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Quebec (1867)

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[Map: Canada, 1867](#)

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Territorial Development

At the time of Confederation, the province consisted only of the southern part of what is known as modern-day Quebec. Almost half the population (42.5%) lived in the Montréal area. Elsewhere in the province, most settlers lived along the shores of the St. Lawrence, but settlements were beginning to take root in the Laurentians, on the shores of the Ottawa, Saint-Maurice and Saguenay Rivers, and in the Eastern Townships.

Population and Urban Development

The 1871 census indicates that the population of Quebec was nearly 1.2 million, of which 86% was Catholic. Of the total population, 78% was French, 10% was Irish, 6% was English, and 5% was Scottish. At the time of Confederation, the total population of the British North American colonies was about 3.5 million, of which 75% lived in United Canada (Quebec and Ontario). About 80% of the population of United Canada lived in rural areas.

From 1840 to 1867, Quebec's population nearly doubled despite an exodus of close to 200,000 people to factories in New England. Montréal and Québec City were the main urban centres affected by the skyrocketing population. In 1851, the population of Montréal was 57,000; by 1861, it was 90,000. Québec City had a population of 50,000 in 1861.

The year 1854 marked an important event in the history of Quebec -- the abolition of the seigneurial system, a legacy of the French colonial era which governed land grants and land development in Lower Canada (later Canada East). In the 19th century, the landed bourgeoisie demanded that this system be amended, if not revoked. In 1854, the government voted to abolish the system and to indemnify seigneurial landowners. Though they were not living under this tenure, the inhabitants of Canada West and the Eastern Townships protested that they would not be indemnified and succeeded in winning a compensation of sorts.

Montréal



Montréal harbour, ca.
1874.



Montréal, from Place
d'Armes, 1865.



Montréal, from Beaver
Hall hill, ca. 1851.



Montréal, Marché
Bonsecours, ca. 1875.



Montréal, from Mount
Royal, 1865.

Québec



Québec, Saint-Jean and
Couillard streets, ca.
1868-1871.



Québec, Casse-Cou stairs, ca. 1870-1872.



Québec, Saint-Jean Street, ca. 1860-1865.



Québec, Saint-Jean Street, ca. 1865.



Québec, winter scene, ca. 1872.

Transportation

In 1867, Quebec's rail network was underdeveloped, comprising only 925 km of rail. Its only line was the Grand Trunk, which ran from Rivière-du-Loup to Sarnia, Ontario.

While the government invested somewhat in the development of the railway, it did not contribute to building or maintaining the province's roads. As a result, the road network was equally underdeveloped and in dreadful condition. In summer, rain turned the poorly maintained dirt roads into a sea of mud. The situation improved somewhat in winter, when frost smoothed the road surfaces. The condition of the roads was not the only problem, however. The number of roads between cities and towns was too small to allow for close relations between communities.

Maritime transportation, however, played a crucial role in the province. The St. Lawrence linked the ports of Québec City and Montréal to the Great Lakes and to international markets. The Ottawa River connected western Quebec and eastern Ontario to the economic centres, while the Richelieu River provided a navigable route to New York.

The Economy

After the recovery of 1850, the economy of United Canada proved that the colony could survive and prosper quite well without the British preferential system. Beginning in 1854, Canadian wheat exports rose dramatically as a result of the Crimean War's impact on the international wheat market. Exports in general increased under the Reciprocity Treaty of 1855-66, while the boom in railway construction stimulated the economy. These elements combined to give United Canada a robust economy.

Quebec's industrial production was limited to logging and lumber processing, as well as leather and potash production. The reorientation of agricultural production in the early 1830s proved a success: oats, barley, fodder and livestock production replaced wheat farming, which was now concentrated in Canada West. Commercial agriculture, rather than subsistence farming, was mainly found in the area around Montréal, near Lake Saint-Pierre, and in the Eastern Townships. This production was intended for the domestic market and the United States. Rural Canada East benefited greatly from the Reciprocity Treaty and the higher demand generated by the American Civil War.

