correspondence took place in early May, leaving less than two months to locate “some of the grave sites forgotten over the years.” The grave sites were located throughout the four original provinces as well as Prince Edward Island. In addition, the grave site of New Brunswick Father of Confederation Sir John Hamilton Gray was located in Victoria, British Columbia. Gray was appointed by Sir John A. Macdonald to the Supreme Court of British Columbia in 1872. He was laid to rest in that province in 1889.

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The Boy Scouts of Canada, with the support of the National Committee, published a booklet, called *Procedure for the Ceremony for the Decoration of the Graves of the Fathers of Confederation*, to delineate the content of the ceremony.\(^{59}\) As such, the ceremony at the grave site of every Father of Confederation was identical in nature. The booklet suggested that, at noon on Dominion Day, the scout troop be placed in a horseshoe formation facing the burial place, with national and provincial flags around the tombstone. The ceremony followed a strict order of events, starting with the singing of *O Canada*, the reciting of the Lord’s Prayer and a reading of the role of the Fathers of Confederation. Scouts would then salute the tombstone before wreaths were laid. The ceremony ended with the reciting of the Scout Promise, a moment of silence and, finally, the singing of Canada's then national anthem, *God Save the King*.

Despite the Boy Scouts’ success in commemorating all Fathers of Confederation equally, some Fathers were the subject of a more elaborate commemoration. This was the case for Sir John A. Macdonald. His tombstone and the grave’s physical surroundings had been completely restored for the occasion, a task headed by Kingston Conservative MP, Brigadier-General Arthur Edward Ross.\(^{60}\) The scout troops from three communities – Kingston, Portsmouth and Deseronto – participated in the event, increasing the number of scouts in attendance. Numerous civic leaders also gathered in the Cataraqui Cemetery for this occasion. Finally, the *Kingston Whig-Standard* featured the ceremony, describing it as “a most impressive one, the ceremony being carried out according to the program issued by the

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\(^{59}\) LAC, Boy Scouts of Canada (MG28, I73), Vol. 31, File “Diamond Jubilee of Confederation,” booklet *Procedure for the Ceremony for the Decoration of the Graves of the Fathers of Confederation*. The booklet has four pages, which includes the delineation of the ceremony as well as the words to *O Canada* and *God Save the King*.

national committee.” Together, the restoration of Macdonald’s grave and the participation of various representatives from the greater Kingston area confirm that the event captured the interest of the local community.

Macdonald’s grave site ceremony also captured national attention. The *Kingston Whig-Standard* noted that a “veritable bower of flowers received from all over the Dominion” were placed around Macdonald’s tomb. Many of these flowers came from Conservative Party associations across the country, including Quebec. For example, the Conservative Party president for the riding of Quebec City, Armand Lavergne, noted that “all Canadians of all origin recall (Macdonald’s) principles of a united and bilingual country.” Lavergne had been a long-time crusader for the federal government to improve its French-language services. As such, he resorted to attempts to shape the public memory of Macdonald to advance his cause. From Hull, Quebec, riding President F. A. Labelle writes: “The French-Conservative of the Province of Quebec take as great a pride in Sir John A. Macdonald. (...) In cordial unity with all true Canadians offer this public tribute of their gratitude and admiration for his devotion to our country which he has left with heritage of principles of public service and true patriotism.” These tributes, from at least two Conservative Francophone Quebeckers, indicate that Macdonald’s appeal among some of his former party’s loyal partisans remained strong in Quebec and beyond.

The Boy Scouts of Canada carried out the same program at Macdonald’s grave as they did for every other Father of Confederation. However, the greater level of activities

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62 *Ibid.* Considerable volume of flowers was also placed in front of the Macdonald memorial in Kingston’s City Park.
63 *Ibid.* Lavergne would be elected as a Liberal MP in the 1900s and as a Conservative MP in the 1930s. Rumours persisted that Lavergne’s father was really Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and not Laurier’s former law partner, Joseph Lavergne, largely due to Laurier’s closeness with Lavergne’s mother. See: Joseph Schull, *Laurier: The First Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1987), 277-280.
64 *Kingston Whig-Standard*, July 2, 1927, 3.
surrounding the commemoration of Macdonald’s grave site confirms a continued appreciation for Sir John A. Macdonald in many sectors of society at the local and national levels. This recognition extended beyond Macdonald as a Father of Confederation. It also reflects an appreciation for Macdonald’s longevity and accomplishments as Prime Minister of Canada. As such, Macdonald’s greater stature within his community, his party and his country led to a higher level of commemoration.

C. Historical Booklet

The National Committee was also interested in using print media as a medium for increasing interest in the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. The production of a booklet, entitled *Confederation and After: Sixty Years of Progress*, provided daily and weekly newspapers with stand-alone historical sketches between 250 and 500 words promoting a common understanding of Canadian history across the country and in both languages. 65 In total, 85 historical sketches were prepared covering a wide array of subjects, including a description of Canadian provinces in Confederation, leading politicians, scientists and businessmen, technological, agricultural and healthcare advancement, as well as the arts. Several of these historical sketches focused on Sir John A. Macdonald, thus providing an opportunity to analyze the efforts of the National Committee to shape his public memory.

The production of all history-related material became the responsibility of the National Committee’s Historical Subcommittee. Under the chairmanship of National Archivist Arthur Doughty, this subcommittee worked in parallel with the National Committee to ensure that materials would be ready prior to the main celebrations on Dominion Day. The twelve members of this subcommittee included an equal participation

of French- and English-Canadian intellectual leaders. The French-Canadians on the committee were: National Archives employee (and future National Archivist) Gustave Lanctôt; Université Laval history professor, Senator Thomas Chapais; journalist and librarian Aegidius Fauteux; lawyer and former president of the Société historique de Montréal Victor Morin; House of Commons translator and independent historian Léon Gérin; and Quebec’s legislative archivist Pierre C. Roy. The English-Canadian members were: Dominion Statistician Robert Hamilton Coats; Parliamentary Librarian Martin Burrell; Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs and a member of the “Confederation poets,” Duncan Campbell Scott; Canadian Historical Association co-founder Lawrence J. Burpee; and former Toronto journalist and now Liberal Senator, John Lewis. Together, these individuals held responsibility for the approval of historical material published under the authority of the National Committee of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.

69 Université de Montréal, Service de la gestion de documents et des archives, biographie de Victor Morin, available online and accessed on August 10, 2010, from: http://www.archiv.umontreal.ca/P0000/P0056.html.
73 Burrell was Minister of Agriculture in the first Borden cabinet. It was Burrell’s receipt of the letter from Dr. George Sterling Ryerson which sparked the discussions on the commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Sir John A. Macdonald. Burrell was injured during the 1916 fire that destroyed the Centre Block of Parliament. He became parliamentary librarian in 1920. Library of Parliament, History of Members of Parliament, available online and accessed on August 10, 2010, at http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/SenatorsMembers_house.asp?Language=E&Parl=39&Ses=2&Sect=hoschist by name search “Martin Burrell.”
The publication of the *Confederation and After* booklet provides the opportunity to examine the representations of Sir John A. Macdonald these elite members of Canadian society wished to impress upon Canadians. The inaugural article of this historical booklet focused on the ‘Idea of Confederation.’ The article sets the number of Fathers of Confederation at 33, thus excluding the three men added by the National Committee in light of their participation in the London Conference. The article also introduces a new concept among the Fathers of Confederation, defining seven Fathers as the “governing minds” of this political movement. The men were deemed “governing minds” because of their ability to unite various factions within Canada – French-Canadians, Maritimers, Upper-Canadian Reformers, Irish-Canadians – under a single tent.\(^7\)\(^7\) As such, the article focuses on consensus-building and process as opposed to the main issues needing to be addressed, including the separation of powers and the representation in the Parliament of Canada among other issues.

The French version of the ‘The Idea of Confederation’ article introduced two important differences. First, the number of ‘governing minds’ (or in French, “principaux réalisateurs”) increased from seven to ten (Table 4.2). Sir Étienne-Paschal Taché, Sir Jean-Charles Chapais and Sir Hector Langevin were added alongside Sir George-Étienne Cartier as members of the ‘governing minds.’\(^7\)\(^8\) The inclusion of four French-Canadians Fathers of Confederation required the authors to delete the depiction of Cartier as the individual who

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\(^7\) Canada, *Confederation and After: Sixty Years of Progress: A Series of Biographical Sketches and Historical Articles* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1928), 1. Sir John A. Macdonald’s “inimitable leadership piloted Confederation through countless difficulties.” Sir George-Étienne Cartier “persuaded French Canada to consent to the union”. Galt had the “far-sightedness, the enthusiasm and the constructive mind” to promote and achieve Confederation. Sir Charles Tupper and Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley “won the Maritimes.” George Brown “ensured the support of the influential Reformers of Upper Canada.” Finally, Thomas D’Arcy McGee “by his eloquence swayed the Irish vote.”

\(^8\) Canada, *Confederation and After: Sixty Years of Progress: A Series of Biographical Sketches and Historical Articles* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1928), 113.
“persuaded French Canada to consent to the union.” The inclusion of more French-Canadian political leaders on the list acknowledges a greater French-Canadian effort to make Confederation a success. Secondly, the enumerated order of these ‘governing minds’ had changed. Macdonald was enumerated first on both lists. Taché, who chaired the Quebec Conference, was added before Brown. Sir Jean-Charles Chapais, who attended the Quebec conference only, received a higher enumerated position than Langevin who attended all three conferences. The inclusion of Chapais and Langevin among the list of ‘governing minds’ and the enumerated order of these Fathers may relate to the presence of Senator Thomas Chapais on the Historical Subcommittee. Senator Chapais had family ties with both of these Fathers of Confederation: Sir Jean-Charles Chapais was his father; Sir Hector Langevin, his father-in-law. In the end, this article is an example that French- and English-Canadians were offered a different vision of their national history and the role of its central figures by the federal government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In English</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>In French</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sir John A. Macdonald</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sir John A. Macdonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir George-Étienne Cartier</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sir George-Étienne Cartier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Alexander Galt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sir Alexander Galt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Charles Tupper</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sir Charles Tupper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Brown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sir Étienne-Paschal Taché</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas D’Arcy McGee</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>George Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Thomas D’Arcy McGee</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sir Hector-Louis Langevin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

79 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
In writing about the history of Canada, the Historical Subcommittee furthered the development of the myth of the Fathers of Confederation. One article was prepared on the collective role of the Fathers of Confederation, while another focused on the ‘Idea of Confederation.’ The Historical Subcommittee did not request the preparation of individual profiles for each Father of Confederation. Out of the 36 Fathers of Confederation, only six were the subject of an historical sketch: Macdonald, Cartier, Galt, McGee, Tupper and Sir Oliver Mowat. In addition, Macdonald and Cartier were the subject of a second historical sketch, thus receiving even greater attention from the Historical Subcommittee. As such, beyond the grave site ceremonies, most of the Fathers remained unknown even after the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.

The two biographical sketches of Sir John A. Macdonald provide an understanding of how Macdonald was viewed by its authors. Macdonald was recognized as the “chief architect” of Confederation, a label that had been used since the 1890s to describe his pre-eminent role among the Fathers of Confederation. Elements of Macdonald’s tenure as Prime Minister were also heralded. For example, Macdonald’s efforts to retain strong connections with Great Britain and to ensure a united Canada were prominently featured. His ability to make concessions to minority groups and his role in shaping Canada’s future, through the acquisition of Rupert’s Land, the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the entry of British Columbia, were also highlighted. His personal qualities were also the focus of these articles. In one reference, the author notes that Macdonald’s “wit, his broad-mindedness and his remarkable statesmanship will be famous for all time.” These articles reflect four key themes used by Liberal-Conservatives during the 1890s in framing Macdonald’s public

82 Canada, Confederation and After: Sixty Years of Progress: A Series of Biographical Sketches and Historical Articles (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1928), 16-19.
83 Ibid., 16.
memory: Macdonald as the leading Father of Confederation; Macdonald as a nation-builder; Macdonald as a conciliator; and Macdonald as a loyal British subject.

Macdonald’s National Policy was also reinterpreted in one of these historical sketches. During the 1890s, the Liberal-Conservatives trumpeted this economic policy as a representation of Macdonald as a nation-builder. At the same time, Laurier and the Liberal Party frequently criticized this policy. Upon forming the government, the Laurier government noted that it would “turn away” from the “mistaken policy” of the National Policy experience.84 In reality, the political rhetoric of the 1897 federal budget speech did not alter Canada’s protectionist stance. Some very minor modifications were made to the National Policy, argued historians Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, to “save the Liberals from the charge of totally deserting their [reciprocity] principles.”85 These changes did not bring Canada to closer reciprocity economic policies. In 1927, the Historical Subcommittee labelled the National Policy as an “enduring benefit … which all succeeding governments have continued, with necessary modifications, to this day.”86 As such, the article praised Macdonald’s leadership in moving forward with Canada’s protectionist policy in 1878, a message often repeated by Conservative Party members in the 1890s and beyond. However, the historical sketch does suggest that subsequent administrations, like Laurier’s government, modified and strengthened the policy.

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84 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, Printer to the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1926), April 22, 1897, 1092.
85 Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada: 1896-1921, A Nation Transformed (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994 [1974]), 20. Economists, like Kenneth Norrie and J.C. Herbert Emery, also conclude that the Laurier’s government “did not spell an end of industrial protectionism, whatever campaign rhetoric might have led voters to believe” and “the overall level of protection was altered very little.” See Kenneth Norrie, Douglas Owram and J.C. Herbert Emery, A History of Canadian Economy, Third Edition (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2002), 218.
86 Canada, Confederation and After: Sixty Years of Progress: A Series of Biographical Sketches and Historical Articles (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1928), 11.
Two new elements were added to Macdonald’s public image through these articles. First, Macdonald was praised for his lifelong devotion to public life, despite the financial sacrifice it entailed due to the low salaries paid to public office holders. No previous commemoration had focused explicitly on Macdonald’s precarious financial situation. Second, it noted Macdonald’s role in appeasing the secessionist movement led by Joseph Howe in Nova Scotia. The article mentioned the importance of “making concessions to divergent elements and minorities that might otherwise become insurgent.”87 The role of conciliator in this narrative focused on the need to appease Nova Scotians, as opposed to previous and more frequent representations of Macdonald building consensus between French- and English-Canadians.88 This example came to the fore due to the rise in the Maritime Rights movements in the 1920s. This example illustrated Macdonald’s capacity to deal with internal dissent within the nascent nation. For its part, the Liberal Party may have attempted to tie Prime Minister King’s conciliation efforts through the appointment of a commission to explore the grievances of some Maritimers to those of Sir John A. Macdonald with Joseph Howe.89 As such, Macdonald illustrated his capacity to deal with internal dissent within the nascent nation. At the same time, Canadians were introduced to two elements of Macdonald’s life that had not been discussed in previous commemorations.

The adaptation of this article in French also introduced a unique difference. The nuance involves Macdonald’s relations with Quebec. In English, Macdonald is defined as an Orangeman who always “considered Quebec’s needs to the extent that he always had support from there, and sometimes his chief support.”90 In French, the article framed

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 16.
90 Canada, Confederation and After: Sixty Years of Progress: A Series of Biographical Sketches and Historical Articles
Macdonald as more sympathetic to Quebec, “une sollicitude qui lui valut l'appui des Canadiens-français, parmi un appui très ferme et très utile.” As such, in English, Macdonald is described as a strategic politician who ensured the required political support. Meanwhile, in the French version, he is described as an ally to French-Canadians, and thus French-Canadian MPs supported him in his effort. This shift in messaging provides another example of a different narrative emerging through the adaptation of these articles in both official languages.

The positive representations of Macdonald were also accompanied by realism. Macdonald was not simply heralded for his political accomplishments and his personal qualities. Some perceived weaknesses were quickly discussed in the articles. For example, there is a reference to Macdonald’s “opportunism and his conviviality” being held against him in the past. Yet the unidentified author does not specify further what is implied by such references which could be qualities in certain situations. Conviviality was coded language at the time to reference drinking. Despite these two perceived weaknesses, the article ignores other elements that could depict Macdonald in a more negative light, including his role in the Pacific Scandal, in electoral gerrymandering, as well as his fondness for drinking. The article concludes with the following statement:

impartial historians agree that Canada could not have been happier in her first premier, since Sir John A. Macdonald combined the wise vision, that knew how (sic) to build well for the future, with a strong hand, that held discordant elements together in the nascent nation, until natural fusion might take place.92

These perceived weaknesses do not take anything away from Macdonald’s accomplishments, and thus the articles praise Macdonald as a great political leader and a visionary.

(Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1928), 11.
91 Ibid., 120-121.
92 Ibid., 11.
Overall, the Historical Subcommittee did focus considerable attention on Sir John A. Macdonald, thus providing a view of Macdonald by some members of the Canadian elite in 1927. These articles provided a more balanced understanding of Macdonald’s political career, which differed from the hero worship by the Liberal-Conservatives and the vilification by the Liberals seen between the 1890s and the 1910s. However, the articles were very complimentary to Macdonald, shaping his public memory in constructive ways. While focusing so much attention on Macdonald, the Historical Subcommittee largely ignored the majority of the Fathers of Confederation. The National Committee did not push for equal treatment of all Fathers of Confederation. As such, the National Committee helped to strengthen the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald.

D. Macdonald’s Boyhood Home

At the only meeting of the Corporation for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, the suggestion had been made to erect a plaque at the birthplace of the Fathers of Confederation.93 The suggestion raised the possibility of increasing the familiarity of Canadians with individual Fathers of Confederation, and to commemorate them equally. No action was taken with this initial suggestion. In early April 1927, the National Committee received a suggestion to commemorate the boyhood home of Sir John A. Macdonald in Adolphustown, Ontario. The suggestion was provided by local resident Arthur Ross Davis to Prime Minister King, and the suggestion was forwarded to the National Committee for its consideration.94

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94 Davis owned this plot of land. In writing to Prime Minister King, Davis noted that the unveiling of the Macdonald plaque in Adolphustown “would be one of the opportunities of (King’s) life for a non-political address in Central Ontario.” See: LAC, Diamond Jubilee of Confederation (RG6), D3, Vol. 447, File 15 - Boyhood home – John A. Macdonald and Wilfrid Laurier, Letter written by Arthur Davis to Prime Minister King, dated April 4, 1927; Letter from King’s Private Secretary to Davis, dated April 7, 1927.
For nearly two decades, Davis had written to various elected officials, including Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Sir Robert Borden and Arthur Meighen, attempting to persuade them to commemorate the plot of land where Sir John A. Macdonald’s boyhood home once stood. In 1926, Arthur Meighen was the first elected official to forward the suggestion to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) for its consideration. The HSMBC “express[ed] its appreciation of the action taken by the council of Adolphustown in regard to the commemoration of this site.” However, the Board did not award this parcel of land the requested national historical designation. In his fourth attempt, Davis expanded his suggestion to include the commemoration of Sir Wilfrid Laurier’s boyhood home in St-Lin at the same time as Macdonald’s. Within ten days, the National Committee confirmed its interest in commemorating both boyhood homes, without offering similar treatment for other Fathers of Confederation. As such, Macdonald’s boyhood home was to be commemorated after unsuccessful attempts over a twenty year period. Prime Minister King may have transferred the letter’s request to the National Committee knowing that the active members of the National Committee, notably the significant number of Liberal Party supporters, would be agreeable to simultaneously commemorating Macdonald’s and Laurier’s boyhood homes.

95 Davis profiles his efforts to get recognition of Macdonald’s boyhood home in the following article: Allen Ross Davis, “Bay of Quinte Landmarks: The Mother-Church of Methodism and Sir John Macdonald’s Boyhood Home,” Ontario Historical Society: Papers and Record (Vol. 27, 1931), 332. Of Laurier’s lack of interest in this project in March 1911, Davis writes: “With all the boasting of a deep regard for the man who trained him in political life, Sir Wilfrid cannot rise to that elevation of a statesman necessary to gladly do honour to a political opponent even thought that opponent has been resting in the grave for 22 years.” See: LAC, Sir Robert Laird Borden Fonds (MG26H), Reel C4361, Letter from Allan Ross Davis to Robert Laird Borden, dated November 10, 1913, 144429.

96 Canada, Minutes of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Meeting of May 25, 1926, 3.

The National Committee received the support of the HSMBC to determine the plaque’s inscription and to lead their installation through cost-recovery measures.\(^98\) The HSMBC’s support came less than one year after it had rejected the suggestion to commemorate Macdonald’s boyhood home. The HSMBC inscription notes that the plaque was being erected by the National Committee for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, thus creating a certain distance between both organizations. The HSMBC’s support did not lead to a national historic site designation. In regards to the plaque’s inscription, the following text was proposed:

Sir John A. Macdonald, whose boyhood days, those critical years that decide the character of the man, were spent here where loyalists had carved new homes out of the wilderness. From this soil he drew the inspiration to weld together the weak and scattered colonies of his day into a strong and ambitious dominion, equal partner in the far-flung British Commonwealth.\(^99\)

The inscription offers a strong parallel between Macdonald’s youth as a critical formative period and his own influence on a country in its own youth. The unknown author of this inscription also highlights the continuing loyalist myth present in Ontario during the earlier decades of the twentieth century.\(^100\) The text also reflects the repetitive imperial commemoration of Canadian history which governed much of the HSMBC activities between 1919 and 1950.\(^101\) Macdonald is also recognized as the one who drew the inspiration


to unite colonies into a stronger nation, and thus more importance is placed on him than other Fathers of Confederation. The plaque introduces a revisionist interpretation of Macdonald’s public image, reflective of Canada’s changing place in the world. In 1926, the Balfour Declaration proclaimed the nations within the British Empire as “autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another.” As such, the traditional representation of Macdonald as a loyal British subject was being reinterpreted through this Diamond Jubilee of Confederation plaque as Macdonald striving for Canada’s equal partnership with Great Britain. The final inscription had to be shortened to ensure a suitable font size on the plaque (Figure 4.2). Nevertheless, the inscription retained the same key elements.

The committee had anticipated that the plaque would be unveiled around Dominion Day. However, the plaques themselves were not finalized until the end of September. Prime Minister King had indicated his interest in traveling to St-Lin to unveil the Laurier plaque while leaving to others the task of unveiling the Macdonald plaque. The National Committee noted to the Prime Minister’s Office that “it would be difficult for him to appear at the unveiling of the tablet to the memory of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, at Saint-Lin, after having decided to stand aside” on the unveiling of the Macdonald tablet. A senior official in King’s office noted in response that both plaques should be unveiled the same day. The official adds: “It might not be advisable for the prime minister to attend the function as it

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104 Ibid., Letter from Jean Désy to Harry Baldwin, dated October 13, 1927.
might be in the nature of an anti-climax.” The absence of senior political leaders made the unveiling of these plaques a mostly community-specific event.

Figure 4.2. Photograph of the plaque erected by the National Committee for the Celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. It was erected in Adolphustown, Ontario to commemorate the boyhood home of Sir John A. Macdonald.

Photo Credit: Parks Canada Agency

105 Ibid., Letter from Harry Baldwin to Jean Désy, dated October 13, 1927.
106 The plaque was replaced in 1980, reasons unknown, for a new plaque. It reads: “Born in Scotland, the young Macdonald returned frequently during his formative years to his parents’ home here on the Bay of Quinte. His superb skills kept him at the centre of public life for fifty years. The political genius of Confederation, he became Canada’s first prime minister in 1867, held that office for 19 years (1867-73 and 1878-91), and presided over the expansion of Canada to its present boundaries, excluding Newfoundland. His National Policy and the building of the CPR were equally indicative of his determination to resist the north-south pull of geography and to create and preserve a strong country politically free and commercially autonomous.” This new plaque redefines yet again Macdonald as known by later generations of Canadians.
E. Conclusion

The National Committee attempted to foster greater national interest in the Fathers of Confederation through these commemorative activities. In these four instances, however, the National Committee’s efforts did not result in an equal treatment of all Fathers of Confederation. Macdonald remained the most common symbol on stamps issued for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. Macdonald was the subject of more historical sketches dealing either directly or indirectly with the Fathers of Confederation than any other political figure. Macdonald’s boyhood home was commemorated by the National Committee. Finally, Macdonald’s significance in some sectors of Canadian society was reflected in the commemoration of his grave site. Macdonald remained the most well-known figure among the Fathers of Confederation. As such, the National Committee’s efforts to rebrand the legacy of Confederation by talking about the Fathers of Confederation and various legacies of nation-building could not move forward successfully without continuing to give Sir John A. Macdonald centre stage, despite their best efforts to do otherwise.

4. Dominion Day

Thousands of Canadians gathered on Parliament Hill or around their radio to hear various distinguished Canadians address them on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. The event was planned by the National Committee of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, with representation from local residents, including Ottawa Mayor John P. Balharrie,107 Hull Mayor Theodore O. Lambert,108 Ottawa Improvement Commission

Chairman Thomas Ahearn\textsuperscript{109} and businessmen Archibald Jacob Freiman.\textsuperscript{110} The following section will explore the use of the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald by those responsible for the organization of the Dominion Day celebrations and by those political actors who spoke on the occasion.

A. The National Committee

The National Committee sought to include the memory of the Fathers of Confederation through two different means during the Parliament Hill Dominion Day celebrations. The first was the invitation to the sons and daughters of the Fathers of Confederation to travel to Ottawa to participate in this national event. Three of these sons were invited to speak about the role of the Fathers of Confederation. The second was the selection of excerpts from speeches delivered by the Fathers of Confederation during the Quebec Conference of 1864 which highlight the various contributions of the Fathers in shaping Canada’s political destiny. The use and the representations of Sir John A. Macdonald during the Dominion Day event on Parliament Hill will thus be the focus of the analysis of the following section.

I. Sons of the Fathers

On April 21, 1927, the organizers discussed for the first time the notion of inviting the sons and daughters of the Fathers of Confederation to travel to Ottawa for the national Dominion Day celebrations on Parliament Hill. After a five-week delay, the National Committee invited three sons of the Fathers to participate in the event: Senator Thomas Chapais;\textsuperscript{111} New Brunswick cabinet minister Leonard de Percy Wolfe Tilley;\textsuperscript{112} and retired


\textsuperscript{111} Chapais, son of Sir Joseph Aimable, was a member of National Committee’s Historical Subcommittee. A defeated Conservative candidate in the federal general election of 1911, Chapais was appointed to the Senate in
Manitoba Premier Sir Hugh John Macdonald. All three men had been or were public figures holding political office under the Conservative Party banner. The process by which these men were selected was not documented by the National Committee. The invitation aimed to ensure that the “voice of the fathers might be heard through the sons.” At the same time, the National Committee invited the other living sons and daughters of the Fathers of Confederation to join them in Ottawa.

Tilley’s speech aimed to highlight two key messages. The first related to the fulfilment of his father’s “prediction” that Canada’s original four provinces would “enlarge their national partnership” to extend the “Dominion from sea to sea.” As such, Tilley reminded Canadians that his father, Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley, suggested a passage from Psalm 72 of the King James Bible to identify Canada as a ‘Dominion.’ The second related to the need to continue fostering conciliation between the races and the provinces in Canada. He noted the need to “perpetuate the ideals of the statesmen who made Confederation possible” by “treat[ing] our fellow-countrymen of whatsoever race or creed upon the same broad plane, with the same noble vision, as did the founders of the Dominion.”


Leonard Percy de Wolfe Tilley was president of New Brunswick’s Executive Council in 1927, and would become the province’s Conservative premier in the 1930s. See: Arthur T. Doyle, The Premiers of New Brunswick (Fredericton: Brunswick Press, 1983), 57-59.


LAC, Diamond Jubilee of Confederation (RG6), D3, Vol. 447, File 1, Minutes of the Eight Meeting of the National Committee of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, dated April 21, 1927, 8.


Ibid.
For his part, Senator Chapais spoke about the important role of the Fathers of Confederation. Confederation became a reality, affirmed Chapais, because the Fathers had “dans leur âme la foi, dans leur volonté, l’énnergie, et dans leur coeur, l’espérance. Leur ambition si haute et leur dessein si vaste pouvaient paraître téméraires.”  

He also noted that the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation was the ideal occasion to commemorate their conception of Confederation, their actions and their successes. Chapais illustrated the success of Confederation by contrasting the nation’s population, trade and wealth between 1867 and 1927. Chapais ended his remarks by quoting from the patriotic song “O Canada, mon pays, mes amours!” written by a Father of Confederation from Quebec, Sir George-Étienne Cartier. He wished that all Canadians would feel a deeper love for Canada, and that “les évocations émouvantes de ces fêtes jubilaires le rendent plus profond, plus fidèle et plus ardent!” Chapais’ final comment restated the overall objective of the commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.

The third selected son of the Fathers was Sir Hugh John Macdonald, son of Sir John A. Macdonald. The 77-year old Macdonald was in ill health in his Winnipeg residence at the time of receiving the invitation. Thus he was unable to travel to Ottawa to attend the event. Despite Macdonald’s absence, Graham impressed upon Canadians the National Committee’s “strong desire” to have Macdonald address the nation. He stated: [the committee’s] “happiness would have been more complete could we have had on this platform at this moment, Sir Hugh John Macdonald – a great son of a worthy sire.” Although unnecessary, Graham thus took the time to highlight Sir Hugh’s inability to attend the proceedings and to

119 Ibid., 92.
lavish praise on both Macdonalds. Sir Hugh’s absence thus limited the number of references to Sir John A. Macdonald during this portion of the ceremony.

II. The Words of the Fathers

The National Committee of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation also wished to invoke the memory of the Fathers of Confederation through the reading of excerpts from speeches delivered during the Quebec City conference. The National Committee called upon former Quebec premier and federal minister Sir Lomer Gouin for this task. The bilingual Gouin was also the Co-President of the Corporation of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. His Liberal Party affiliation complemented the invitation to the sons of the Fathers with Conservative ties.

Gouin began his remarks by reading the April 1927 proclamation passed by Parliament which “placed on record its deep appreciation of the achievement of the fathers of confederation (sic).” He then commented that Canadians, the “inheritors of Confederation,” had received “messages of courage and vision and faith” from the Fathers, and that it was important for all citizens to “carry the torch that they lighted.” In total, Gouin read quotes from seven Fathers of Confederation, representing all four original provinces. Gouin’s selections reflect almost perfectly the list of the “governing minds” of Confederation. Two Fathers from Ontario were selected by Gouin: Sir John A. Macdonald and George Brown. Gouin selected a passage from Macdonald which focused on “British laws” and the “British connections” as being the best means by which to continue

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122 Charles H. Macintosh, Chronicles of Canada’s Diamond Jubilee: Commemorating Sixty Years of Confederation (Ottawa, 1929), 116.
123 The only exception is Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley. Gouin quoted from another Father of Confederation from New Brunswick, Sir John Hamilton Gray.
strengthening “the social, political and material prosperity of the country.” For George Brown, the selected quote focused on “one united government, united under the British flag, shall extend from sea to sea.” Three Fathers from Quebec were selected: Sir Alexander Galt, Sir George-Étienne Cartier and Thomas D’Arcy McGee. Galt’s quote highlighted the geographic importance of Canada within the North American realm. With Cartier’s remarks, Gouin focused on Canada as a model of cooperation for Protestants and Catholics, English, French, Irish and Scot. With McGee, the focus was on freedoms enjoyed by Canadians. Finally, the messages from New Brunswick’s Sir John Hamilton Gray and Nova Scotia’s Sir Charles Tupper both focused on Canada’s economy prosperity.

