

Chapter

4

Confederation Discussed and Delayed

Tragedy in Ottawa

THE OTTAWA TIMES

Tuesday, April 7, 1868

HORRIBLE TRAGEDY!

*Hon. Thomas D'Arcy McGee
Shot Dead on the Street*



The newspapers tell the story. One of the Fathers of Confederation, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, has been murdered. He was gunned down in the street as he was walking home from a late night meeting of the House of Commons. As he bent down to unlock his door, he was shot from behind at close range. The bullet went right through his brain.

Within a few minutes, a little crowd gathered around the slumped body. A doctor pronounced McGee dead. Someone ran to John A.'s house with the news. Macdonald hurried to the scene and helped carry his friend into the house.

McGee was a brilliant speaker. He was one of the strongest supporters of Confederation. In speeches in Parliament he spoke of the great future Canadians could have if they united with the other British colonies in North America. But McGee

had enemies. He had also spoken out strongly against the Fenians. He warned of the danger of the Fenian plot to throw the British out of North America. He urged the government to train and arm a large militia to defend against the Fenians. In the end, the Fenians got even with D'Arcy McGee.

The government offered \$20 000 for information leading to the arrest of the assassin. The murder was traced to the Fenians. The assassin, Patrick Whelan, was tried, convicted, and hanged. But Canada had lost one of the leading Fathers of Confederation at a time when he was needed most.

Predicting

1. D'Arcy McGee was assassinated *after* Confederation had been won in 1867. What effect do you think the news of his assassination had on people in the new country of Canada?
2. What does the murder of D'Arcy McGee suggest about the atmosphere in Canada around the time of Confederation?

Confederation Conferences 1864

Before D'Arcy McGee's sudden assassination in 1868, the work toward Confederation had been underway for several years. There were many obstacles to overcome. In 1864, two conferences were held that changed the course of history for the British North American colonies.

The Charlottetown Conference

It is 1 September 1864. Delegates from the Province of Canada including John A. Macdonald, George Brown, D'Arcy McGee, Alexander Galt, and George Cartier have just stepped off the ship at Charlottetown. They have come to join in a conference organized by the Maritime colonies. The conference is to discuss a union of the Maritime colonies. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island had been talking about a union among themselves for several years. The Canadian politicians have come with their plan for an even wider union, one that would include Canada and the Maritimes.



Fathers of Confederation arrive for the Charlottetown Conference. PEI politician W. H. Pope rows out to greet them.

The speeches from the Canadian politicians are effective. They promise to build a railway connecting Canada and the Maritimes. They talk about the advantages of free trade between the colonies. Maritime fish and coal would find a large new market with the 3 million people living in the Canadas. The Maritime delegates are interested. They agree to meet with the Canadians to discuss the idea of Confederation further at another conference in Québec City in October.

The Charlottetown Conference Program

Friday, 2 September 1864

Speaker: George Cartier
Topic: "The Arguments in Favour of Confederation"

Luncheon: buffet luncheon of lobster, oysters, and other island delicacies at the home of W.H. Pope in Charlottetown

Saturday, 3 September 1864

Speaker: A.T. Galt
Topic: "How Finances Could be Arranged in the United Provinces"

Luncheon: Canadians host a party on board the *Queen Victoria*

Speaker: George Cartier
Topic: "Canada of the Future"

Speaker: George Brown
Topic: "The Dream of Canada Atlantic to Pacific"

Monday, 5 September 1864

Speaker: George Brown
Topic: "The Powers of the General Government and the Powers of the Local Government in Confederation"

Tuesday, 6 September 1864

Topic: "Other Reasons for Confederation"

Wednesday, 7 September 1864

Maritime delegates report on their decision about Confederation

Thursday, 8 September 1864

Supper and Grand Ball, Parliament Buildings, Prince Edward Island (speeches, dinner, dancing)



As a break from the political discussions, delegates and their wives join in grand balls, banquets, and other social activities at the conferences. These social events help to support the spirit of cooperation. In the many conversations, women offer their advice and points of view on the issues.

