Ontario (1867)

Map: Canada, 1867

Territorial Development

In 1791, the former Province of Quebec was divided into two territories: Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec). In the new Upper Canada, land grants were based on the British tradition of free and common socage, rather than on the French colonial tradition of seigneurial tenure. The British model made it easier to buy and sell land. This difference would have a significant impact on the territory's development.

The Treaty of Paris established a southern border in 1783. It followed the Saint Lawrence River, then divided Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Huron and Lake Superior with the United States. The border then ran along the Ottawa River all the way to Lake Temiskaming before continuing north. The western border remained a matter of dispute between Upper Canada and the British (later Canadian), government until the Western provinces were created.

Transportation

In the 1830s, although construction of roadways had improved, travel by carriage remained difficult in Upper Canada. Farmers in remote villages were continuously asking the government to provide money to improve roads between communities.

When canal construction ended in 1848, railway construction was in full swing. In 1855, the Great Western Railway connected Windsor and Hamilton, as well as Toronto, Hamilton and Niagara. That same year, the Canadian Northern Railway linked Collingwood (on Georgian Bay) to Toronto. The Grand Trunk Railway connected Montreal to Sarnia in 1859.

Political Organization

Under the *Act of Union* of 1841, what is now Ontario was known as Canada West. This section of the united Province of Canada was organized politically with the following: a governor appointed by the British Crown -- he was the true leader of the government; an executive council not answerable to the House; a legislative council appointed by the Crown; and a House of Assembly with 84 elected representatives, 42 for Canada West and 42 for Canada East (Quebec).

On March 11, 1848, the Province of Canada was granted responsible government. From then on, members of the Executive Council would be chosen from the governing political party (or coalition). This meant that the Council must resign if the governing party or coalition lost its majority.

In 1854, the number of elected representatives rose to 65 for each of Canada West and Canada East.

Political ideas in eastern and western Ontario were markedly different. The east, represented in Parliament by John A. Macdonald, was mainly interested in industry and commerce, whereas the west, represented by George Brown, was primarily concerned with the demands of its essentially agricultural constituency. This would become a factor in the negotiations leading to Confederation.

The Economy

Pre-Confederation Ontario was a mainly agricultural society. In 1860, over 80% of the population lived in rural areas. Subsistence farming was the predominant activity, even though farmers were increasingly able to sell part of their crops on the commercial market.

The few existing industries at the time were small and employed only a handful of workers. Industry was based in logging and mills, in canal and railway construction, and in the manufacture of farm implements, shoes and clothes.

The end of the British preferential system had a serious negative impact on Ontario's economy. Ontario's exports of wheat and wood through Montreal lost their preferred status. To offset this loss, the Canadian government negotiated the Reciprocity Treaty with the United States. It would be in effect from 1854 to 1866.

Population and Urban Development

At the time of Confederation in 1867, about 3.5 million people had settled in the British North American colonies. Seventy-five percent of these people lived in Ontario and Quebec.

The 1871 census indicates that the population of Ontario was over 1.6 million. Of these, 1.3 million were British (42% Irish, 32% English, 24% Scottish, and 3% Welsh), 159,000 were German, and 75,000 were French. The most popular religious affiliations among the populace broke down as follows: 29% Methodist; 22% Presbyterian; 20% Anglican; 17% Catholic; and 5% Baptist.

From 1840 to 1861, the population of Canada West grew substantially, from 432,000 inhabitants in 1840 to 952,000 in 1851, and 1,396,000 in 1861. In 1861, Toronto (pop. 45,000), Hamilton (pop. 19,000), Ottawa (pop. 15,000) and Kingston (pop. 14,000) were the largest cities in Ontario. These centres experienced strong urban, commercial and industrial growth. Montreal, however, remained the metropolis of United Canada, with a population of 90,000 in 1861.

Toronto (pop. 45,000)

Front Street, Toronto, ca. 1876.

King Street, Toronto, ca. 1868.

Yonge Street, Toronto, ca. 1868.

Ottawa (pop. 15,000)

Corner of Rideau and Sussex St., Ottawa, ca. 1865-1870.

Old Albion Hotel on Nicholas St., Ottawa, April 17, 1875.

Corner Sparks and Metcalfe St., Ottawa, 1864.

Kingston (pop. 14,000)

King Street, Kingston, ca. 1862-1865.

Kingston, ca. 1862-1865.

Hamilton (pop. 19,000)

Hamilton, ca. 1862-1865.

Factors Leading to Confederation

Several factors led to Confederation in 1867. Of these factors, some were inherently linked to Canada East, which, with Canada West, formed the Province of Canada after the *Act of Union* was signed in 1840.

Political Factors

Equal parliamentary representation suited Canada West as long as its population was less than that of Canada East; however, the 1851 census revealed that, for the first time, the population of Canada West exceeded that of Canada East. Faced with this new state of affairs, George Brown began his campaign for rep by pop (representation by population). Although elected by a majority in Canada West, Brown's Clear Grits were unable to form a government because of alliances from 1854 to 1864 between John A. Macdonald's Conservatives and George-Étienne Cartier's Parti Bleu.

