



Scots who made their mark on..... The History of Canada 4: Thomas Douglas



Far Right Prince Edward Island is top right and the relatively small Lake Saint Clair just to the right of the "T" in Detroit, bottom left, South of Lake Huron and W of Lake Erie.



Right (bottom right) the Winnipeg area, where the Red River Colony was founded. Note the city of Selkirk to the South of Lake Winnipeg

Thomas Douglas, 5th Earl of Selkirk (1771-1820)

The description of the Red River country in Sir Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages* is said to have been the first to arouse Douglas's interest in the region and both men were to buy shares in the Hudson Bay Company (H.B.C.) to promote the resettlement project.

Although a Lowlander, Douglas, very much aware of the Highland Clearances was a pioneer of emigration to northern America. He had travelled around the North of Scotland in 1792 as part of his education and in Ireland a decade later so had seen for himself the result of the intervention of great landlords like the Duke of Sutherland, coupled with atrocious weather which destroyed the meagre crops of peasant families. He began to theorise a social philosophy regarding what could be done to help people affected by privation and poverty but, as the seventh son of the 4th Earl, Douglas could only dream about what could be done—until remarkably, one by one, his six older brothers passed on and he had his father's wealth and title at his disposal.

Since the British government had a very stern attitude to "Irish rebels" Douglas, now Lord Selkirk, took 800 Scots to a new life on Prince Edward Island in 1803 and a year later others to found a new township to be called Baldoon on Lake St Clair, near the River Detroit. (See map, above right). Far from being an absentee philanthropist, Selkirk set out to inform himself about every aspect necessary for the successful organisation of new settlements and personally appointed his managers, not always successfully as it turned out.

Returning to Scotland in 1804 he wrote a tract arguing the whys and wherefores of what he was doing, very much against the official line of the British authorities, but his rank and wealth counted for a lot. When the Baldoon project foundered he turned his mind to "the Red River project" on land owned by the H.B.C., and working with Mackenzie and other friends and relatives bought enough shares in order to force the Company to sell him the land. The rival North West Company (N.W.C.) was very much against the idea also because the proposed settlement lay across their fur trading routes to the North.

So in 1811 Douglas was able to purchase an area five times the size of Scotland from H.B.C. to establish the Red River colony around

what is now Winnipeg (see smaller map above left) and during the second decade of the 19th century brought several shiploads of immigrants from Orkney, from the North of Scotland and from Ireland across vast tracts of North America to his Fort Douglas (now Point Douglas in Winnipeg).

For ten years these attempts at settlement greatly angered the N.W.C. trappers who responded with intimidation and violence forcing settlers off their land, but Douglas strongly retaliated to their plight so incurring the hatred and wrath of the fur-traders. More than that, it was a constant source of irritation and argument between H.B.C. and N.W.C., eventually bringing about the demise of the latter company and remorselessly eating away at Selkirk's fortune; his story is not a classic one of great success for an entrepreneurial Scot. In fact in 1816 he had to resort to physical intervention pitting his own troops against the local Métis people who supported N.W.C. for commercial reasons. Selkirk's colonisation project had in the cliché but apt phrase added insult to injury by firstly occupying their land then prohibiting their sales of pemmican to N.W.C. traders. The Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816 cost the lives of more than two dozen of Douglas's own men and the whole action was deemed illegal and called for his arrest.



The following protracted litigation with claim and counter claim becoming ever more desperate for Selkirk eventually broke his health—he was suffering from tuberculosis—and when in early 1819 he gained some sort of satisfaction from the Canadian courts his victory was a Pyrrhic one because he was by then very ill. Some of the final words he wrote about the Red River project sum up ironically what it really amounted to: "We had the prospect of doing so much good". Thomas Douglas, Lord Selkirk, died in the South of France in April 1820, a legend to those for whom he tried to offer change and prosperity and a noble Scot whose endeavours did not in the end produce the result for which he had aimed.

The Red River project was closed down for good within thirty years as the H.B.C. (which had taken over the N.W.C) lost interest but it was to be reborn as the basis of Manitoba following the Red River Rebellion in 1869/70.

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Scots who made their mark on..... *The History of Canada 5: George Brown*



Hon. George Brown (1818-1880)

Born in Alloa, George Brown rose to become a very considerable figure in the worlds of journalism and politics in Victorian Canada, so much so that his murder was widely regarded as an "assassination".

He moved to Toronto (via the USA) following completion of his degree at Edinburgh University and building on strong religious principles—he was a member of the Free Church of Scotland—his first newspaper venture was the proselytising and very popular *The Banner* in 1843. In the following year he published *The Globe* referenced on this 1968 Canadian issue. Quickly becoming a daily it was very influential in guiding political opinion all over Ontario.



Brown was elected as the Clear Grit (or Liberal) M.P. for Kent in 1851 and in that position made bitter and consistent attacks on the Roman Catholic Church and French Canadians which obviously would have polarised opinions about him greatly. It was largely through his influence that the sense of segregation between Protestant and Catholic which exists today was born. Brown was so concerned about the influence of the R.C. Church on the education of young and impressionable Canadians that he tried to have their faith schools abolished but the Church was too strong for him and he had to admit failure in this quest.

However, despite some radical opinions he was widely regarded as honest and principled. He was very interested in prison reform (producing *The Brown Report* in 1849) political democracy particularly as the growing population of Upper Canada was not proportionately represented in Parliament, reduction of bureaucracy and he was naturally an anti-slavery promoter.

A further major political topic of interest to Brown was confederating British colonies in northern America and in order

to achieve this he was prepared to compromise with fellow Scots politician and opponent Sir John Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, shown on the right of this 1927 issue celebration of Confederation. Macdonald and Brown are pictured in the painting "Fathers of the Confederation" (*bottom of page*) Brown sitting just right of centre, referenced in Canadian stamps for 1917 and 1927. Soon after Confederation was achieved (1867) Brown lost his seat and quit formal politics. He continued to be regarded as the doyen of the Liberal party though no longer an M.P. and much consulted about current affairs. He had argued for an appointed Upper Chamber in parliament and was made Senator in 1873, from which privileged position he continued to criticise his arch rival Sir John MacDonald.



He went on to support financial the purchase of North-West Territories from The Hudsons Bay Company, as first explored by Europeans including Scots such as Sir Alexander Mackenzie almost a century before and he was in favour of building favourable links with the U.S.A. following major hostilities earlier in the century.

When it was suggested to him that his various activities now merited a knighthood he rejected the idea, and also spurned the offer of becoming Governor of Ontario so when he was murdered by a sacked employee he was working as Editor of his beloved *Globe*, which he had founded some 36 years before. He was not killed outright as the term "murder" might imply but shot in the lower leg and died two months after the assault, in May 1880, from the effects of gangrene setting into the wound. His son George Mackenzie Brown (1869-1946) became a British M.P.

Over a hundred and twenty five years later, the *Globe* still exists as *The Globe and Mail*.

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

Brown is pictured very prominently at centre front, left hand across his lap

Below SG 244 (1917)



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