The selection of quotes is often a subjective process. Gouin selected passages that he thought would resonate with Canadians and that would address current social and political issues. These quotes suggest that Gouin was optimistic of Canada’s future. He continued to envisage Canada as a country where the reconciliation among all races and creeds was possible. Gouin also believed that Canada’s economic prosperity and personal freedoms required the continuation of strong ties with the British Empire. On this last theme, Gouin turned to Sir John A. Macdonald as an example of a Canadian who recognized Canada’s continuous prosperity through its attachment to Great Britain and the British Empire. As such, Gouin resorted to strengthening the public memory of Macdonald as a loyal British subject.

B. Political Speeches

The National Committee ensured a number of references to the Fathers of Confederation through its efforts of inviting Sir Lomer Gouin as well as three sons of the

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Fathers of Confederation to address the audience. The National Committee also invited Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and acting leader of the Conservative Party, Hugh Guthrie, to deliver remarks. Their remarks remained unscripted by the National Committee and thus reflect their own views and their own objectives. As such, the following section provides an opportunity to analyze the use of the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald and the other Fathers of Confederation by the leadership of both national political parties.

I. Prime Minister King

King’s interest in discussing three different themes, each of various lengths, produced a long, seemingly disjointed keynote address. However, King used his remarks to advance a few key themes. The first was that Confederation was a milestone, not a turning point, in Canadian political history. Canada was not a young country, argued King. He reminded Canadians that their nation’s history was 400-years rich, from John Cabot and Henry VII to representative institutions in Nova Scotia and the rebellions of 1837-1838. As such, Canadians should know and be proud of their history. In this 400-year span, King suggested that Confederation was simply another important event in the country’s evolution. As such, the section focusing on the Fathers of Confederation was relatively brief. In that broader context, King had no need to actively shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald or any of the other Fathers of Confederation.

The second theme was King’s desire to ensure a greater recognition of the impact of the Balfour Declaration for Canada. King was one of the leading devolutionists of the British Empire and he sought greater foreign policy independence following the adoption of this policy position.126 He suggested to Canadians that, just as their country had grown and

126 B. J. C. McKercher, “A Greater and a Higher Ideal: Esme Howard, Imperial Unity and Canadian Autonomy
matured, so too had the British Empire. He argued: “From a parent State with colonial possessions, the British Empire has become a community of free nations.” He suggested that Canada, as a free nation, made the decision to participate in the First World War. In 1927, King argued that Canada had its own voice as a leading member of the British Empire and the League of Nations.

The third idea was an articulation of the need to beautify Ottawa. Ottawa had benefited from the Ottawa Improvement Commission, founded by Parliament in 1899. In 1927, King created an even more powerful organization, the Federal District Commission, to further transform and beautify Canada’s national capital. King wished to see Ottawa engage in the international competition that was leading the most powerful nations to “bolster their self-esteem in the most visible, ostentatious manner.” As such, King wanted the Federal District Commission to ensure similar beautification efforts to those taking place in Washington, London, Paris, Rome and other capital cities. King wanted Canada’s newly acquired stature in international affairs to be reflected within the way the nation projects itself through its capital city infrastructure.

II. Conservative Leader Hugh Guthrie

The leader of the Conservative Party took a more focused approach than Prime Minister King during his speech commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. Hugh Guthrie focused on a single message: the Fathers of Confederation’s “arduous and protracted labours” had “prove(n) so absolutely successful” in shaping Canada’s constitution in Foreign Relations,” in Michael Graham Fry, ed. Power, Personalities and Policies (New York City: Routledge, 1993), 129-130.

and political future.\textsuperscript{129} The development of this message required Guthrie to outline the “unworkable and unsatisfactory” legislative union that existed at the time between Upper- and Lower-Canada. He suggested that Sir John A. Macdonald and other leading figures, despite their considerable skills, were unable to remove important deadlocks in the political decision-making processes. As a result, a new framework was required to resolve this situation.

Guthrie acknowledged that the Fathers discussed the “grave difficulties of race, language and creed” and the “tremendous problems of commerce and transportation.”\textsuperscript{130} Together, they achieved a new political arrangement with a solid foundation. As such, 60 years later, Guthrie concluded that Canada had “reached the first milestone of our history as a great dominion, … the most important unit in the British Empire, and a great and powerful influence in world affairs.”\textsuperscript{131} Guthrie’s review of Canada’s evolution was articulated in terms of extreme optimism, affirming that the dreams of the Fathers had been more than realized.

The impressive work of all Fathers of Confederation cannot be forgotten. As such, Guthrie argued that the public memory of these men must be strengthened. He stated:

\begin{quote}
The Fathers must always hold an important and revered place in the history of this country. We must always pay tribute to them for their foresight, their perseverance and their statesmanship in the solution of many difficult problems. … (A) strong, vigorous young nation stands faithful to the memory of those men who, through unselfish loyalty to a great principle and through their steadfast belief in the future of this land, arrived upon common ground to found a united people.\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[130]\textit{Ibid.}, 92.
\item[131]\textit{Ibid.}, 92-93.
\item[132]\textit{Ibid.}, 93-94.
\end{footnotes}
Guthrie did make a few direct references to Macdonald, and thus Canada’s first prime minister remained the central figure among the Fathers of Confederation. He thus sought ways to entrench in Canadians the role these men played in shaping Canada’s political destiny.

III. Conclusion

The content of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations on Parliament Hill prompted considerable attention to the role of the Fathers of Confederation in Canadian history, reinforcing their importance. During this Parliament Hill event, however, the focus remained on the Fathers of Confederation as a collective rather than on Sir John A. Macdonald as an individual. There were still multiple references to Macdonald during the event, through the words of Senator George Graham, Sir Lomer Gouin and Hugh Guthrie, more than any other Father of Confederation. Nevertheless, the quick references to Macdonald were not related to particular representations of Macdonald beyond Macdonald as a loyal British subject.

5. Conclusion

The Liberal Party under Sir Wilfrid Laurier had rejected Macdonald’s transformation into a national hegemonic symbol. As such, Macdonald remained largely a symbol of the Conservative Party at the time of planning the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. Laurier’s successor, William Lyon Mackenzie King, opted to commemorate the Fathers of Confederation as a whole during this aforementioned event. The National Committee attempted to brand the legacy of Confederation by talking about the Fathers of Confederation as a collective. This approach allowed King and the Liberal Party to shift the focus away from Sir John A. Macdonald, whose role in the Confederation process and in
governing the nascent nation for 18 years rendered him a central figure among the Fathers of Confederation.

The Diamond Jubilee of Confederation thus provided an opportunity to develop a myth regarding the role of Fathers of Confederation in shaping Canada’s destiny. The myth-making process required the National Committee to identify the Fathers of Confederation, locate their grave sites and list their descendants. The compilation of such information confirms that the federal government had not yet begun the process of building the narrative around the Fathers of Confederation. The story of the Fathers of Confederation was introduced to Canadians through a variety of approaches. The National Committee published stories that described their role in shaping the nation. It opted for a visual representation of the Fathers of Confederation through the issuing of stamps. It approved an initiative to ensure an equal commemoration of their grave sites on Dominion Day. These different approaches reinforced the message of their important role in charting the nation’s future. In theory, the commemoration of the Fathers of Confederation ensured an equal recognition for these political figures.

In reality, the National Committee’s efforts were insufficient and inadequate. The myth of the Fathers of Confederation could not move forward successfully without continuing to give Sir John A. Macdonald centre stage, despite their best efforts to do otherwise. These efforts did not result in an equal treatment of all Fathers of Confederation as Macdonald had become through his work on Confederation and his long tenure as Prime Minister a central figure among them. His years of public service transformed Macdonald; no policy or initiative could erase his place from the national stage. As such, the myth of the Fathers of Confederation was often illustrated through Macdonald’s political career and image, raising his profile above the other Fathers during the event. The majority of the
Fathers of Confederation did not receive any specific attention through the production of historical material. As such, the National Committee helped to strengthen the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald through its largely unsuccessful efforts of building the myth of the Fathers of Confederation.

Finally, this chapter has demonstrated that French- and English-Canadians were offered a different vision of their national history and the role of its central figures by the federal government. Most of the changes were clearly content modifications to appease one of Canada’s official language communities. Some others may have been introduced through the art of translation. Overall, the historical materials produced by the National Committee led to a different understanding of which Fathers of Confederation contributed to the success of the *British North America Act*. In addition, Sir John A. Macdonald’s relations with Quebec were presented differently in English and French. As such, for the first time, two different Macdonalds begin to appear, not based on partisan divisions which existed in previous decades, but on linguistic grounds.
Chapter Five: The Image of Sir John A. Macdonald during the Second World War

Macdonald was essentially a national builder ...
His great merit was to raise above the narrow divisions of provincialism the powerful figure of a united country.1

Ernest Lapointe

The First World War period delayed the opportunity for Canadians to commemorate a key milestone anniversary of Confederation, resulting in the 60th anniversary of Confederation in 1927 being celebrated as opposed to the 50th anniversary of Confederation in 1917. Canada’s entry into the Second World War in September of 1939 required a considerable marshalling of material and human resources to respond to the conflict in Europe and beyond. At a time of emotional and physical hardship for many Canadians and with the weight of an unprecedented and perceivable unending war weighing on the national consciousness, the federal government decided to plan a national commemoration around a new invented tradition: the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald on June 6, 1941. A commemorative event not related to the war effort could have been disputed by some as a mere distraction and as something at odds with the government’s wartime priorities. However, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and Conservative Party acting leader Richard Burpee Hanson,2 alongside members of their political parties, joined together for the first-ever national commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald on Saturday, June 7, 1941 in Kingston.

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This chapter analyzes the details relating to this commemorative event, which took place in Kingston’s City Park. In a first instance, the chapter examines who was the driving force behind this event, and what was the key motivation to organize a national celebration in the midst of an escalating war overseas. In a second instance, an analysis of the speeches will determine the speakers’ respective efforts to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald and to advance their own political agendas through their remarks. In a final instance, the media coverage in English and French following the event will be examined to determine the extent to which newspapers reported on the events for their respective readership. Through this course of action, this chapter aims to demonstrate that the political focus of this Sir John A. Macdonald commemoration, especially among the governing Liberal Party representatives, was only marginally related to the commemoration of Canada’s first prime minister. In fact, this chapter argues that the event served as a patriotic event to strengthen civic support for national unity in light of diverging wartime views in the country. In particular, Prime Minister King’s effort to bring this event to a realization was motivated by a personal desire to use the public memory of Macdonald as a conciliator of races to foster a greater sense of national unity among French- and English-Canadians during the Second World War.

1. The Driving Force behind the Event

The first known documented reference by a political actor to the idea of marking the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald was found in the personal diary of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King.\(^3\) On April 29, 1941, King added a diary entry describing a vision he had a few days prior. It reads:

\(^3\) One newspaper, the Conservative-leaning Toronto Telegram writes: “the proposal for a national observance … emanated from Hon. W.F. Nickle, and the Prime Minister eagerly grasped at it.” The date of reference of this quote is six weeks after the dated entry into King’s diary. The absence of similar references in other
This afternoon while talking with the B.C. Members, I suddenly looked at the picture of Sir John MacDonald (sic) and then out the window at the National (War) Monument. There came to mind the vision I had a day or two ago of looking out of an open window at what seemed to be the grave of Sir John MacDonald. (...) It brought to mind what I had intended to plan as to a memorial service at his grave on the 50th anniversary of Sir John’s death. 4

As such, King’s diary points out that the inspiration to commemorate Macdonald came through one of his many mystic visions. 5 King may have been assured of the exactitude of the actual physical details of Macdonald’s sepulchre and its landscaped surroundings as he had visited the gravesite on at least two previous occasions. 6 The diary lacks any references to what might have motivated King.

This reference to Sir John A. Macdonald within the pages of Prime Minister King’s diary was not an isolated incident. In fact, Macdonald was frequently a subject of King’s diary beyond King’s visit to his gravesite. In many instances, King reflected on how he was gaining on, and eventually surpassed, Macdonald’s tenure as prime minister. 7 King was also familiar with Macdonald’s political longevity and accomplishments by becoming a student of Macdonald’s life through reading Sir Joseph Pope’s and William Stewart Wallace’s newspapers, including the Kingston Whig-Standard, suggests perhaps a partisan motive. See: Toronto Telegram, June 9, 1941, 5.


5 For example, on October 17, 1932, page 2, Mackenzie King writes: “The talk with Sir John A. Macdonald (on a legislative amendment), was a great help, Sir Wilfrid’s particularly so. I felt strongly the influence of all the loved ones, and particularly those concerned with ‘Government’ around me.” On December 3, 1941, he writes: “Had a vision toward morning of someone telling me that Sir John A. Macdonald had been in Ottawa with a view of seeing me and to let me know of his help and good-will.” See: LAC, William Lyon Mackenzie King Fonds, MG 26 J5, Series 13, Diary. Available on-line at http://king.collectionscanada.ca, accessed on April 14, 2006. Mackenzie King’s visions and his interest in the paranormal were not widely publicized during his lifetime, coming to light with the public rendering of his private diary. There are several books on Mackenzie King’s interest in the paranormal, but they do not focus specifically on the diary entries relating to visions of Macdonald. See: Charles P. Stacey, A Very Double Life (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976); and Joy Esberey, Knight of the Holy Spirit (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).


7 Ibid., Diary entries for March 19, 1927, 2; February 1, 1937, 1; June 10, 1937, 2; January 8, 1943, 2; and April 19, 1946, 1.
biographies of Macdonald. In others instances, King noted in his diary his appreciation for political guidance through mystic visions offered by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir John A. Macdonald. King also took pride in receiving as a gift a small bust of Macdonald which he honoured by visibly displaying it in his home, Laurier House. Finally, King wrote in his diary about Macdonald during social events at Earnscliffe, a one-time Macdonald property in Ottawa, which became the residence of the British High Commissioner to Canada in 1930. As such, Macdonald had a frequent presence in King’s diary, through which King demonstrated his knowledge of, and his familiarity with, Canada’s first prime minister and his political career.

Despite these multiple references to Macdonald, King had not previously suggested the organization of a commemorative event relating to Sir John A. Macdonald. He did arrange in 1937 for the federal government to assume the cost for the perpetual care of Macdonald’s gravesite, without suggesting increased commemoration. As such, this April 1941 suggestion to commemorate Macdonald was a departure for King. In fact, it remained the lone reference indicating the idea of commemorating Macdonald through the diary’s 57 years of entries. In the public sphere, King also rarely invoked the public memory of Sir

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8 Ibid., Diary entries for October 28, 1924, 2; and February 24, 1945, 3. Wallace’s biography was published in 1924 and was read by King that same year. See: William Stewart Wallace, Sir John Macdonald (Toronto: Macmillan, 1924), 135 pages. Pope published two biographies, but King did not specify which version he read. 9 For example, on October 17, 1932, page 2, Mackenzie King writes: “The talk with Sir John A. Macdonald (on a legislative amendment), was a great help, Sir Wilfrid’s particularly so. I felt strongly the influence of all the loved ones, and particularly those concerned with “Government” around me.” On December 3, 1941, he writes: “Had a vision toward morning of someone telling me that Sir John A. Macdonald had been in Ottawa with a view of seeing me and to let me know of his help and good-will.” Another mystic discussion between King and Macdonald was report in King’s diary entry for September 30, 1932. See: Ibid., Diary entry for September 30, 1932. Mackenzie King’s visions and his interest in the paranormal were not known during his lifetime, coming to light with the public rendering of his private diary. There are several books on Mackenzie King’s interest in the paranormal, but they do not focus specifically on the diary entries relating to visions of Macdonald. See: Charles P. Stacey, A Very Double Life (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976); and Joy Esberey, Knight of the Holy Spirit (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). 10 LAC, William Lyon Mackenzie King Fonds, MG 26 J5, Series 13, Diary entries for November 28, 1928, 1; and April 3, 1941, 2. Available on-line at https://king.collectionscanada.ca, accessed on April 14, 2006. 11 Ibid., Diary entry for December 31, 1937, 3-5. 12 For more on the preservation of Macdonald’s gravesite, see Chapter Four of this thesis.
John A. Macdonald. For example, during his speeches for the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in Ottawa on July 1, 1927 marking the sixtieth anniversary of Confederation, King did not make any references to the lead architect of Confederation, as Macdonald continued to be known throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In the absence of previous interest in commemorating Macdonald, King’s willingness to shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald at this tumultuous point in Canadian history raised interesting questions. What motivated King to lead the first national commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald? Why did King find the current wartime context acceptable for this national commemoration?

Significant information on King’s motivation to plan a memorial service on the 50th anniversary of Macdonald’s death can be gleaned from the date of his vision. In the last week of April 1941, Prime Minister King met United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt in Hyde Park, New York, to sign a declaration allowing Canada and the United States to provide each other with manufactured goods that would aid the United Kingdom in its war effort. King’s government introduced its annual budget in the House of Commons with a clear focus on military spending. The prime minister also met with the Japanese ambassador to explain Canada’s decision to end its export of wheat and lumber to Japan due to its alliances with Italy and Germany.\footnote{LAC, William Lyon Mackenzie King Fonds, MG 26 J5, Series 13, Diary entries for April 20, 1941 to April 28, 1941. Available on-line at http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/king/index-e.html, accessed on October 17, 2009.} In fact, King remembered his early vision of Macdonald’s gravesite during a meeting with MPs from British Columbia, where he was informing them of the Government’s wartime decision to cut off trade with Japan, a decision with unavoidable regional implications.\footnote{Ibid., Diary entry for April 30, 1941, 2.} These three examples, all within a seven-day period prior to the vision, provide clear evidence of an escalating war and the prime minister’s increasing...
The page contains a paragraph discussing a role to strengthen Allied efforts. As the war escalated, King recognized that the growing fragilities of national unity in times of war, which were made all too familiar during the conscription crisis of 1917, could once again become an issue.

Since the invasion by Hitler’s army of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, King and his Quebec political lieutenant, Ernest Lapointe, recognized the potential national difficulties of another conflict similar to the First World War. King reflected in his diary that he “felt very strongly that it was necessary to make clear Canada’s determination to stand with other democracies in opposing aggression and attempt at domination of the world by force.” At the same time, Lapointe knew “there would be hell to pay (for military participation abroad) but it could not be helped.” Lapointe’s response six months prior to Canada’s entry into the Second World War foreshadows the internal conflict that would arise between French- and English-Canadians. During the March 1940 federal general election, the governing Liberal Party promised Quebeckers that their interests would be protected by not imposing conscription for overseas military service. Despite political promises, conscription remained a menacing question in light of Canada being requested to increase the strength of its troops overseas.

King went public with his intent to organize a Macdonald commemorative event two weeks after his diary entry with a statement in the House of Commons outlining the government’s intention to “have official recognition of that anniversary by a suitable ceremony, to take place at the gravesite in the Kingston cemetery.” The announcement was

15 Ibid., Diary entry for March 20, 1939, 1.
16 This is the statement written by King in his diary. It is difficult to validate through Lapointe directly. However, this statement follows subsequent positions by Lapointe regarding the Second World War. See: Ibid., Diary entry for March 21, 1939, 4.
18 King remained focused on war planning during this two-week period, and attended the House of Commons regularly. As such, it is uncertain why King waited two weeks before announcing his decision to commemorate
made less than three weeks before the actual anniversary. The planning for an event for such
an acclaimed national figure would rarely begin less than three weeks prior to the event. The
context of the Second World War may have delayed the decision and could cast a shadow
over any national celebration. However, the war did not figure in King’s remark announcing
the event. Rather, the prime minister commented on the “appropriate(ness)” and the
national importance of commemorating this anniversary without substantiating his thinking.
In making the announcement, King also commented that he was “making this
announcement at the moment as, no doubt, suggestions may come from different quarters
as to what may be most appropriate in connection with the ceremony.”19 As such, King
indicated that the government was open to hear from other groups in terms of their
suggestions for this ceremony.

In King’s opinion, the preferred organizing committee was a core group of five men.
First of all, King envisaged a key role for himself as part of the committee, possibly as chair
and the senior decision-maker in light of his political office. Another member of this
committee would be Hanson, as King noted that both men were “joining together to see
that arrangements are made befitting the occasion.”20 In addition to King and Hanson,
Liberal MP Angus Lewis Macdonald was a logical choice for King as he was the current MP
for Kingston and a trusted advisor to King in his capacity as minister responsible for the
military’s naval services.21 Former Conservative MP from Kingston, William Folger Nickle,
who served two terms during the 1910s was another logical choice for King. He was a well-

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Macdonald. Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1941), May 16, 1941, 2884.
Mackenzie King also made note of the government’s intention to mark this anniversary in his personal diary.
19 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1941), May 16, 1941, 2884.
20 Ibid.
21 Library of Parliament, Members of the House of Commons: Historical Information Since 1867, search by
known and long-time Kingston politician best remembered in political circles for the Nickle
Resolution, a parliamentary resolution banning the bestowing of honorary titles on
Canadians.\textsuperscript{22} Two Liberals and two Conservatives would be responsible for carrying out the
suggested commemoration. The fifth man on this committee was Canada’s Under-Secretary
of State, Ephraim Herbert Coleman.\textsuperscript{23} As Canada’s senior official responsible for state
protocol and special events, Coleman could use the machinery of government to efficiently
put together an event worthy of such a national commemoration in such a short time frame.
His role on many high profile events, including the 1939 royal tour of King George VI and
Queen Elizabeth and the installations of governors general and prime ministers, had
demonstrated his organizational capacity.\textsuperscript{24} As such, King hoped that Coleman could “work
out all the arrangements” for this event, and liaise with the Kingston Conservative
Association who had organized the annual gravesite tribute to Macdonald in previous years.\textsuperscript{25}

The commemoration of Macdonald was clearly a government initiative led by King
himself. At the same time, King does not seem to have engaged Hanson in any significant
conversation before the announcement of this event on the floor of the House of

\textsuperscript{22} The Nickle Resolution was another means applauded by those, including King, supporting a greater
devolution from the British Empire. Mackenzie King as a devolutionist was mentioned in chapter 3. For more
information on this element of his political vision, see: B. J. C. McKercher, “A Greater and a Higher Ideal:
Esme Howard, Imperial Unity and Canadian Autonomy in Foreign Relations,” in Michael Graham Fry, ed.
\textit{Power, Personalities and Policies} (New York City: Routledge, 1993), 129-130. For a biography of Nickle, see:
Library of Parliament, Members of the House of Commons: Historical Information Since 1867, search by name,
available on-line and accessed on January 19, 2009, \url{http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/SenatorsMembers_house.asp?Language=E&Parl=40&Sec=1&Sect=hochist}. For more on the Nickle Resolution, see:
Christopher McCreery, \textit{The Canadian Honours System} (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2005), 36-37. It should be
noted that Nickle voted against the adoption of this resolution due to the modification of the language of the
resolution.

\textsuperscript{23} The position of under-secretary of state and deputy registrar general was created in May 1896, and was first
occupied by Sir Joseph Pope, Macdonald’s former private secretary. The position is distinct from the position
of under-secretary of state (external affairs). Coleman was a former Dean of Law at the University of Manitoba,
and would serve in diplomatic position after leaving the position of under-secretary of state in January 1943.

\textsuperscript{24} LAC, RG6, Description of Fonds. Coleman assumed the position of under-secretary of state in in October
1933.

\textsuperscript{25} Canada, \textit{Debates from the House of Commons} (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1941), May 16, 1941, 2884; \textit{Kingston
Whig-Standard}, May 21, 1941, 12; Margaret M. Cohoe, ed., \textit{Sir John A. Macdonald 1815-1891: A Remembrance to
Mark the Centennial of his Death 6 June 1891} (Kingston: Kingston Historical Society, 1991), ix.
Commons. Hanson is referenced in King’s remarks as accepting to join King in Kingston for this event. However, a private conference between King and Hanson immediately after King’s remarks led to two additional members being appointed to this committee. The first was General Arthur Edward Ross, a well-known First World War veteran who represented Kingstonians for more than 30 years as alderman and mayor, before serving as a provincial and a federal Conservative Member of Parliament, his last two years in the House of Commons as minister of health.26 The second additional member to the committee was Wilbert Ross Aylesworth, the then Conservative MP for the riding of Frontenac-Addington, which bordered the riding of Kingston.27 Hanson’s choice focused on two men with strong ties to the greater Kingston area and to the Conservative Party. Their local ties would be helpful to Coleman in completing the logical arrangements in the remaining three weeks before the event. King noted that “it will be a pleasure to the government” to add Ross and Aylesworth to the organizing committee.28 The announcement of the membership’s composition in a two-step process does suggest that King solicited limited feedback from Hanson or other parliamentarians prior the announcement.

During the planning meetings of the organizing committee, a few key decisions were made regarding who should be special guests at the event. One of the first categories of distinguished guests related to individuals who served alongside Macdonald in the House of Commons. This gesture made a living connection with Macdonald’s legacy by having his colleagues who had served in the House of Commons with him participate. As a result of

28 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1941), May 16, 1941, 2885.
this decision, the Department of the Secretary of State, under Coleman’s leadership, invited surviving MPs who served with Macdonald. In total, there were five surviving MPs. Two were able to accept the invitation: 97-year old Sir William Mulock, first elected to the House of Commons in 1882 at the age of 38, serving for 23 years in Parliament, including nine years in Sir Wilfrid Laurier’s cabinet prior to his appointment to the bench. The other was 84-year old Emerson Coatsworth, a lawyer who entered the House of Commons following the 1891 federal general election at the age of 37 as a single-term Conservative MP, Macdonald’s last federal election campaign. Coatsworth was also one of the committee members responsible for the Macdonald memorial on the grounds of Queen’s Park in Toronto in 1894. Both men lived in Toronto and thus had a short distance to travel to the event. Their presence brought a touch of the past into a contemporary reality.

The other three surviving MPs, all from Quebec, were unable to attend possibly due to age, ill health, and a greater distance to travel. They were: 87-year old Philippe Auguste Choquette from Montmagny, who served as a Liberal MP and a Senator; 85-year old Robert Smeaton White from Montreal, a five-term Conservative MP; and 84-year old Rufus Pope of Compton was a four-term Conservative MP before his appointment to the Senate. Interestingly, both White and Pope entered the House of Commons in 1888 and 1889, respectively, upon the death of their fathers. Both fathers were members of Macdonald’s cabinet, serving as Minister of the Interior and Minister of Railways and Canals, respectively,

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29 Ottawa Citizen, June 5, 1941, 22.
31 “Sat with Sir John,” Vancouver Province, June 10, 1941, 4.
32 White was unable to travel due to ill health. See: Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph, June 7, 1941, 3.
which would have brought their fathers and themselves into closer interaction with Macdonald.

The organizing committee also sought to invite newspapermen who covered Macdonald’s political career. Three such men, all retired, were identified: Philip Dansken Ross, journalist at the *Montreal Star* and subsequently publisher of the *Ottawa Journal*; Robert M. MacLeod of *Reuters* and Fred Cook of the *London Times* and several other Canadian dailies. Their presence would have provided another touch of history to the event by showcasing individuals who spent a portion of their careers reporting on Macdonald’s political activities first-hand. Subsequent lack of references to this category of distinguished guests leads to the conclusion that they were unable to attend.

Beyond those who may have served with or reported on Macdonald, the committee was also eager to have present direct descendants of Macdonald. A father of three, Macdonald saw only two of his children live into adulthood: Sir Hugh John Macdonald and Mary Macdonald. Mary was born with an irremediable health condition requiring special care throughout her life. As such, Hugh provided his father with his only grand-children and great-grand-children. His grand-daughter, Isabella Mary (Daisy) bore two sons, Macdonald’s only great-grand-children. One of them, 22-year old Hugh Gainsford – named in honour of his maternal grand-father Sir Hugh John Macdonald – traveled from Winnipeg to participate in the event. As such, the organizing committee could also add another link to

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34 *Kingston Whig-Standard*, June 2, 1941, 12.
36 Manitoba Historical Society, Biography of Sir Hugh John Macdonald, available on-line and accessed on November 18, 2009, [http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/macdonald_hj.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/macdonald_hj.shtml). Hugh John’s only daughter, Daisy, married George K. Gainsford. They had two sons: Lionel and Hugh. Daisy was born in 1877 and died in 1959. She would have been 64 years old at the time of the 1941 commemoration. The reason she didn’t travel to Kingston was not explained in the press. Lionel’s absence at the event in not explained either. Hugh John’s only son, John Alexander, died of diabetes at the age of 20.
37 *Kingston Whig-Standard*, May 21, 1941, 1; *Kingston Whig-Standard*, June 6, 1941, 3. The invitation from the
history through Hugh Gainsford’s participation in the commemoration of his great-grandfather.

Finally, the other category of distinguished guests at the event focused on members of the foreign diplomatic corps based in Canada. Canada had nine accredited ambassadors or high commissioners by the start of the Second World War. They represented Australia, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, South Africa and the United States. King made a point of inviting some of them to the Kingston-based event, as their presence would highlight to Canadians a perceived international interest and a recognition of the work of Sir John A. Macdonald. Three members of the diplomatic corps were in attendance: the minister plenipotentiary of the United States, J. Pierrepont Moffat; the high commissioner for the United Kingdom, Scotland-native Malcolm MacDonald; and the accredited representative for the Union of South Africa, David de Waal Meyer. Their participation in the event was acknowledged repeatedly both in print and in photographs. As such, Canadians did get the impression that the interest in Macdonald extended beyond its national borders.

Beyond these four categories of distinguished guests, the committee also discussed the relative merits of the event’s master of ceremonies. Hanson suggested and the committee approved the selection of the then mayor of Kingston, Dr. Harry Allan Stewart. The committee was extended to both of Sir John’s great grandchildren. It is uncertain why their mother, Daisy, was not specifically mentioned as receiving an invitation.

38 Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trades. Discussions with Ms. Mary Halloran, Senior Historian, Historical Section. By June 1941, two additional states (Brazil and Argentina) added a foreign diplomatic mission in Ottawa. Canada’s evolving relationships with these nations is one of the focuses of the leading monograph in this field: John Hilliker, Canada’s Department of External Affairs Vol. 1 The Early Years, 1909-1946 (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).

