William England's photograph of the Great Western Railway crossing the Niagara Suspension Bridge in 1859 not only preserves for posterity a moment in time but conveys the dramatic impact civil engineering had in sustaining the great boom of the 1850s in Canada West (NAC/PA 165997)

Chapter 9

THE UNION YEARS 1841-1867

JAN NOEL

ONTARIO WAS OFFICIALLY known as Canada West but still usually called Upper Canada during the Union period, 1841-1867. In those brief 26 years she evolved from infancy to young adulthood. Settled by Loyalists in the late 18th century, Upper Canada was still finding her feet when she was united with predominantly French Lower Canada to form the Union of the two colonies in 1841. Both colonies having recently rebelled in 1837, they were now kept in leading strings by the governor and his appointed councillors, known as the Family Compact. When the novelist Charles Dickens visited Toronto at the beginning of the Union, he saw this tight rein as "rabid Toryism."

Despite this inauspicious opening of the Union period, Upper Canada was entering a time of growth that was truly remarkable. In the 1840s she learned to stand, politically, on her own two feet. The 1850s might be described as a period of troubled adolescence; in the 1860s the province was to emerge as an adult. It was a time of rapid growth, with Upper Canada's population tripling between 1841 and 1867. Independence would also increase: although never severing ties with Montreal, the region would develop her own business enterprises. The energetic young province would prove a driving force for economic expansion through railways and, later, through Confederation. Then too, in this union period the basic lines of Ontario's character would appear. The province's urban structure, key transportation lines, the roles of the major religious denominations, the educational system, the social welfare institutions, the dis-

When novelist Charles Dickens visi Toronto in the 1840s he saw the po scene as one of "rabid Toryism" (C.J. Humber Collection)

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1. In 1841 Upper Canada became better known as Canada West. It was not until 1867 that the province was named Ontario (NAC/NMC 2883); 2. Mid-nineteenth century immigrants by the thousands were quarantined at Grosse Isle in the St. Lawrence River before being transported to destinations in Canada West. Many were Irish seeking escape from famine; many hundreds died from typhus. Newspaper stories covering the 50th anniversary ceremonies on Grosse Isle labelled 1849 as the year of "the greatest calamity that ever befell a people sailing to Canadian shores" (taken from The Standard, Montreal, August 28, 1909/NAC/C 66299)

tinctive values, the systems of local and provincial government—all were inchoate or unclear at the beginning of the period, but, by the time Ontario entered Confederation, all those were firmly established.

The initial period of close tutelage was short. The Family Compact was a spent force by the mid-1840s. Around that time, too, England began withdrawing special trade privileges, beginning in 1846 with repeal of the Corn Laws. The weaning from the British protection was so traumatic that the merchants of Montreal, feeling abandoned, sought annexation by the United States. Canada West showed little interest in the proposal. Why annex when American markets were already available? The bustling little towns on Lake Ontario's North Shore had already begun sending their grain and potash down to the States by the Erie Canal, receiving groceries and wares in return. Canada West's loyalty, stiffened by the alternate source of supply, enabled her to turn her back on the Annexation Manifesto.

Less dependent now on the mother country, infant Ontario grew rapidly. Population doubled in the single decade of the 1840s, growing from 480,000 to 952,000. This was the decade of the pathetic Irish Famine migration. Of over 100,000 who came to British North America in 1847, many found their way to the upper half of the province; the dreaded typhus came along with them and took its toll of the frightened populace. By mid-century people of Irish origin were the largest single ethnic group in the province; but in contrast to the situation in both Ireland and the United States, the majority (about two-thirds) of Canada West's Irish were Protestant. Most of the Irish, both Catholic and Protestant, within a decade or two would settle themselves as farmers and blend into the landscape of a province in which, in 1851, about two-thirds of the populace still pursued rural occupations.

In the 1840s, though, the province was still brawling and noisy. Some of her primitive behaviour could be attributed to frontier conditions. Lumbering, which rivalled farming as the major industry, was a boisterous and often drunken business. It employed large numbers of men, away from their womenfolk, under dangerous conditions at the shanties and on the rushing waters. In the early 1840s the Irish Shiners battled with French Canadian lumberjacks for jobs in the Ottawa valley, carousing in the

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taverns and sending gangs of bullies to terrorize Bytown. A cruel climate and unfeeling views of how much hardship the labouring classes could stand saw canal workers digging from dawn until dusk, half-submerged in icy waters, with guards patrolling overhead to keep them quiet — small wonder that they drank, rioted and conducted some of Canada's earliest strikes. In the back townships, farm families still relied on their neighbours to help out with logging bees and barn raisings. These, too, were often drunken affairs that ended in fighting.