The Québec Conference

In October, delegates from all the colonies gather together at Québec City. There are seven from New Brunswick, seven from Prince Edward Island, and five from Nova Scotia. Newfoundland, which had not been present at Charlottetown, sends two officials. All are ready to sit down and talk business with the twelve delegates from Canada East and Canada West.

The politicians have to work out all the details of a plan for union. All the Fathers of Confederation agree on one point. The union must be a strong one that could not be broken by any one province. The central government must have great power. In fact, it must be more powerful in every way than the governments of the provinces. The plan worked out is known as the **Seventy-Two Resolutions**.



Netsurfer

Find out about the important roles the wives of politicians played at this time in history by visiting this web site on the Mothers of Confederation
www.nlc-bnc.ca/confed/moc.htm

Key Points of the Seventy-Two Resolutions

- There would be a strong central (federal) government to look after affairs affecting the whole country such as defence, trade, and foreign affairs.
- Each province would have its own government to look after local matters.
- The system of government would follow the British Constitution and the head of government would be the queen or king of England.
- The federal government would be made up of an elected House of Commons and an appointed Legislative Council (Senate).
- Members in the House of Commons would be elected according to the principle of representation by population.
- Members of the Legislative Council would be appointed and each region (Canada East, Canada West, Atlantic Canada) would have 24 members.
- Newfoundland, the North-West Territories, British Columbia and Vancouver would be allowed into the union as terms could be worked out.

Skill Building: Interpreting Political Cartoons

You probably enjoy reading the comics in the newspaper. Did you know that there are other cartoons in the paper as well? They are usually found on the editorial page. These are political cartoons. **Political cartoons** are designed to poke fun at politicians. Through the use of humour and sarcasm, they comment on important policies or issues of the day. They usually use only one picture to get their message across.

When you look at political cartoons, here are some questions to ask. Use them to help you understand the political cartoon below drawn by J.W. Bengough at the time of Confederation. He is examining the question: "Who is the Father of Confederation?"

Key Questions

- Does the cartoon have a title? If so, what does it mean?
- What issue or event is the cartoon referring to?
- What is the setting? Describe what you see.
- Who are the people or figures in the cartoon? What is their mood? What are they saying?
- What other objects, symbols, words, or letters are in the cartoon? What do they mean?
- What comparisons are being made?
- What is the cartoonist's view of the issue or event? What does he or she think about it?
- At what or whom is the cartoonist poking fun?
- What is the main message of the cartoon? Try to state it in a sentence.
- Does the cartoonist succeed in getting the message across effectively? Why or why not?

What Can You Learn?

- Working in groups, collect political cartoons from modern newspapers and magazines. Each group could focus on a particular theme, character, or issue of the day. Then create a scrapbook of your collection with a short explanation for each cartoon.
- Try creating your own political cartoon. Decide on an issue, character, or group to focus on. Think about what you want the cartoon to say and how you can say it clearly and simply. Remember not to make it too complicated. You want your audience to get the message almost immediately. Present your cartoons to the class.



Confederation Discussed and Delayed

The Québec Conference was a fine beginning, but there was trouble ahead. The Seventy-Two Resolutions had to be accepted by the government of each colony. The Fathers of Confederation went home to convince their people of the idea. Would the people of the colonies be as excited about Confederation as were the delegates to the Charlottetown and Québec conferences?

Seesaw in New Brunswick

In New Brunswick, Premier Leonard Tilley was a staunch supporter of Confederation. After the Québec Conference, Tilley called an election in New Brunswick. Confederation was the main issue. Those who were opposed to Confederation (the **anti-Confederationists**) poked fun at the whole idea. At the Québec Conference, it had been decided that each province would receive a sum of money each year from the central government. This money was called a **subsidy**. The amount of the subsidy was based on the population of the colony. In the case of New Brunswick, the subsidy amounted to 80¢ per person. Opponents of Confederation complained that Tilley was selling New Brunswickers out to the Canadians for 80¢ each.