39 According to Susan Halpert, Houghton Library, Harvard University, there is no correspondence between Moffatt and any of the members of the organizing committee regarding this event within Moffat’s archives. Consequently, it is impossible to know the content of the invitation.

40 Le Soleil, June 9, 1941, 15; Montreal Star, June 9, 1941, 4; Kingston Whig-Standard, June 6, 1941, 3; Kingston Whig-Standard, June 9, 1941, 1; Toronto Star, June 9, 1941, 21.
selection reflected that the event was taking place in the city where Stewart had been the mayor since 1938. Despite the committee’s support for Stewart, Prime Minister King was disappointed with the decision. He writes in his diary that the decision to appoint Stewart was “done deliberately to make sure I would not preside myself. … I think this would have been more appropriate, if the occasion was to be recognized as a national one.”

King’s participation in any event would draw media attention. As such, this commentary perhaps masked the real frustration. Stewart had been closely aligned with the Conservative Party, becoming the party’s elected representative for Kingston in the Ontario Legislature between August 1943 and October 1951 following his five-year mandate as mayor of Kingston. In King’s opinion, Stewart’s selection to chair the event placed one too many Conservatives on the national stage.

Another decision by the committee was to encourage Canadian radio stations to broadcast the event. During the 1927 Diamond Jubilee broadcasts, the airwaves helped inspire Canadians with a greater sense of national identity and national history. King supported this form of ‘technological nationalism’ yet again in 1941, seeing the benefits of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in Ottawa reaching thousands of Canadians in their homes and places of work. This technological feat had not been repeated frequently, and thus had retained its uniqueness by the start of the Second World War. Historian Benedict

42 Legislative Assembly of Ontario, List of Past and Present MPPs, Parliamentary History for Harry Allan Stewart, available online and accessed on November 8, 2009 at http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members_all_detail.do?locale=en&ID=1876
43 A digital copy of the recording of this event is available for purchase through CBC Radio Archives in Toronto.
45 Mary Vipond profiles the use of mass media in promoting nationalism in Canada and around the world. She
Anderson highlights mass communication technologies, like a national radio broadcast, as an important tool in helping to form a single imagined community sharing in a lived experience.\textsuperscript{46} By encouraging a national broadcast, King knew the message from the event would reach a larger audience who would be compelled hopefully by the event’s key messages. The organizers were praised for the sound quality of the broadcast, allowing some Canadians to imagine themselves in Kingston’s City Park.\textsuperscript{47}

Beyond the national broadcast, two additional strategies were used by the committee to engage a greater public attendance. The commemoration ceremony itself was delayed by one day from the actual anniversary in order to place it on a Saturday, when a greater number of citizens could attend, either in person or by tuning in, more easily.\textsuperscript{48} In addition, the Mayor of Kingston declared a half-day civic holiday in the afternoon with the expressed intention of convincing merchants to close their stores and attend the event.\textsuperscript{49} The desire to attract a larger crowd also encouraged a change of venue from the one announced by King in the House of Commons. The committee opted to move the event from the small and serene setting of Cataraqui Cemetery, Macdonald’s final resting place, to City Park, near Queen’s University. The City Park statue of Sir John A. Macdonald, unveiled by Prime Minister Sir Mackenzie Bowell on October 23, 1895, served as the backdrop for the event.\textsuperscript{50}

The organizing committee managed to finalize all details of the commemoration in time to ensure a successful planning and staging of the event. However, King expressed his frustration with the committee’s decision-making process in his diary:

\footnotesize

\begin{itemize}
\item provides an analysis of the use of a national broadcast on Empire Day in 1939, which coincided with King George VI’s visit to Canada. See: Mary Vipond, “The Mass Media in Canadian History: The Empire Day Broadcast in 1939 (Presidential Address),” \textit{Journal of the Canadian Historical Association}, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2003, 1-20.
\item Based on a letter to the editor by Mr. James Sutherland of Prince Edward Island to the \textit{Kingston Whig-Standard}. See: \textit{Kingston Whig-Standard}, June 10, 1941, 4.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, May 21, 1941, 1; \textit{Ibid}, June 2, 1941, 12.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, June 7, 1941, 1.
\item For more on the unveiling of the Macdonald memorial in Kingston, see chapter 1 of this thesis.
\end{itemize}
I confess I was amused to see the zeal with which all the Tories present sought to keep a monopoly on the entire proceedings—not to let it be national in the true sense of the word, as much as Conservative, with the Prime Minister of the day present. … What was even funnier was to see how Hanson disposed of each matter as it came up. He took charge of the proceedings. I was careful not to raise any point or make a suggestion other than the most obvious.51

King’s efforts to show his pragmatism and his flexibility at the end of a diary entry contradict the earlier statements of Hanson taking control of the planning of the event. The Conservative Party had been responsible to a large extent for keeping the memory of Sir John A. Macdonald alive at the local, provincial and national level since his death in 1891. As such, the Conservative members of the organizing committee may have felt uncomfortable with attempts by a Liberal prime minister to associate himself with the political legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald by leading the planning of a national commemorative event. Conversely, King felt that his role as prime minister should not be ignored as he wanted to help transform the event into a national commemoration, which would help transform Macdonald from a Conservative Party hero to a national figure above partisan politics, not to mention help steady governing Liberal fortunes during a period of national crisis.

King had not previously expressed an interest in commemorating Macdonald. In the end, King was without question the driving force behind this event. He limited the organizing committee to his core group, but had to acquiesce to Hanson’s very public and reasonable request for additional members. He attempted to influence the planning of the event. He also expressed displeasure at having the Mayor of Kingston thrust upon him as the emcee, thus giving another Conservative a national spotlight at the event. Finally, he felt the Conservative members of the committee were too eager to take charge of the planning.

These are three clear examples the prime minister aimed to ensure control over the outcomes of the commemoration.

2. The Speakers and the Speeches

During the planning process, the organizing committee determined that the number of speakers should be limited to four, and that each speaker should not speak for more than five minutes. Based on these self-imposed limitations as to the number of speakers, the final choice seemed relatively easy. As leaders of their respective political parties and as co-convenors of the event, King and Hanson were logical choices to speak at the event. King suggested that the only surviving former Conservative Prime Minister living in Canada, Arthur Meighen, be invited to speak. At this time, Meighen was being encouraged by many party faithful to launch his campaign to resume the leadership of the Conservative Party after the sudden resignation of Robert Manion following the 1940 federal general election. The combined weight of Meighen’s status as one of Canada’s great parliamentarians and internal pressure to have Meighen return to the Conservative leadership made his acceptance as a speaker a quick decision for the Conservative members of the organizing committee.

For the final spot, King was adamant that a French-Canadian speak at the event. King recognized that the views of a leading politician from French-Canada would be disseminated by the Quebec press, in both French and English. Conversely, the absence of a French-Canadian speaker might reduce the Quebec media coverage of an Ontario-based

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52 Kingston Whig-Standard, June 2, 1941, 12; Hamilton Spectator, June 2, 1941, 2.
event. The first suitable candidate for King was Senator Raoul Dandurand. King had “an affection almost approaching veneration” for Dandurand.55 Their relationship began during King’s first administration in 1921 in which Dandurand served as Minister without Portfolio. In 1941, Dandurand was 81 years old, and continued to serve as Leader of the Government in the Senate of Canada and Minister without Portfolio.56 He was a beloved figure and a symbol of pride for many French-Canadians as well as an internationally distinguished statesman following his selection as President of the League of Nations Assembly in 1925.57

The second suitable candidate was Ernest Lapointe, King’s political lieutenant in Quebec and an MP since 1904. Born in 1876, Lapointe was 15 years younger than Dandurand.58 Lapointe had played a vital role in the defeat of the Duplessis provincial government in October 1939. He also led the Liberal Party to a federal majority government status in March 1940, largely due to winning 64 out of Quebec’s 65 seats in the House of Commons.59 Throughout his career, and especially in the final years of his life (Lapointe died on November 26, 1941), Lapointe was a strong force within Quebec and beyond. More than

59 Lita-Rose Betcherman, Ernest Lapointe: Mackenzie King’s Great Quebec Lieutenant (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 284-311. There were 62 MPs elected under the Liberal Party banner; two were elected as Independent Liberals; and one was elected as an Independent Conservative. See also: Library of Parliament, Members of the House of Commons: Historical Information Since 1867, search by 19th Parliament and by Quebec as province, available on-line and accessed on January 19, 2009, http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/SenatorsMembers_house.asp?Language=E&Parl=40&Ses=1&Sect= hochist.
two decades after Lapointe’s death, René Lévesque commented that Lapointe held “Quebec in the palm of his hand” during his later years.\(^6^0\)

The participation of either man would have ensured a more complete media coverage of the event in Kingston within Quebec media. With two impressive choices, King’s preference rested with his Quebec lieutenant.\(^6^1\) The choice by King depended on the certainty of Lapointe’s message to ensure coherence with his own message. For many years, King and Lapointe had maintained close relations, both working throughout their lives to ensure national unity. In this regard, Lapointe was described as King’s soul mate, with national unity being their political credo.\(^6^2\)

The selection as speakers of two Conservatives and two Liberals provided equal prominence to both national political parties in their mutual efforts of commemorating Canada’s first prime minister. Beyond the equal representation for both parties, King had ensured that an event in Kingston would be featured within the Quebec press, in both French and English. For Conservative Party supporters, the event included speeches by two leading figures of their party: a former prime minister and the acting leader of the party in the House of Commons. These men were important political leaders, and the media should demonstrate an interest in covering the event, including their representations of Sir John A. Macdonald.

A) The Meaning Behind the Speeches

Each speaker had certain political messages he wished to impart to Canadians through his participation in the fiftieth anniversary commemorating the death of Sir John A. Macdonald.

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\(^6^0\) LAC, MG 31, E 50, Elspeth Chisholm Fonds, Volume 19, File “Transcript of the Last Lieutenant” (Broadcast on CBC Sunday Night), May 3, 1964, 3.


Macdonald. As such, the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald became another political forum for them to advance certain ideas and to ensure Canadians would accept these ideas without criticism. The following section explores each speaker’s speeches through the lens of the theory of official memory.

I. William Lyon Mackenzie King

King’s diary made clear the prime minister’s interest in Macdonald’s political career existed before 1941. At the same time, King never participated in or sought to organize a Macdonald commemoration. As such, King had specific intentions in this commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald which resulted in him becoming the driving force behind the event. At the beginning of his speech, King made clear that he was “leav(ing) to others to speak of Sir John Macdonald’s career and attainment.” He wanted to focus on “certain characteristics in his life which … have left an imprint on the life of Canada.” 63 As such, King freed himself to speak about two key ideas that he wished to promote: a subtle promotion of greater Canadian autonomy from the United Kingdom and a direct appeal to national unity.

King used the theme of Macdonald as a British subject to advance his own conception of greater autonomy for Canada. The Balfour Declaration of 1926 granted British dominions, like Canada, the status of “autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status.” 64 However, the sentimental bond between Canada and Great Britain remained strong. King characterized Macdonald’s view of Canada’s relations with Great Britain as the “loyal daughter at her mother’s side,” a statement that would have

64 Peter H. Russell, Constitutional Odyssey: Can Canadians Become a Sovereign People (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 53.
pleased British loyalists. The passage of time since Macdonald’s death led King to ponder if Macdonald “could ever have … present to his mind … (Canada’s) growth in extent, in strength, and in service to the world.” King was thus suggesting that Macdonald would view Canada’s relations with Great Britain differently in their era, which was marked much more by independence in light of its international contributions. Such statements reinforced King’s preference for Great Britain to devolve its foreign policy control over Canada, a constant theme throughout his political career.

King’s main objective behind this event was to foster national unity. At a time when tensions between English- and French-Canadians were increasing over divisions about Canada’s participation in the Second World War, King wanted to strengthen national unity. In King’s mind, the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald as a conciliator of races could be strengthened for the country’s current political needs. King stated:

A country of two races merged into one nationality, governed in the well-tried ways of the British Constitution, a pride and glory to the new world, this was the daydream of his youth. Its unity was the hope and the prayer of his riper years. Sir John, not only lived to see his dream realized and his prayer answered, but both, in memorable part, affected by his own exertions.

As such, King defined the entirety of Macdonald’s political career as one dedicated to national unity. Macdonald had worked hard to make it happen, just like Canadians in 1941 would need to do. King fought against the notion of two communities in Canada. In his

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66 Ibid., D39929.
mind, and Macdonald’s, “one young and vigorous nation” has emerged from the “union of two historic races.” King needed this message understood by Canadians at a time of growing national disunity over the war.

II. Ernest Lapointe

Ernest Lapointe’s close relationship with William Lyon Mackenzie King was founded, among many elements, on a mutual understanding of the importance of national unity in Canada’s continued political, economic and social development. Their political partnership has been compared to that of Robert Baldwin and Sir Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine or even Macdonald and Cartier. Together, Lapointe and King aimed to ensure the continued unity of Canada. By June 1940, Lapointe knew that his promise to French-Canadians not to allow the government to introduce conscription for overseas military action would be difficult to

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69 Ibid., D39929.
keep in light of the invasion of France by Hitler’s army.\textsuperscript{71} As such, Lapointe took advantage of opportunities to remind both English- and French-Canadians of the importance of national unity.

During his speech at the Macdonald commemorative event, Lapointe was cognisant of the “dark cloud [which] hangs over our civilization”; in light of the war, he recognized that Canada was “facing new and momentous trials” to its national unity.\textsuperscript{72} Through his speech, Lapointe defined Macdonald as a symbol of brotherhood and tolerance, who benefited from the support of Cartier and French-Canadians in governing the country. In Macdonald’s mind, Lapointe argued, there was only one nationality in Canada: Canadian. Macdonald had concluded that “(t)here is no paramount race in this country, there is no conquered race in this country; we are all British subjects,” quoted Lapointe.\textsuperscript{73} As such, he asked all Canadians to “serve what (Macdonald) has loved and served, our beloved Canada.” Through this, Canadians would honour Macdonald’s memory by keeping alive the ideal of justice and liberty to which he devoted the best of his life.

Although King had addressed French-Canadians during his speech, Lapointe used the language of Molière to do the same:

Merci, Sir John! Je salue en vous un des premiers champions de l’esprit national. Les Canadiens de langue française sont heureux de s’unir à leurs concitoyens pour vous rendre hommage, ils vous sont reconnaissants de les avoir compris et appréciés, d’avoir su mériter leur confiance et leur loyale coopération dans l’édification de notre patrie commune.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71} Lita-Rose Betcherman, \textit{Ernest Lapointe: Mackenzie King’s Great Quebec Lieutenant} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 312.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid.}, D39936.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid.}, D39935.
Lapointe asserted that Macdonald had been responsible for safeguarding of the French language in Canada, and thus Macdonald should be viewed as a defender of their rights and liberties. In addition, Lapointe thanked Macdonald for his efforts to understand French-Canadians, a statement geared to English-Canada if they wished to ensure cooperation in the governing of Canada. In the end, the core message of Lapointe was a call to national unity, to continue building Canada for the future. His message was well-received by the audience in Kingston’s City Park, receiving the only interruptions for applause during his speech.75

III. Arthur Meighen

Arthur Meighen’s speech commemorating Sir John A. Macdonald held a key focus on two points: strengthening the bond with the British Empire and elevating Macdonald. Since his entry into politics, Meighen always expressed his “firm support for the British connection.”76 During this speech, Meighen reaffirmed his personal belief in the importance of preserving Canada’s ties with Britain. He described the “oneness of our destiny with the British Empire,” “the permanence of (Canada’s) place in that Empire” and equated Macdonald’s “service to the Empire … (at) the same rank with those of Wellington and Nelson.”77 As such, Meighen did not want to see Canada lose its British connection, despite the increasing independence of Canada which he supported.

The second theme to emerge from Meighen’s speech was the use of Laurier as a means of elevating Sir John A. Macdonald beyond simply a Conservative Party hero. He labelled Laurier’s tribute to Macdonald shortly after his death as being “so graceful, so

75 “Fiftieth Anniversary of the Death of Sir John A. Macdonald,” CBC Radio Broadcast, June 7, 1941. Lapointe was interrupted on three separate occasions by applause.
memorable and so generous.” He even suggested that Sir John Thompson’s tribute to Macdonald during the unveiling of the Macdonald memorial in Hamilton in 1893 did not compare with the tribute from Laurier, his “greatest rival.” As such, Meighen argued that Laurier had awarded Macdonald “the primacy among the founders and the builders of our nation.” As a result of Laurier’s “eternal credit,” Macdonald should be elevated to the highest possible rank in the “galaxy of our eminent men.” Meighen ignored the criticism of Macdonald expressed by Laurier during his eulogy and at other moments of his political career. Nevertheless, Meighen was supportive of the transformation of Macdonald from Conservative Party hero to a national figure above politics.

IV. Richard Hanson

In its own way, Richard Hanson’s speech echoed the same message of national unity. He begs Canadians “who inherited the early fruits of (Macdonald’s) work (to) strive to make of this nation the best that is possible for all of our people.” He also recognized that “in diversity there can be true unity.” As such, he was suggesting to the audience that the diversity of Canada’s population was a major strength, and not a weakness. He also noted that Macdonald had taught Canadians about the importance of duty, unity, loyalty and empire. Although these values could be assigned to Macdonald’s political legacy, it is clear that the importance of empire and service to nation were important legacies he wished Canadians would take away from this commemorative service.

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
V. Conclusion

The allotted time per speaker resulted in 20 minutes of speeches. During that time, a considerable number of representations of Sir John A. Macdonald were delivered to the audience in an effort to shape his public memory. For the first time, Macdonald was transformed from a Conservative Party hero to a hegemonic figure. This transformation was necessary in order for both Liberals and Conservatives to use his public memory to reinforce the need for conciliation, understanding and respect between French- and English-Canadians. As such, King, Meighen, Lapointe and Hanson redefined Macdonald into a symbol of national unity. They argued that his political career held the required lessons to ensure continued unity in times of crisis. The representation of Macdonald as a symbol of national unity overshadowed other representations of Macdonald. Nevertheless, other representations were present, and they illustrated how the representations of Macdonald shifted with the passage of time.

The goal of the delivery of these speeches went beyond the commemoration of Macdonald’s death. The focus was on shaping the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald, and delivering representations of Canada’s first prime minister in a manner that would resonate with Canadians. The first indication that the speakers’ message was accepted, beyond the polite applause, came at the end of each speech. Each speaker was warmly applauded. In addition, Lapointe’s speech (and only Lapointe) was interrupted by applause on three separate occasions, a sign that the content and the delivery of his speech was resonating with the audience.82 Of all of the speeches, King also agreed they were all good, but that Lapointe’s was “the best of all.” He also noted, typically given his dislike for his

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82 “Fiftieth Anniversary of the Death of Sir John A. Macdonald,” CBC Radio Broadcast, June 7, 1941, 1m40s of the broadcast. This radio broadcast provides the opportunity to listen to the crowds’ reaction to the delivery of each speech.
opponent, that Meighen delivered a speech that was “very good with blemishes; very poorly delivered” while Hanson was “better than usual.”\footnote{LAC, William Lyon Mackenzie King Fonds, MG 26 J5, Series 13, Diary entry for June 7, 1941, 2. Available on-line at \url{http://king.collectionscanada.ca}, accessed on April 14, 2006.} Although King’s opinion of these speeches is interesting, the reactions from the audience and the press ultimately carried a greater ability to influence Macdonald’s public memory.

B) Representations of Macdonald

During the event, the four speakers highlighted various elements of Sir John A. Macdonald’s life and political career. These elements were meant to shape the public memory of Canada’s first prime minister for a new generation of Canadians. Some of these representations of Macdonald were presented in more than one of these speeches. As such, this section examines these representations in a cross-cutting analysis. The representations of Macdonald during this event will be compared to representations of Macdonald offered by earlier generations of Canadians. As such, the speeches will follow the eight main representations of Sir John A. Macdonald that have been tracked since the first Sir John A. Macdonald commemoration in 1893.

I. Sir John A. Macdonald as a Partisan Politician

The representation of Macdonald as a partisan politician advanced by previous influential members of the Liberal Party, including Laurier, had been dismissed by the current leaders of the Liberal Party. King would not have organized such an event to simply commemorate a Conservative Party hero. He needed him to represent more than a party; he needed a figure that could bind Canadians together during a time of duress and crisis, regardless of party. This view was echoed by Lapointe who began his address by noting: “Sir John A. Macdonald does not belong to a party. He belongs to his country and this is the
homage of the whole nation to the chief architect of Confederation.”\textsuperscript{84} As such, the 1941 commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald became the first occasion on which the portrayal of Macdonald was transformed from a Conservative Party hero to a perceivable hegemonic figure.

II. Macdonald as a Symbol of Canadian Unity

Macdonald as a symbol of Canadian unity was the most important and frequent representation of Sir John A. Macdonald. On previous occasions, this representation of Macdonald had been present, echoing efforts from earlier generations of leaders. However, in this context, each speaker used colourful language about Macdonald to stress the importance of national unity. For example, King argued that “the union of two historic races into one young and vigorous country” was Macdonald’s greatest legacy, reflecting not only the founding of Confederation but Macdonald’s role in ensuring national unity during his years as prime minister. The appeal from Meighen was accompanied by even stronger language: “There is more to be learned from him than from any other. If we govern ourselves, each one of us, by the principles which governed him; if we work as he worked; dare as he dared; and follow the start that lighted his life, we will serve our country as we ought to serve it and, with God’s help we will save it.”\textsuperscript{85} Meighen was thus appealing for every Canadian to become a conciliator, ensuring that Canada’s destiny would not be threatened through linguistic conflict.

Similar representations of Macdonald as a symbol of Canadian unity were used by Lapointe and Hanson. Lapointe suggested that Macdonald, above all of his political


contemporaries, understood “the problems that had to be solved and succeeded to unite traditionally opposed sections, laying down the principles upon which this nation is based. His great merit was to raise above the narrow divisions of provincialism the powerful figure of a united country.” Macdonald’s ability to understand French-Canadians allowed him to unite the country. Through this commemoration, it is Macdonald’s role in uniting both English- and French-Canadians that all Canadians were commemorating. Hanson picked on one last point, noting:

> Unless we ourselves heed the lessons of (Macdonald’s) life; unless we be in deed and in truth real Canadians and servants of mankind—ready to give our lives for the freedom of the great nation which nurtures us, and for the flag which shelters and protects us—we are not worthy to stand her, not worthy of this shrine of John A. Macdonald.

The appeal for Hanson of national unity was strong, calling on all Canadians to take pride in their nation’s freedom and to work together, using the example set by Macdonald, to ensure its continuing success.

All four speeches left a strong impression of Macdonald’s lifelong quest to unite all Canadians. The speakers highlighted in various ways how Macdonald united all Canadians to found a new country. The use of this representation made intrinsic sense in light of growing tensions among English-Canadians wishing for a greater role in the war and French-Canadians fighting to prevent the imposition of conscription. These impassioned appeals for national unity and the commonality of this representation suggests that Macdonald as a symbol of national unity was indeed the driving theme behind this first-ever national commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald.

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86 Ibid., “Address by the Right Honourable Ernest Lapointe” at the Commemorative Services, Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, D39935-D39936.
87 Ibid., “Address by the Honourable R. B. Hanson” at the Commemorative Services: Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, D39939.
III. Macdonald as the Leading Father of Confederation.

The representation of Macdonald as the leading Father of Confederation remained a major theme throughout this first half of the twentieth century. This representation was much in evidence during this 1941 national commemorative event. Of the four speakers at the event, three represented Macdonald in this way. However, each introduced the theme in different ways. Meighen wished to honour the man “who more than any other founded our country.”88 Meighen recognized that Macdonald “does not stand alone in the galaxy of our eminent men; but his greatest rival [Sir Wilfrid Laurier], to his credit, has awarded him the primacy among the founders and the builders of our nation.”89 Meighen’s statement was a deliberate attempt to create consensus through the revision of Laurier’s documented remark about Macdonald and in spite of the Liberal Party’s history of downplaying Macdonald and his legacy. Lapointe commented that Macdonald “belongs to his country and this is the homage of the whole nation to the chief architect of Confederation, to the leader of those we call the ‘Fathers.’”90 Finally, Hanson simply identified Macdonald as the “chief architect of Confederation.”91 As such, the representation of Macdonald as the leading Father of Confederation remained present throughout this event. This representation was reemphasized by members of both national political parties, confirming to the audience Macdonald’s pre-eminent role in the founding of Canada.

89 Ibid., D39934. Meighen makes this affirmation based on the text of Laurier’s eulogy to Macdonald on the floor of the House of Commons. See Chapter 1 of this thesis for more information.
91 Ibid., “Address by the Honourable R. B. Hanson” at the Commemorative Services: Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, D39938.
IV. The Macdonald-Cartier Partnership

In previous commemorations, Cartier had received some limited attention in the remarks of political actors during the unveiling of Macdonald memorials and during the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. During this 1941 event, Lapointe was the only speaker to recognize the role of Cartier as an equal to Macdonald. Lapointe discussed the “unbroken alliance” between Macdonald and Cartier. He argued that when Macdonald “found himself in a minority position in his own Province,” Cartier was able to ensure the ratification of Macdonald’s political agenda by marshalling French-Canadian support for these legislative actions. As such, Lapointe was claiming recognition of Cartier’s role in Macdonald’s successes. The other speakers – all English-Canadians – were silent on Cartier’s contributions to Canada, thus downplaying or doing little to promote his public memory outside Quebec. As the lone French-Canadian speaker, Lapointe reintroduced the representation of Cartier as a partner in Macdonald’s earlier accomplishments.

V. Macdonald as Nation-Building

The theme of nation-building has been long associated with Macdonald. In previous commemorative events, speakers had highlighted the union of the four provinces (colonies) as a key accomplishment of Confederation and of Macdonald. During this ceremony, Macdonald was also recognized as a nation-builder. However, the theme received a less prominent focus than in previous decades. For King, Macdonald was one of the “Makers of Canada.” For Meighen, Macdonald had “a far-reaching vision beyond the events of his time.” For Lapointe, Macdonald was “essentially a nation builder ... His great merit was to

92 Ibid., “Address by the Right Honourable Ernest Lapointe” at the Commemorative Services, Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, D39936.
94 Ibid., “Address by the Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King” at the Commemorative Services, Fiftieth
raise above the narrow divisions of provincialism the powerful figure of a united country.”

Finally, for Hanson, Macdonald had “laboured arduously to give life to [a strong and powerful nation].” As such, all men recognized Macdonald as a nation-builder through a slightly different passing reference. None of the speakers provided more evidence of Macdonald’s work in this specific area. Nevertheless, such generic statements could have been easily suppressed if the speakers had not deemed Macdonald as a symbol of nation-building.

VI. Macdonald as a British Subject

The importance of the British connection remained present throughout the first half-century of the twentieth century. At the same time, the representations of Macdonald often focused on the man being a living connection between Canada and the British Empire. The theme of Canada’s attachment to the United Kingdom was another key representation of Macdonald in 1941. For Meighen, the importance of Macdonald and his contribution to the Empire should not be underestimated. In November 1893, during the unveiling of the Macdonald memorial in Hamilton, former Prime Minister Sir John Thompson equated Macdonald to British war heroes Arthur Wellesley (1st Duke of Wellington) and Horatio Nelson (1st Viscount Nelson). Roughly fifty years later, Meighen yet again compared Macdonald to Wellington and Nelson. He noted: “We do honour to him here as the father of our Canadian Confederation, but right in the heart of England, in the Cathedral of St. 

Anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, D39927.
96 Ibid., “Address by the Honourable R. B. Hanson” at the Commemorative Services: Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, D39939.
97 Macdonald Memorial Committee, The Proceedings at the Unveiling of the Statue of the Late Sir John Alexander Macdonald in Hamilton on the first day of November 1893 (Hamilton, Macdonald Memorial Committee, 1893), 12. The unveiling of a bust of Sir John A. Macdonald inside St. Paul’s Cathedral in London took place in November 1892. See: The Globe, November 29, 1892, 4. The bust is only steps away from the tomb of these two decorated British war generals.
Paul, honour was done him one whose services to the Empire deserves to be ranked with those of Wellington and Nelson. As such, Meighen continued the comparison as a means of raising Macdonald’s importance beyond national status to an imperial importance. In his remarks, King made reference to Macdonald’s loyalty to the Empire and to the British Crown. He noted: “I doubt not that he saw our country ever as a loyal daughter at her mother’s side.” This quote had thus a dual reference: Macdonald’s attachment to the British Empire and Canada’s response to the United Kingdom during this current war. As such, Meighen articulated the continued role of Canada within the British Empire while Mackenzie King argued that Macdonald would never have dreamed of Canada’s ability to be an equal partner to Britain.

Among the other two speakers, Hanson was quick to highlight that Macdonald had taught Canadians about the importance of the Empire. Lapointe did the same thing, by noting what the Empire meant for French-Canadians. He noted that British subjects could be equally French- or English-speaking Canadians as Macdonald had made clear: “there is no conquered race in this country.” Lapointe was also clear about highlighting the British form of constitution by acknowledging that Macdonald “defined what a great British country in North America should be and he created it.” As such, the constant presence of Macdonald and the ties he strengthened with Britain are not surprising. However, we see that each speaker evolved the theme to reflect his own vantage point.

101 Ibid., D39935.
VII. Macdonald’s Strong Central Government

The image of Sir John A. Macdonald as a defender of a strong central government had been invoked in previous commemorative efforts, especially in the decade following Macdonald’s death. In many ways, the representation of Macdonald as a defender of a strong central government was an attempt to counter the growth of the notion that Confederation was a compact between its member provinces in the minds of Canadians. This view, expounded by Sir Oliver Mowat and Honoré Mercier, argued that the provinces should retain all rights not explicitly given to the federal government through the *British North America Act*. As such, the judicial interpretation of Canada’s constitution had been a common theme during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Political scientist Garth Stevenson argues that, by the mid-twentieth century, few prime ministers “dared to challenge the compact theory as Macdonald would have done.”

As such, any reference to Macdonald as a defender of a strong central government would no longer be acceptable.

The absence of reference to Macdonald as a defender of a strong central government is not simply a reflection of increasingly assertive provincial governments within Canada. It also reflects the difficult times in Canada during the 1930s and the 1940s. The Great Depression resulted in the “federal government (being) called upon to rescue the peripheries (Prairie Provinces), but faced increasingly determined and successful obstruction by the governments of the two central provinces.” Many Canadians believed the federal government did have a role to play in ensuring all citizens had access to the same level of services, regardless of where in Canada they lived. As such, finding the middle ground

102 Garth Stevenson, *Unfulfilled Union: Canadian Federalism and National Unity* (Toronto: Gage, 1989), 239.
103 Ibid.
between both extremes was important, and reflects the absence of this specific representation of Macdonald.

