



Scots who made their mark on..... *The History of Canada 3: John A. Macdonald*



Sir John Alexander Macdonald, (1815-1891)
"Sir John A", as he is frequently referred to, was arguably the most important politician in the history of Nineteenth Century Canada, delivering the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867 and the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway eighteen years later.

Though his family were from Sutherland, Macdonald was born in Glasgow and moved to Canada at the age of 14 when his family became economic migrants to the New World.



Within a year he had joined the legal profession and finding this his true métier, was called to the bar at the age of 21 and soon formed his own law firm. Turning to criminal law in 1837, Macdonald took on several high profile cases associated with the Rebellions of that year, defending over half a dozen men charged with treason and won acquittals in all cases. He also took on a high risk case giving private advice to American cross-border raiders who had tried to usurp British military authority at the Battle of Middlehill, when no other Canadian lawyer would go anywhere near the case. The American action had resulted in the spilling of much Canadian blood and several of the Americans went to the gallows, nevertheless grateful for Macdonald's technical support.

Having first become a Kingston, Ontario alderman he was elected a Member of Parliament in 1844 and ten years later made cabinet rank as Attorney-General in the new Liberal Conservative administration. In the following few years Macdonald served twice as Joint Premier of The Province of Canada, sharing the position with George-Étienne Cartier.



Macdonald and Sir Wilfrid Laurier (later P.M.) on a 1927 issue. The Scot had an uncanny resemblance to Benjamin Disraeli

Relying on the bitter-sweet support from the Liberals (under George Brown) and the Parti Bleu (under Cartier) Macdonald took his Conservatives into the Great Coalition in 1864-67 the main purpose of which was to effect the Confederation of Canada.

With British agreement for the creation of the Dominion, Macdonald became its first Prime Minister, was knighted by Queen Victoria on July 1st (Canada Day) and served a total of almost 20 years as P.M., winning six elections. His great ambition was now to unite, expand and prosper Canada. This was a time of great political activity and entrepreneurship as the North West Territory was purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company and new areas of the Dominion incorporated. However, in 1873, Macdonald was forced into Opposition for four years, following charges of bribery related to railway contracts made against him by the Liberal Party whose leader Alexander Mackenzie (1822-1892), another Scot, was invited to become the second Prime Minister of Canada

Macdonald was re-elected as Prime Minister in 1878, and in 1882 was credited with the controversial Canadian Pacific Railway as one of his greatest achievements. In its first year its value was greatly appreciated when it was used to send troops quickly to put down the North West Rebellion (between many of the Métis people led by Louis Riel and native Canadians protesting against the Government's policies of resettlement and expansion). The rebel leader's subsequent execution caused long lasting antipathy between the two communities.

Macdonald's last government was elected when he was 76 and in declining health in 1891. He had enjoyed alcohol to excess for most of his life, resorting to it to cope with a series of personal tragedies and political problems. Suffering a stroke in late May of that year Macdonald died within a week and was given a state funeral, his cortege seen by hundreds of thousands of people.

His name is synonymous with the development of Canada's nationhood and early prosperity.



Map showing an outline of the C.P.R. network and an early Canadian locomotive

Robert Harris's 1867 painting of the Fathers of Confederation.

Macdonald is pictured standing in the centre of the middle window

Below 1927 Issue for Charlottetown Confederation convention 1864 with Macdonald at centre of group





Scots who made their mark on..... *The History of Canada 6 : Alexander Mackenzie*



Rt Hon Alexander Mackenzie (1822-1892)

Born in Logierait, a small village just off the A9 between Dunkeld and Pitlochry, Alexander Mackenzie rose to become Canada's second Prime Minister. He formed a Liberal government for four years sandwiched between two Conservative administrations led by rival Sir John A. Macdonald and was responsible for the establishment of several long lasting aspects of Canada's institutional framework.

Mackenzie arrived in Canada aged 20 after a traditional Scottish schooling at Dunkeld and Perth and began work as a stone mason, a trade which he effectively developed into a business venture as a public building contractor in his new country. However he was also a writer and within a decade of arriving in Canada was editing a newspaper (the *Lambton Shield*) with Liberal views which were reinforced by strong Presbyterian beliefs. Within a few years of arriving in Canada he became a Baptist and also an influential figure in the burgeoning Temperance movement.

He was a notable public speaker, sermonising at length to large audiences in a distinct Scottish accent without much in the way of notes on account of his wide reading and tremendous memory and using a cutting, sardonic humour. He campaigned for the election to Parliament of the formidable editor of the *Globe* George Brown and then sought election himself. Happily married, widowed and married again, Mackenzie became the Liberal member of parliament for Lambton in Ontario in 1867, but when he became Prime Minister he must have had Shakespeare's words (from *Twelfth Night*) in mind....

"Be not afraid of greatness: some men are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them."

...because when Prime Minister John A. Macdonald had to resign late in 1873 facing charges in a bribery scandal concerning railway contracts—known as "the Pacific Scandal"—it looked as if nobody was eager to take the job: Canada's Governor General Dufferin had already spoken to three senior Opposition members before approaching Mackenzie to form a government. Mackenzie was technically leader of a Liberal party with many internal factions and schisms but was self-effacing, and as there were doubts about his suitability as P.M. other major figures in the Liberal Party were sounded out before him some of who created further problems for him once he was P.M. On taking office Mackenzie, however, honourably and sensibly sought a mandate from the people and following a general election in January of the following year was returned as Prime Minister, holding the post until Macdonald was returned four years later.



In his term as Premier Mackenzie accomplished much, streamlining government and immediately introduced the secret ballot for voting, the 1874 election being the first to use this method in Canada. Two of his biggest achievements were the creation of the Supreme Court of Canada and the establishment of the Royal Military College of Canada both of which were set up in his first two years of office.



Canada's equivalent of Sandhurst is commemorated in stamps in 1976 and 2001 and the Supreme Court by issues in 1975 depicting a statue of Justice and 2000



He also created the office of Auditor General and contributed to the formation of the national railway in which other Scots like Sir Sandford Fleming and Sir Donald Alexander Smith were involved.



When voted out of office in 1878 he remained as Opposition Leader for a further two years and continued as a backbench M.P., until his death which occurred as a result of an accident in 1892.



The R.M.C. Mackenzie Building as shown above on stamps

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