On election day in 1865, the anti-Confederationists won easily. It was a black day for those who dreamed of a great united country. Without New Brunswick, there could be no Confederation. New Brunswick was the land link between Canada and the other Atlantic colonies.

But Leonard Tilley did not give up. In the months that followed, he spoke in every part of the colony on the subject of Confederation. He talked about the advantages of the Canadian market for New Brunswick. He said that railway construction would open new lands for settlement and for forestry, plus provide new jobs. His personal efforts helped to win people over to the side of Confederation.



Leonard Tilley became premier of New Brunswick in 1858. He also became a Member of Parliament for the province in the new government at Ottawa after Confederation.

Three other events helped to convince New Brunswickers that there could be no progress without Confederation:

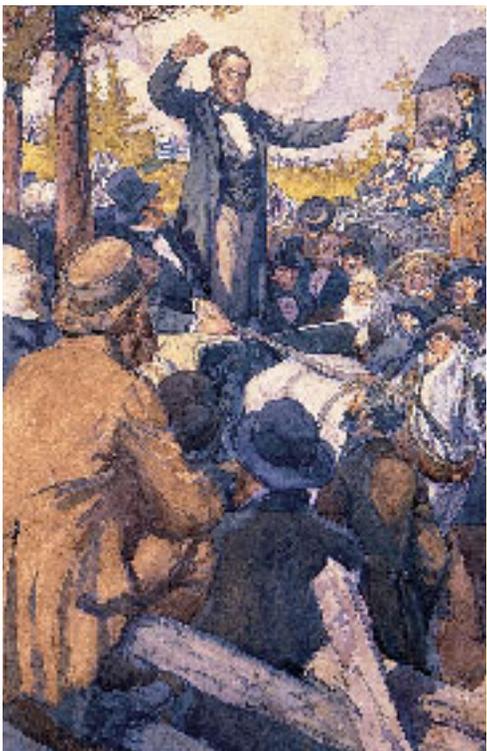
1. The United States ended free trade with the British North American colonies. No longer would New Brunswick's goods enter into the United States tax-free.
2. The British government sent a message encouraging New Brunswickers to join Confederation.
3. The Fenians attacked New Brunswick in 1866. The people were terrified as word arrived of hundreds of Fenians gathering near the border. The New Brunswick militia was called out. During April, small bands of Fenians did cross into the colony.

While the Fenian threat was still present, an election was again called in New Brunswick. This time, people voted in favour of Confederation.

Success in Canada West

In Canada, the politicians spent more than a month debating the Québec Conference resolutions. Every member of the Assembly was allowed to speak. One of the most effective speeches was given by George Brown. Brown gave six main reasons why he was in favour of Confederation:

1. Confederation would change them from five unimportant colonies into a great and powerful nation.
2. It would remove the barriers to trade among the colonies and provide a market of four million people.
3. Canada would become the third largest sea-going nation in the world after Britain and the United States.
4. It would encourage people to come from other countries to settle in Canada.
5. Since the United States had cancelled free trade with the colonies, Confederation would provide other markets for their goods.
6. In case of war, all the colonies would stand strong together.



The people of Canada listened to respected leaders like George Brown and John A. Macdonald. When the vote was taken, the resolutions were approved 91 to 33.

George Brown gave many powerful speeches in favour of Confederation. After 1867, he withdrew from politics and gave all his attention to his newspaper, the *Globe*. In 1873, he was appointed to the Senate, but he called it a dreary place because it was so quiet. His life ended in tragedy. Brown had fired an employee for being drunk. The employee burst into the *Globe* offices and shot George Brown. He never recovered from the attack and died on 10 May 1880.