VIII. Macdonald as a Self-made Man

The myth of the self-made man was attached to Macdonald during the 1941 commemorative event. Among the speakers, King was the only political leader to address this historic representation of Macdonald. He commented: “In our public life, young men may also become the architects of their country’s future. As was the case with Macdonald … this distinction may be gained without regard to birth, or race, or class. Intelligence, industry and integrity are the basic qualities by which it is achieved.”

Behind this representation of Macdonald is the aspiration that all Canadians can improve themselves and strengthen their communities, regardless of wealth or origins. King’s objective was to inspire Canadians to better themselves, to become the architects of their own futures. As such, the introduction of this representation had little to do with the individual who was the subject of the commemoration.

3. The Reactions

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald involved considerable effort from the organizers and the speakers. The purpose of the event was to reinforce the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald. For some of the speakers, the goal was also to shape his public memory to advance certain ideas linked to their own political agendas. As such, the size of the audience and the media coverage are two important ways to gauge interest in and reactions to the event.

A) Attendance

The weather often plays an important role in encouraging citizens to attend events. In Kingston, on June 7, 1941, the weather was described as “fine” despite a small chance of rain. As such, the weather was a contributing factor for the presence of large crowds, argued the same paper. The Toronto Star’s special correspondent to the event noted that 3,000 citizens were in attendance at the event. However, no other newspaper offered another estimate of the size of the crowd. Kingston, in 1941, had roughly 30,000 residents. The Globe and Mail reported “several thousand Canadians” in attendance while another article in the Kingston Whig-Standard described the City Park audience listening to the speeches as “hushed thousands.” Despite the vague reference to the size of the audience in the latter two newspapers, there does seem to be a vague convergence as to the actual size of the audience. The CBC Radio broadcast also indicated that 5,000 members of “Canada’s fighting forces” attended the event in City Park. As such, more than 8,000 individuals gathered to participate in the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald. Finally, there was no ability to estimate the number of Canadians who listened to the radio broadcast of the event.

Among the crowd were members of the House of Commons and the Senate. Their attendance was highlighted by the press, with a complete list provided by the Kingston Whig-Standard. The House of Commons and the Senate were both in session the weeks prior to and after the event. As such, the majority of parliamentarians would be in Ottawa during this time, as opposed to their hometowns. The participation of MPs and Senators can serve as an indicator of individual MPs wanting to be associated with the event in the absence of party

105 Kingston Whig-Standard, June 9, 1941, 4.
106 Toronto Star, June 9, 1941, 2.
107 The Globe and Mail, June 9, 1941, 12; Kingston Whig-Standard, June 9, 1941, 2; Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph, June 9, 1941, 10.
108 “Fiftieth Anniversary of the Death of Sir John A. Macdonald,” CBC Radio Broadcast, June 7, 1941, 1m40s of the broadcast.
109 Kingston Whig-Standard, June 7, 1941, 1.
pressure to be in attendance. In total, there were 30 MPs who participated in the event representing 12% of the membership of the House of Commons. There were MPs of three separate political parties (16 Liberals, 13 Conservatives and one Social Credit) and their ridings were in seven different provinces (Table 5.1).  

In the 1940 federal general election, the Liberal Party of Canada won 178 ridings, while the Conservative Party elected 39 MPs. As such, 33% of the Conservative caucus was in attendance in comparison to 9% for the Liberal caucus. As such, in absolute terms, the Conservative Party retained a higher level of attachment through their level of participation in the commemoration of Macdonald than the Liberal Party. The interest in commemorating Sir John A. Macdonald seemed centred in the Province of Ontario, with 50% of the MPs in attendance being from that province. Ontario MPs were almost equally divided among Liberals and Conservatives. At the same time, 50% of the MPs were from outside Ontario. After Ontario, it was Saskatchewan which had the largest number of participating MPs, including Prince Albert MP William Lyon Mackenzie King, as well as a first-term, 46-year old Conservative MP, John George Diefenbaker. In Quebec, three Francophone MPs were in attendance, a very small number considering the Liberal Party had been successful in 64 of Quebec’s 65 provincial seats in the federal parliament.

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111 In the 1940 federal general election, the Liberal Party won 62 seats out of a possible 65 seats. Of the three seats the party did not win, two MPs were elected as “independent Liberals” and one was elected as an “independent Conservative.” See: Library of Parliament, Members of the House of Commons: Historical Information Since 1867, search by Parliament, then province, available on-line and accessed on April 9, 2009, [http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/Senators Members_house.asp?Language=E&Parl=40&Ses=1&Sect=hochist](http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/Senators Members_house.asp?Language=E&Parl=40&Ses=1&Sect=hochist).
Table 5.1. Participation of MPs at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Death of Sir John A. Macdonald in Kingston on June 7, 1941.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MPs</th>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Liberals</th>
<th>Social Credit</th>
<th>Total at Macdonald event</th>
<th>Total in the House of Commons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon/NWT</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>245</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* William Lyon Mackenzie King is counted as a Saskatchewan Liberal MP. He represented the riding of Prince Albert from 1926 to 1945. Most Canadians associate the prime minister with his hometown of Kitchener.

The Senate of Canada was also represented at the event (Table 5.2). Of a total membership of 91 filled Senate seats at the time of the event, six Senators were in attendance, representing 7% of the membership of the Senate of Canada. Among the six Senators in attendance, four were Liberals appointed to the Senate by William Lyon Mackenzie King. Joseph Duffus (Peterborough), Arthur Hardy (Leeds) and Henry Horsey (Prince Edward County) were from Ontario while William Hushion was from Quebec. The three Ontario Senators were from communities in close proximity to Kingston. The two

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Conservative Senators, both Ontarians, were Gerard White (Pembroke), appointed to the
Upper House by Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1919 and Arthur Meighen (St. Marys),
appointed in 1932 to the Senate by Prime Minister Richard Bedford Bennett.\textsuperscript{113}

Table 5.2. Participation of Senators at the sesquicentennial anniversary of the death
of Sir John A. Macdonald in Kingston on June 7, 1941.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Liberal Party</th>
<th>Conservative Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the event there were 46 Conservative Senators and 45 Liberal
Senators.\textsuperscript{114} As such, 9\% of the Liberal Senate caucus was in attendance in comparison to
4\% of the Conservative Senate caucus. Within Ontario, all 24 senatorial seats were filled at
the time, with 13 Conservatives and 11 Liberals.\textsuperscript{115} As such, 27\% of the Ontario Liberal
Senate caucus was in attendance in comparison to 15\% of the Ontario Conservative Senate
caucus. From these numbers, the interest to participate in this event was very low. Those
Senators in attendance were more likely to come from communities in closer geographical
proximity to Kingston. In particular, 83\% of the Senators in attendance (five out of the six
Senators) represented Ontario and 17\% represented a Quebec region (one out of six
Senators). This demonstrated that the appeal to participate in a Macdonald commemorative
event among Senators was regionally based, and that the Liberal Senators from Eastern
Ontario were more likely to accept King’s invitation.

\textsuperscript{113} Kingston \textit{Whig-Standard}, June 7, 1941, 1. Library of Parliament, Members of the Senate of Canada: Senators
Since 1867, search by members of the 19th Parliament, available on-line and accessed on April 9, 2009,

\textsuperscript{114} Calculations by the author.

\textsuperscript{115} Calculations by the author.
B) The Media’s Response

Each newspaper surveyed by this study provided its readership with multiple articles on the fiftieth anniversary of Sir John A. Macdonald’s death and the corresponding commemorative event in Kingston. The announcement of the forthcoming commemoration received limited press coverage, resulting from the media’s interest in relating stories once they actually happened. As such, most stories covered the actual event. During this era, Canadian Press articles were a cost-effective way for dailies to have access to stories taking place outside of their immediate communities. Alongside these generic Canadian Press articles, each newspaper editor drafted the headline framing the story. For example, a Canadian Press article ran in the Hamilton Spectator under the headline “Political Leaders Honour Memory of Noted Statesman. Great Conservative Chief Eulogized at Service in Kingston. Dreams Surpassed.”116 As such, the editor reintroduced the notion of Macdonald as a leader of the Conservative Party rather than a non-partisan figure, and also indicated that Macdonald’s dreams for his country have already been surpassed. In Quebec City’s Le Soleil, the Canadian Press article ran under the headline: “Hommage national au principal artisan de la Confédération. Une manifestation imposante a eu lieu hier à Kingston en l’honneur de sir John-A. Macdonald. Le canadianisme de Sir John.”117 As such, the article recognized a primacy for Macdonald in achieving Confederation and focused on the event in Kingston being imposing, thus meriting attention from its readers. It also heralded Macdonald for being first and foremost a Canadian as opposed to a British subject. Overall, most newspapers ran the same articles with similar positive headlines, making it difficult to compare and contrast the representations of Macdonald being offered.

116 Hamilton Spectator, June 9, 1941, 11.
117 Le Soleil, June 9, 1941, 16.
In a few cases, newspapers had their own reporters on the scene filing stories about the event. For example, the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* each dispatched a staff writer to attend the event and to file their own stories. The *Toronto Star*’s main focus of the event coverage echoed a theme from King’s speech. Under the headline “Union of Two Races Called Sir John A.’s Supreme Mark,” the article agreed that Macdonald’s role in conciliating English- and French-Canadians was a key element of his political career.\(^{118}\) Another key element of Macdonald’s political career was to ensure a strong British connection. The article noted that King “recalled the first prime minister’s zealous desire that Canada never should sever any ties with the mother country.”\(^ {119}\) The journalist is silent on the sentiment King was invoking in the remaining sentences of that section of his speech: Canada’s increasing importance on the world stage and thus an equal partner to Great Britain, and not a colonial territory.

For its part, the *Globe and Mail* ran the story about the commemoration of Macdonald’s death by focusing on Macdonald’s perceived ability to “Put National Welfare Ahead of Party.”\(^ {120}\) In expanding on the meaning of the headline, the journalist noted the importance for Canadians “to implement the work of one who put the national good before party interests in his efforts to knit Canada into a great nation, united within itself and with the rest of the Empire.”\(^ {121}\) Although Macdonald had been known as a highly partisan politician during his lifetime, the message from King and Lapointe, among others, reinforced the message of Macdonald as a conciliator among races and political parties. As such, both the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* presented Macdonald through the lens offered by King and Lapointe without criticism.

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\(^{118}\) *Toronto Star*, June 9, 1941, 2.

\(^{119}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{120}\) *Globe and Mail*, June 9, 1941, 12.

\(^{121}\) *Ibid.*
In addition to Canadian Press articles with locally selected headlines and staff writers dispatched to Kingston to cover the event, seven newspapers offered its readers an editorial about the event and the meaning of Sir John A. Macdonald. The following section will thus focus on some of the editorials about Sir John A. Macdonald’s political legacy. The diversity of editorial views is reflective of these seven newspapers: the *Kingston Whig-Standard*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Telegram*, *Le Droit*, *La Presse*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*.

I. *Kingston Whig-Standard*

In Macdonald’s hometown of Kingston, the forthcoming event was featured on at least 14 occasions between May 17th and June 6th, with many updates featured on its front page.122 As such, the *Kingston Whig-Standard* demonstrated a keen interest in keeping its readers informed as to the pending event in their city. After all, the *Kingston Whig-Standard* claimed “(v)ery few events in recent Canadian political history have caught the imagination of the country so strongly.”123 King’s leadership of this event led to the conclusion that the “transition of Sir John A. Macdonald from this partisan sphere to that of a great Canadian historical figure in whom all Canadians, no matter what their political affiliation,” had taken place, without any acknowledgement of his possible motives.124

The actual event also resulted in substantive coverage. An editorial praised Macdonald as the “Great Canadian” who was “the outstanding architect and builder of the Canadian nation.”125 Such praise from Macdonald’s hometown newspaper is not surprising. Beyond the commemoration of Macdonald and his role in shaping Canada’s destiny, the

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122 Some of these articles were featured in: *Kingston Whig-Standard*, May 17, 1941, 1; *Kingston Whig-Standard*, May 21, 1941, 1; *Kingston Whig-Standard*, May 23, 1941, 2; *Kingston Whig-Standard*, May 24, 1941, 2; *Kingston Whig-Standard*, May 29, 1941, 3.
124 Ibid.
125 *Kingston Whig-Standard*, June 7, 1941, 4.
editorial focused on the benefits of this commemoration in light of the war. According to the editorialist, the organizers had not envisaged the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death serving other purposes than a tribute to Macdonald. It noted that the event was “not a conscious or deliberate devised demonstration of national and Commonwealth unity, but that is what they amount to. Sir John A. in his lifetime had the genius to get men to sink their differences and even their political identities for the welfare of the country as a whole at a critical time.” However, the motivation for King in pushing for this event and playing such a leadership role in the planning was indeed to ensure that the event served as a rallying call for national unity in times of war. According to the Whig-Standard’s editorial board, it was Macdonald’s legacy that helped the ceremony transcend national tensions to stand for something larger, rather than any deliberate planning on the part of the government.

The Kingston Whig-Standard was very complimentary to those local Kingstonians who played a key role in assisting Under-Secretary of State Ephraim Herbert Coleman in “bringing the national ceremony to such a successful conclusion.” One of three individuals singled out was Thomas Ashmore Kidd, the former Conservative Member of Provincial Parliament in Toronto. The very next day, however, Kidd received an editorial rebuke for a comment he made during the annual event organized by the Kingston Conservative Association at Macdonald’s grave. During this speech, Kidd was critical of the federal government and French-Canadians by asserting “Canada’s war effort is not Imperialistic

126 Ibid.
127 Kingston Whig-Standard, June 9, 1941, 4.
129 The Kingston Conservative Association still held their annual graveside tribute. See: Kingston Whig-Standard, June 7, 1941, 2.
enough” and that “the official war effort goes only so far as a certain element in the Province of Quebec permits it.” Kidd was a grand master of the Orange Order, a group “claiming to defend British principles (… and) the English language” and many of their members believed “French Canadians were probably disloyal, given their poor showing in the enlistment figures for the war.” As such, Kidd’s remarks echoed the attitudes toward French-Canadians held by some members of this Order as well as the belief that compromise for the sake of pleasing Quebec was hindering Canada’s contribution to the war effort.

In its response to Kidd’s statement, the Kingston Whig-Standard argued that his remarks offered “figures (which) do not justify assertions” and that it was unnecessary “to strike a note of national disunity and political partisanship.” It also mentioned:

We (French- and English-Canadians) can live together in unity, happily and contentedly, if we are but tolerant of one another. To talk about Quebec Province as if it were trying to hinder Canada’s war work is manifestly unfair. We do not know what military quotas are given the various provinces, but we do know that Quebec has maintained the quota of reinforcements allotted to it as well as any province in Canada.

The spirit of the editorial rebuke emerging from Kingston, a community with a long association with the Orange Order, is reflective of the tone set at the national commemorative event. In fact, the rebuke was partially inspired by Ernest Lapointe’s efforts to strengthen national unity in these difficult times. The editorial quotes an excerpt of Lapointe’s speech to make his point: “Let us all stand shoulder to shoulder without regard

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130 Kingston Whig-Standard, June 10, 1941, 4.
131 Susan Mann, The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec (Toronto: Gage, 1982), 205. Kidd’s role as the Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Canada is found within his personal archives at Queen’s University Archives, Kingston.
132 Ibid., June 10, 1941, 4.
133 Ibid.
134 For a history of the Orange Order in Canada, see: David A. Wilson, ed., The Orange Order in Canada (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2007).
to the ancestors or the creed of our fellow citizens, but only the sincerity of our Canadianism, working all together, hearts, souls and minds, for the honor, the strength and the greatness of our common land.” Such efforts of mutual understanding among French- and English-Canadians were at the core of King’s motivation for this event. As such, the event seems to have had at least the short-term impacts that King had wished, at least in the city obsessed with Sir John A. Macdonald.

II. Globe and Mail

The Globe and Mail commented in its editorial that it was fitting for leaders of both national political parties to honour “the great Conservative leader.” Despite labelling him by his political party affiliation, the editorial argues that the memory of Sir John A. Macdonald would be remembered differently by Canadians of various generations. For older Canadians, it was the partisan politician who stood out, skilled in demolishing arguments through formidable oratory style, equipped with “wonderful tact in the management of men” and with impressive personal influence. For these reasons, the Globe and Mail argued, “(h)is party followers almost worshipped him.” For younger generations, it was not Macdonald as the successful Conservative chieftain that they would remember, but rather one of the Fathers of Confederation, the “statesman who had much to do with the establishment of his Dominion of Canada.” The editorial concluded the fitting nature of a national commemorative celebration where both political parties, and not simply the Conservative Party, took part. As such, the Globe and Mail echoed the Kingston Whig-Standard pre-event editorial in describing the transformation of Macdonald from a partisan politician to a statesman.

135 Kingston Whig-Standard, June 10, 1941, 4.
136 Globe and Mail, June 9, 1941, 6.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
III. Toronto Telegram

The Toronto-based conservative-leaning daily newspaper remained critical of Prime Minister King’s efforts to commemorate Sir John A. Macdonald. A week before the event, the paper published an editorial which argued:

Mr. King has kidnapped Sir John A. for the occasion, and will employ him as a publicity agent for himself. Into the traditional observance of the day, Mr. King will shoulder his way to the front in the best Hollywood manner, taking the ceremonies out of the hand of the Conservatives and graciously allowing them to look on while he addresses the nation.139

The editorial was crafted to raise partisan ire among its readership, and to question the motives leading King to commemorate Macdonald. The clear worry expressed by this paper is the removal of Macdonald from the Conservative fold for the partisan use of Macdonald’s image by the Liberal Party, and by King in particular.

The *Toronto Telegram* expressed the same negative partisanship after the event. The main headline for the event reflects the perceived appropriation of Macdonald’s image by the Liberal Party. “King Snubs Conservatives at Chieftain’s Memorial Only Two on Platform” reads the headline of the event.140 Beyond the headline, the article states that King and his officials “eagerly grasped” former MP William Folger Nickle’s suggestion for this event, and then King and the Liberal Party proceeded to “cold-shoulder provincial and local Conservatives.”141 It also notes that, “had not Conservative Leader Hanson insisted that the chairman be the Mayor of Kingston, H. Stewart, the ceremony might have taken on an even

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139 *Toronto Telegram*, May 28, 1941, 8.
140 *Toronto Telegram*, June 9, 1941, 5. In reality, there were four Liberals on stage (King, Lapointe, Angus Macdonald and Mulock) and three Conservatives (Hanson, Meighen and Coatsworth). Coatsworth is forgotten by the *Telegram*. Mulock and Coatsworth were special guests, as they served with Sir John A. Macdonald in the House of Commons.
141 *Toronto Telegram*, June 9, 1941, 5.
greater Liberal tinge." As such, the *Telegram* attempted to demonstrate that King used this opportunity to associate himself with Macdonald and to build up support for himself and the Liberal MP for Kingston, Angus Macdonald. The remainder of the *Telegram*’s coverage summarized elements of the event and the speakers’ speeches. In the end, however, the article leaves the impression to the *Telegram*’s readership that King had disgraced Conservatives by claiming that Ontario Conservative Party leader George Drew and Nickle were not invited to the event. However, the paper omits that the former was a member of the event’s organizing committee and that the event was planned by a bipartisan committee. As such, the *Telegram* pursued partisan attacks on King and the Liberal Party, and this event became another forum to voice such criticisms.

*IV. Le Droit*

Prior to this national commemorative event, Ottawa’s French-language daily newspaper had articulated a clear representation of Sir John A. Macdonald as an unequivocal defender of French-language rights outside Quebec. An editorial noted: “Sir John Macdonald se fit toujours remarquer par sa longueur d’esprit. Il désirait intensément l’unité politique du Canada sous un gouvernement central où les représentants des deux grandes races fondatrices du Canada jouiraient de droits égaux et partageraient les mêmes responsabilités.” As such, he is reminding his French-speaking readers, and to some degree English-Canadians, that Macdonald had laboured throughout his career to ensure equality of rights for both linguistic groups. The editor of *Le Droit* during this period was Charles Gautier, a long-time pillar of the Franco-Ontarian community and a leading voice behind the *Ordre de Jacques Cartier*, an Ottawa-based French-Canadian secret society.

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142 Ibid.
143 *Le Droit*, May 21, 1941, 3.
144 Ibid.
The ‘Ordre’ worked in the shadows for greater rights and recognition of French-Canadians; its leadership increasingly represented a growing Franco-Ontarian voice in national affairs.¹⁴⁵

This approach reflected _Le Droit_’s origins in the aftermath of the introduction of Ontario’s Regulation 17 in 1912 which restricted the use of French as a language of instruction in Ontario schools.¹⁴⁶

Following the event, an editorial written by Camille L’Heureux, a political commentator for _Le Droit_ and an ardent defender of Franco-Ontarians, noted: “ce grand homme d’État avait le courage de prononcer, au soir de sa vie, en faveur du français de l’Ouest (canadien). … John A. Macdonald n’hésita pas à cette occasion de prendre la défense de la minorité canadienne française.”¹⁴⁷ As such, Claude Gautier and Camille L’Heureux found in Macdonald a symbol for the continuing quest of Franco-Ontarians for equality of rights within Ontario and Canada. The context of the Second World War was not ignored by L’Heureux in his editorial. In fact, he found a way of linking the representation of Macdonald as a defender of rights for Francophones throughout Canada to the growing difficulties of French-Canadians in conscription for overseas military service. He noted that Macdonald was a conciliator among English- and French-Canadians. This “esprit de sir John Macdonald, il faut le faire passé dans nos efforts de guerre. C’est encore la meilleure façon d’honorer ce grand homme d’État en ce 50e anniversaire de sa mort.”¹⁴⁸ As such, L’Heureux used this representation of Macdonald to push for a greater understanding of the reluctance of certain Canadians to become involved in the war.

¹⁴⁷ _Le Droit_, June 10, 1941, 3. Camille L’Heureux was born in St. Jude, Quebec, and worked at _Le Droit_ from 1927 to 1962, first as a journalist and working his way up to editor. His archives are stored in the Centre d’histoire de Saint-Hyacinthe. The description of the archives, which includes a biography of L’Heureux is available on line at: http://www.archivessh.qc.ca/archives/Fond_detail.php?id=615.
¹⁴⁸ _Le Droit_, June 10, 1941, 3.
Similar to Ottawa’s French-language paper *Le Droit*, the coverage of the Kingston event was also favourably received within Quebec’s Francophone media. The newspaper *La Presse* had been relatively silent on this upcoming event, and did not introduce it to its readers until June 2nd. An additional article prior to a full coverage of the June 7th event also reflects openness on the part of the newspaper’s editorial team to reintroduce Sir John A. Macdonald to its readership. The summary of the national commemorative event, prepared by the Canadian Press, ran under the headline: “L’unité nationale fut l’espoir et le voeu de sir John-A. Macdonald. Le très hon. M. King et autres hautes personnalités politiques rendent un émouvant hommage à l’homme d’État mort il y a 50 ans.” The self-selected headline focuses on the moving tribute Macdonald’s memory received, an indication of the editorial team’s overall support for the event and the messages expounded. The article is accompanied by a photo of King, Hanson and the foreign dignitaries overlooking Macdonald’s gravesite and the multiple wreaths. Nearly a full broadsheet focused on the event, making it difficult for the readers to miss a reference to the event.

*La Presse* also prepared a lengthy editorial which recognized the importance of this tribute for Macdonald. He was acknowledged as “l’une des figures de notre histoire politique, comme l’un des bienfaiteurs insignes de notre Dominion.” It also argued that Canadians werehonouring themselves through the commemoration of Macdonald and the other “patriots” who work diligently to create favourable economic conditions for the benefit of the Dominion and the welfare of its citizens. *La Presse* also noted that Macdonald

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149 *La Presse*, June 2, 1941, 11.
had provided Canada with the ability to withstand challenges, by ensuring that its political foundation was solidly built.

Il voulut ... préparer [le nouveau pays] à toutes les éventualités en le plaçant sur des bases solides. L'expérience a prouvé qu'il avait agi sagement. Les épreuves et les coups n'ont pas manqué au Canada. Mentionnons seulement la guerre de 1914-18, celle qui fait rage aujourd'hui et la dernière crise économique. Pourtant notre pays n'a pas bronché et ne broche pas. L'édifice est bien construit.153

Despite the multiple linguistic tensions in Canada since the nascent beginnings of Confederation, La Presse argues that Canada had been able to overcome the conflicts. Canadians take inspiration, the editorial argued, from the examples offered by the Macdonalds, Cartiers, Galts and Langevins of this world. It suggested: “La formule politique qu’ils avaient adoptée est toujours celle qui convient. En y adhérant nous servirons les meilleurs intérêts du Dominion et les causes vitales que nous nous sommes engagés à défendre.”154 As such, the editorial reminded political leaders and citizens of the need for conciliation, picking up on one of the key themes from the speeches of King and Lapointe.

La Presse also ventured a suggestion as to how Macdonald could become a conciliator of races in Canada. Others have mentioned that the partnership between Macdonald and Cartier had helped Macdonald understand the realities of French-Canada. La Presse offered a new suggestion:

Sir John vécut quelque cinq ans à Montréal au début de sa carrière parlementaire. Il est permis de croire que la connaissance directe qu’il put acquérir pendant ce séjour de nos hommes publics et de notre population l’engagea à travailler avec plus d’ardeur encore à l’œuvre de la Confédération. Très clairvoyant, doué d’un rare sens pratique, il avait sans doute aperçu du premier coup que le développement et la prospérité du Canada étaient

153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
As such, it was Macdonald’s time in Montreal, the economic heart of French-Canada, which allowed him to have a different perspective on French-English relations in Canada in comparison to other English-Canadian political leaders. Macdonald’s approach to conciliating the races within Canada remained the best political formula to follow. The editorial pushes for more discussion and compromises in decision-making to ensure continued national unity.

V. Montreal Gazette

The Montreal Gazette and the Montreal Star were no different from their French-language counterparts within the city in the lateness with which the newspapers referenced the upcoming commemorative event marking the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald. Nevertheless, both newspapers provided important coverage on the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death and the commemorative event in Kingston. Both newspapers provided positive and enthusiastic coverage, with headlines like “Statesmen Unite in Tributes to Father of Confederation” and “Tribute Paid to Macdonald.” The source of information for both papers was Canadian Press articles, providing limited content for a Montreal English-language readership.

One of the two newspapers did publish an editorial providing some insights as to the representations of Macdonald being advanced specifically for Montreal’s Anglophone community. An editorial appeared in the Montreal Gazette on June 7, 1941, the day the

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155 Ibid.
156 The first article on the forthcoming anniversary and ceremony in the Montreal Star was published on May 31, 1941. See: Montreal Star, May 31, 1941, 5. Two more articles were published on this event: See: Montreal Star, June 7, 1941, 11; Montreal Star, June 9, 1941, 4. The first article on this upcoming event was published on June 7, 1941. See: Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1941, 1941, 6.
157 Montreal Star, June 9, 1941, 4.
158 Montreal Gazette, June 9, 1941, 1.
national commemorative event was taking place in Kingston. The editorial reflected on the familiarity of Macdonald with the current generation of Canadians. It noted: “The name of John A. Macdonald, after half a century, is still familiar on Canadians’ lips as household words. It tells as much to them as Canada owes to him, and that is a great deal.” As such, Macdonald’s public memory had survived the test of time, with his relevance to Canadians extending from generation to generation, without expounding on how this was achieved. Later in the editorial, there is a categorization of Macdonald’s history as being “practically that of the modern and virile nation he helped to build up.” As such, Macdonald’s quintessential role in Confederation and his leadership of the country for nearly two decades as prime minister seems to be the reason.

Beyond commemorating Macdonald in the editorial, the newspaper does use the public image of Macdonald to advance a few additional ideas. The first idea is the need for new leadership. It suggested: “Canada needs now, as it did in Sir John Macdonald’s day, leaders with imagination, leaders with a genius akin to his for managing men and for governing the country by the art of a statesmanship that is less mindful of the success of party and more concerned for the welfare of the present and coming generations and the continuing success of the country.” The second idea focused on the need to better understand Quebec and in particular the French-Canadian population. The editorial makes clear that Macdonald “captured Quebec, though he learned but little of the French language.” As such, the acquisition of the French language in and of itself will remain insufficient to understand the aspirations of French-Canadians. “His amazing humanity

159 Ibid., June 7, 1941, 6.
160 Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1941, 6.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
endeared him to the rank and file of the people to an extraordinary degree, and through
what may … he did much to unite the two root races of the Dominion.”

Taken together, both ideas would go a long way in addressing the growing tensions
between French- and English Canadians relating to Canada’s overseas military actions, the
Montreal Gazette argued. “With such a model to copy, our present national and provincial
leaders, feeling the transcending power of Sir John Macdonald’s example, may, with greater
confidence, hope more readily to evolve solution of the immediate war problems and the
continuing national problems for the good of the Canadian people as a whole.” The
anniversary of Sir John A. Macdonald’s death was not only an opportunity to commemorate
him. It also offered an opportunity for those speaking of his legacy to use him as a model of
conciliation, leadership and humanity that Canada needed to highlight to ensure that other
nations learn from him as well.

VI. Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph

In addition to the Canadian Press article with a locally selected headline, the Quebec
Chronicle-Telegraph provides a reflection of the event from a provincial capital several hundred
kilometres from Kingston about how the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir John A.
Macdonald had been “virtually unnotice and certainly unobserved” in most parts of the
country. The first point made by the editorial was the absence of sufficient
commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald. It argued: “Yet apart from (the Kingston and
Rivière-du-Loup ceremonies) and from a few biographical or reminiscent articles in the
newspapers, the anniversary went unmarked so far as we are aware, among other places, in

163 Ibid.
164 Ibid.
165 Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph, June 9, 1941, 4.
166 A Historic Sites and Monuments Board plaque commemorating Macdonald’s summer home in St. Patrice
had been approved in 1937. It had not yet been unveiled. The request was made and approved to unveil the
plaque during the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death. It was a small gathering. See: Le Soleil, June 9, 1941,
4; Minutes of the HSMBC, May 22, 1937, 18.
Quebec City and in Charlottetown, those two cradles of Confederation.”\textsuperscript{167} The Prime Minister was recognized as the driving force behind the Kingston event, “whose admirable quality … is that very sense most of historic values, which he possesses in a much larger degree than most of his fellow-countrymen.”\textsuperscript{168} As such, the editorial implies that the absence of King within the federal government could have resulted in this event not taking place.