Much of the roughhousing, however, sprang not from the North American frontier but from ancient customs and rivalries the population had brought from Europe. Young Ontario re-enacted many of them. The ghosts of Henry VIII and John Knox, Wycliffe and Wesley walked abroad as religious sects clamoured and clashed. The Methodist alliance of British Wesleyans and Canadians broke apart, and Free Kirk Presbyterians splintered off from the Church of Scotland. A cry of condemnation greeted Bishop Strachan's attempt to establish the provincial university at Toronto as a Church of England school. In town, and especially in Toronto ("the Belfast of Canada"), Orangemen re-enacted the Battle of the Boyne, parading with King Billy astride his white horse, marching with fife and drum through the Green districts and hanging the heads of any who objected. Hired bullies, many of whom had learned their arts of intimidation in oppressed Ireland, showed up at the open polling stations and tried to win

1. The pine trees cut down in the 19th century were huge! Often called "Queen Annes" because they were standing at the time of the reign of this British monarch, first growth pine trees succumbed to logging bees such as this one at Carleton Place in the late 19th century (NAC/C 29519); 2. 19th century barns dotting Ontario's countryside are the result of barn bees such as this one at the MacMillan farm in Maxville, Ontario at the turn of the century; 3. Most communities in Canada West commemorated the Battle of the Boyne (1690) and the victorious William of Orange. This parade, crossing the Boyne River, near Alliston, at the turn of the century, celebrates this victory; 4. This view illustrates native Indian women parading on July 12 in Petrolia circa 1905 (J-4 JC J. Humber Collection)


SCOBIE & BALFOUR'S

CANADIAN ALMANAC,

AND

REPOSITORY

OF

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE,

FOR THE YEAR

1848,

BEING LEAP YEAR.

TORONTO:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED

BY SCOBIE & BALFOUR,

AND SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1847.

The Canadian Almanac was a household necessity and soothed many a family with the comforting prognostications that the forthcoming winter would be mild or that spring would be early or that the fall wheat would fetch a good price at market. (Ontario Archives)

the elections by physically capturing the places and frightening the opp nents' supporters away. Electoral battles, metaphor now, were reality th

Such excitements relieved the dull pace of daily life. In the 1840s, Canada West was only crawling along. People lumbered over dusty ro in ox-carts, laboriously hauling everything to and from water's edge. Th got bogged down in mud on the Weller stagecoach that might take fiv days to reach Montreal from Toronto, at a speed anywhere from three nine miles an hour. They steamboated along the lake at about the sam pace as people walked along the shore. Around the beginning of the Un period, Canada West still belonged to a pre-industrial world that woul disappear later in the century. There was as yet no great difference betw the quiet towns and the countryside. The sun and not the clock regula the day and the year. Those were the days when, after the harvest was neighbours would "stop of a morning" and stay till dusk. A man migh spend a whole day walking to the nearest post office to mail a letter or fetch a "water witch" who would use a hazel twig to discover where to the new well. Winter marched on and on, to the monotonous thump, thump of the flails on the barn floor or the trampling out of the grain b the horses' feet. Women in the remote districts might year after year retrace the same path from home, to church, to general store, to neigh bour's house; some gave their first cries, bore their children and breath their last, all within the same four walls. Sitting around the open kitch fireplace at night, these farm folk still shivered when a wolf howled, an omen that one of the children would be snatched away. To learn wh to wean the baby or sow the peas, they still turned to the almanac to s what counsel the ancient stars would give.