As it was impossible to forge an alliance between reformers in Canada West, often anti-French and anti-Catholic, and reformers in Canada East, who wished to protect the status of the French language and were openly nationalistic, George Brown was relegated to the opposition. Government was also extremely unstable from 1854 to 1864 due to the nature of United Canada's political system.

Great Britain's waning interest in its North American colonies spurred a desire to politically restructure Canada West. It was the political instability in the Province of Canada that motivated John A. Macdonald and Alexander Tilloch Galt to make an overture to George Brown and raise an appeal for a coalition.

In the interests of entering government and asserting his political ideas, of eradicating political instability, and of promoting the federation of British North America, George Brown answered his political opponents and agreed to join the Great Coalition of 1864. With this, the coalition launched the process that would lead to Confederation in 1867.

A few days before this proposal, a report was tabled by a parliamentary committee (formed and chaired by George Brown himself) responsible for examining political problems in the Province of Canada. The report was brief and general. Nevertheless, it was a foundation for resolving United Canada's political problems. Proposals that were considered unworkable were removed, such as the double majority, rep by pop, and dissolution of the Union. The committee favoured a federal system, but did not attempt to define the form it would take.

Economic Factors

Canada West's trade in wheat, flour and timber had benefited substantially from the Reciprocity Treaty with the United States. Its possible abrogation (which did finally occur in 1866) made farmers and merchants in Canada West apprehensive. A proposed union of the British North American colonies was highly appealing to them for this reason.

Territorial Security Factors

After the American Civil War, British authorities in London feared reprisals against British colonial territories by the victorious Northern states. Since Great Britain had openly supported the South, their fear was well founded. The dangers of this war also stirred Loyalist sentiments in Ontarians. Protecting Canada West from American influence meant protecting British traditions and institutions in North America.

The threat of attacks by Fenians also motivated London to reorganize the political status of its North American colonies. If the United States considered Canada a sovereign country rather than a British colony, the Fenians might be less inclined to continue their attacks.

The issue of the North-Western Territory also played a significant role in Canada West's desire to politically restructure British North America. Some members of Ontario's political leadership believed that the territories west of the province were rightfully theirs. Political restructuring was an

ideal opportunity to claim them.

Factors Related to the Railway

The British colonies involved in the confederation project had amassed considerable debt from railway construction. Pooling their debts in a federation would relieve the stress on their several economies. By facilitating commerce between provinces, confederation would also encourage the profitability of railway companies.

The Process

Many proposals for a new political arrangement surfaced in the 1850s and 1860s.

In the 1850s, the controversial William Lyon Mackenzie proposed that the Union simply be dissolved. Neither the eastern nor the western faction of Canada West agreed with this proposal. A return to single-colony status would have isolated Canada West from the markets and waterways essential to commercial development.

John Sandfield Macdonald presented a proposal that would make a double majority mandatory to form a government. When he came to power in 1862, he tried to apply this principle -- which was fairly attractive in theory, at least -- but failed. He was unable to remain in power.

George Brown's proposal of rep by pop was by far the best-known suggestion at the time. It would be equivalent to a simple legislative union, without further change, but under it French Canadians would lose the advantages they had gained over the years. John A. Macdonald and John Sandfield Macdonald, both representatives from the eastern section of Canada West, opposed it.

When George Brown joined the Great Coalition, asking the government to include a solution to the political problem in United Canada as part of its mandate, he took up a proposal originally made by Alexander Tilloch Galt in 1858. That year, Alexander Tilloch Galt, George-Étienne Cartier and John Ross had travelled to Great Britain to present Queen Victoria with a federation project for the British colonies. The proposal had been received by the London authorities with polite indifference.

Originally, George Brown's proposal involved only Canada East and Canada West. When the government of United Canada learned that the Maritime colonies were planning a meeting to discuss a possible union amongst themselves, a delegation was sent to convince United Canada's Atlantic neighbours of the federation project's validity.

The Charlottetown Conference

In 1864, a Canadian delegation presented a proposal to federate the British North American colonies at the meeting of the Maritime colonies in Charlottetown. Members of the delegation included John A. Macdonald, William McDougall and George Brown. The Maritime colonies were

keenly interested and decided to abandon their initial plan in favour of this new proposal. All agreed that they would meet again in Québec City on October 10, 1864.

The Québec Conference

The confederation project took its final shape at the Québec Conference. At this conference, the representatives for Canada West were John A. Macdonald, William McDougall, George Brown, Oliver Mowat, Alexander Campbell and James Cockburn.

Negotiations at the Québec Conference dealt with the United Canada's -- particularly Canada West's -- insistence on its vision of the federation project. Also at issue was the desire of the Maritime provinces to obtain their fair share in any agreement. If John A. Macdonald wanted a strong central power, he would have to alter his stance on the demands of the Maritime provinces. He would also have to yield to the elected representatives of Canada East, who wanted the provinces to retain certain rights with respect to the administration of day-to-day activities.