Beyond decrying the lack of events to mark the anniversary, the editorial also lamented Canadians’ lack of interest in their own history. This was the second point of the editorial. It suggested to its readers that “Canadians… remain a young people with the task of building the nation largely uncompleted.”\textsuperscript{169} The editorial worried about what kind of memory future generations of Canadians would have of Macdonald. It argued that the “lapse of time” since his death was still short, and “five men who sat in the House of Commons with Canada’s first Prime Minister still survive.”\textsuperscript{170} It pondered the question of what would happen in the future. Despite the push for more interest and awareness of its past, it did not ask Canadians to go as far as Americans in the perceived hero worship of that nation’s leading political actors:

One would not expect nor would one wish to see Canadians pay homage to the memories of their great men in precisely the same way that Americans do with theirs. We could find it in our heart to wish, notwithstanding, that Canadians were sufficiently demonstrative to give to the anniversaries of men such as Macdonald and Laurier a comparable national status to that which the anniversaries of Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson and others enjoy in the neighbouring country.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{167} Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph, June 9, 1941, 4.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
While not suggesting a similar commemoration of some of Canada’s leading political actors, the editorial did wish for a greater recognition among Canadians of its past to guide its future. As such, the focus on the importance of history emerging from this *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph* editorial differed from efforts in the *Montreal Gazette*, *La Presse*, and *La Patrie* to position Macdonald as the model for other English-Canadians to emulate in their relations with French-Canada.

VII. Conclusion

The announcement by Prime Minister King of the forthcoming Macdonald commemoration, announced on May 16, 1941, captured limited media interest. In contrast, the level of coverage of the actual event was both considerable and universally positive. Beyond the publication of Canadian Press articles, many newspapers published editorials on the meaning of Sir John A. Macdonald. Most articles and editorials focused on elements of Macdonald as a symbol of national unity, the key theme underlining the entire event. With the exception of the *Toronto Telegram* which aimed to retain Macdonald as a Conservative icon, the other newspapers found a different way of supporting Macdonald’s political legacy. As such, King must have been delighted that the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald became a bipartisan platform to stress greater national unity as he had intended.

5. Conclusion

During the Second World War, and in particular in June 1941, Canadians found themselves with a unifying symbol for national unity. This symbol was personified through the public memory of Canada’s first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. For the first time since his death in 1891, Macdonald was a universally acclaimed national figure, heralded by senior members of the Liberal and Conservatives parties. Their complimentary representations of Macdonald, offered by Canada’s then political leaders, were accepted
without criticism or analysis by almost all surveyed media outlets. As such, the readership of these newspapers found positive reviews of Macdonald’s contributions to Canada. In some cases, Macdonald’s political legacy was translated into how the lessons from his career could be applied to Canadians during the Second World War.

Of course, the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald was an invented tradition, not a spontaneous gathering. Five weeks prior to this milestone anniversary, there seems to have been limited or no public discussion. The driving force behind the event was then Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. An ardent student of history, King had realized that the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald could serve to bolster national unity through a better understanding of Canada’s main linguistic groups. King’s one-time interest in commemorating Macdonald resulted from the specific circumstances of the Second World War, which sparked increasing tensions among French- and English-Canadians. He attempted to dominate the planning of the event to ensure himself a national stage on which to argue in support of national unity. Through the planning process, King ensured the participation of Ernest Lapointe as one of only four speakers. As such, King recognized that Lapointe’s speech, speaking to English-Canadians in the language of Shakespeare and French-Canadians in the language of Molière, would most likely be favourably received in both English- and French-language newspapers.

The announcement of the forthcoming commemorative event did not spark significant interest within the surveyed newspapers. In fact, only the *Kingston Whig-Standard* was eager to promote the event, which provided national visibility to the city’s most illustrious former resident. Only two other newspapers issued editorials prior to the event: *Le Droit* positioned Macdonald as a defender of French-language minority rights; the *Toronto Telegram* redefined Macdonald as the chieftain of the Conservative Party, rather than an
apolitical figure. The media coverage resulting from the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death was extensive and universally favourable. If King and Lapointe had set objectives for the media coverage, they would have surely been surpassed. The *Kingston Whig-Standard* quoted Lapointe’s speech in rebuking Thomas Ashmore Kidd for his negative portrayal of French-Canadian participation in the Second World War. The perceived lessons learned from Macdonald’s political career continued to be applied shortly after the event. As such, on June 7, 1941, Macdonald became a symbol of national unity.
Chapter Six: The Macdonald of the 1960s

They build Canada primarily out of their concern to settle the problems …
By securing the present in 1867, Sir John and his colleagues laid
the foundations for the Canada of their futures; the Canada of our today.1

Lester B. Pearson

In the 1960s, Canadians were (re)introduced to Sir John A. Macdonald during a
series of state-sponsored commemorative events leading up to Canada’s centennial
celebrations. Not since 1941 – the commemoration of the fiftieth of his death – had
Macdonald been the focus of a national political event. On that occasion, Macdonald had
been portrayed as an apparent hegemonic figure elevated above other historical figures by
Liberal and Conservative political leaders. The political leaders seem to expound on
Macdonald’s role in building consensus between English- and French-Canadians. In this
way, Macdonald was positioned as a symbol of national unity by Canada’s political leaders. It
seems this portrayal was accepted without criticism by Canada’s print media, and they
perpetuated this representation of Macdonald in both languages within Ontario and Quebec.
Political leaders felt that positioning Macdonald as a symbol of unity between English- and
French-Canadians and a symbol of consensus-building would resonate with Canadians at a
time of growing national disunity over the war. As a result of the commemoration of the
fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada’s political class was able
to persuade subordinate classes of the importance of national unity.2

Despite a seemingly hegemonic portrayal of Macdonald among Canada’s opinion-
makers in June 1941, historian Ian McKay reminds us that “hegemony” is “never a once-

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1 LAC, Lester B. Pearson papers, MG 26 N9, Vol. 42, File “January 1967”, Transcript of the Prime Minister’s
Remarks at Queen’s University Ceremony, January 11, 1967, 8.
and-for-all achievement of some (unverifiable) majority consensus.” In 1941, the leadership of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, the participation of Ernest Lapointe as a leading political force from Quebec and the growing tensions around national unity provided the favourable conditions under which this majority consensus around Sir John A. Macdonald was reached. By the 1960s, these conditions had changed considerably. Canada had new political leadership at the federal and provincial levels. There were also many new socio-political developments, like the rise of a sovereignty movement in Quebec and the increasing integration of Canada in the United States sphere of influence. This chapter examines the extent to which Macdonald remained a hegemonic figure within this new historical context.

During the 1960s, Prime Ministers John Diefenbaker and Lester Pearson approved four events to commemorate Canada’s first Prime Minister. They were: the unveiling of a historic designation plaque of Earnscliffe, Macdonald’s longstanding Ottawa residence; the purchase of Bellevue House in Kingston; the commemoration of the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birth in 1965; and the commemoration of Macdonald’s birthday in 1967. This chapter analyzes the dominant representations of Macdonald’s political legacy to determine how both Prime Ministers used Sir John’s public memory to advance their respective conceptions of Canada and their individual political agendas. The repetitive commemoration of Macdonald by two different political parties in a relatively short period of time seems to suggest that the interpretation of Macdonald was based on a majority consensus among French- and English-Canadians, similar to the one reached in 1941.

However, Macdonald became a reluctantly commemorated national figure. The emergence of a voice for greater independence for Quebec during the 1960s made many

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federal politicians uncertain about repetitive and expansive national commemoration of the man previously labelled as *the* Father of Confederation. The lack of active promotion of his public memory at the national level and in Quebec marginalized Macdonald into an Ontario-centric symbol, and specifically a symbol of Kingston, Ontario. In fact, the majority consensus position enjoyed by Macdonald in 1941 dwindled. This conclusion can be reached by exploring the process used to approve these four events, the type of speeches delivered by Diefenbaker and Pearson, as well as the media coverage of these events from multiple French- and English-language newspapers, both in Ontario and Quebec.

1. Commemoration of Macdonald in the 1960s

During the 1960s, there were four Macdonald-specific events that received the support of Prime Minister Diefenbaker (1957-1963) and Prime Minister Pearson (1963-1968). These events included: the unveiling of a historic designation plaque on the 70th anniversary of Macdonald’s death (June 6, 1961) at Earnscliffe, Macdonald’s longstanding residence on the banks of the Ottawa River; the purchase of Bellevue House, an 18-month rental property associated with Macdonald in Kingston, as a national “shrine” to his memory;\(^4\) the commemoration of the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birth on January 11, 1965; and the commemoration of Macdonald’s birthday in 1967, the year of Canada’s centennial. Each of these events will be examined separately to understand who was responsible for pushing each onto the public agenda.

A. Earnscliffe

Following the erection of national historic plaques at three locations associated with Macdonald (his boyhood home in Adolphustown, Ontario in 1927; his summer residence in 4 The term “shrine” was first used by Diefenbaker in 1959 in regards to this property. The National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada used it in subsequent materials. See: Diefenbaker Center Archives (hereafter: DCA), MG 01 VI914.11, Volume 576, Letter from Diefenbaker to Mr. A. J. H. Richardson, Chief, National Historic Sites, dated Ottawa, August 17, 1959, 438791.
St. Patrice, Quebec in 1927; and his gravesite in Kingston, Ontario in 1938), the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) came to the conclusion, in 1938, that Macdonald had been appropriately commemorated. Consequently, the Board removed Macdonald’s name from its working list of distinguished Canadians requiring commemoration and did not discuss Sir John in the following two decades. In 1959, however, a letter from Prime Minister Diefenbaker to the Board triggered a renewed discussion among Board members of the commemoration of Macdonald. Diefenbaker’s letter to the Board was in response to a letter from a young Conservative about the pending sale of a one-time Macdonald rental property in Kingston, Bellevue House. This young Conservative observed that the nation has “a Laurier House; let us now have a MacDonald (sic) House.” Diefenbaker’s letter sought the Board’s approval for the purchase of this Macdonald property in order to transform it into “one of Canada’s shrines.”

Diefenbaker’s letter sparked an investigative effort by the HSMBC to compare the relative merit of previous Macdonald residences as a site of national commemoration. The work was led by the Board’s newest member, University of Toronto historian Donald Creighton, appointed by Diefenbaker to the HSMBC in 1958. Creighton was well-versed in

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6 DCA, MG 01 VI914.11, Volume 576, Letter from John Le Claire of Toronto to Diefenbaker, dated Toronto, August 4, 1959, 438786.
7 Ibid., Letter from Diefenbaker to Mr. A. J. H. Richardson, Chief, National Historic Sites, dated Ottawa, August 17, 1959, 438791; Ibid., Letter from A. J. H. Richardson to Diefenbaker, dated Toronto, August 26, 1959, 438783-4. See also: DCA, MG 01 VI914.11, Volume 576, Letter from Diefenbaker to Mr. A. J. H. Richardson, Chief, National Historic Sites, dated Ottawa, August 17, 1959, 438791.
8 Diefenbaker invited Creighton to join the new created Board of Broadcast Governors (now the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CRTC), an offer the scholar declined. However, shortly thereafter, Creighton did accept a position on the HSMBC. See: Peter C. Newman, “John Diefenbaker shows his souvenirs of John A. Macdonald,” Maclean’s, Vol. 72, No. 14, July 4, 1959, 30.
the life of Macdonald having authored a two-volume biography – the first in 1952, the second in 1955. The review of Sir John’s residences suitable as a shrine was Creighton’s second file since joining the Board, the first being the establishment of an authoritative list of the Fathers of Confederation, the required precursor to the Board’s recommendation that the perpetual care of those individuals’ graves be maintained by the state as a public expense.10

Following its investigation of possible residences to commemorate Macdonald, the Board unanimously concluded that Earnscliffe, Sir John’s home on the banks of the Ottawa River for more than a decade, where he took his final breath, was the most appropriate selection. The Board subsequently rejected the suggestion of Bellevue House and passed the following resolutions in June 1960:

That in the opinion of the Board, Earnscliffe is of such national historic importance that it should be considered a national shrine to Canada’s first Prime Minister; (t)hat the Board recommend that the Minister investigate ways and means to acquire it for this purpose; (t)hat the Board further recommend that this be undertaken as a Centennial project of first priority.11

The recommendation that Earnscliffe be purchased by the federal government and turned into a shrine to Canada’s first Prime Minister came thus directly from the HSMBC. The Board’s wording underscores the importance it attributed to the Earnscliffe property. It recommended that the federal government purchase the property, rather than simply

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9 Donald Creighton, John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952); Donald Creighton, John A. Macdonald: the Old Chieftain (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955). The impact of this biography was best illustrated by Maclean’s magazine, which noted that Creighton was “The man who revived Sir John A.” See: Maclean’s, March 6, 1965, 2-3. By the time of the publication of the Macdonald biography, Creighton was already a senior scholar, who received an honorary doctorate from McGill University in 1958 in recognition of his academic accomplishments. See: Minutes of the HSMBC, May 25-29, 1959, 24.
10 Minutes of the HSMBC, May 25-29, 1959, 16-18. At the next meeting, the Board was informed that the Minister responsible for the HSMBC could not support this recommendation. See: Minutes of the HSMBC, May 23-26, 1961, 21. This issue would resurface during the Centenary of Confederation celebrations, with plaques being added in the early 1970s.
designate it as a national historic site. In addition, the Board framed the purchase of this property as an important initiative that could be completed as part of the upcoming centenary of Confederation celebrations, for which discussions were already taking place.¹²

The historic significance of Earnsliffe had not gone unnoticed by the Diefenbaker government. For example, Diefenbaker had previously lamented the Conservative Party’s lack of action in securing the residence from Macdonald’s widow when she sold the property in 1900.¹³ Since 1930, the property belonged to the British Government as the residence of its High Commissioner to Canada.¹⁴ Walter Dinsdale, the minister responsible for the HSMBC, approached the British High Commissioner, Sir Saville Garner, for permission to affix two HSMBC tablets – one in English, one in French – to this British property. Garner agreed, and Dinsdale proceeded to plan an event to unveil the plaques. Creighton prepared the text of the plaque, which described Macdonald as the “chief architect of Canada” before providing details about the history of the building.¹⁵ On June 6, 1961, the 70th anniversary of Macdonald’s death, Prime Minister Diefenbaker and Leader of the Opposition, Lester B. Pearson, gathered on the lawn of Earnsliffe alongside 500 fellow citizens for the national historic designation of Macdonald’s former residence.¹⁶ This was the only event relating to the commemoration of Macdonald during Diefenbaker’s tenure as Prime Minister. The only minor controversy to emerge during the planning of the event was a dispute over which of

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¹³ In 1959, the Prime Minister had written to a party supporter decrying the sale of the property in 1900: “(t)he Conservative Party was most neglectful when it allowed Sir John A. Macdonald’s residence to become a private house.” See: DCA, MG 01 VI914.11, Volume 576, Letter from Diefenbaker to John Le Claire of Toronto, dated Toronto, August 20, 1959, 438785. A history of Earnsliffe was published in The Globe and Mail, June 6, 1961, 7.

¹⁴ The Globe and Mail, June 6, 1961, 7. This date of purchase is also referenced on the plaque.


¹⁶ Ottawa Citizen, June 7, 1961, 3.
Macdonald’s denominations – the Presbyterian of his youth, or the Anglican of his later years – should be included in the event. This controversy was the focus of exactly two out of the four stories in one of the two local papers – the Ottawa Citizen about Earnscliffe’s designation as a national historic site. Nevertheless, the designation event was covered in a few Canadian Press articles reproduced in most major newspapers (exception: the Montreal Star).

The government’s decision to erect plaques on the building ignored the key part of the Board’s recommendation, the acquisition of Earnscliffe as a memorial to Macdonald. Less than two weeks before the plaque unveiling ceremony, the Board, at its annual meeting, decided to remind the federal government of its multiple recommendations regarding the Earnscliffe property. The Board passed a second recommendation regarding Earnscliffe, which underlined the “need for urgent and emphatic action to acquire it for the purpose proposed.” For many years thereafter, both the Diefenbaker and Pearson governments attempted to purchase the Earnscliffe property. In exchange for Earnscliffe, the federal government offered the British government 24 Sussex Drive or another property in Rockcliffe Park even though the British property was both smaller than 24 Sussex and more difficult to protect because of its proximity to a projected new interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River. Pearson concluded that there was “no alternative residence or location

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17 Ibid., June 1, 1961, 7; Ibid., June 3, 1961, 4; Hamilton Spectator, June 2, 1961, 15. In the end, the Anglican faith was present at the event.
18 The absence of a story about Earnscliffe in the Montreal Star is not reflective of the paper’s reporting of subsequent Macdonald commemorations.
19 Minutes of the HSMBC, May 23-26, 1961, 15.
that the British Government would find suitable.”  

He eventually brought these prolonged discussions to an end and wrote to the British High Commissioner to “remove doubt that Earnsliffee can remain indefinitely in the title of the British Government.”  

For these reasons, the HSMBC recommendation that Canada purchase Earnsliffee never materialized, and the property remains the private residence of the British High Commissioner to this date.

B. Bellevue House

In November 1963, the idea of a purchase of Bellevue House as a site to commemorate Macdonald received renewed interest in political circles when the property was put up for sale for the second time in four years.  

Behind this campaign were the Kingston Historical Society, a local Kingston resident, Arthur Phelps, and a well known Royal Military College historian, Dr. George F. G. Stanley.  

Phelps wrote to Prime Minister Pearson and Conservative Party Leader Diefenbaker and underlined that:

It could make a Museum Memorial to Sir John A. Macdonald and his times midway between Montreal and Toronto, - a Centennial gesture of a truly national stature. You two men could do it. You could do it for Canada.

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21 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter: LAC), RG 2, Vol. 6274, File 23-65-1, Confidential Memorandum to the Cabinet, from the Prime Minister, dated December 18, 1964, Sir John A. Macdonald: 150th Anniversary.
23 Bellevue House was purchased by Dr. James MacDonald Richardson Beveridge following his appointment as Dean of Medicine at Queen’s University in 1959. He sold the home following his appointment as President of Acadia University in 1963. See: Kingston Whig-Standard, January 9, 1965, 4.
24 Arthur Phelps resided at 58 Centre Street in Kingston, a few houses away from Bellevue House, which is located at 35 Centre Street. The author found no documentation that could establish why Phelps lobbied for the federal purchase of Bellevue House. Cf: LAC, Lester B. Pearson papers, MG 26 N3, Volume 305, File 918.3: Macdonald Residences, Letter from Arthur Phelps to Diefenbaker and Pearson, dated Kingston, November 1, 1963. Stanley is better known as the designer of the Canadian flag in 1965 and as the former lieutenant-governor of New Brunswick. See Stanley's obituary “Historian designed Maple Leaf flag” in Ottawa Citizen, September 14, 2002, 5. Finally, as far as the Kingston Historical Society (KHS) is concerned, the author could not find any letters in the papers of Prime Ministers Pearson or Diefenbaker or KHS fonds within Queen’s University Archives about their representation. However, the then president of the KHS claims that the purchase was the result of their representations. See: Queen’s University Archives, Reginald Dixon papers, Box 1, File 11, Letter from L. J. Flynn, President, KHS, to Reginald Dixon, dated April 12, 1966.
Phelps thus appealed to both men as national leaders of political parties, and not simply party leaders. He expounded the geographical convenience in commemorating Macdonald in Kingston and linked the projected purchase to the large-scale Centennial plans that were already underway all across Canada.

For his part, Stanley was probably aware of the preference of his fellow historians on the HSMBC for preserving Earnscliffe instead of Bellevue House. After all, Bellevue House lacked the organic and authentic Macdonald connection which Earnscliffe enjoyed. However, in a letter to Pearson, Stanley attempted to counter the “Ottawa-centricity” of Earnscliffe by emphasizing Macdonald’s local connection: “He was Macdonald of Kingston. And even today, I believe that people, when they think of associating Macdonald with a particular community, associate him with Kingston.”26 This position articulated by a man born in Alberta and with a national reputation as a historian carried more importance than the same sentiment coming from the Kingston Historical Society or a lifelong Kingstonian. In addition, Stanley referenced other sites commemorating Prime Ministers, referring specifically to Laurier’s birthplace in St. Lin, his residence in Ottawa (Laurier House) and Mackenzie King’s Kingsmere residence in Gatineau Park. “It would be a shame if nothing were done to preserve some house associated with the man who, more than any other, made the Canadian union,”27 wrote Stanley. Like Phelps, Stanley used the upcoming celebrations of the Centennial as a convenient vehicle for immediate action and as a potential source of funding: “With the anniversary of Confederation only a few years away, surely there would

be merit in establishing some kind of a major focus of interest as far as Macdonald is concerned.”

These exchanges of letters were not printed in newspapers, and no public campaign had been yet undertaken. Nevertheless, within a week, Stanley received a letter from Pearson confirming the federal government’s intention to purchase Bellevue House. The government’s decision conflicted with the advice from its own HSMBC. Pearson’s decision was not immediately communicated to Diefenbaker, who raised the forthcoming possibility of acquiring Bellevue House “as a national memorial, where Canadians could do honour to one of the great architects of confederation” in the House of Commons on December 9, 1963. In the Prime Minister’s absence, Minister of Justice Lionel Chevrier thought the request was reasonable and should be given consideration by the government. It is unclear whether or not Chevrier had been informed of this government decision or whether he simply responded to Diefenbaker’s question in a vague manner, in anticipation of a more formal announcement of this decision.

In fact it was only two weeks later that the federal government announced its decision to purchase Bellevue House in a press release dated December 23, 1963:

A programme for restoring the house will be undertaken, and it is my hope that this work can be completed within two years. This house will be refurbished not only in the style of Sir John A.’s time but with some of the actual furniture used by him. … The house will represent a proud historical trust of the Canadian people. As such, it is my sincere hope that it will contribute in real terms in keeping alive the memory of a very great

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29 Ibid., Letter from Pearson to Stanley, dated Ottawa November 25, 1963. In response to another exchange, this time a telegram dated December 17, 1963, Pearson promised that an announcement would be made soon. In fact, the announcement was made the following week. See: Ibid., Letter from Pearson to Arthur L. Phelps, dated Ottawa December 17, 1963.
31 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Roger Duhamel, 1963), December 9, 1963, 5590.
32 Ibid.
Canadian. … Purchase was made on advice of the HSMBC that “Bellevue” was considered of material historic importance to Canada.33

An analysis of the context of this statement provides a few interesting observations. First of all, the timing of the announcement two days before Christmas when Canadians were focused on the upcoming holidays suggests that the government aimed to limit the public awareness of this gesture. Second, the focus of the statement is on establishing an historical trust in Macdonald’s honour, rather than defining Sir John in a specific way. Third, the news release mentioned the total cost for this project was $65,000. However, the related submission to the Secretary of the Treasury Board requested a funding envelope of $125,000, nearly double the publicly announced cost. This discrepancy suggests the government wanted to either downplay the significance of their investment in an effort to reduce media attention or avoid negative publicity about the considerable cost of Bellevue House.34 An amount between $65,000 and $125,000 (the equivalent of $500,000 to $900,000 in 2010 dollars) represented a respectable investment in the nation’s cultural heritage.35 Fourth, the stated approval of HSMBC is factually incorrect. While some government officials may have consulted some Board members, there is no indication of such exchanges in the Board’s minutes. At the next meeting after the announcement, in October 1964, the Board acknowledged the government’s acquisition of this “temporary residence.” However, it did not designate the property as a site of national historic importance, which it granted only 31 years later, in 1995.36 The reference to Bellevue House as a ‘temporary residence’ of

34 Ibid., Letter from Ernest Côté, Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources to Secretary of the Treasury Board, Department of Finance, dated Ottawa, December 24, 1963.
36 Minutes of the HSMBC, October 27-29, 1964, 14-15. The minutes from this 1995 meeting state: “Although the Board supported the acquisition of Bellevue House, it never did make a specific recommendation relating to the national significance of the building and the Program requested that it do so. The Board recommended
Macdonald and its withholding of a national historic designation status for the property are two indications of the Board’s disagreement with the government’s actions.37

The timing of the announcement led to only a few media reports on the purchase the next day. The action suggests that Pearson was comfortable doing something for Macdonald, but doing too much might be divisive. Furthermore, the decision was not re-announced in early January around the time of Macdonald’s birthday. But it was not only ordinary Canadians who were not truly informed of this decision; MPs seem to have missed the announcement as well. A good indication is a motion from Conservative MP Almonte Alkenbrack from Prince Edward-Lennox (near Kingston), tabled on March 18, 1964, which urged the government to purchase Bellevue House. This motion caused considerable chaos in the House of Commons, since it was “asking that something be done which has already been done.”38 Most surprisingly, however, the Speaker of the House – a Liberal MP himself – acknowledged the lack of “definite proof” of the government’s actions and allowed MPs a half-day to debate the motion.

The Pearson government’s quick decision to accede to these private requests to commemorate Macdonald does not necessarily demonstrate an interest on the part of the Liberal Party in associating itself with Macdonald and his political legacy. This might explain why the press release of the Pearson government was comparatively “low key” and why it downplayed the related actual cost of the acquisition. Furthermore, the government likely attempted to satisfy the interest of Kingstonians without drawing a lot of national attention

that: Bellevue House, in Kingston, is of national historic and architectural significance both because it is an outstanding Canadian example of Italianate architecture in the picturesque manner and because of its associations with Sir John A. Macdonald, a Father of Confederation and Canada’s first Prime Minister.” See: Minutes of the HSMBMC, July 6-7, 1995, 15-16.
37 The government’s decisions not to seek or not accept the recommendations of its own historical advisory board remained a source of frustration between both parties. For other examples, see: C.J. Taylor, Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada’s National Historic Parks and Sites (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 189.
38 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Roger Duhamel, 1963), March 18, 1964, 1224-1225.
to its commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald. More specifically, the announcement may have served to raise the profile of Edgar J. Benson, Pearson’s local Liberal Party MP. This decision might help secure for him a favourable opinion among local Conservatives, and thus help retain his seat for the Liberal Party. Benson had entered the House of Commons for the first time in 1962 and was appointed by Pearson in 1964 to serve as his Minister of National Revenue and later as the President of the Treasury Board.  

The opening of Bellevue House three years later on May 24, 1967, was a low-key community affair (see figure 6.1). 300 participants were in attendance, and only the Kingston

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Figure 6.1. Photograph of the official opening of Bellevue House on May 24, 1967
Photo Credit: Queen’s University Archives

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Whig-Standard reported on the event. Benson was the senior representative of the federal government participating in the event, accompanied by the Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister responsible for the HSMBC, Toronto MP Stanley Haidasz. Although former Prime Minister Diefenbaker was scheduled to attend, a farm protest on Parliament Hill retained his attention. The only time Bellevue House received a good deal of media coverage that year was during the Centennial visit to Canada of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, which included a 10-minute Bellevue House visit as part of a 45-minute stop in Kingston.

C. Sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s Birthday (1965)

The interest among some members of Canada’s political class in commemorating the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birth on January 11, 1965, became the third event that focused political attention on Canada’s first Prime Minister during the 1960s. One of the leading promoters of this anniversary was Toronto resident Alexander Malcolmson. Throughout 1964, his efforts included promoting the anniversary by forwarding circular letters to editors of daily and weekly newspapers as well as members of the House of Commons and the Senate. He also engaged in correspondence with the then British Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home about securing Earnscliffe as a Macdonald museum. Independently of Malcolmson’s activities, some media outlets were noting the absence of commemoration of Macdonald’s birthday. For example, the Toronto Star published an

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41 Ibid. The official program for the event, including Diefenbaker’s name, is available at: Queen’s University Archives, Reginald Richard Dixon papers, File 11, Programme for Official Opening of Bellevue House, Agenda for the opening ceremony.
43 Efforts to locate more information on this individual, including searches on biographical datasets and Toronto-area obituaries through the online search engines for the Toronto Star and The Globe and Mail, proved unsuccessful.
45 Globe and Mail, March 6, 1964, 8.
editorial on January 11th, 1964 – the 149th anniversary of Macdonald’s birth – to mark this “regrettably forgotten birthday:” “we can start making plans now to celebrate [his 150th anniversary] fittingly, so as to give a new lease of life on the memory of our greatest statesman. In this time of growing disunion, we have need of his memory and his example.”

In 1964, the federal government was asked several times to describe its commemorative intent regarding this anniversary. In the House of Commons, some MPs requested information regarding the government’s intentions to commemorate the anniversary of Macdonald’s birth and offered their own suggestions. For example New Democratic Party (NDP) MP Barry Mather from New Westminster, British Columbia, requested a written response from the government regarding its consideration of declaring January 11, 1965, a national holiday. PEI Conservative MP (and later Senator) Heath Macquarrie suggested the issuing of a commemorative stamp to honour the anniversary. Other MPs, including NDP House Leader Stanley Knowles, wrote to the Prime Minister noting that “I assume plans (for the sesquicentennial) have been made to make special note of it. I should simply like to say that, for my part, it seems a good idea that this should be done.” Beyond federal MPs, the Premier of Ontario, Conservative John Robarts, also expressed his interest in cooperating with the federal government, as “Sir John A.

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46 *Toronto Star*, January 11, 1964, 6.
Macdonald was a native of this province.50 The federal government was thus receiving indications from many corners that Sir John’s anniversary was quite worthy of the federal involvement.

The increasing number of suggestions to commemorate the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birthday required a response from the federal government. Secretary of State Maurice Lamontagne, who previously served as one of Pearson’s political advisors on Quebec, told the Prime Minister that if he were “sufficiently interested in this,” he could set up a small interdepartmental committee of officials to examine possibilities.51 Two days later, Pearson agreed to the suggestion.52 During this period, Lamontagne was a principal voice in shaping Pearson’s views about Quebec. As the minister responsible for the Centennial Celebrations, Lamontagne sought to unite English- and French-Canadians. A speech delivered at McGill University in January 1964 made his point:

we will not have much to celebrate (during the Centennial) if we fail in our attempt to rebuild our unity on a more concrete and realistic basis. We began in 1864 to develop the compromise which we accepted in 1867. It was not too early to start to work together in 1964, if we want to celebrate a new alliance in 1967.53

Lamontagne anticipated the challenges among French-Canadians, especially among the small nationalist elite within Quebec, of using Macdonald as a national unifying figure. Even the

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53 LAC, Maurice Lamontagne Fonds, MG 32, B32, Vol. 1, File 5 – Unité nationale (discours), Address by the Honourable Maurice Lamontagne, President of the Privy Council to the Students of McGill University, Montreal, January 22, 1964, 11. Note: Lamontagne was appointed as Secretary of State on February 23, 1964.
Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism is silent about Macdonald throughout its report.54

Throughout the rest of the year, whenever a question was asked about possible commemorations, government officials noted that consideration was being given to various suggestions.55 However, less than two months before the anniversary, the government had still “not yet received [the committee’s] report or recommendation.”56 Such inaction and indecision suggests that this event was either low on the federal government’s list of priorities or else a file that could cause rift and debate.