Shortly before Confederation, Montréal was the metropolis of British North America. Luxury hotels, horse-drawn streetcars and well-maintained streets were the hallmarks of Montréal's prosperity, and many people were drawn to the city. Many of the colony's largest companies and banks were headquartered in Montréal: the Grand Trunk, the Molson Bank, the Bank of Montréal, the Merchants' Bank, and the Bank of British North America. The port of Montréal was served by a well-developed canal system and was located at the confluence of several major rivers. Ships from all over the world were moored in Montréal, and the port was a hub teeming with goods of all kinds.

Political Organization

The *Act of Union* was passed on July 23, 1840, and came into effect on February 10, 1841. The Act, which governed Quebec from 1841 to 1867, united Lower Canada (Quebec) and Upper Canada (Ontario). Beginning in 1840, the colony was called the Province of Canada, or United Canada, which was divided into Canada East (Quebec) and Canada West (Ontario).

Politically, the new province was governed as follows: a governor appointed by the British Crown - he was the true leader of the government. He was aided by an executive council not answerable to the House; a legislative council appointed by the Crown; and an elected assembly with 84 representatives, 42 for Canada East and 42 for Canada West.

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 the Council must resign if the governing party or coalition lost its majority.

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

Factors Leading to Confederation

Political Factors

By the early 1860s, Great Britain was gradually losing interest in its North American colonies, which were seen to be an economic, military and political burden. With this detachment came a desire to reorganize the colonies' political structure by giving them greater autonomy. The political system of United Canada had been extremely unstable since the mid-1850s. Government crises occurred every year from 1854 to 1857, and twice a year in 1858, as well as from 1862 to 1864. Once in power, the Great Coalition of John A. Macdonald, George-Étienne Cartier and George Brown planned a legislative union of the British North American colonies. The debate surrounding the issue of representation by population (rep by pop) also called for a political reorganization.

Economic Factors

The success of railway companies, particularly that of the Grand Trunk Railway Company, was crucial to the economic health of United Canada. In 1855, skyrocketing construction costs forced the government to begin massive investment in the Grand Trunk Railway Company in order to save the project. This commitment spelled financial ruin for the government, which would soon be unable to pay interest on its debt. It became clear that railway profits would never materialize. The government of United Canada was forced to increase import tariffs, its main source of revenue. But these hikes could not solve the colony's financial woes. In 1860, the government had to borrow more money to buy out the Grand Trunk Railway Company's debts. In 1860, Canadian debt reached \$50 million. The Reciprocity Treaty with the United States was about to expire and Canada

had no choice but to turn to the markets of the British Atlantic colonies. When the Reciprocity Treaty came to an end in 1866, fewer markets were available to Canada. A union of the British colonies in North America would open up new markets.

Security Factors

Great Britain was no longer interested in financing the defence of its North American colonies and asked that United Canada assume the responsibility for its own defence. In 1862, as a show of goodwill, the Macdonald-Cartier government proposed a bill allocating \$1 million to maintain a militia of 50,000 men. The bill was defeated in the House, disappointing the British authorities. From then on, they would be receptive to any project to unite the North American colonies, which would solve the problem of North American defence.

When the American Civil War ended, Great Britain worried about the victors' reaction to British support of the Southern cause. Britain's withdrawal from North America might normalize relations between Canada and the United States.

The perceived "threat" posed by expanding American interests increased when the United States purchased Alaska. Great Britain believed that the uncertain status of the North-Western Territory and Rupert's Land might lead to confrontation with the United States. In the mid-1860s, Great Britain encouraged negotiations to transfer these territories to the new country that would become Canada. When Confederation came into effect in 1867, the Hudson's Bay Company began the transfer of the North-Western Territory and Rupert's Land to the new Dominion of Canada.

Finally, Great Britain also feared that Fenians might attack its North American colonies.

Factors Related to the Railway

In the mid-19th century, Great Britain wanted, for strategic reasons, to connect its North American colonies by means of a railway. Given the project's scope, no single colony could provide the necessary financial resources. A political union would allow the colonies to pool their resources and make the railway project more feasible.

The Process

In 1858, after George-Étienne Cartier and Alexander Tilloch Galt reached an agreement, the former announced a government project in these terms:

"Le gouvernement étudiera l'opportunité d'une union fédérale des provinces britanniques de l'Amérique du Nord, et se mettra en communication à ce sujet avec le gouvernement impérial et avec les provinces Maritimes. Le résultat de ces communications sera soumis au Parlement à sa prochaine session."