Yet women in this period did experience the beginnings of moder nization—for better or for worse. British and American ladylike ideal involved withdrawing from fieldwork both women and children and giving the former group exclusive charge of tending the latter. Such notions, current among the elite for half a century, appear to have trickl down to the middle and farming classes during the union period. The stress on female service rather than production would lead to loss of th skill and power derived from control over dairy and poultry and the mak ing of such necessities as cloth and clothing, soap and candles. These items were now more often purchased than made at home. The new eth decreed that males were best suited to earn the money that bestowed purchasing power. On the positive side, more maternal nurturing eased children's lives with mothers learning from sermons, advice books and new "family" newspapers to teach children good conduct rather than t beat it in. The new domestic idealism was not unrelated to the fact tha the majority of houses were no longer, after mid-century, log cabins; an that mothers had more time for the fine points as those who survived

their childbearing years tended to bear an average five children (1871) rather than seven (1851). The negative side of this new domestic sphere is evident, however, in the Assembly's explicit banning in 1849 of female voting (previously exercised by a few landowners), which paralleled similar backward steps elsewhere in British North America.

In another political development, Canada West was quite forward-looking; she learned the basic process of self-government. Prior to 1841, the centre of power in Upper Canada was the governor, advised by a council of appointed officials. In 1841 it was decided by the new governor of the Union, Lord Sydenham, that this council should be based on elected members of the Assembly. The "Resolutions of 1841" declared that these officials must maintain the confidence of a majority in the Assembly. The vital question then became whether the members of the council could be overruled on domestic questions by the governor. By the end of the decade, Reformers in the province had won British government recognition that the governor would accept the advice of his local Ministers on local questions as long as they had a parliamentary majority for their policies. This was the essence of responsible government. It fell to Lord Elgin to recognize this new status in 1849 by allowing passage of the unpopular Rebellion Losses Bill when it was introduced by the majority Reform Party.

Governor General Lord Elgin, in 1849, allowed passage of the unpopular Rebellion Losses Bill introduced by the Reform Party (NAC/C 291)

The leader of Ontario's crusade for local self-government was Robert Baldwin, head of the Reform Party of Upper Canada. Baldwin differed from most politicians of earlier years in his eminent respectability and unimpeachable integrity. He shaped anew the Reform support that had been shattered in the aftermath of the Rebellion of 1837. Fighting the perception that opposition was disloyal, he established party government as the alternative to rule by officials of the empire. As he and his chief lieutenant, Francis Hincks, argued through the 1840s, party government was the essence of responsible government; how else could the people have a choice! They worked to build up a disciplined body of supporters in the Assembly and to secure the necessary control over positions and patronage. As pioneers in a period of constitutional change, Baldwin and Hincks pushed the party in a direction that anticipated the methods of John A. Macdonald. Under Baldwin's guiding hand Ontario also developed her local municipal institutions.

Another development of the 1840s was a burgeoning relationship with Canada East. Part of this was making a virtue of necessity since Britain had amalgamated the two Canadas in the Union of 1841, hoping that French Canada would be assimilated through this Union. Yet reformers in both halves of the province cooperated to prevent this. In 1839-40 Francis Hincks in Toronto wrote a series of letters to Louis Lafontaine, a leading French Canadian liberal, proposing that reform-minded Upper and Lower Canadians band together in the new Union Assembly. When Lafontaine

1. The arrival of Governor General Lord Sydenham to open the Union Parliament in Kingston, 1841, was a gala occasion (painting by Charles Walker Simpson/ NAGC: 12945). 2. Sir Francis Hincks argued throughout the 1840s that party government was the essence of responsible government. He was a pioneer in a period of constitutional change (private collection). 3. When Louis Lafontaine was unable to get elected in Canada East, his home province, he ran for office in Canada West and was elected to represent such communities as Sharon and Stouffville in the Assembly of the United Canadas (Ontario Government Collection 12883-9)

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did not secure a Lower Canadian seat in 1841, Baldwin found one for him in the future North York, successfully persuading the farmers of Sharon and Stouffville to vote for the candidate from Terrebonne. Later, when Baldwin lost an election in Hastings, Lafontaine reciprocated by arranging a safe seat in Rimouski for his Upper Canadian colleague. More important, the two got their respective followers to synchronize their efforts during the seven-year struggle for responsible government. In the 1850s politicians such as Hincks and Macdonald would continue this attitude of cooperation with the French, not least because it was so important for economic development that the Canadas work together. The relationship between Ontario and Quebec has been a long one and not without its tensions. In the 1840s, however, we see it at its best — a happy blend of idealism and enlightened self-interest for both sides, whereby the French warded off assimilation and the English warded off oligarchy.