One particular MP was particularly frustrated by the apparent lack of action on the part of the special committee. Heath Macquarrie had long been an advocate for more commemorative efforts for Macdonald on the part of the federal government. For example, each year between 1964 and 1979, Macquarrie introduced a private member’s bill to create a Sir John A. Macdonald Day.57 Beyond linking Macdonald to his role in Confederation and the forthcoming centennial celebrations, Macquarrie emphasized the relationship between the commemoration of Macdonald and Canada’s national values:

[A] nation is judged not only by the men it produces but by the men it honours. … Part of our trouble is that we are always so reluctant to enthuse or emote about the things which have made this Canada a good and worthy country. … I would urge (Secretary of State [Maurice] Lamontagne) to keep in mind this need to pay tribute to our great men and honour our national founders. Let him give leadership in this regard. I shall be interested in what

54 Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Ottawa: Queen’s Printers, 1967)
56 Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Roger Duhamel, 1964), November 10, 1964, 9950.
happens on January 11, and I shall expect to see his hand there in celebrations worthy of the man and worthy of our country.\textsuperscript{58}

Macquarrie argued that Canada’s political leaders needed to make a concerted effort to honour those who shaped this country’s destiny. The commemoration of Sir John’s birthday was even more important, he argued, because of the upcoming commemoration of the centennial of Confederation. Despite all his efforts, Macquarrie lamented that only a dinner in Kingston had been organized to honour the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birth, in which the federal government, through its Centennial Committee, played a rather minor role.\textsuperscript{59}

A final decision about the federal government’s commemoration was not taken until one month before the anniversary.\textsuperscript{60} At that point, the federal government had received from its special interdepartmental committee recommendations three options to commemorate Sir John’s anniversary: first, conduct repairs to the portico of the former seat of government before Confederation which now served as Kingston’s City Hall; second, build a new park bearing Macdonald’s name; or third, build a “sanctuary.”\textsuperscript{61} All three suggestions focused on material development rather than participatory events. The federal government’s final choice favoured a participation in a shared-cost project with the Government of Ontario and the City of Kingston: a $100,000 contribution to reconstruct

\textsuperscript{58} Canada, \textit{Debates from the House of Commons} (Ottawa: Roger Duhamel, 1964), November 24, 1964, 10436-10437.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.} Journalists recognized that most of the organization of the dinner had been undertaken by the Ontario government. See: \textit{Hamilton Spectator}, January 12, 1965, 6.
\textsuperscript{60} The Prime Minister’s Office had yet to discuss this matter with Minister Edgar Benson (the local Liberal MP) to enquire about his preference for marking Sir John’s anniversary. LAC, Lester B. Pearson papers, MG 26 N3, Volume 305, File 918.3: John A. Macdonald – 150\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary, Memorandum from James Allan Coutts to Gordon Robertson, dated December 16, 1964.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, Memorandum from Jules Pelletier to Ms. C. Carrière, secretary to the Secretary of State, dated December 11, 1964; \textit{Ibid.}, Memorandum from Jules Pelletier to Lester Pearson, dated December 14, 1964; \textit{Ibid.}, Memorandum from James Allan Coutts to Gordon Robertson, dated December 16, 1964.
the portico of Kingston’s historic City Hall to honour Macdonald.62 The need for a decision seemed inspired by Pearson accepting an invitation by the Kingston Historical Society to participate in this jointly organized dinner in Kingston.63

While the decision on how best to commemorate Macdonald was delayed, the organizers were surprised to learn on January 5th that Pearson would not be attending the event, despite his previous commitment. As evident in a rather acid headline, Pearson’s decision irked the local Kingston newspaper - “Pearson makes choice: Sun not Father. Sir John’s Tribute Bypassed.”64 Thus, Pearson headed south for a holiday during this anniversary. Through his absence, the event lost its national and bipartisan nature. Among the 500 guests, Conservatives, including Diefenbaker, former Conservative leader Earl Rowe in his capacity of Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, and Premier Robarts, another “professed admirer” of Macdonald, lent their support to ensure a “glittering tribute” to Canada’s first Prime Minister.65 Quebec Premier Jean Lesage declined the invitation but sent Bona Arsenault, one of his cabinet ministers, as a replacement. Pearson’s decision to support the reconstruction of the portico was overshadowed by the multiple commemorative initiatives related to Macdonald, which the Robarts government undertook. They included: renaming Highway 401 as the Macdonald-Cartier Freeway; naming the new bridge linking Ottawa and Hull as the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge; the establishment of Macdonald Fellowships for Ontario.

62 LAC, Lester B. Pearson papers, MG 26 N9, Vol. 32, File “January 1965”. Press release from the Prime Minister’s Office, dated January 10, 1965. The press release justified the link to Macdonald’s sesquicentennial by pointing out that Macdonald participated in the cornerstone-laying ceremony as a city alderman in 1843 and that Macdonald’s body was laid in state in this Kingston building following his death.


64 Kingston Whig-Standard, January 6, 1965, 1. The Hamilton Spectator, the Globe and Mail and the Montreal Gazette made similar remarks about Pearson’s absence. See: Hamilton Spectator, January 6, 1965, 5; The Globe and Mail, January 6, 1965, 5; and Montreal Gazette, January 7, 1965, 1. Only the Ottawa Citizen defended the Prime Minister’s absence, noting this was his “only opportunity to take a holiday because of the pressures of business in Ottawa.” See: Ottawa Citizen, January 6, 1965, 5. Prime Minister Pearson designated as his official representative Minister George McIlraith, President of the Privy Council.

65 Ottawa Citizen, January 8, 1965, 11.
students; the establishment of a professorial exchange program for Queen’s faculty; and the offering of Creighton’s biography of Macdonald to the best two students in each high school in the province.66 The efforts to link Macdonald to Cartier went beyond pleasing Quebec Premier Jean Lesage’s representative at the event, Bona Arsenault. It truly reflected Robarts’ efforts to build political bridges between Ontario and Quebec in an effort to strengthen national unity.67

In this third example, the federal government did agree to participate in the commemoration of Sir John through a financial grant to the rebuilding of a portico in honour of Macdonald. The federal government’s contribution to the actual event took over a year to decide, and resulted in a one-time investment which did not involve citizens learning more about Sir John A. Macdonald. While Ontario did everything possible to raise the profile of Macdonald, the federal and Quebec governments were largely absent at the event. By this point, Macdonald was increasingly becoming a symbol of unity for Ontarians, but was no longer considered by the federal government as a suitable symbol for Canadians as a whole.

D. Centenary Year Commemoration of Macdonald’s Birthday (1967)

After Pearson assumed the office of Prime Minister in 1963, he expounded his vision of the upcoming Centennial of Confederation celebrations.68 He encouraged the

67 Robarts initiated the ‘Confederation for Tomorrow’ Conference, which sought new constitutional arrangements as a means from some English-speaking political leaders to respond to Quebec’s nationalism. For a biography of Robarts, see: Allan Kerr McDougall, John P. Robarts: His Life and Government (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1986); Steve Paikin, Public Triumph, Personal Tragedy: The Biography of John Robarts (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2006).
Commission responsible for the celebrations to develop a plan “not for Ottawa, not for the provinces, but for every town, village and home in Canada.” The local approach was ideal to get every community, regardless of its demographic and linguistic composition, excited about celebrating Canada’s achievements. One of the perhaps unintended consequences of “thinking locally” about the centennial celebrations was a diminished national visibility for Canada’s Fathers of Confederation in general, or, more specifically, for the man labelled as the architect of Confederation, Sir John A. Macdonald.

Following the commemoration of the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birth in 1965, the federal government made only limited efforts to ensure a repeated commemoration of this anniversary. The main discussion about whether to create a commemorative event for Sir John A. Macdonald during the centenary of Confederation was conducted in the House of Commons. In 1964, 1965, and 1966, Heath Macquarrie introduced close to identical private member’s bills calling for the creation of Sir John A. Macdonald Day which, however, were never discussed beyond first reading. In December 1966, during Question Period, the Prime Minister was asked about the observance of Sir John A. Macdonald’s birthday. When Pearson avoided answering the question a first time, Diefenbaker asked him the question again. However, Diefenbaker introduced partisanship in his question by noting that “party considerations disappear after one dies; that is one of the characteristics of our country.” Diefenbaker thus suggested that Pearson would be responding affirmatively if the historic figure was a Liberal Party member. Pearson’s response was straightforward: “No one wants to abolish Sir John A. Macdonald, who stands pre-eminent in our history as one of the

71 In response to Nova Scotia Conservative MP Michael Forrestall’s question, Pearson suggested that the question was of “such importance” it should be “put on the order paper.” See: Canada, Hansard from the House of Commons Canada, Debates from the House of Commons (Ottawa: Roger Duhamel, 1966), December 15, 1966, 11155. See also: Ibid., December 21, 1966, 11463.
Fathers of Confederation. I think the suggestion (Diefenbaker) has made, and which has been under consideration for some time now, is a very good one indeed.” Pearson indicated his openness to the suggestion, but without indicating when a decision would be reached. However, Pearson’s use of the word “abolish” in response to an unscripted verbal exchange in the House of Commons may imply that he wished not to alienate English-Canadians by ignoring Macdonald completely.

Appearing on the popular CBC series *Front-Page Challenge* during the first episode of the centennial year, veteran journalist Gordon Sinclair asked Prime Minister Pearson about a possible new national holiday for the people of Canada to honour Sir John A. Macdonald. Sinclair had previously spoken out in support of a national holiday on January 11, trumpeting the merits of this new national holiday during a Toronto radio broadcast on January 11, 1960. Pearson’s response was cautious: “Well, as we say in Ottawa, I’ll give very careful and sympathetic consideration to it. I think it’s a good idea, though.” Beyond those watching the CBC program, only the readers of the *Montreal Star* were made aware of the Prime Minister’s comments about a Macdonald commemoration.

Pearson’s *Front-Page Challenge* comments about commemorating Macdonald became a topic of conversation at the next meeting of the federal cabinet. On January 4, 1967, the cabinet passed an Order-in-Council proclaiming January 11, 1967 as the observance of the birthday of Sir John A. Macdonald. Only a bill passed in Parliament such as one of Macquarrie’s private member’s bills creating a holiday in Macdonald’s honour, would have allowed the observance of a statutory holiday. In announcing this decision, the Prime

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72 Ibid., December 21, 1966, 11463.
Minister’s Office noted the “appropriate(ness) in this year of observance that we commemorate the birthday of Sir John A. Macdonald who has a special place in our history not only as one of the Fathers of Confederation but as the first Prime Minister of Canada.” The press release referred to Macdonald only as a Father of Confederation and as Canada’s first Prime Minister. Furthermore, it repeatedly underlined that the observance of Macdonald’s birthday was limited to the centennial year. Canadians were thus invited to commemorate Sir John A. Macdonald as part of their regular activities that day, and only that year.

The government’s decision met with some disappointment. On the Conservative side, two key politicians complained that how the federal government’s proclamation did not meet their expectations. On the one hand, Diefenbaker described the proclamation as a “half-hearted gesture on the part of the government.” On the other hand, Ontario Education Minister Bill Davis expressed his disappointment that January 11th did not become a statutory holiday by remarking: “Frankly, it falls far below our expectations.”

Figure 6.2. Photograph of former Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker, Ontario Premier John Robarts after placing a wreath on the grave of Sir John A. Macdonald in Kingston’s Cataraqui Cemetery, on his birthday (January 11) the year of Canada’s Centennial.

Photo credit: Queen’s University Archives

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Members of Canada’s fourth estate, especially in Ontario, expressed similar disappointment. The focus of many of these articles was the government’s decision not to adopt a new statutory holiday, a decision which would have given Canadians a new paid holiday. For example, Ottawa’s French-language newspaper Le Droit led its coverage of the proclamation with the front-page headline: “Pas de fête chômée pour l’anniversaire de Sir John A. Macdonald.” Similar headlines appeared in other newspapers: “It’s a holiday for a few” wrote the Kingston Whig-Standard. “Few getting vacation on Sir John A. Day” noted the Ottawa Citizen. Another angle for headlines and storylines was the one-time nature of the proclamation which underlined the limited importance of the event. Finally, the last media angle was the lateness of the decision, making it difficult for groups interested in organizing an event to plan adequately. In response to the federal government proclamation, the provinces of Ontario and Prince Edward Island gave its students a half-day holiday while the province of Nova Scotia decreed a full-day holiday. Altogether, the media coverage of the proclamation projected a lack of enthusiasm for a calendar day dedicated to the commemoration of Macdonald in the absence of an annual event or a statutory holiday.

The lack of federal government planning to commemorate this event led to only a handful of events, mainly in Ontario. In Kingston, the self-proclaimed host of “a big party for a big man,” the Macdonald-specific events included a gravesite visit, a speech to 300 civic leaders (and later to the Queen’s University community) by Prime Minister Pearson, a gala dinner, and a youth dance. Despite an event focusing on youth, most of the attendees were

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80 Le Droit, January 6, 1967, 1.
82 Ottawa Citizen, January 9, 1967, 12.
85 Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph, January 9, 1967, 2. The Kingston Whig-Standard described this half-day holiday as being “only half-hearted.” See: Kingston Whig-Standard, January 10, 1967, 1.
quite clear: “John A. Macdonald didn’t count. A dance is a dance and that’s it to Kingston teenagers.”87 In Ottawa, roughly 1,000 citizens gathered in the city’s recently vacated Union Station, renamed Confederation Centre in honour of the Centennial, to listen to speeches by former Prime Minister Diefenbaker and other federal politicians on Macdonald’s contributions to Canada.88 In Hamilton, an event was organized at the base of the Macdonald memorial in Gore Park, with an acknowledgment that the city was the first to honour Sir John with a statue.89 There were also fanfare and speeches at Queen’s Park in Toronto at an event hosted by Ontario Premier John Robarts.90 Macdonald’s public memory in Ontario remained strongest.

The organization of commemorative events in these four Ontario communities was contrasted with an almost complete absence of such events in Quebec. Within the province, Macdonald’s birthday would have been forgotten had not his statue been the target of an act of vandalism associated with the “100 ans d’injustice” campaign.91 The only event to take place in Montreal was the anonymous laying of a wreath at the base of Macdonald’s memorial in Montreal’s Dominion Park.92 The commemorative dichotomy between Ontario and Quebec was noted in Quebec’s newspapers, but ignored in Ontario newspapers. For example, in La Presse’s coverage of these Ontario events, two headlines were used to describe each province’s approach to this anniversary. “Quebec boude la fête de John A. Macdonald”

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87 Ibid., January 12, 1967, 14.
88 The Ottawa Citizen estimated the crowd at 1,200, while Le Droit quoted the lesser number quoted above. See: Ottawa Citizen, January 12, 1967, 19; Le Droit, January 12, 1967, 4.
89 Hamilton Spectator, January 12, 1967, 7.
noted *La Presse* but added that, in Ontario, “ce sera tambours et trompettes.”

93 Similarly, the Montreal *Gazette* offered a similar pan-Canadian perspective, concluding that “Sir John A. Macdonald’s birthday created remarkably little stir all across the country … ceremonies in Kingston and a few centres staged half-holidays for school-children, but that was about all.”

94 Overall, French-language newspapers showed a certain pride in the absence of events in Quebec regarding Macdonald while English-language newspapers decried the lack of events in their province.

**E. Conclusion**

The events commemorating Sir John A. Macdonald during the 1960s were the result of the federal government reacting to external requests. In one instance, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recommended the purchase of a specific Macdonald residence as a historic site. In other instances, requests to commemorate Macdonald by private citizens, the Kingston Historical Society or federal MPs were received as part of efforts to mark milestone anniversaries in the life of Sir John or of Canada. In each instance, the federal government’s role was less than requested. The Diefenbaker government, despite its leader’s widely professed admiration for Macdonald, did not organize large-scale events to generate more interest in the life of Canada’s first Prime Minister. Its action was limited to one event, in which a historic designation plaque was erected on Macdonald’s Ottawa residence, Earnscliffe. The federal government did not seek the means to secure the property in order to transform it into a Macdonald shrine, as recommended twice by its own historic commission. For its part, the Pearson government dithered in defining its role in commemorating Macdonald, leaving to others the role of defining his public memory. In one example, it proceeded with expediency in securing a Macdonald property, but did not do

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93 *La Presse*, January 11, 1967, 32.
so in a high-, but rather a low-profile manner. In all three examples, the Pearson government’s involvement focused on financial contributions rather than participatory events, and its tardiness in announcing plans offered little time for others to organize complementary activities.

A national figure whose public memory was still deemed relevant to the socio-political context of the time would normally benefit from larger, better coordinated and higher profile events to mark milestone anniversaries. The absence of related plans leads the author to the conclusion that Macdonald could no longer be a national hegemonic figure in the 1960s. Neither Diefenbaker nor Pearson clearly articulated their thinking behind their preferences for smaller-scale events focused mainly in Kingston, where Macdonald retained a high public visibility due to his lifelong attachment to the community. However, both leaders were confronted with new political issues, including the rise of separatism in Quebec, which resulted in a reinterpretation of Canada’s constitutional evolution and in the establishment of a royal commission on bilingualism and biculturalism. Pearson and Diefenbaker’s participation in these events commemorating Sir John nevertheless provided an opportunity for both Prime Ministers to highlight those elements of Macdonald’s political career which they felt were most relevant to the current context. They also provided insights as to their conceptions of Canada.

2. Conceptions of Canada: Political Use of Macdonald’s Public Memory

During their respective stints as Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, Diefenbaker and Pearson participated in several events to commemorate Canada’s first Prime Minister. Diefenbaker attended the national historic designation of Earnscliffe in 1961, the gala dinner honouring Sir John A. Macdonald on the sesquicentennial of his birth in 1965, and the Ottawa-based event honouring Macdonald’s birthday in 1967. For his part,
Pearson helped frame Macdonald’s public memory through the announcement of Bellevue House as a historic site, the designation of a non-statutory holiday marking Macdonald’s birthday and his speeches in Kingston on Macdonald’s birthday that centennial year. Diefenbaker devoted limited energy to this commemoration of Macdonald during his actual tenure as Prime Minister, although he eagerly pushed for more commemorative events during his time in opposition. Pearson’s limited enthusiasm for commemorating Canada’s first Prime Minister still provided him with opportunities to define Macdonald for his own benefit. Apart from the increased visibility of Sir John A. Macdonald among Canadians, both Prime Ministers strove to shape Macdonald’s public memory for their own political and personal advantage.

A. Diefenbaker

In 1961, the *Globe and Mail* described Diefenbaker’s interest in Macdonald as “a man who reveres Sir John as probably no other Canadian does.” While it is difficult to measure Diefenbaker’s level of reverence in Macdonald in comparison to others, Diefenbaker’s public and private statements provide insights as to why Macdonald was significant to him. On the one hand, his public thoughts will be examined through pertinent references to Macdonald in Diefenbaker’s three-volume autobiography, released between 1975 and 1977. In addition, one also notes Diefenbaker’s spoken or written remarks about Macdonald during the aforementioned commemorative events, contexts which elicit reflections on Macdonald’s person and legacy. Documents in his personal papers also provide important insights into Diefenbaker’s private thinking about Macdonald.

In Diefenbaker’s autobiography, there are roughly 25 separate references to Macdonald’s personal life and political career, which demonstrated a considerable interest.

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95 *Globe and Mail*, June 6, 1961, 7.
and familiarity with Sir John. The first major theme that emerges is the common personal and political heritage. He traced both of their families’ migration to Canada as a result of the Sutherland clearances of 1811. More specifically, Diefenbaker claimed that his conservatism was rooted in the tradition of Macdonald, Benjamin Disraeli and Edmund Burke. Furthermore, he compared his electoral success of 1958 in Quebec and throughout Canada with Macdonald’s electoral triumphs, illustrating that both men understood the needs and aspirations of Quebeckers. Moreover, he felt his parliamentary majority in 1958 would allow him to further Macdonald’s nation-building efforts. Finally, Diefenbaker took pride in the fact that, while Macdonald had been the first Canadian sworn into Her Majesty’s Imperial Privy Council, he would be the last to receive that honour.

The second central theme in Diefenbaker’s memoirs is that of his profound and life-long admiration of Sir John. Already in elementary school, Diefenbaker chose Macdonald as the one historical figure to whom he attached particular importance. As a first-term MP, he attended the 1941 Kingston event marking the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death. He commented on the need to “turn” his Quebec political lieutenant, Léon Balcer, “into a modern George-Etienne Cartier,” which seems to indicate that he

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99 Ibid., 85.

100 Ibid., 195.


102 Kingston Whig-Standard, June 7, 1941, 1.
regarded himself as a modern-day Macdonald. In addition, Diefenbaker became an avid collector of all things Macdonald. “The statuette and the other Macdonald relics … present only the physical expression of his veneration for the country’s first Prime Minister,” noted Maclean’s journalist Peter C. Newman. These Macdonald artefacts are now housed at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre and represent a significant portion of the Diefenbaker archives.

The third major theme in Diefenbaker’s autobiography relates to similar political positions held by both men. From his early political years, Diefenbaker believed that Macdonald had imbued Canadians with the two core principles: devotion to monarch and British Empire; struggle to reduce the influence of the United States on Canada. Moreover, key policies of Macdonald helped Diefenbaker frame some of his policies, most significantly his 1956 Northern Development Strategy, which he portrayed as the twentieth-century equivalent to Macdonald’s National Policy. He claimed that this development policy would help Canada’s economy grow while reducing the influence of American companies in Canada. Last but not least, Diefenbaker wanted to ensure Canada remained as a single, united country: Macdonald had achieved Confederation; Diefenbaker wanted to solidify Confederation through his “one Canada, one Nation” policy.

Diefenbaker’s interest in Macdonald remained strong and present throughout his life. In fact, in 1959, Diefenbaker argued that “Macdonald is as vital today as if he were

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105 For a complete list of Macdonald letters and artefacts held by Diefenbaker, see: DCA, MG 01 Series XI, XII and XV.


108 Ibid., 37.
There are multiple reasons for this. The first is that within Macdonald’s personal history were elements that touched the core of Diefenbaker’s identity. The second is that Diefenbaker’s political vision of Canada explicitly built on Macdonald’s. For these reasons, Diefenbaker felt a very great personal and political affinity to Sir John. Indeed, his reverence developed into an appreciation of Macdonald’s life and work which allowed him to push his own political vision forward. Finally, references to Macdonald helped Diefenbaker to elevate himself among Canada’s pantheon of political leaders by equating Sir John’s political accomplishments and vision with his own. As such, Diefenbaker’s private writings about Macdonald reflected both his personal interest in Canada’s first Prime Minister and his belief that Sir John’s life could still teach important lessons to Canadians in the 1960s.

Many of these same themes were found in Diefenbaker’s public commentary. In public, Prime Minister Diefenbaker claimed a shared heritage with Sir John A. Macdonald. For example, a common ancestral reference repeated frequently by Diefenbaker related to their families’ migration to Canada following the Sutherland clearances of 1811. “If it hadn’t been for the Duchess of Sutherland, you would not be celebrating Sir John A.’s Birthday here tonight and I would not be here to say, as one who descended from the same group, I am happy to have the opportunity of honouring him.” Beyond linking his family’s ancestral tree to Macdonald, Diefenbaker liked to make other personal comparisons. He felt


\[\text{110 The Sutherland Clearances of 1811 led to the forcible removal of agriculturally-orientated tenants at the subsistence level to enable more profitable activities such as helping, sheep farming, establishing coal-pits, salt pans, brick and tile works as well as herring fisheries. For a recent account of the Highland Clearances, see: Eric Richards, Debating the Highland Clearances (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).}\]

his own political track record had many similarities to Macdonald’s, with electoral majorities both in Quebec and in Canada and a period in opposition after his tenure as Prime Minister. For example, in 1965, Diefenbaker observed after his electoral defeat by Pearson in April 1963 that “Sir John A. had been in opposition for a number of years. He was hopeful too!” Diefenbaker thus underlined his confidence that he would return as Prime Minister in a subsequent election, just like Macdonald had done in 1878.

Like many before him, Diefenbaker eloquently praised Sir John’s personal virtues. His human sympathy, vitality, patience and broad thinking were all “qualities most notable in his character and vital in his achievement.” Because of these qualities, Diefenbaker claimed, Macdonald was “unbowed in defeat or adversity and resolute when political disaster seemed to have engulfed him”. Like Diefenbaker, Sir John was also helped by his close contact with fellow citizens: “He trusted the people for he was a man of the people.” These qualities allowed Macdonald to have the vision he needed for Canada’s future: “He possessed in unchallenged measure statesmanship marked by vision. … he believed in the equality of the basic races.” Finally, Diefenbaker argued that “no words can do justice to the contribution made by Macdonald.” Because of his qualities and vision, Diefenbaker concludes, “Today[,] almost 75 years since his death[,] he looms larger than he did even in his day and generation.”

Beyond these statements of personal suitability and professional accomplishments, Diefenbaker differed from a few other political actors by using the public memory of Sir

114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 2.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid., 3.
John A. Macdonald to advance his own conceptions of Canada. One of them was a modern spin on the traditional definition of Macdonald as a British subject, a representation of Sir John used in every single commemorative event since his death. By the 1960s, the use of the term ‘British subject’ within a Canadian context had become rare following the adoption of the 1947 *Canadian Citizenship Act*. From that point forward, British subjects domiciled in Canada were officially Canadian citizens. The introduction of Canadian citizenship was one of several devolutionist measures supported by the Mackenzie King government, following the 1926 Balfour Declaration and the 1931 Statute of Westminster, which formalized greater Canadian autonomy from the United Kingdom. For his part, Diefenbaker aimed for an economic and political rapprochement between Canada and the United Kingdom. Increasing imports from Britain was one way to bring this about.\(^{119}\)

The other was helping develop the British Commonwealth of Nations. On two separate occasions, Diefenbaker represented Macdonald as the first statesman of the British Empire to give utterance to the concept of the British Commonwealth of Nations. “It was Macdonald who first thought of the Commonwealth,” claimed Diefenbaker.\(^{120}\) He supported his claim with references to the common defence of Britain by her former colonies and the creation of diplomatic missions between these colonies and the mother country. On the former, Diefenbaker read a phrase he attributed to Macdonald: “The day will come when the

\(^{119}\) Canada was increasingly linked to the American economy. However, in 1957, Diefenbaker attempted to divert 15% of imports from the United States with British imports. See: Denis Smith, *Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker* (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 1995), 252; and Bruce W. Muirhead, *The Development of Postwar Canadian Trade Policy: The Failure of the Anglo-European Option* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 163-177.

countries that today are colonies overseas, will voluntarily go to the aid of the mother country when she is attacked.” Diefenbaker expanded on this theme:

Macdonald inaugurated the system of High Commissioners to the United Kingdom. The Statute of Westminster which was passed 40 years after his death embodies many of the ideas for which he stood in his day. … It is significant too that he referred to Queen Victoria as “Queen of Canada.”

Through such comments, Diefenbaker underscored the relationship he wished to foster at that time with the United Kingdom and other (previous) British colonies. He affirmed Macdonald’s incredible foresight in anticipating that Canada would come to the aid of Britain during an international conflict, such as the First World War and the Second World War.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister was always uncertain about Canada’s evolving relationship with the United States. His relationships with United States’ presidents, especially John F. Kennedy, were difficult. As such, he used Macdonald’s language to address his own concerns about the United States:

(Macdonald) was fearful of the influence of the United States on Canadian policies. He was fearful that the influence of the great neighbor to the south would overwhelm Canada’s destiny. He also made it clear that French Canada should realize one fact: that only in a Canadian nation would be preserved their traditions, their language, their religion.

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121 Ibid. On another occasion, he said the same thing using these words: “He foresaw that Canada and other nations within the British family, though free to do otherwise, would make common cause with Great Britain voluntarily against her enemies.” See: DCA, MG 01 XIB, File 398.1, Vol. 95, Sir John A. Macdonald In Perspective: Tribute of an Admisher, by the Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker, Leader of the Opposition, dated January 11, 1965, 2.


Evoking such sentiments, Diefenbaker was attempting to reach Canadians, underlining that only they should define Canada’s destiny. In particular, he addressed French-Canadians directly, asserting that the federal government would continue to protect their rights within a united Canada. Diefenbaker made this last claim in a particularly strong fashion in 1965: “If Canada’s independence was ended by annexation[,] there would be a denial of those … basic rights of the two races.” As such, Diefenbaker used Macdonald’s fears of an American annexation in an attempt to relate directly to French-Canadians in Quebec who were increasingly thinking of their own political destiny.

Diefenbaker’s historical and political affinities notwithstanding, some Conservatives expressed disappointment that more was not done to strengthen the public memory of Canada’s first Prime Minister during the tenure of the Conservative government. For example, Macquarrie observed in 1978 that “(o)ne notes with some sadness that John Diefenbaker who loved to equate himself with Sir John A. did nothing during his Prime Ministership to foster recognition of or respect for our first Prime Minister.” However, Macquarrie seems to ignore the political context of the late 1950s and the 1960s. The results of the 1958 federal general election provided Diefenbaker and the Progressive Conservative Party with the largest majority in Canadian history: 208 Conservative MPs versus 49 Liberal MPs and 8 Co-operative Commonwealth Federation MPs. In Quebec, Diefenbaker led that campaign with the slogan “Let’s Not Isolate Quebec. We’re going to win, so you might as well join us.” Quebec voters seemed to have heard and understood the message,

127 Robert Marleau & Camille Montpetit, La procédure et les usages de la Chambre des communes (Ottawa: House of Commons, 1999), 1031.
electing 50 Progressive Conservative MPs out of the province’s 75 ridings. The nationalism of his large Quebec caucus was increasingly at odds with Diefenbaker’s own political support for Great Britain and the British Crown.\textsuperscript{129} Two Quebec institutions – \textit{Le Devoir}, founded in 1910 and the \textit{Action nationale}, founded in 1917 – were shaping a new nationalist discourse in Quebec as early as 1945. This neo-nationalist movement later resulted in the Quiet Revolution at the provincial level and a reinterpretation of Canada’s constitutional basis at the federal level.\textsuperscript{130} A conciliatory approach to Quebec was difficult to reconcile with Diefenbaker’s \textit{One Canada} policy, which argued “there could not be one law for eight (sic) provinces and a different law for Quebec.”\textsuperscript{131} In practice, Diefenbaker’s vision of Canada allowed no special concessions for Quebec. Not surprisingly, in the following general election in 1962, Diefenbaker’s support in Quebec had largely dissipated. His party won only 14 out of the possible 75 seats. The rise of the \textit{Ralliement créditiste} under the leadership of Réal Caouette and the steadily climbing support for the Liberal Party had also helped to diminish Diefenbaker’s hold in Quebec.\textsuperscript{132}

The rise of a voice for independence in Quebec made it difficult for many national political leaders, including Diefenbaker, to elicit stronger support in that province by emphasizing Macdonald as a national icon, a symbol of unity and admiration for all Canadians. Although Diefenbaker nominally appointed Léon Balcer, MP for Trois-Rivières and the former president of the Progressive Conservative Party, as his own Quebec lieutenant, the men did not have the close relationship which existed between Macdonald

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Ibid.}, 234.
\textsuperscript{132} In the 1958 election, the Progressive Conservatives won 50 Quebec seats, the Liberal Party only 25. However, in 1962, the Progressives Conservatives elected a mere 14 MPs, the Liberals 35 MPs, and the Social Credits 26 MPs.
and Cartier or Mackenzie King and Lapointe. In fact, Diefenbaker did not trust Balcer because he had supported a rival leadership candidate at the party’s leadership convention.\textsuperscript{133} The difficult relationship between Diefenbaker and Balcer reached its peak in 1964 when Conservative MPs from Quebec refused to support Diefenbaker’s preference for a flag that reflected the country’s British heritage as well as its French heritage.\textsuperscript{134} Diefenbaker’s stance on the flag is symbolic of his demonstrated lack of flexibility and open-mindedness to the nature and the political forces at work within Quebec in general and to the views of his large Quebec caucus in particular.