(Robert Rumilly, Histoire de la province de Québec, vol. 1, Montréal : Fides, 1971, p. 15)

[translation]

"The government shall study the timeliness of a federal union of British North American provinces, and will contact the imperial government and Maritime provinces in this regard. The result of these communications will be presented to Parliament next session."



Étude sur l'union projetée des provinces britanniques de l'Amérique du Nord by Joseph Cauchon, 1858. p.36

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This project was essentially that of Alexander Tilloch Galt. It arose from an ideological debate begun by some members of the Canadian political elite, Francophone and Anglophone, when the Canadas were united in 1840. In 1858, many of the main players in the Confederation conferences of 1864 to 1867 were already on the scene, including George Brown, George-Étienne Cartier, John A. Macdonald, Alexander Tilloch Galt, Joseph-Charles Taché, Antoine-Aimé Dorion, Étienne-Paschal Taché, Hector-Louis Langevin and Thomas D'Arcy McGee. Others, like Joseph-Édouard Cauchon, exerted a more subtle influence. Though only a member of Parliament, Cauchon managed to influence public opinion in favour of a political union through his newspaper, *Le Journal de Québec*.

In 1858, George-Étienne Cartier, Alexander Tilloch Galt and John Ross travelled to London to present Queen Victoria with a federation project for the British North American colonies. There were received with polite indifference. After this refusal, the political class put its project aside for a number of years. The frequent changes in government also disrupted the process. The federation project resumed in 1864, and this time, it was brought to a conclusion on July 1, 1867.

In 1864, when the Conservative Taché-Macdonald government was defeated in the House, George Brown, who held the balance of power, wanted to resolve the political crisis once and for all, and agreed to co-operate with any government that accepted constitutional reform. (Ibid, p. 18) John A. Macdonald, who did not like George Brown at first, made an overture to him. Brown replied that he would join a Conservative majority government if it agreed to include federation as part of its platform. (Ibid, p. 18) This government, called the Great Coalition, included several politicians who favoured a union of British colonies, including Alexander Tilloch Galt, George-Étienne Cartier, Hector-Louis Langevin, Étienne-Paschal Taché, Thomas D'Arcy McGee and Jean-Charles Chapais. It was this overture to George Brown that set the wheels of the Confederation project in motion. The overture was also remarkable in that political foes joined forces to support a common goal. This goal was hard to define, however, since not everyone had the same definition of Confederation. Alexander Tilloch Galt, for example, believed the Confederation project should include the Maritime provinces, while George Brown initially viewed it simply as an amendment to the union of Canada East and Canada West. In the end, all managed to agree.

The Charlottetown Conference

For close to ten years, the British Atlantic colonies had considered a union to improve their lot in colonial North America. By simplifying their administration, reducing expenses, and pooling their energies and resources, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia might face the future with serenity.

As we have seen, the Province of Canada was also considering a political reorganization of the British North American colonies. The union could include only Canada East and Canada West, or the Maritime colonies as well. Having heard of the discussions of underway among the three Maritime colonies, the Parliament of United Canada contacted the various colonial governments. All agreed to meet in Charlottetown in September 1864 to discuss a possible union.

The Parliament of United Canada obtained permission to send seven of its members. For Canada West, the representatives were John A. Macdonald, George Brown and William McDougall; for Canada East, they were George-Étienne Cartier, Alexander-Tilloch Galt, Hector-Louis Langevin and Thomas D'Arcy McGee.

The United Canada delegates explained their plan for a union of British North American colonies. They did so with such conviction that the delegates for the Maritime colonies set aside their initial Maritime union project to concentrate on the new Canadian federation project. In Charlottetown, they agreed to resume discussions at a second conference in October 1864, this time in Québec.

Before returning to Canada, the United Canada delegates toured the Maritime colonies, giving speeches and drumming up support for their project.