It was in the 1840s, too, that the young colony first started attending school on a regular basis. Property tax meant that the fees dropped considerably. The tone of education grew more

British as the frontier days passed. American school readers of yesteryear were packed away in trunks and replaced with the Irish National Reader adapted for use here; and, while many of the earliest teachers had been American, after 1845 "Aliens" were no longer licensed to teach. By the 1850s many Catholic pupils were going off to separate schools, which became well-established in that decade. Universities, too, were opening their doors. In Toronto, in 1843, a Medical College and King's College (re-established as the nonsectarian University of Toronto in 1849) appeared. Also opening, in 1842, were Queen's at Kingston and Victoria College at Cobourg. The important effort to "bend the twig" through schooling owed much to the remarkable energies of Egerton Ryerson. From a Loyalist family, he was also a onetime Methodist circuit rider, sometime opponent of Family Compact leader John Strachan, and longtime editor of the widely circulated Christian Guardian. As superintendent of education from 1844 to 1876, he worked tirelessly to establish the schools, train the educators and develop the curriculum. Ryerson had been appalled by the Rebellion of 1837, and it was part of his philosophy that the schools must teach common civic values to the young — one of the most important being how to live harmoniously with others of different political views. The system would, after Confederation, serve as a model in provinces farther west. In the meantime, it trained hundreds of thousands of Ontarians in literacy, sense of duty, and an attachment to Britain — at the same time schools encouraged a degree of tolerance toward other ethnic groups and religions, a quality on which Canadians pride themselves to this day.

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1. Victoria College was founded in 1841 in Cobourg. Egerton Ryerson was the first principal. This view, 1844, depicts Victoria College with its tall cupola in the centre of town (George Seton, artist/ NAC/C 041645). 2. This King's College Plaque at the east entrance to the Provincial Parliament Buildings unfolds the story of the University of Toronto going back to 1827 (photo/C.J. Humber)

The schools could not help reflecting, though, the values of the dominant society led by a very confident middle class. Prosperous and growing, that class congratulated itself on its self-discipline, agriculture and industry. Native people provide perhaps the best example of a group who could not slide comfortably into the angular desks and stuffy schoolrooms that society's "winners" were creating. They, by contrast, were increasingly on the margins. Now vastly outnumbered by immigrants, they no longer played the important military role of former days. Indian department officials, missionaries — and initially some native leaders themselves — favoured adapting to this new situation by sending children away from home to government-funded, missionary-run residential

1. *Residential schools, such as Shingwauk in Sault Ste. Marie, were built in the late 19th century by governments to train native children in "the three Rs" and prepare them for farming or a trade;* **2.** *Young boys and girls were frequently coerced into pledging abstinence. This pledge card is from Goderich, Ontario circa 1875 (1, 2 JC J. Humber Collection)*

schools combining the three Rs with training in farming or a trade. But natives balked when the Bagot Commission of 1842 advocated relocating whole bands from ancestral lands to the sites of these schools and further eroding communal landholding systems by giving graduates of the residential schools 20-acre individual plots carved from reserve land. Natives also boycotted an 1857 plan for enfranchisement for those who could prove themselves educated, debt-free and morally sound—a test (historian J.R. Miller pointed out) many non-native settlers would scarcely have passed.

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Farther north, natives responded to increasing white presence with varying degrees of acceptance and resistance. The Hudson Bay Cree, delighted when missionaries introduced a system of Cree syllabics in 1842, made creative use of the new writing to fashion their own "tracks to Heaven" and filled the woods with hymns of praise in a revivalistic religion drawing on both cultures. To the west, a native threat to attack an unauthorized mining development near Lake Superior helped persuade the government to create Ojibwa reserves large enough to allow traditional hunting practices.