Success and Tragedy in Canada East

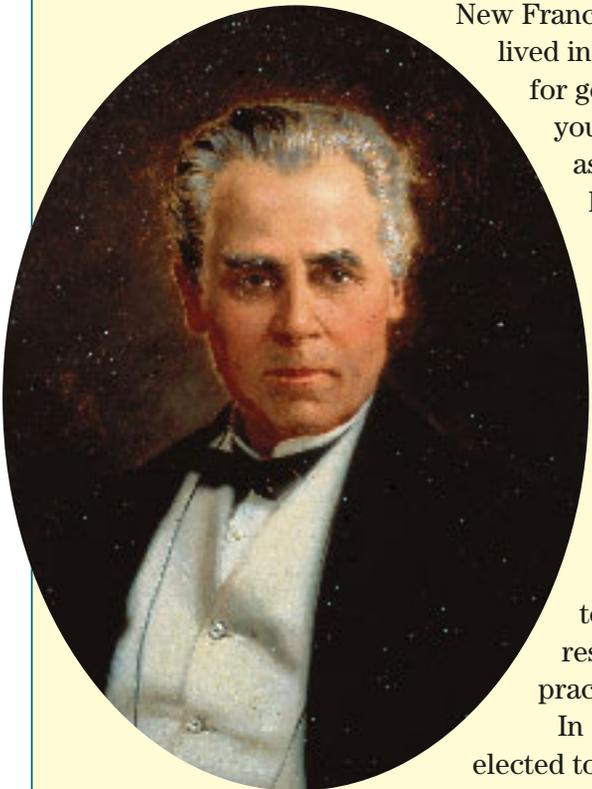
In Canada East, there were bitter critics of the plan for Confederation. The leader of the reformist *Parti Rouge*, A. A. Dorion, complained that at the Québec Conference only 4 of the 33 delegates were French-speaking. The discussions had been carried on entirely in English. Dorion argued that Canada East was being sold out. The new government would be based on representation by population and Canada East would be outnumbered in the new parliament.

Most French-speaking Canadians were eventually won over to the idea of Confederation by George-Étienne Cartier. He explained that in Confederation, French and English would be equal partners. He promised they would not lose their language, religion, or schools. Cartier warned that if Canada East did not join Confederation, it could be swallowed up by the United States.

The Roman Catholic Church added its voice in support of Confederation. But when it came time to vote, 22 of the 48 French-speaking members of the combined Assembly of Canada East and Canada West voted *against* Confederation. A. A. Dorion wanted a **referendum**. This means that all the people of Canada East would be given the chance to vote on the question. Dorion believed that on such an important issue it was not enough just to have the elected members of the Assembly vote. His request was refused by Cartier and the supporters of Confederation. The vote in the Assembly of Canada East and West went in favour of Confederation.

Profile

George-Étienne Cartier



George Étienne Cartier was a descendant of Jacques Cartier, the famous explorer of New France. His family had lived in French Canada for generations. As a young man, he trained as a lawyer. In 1837 he fought on the *Patriote* side in the Rebellion in Lower Canada. After the Battle of St. Denis, Cartier fled to the United States. When things quieted down, he returned to Canada and resumed his law practice.

In 1848, Cartier was elected to the legislature of Canada. By 1856 he was the leader of the *Parti Bleu* or Conservatives in Canada East. Cartier worked closely with John A. Macdonald to govern the Province of Canada in the years before Confederation.

At both Confederation conferences, Cartier spoke strongly in favour of union. He was probably the most important influence in persuading French Canadians to join Confederation. After 1867, Cartier remained one of the leading ministers from Québec in the new government. However, his health failed and he died in 1873. When Macdonald unveiled a statue of Cartier on Parliament Hill he said: “Cartier was as brave as a lion ... If not for him Confederation could not have been carried.”

1. List some similarities and differences between George Cartier and John A. Macdonald.
2. Reread John A. Macdonald’s quote about Cartier at the end of the Profile. What did John A. mean? To what extent do you think this statement is true?

Division in Nova Scotia

In 1864, Charles Tupper became the premier of Nova Scotia. Tupper was excited and enthusiastic about the possibility of Confederation.