The Québec Conference

The United Canada delegates who attended the Québec Conference were, for Canada East: Étienne-Paschal Taché, George-Étienne Cartier, Alexander Tilloch Galt, Jean-Charles Chapais, Hector-Louis Langevin, Thomas D'Arcy McGee and, for Canada West: John A. Macdonald, George Brown, Alexander Campbell, Oliver Mowat, William McDougall and James Cockburn.

The Québec Conference was held in the utmost secrecy from October 10 to 26, 1864. When the general population made it clear that it wanted to know more about the negotiations that would decide their future, the Québec Resolutions were published. These resolutions served as the basis for the talks leading to Confederation. It was essentially these same 72 resolutions that were voted on, after long debate, by the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly of United Canada.

Anti-Confederation Reaction

The "parti rouge", some Clear Grits in Canada West, and a few Conservatives from both parts of United Canada reacted negatively to the publication of the Québec Conference resolutions. They objected to the project as it was proposed. All disagreed with its centralizing nature. Parts of the population in Canada East were not interested in a legislative union based on representation by population. The more radical "parti rouge" under Jean-Baptiste-Éric Dorion and some French-Canadian Conservatives feared that French-Canadian institutions were not given enough assurances. As elsewhere in the British North American colonies, the Confederation project was a subject of disagreement.

Antoine-Aimé Dorion, the Liberal leader in Canada East, was the most vocal opponent of Confederation. He feared for the independence of the provinces called to form the new Canada, and believed that inclusion of the Maritime colonies would increase the financial burden on United Canada. Moreover, the Senate, as it was proposed at the Québec Conference, could impede the will of the people and block adoption of progressive legislation. Finally, he firmly believed that the Confederation project should be subject to the people's approval by a vote. Antoine-Aimé Dorion gave a speech to the constituents of the Hochelaga riding and, in 1865, he made a long plea to Parliament against Confederation. In October 1866, he signed a manifesto as a last resort. The document's signatories, who claimed to represent one third of the ridings in Lower Canada, gave the history of the federal project to show that it was not the will of the people.

The "parti bleu" under George-Étienne Cartier retorted that the Confederation project drafted in Québec adequately recognized and protected the rights of Francophones as a distinct cultural and ethnic group, as well as the rights of Quebec as a province. Confederation was an object of debate in Quebec. But the well-oiled political machine of the "parti bleu", supported by the persuasive power of the Catholic clergy, assured that such debate did not impede the Confederation project.

The London Conference

The road to the new Dominion of Canada ended in London. The delegates for United Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick met at the Westminster Palace Hotel on December 4, 1866. Their working document was the Québec Resolutions. After one month, they emerged with a new

document: the London Resolutions. The delegates for United Canada were, for Canada West: John A. Macdonald, William McDougall and W. P. Howland; for Canada East: George-Étienne Cartier, Alexander Tilloch Galt and Hector-Louis Langevin. The talks were chaired by John A. Macdonald, who tried to change the wording of the Québec Resolutions several times. George-Étienne Cartier and other delegates had to temper his zeal.

Once the London Resolutions were drafted, the text had to be converted to a parliamentary bill. The imperial government assigned several of its best writers and jurists to the task. The bill was debated in Great Britain's House of Lords and House of Commons.

Native People's Reactions

The history of relations between Native people and the British and Canadian governments is one of unequal power. London and the various colonial governments imposed their view of the established order with a series of treaties and laws intended to regulate the lives of Aboriginal people. The process that led to Confederation did not consider Aboriginal people, yet they lived in the land and were directly affected by the decisions made from 1864 to 1866 in Charlottetown, Québec and London. As Olive Patricia Dickason has stated [*translation*]: "When the federation of British North America was agreed upon in 1867, Aboriginal people were, yet again, not consulted; the possibility of an association with them was not even raised." (Olive Patricia Dickason, *Les premières nations du Canada*, Sillery, Québec : Septentrion, 1996, p. 253)

A New Country

The British Parliament passed the *British North America Act* without difficulty in March 1867. United Canada, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were brought together under a same constitution. Canada East became the province of Quebec, and Canada West became the province of Ontario.

The birth of the new country was celebrated on July 1, 1867. Towns were decorated modestly. Newspapers were no longer fascinated by Confederation, and simply mentioned the few official meetings organized to mark the event.

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