

## John A. Macdonald: Father of Confederation

History 103  
Canadian History Through Biography

How did John A.'s vision for Canada shape how the country developed from 1850 to 1891, when he died?  
What were his major achievements, and what motivated him to act?  
And what personality traits made him a successful politician?

### Personal Background

- born 10 Jan. 1815, Scotland
- To Upper Canada (Ontario) at age 5
- Lawyer – mainly commercial

Isabella Clark (married 1843, chronic illness, died 1857); lost first son

Province of Canada (1840)

CANADA WEST (Ont.); CANADA EAST (Que.)

### Approach to Political Power

- Pragmatic
- Need for balance between English and French
- Highly personal, charismatic, humourous

Macdonald-Cartier Coalition

1850s: “Instability was the essence of Canadian politics”

### Confederation Option

- Legislative Union; Federal System

The Great Coalition (June 1864)

U.S. Threat

Charlottetown Conference (Sept. 1864): The Blueprint Takes Form

Quebec Conference

Setbacks

London Conference (1866-67)

Confederation, 1 July 1867

- Big Dreams but a country *ad mari usque ad mari* (from sea to sea) not yet a reality

### Macdonald's Gov't (1867-73)

Nova Scotia and "Better Terms"

The Northwest and the question of Manitoba

"Macdonald Woos B.C." (1871)

Prince Edward Island comes on board (1873)

- Second Wife: **Susan Agnes Bernard**
- Daughter: **Mary**
  
- Personal Financial Woes

The Pacific Scandal (1873)

### Liberals: Alexander Mackenzie, 1874-78

1878 Campaign: "National Policy"

- Protective Tariff
- Transcontinental Railroad
- Immigration and Settlement of the West
- Regional Impacts
- "National Policy" as Canadian Nationalism

Anti-Americanism

"Provincial Rights"

Catholic-Protestant Tensions

Died 6 June 1891

### Approach to Politics

- Strong, centralized government
- British and Canadian
  - "A British subject I was born, a British subject I shall die." (1891)

### Major Achievements

- Confederation – BNA Act
- Canadian Pacific Railroad
- National Policy

Sir Wilfrid Laurier (1891):

"The place of Sir John A. Macdonald in this country was so large and so absorbing that it is almost impossible to conceive that the political life of this country can continue without him."