To most settlers in the more established regions, the mid-century decades brought the "taming" of Upper Canada. There was a concerted attack on the drunkenness common to a raw young frontier, where liquor sold for twenty-five cents a bottle and people drank it not only as one of the few recreations available but also as a stimulant, the way they drink coffee today. So many accidents, fights and family tragedies resulted that liquor came to be seen as a monstrous social evil. Thousands of people took the teetotal pledge. The tactful Lord Elgin, in response to public sentiment, curtailed the use of liquor at government banquets. In the 1840s, most of the emphasis was on voluntary abstinence to create a sober world. By the 1850s, although they had corrected the worst excesses, temperance people remained unsatisfied and asked for laws, hoping they would be harder to break than pledges. Eighty thousand people petitioned for prohibition in 1852. The government responded with more restrictive laws but not prohibition. The Sabbatarian movement, which decreed all praying and no playing on Sundays, loomed so large that children were occasionally arrested for swimming or for playing in the street. Sabbatarians also objected to working on Sundays: this meant that labourers got a badly needed holiday and that, on many a farm, Sunday's potatoes were peeled and Sunday's water drawn on Saturday night so that no finger would be lifted on the Sabbath. The non-conformist Protestant churches to which

a majority of Upper Canadians belonged, especially Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, played a large role in creating this more sober climate.

There were other reforms as well. Institutions were created for the insane and the orphaned, who formerly had been jammed into the local jail. In the towns, the middle classes played an active part in promoting social welfare institutions, just as they had endorsed schools and sobriety. They were moved by some difficult-to-determine mixture of self-righteousness, fear of growing crime, and genuine concern. The reforming activity was probably, on balance, positive. Society was physically safer as drunken accidents and brawling declined and the ill and the abandoned were sent to various institutions. The extremes of freedom—but also those of misery—were disappearing.

Ontario was a bright, well-combed, well-scrubbed child by the end of the 1840s; in the 1850s she moved into adolescence. These years were troubled and temperamental, a time of demanding rights and quarrelling with other members of the family at one moment and espousing dreamy, generous ideals the next. The province borrowed a lot of money and spent it wildly, building canals along the St. Lawrence and buying herself into the railway age. The 1850s also found her casting amorous eyes at her American cousin as railways and the Reciprocity Treaty greatly increased coming and going across the border.

Adolescence is the season of idealism, and Ontario glowed with it around mid-century. She sided with the oppressed slave and wept her way through *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. After the States passed the Fugitive Slave Law, southwestern Ontario (as part of the British Empire, in which slavery was illegal) became a terminus for the Underground Railway. It has been estimated that as many as forty thousand blacks may have arrived in Canada West by 1861. Few Canadians could sufficiently transcend current racial attitudes to allow desegregated schools, churches and workplaces. Clearly it was no utopia here, and the majority of blacks would find their way back across the border after the Civil War.

Yet slaves seeking freedom "under the Lion's paw" did escape their chains and the fate of being bought and sold. The favourable comparison gave Canadians pride in their membership in the Empire; and England's wealth and might reinforced the feeling. Its remarkable factories produced cheap fabrics and iron tools for use around the world, as well as the engines to propel many a sleepy colony into the modern age. In sheer might, England's empire rivalled that of ancient Rome. A young editor from Galt who visited the House of Commons about this time came away

1 Original home of Uncle Tom, near Dresden. Today it is a tourist site and has undergone restoration (C.J. Humber Collection); 2. Poster from Scotland, 1859, showing that interest in helping the "freedom seekers" was great even across the ocean (NAC/MG24J14, p.860)

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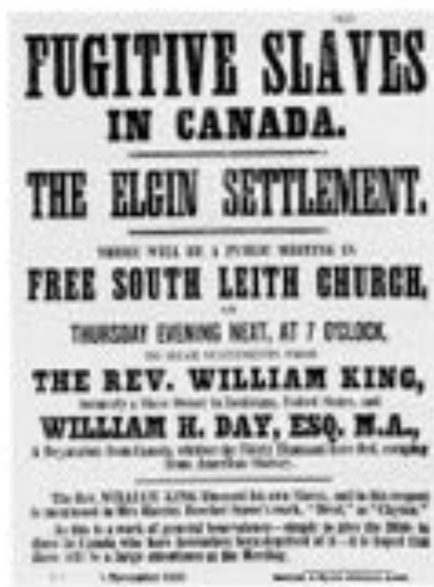