Macdonald may have been a symbolic icon to represent Diefenbaker’s vision of Canada. However, with the increasing nationalist push in Quebec and among his own Quebec MPs, Diefenbaker recognized that an expansive commemoration of Macdonald would be unpopular within his own caucus and in Quebec. This explains in part why only one Macdonald commemorative event was held during Diefenbaker’s tenure as Prime Minister. During the 1965 federal general election, Diefenbaker’s Conservatives were elected in 94 ridings, of which only 7 were in Quebec.\textsuperscript{135} With a smaller Quebec caucus, Diefenbaker, now Leader of the Opposition, perhaps felt freer to push for more commemoration of Macdonald.

\textbf{B. Pearson}

Lester B. Pearson’s political thinking about Macdonald’s contributions to Canada is difficult to ascertain in light of the very limited number of relevant documents. A trained

\textsuperscript{133} Donald Creighton, \textit{The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957} (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 288.
\textsuperscript{134} Balcer resigned from the party in April 1965 to sit as an independent and retired from federal politics a few months later. See: Léon Balcer, \textit{Léon Balcer raconte} (Sillery, QC: Les editions du Pélican/Septentrion, 1988), 74; 103; Marcel Gingras, \textit{Diefenbaker et le Canada français} (Vanier, ON: L’Interligne, 1997), 38-39; Denis Smith, \textit{Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker} (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 1995), 209.
historian familiar with Creighton’s two-volume biography of Macdonald, Pearson was knowledgeable of Macdonald’s political career and his contributions to Canada’s national development.136 Despite a shared experience – legal training, politician, party leader and Prime Minister – there is only one reference to Macdonald in his three-volume autobiography in the chapter entitled ‘National Unity’, where Pearson corrects a popular misinterpretation that he was a believer in Canada as two nations. Pearson outlines his thinking on French-Canada using a quote from Macdonald: “Treat them as a nation and they will act as a free people do—generously; call them a faction and they became factious.”137 In this connection, Pearson’s use of the term “nation” had a particular sense - French-Canadians as a separate people. In light of the growing nationalist sentiment in Quebec prior to and during his years as Prime Minister, Pearson deemed this approach “particularly valuable.”138 This Macdonald-inspired vision was subsequently enshrined in the federal government’s terms of reference for the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which was to recommend “what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races.”139 Pearson’s related messages to Quebeckers and his push for greater inclusion of French-Canadians within the federal government undoubtedly helped to increase his party’s support among Quebec voters. As a result, the Liberal Party captured 81% of the federal seats in

136 Pearson praised Creighton for his Macdonald biography, which he wrote “represents an outstanding contribution to our knowledge of Macdonald and of our national development.” He also commented that it has “set a high standard in Canadian historical writing.” See: LAC, Lester B. Pearson papers, MG 26 N1, Vol. 3, File Donald G. Creighton, Letter from Pearson to Creighton, dated Ottawa, February 6, 1953.
139 Order-in-Council 1963-1106, which established the Royal Commission, is reprinted in Appendix 1 of the Commission’s first report. See: Canada, Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1963), 173-174.
Quebec in the 1965 federal general election - an increase of 16 percentage points compared to 1963.140

Pearson’s quote from Macdonald picks up a central theme which emerged two decades earlier at the 1941 commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death. Speeches delivered by Prime Minister King, Minister Ernest Lapointe and Senator Arthur Meighen emphasized the theme of Macdonald as a conciliator of English- and French-Canadians, which both English- and French-language newspapers approvingly repeated. However, Pearson did not use this theme in public during his time as Prime Minister, since he did not, for example, make a speech during the unveiling of the HSMBC plaques at Earnscliffe. He ensured a limited public awareness of the government’s purchase of Bellevue House by announcing it on December 23, 1963, and by focusing on its restoration and refurbishment programs. He missed the 150th anniversary celebrations of Macdonald’s birth despite strong cooperation with Ontario Premier Robarts’ government in May 1964.141 In fact, the federal government’s collaboration with Ontario continued its non-participatory approach to the commemoration of Macdonald – it contributed to the reconstruction of the portico of Kingston’s historic City Hall. If the Pearson government had intended to promote the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald, such events could have been handled more strategically.

The negative press Pearson received for missing the sesquicentennial of Sir John’s birth in 1965 may have helped to encourage his participation in the celebration of Macdonald’s birthday in 1967. The federal government’s decision to commemorate this

anniversary on January 11, 1967 was based on the Prime Minister’s recommendation that it was “desirable” to do so. However, this late cabinet decision did not leave much time for proper planning. Pearson quickly accepted two invitations to speak in Kingston on January 11, 1967. The first event was a civic luncheon in Kingston at 12:45 p.m., which was followed by a ceremony at Queen’s University beginning at 3 p.m. On both occasions, Pearson delivered separate remarks in honour of Sir John A. Macdonald.

How did Pearson frame the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald, and which elements did he choose to emphasize? Pearson expounded on several positive themes. He demonstrated great respect for Macdonald, noting his greatness, wisdom, flexibility, tolerance, and determination. He also called him the “pre-eminent architect of Canada’s confederation.” In addition, Pearson praised Sir John’s service to the public, often to the detriment of his personal ambitions. Moreover, he underlined that, in death, Macdonald was sanctified, and that history had justified Laurier’s eulogistic tribute in the House of Commons. In making his remarks, Pearson noted Macdonald’s “local connection”, stating that it was “appropriate to commemorate him with events centered in this city.” He suggested the familiarity of Kingstonians with Macdonald made it unnecessary to further harp on Sir John’s contributions to Canada, a strategy allowing him to say less. Such comments confirm that both speeches were penned for the Kingston audience first and foremost, rather than addressing a national audience via a community event.

At the same time, Pearson used several colourful examples to talk about a few perceived negative traits of Macdonald’s character. He noted that, in his first campaign for a

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federal seat, some young friends of Sir John held up their hands against him because they were afraid he would win by acclamation.\textsuperscript{145} The statement implies a lack of trust in Macdonald among some closest friends. It could also be a sign of strong support, so that the election would appear to be more democratic, since acclamation appears more artificial, and some false dissenting votes might give a vote more credence. Regarding Sir John’s decision-making capacity, Pearson acknowledged that Macdonald had a gift for being able to seize opportunities. However, he commented that Macdonald’s “delayed decision-making” earned him the nickname of “Old Tomorrow.” Finally, Pearson highlighted Macdonald’s strong partisanship by referencing exaggerated claims made during and after the 1878 federal general election when Macdonald sought a return to office. He shared the story from an unnamed Toronto citizen who noted that Macdonald “assured (him) that his Conservative cow gave three quarts of milk more a day after the election than before, while a good Conservative lady friend solemnly affirmed that her hen laid more eggs, larger eggs, and more to the dozen ever since the new administration came in.”\textsuperscript{146} Overall, Pearson’s examples depended on humour to make selective criticisms of Macdonald more acceptable to the Kingston audience. Nevertheless, they provided further ammunition for critics of Macdonald and his legacy.

The above summary leaves the impression that Pearson spent considerable time on Macdonald during his two speeches in Kingston. However, this conclusion is somewhat misleading, because while he talked a good deal about Macdonald, he also focused on the

\textsuperscript{145} Donald Creighton’s biography of Macdonald does not describe this election in the same manner. Electors demonstrated their voting intentions through a physical act. In the 1844 election, electors “marched to the hustings” rather than raised their hand. See: Donald Creighton, John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 96-99.

Fathers of Confederation as a group. For example, in one section, Pearson equated the importance of Macdonald with that of two others – George Brown and Sir George-Étienne Cartier – arguing that their co-operation and support was needed to achieve “the great work [of Confederation] … putting the interests of a cause above any other interest, personal or partisan.” By raising the importance of Brown and Cartier to that of Macdonald, Pearson simultaneously downplayed Macdonald’s significance for Canadian history, while attributing to him a conciliatory nature. In another section, Pearson lamented Canadians’ lack of knowledge of their history and founding fathers:

I don’t think we in this country are as aware as we should be, or honour as we should, the men who made, built and developed our country. If they had been Generals in red uniforms, on horseback with flashing swords, charging a tyrant foe and driving him out of the country, perhaps we would be more conscious of their contribution to our country and to national development and our national freedom. But these men were politicians and statesmen – men in frock coats – quietly sitting around a table. … Not fighting anybody in doing it, but working together, finishing that work and then taking it across the sea to the mother country.

The absence of a war for Canada’s independence, Pearson suggested, should not obscure the fact that these were great men who built our country. From this perspective, Pearson’s key message was that Canada was the result of the Fathers of Confederation working together to shape a common destiny.

Interwoven within the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald and the alleged lack of knowledge of Canadian history was Pearson’s appeal to national unity through compromise. This was not a new theme for the Prime Minister and had emerged in a House


\[148\] Ibid.
of Commons speech in December 1962. In his 1964 *Dominion Day* message eighteen months later, Pearson repeated this theme:

> There is also cause for a balanced concern at the noisy activities of those few who would divide us; who would turn the Canadian dream of nationhood into a nightmare of people and sections in conflict and disunity. … Recognizing them is the first step towards mobilizing our most effective counterforce: informed nationalism, persuaded by facts and reasons that even on material grounds alone, the consequences of any separation in Canada make it unthinkable.149

The increasing ‘noise’ from Quebec started to become one of the hallmarks of Pearson’s tenure as Prime Minister, which is why he took advantage of any opportunity to stress the need for compromise, including the commemoration of Macdonald in events in Ontario.

The references to the Fathers of Confederation during these Macdonald speeches allowed Pearson to bring up his important theme of compromise:

> They build Canada primarily out of their concern to settle the problems and to overcome the difficulties of their own present. … By securing the present in 1867, Sir John and his colleagues laid the foundations for the Canada of their futures; the Canada of our today. … I can only hope that we will show that same dedication, that same determination, to meet the challenges of our time.150

Pearson reminded his audience that the achievement of Confederation was made possible through compromise and the understanding of different points of view. Drawing a historical parallel, he observed that compromise and understanding different points of view would also be required, if the other provincial governments and the federal government were to successfully address the issues related to Quebec.

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In the same breath, Pearson spoke to Quebeckers. Like previous politicians, he argued that the language, culture, and traditions of Quebec would be better preserved within a united Canada. Moreover, he claimed that provinces could develop in their own way within Confederation:

[The Fathers] believed that, as Canada did go forward, there was room inside Confederation for the provinces to develop in their own way inside the Constitution and ... that French-speaking Canadians could feel Canadian inside Confederation. Sir John A. Macdonald was a staunch believer in that kind of approach to the minority inside our country. “Treat them as a nation, he said, and they will act as free men do act when they are treated that way” – I’m paraphrasing what he said – “but treat them as a faction and they will react as a faction.”

In this context, Pearson resorted to the Macdonald quote he would later use in his own autobiography. Quebeckers were free to develop in their own way within Confederation. He implored them to explore their options before undertaking more drastic and potentially irreversible measures. The focus on Macdonald and the Fathers of Confederation allowed him to stress the continuing need for political compromise, in the 1960s as much as in the 1867. Last but not least, Pearson recognized that the changing political views in Quebec during the 1960s made it impossible for Macdonald to be used as an overall symbol to foster national unity.

C) Conclusion

Diefenbaker used the public memory of Macdonald to advance his own conceptions of Canada, including Canada remaining within the British sphere and strongly independent from the United States. Despite his own personal and political attachment to Macdonald, he opted not to initiate more commemorative events, fearing to increase a major fault line
between himself and his large Quebec caucus. Pearson, for one, was far less attached to Macdonald. But he, too, struggled with how to commemorate Canada’s first Prime Minister in light of the changing political landscape in Quebec. On those few occasions where Pearson did speak about Sir John, his remarks quickly shifted from Macdonald more narrowly to the Fathers of Confederation more broadly. This shift allowed him to use the events to highlight the continuing need of political compromise to make Canada work, a message intended for political leaders, especially the Premiers. On the whole, then, the articulation of a voice for independence in Quebec since the late 1950s influenced the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald by both of these Prime Ministers.

3) The Media’s Personification of Macdonald

Through reports, articles, and editorials, the Canadian print-media offered Canadians the opportunity to read about the four commemorative events described above. They allowed citizens to form their own opinions about the ideas and vision of Macdonald (and Canada), which the nation’s opinion-makers were advancing in their discussions of Sir John. The following section is divided into two parts. The first section analyzes the media coverage from these events in Ontario and Quebec newspapers. The second section examines the new themes relating to Macdonald, which started to emerge in the 1960s.

A) Media coverage

The four events commemorating Canada’s first Prime Minister received considerable attention in the Globe and Mail, more so than in any other newspaper examined in this study. Quite a few Canadian Press articles were featured only in the Globe and Mail. In addition, the Globe published especially commissioned articles on Macdonald, including a history of “Canada’s Lavish Mourning for Sir John A.”, and on Earnscliffe (“Scenes from Happy
These articles were clearly drafted to impress upon the newspaper’s readers the importance of the man. The Globe and Mail also provided a full page collection of excerpts from Macdonald that described his views on multiple issues ranging from national flags to federalism, from Confederation to party unity, and from senate reform to separate schools. These quotes were intended to demonstrate the continued relevance of Macdonald’s thought to modern-day political issues. They were accompanied by laudatory and admiring excerpts of Laurier’s eulogy of Macdonald in the House of Commons a few days after his death, leaving out those sections critical of Sir John.154

Similar to the Globe and Mail, the other Ontario English-language newspapers supported the continuing commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald. Not surprisingly, the Kingston Whig-Standard used the commemoration of Macdonald to raise the community’s own profile. In addition, the Whig-Standard constantly reminded Kingstonians that Macdonald was a “true son of Kingston” and claimed that Kingston was the centre of national attention as a result of these commemorations. The Hamilton Spectator and the Ottawa Citizen provided several favourable articles and editorials for each of the four commemorative events. On the one hand, the Hamilton Spectator’s tone regarding these events is reflected in two editorials. The first editorial deplored that not more was being done to commemorate Macdonald: “(g)iant deserves a (statutory holiday) to himself.”156 The second editorial decried the federal government’s “thumb-sucking reluctance to pay suitable attention to its greatest citizens.”157 On the other hand, the Ottawa Citizen called the tributes were “sweet as wine” and claimed...
that the commemoration of Sir John was taking place “from coast to coast.”158 By providing dozens of articles and editorials during the 1960s, Ontario newspapers stressed for their readers Macdonald’s continued importance to Canada and argued that more should be done to commemorate him.

Ontario’s leading French-language daily newspaper adopted a similar perspective on Macdonald. During the 1941 commemoration of Sir John’s death, Le Droit had portrayed Canada’s first Prime Minister as one of the strongest supporters of minority language groups in Canada, in its efforts to secure English-Canadian support for the respect of the rights and the language of Franco-Ontarians. During the 1960s, the paper’s editorial team resurrected this approach. The paper devoted significant column space to positively featuring each of the four Macdonald events. Le Droit also ran Canadian Press articles with the headlines “On fait l’éloge de Sir John à Kingston” in 1965 and “L’anniversaire de Macdonald célébré avec éclat à Ottawa” in 1967.159 As such, the headlines indicate both the event and the support for the commemoration. Moreover, Le Droit was the only newspaper to feature the following remarks of Quebec cabinet minister and historian Bona Arsenault, Premier Jean Lesage’s representative at the 1965 commemorative event. “Aussi longtemps que l’esprit de Macdonald et Cartier sera conservé, le Québec ne se séparera pas de la Confédération.”160 Le Droit used Arsenault’s quote to continue pushing for the continuing need of political compromises to make Canada work, compromises which would entrench more deeply the rights of Franco-Ontarians.

While all Ontario newspapers, regardless of language, were supportive of the commemoration of Macdonald, Quebec newspapers showed differences based on their

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159 Le Droit, January 12, 1965, 5; Ibid., January 12, 1967, 4
language of publication. Readers of Quebec’s major English-language daily newspapers – the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Montreal Star*, and the *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph* – were presented with an image of Macdonald that closely resembled that appearing in Ontario newspapers. They celebrated Sir John’s memory and complained about the lack of commemorative events to honour his memory. For example, the *Montreal Gazette* argued that the current commemoration of Macdonald was too low key and did not accord Canada’s first Prime Minister the importance he deserved: “This [commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Macdonald’s birth] doesn’t seem very much considering John A.’s role in forming a country as great as ours“, wrote Al Palmer, author of the widely read column *Our Town*, “We think much more should be done.”161 The *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph* and the *Montreal Star* offered their readers full accounts of the four Macdonald events, using articles from the Canadian Press as their main source of information. Their headlines focused on Macdonald as a national icon, which was acceptable to both main national political parties, and both papers regretted the “belated” planning of these events.162 Quebec’s three largest English-language daily newspapers thus felt that Macdonald remained an important historical leader, one that Canadians, especially their Anglophone Quebeckers, should not forget.

Compared to their English-language counterparts, Quebec’s French-language papers provided considerably less coverage of the events. *La Presse*, for example, featured only a single article on the unveiling of the historic designation plaque and elected not to cover at all the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birth and its associated events. The only significant article profiling a commemorative event appeared in 1967, when *La Presse* suggested that

161 *Montreal Gazette*, January 11, 1965, 3. Al Palmer (1913 - 1971) was a well known newspaper columnist and author of *Montreal Confidential. The Low Down on the Big Town* (Montreal 1950). His papers are now at Concordia University. See [http://archives3.concordia.ca/Privatefonds/P084.html](http://archives3.concordia.ca/Privatefonds/P084.html).

Quebec paid no attention to the anniversary while important celebrations took place in Ontario.\textsuperscript{163} The article examined the growing divide regarding commemoration of Macdonald between Ontarians and Quebeckers. 	extit{Le Devoir} and 	extit{Le Soleil} ran even fewer articles than 	extit{La Presse} and limited themselves to strictly factual accounts. For example, one brief story noted that a plaque had been unveiled at Earnscliffe, Macdonald’s former property in Ottawa.\textsuperscript{164} Quebec’s largest French-language newspapers found very little benefit in presenting commemorative events about Macdonald to their readers, which helped to further diminish the public profile of Canada’s first Prime Minister among Francophone Quebeckers.

An objective analysis of the newspaper coverage of these events allows only one, rather straight-forward conclusion: Ontario’s French- and English-language newspapers, as well as English-language newspapers in Quebec, were supportive of the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald. All saw benefits to Macdonald’s public memory, which is why they stressed the need for an even greater commemoration. Their calls for the federal government to do more to commemorate Macdonald were tempered by the shifting opinion about Quebec’s future within Canada. This shift was reflected in the coverage of the Quebec’s largest French-language newspapers, which were largely silent on the commemorative efforts relating to Canada’s first Prime Minister. For them and, by extension, for their readers, Macdonald was no longer an icon reflective of and appropriate for Quebec’s French-language population.

\textbf{B) New Themes}

Apart from the decreased coverage among Quebec’s French-language daily newspapers, the media coverage of these events was reflective of the trends examined in

\textsuperscript{163} \textit{La Presse}, January 11, 1967, 32.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{Le Devoir}, January 6, 1961, 6.
previous chapters. However, the following three new themes emerged: Macdonald's human failings; the origins of Confederation; and the increasing comparisons of Macdonald to American presidents.

1) Human Failings

The commemorative representation of real or imagined human failings associated with Macdonald had been largely downplayed or ignored since his death. An exception took place during Sir Wilfrid Laurier's years in opposition, as seen in chapter 2, when his party was attempting to frame Macdonald’s memory in a way that would help promote itself to the detriment of Sir John and the ‘Old Party.’ In the 1960s, criticisms of Macdonald resurfaced in the press. For example, during the unveiling of the HSMBC plaque at Earnscliffe in 1961, a Canadian Press article printed in, among others, La Presse and the Montreal Gazette, provided a factual and overall positive description of the event and Macdonald. A few interesting content differences emerged, however, from the published Canadian Press text for English- and French-Canadians. While both papers conceded that Macdonald’s supporters “forgave his weakness for liquor and wine,” only La Presse included a short paragraph on Macdonald’s role in the Pacific Scandal, which forced him to resign as Prime Minister in 1873. Already in 1955, historian Donald Creighton had provided Macdonald with a vindication for his perceived faults in this incident, a vindication that had been covered by some newspapers. Nevertheless, La Presse reintroduced this theme in Macdonald’s political career in a way that questioned the validity of previous iconic representations of Sir John.

165 La Presse, June 7, 1961, 5, 10; Montreal Gazette, June 6, 1961, 4; Toronto Star, June 6, 1961, 17; Le Devoir, June 6, 1961, 6.
166 La Presse, June 7, 1961, 5, 10; Montreal Gazette, June 6, 1961, 4. For clarity, it should be noted that Le Devoir did not offer its readers with the paragraph of bribery regarding the Pacific Scandal. This equivalent English-version of the bribery charge was featured in the Toronto Star version.
167 Globe and Mail, September 17, 1955, 8.
In their tributes, some of Canada’s political actors also commented on Macdonald’s penchant for drinking. Diefenbaker, for one, admitted that Macdonald drank “on occasion in excess” but these shortcomings “brought him, if anything, closer to the people he represented.”\(^{168}\) Liberal cabinet minister George McIlraith made similar comments about Macdonald’s fondness for drinking. However, he concludes that society was “more tolerant” of drinking in those days.\(^{169}\) In another instance, House of Commons Speaker Lucien Lamoureux invited fellow MPs to join him to commemorate Macdonald in his chambers on January 11, 1967. Speaker Lamoureux’s invitation, calling on them to “fraternize in the spirit of Macdonald,” received boisterous laughter from MPs, according to the *Globe and Mail*.\(^{170}\) The real meaning of this invitation was clear for MPs - alcoholic beverages would be served. These discussions of Sir John’s fondness for drinking raised questions about his apparent weaknesses.

Macdonald’s role in the Pacific Scandal and his perceived fondness for drinking were referenced in newspapers. However, the transformation of an historical figure into a mythical character results from a normal distortion of reality where accomplishments are exaggerated and weaknesses are downplayed. This trend has been observed in previous generations. By the 1960s, however, Macdonald’s public memory has lost its status as a figure finding a majority consensus among Canadians. This loss of a majority consensus has been helped by the reintroduction of perceived faults or wrong-doing, especially for readers of French-language newspapers in Quebec. It is also among French-Canadians in Quebec.

\(^{168}\) *Ottawa Citizen*, January 12, 1967, 19. This article reviewed Diefenbaker’s speech to a crowd gathered in Ottawa in honour of this anniversary.

\(^{169}\) *Globe and Mail*, January 12, 1967, 8.

that Macdonald has lost the repetitive and positive representation of his public memory, although repetitive negative representation could also work to undermine historical figures.

2) Origins of Confederation

While English-Canadian newspapers in Ontario and Quebec were profiling Macdonald’s political legacy emerging from these four commemorative events, most French-language newspapers in Quebec ignored or downplayed them. In one instance, however, a leading French-language newspaper regularly published editorials reinterpreting and redefining Canada’s constitutional origins within Quebec. The publication of these editorials coincided with the Macdonald commemorative events.

*Le Devoir* has long been a source of intellectual leadership within Quebec, including fuelling the discussions that led to the Quiet Revolution. 171 An opinion-shaper for many years, the newspaper took up certain positions to strengthen Quebec on specific issues. One of these issues related to the real intent of Confederation. In one example, an unsigned article in *Le Devoir* criticized historian Donald Creighton for his thoughts that the Fathers of Confederation never sought to create a bilingual and bicultural nation. 172 Despite this critique, Ryan supported Creighton’s conclusion: “La thèse voulant que la Confédération ait été un contrat biculturel est si complètement imaginaire que ses partisans éprouvent le besoin de la définir comme une entente extrajuridique implicite ou tacite.” 173 Ryan’s views were not accepted by all within the pages of *Le Devoir*. An unnamed editorialist offered the following idea the very same day: “il y a peut-être eu une montée nationaliste au Québec

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depuis les 1960, mais il y a belle lurette que la théorie du ‘pacte’ fédéraliste entre le Canada français et le reste du pays a cours chez nous.”

This historical revisionism on the myth of Confederation was analyzed by historian Stéphane Paquin. He argued that the official position of the government of Quebec between 1867 and 1956 was that Confederation was a pact among the provinces, not simply an Act of the British Parliament. However, in 1956, the ‘myth’ of a Canada’s birth as a bicultural nation popularized by historian Lionel Groulx became entrenched in the public memory of Quebeckers through Quebec’s Commission royale d'enquête sur les problèmes constitutionnels (Tremblay Commission). This Commission argued that the goal of Confederation was to provide a framework within which English and French communities could live in a federal state. The popularity of this myth aimed to strengthen Quebec’s position in negotiation with Canada as a whole as opposed to being simply one of many provinces at the table.

Le Devoir did not simply strengthen the notion that Canada was founded as a bicultural nation. It also suggested that finding new political arrangements would be difficult. Two days before the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birth, Claude Ryan penned an editorial on the difficulties of reaching new political arrangements with the rest of Canada. His editorial debate focused on the Fathers of Confederation preferring a strong central government. Ryan wrote:

À lire certains textes de Brown et de Macdonald, on a nettement l'impression … (que) les concessions faites au Bas-Canada et aux Maritimes ne devaient en rien amenuiser la force qu'il voulait conférer au

174 Ibid.
175 Stéphane Paquin, L'invention d'un mythe, le pacte entre les peuples fondateurs (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1999).
176 Ibid., 96-97.
177 Rapport de Commission royale d'enquête sur les problèmes constitutionnels, Vol. 1 (Québec, Québec: 1956), v; Stéphane Paquin, L'invention d'un mythe, 111-113.
Ryan argued that the real preference of many Fathers of Confederation, notably Brown and Macdonald, was for a strong central government, with reduced legislative powers of the provinces. Ryan’s analysis differed from Cartier who argued for stronger provinces and a more decentralized federation. These opposing views of the constitutional interpretations of the British North America Act made it possible for Ryan to pessimistically conclude that the century-long debate about the real intentions would never be resolved with any satisfaction for either party.

The commemoration of Macdonald in Canada’s centenary year also produced new editorials from Le Devoir about the future of Quebec. The celebrations in many communities outside La Belle Province provided Quebec with an opportunity to ponder its own future. Le Devoir claimed: “Le centenaire de la Confédération doit être chez nous l’occasion d’un jugement lucide de notre situation et le point de départ de réformes qui pourront nous donner dans l’avenir un vrai fédéralisme, et nous devons mettre l’accent là-dessus plutôt que sur la célébration d’un passé fort discutable.”

While such editorials made the case for political change - although discounted by the Montreal Star - Ryan reminded readers that the idea of Confederation germinated quickly and that change could yet again be a realistic goal. Unlike the previous example, Ryan suggested that a political will could quickly address Quebec’s constitutional concerns.

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180 Ibid., January 9, 1965, 4. A Montreal Star editorial rebutted Ryan’s claim for the need for change. The Star notes “The B.N.A. Act, as interpreted by the courts in the momentous Privy Council decisions of the past, has not yet been fully exploited. Until it has been, and until all available areas of exploitation have been used, it is premature to seek a revision which may not, in the event, be needed.” See: Montreal Star, January 11, 1965, 8.
Le Devoir published further articles about the need for constitutional changes during the time of the commemoration of Macdonald. However, at no point did the paper portray Macdonald’s character or motives in a negative light. As demonstrated by an unidentified editor:

Il ne s’agit pas de contester les talents politiques de Macdonald ni l’importance de son rôle dans les débuts de la fédération canadienne. Je suis assez âgé pour avoir connu des Canadiens français du Québec qui conservaient à la mémoire de Macdonald une admiration analogue à celle que tant d’autres ont eu plus tard envers Laurier.181

The increasing calls for constitutional renewal did not result in the disparagement of Macdonald’s political career and achievements by political actors or newspapers. This approach, the editors recognized, would have shifted the debate from constitutional discussions to a defence of Macdonald’s memory.

While Le Devoir was leading an intellectual debate about Quebec’s future with words, others resorted to physical action, namely damaging or destroying the Sir John A. Macdonald statue in Montreal’s Dominion Square. In April 1963, the statue was the target of the first bomb attack of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ). However, the presence of police patrolling the square prevented the placement of the bomb.182 In January 1967, the perceived propaganda by the federal government’s Centenary Commission resulted in the birth of a “Cent ans d’injustice” campaign. On January 8, 1967, the base of four statues associated with the federal government and the British Crown in Montreal – Sir John A. Macdonald, Sir George-Étienne Cartier, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and Queen Victoria – were sprayed with orange

182 In 1963, the FLQ launched a domestic terror campaign against the federal government and Montreal’s bourgeois Anglophone community. On April 20, 1963, the FLQ was prevented from placing a bomb near Montreal’s Macdonald statue because of the presence of too many police officers. Their alternate target was an army recruitment centre. The bomb killed Wilfrid Vincent O’Neill. Globe and Mail, June 13, 1963, 2; Ibid., June 15, 1963, 9.
paint linked to the campaign. The future of Quebec, envisioned by *Le Devoir* and some nationalists, was difficult to reconcile with the principles of national unity promoted by some English-Canadians. The publications of these specific editorials and the acts of vandalism were not happenstance. They coincided with the state-sponsored commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald. Few such events took place in Quebec, which further demonstrated how unsuitable as a national or even simply positive Canadian symbol Macdonald had become in that province. The acts of vandalism further amplified this.

3) Canada’s Equivalent to American Icons

A new trend emerged in the commemoration of Macdonald during the 1960s. For the first time, Macdonald is frequently referred to by political actors and by the press as Canada’s equivalent to George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. During the 1941 event commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of his death, Macdonald was one last time officially compared to British icons Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, and Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson. There was no comparison of Macdonald to an American icon during this event.