But when he returned to Halifax from Québec, he found trouble. Opposition leaders, especially Joseph Howe, were stirring up a storm against union. Tupper knew that if he tried to introduce the Seventy-Two Resolutions in the Assembly, he would be defeated.

Instead, he stalled for time. He travelled throughout the colony and tried to destroy the arguments of Howe and the anti-Confederationists. Bitter statements were written and spoken on both sides. Friendships were broken up when people disagreed violently over the need for union.

About that time, word reached Nova Scotia of the Fenian threat to New Brunswick. Many thought that there was a real possibility that Nova Scotia would be invaded too. New Brunswickers had started to talk seriously of joining Confederation. Some people in Nova Scotia began to hint that they might also join if they received a better deal from Ottawa. Nova Scotia did eventually agree to enter Confederation.



Joseph Howe spoke out passionately against Confederation in Nova Scotia. He objected to the subsidy worked out with the new government. “Tupper has sold out to central Canada for a grant of 40¢ per person—the price of a sheepskin,” roared Howe. Howe continued his campaign against Confederation for years, but ultimately lost the battle.



Fast Forward

Newspapers Past and Present

The first daily newspaper in Canada was the *Halifax Gazette* founded in 1752. George Brown founded the *Toronto Globe* in 1844, today one of our national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail*. At the time of Confederation, there was no radio or TV, so newspapers were one of the few ways to get news. There were almost 400 newspapers printed weekly or daily in British North America by 1865. The papers were usually just four pages. The front and back pages were mostly advertising. Inside was the news, letters to the editor, editorials, cartoons, and short summaries of debates in parliament. Today Canada has two national newspapers and thousands of local papers. Newspapers are also much larger and contain everything from local to international news, cartoons, weather reports, classified ads, business reports, regular columns, and entertainment reports.

Rejection in Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island flatly rejected the Québec Resolutions. It was not until six years later, in 1873, that Prince Edward Island entered Confederation.

Prince Edward Islanders feared they would be swamped in the union. The new Parliament would be based on representation by population. Prince Edward Island had a very small population, smaller than the city of Montréal. PEI would have only 5 out of a total of 194 members in the House of Commons. How could the voice of the island be heard with only five members in Parliament?

The people of the island listened to all the talk of a railway from Canada to the Maritimes. Since their province was an island, the railway was of no great interest to them. What they needed was a railway to join the places on the island. There was no mention of that in the Québec Resolutions.

Nor was there any mention of buying out the absentee landlords of the island. Not until the last minute was it suggested that this should be done. In October 1866, when it appeared that Prince Edward Island would not enter Confederation, a last-minute promise was made. Canada would buy the land for Prince Edward Island from the landlords for \$800 000. But it was too late. The Islanders had made up their minds. They wanted no part of Confederation. They thought they would gain very little.

Rejection in Newfoundland

Newfoundlanders had not sent representatives to the Charlottetown Conference. However, two delegates had attended the Québec Conference. One of these, F.B.T. Carter, became Newfoundland's premier in 1865. Although



A ferry across the Northumberland Strait was the only way to travel between PEI and New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In winter pack ice, passengers got out, put on harnesses, and pulled boats across. Promise of a steamer was one reason PEI agreed to join Confederation later in 1873.

Carter personally was in favour of Confederation, he could not convince his independent people. Newfoundlanders were very proud of their historic ties with Britain and the fact that they were Britain's first overseas colony.

A wealthy St. John's merchant, C.F. Bennett, led the fight against Confederation. He warned that the new government would probably tax their boats, fish, and fishing tackle. Goods from Canada, he said, would be so cheap that Newfoundland products would not sell. He hinted that young people from the island would be expected to give up their lives "in defence of the desert sands" of Canada. He made that statement even though Canada promised that Newfoundlanders would not have to serve in the army on the mainland.

On the night Confederation was defeated in Newfoundland, a huge parade wound through the streets of St. John's. Anti-Confederationists pushed a large coffin labelled "Confederation." The coffin was buried during a fake funeral. Confederation was a dead issue in Newfoundland. It stayed buried for 82 years until 1949 when Newfoundlanders voted to join Canada as the tenth province.