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awestruck to have heard the likes of Palmerston and Peel and other "gentlemen...whose words, when they officially voice the nation's resolve princes sometimes tremble and the struggling millions take hope." In mor progress, the Victorians felt they clearly surpassed the Romans. The cry for national self-determination wou later sour the colonial experience, but in those days it seemed that the Empire—free of slavery, bustling with mechanics' institutes, agricultural and building soci- eties, missionaries and travelling lecturers, cyclopedias of the household arts and the self-made men, and penn classics for the poor—was an immense force for good. Britannia marched with a mighty train of blessings fo the talented and industrious in the remotest corners of the earth. It is small wonder that in Toronto they began to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday in 1849 and, six years later, illuminated the city with a great blaze of gaslight to celebrate the fall of Sebastopol. Never, as historian J.M.S. Careless has pointed out, had Ontario been more British than she was in the middle of the 19th century when many of her politicians were British-born, and those who sought self-government looked to the British model of cabine rule and the parliamentary system. Many of them saw Victorian liberalis with its mixed constitution and small property vote requirement as clear preferable to unrestrained democracy. Government, like life, called for a certain decorum.

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1. Mechanics' Institutes in Canada West were the forerunners of the public library system. In addition to loaning out books, they offered lectures and public meetings promoting scientific knowledge. Religious and political subjects were "carefully excluded." (C.J. Humber Collection);
2. Agricultural Societies were being formed in Canada West by the mid-19th century. This poster tells of events of the Agricultural Show sponsored by the Etobicoke Agricultural Society in 1855. Here horse, cow, and bull contests were conducted as well as ploughing and turnip drill matches (MTRL1855A1)

The young province was idealistic in another, more troublesome way as well. In adolescence, one is particularly receptive to religious faith. Ontario of the 1850s took her religion very seriously. A majority of the population was affiliated with churches, overwhelmingly with Protestant ones (82% in 1851). The prevailing tone was evangelical. People had a very real and vivid sense of God's presence. Many of these fervent Protestants were "voluntarists" who agreed that the sincerity of religious conviction would suffer if the government paid clergymen as it did minis- ters of the Churches of England and Scotland and several other denomi- nations with its Clergy Reserves fund. Many also felt denominational schools and charities should pay their own way.

Many of these people were also anti-Catholic. As they looked about the globe, they believed they saw clear evidence that the Protestant countries were throwing aside old customs, modernizing their agricultur education and industry, while Catholic countries were lagging behind. Th saw Protestantism and Catholicism as opposing principles. Wherever on flourished the other must recede, determining a people's fate in this worl and the next. That is the reason young Protestant Ontario became extreme ly heated when separate schools that the majority of her own population

did not want were built in Canada West because of the votes of Catholic Canada East in the Assembly. The warm friendship with her French Canadian sibling began to dissolve. Now Canada West was on the offensive, using the rasping tones of the Clear Grit party which emerged in 1850, attacking Catholic separate schools, calling for an end to public funding of Catholic institutions, demanding more votes to stop this "French domination."

In these family feuds she found a wonderful Galahad—a strapping red-headed Scot named George Brown. He always began his speeches with a little nervous stammering and stuttering. When he warmed up, though, he was full of fiery eloquence. He was eminently respectable—the editor of the most influential newspaper in Canada West, well-connected with Toronto businessmen and owner of oilfields in the western counties. He was religious too—a fervent Free Kirk Presbyterian who even (for a while) swung his Globe over to the teetotal cause. He stood up for Canada West and said that, since she had more people, indeed she should have more votes, and he agreed with her opposition to separate schools, too. Were Brown and the Canada West majority right? It was difficult to judge these demands, and politicians of the day generally succeeded in stalling on them. Upper Canada's claims were valid if one considered her alone, but not if one took responsibility for the whole family—that is, the English and French halves of the Union. Voluntarism and Canada West's preponderance in the Assembly were unacceptable to French Canada. There, too, religion was taken seriously, and the ultramontane Catholicism of the day advocated very close connections between church and state — precisely the opposite of voluntarism. Moreover, Lower Canada had not, at the outset of the Union, been granted representation by population, though possessing more people than the English half had; why should Upper Canada get it now that she had grown to be the bigger one? And yet... neither group wished to be pushed around by the other, whose ideas—and ideals—were vastly different.