By the 1960s, Canada’s contemporary political leaders had a longer association with the United States than their predecessors. Just as their predecessors attempted to gain greater acceptability by comparing Macdonald to British war heroes, Canada’s political actors now compared Macdonald to American presidents. New Democratic Party leader Tommy

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185 Macdonald was almost compared directly to Abraham Lincoln during the 1941 commemorative event in Macdonald’s honour. In the original draft of then Conservative Party leader Richard Hanson’s speech, his concluding line was originally written as: “Like Lincoln, (Macdonald) now belongs to the ages.” The word ‘Lincoln’ is circled and a marginalia notation is added: “Suggest deletion. Why mention an American even when paraphrasing.” Hanson approved this deletion, making the final line of his speech read: “He now belongs to the ages.” As such, the direct association of Macdonald with Lincoln or any other American icon disappears from the 1941 event. See: LAC, Richard Burpee Hanson, MG27, IIIB22, Reel C-3129, Undated draft speech for Hanson on the 50th Anniversary of the Death of Sir John A. Macdonald, 54748-54751.
Douglas suggested Canadians should make as much fuss about Sir John as Americans routinely did over George Washington.\(^{186}\) Conservative Party leader John Diefenbaker expressed the hope that Macdonald’s birthday, just like that of Washington or Lincoln in the United States, would be declared a national holiday.\(^{187}\) For his part, Ontario Premier John Robarts noted: “Though not a military genius or truthful about cutting down a cherry tree, Macdonald ranks with George Washington in the United States.”\(^{188}\) American political historians had previously concluded that Washington’s strategic military might and honesty of admitting to chopping down a cherry tree were both fabricated stories. Nevertheless, these stories endeared Washington to subsequent generations of American citizens.\(^{189}\) Within a Canadian context, Douglas, Diefenbaker, and Robarts were among those political actors attempting to raise the profile of Macdonald for Canadians by equating his contribution to those of Washington and Lincoln at a time when these two American presidents retained strong public appeal.

Many of Canada’s English-language editorialists also began to compare Macdonald and some American presidents. For example, the *Hamilton Spectator* editorialized that “the least Ottawa could do is eventually construct a memorial along the lines of the Jefferson or Lincoln memorial in Washington that would house sculpture and memorabilia” as a means


of “provid(ing) us with a non-abstract source of pride.” This position was not surprising in light of the same paper’s description of Macdonald as an “immigrant boy that became this nation’s George Washington.” Similarly, the Ottawa Citizen suggested: “Like George Washington, Macdonald is almost a legendary figure, with his strengths and weaknesses exaggerated, and many of the stories about him becoming more interesting than factual.” However, the addition of a question mark in the headline of this editorial “Canada’s answer to George Washington?” implied certain reservations about the comparison.

Portraying Macdonald as Canada’s version of Washington or Lincoln was most likely part of a push to highlight Canada’s increasing importance on the international stage. Not long ago, Barry Schwartz, an American sociologist of history and collective memory argued that “[o]rdinary men cannot represent great and powerful nations.” Canada neared the 100th anniversary of its birth, making it one of the oldest continuous democracies in the world. Following the United States, Canada was ranked the second most affluent country in the world, with an unemployment rate at a record low of 3.7%. The country had just secured the hosting of Expo ’67. The federal government, headed by Nobel Peace Prize winning Prime Minister Pearson, was preparing to welcome an unprecedented list of foreign dignitaries and thousands of visitors. These accomplishments were anchored in the work of its first Prime Minister who, according to public memory, remained the main architect of this confederation. The absence of such Macdonald comparisons to American presidents in the French-Canadian media results from a continued uncertainty about Quebec’s future.

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within Canada. In addition, an American symbol like Washington or Lincoln would not have been part of Francophone Quebec’s cultural references before its Americanization, which took place in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{196} The movement was given a voice through groups like the Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale and a campaign launched to portray the history of Quebec in Confederation as ‘Cent ans d’injustice.’\textsuperscript{197}

**Conclusion**

During their respective tenure as Prime Minister, neither Diefenbaker nor Pearson bolstered the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald. Four events under their auspices were approved to commemorate Canada’s first Prime Minister in the 1960s. However, these four events were not mere repetitions of previous commemorative events by two different political parties in a relatively short period of time. Rather, they constituted hesitant federal government responses to external forces requesting events to mark milestone anniversaries in the life of Sir John A. Macdonald (or of Canada) or suggesting the purchase of Macdonald properties. On each occasion, the federal government made a point of limiting its role and/or involvement. Diefenbaker did not follow the recommendation of his own historic advisors, which would have given Canada a Macdonald memorial museum in Ottawa. During his six-year term as Prime Minister, Diefenbaker did also not request the organization of any other political event to commemorate Macdonald. Pearson repeatedly dithered on the planning of Macdonald commemorations, acting very quickly only once to secure Bellevue House in Kingston as a museum. However, the announcement of the


purchase and the official opening were conducted in a way that ensured no media coverage outside of Kingston.

These two Prime Ministers may have been hesitant to publicly commemorate of Sir John. Nevertheless, they were able to find ways of using Macdonald’s public memory to advance their own conceptions of Canada and their political agendas. Diefenbaker’s anti-Americanism led him to modernize the theme of Macdonald as a British subject by introducing Sir John as the founder of the British Commonwealth of Nations. This new theme focused on Canada retaining its ties with Great Britain. Diefenbaker equated himself to Macdonald to elevate his own importance. For his part, Pearson’s remarks at commemorative events quickly shifted from Macdonald more narrowly to the Fathers of Confederation more broadly. This approach allowed him to stress the benefits of continuing political compromises, and exemplified what the Fathers were able to achieve.

Although their backgrounds were different, both Diefenbaker and Pearson were driven by the same understanding: Macdonald could be used as a symbol of national unity only with difficulty in the context of the nascent independence movement in Quebec without causing increasing political rifts. Both Diefenbaker’s and Pearson’s government relied on large, neo-nationalist Quebec caucuses. The commemoration of Macdonald remained vibrant and enjoyed a significant profile in Ontario throughout this period. In Quebec, Macdonald was largely ignored in French-language newspapers. Thus, from the 1960s, Macdonald was no longer a national hegemonic figure whose public memory is acceptable to a majority of Canadians. He was transformed into a symbol of pride for Ontarians and a symbol forgotten, or even opposed, by Francophone Quebeckers.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Sir John A. Macdonald has been a political figure frequently referenced in Canadian history. Yet no study has explored the evolution of his public memory. This study provided a focused examination of the attempts by Canada’s federal political parties to do so. The period of study began immediately following the death of Sir John A. Macdonald on June 6, 1891 and continued until the Centennial Celebrations of Confederation in 1967. It first aimed to identify and analyze events and activities organized or supported by Canada’s federal political class which provided them with opportunities to shape Macdonald’s public memory. It then explored, through the lens of official memory, their motivation to engage in his commemoration and to shape his memory in specific ways. The objective was to answer two specific research questions. The first asked if Canada’s federal political leaders were interested and successful in shaping Macdonald’s public memory during this period and whether this permitted the emergence of a seemingly national hegemonic figure acceptable to both political parties. The second asked if the federal political parties’ attempts to depict Macdonald as a unifying national symbol were picked up in the media in Ontario and Quebec and in both official languages, thereby reinforcing his seemingly hegemonic status for the federal political class. This concluding chapter synthesizes the findings of this study.

1. Sir John A. Macdonald as an Object of Commemoration

During the period of study, Sir John A. Macdonald was the object of multiple commemorative activities involving the leaders of Canada’s main political parties. In the years following Macdonald’s death, the Liberal-Conservative governments of Sir John Thompson and Sir Mackenzie Bowell were eager to participate in the many unveilings of Macdonald monuments in Quebec and Ontario. These monuments in Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal and Kingston were organized and financed by members of the Liberal-
Conservative Party and businessmen with ties to the party. They shared the self-interested goals of seeing their party and Macdonald’s economic policies remain in place. The Liberal-Conservative Party also used its majority in the House of Commons to further Macdonald’s commemoration through the approval of public funds to erect a Macdonald monument on Parliament Hill. The participation of the Prime Minister of Canada and his cabinet at these five events helped raise the profile of the events and shape the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald.

The efforts to commemorate Sir John A. Macdonald and to elevate his public memory above other national figures were met with resistance from the Liberal Party between 1891 and 1911. On most occasions, Laurier and the Liberal Party continued to attack the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald and the policies of the Liberal-Conservative Party as vigorously after Macdonald’s death as they had during Macdonald’s life. As such, the Liberals countered the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald being advanced by Liberal-Conservatives during the Macdonald memorial unveilings. On some occasions, Laurier and other members of the Liberal Party were willing to commemorate the man for certain policies, when beneficial to themselves or their party. By the end of Laurier’s tenure as Prime Minister, Macdonald remained largely an iconic figure for the Liberal-Conservative Party, not a national figure raised above partisan politics.

During the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation in 1927, a bipartisan committee approved numerous commemorative activities focusing on Sir John A. Macdonald. Prime Minister King and the National Committee had attempted to develop a myth around the Fathers of Confederation. This approach sought to ensure that all Fathers of Confederation, not simply Sir John A. Macdonald, were the focus of commemoration. For its part, the National Committee attempted to support the development of a myth of the Fathers of
Confederation through many of its commemorative activities. These efforts did not result in an equal treatment of all Fathers of Confederation as Macdonald had become through his work on Confederation and his long tenure as Prime Minister a central figure among them. His years of public service transformed Macdonald into a figure on the national stage which no policy or initiative could erase. As such, the myth of the Fathers of Confederation was often illustrated through Macdonald’s political career and image, raising his profile above the other Fathers during the event.

The Liberal and Conservative Parties collaborated on a national commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death. Prime Minister King was the driving force behind the event on June 7, 1941. An ardent student of history, King understood that the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death could serve as a forum to bolster national unity. King stood alongside former Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Meighen, acting Conservative leader Richard Hanson and Liberal cabinet minister Ernest Lapointe to praise Macdonald’s political legacy. The event was the first occasion where both political parties joined together to commemorate Macdonald as a symbol of Canadian unity and conciliation among French- and English-Canadians.

Finally, during the 1960s, the commemoration of Macdonald took place in four events supported by the federal government: the unveiling of a historic designation plaque on the 70th anniversary of Macdonald’s death at Earnscliffe; the purchase of Bellevue House in Kingston; the commemoration of the sesquicentennial of Macdonald’s birth on January 11, 1965; and the commemoration of Macdonald’s birthday in 1967, the year of Canada’s centennial. Unlike previous government commemorative efforts, these measures represented cautious responses by two administrations trying to strike a balance between demands for action from Ontario and maintaining an approach which did not antagonize the nascent
independence movement in Quebec. Thus, both Diefenbaker and Pearson had to tread carefully in promoting Macdonald as a symbol of conciliation and national unity.

2. The Commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald through the Lens of Official Memory

During the period of study, Sir John A. Macdonald was the object of more than a dozen events commemorating his public memory. These events provided a forum for members of Canada’s federal political class to highlight selective elements of Macdonald’s political career or personal characteristics. The selected themes often revealed the speakers’ attempt to shape memories that are complimentary to themselves.

Sir John A. Macdonald’s successors – Sir John Thompson and Sir Mackenzie Bowell – both found self-serving reasons to engage in the efforts to shape Macdonald’s memory. As Canada’s first Roman Catholic Prime Minister, Thompson needed to build support among Protestants. His Roman Catholicism had initially prevented him from succeeding Macdonald as Prime Minister. In forming his cabinet, Thompson appointed to the ministry N. Clarke Wallace, MP for York-West and Grand Knight of the Orange Order. His appointment was a clear sign of Thompson’s efforts to build bridges among creeds within the Liberal-Conservative Party. The Macdonald memorial unveiling in Hamilton allowed him to associate himself publicly with Wallace. Thompson spent considerable time during his speech discussing Macdonald as a conciliator of races and creeds. As such, he raised the importance of conciliation among all Canadians, and especially among Liberal-Conservatives of Protestant and Roman Catholic faiths. For his part, Sir Mackenzie Bowell suggested to Canadians that his leadership as Prime Minister of Canada would ensure the continuation of Macdonald’s vision for Canada. He stressed within his speech how he assisted Macdonald in
shaping those policies. As such, Bowell articulated the rationale why supporters of Sir John A. Macdonald should vote for him and his party as a means to perpetuate his policies.

Between 1891 and 1911, the Liberal Party reacted strongly to the efforts of the Liberal-Conservative Party to elevate Macdonald above other Canadians. On most occasions, the Liberal Party under Sir Wilfrid Laurier attempted to showcase to Canadians the errors of Macdonald’s ways. During their years in opposition, they offered a critical review of Macdonald’s policies and legacies to suggest a more promising future under a Liberal Party banner. This strategy aimed to shape Macdonald’s public memory in a more negative light as a tactic to garner greater support among the electorate. Once in office, the Liberal Party’s approach to Macdonald’s public memory fluctuated to meet the needs of the party. On a few occasions, Laurier turned to elements of Macdonald’s past to provide a validation for his policies. However, the Liberal Party also remained disparaging towards Macdonald’s legacy. Thus, by the 1910s, Macdonald remained a symbol for the Liberal-Conservative Party, not a national symbol for the political elite.

Prime Minister King had two opportunities to commemorate Sir John A. Macdonald. The first opportunity came during the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. At this national commemoration, King sought to strengthen the myth of the Fathers of Confederation as an effort to ensure equal recognition of all Fathers and thus reduce the specific focus on Sir John A. Macdonald. King hoped this strategy would allow him to avoid comparison with Sir John A. Macdonald in light of his iconic stature within the Conservative Party. At the same time, the development of the myth of the Fathers of Confederation required the National Committee for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation to provide a foundation to build this myth. The myth thus rested largely on the memory of Sir John A. Macdonald as the best known Father of Confederation who governed Canada for nearly two
decades afterwards. The historical material produced for the Diamond Jubilee concluded that Canada should be pleased with her first Prime Minister, a message that builds confidence in Canada’s origins.

King’s second opportunity came with the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald in 1941. King was the driving force behind this event and this was the only occasion during which King championed Macdonald’s legacy. King understood that Canadians needed a symbol of conciliation at a time of growing political and linguistic tensions regarding Canada’s overseas participation in the Second World War. In the spirit of invented tradition, King defined during the event Macdonald as a symbol of national unity and conciliation by focusing on selected elements of Macdonald’s past. King’s message about Macdonald was echoed by the other members of Canada’s federal political class who spoke at the Kingston event. These speakers shaped Macdonald’s public memory in a unified and effective way for the first time, seeking together to transform his legacy into a symbol of conciliation that all Canadians should emulate.

Despite Prime Minister John Diefenbaker’s own personal and political attachment to Macdonald, he opted not to initiate more commemorative events during his tenure as Prime Minister, fearing an increased fault line between himself and his large Quebec neo-nationalist caucus. On those occasions where Diefenbaker delivered a speech about Sir John A. Macdonald, notably during his years in opposition, Diefenbaker reinvented Macdonald to meet his objectives. Diefenbaker’s anti-Americanism and pro-British stance was reflected in his invocations of Macdonald’s support for Britain and the British Empire and as an opponent of closer ties with the United States. Diefenbaker labelled Macdonald as the founder of the British Commonwealth of Nations, an organization created many decades after his death. Despite the historical inaccuracy of his claim, Diefenbaker’s linking of
Macdonald to the Commonwealth provided him with a bridge between Canada’s British past and support for a stronger Commonwealth. For reasons similar to those of Diefenbaker, Prime Minister Pearson was reluctant to commemorate Sir John A. Macdonald. Whenever Pearson was invited to speak about Macdonald, his remarks quickly moved from Macdonald more narrowly to the Fathers of Confederation more broadly. As such, Pearson used the same strategy as Liberal Prime Minister King during the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. This approach allowed Pearson to stress the benefits of continuing political compromises and exemplify what the Fathers were able to achieve through Confederation. He suggested the lessons of the Fathers and their ability to compromise could inform the current political climate.

3. Sir John A. Macdonald as a National Hegemonic Figure

One of this study’s main research questions asked whether Canada’s federal political leaders were interested and successful in shaping Macdonald’s public memory during the period of study, allowing the emergence of a possible national hegemonic figure acceptable to both political parties. The answer is yes, but only on a single occasion. During the Second World War, Prime Minister King organized the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald. King had not previously expressed an interest in Macdonald’s commemoration. Through this planned commemoration, King emphasized the need for conciliation among French- and English-Canadians in the context of a wartime society. King trumpeted Macdonald as the symbol of this conciliation. He focused the public memory of Sir John A. Macdonald on that specific theme in order to serve his own political agenda: maintaining national unity and power during a fractious period. King’s objective was supported by other political figures, either consciously or unconsciously. King’s own Quebec political lieutenant, Ernest Lapointe, echoed King’s message about Macdonald, and
communicated this message in English and French. The Conservative Party held Macdonald in high esteem as an icon of the party, and thus they willingly participated and helped to build a momentary consensus on Macdonald’s legacy.

The second main research question for this study asked if the federal political parties’ depiction of Macdonald as a unifying national symbol became acceptable to Ontarians and Quebeckers as represented by media coverage in both official languages. During the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death, the Canadian media repeated the messages from these political actors without criticism or scepticism. Lapointe’s presence ensured media coverage in both the English- and French-language newspapers within Quebec. As such, citizens in Quebec and Ontario, and in both official languages, read about the beneficial lessons of Macdonald’s life. These newspaper articles and editorials suggested these lessons from Macdonald still held importance for Canadians beyond the federal political class in 1941 and in the midst of an international conflict with domestic impacts. The event was seen to have a positive influence after the event. For example, an editorial from the *Kingston Whig-Standard* was critical of a local political leader for his deemed erroneous and judgemental views of Quebec’s lack of engagement in the Second World War.

4. **Sir John A. Macdonald as a Symbol within Ontario and Quebec**

   Sir John A. Macdonald as an object of commemoration evolved in very similar ways within Ontario and Quebec during the period of study. Between the 1890s and the 1910s, the support for Sir John A. Macdonald was based along party loyalties, and thus along the political leanings of newspapers. In both Ontario and Quebec, and in both official languages, conservative-leaning newspapers echoed the praise lavished on Macdonald by Liberal-Conservatives while liberal-leaning newspapers reduced the events’ coverage within their papers and published editorials critical of Macdonald’s legacy. Support for Sir John A.
Macdonald remained as strong among French-language conservative-leaning newspapers in Quebec as it did among English-language conservative-leaning newspapers in Ontario. Criticisms of Macdonald were largely expressed by the Liberal Party and reflected in liberal-learning newspapers in both provinces.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death resulted in support for the key members of Canada’s federal political class who were able to influence public opinion within Ontario and Quebec. At the same time, the event received both considerable and universally positive media coverage in both provinces and with both official language groups. The French-language press focused on Macdonald’s goal of ensuring national unity and reconciling English- and French-Canadians to each other. The editorials in response to the event encouraged more discussion and compromises in decision-making to ensure continued national unity. The same trend was found in English-language newspapers which focused on elements of Macdonald as a symbol of national unity, the key theme underlining the entire event. As such, the papers were picking up on King’s motivation for marking the event.

The 1960s saw significant interpretative differences about what Macdonald represented for Canadians. Quebec’s French-language papers provided considerably less coverage to the four Ontario-based Macdonald events. The future of Quebec, envisioned by *Le Devoir* and some nationalists, was often difficult to reconcile with the principles of national unity promoted by some English-Canadians. They found little benefit in presenting commemorative events about Macdonald to their readers, which helped to further diminish the public profile of Canada’s first Prime Minister in Quebec. Quebec’s English-language daily newspapers reported on Macdonald in similar fashions as did Ontario dailies. In the 1960s, the image of Sir John A. Macdonald became even more entrenched within the
province of Ontario. John Robarts, the Premier of Ontario from 1961 to 1971, was eager to participate in the commemoration of Canada’s first prime minister. Robarts’ efforts to commemorate the sesquicentennial of his Macdonald’s birth eclipsed the actions of the Pearson government which hesitated to sponsor or actively engage in expansive events to mark this anniversary. As such, Macdonald’s memory remained more prominent in Ontario than Quebec in the 1960s. Even Ottawa’s French-language newspaper, *Le Droit*, recognized the popularity of Macdonald within Ontario. As such, they created a representation of Macdonald as a defender of minority groups. This representation of Macdonald might be beneficial to their community in securing additional constitutional and linguistic rights from the provincial and federal governments. As a result, the discourse emerging from this French-language newspaper in Ottawa differed from the Macdonald narrative emerging from French-language newspapers in Quebec.

A) Thematic summary

At each commemorative event, the analytical framework examined the depiction of eight separate themes relevant to Sir John A. Macdonald the politician and Sir John A. Macdonald the man. The following section provides a synthesis of the use and the evolution of these themes during the period of study.

*Macdonald as the Leading Father of Confederation*

Through the period of study, the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald reinforced the notion of Macdonald as the leading Father of Confederation. During the unveiling of the Macdonald memorials in the 1890s, the Liberal-Conservative Party used different words to reinforce Macdonald’s leadership among the Fathers of Confederation: architect of Confederation, the Father of Confederation, father of Canada and founder of Canada. These terms helped elevate Macdonald to the most important rank among the
Fathers of Confederation and Canada’s leading historical figures. In the 1920s, the public memory of Macdonald as the leading Father of Confederation was further reinforced through the work of the National Committee of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. The National Committee went one step further, arguing in a historical sketch that beyond partisan politics, Canadians should be proud of its first prime minister, whose wise vision and ability to build well for the future held the nascent nation together.

In the second half of the period of study, Macdonald remained clearly identified as the leading Father of Confederation. During the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Macdonald’s death, almost all the speakers at the Kingston event represented Macdonald in this way. For example, Meighen commented that Laurier had “awarded (Macdonald) the primacy among the founders and the builders of our nation.”¹ For his part, Ernest Lapointe commented that Macdonald “belongs to his country and this is the homage of the whole nation to the chief architect of Confederation, to the leader of those we call the ‘Fathers.’”²

In the 1960s, Pearson and Diefenbaker were comfortable with the representation of Macdonald as the leading father of Confederation. As such, they used this representation during the four events commemorating Macdonald during this period. The representation of Macdonald as the leading Father of Confederation characterized this period of study. This representation was reemphasized by members of both national political parties, confirming to the audience Macdonald’s pre-eminent role in the Confederation movement.

\textit{Macdonald as a Symbol of Canadian Unity}

The representation of Macdonald as a symbol of Canadian unity remained present throughout the period of study. For example, during the 1890s, the Liberal-Conservative Party presented Macdonald as a conciliator of races, an element of Macdonald’s public memory ignored by Laurier who also envisaged himself as that symbol. The representation of Macdonald as a national symbol of Canadian unity was strongest during the 1941 commemorative event. The possibility of a new conscription crisis during the Second World War dividing French- and English-Canadians worried Canada’s then Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King. King’s suggestion led to both national parties working together to organize a national event in Kingston to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Sir John A. Macdonald’s death. This invented tradition provided a national forum to shape Macdonald’s public memory. The federal political elites were universal in acclaiming Macdonald as a unifying national figure and a symbol for national unity. This representation of Macdonald was accepted without criticism or analysis by all surveyed media outlets. This seemingly hegemonic moment of political consensus was short-lived, however, in light of the continuing political tensions over the Second World War. During the 1960s, both national political parties were concerned by the nascent independence movement in Quebec. Diefenbaker and Pearson feared that commemorating Macdonald as a symbol of national unity would increase political rifts.

_Macdonald: Nation-Builder_

Macdonald’s longevity in political office at key moments in the country’s evolution ensured a long list of accomplishments relating to nation-building. During the period of study, the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald led to the invocation of his role in leading the Confederation movement, admitting and creating new provinces, purchasing Rupert’s Land, and supporting new infrastructure initiatives. These examples were frequently
referred to by Canada’s federal political leaders in their remarks. Whenever the speaker wished to exemplify Macdonald as a nation-builder, one of these key developments became the focus of a section of their remarks. During one period the representation of Macdonald as a nation-builder was contested. Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal Party attempted to highlight the shortcomings of Macdonald’s actions. As such, they attempted to reshape the representation of Macdonald as a nation-builder in an effort to raise the party’s electoral fortunes.

*Macdonald as a Self-made Man*

The theme of Canada as an individualist society where anyone can strike it rich has existed over the past centuries. The biographies of Macdonald published in the 1910s and the 1920s describe Macdonald through the theme of rags-to-riches vernacular liberalism. The life of Sir John A. Macdonald, who arrived as an immigrant boy to eventually hold the office of Prime Minister of Canada for 18 years, renders itself to the invocation of this theme. Nevertheless, during these commemorations of Sir John A. Macdonald, this theme was only referenced on two occasions. The first was Finance minister George Eulas Foster’s speech unveiling the Macdonald memorial in Montreal on June 6, 1895. Foster described Macdonald as the “immigrant boy who landed, wide-eyed and open mouthed, on the shores of this country at six years” who thereafter “climbed rapidly to the highest public position” and “became the confidential adviser of his Sovereign.” The second was during Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King’s speech on June 7, 1941. King invoked the self-made man by stating that “without regard to birth, or race or class … (i)ntelligence, industry

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4 *Montreal Gazette*, June 7, 1895, 5.
and integrity are the basic qualities by which (greatness) is achieved.” In both examples, Foster and King wished to inspire Canadians to better themselves, to reach higher and to contribute to Canada’s development. Other speakers could have invoked the myth of the self-made man. However, they opted to focus on other themes to shape Macdonald’s public memory.

Macdonald as a British Subject

For many decades, Canada’s sense of identity was closely associated with the British Isles, the land of many of Canada’s forefathers. For several decades, Sir John A. Macdonald became a symbol of Canada’s continuing attachment to Great Britain. In the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald in the 1890s, he was praised as a strong defender of Great Britain, who successfully built Canada’s political foundation on British institutions. Many of the political leaders quoted Macdonald’s famous phrase: ‘A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die.’ The same theme was evoked in the 1920s and during the 1941 commemoration of the fiftieth year of Macdonald’s death, reflecting the continuing importance for many Canadians of its British ties. Through this theme, many of Canada’s political speakers aimed to remind Canadians of the benefits of retaining strong ties with Great Britain.

Beyond using Macdonald as a living symbol of Canada’s continuing ties with Great Britain, many speakers used this theme to elevate Macdonald above other historical figures. On many occasions, Macdonald’s service to Canada and to the British Empire was compared to the efforts of two specific British war heroes. This comparison aimed to elevate Macdonald to a higher stature in light of the popularized efforts of these British war heroes.

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generals. Since the Second World War, Canada had strengthened its economic and political ties with the United States, moving progressively within the American sphere of influence. The advent of mass communications’ vehicles like radio and television during this period further integrated English-Canada to the United States. As a result, Canada’s political leaders became progressively more familiar with American history and political figures, and began comparing Macdonald to American presidents. In the end, the comparison of Macdonald to other world leaders was influenced by Canada’s move from the British sphere of influence to the American sphere of influence.

Sir John A. Macdonald as a Partisan Politician

The negative portrayal of Macdonald’s political partisanship provided a tangible motive to prevent the transformation of Macdonald’s public memory into a seemingly national hegemonic figure. In two specific periods of time, federal political leaders used the negative elements of Macdonald’s partisanship to render him a less suitable national hegemonic figure. Throughout his political career, Sir Wilfrid Laurier highlighted Macdonald’s perceived mismanagement of the economy and the machinery of government. Laurier was as critical of Macdonald in life as in death in an attempt to distinguish his party from Macdonald’s. As a result of such political discourse over a twenty-year period, two very partisan versions of Macdonald emerged from this political battleground between the 1890s and the 1910s. While the Liberal-Conservatives praised Macdonald, the Liberal Party was critical of Macdonald and his political legacy. Both political parties used this strategy to advance their party’s objectives of gaining support among the electorate.

For his part, Prime Minster Lester B. Pearson was on a few occasions critical of Macdonald. However, Pearson used humour to describe Macdonald’s strong partisanship by referencing exaggerated claims made during and after the 1878 federal general election when
Macdonald sought a return to office. He shared the story from an unnamed Toronto citizen who noted Macdonald “assured (him) that his Conservative cow gave three quarts of milk more a day after the election than before, while a good Conservative lady friend solemnly affirmed that her hen laid more eggs, larger eggs, and more to the dozen ever since the new administration came in.” The delivery of this speech in front of a sympathetic Kingston audience employed a jocular reference to make reverential criticisms of Macdonald.

The Macdonald-Cartier Partnership

The theme of the Macdonald-Cartier partnership remained infrequent during the commemoration of Sir John A. Macdonald. During the unveiling of the Macdonald memorial in Montreal in 1895, Cartier was recognized as the necessary and equal partner of Macdonald to accomplish Confederation. During the Ontario Macdonald memorial unveilings, Cartier’s role was minimized or ignored by English-Canadian speakers. In contrast, the equal importance of French-Canadians in Confederation as symbolized through the Macdonald-Cartier partnership was stressed in Quebec.

The arrival of Sir Wilfrid Laurier as another popular leader among French-Canadians also diminished the representation of the Macdonald-Cartier partnership following Laurier’s death in 1919. This event allowed the National Committee for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation to use his image on commemorative stamps. As such, Laurier as Canada’s first French-Canadian Prime Minister replaced Cartier as Macdonald’s equal. From 1927 onwards, the memory of Laurier threw a shadow over Cartier and his role in Confederation.

Finally, in the 1960s, only one member of the governing class referred to Cartier’s role in Confederation. Ontario Premier John Robarts was attempting to foster a greater

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conciliation between Quebec and Ontario during the Quiet Revolution, as reflected in his ‘Confederation of Tomorrow’ conference. As such, he renamed Ontario’s main highway as the “Macdonald-Cartier Freeway” and named a bridge joining Ottawa and Hull as the “Macdonald-Cartier Bridge.” The use of Cartier’s name related more to conciliation and equal partnership between Ontarians and Quebeckers than to raising the profile of Cartier himself. In this context, Robarts’ conservatism may have encouraged him to name the highway and the bridge for his fellow Conservative Cartier rather than the Liberal Laurier.

Concluding Remarks

Sir John A. Macdonald remained an elusive hegemonic figure during the period of this study. Between 1891 and 1941, the Conservative Party demonstrated an interest in elevating Macdonald’s public memory above other Canadian historical figures. At the same time, the Liberal Party used two different approaches. In many instances, the Liberal Party was critical of Macdonald’s political legacy, introducing divisive elements into his public memory. As such, they questioned his suitability as a unifying national figure. In another instance, the Liberal Party remained silent on Macdonald’s public memory during a national commemorative event, a strategy that aimed to reduce the significance of Macdonald’s political career among Canadians. These various approaches from both of Canada’s national political parties resulted in Macdonald remaining a Conservative Party icon. After 1941, Canada’s national political parties were reluctant to commemorate Macdonald. Prime Ministers Diefenbaker and Pearson were driven by the same understanding: Macdonald become a more difficult symbol of national unity as a result of the nascent independence movement in Quebec, which caused increasing political rifts within both federal parties. As a result, the Conservatives under Diefenbaker were no more willing to push Macdonald as a symbol of Canada and Canadian unity than were the Liberals under Pearson.
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