Reaction

A majority of the members of Parliament for Canada West voted in favour of the Québec Conference proposals (55 for and 8 against). All of Canada West's demands were met in the 72 resolutions from the Québec Conference. A kind of rep by pop was reached by establishing provincial governments responsible for part of the administrative powers and by redistributing elected members in the House of Commons in Ottawa. Local costs were controlled by creating provincial legislatures. The main powers were entrusted to a strong federal authority.

Not all reformers voted for the Québec Conference resolutions, though. Even Conservatives, who favoured confederation, reserved the right to critique the project. For the latter, confederation was tantamount to handing Canada West over to the Clear Grits. Some Conservatives even thought the project should be subject to a vote by the people, as the Parti Rouge in Canada East and some New Brunswick politicians were demanding. Several newspapers in Canada West were also calling for such a vote. The Conservative Hamilton *Spectator*, and the Reform Hamilton *Times* supported this call, as did the *Toronto Leader*, a Conservative paper, which stated the following:

> *"No one can doubt what the views of Upper Canada are in regard to an appeal to the people before Confederation is finally carried into effect. Taking the press as an indication of public opinion, we must conclude that the feeling is almost unanimous in favor of allowing the people an opportunity to express an opinion upon the constitution under which they are to live."*
>
> (The Popular appeal, Toronto Leader, November 22, 1864, p.2)

Nor could political leaders agree on the issue of the people's approval of the Confederation project. Sandfield Macdonald was in favour of a popular vote, saying:

> *"If there has been one question more than another before this House, for the last quarter of a century, upon which the views of the people, ought to be clearly and distinctly ascertained, it is upon this proposal [of the House] to destroy the Constitution; and if gentlemen will vote against it, then I hope that at the next general election, the people will pass such a judgement upon them as well as prevent any such scheme ever being proposed in any British Colonial Legislature, without the sanction of the people, during all future time."*
>
> (Confederation Debates, p.1012-1013)

George Brown, on the other hand, was opposed to a popular vote. He said:

> *"If there were any doubt about public feeling, there might be propriety in going to the people. But is there any doubt about it? I am not opposing the honorable gentleman's resolution on constitutional grounds. I am not denying the rights of the people; if I had any doubt whatever about what would be the verdict of the people, I should be the first to say that we ought to go to the people. But it is simply because I am satisfied there would be a sweeping verdict of the people in favor of the measure, that I think it unnecessary to take it to the country. What would be the verdict of the people may be judged from what has been the vote of their representatives here, who are responsible to them."*
>
> (Confederation Debates, p.992)

John A. Macdonald, of course, praised the merits of confederation. Some Conservative and Reform elements thought it undesirable for the central government to wield such power to the detriment of "local" (provincial) authorities. John Sandfield Macdonald's Liberals agreed, but few newspapers in Canada West argued the Liberal stance.

Catholics in West Canada, who were mainly Irish, did not support the Catholic Sandfield Macdonald, who was Scottish. Instead they rallied under the Irish Thomas D'Arcy McGee, who supported the confederation project born of the Québec Conference.

Native People's Reactions

The confederation project arose from the governing majority's desire to politically restructure the British North American colonies. This governing majority was white, male and predominantly British or French-Canadian. The voice of the Native peoples in Canada was not heard during the constitutional conferences in Charlottetown, Québec City or London. When Manitoba joined Canada, the events that transpired showed just how hard the Métis, in this case, had to fight for recognition of their rights. As historian Jean-Pierre Charland states:

[*translation*]

"Although the people in the territories belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company were not invited to send representatives, one resolution of the Québec Conference provided for their inclusion in the federation. The Red River colony would not be a province, but a territory, under the authority of the federal government."

(Jean-Pierre Charland et al., Le Canada : un pays en évolution. Manuel d'apprentissage, Montréal : Lidec, 1994, p.381)

In 1869, two years after Confederation, the Parliament of Canada promulgated *An Act for the temporary government of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory when united with Canada*, and in 1870 Manitoba became a province of Canada. Many Ontario politicians coveted the territories west of the province as their due, and were particularly displeased with the prospect of the predominantly Francophone and Catholic Métis standing in their way. (Ibid, p.381)

The only mention of Native people in the wording of the new Constitution was in section 91, paragraph 24, where it stated that "the exclusive Legislative Authority of the Parliament of Canada extends to all Matters coming within the Classes of Subjects next hereinafter enumerated: (...) 24. Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians." (BNA Act, section 91, paragraph 24)

The Birth of a Province

As a result of these negotiations and deliberations, in 1867, the province of Ontario was created. The word Ontario is believed to be derived from the Iroquoian for "vast body of water." The province bears the same name as Lake Ontario, first referred to by this name in the Jesuit *Relations* toward 1641.

Like everywhere else in the new country, towns in the province were decorated to celebrate Dominion Day. The province's many newspapers described on the event.

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