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1.George Brown was a strapping red-headed Scot and editor of the most influential newspaper in Canada West—the Globe. He believed that Canada West, because of its population size, should have more votes in the Assembly than Canada East; 2.By the 1850s the last wild areas of the Bruce Peninsula were being snatched up by settlers. Wiarton, a town first settled in the 1850s, was the gateway to the Bruce Peninsula (1,2 JC.J.Humber Collection)

Though he perhaps goaded Ontario a little too far on the French question, George Brown had his merits. He taught the young province to think of her future. The quarters were growing cramped, the last wild acres on the Bruce peninsula being settled in the 1850s. George whispered sweet things into Ontario's ear (and broadcast them through his Globe) about fertile lands in the Northwest which could one day be hers. He also argued persuasively against breaking up the Union as this might have the

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watched American growth "from across a river, as people watch a fair and trudge home supperless." In the 1850s, she went to the fair beaming with pride, her wagon groaning with fat bags of golden wheat. The Crimean War cut off British supplies in eastern Europe and greatly increased the demand for Ontario grain. Millions of bushels of wheat and flour poured out from the lake towns of Belleville, Port Hope, Whitby, Toronto, Port Credit and Oakville. The wealth spurred the growth of small centres: the wheat boom largely accounted for the fact that Ontario had 81 towns in 1870 compared to 38 in 1850. In these places businesses produced field and household implements, woollens and specialty items for the newly prosperous farm families. The families, likewise, began to diversify in order to sell their raw wool, meat and dairy products to the towns. In addition to its fertile soil, Canada West benefitted from the capital many immigrants brought with them. As early as 1851 the English half of the province had a greater farm income and was clearly surpassing the French half in processing the products of farm and forest. Canada West had 612 grist mills, of which 37 were steam driven; of Canada East's 541, only 8 were steam driven. Canada West had 1,567 sawmills, 154 steam driven; Canada East 1,065, only 4 of which were steam driven. Canada West's 925 foundries contrasted with the other half's 197; Canada East still led the way in carding and fulling mills.

The earnings piled up. They financed the big town markets and town halls that appeared in the 1850s. Rumours of railways drifted through lace curtains. Suddenly, back streets turned into busy streets as town lots doubled and even quadrupled in price. Ontario turned up a trump: oil was discovered in the southwestern counties in the late 1850s and derricks

1.Oil wells in Canada West began generating returns for entrepreneurs by the late 1850s. Here, in the southwestern part of the province, a Bothwell oil rig in the 1860s is portrayed by an unknown artist (NAC/C 36674); 2.The Scott sawmill in Prince Edward County at Milford is today an historic site run by local conservation authorities. This view, circa 1870, indicates the sawmill at the time of William Scott's proprietorship. The last to run the operation was Carson Scott in the 1950s (C.J.Humber Collection)

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1. *The Brockville, Westport and Sault Ste. Marie engine and train at Brockville, circa 1865 (NAC/PA 164368).*
2. *Grand Trunk Railway Construction at Belle River in 1859 (NAC/C 46481)*

began to pump. Besides earning a lot of money, during the 1850s Ontario also borrowed a lot from England. Her capital imports tripled over those of the previous decade.

There was no doubt that Canada West was exchanging a portion of her homespun for imported finery, and was no longer content with a familiar fellow from the old country like George Brown (though the friendship continued). She was head over heels in love with the United States of America — and she was seeing a good deal of this suspect suitor.

The affair began one night in June 1854, when her governor, the suave Lord Elgin, took her down to Washington for a party. The champagne flowed till long past midnight, and Ontario was at her alluring best. When she woke up in the morning, she and America were going to exchange all sorts of things — farm and forest products, minerals and fish. Moreover, they were both going to sail whenever they liked on Lake Michigan and the St. Lawrence, and no watchful coast guard or customs officer was going to collect a penny or say a word about it. Uncle Elgin, asked to explain, stammered that one couldn't lock up a spirited filly like that, that it was a choice between letting her have Reciprocity or calling out the British Army to keep her quiet. Besides that, he and his home government believed in free trade, which many then saw as the vital step towards universal peace and brotherhood.

It soon became clear that Ontario had cast her lot with a very fast crowd. In the 1850s the steamboats on Lake Ontario got larger and faster. Smooth macadamized highways replaced the old bumpy roads mired in

Lady Elgin turned the first sod for the Northern Railway in Weston in 1851 (NAC/PA 119064)

mud each spring and fall. Along them rode Methodist preachers in comfortable steel-springed buggies, their lean days of riding the circuit on horseback a fading memory. The buggies sped past sawmills with boards spewing out of the new steam cutters. They sped on past wagons abandoned by farmboys who'd been struck with a vision, dumbfounded by the "great pillar of cloud and fire" as the first train they had ever seen shrieked by. Anxious parents received terse messages over newly laid telegraph lines: "Don't wait up for me Ma, gone to Sarnia to help build the Grand Trunk."