Culture Link

Anti-Confederation Song from Newfoundland



Hurrah for our own native isle, Newfoundland!
Not a stranger shall hold one inch of its strand!
Her face turns to Britain, her back to the Gulf,
Come near at your peril, Canadian Wolf!

Ye brave Newfoundlanders who plough the salt sea
With hearts like the eagle so bold and so free,
The time is at hand when you'll all have to say
If Confederation will carry the day.

Cheap tea and molasses they say they will give,
All taxes take off that the poor man may live;
Cheap nails and cheap lumber our coffins to make,
And homespun to mend our old clothes when they break.

If they take off the taxes how then will they meet
The heavy expense of the country's upkeep?
Just give them the chance to get us in the scrape
And they'll chain us like slaves with pen, ink, and red tape.

Would you barter the rights that your fathers have won,
Your freedom transmitted from father to son?
For a few thousand dollars of Canadian gold,
Don't let it be said that your birthright was sold.

Then hurrah for our own native isle, Newfoundland!
Not a stranger shall hold one inch of its strand!
Her face turns to Britain, her back to the Gulf,
Come near at your peril, Canadian Wolf!

Source: Edith Fowke, *Folk Songs of Canada* (Waterloo, ON: Waterloo Music Co., 1954).

1. What objections does this song suggest Newfoundlanders had to Confederation?
2. Why is a folk song an effective way to express feelings about key issues? What other folk songs do you know that express strong feelings about important questions?
3. Write one other stanza to go before the final refrain in the song or write a stanza for a pro-Confederation song from one of the other colonies.

Activities

Understanding Concepts

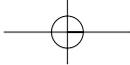
1. Add these new words to your *Factfile*.

Charlottetown Conference	Québec Conference	subsidy
Seventy-Two Resolutions	political cartoon	referendum
anti-Confederationists		

2. a) What was the original purpose of the Charlottetown Conference?
b) Was the Charlottetown Conference a success? For whom?
c) As the conference went on, Maritimers came around to the idea of Confederation. What methods did the Canadians use to persuade Maritimers that Confederation was a good idea?
3. Which colonies approved the Seventy-Two Resolutions? Which rejected them?
4. Suggest reasons why the people of Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island rejected the idea of Confederation.
5. Why did the people of the Canadas accept Confederation?

Digging Deeper

6. **WRITE/DISPLAY** *Extra, Extra! Read all about it!* What might the newspaper headlines in each of the colonies have been after the Confederation votes? Write headlines to reflect the mood and events in each colony. Display your headlines in a collage or on poster board.
7. **CREATE** Suppose you are a political cartoonist for a newspaper in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, or Newfoundland. Create an anti-Confederation cartoon for your newspaper. To help you, review the purpose and parts of a political cartoon on page 54.
8. **ROLE PLAY** Work in groups of three. Suppose you are all French Canadians living in Canada East in 1865-66. Each of you chooses one of the following three points of view. Prepare arguments to support your point of view and then role play a conversation. Be prepared to present arguments against the other alternatives.
 - a) You want to leave the government of the province as it is.
 - b) You prefer to divide the province again into the separate colonies of Canada East and Canada West.
 - c) You wish to join with the Maritimes to form a new nation.



Making New Connections

9. **THINK/DISCUSS** Explain the meaning of the word “referendum.” Suggest reasons why a referendum was not held on the question of Confederation in 1867. What are some issues today that should be decided by a referendum rather than by our elected representatives? Explain why you think these matters should be decided directly by the voters.
10. **MEDIA** In the 1860s, political speeches and newspapers were the main means of communicating a message. Today we have radio, television, telephones, e-mail, and the Internet. Work in groups. Each of you is a citizen of a different colony at the time of the Confederation debates. Write an e-mail to the other people in your group expressing your personal point of view on Confederation as an ordinary citizen of your colony.