There were plenty of jobs for Ontario lads and immigrant cousins in those days. Lady Elgin turned the first sod for the Northern Railway in 1851. By the summer of 1854 there were some 20,000 men a-building. Between 1854 and 1856, at the height of the railway boom, 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometres) of track were laid; by 1860 Canada's Grand Trunk, stretching from Montreal to Sarnia, was the longest line in the world. The Great Western, another east-west line, frightened the chickens and cows residing between Niagara and Windsor. Rails led north from Brockville, Prescott, Port Hope, Cobourg, Toronto, Hamilton, Galt, Port Dover and Port Stanley and branch lines crisscrossed the province west of Toronto. People accustomed to the dead calm of a snowbound farmhouse lost their children to cities where the hum and clatter never ceased. Big factories appeared in Hamilton and Toronto to make steel tracks and parts, and even in a calm place like Kingston the old foundry began to turn out locomotives.

In town, everything seemed designed to pluck the populace from its

rural roots. Merchants who in earlier days had done most of their selling after harvest when the farmers came to town now catered to diverse clientele who shopped the year round. The empty lot next door, where the farmers used to stand and chat, was now filled with a manufactory of sewing machines—one of the many new specialty goods that could now be sent far and wide, cheaply, by rail. Factories (this to occur even more markedly after 1860) grew larger and workers became strangers to their employers. Men who'd always worked with Dad and Bill and Cousin Angus got new jobs in places where they knew no one, and the boss had no qualms about laying them off when times were bad. Old practices such as the goose and cabbage banquet shared by Toronto Journeymen Tailors and their employers in 1852 at the St. Lawrence Hall to celebrate their wage settlement gave way to international unions that negotiated with less cordiality but more clout. Another response to uncordial neighbours or employers was simply to move on—easier to do as train tickets became available at about one-third the price of the old stage-coach rates. People moved houses; artisans tramped to another town or across the border in search of work with an alarming frequency. All was motion, speed and uproar.

Old log houses, such as this one from the Acton area, were giving way to modern two-story brick dwellings by the mid-19th century in Canada West. Many survive today as restored country homes (NAC/PA 88040)

Even when a world-weary Ontario did tramp back to the family farm to rest, she found the old homestead was not quite as she had left it. Far from the house, the old wooden plow rotted in the field, replaced by a strong steel one. Nearer the house, the clatter of the new Massey mowing machine shattered the silence. The house, too, was transformed. Behind a plump row of lilac bushes, two stories of brick stood on the spot where Loyalist grandparents had built the original log cabin. The tall old clock they had brought across the Hudson River with them was still ticking in the hall but it was tolling the end of the oxen-paced farm toil of the ages. And the last of those who had ridden across with the old clocks were going down to their graves.

As Ontario moved into this new world of high finance where the temptations were great, there were a few worries about her character. A Montreal Scot visiting Canada West at the height of the boom declared that "thousands are planning and watching to make a lucky hit" and the Governor General, responsible ministers, the whole legislature and much of the population were all on their knees adoring the "railway idol." Premier Hincks greatly encouraged railway investment with his 1849 Guarantee Act, but derailed his own reputation when he and the mayor of Toronto used inside information to speculate in Toronto railway debentures in what was known as "the £10,000 job." And then there was the Grand Trunk Railway, which by 1860 had swallowed well over fifty million dollars, perhaps a third of which came from public funds. It showed rather modest returns for a creature with such a voracious appetite, fanning the cries of Brown and his followers against jobbery and corruption. And in

retrospect (though Ontario certainly enjoyed it at the time), it can be seen that those railroads put many an enthusiastic town into heavy debt. Four lines penetrated the forests between Ottawa and Georgian Bay. They hauled out the boards that built Chicago and other American towns, but in those days before conservation measures were practised, they left desolate stump-filled regions behind.

There were other signs, too, that this new situation was not entirely healthy. One morning in 1857, Ontario woke up with a giant headache — tired, depressed and broke. Her depression was brought on by the drop in demand for her wheat as the Crimean War ended, was exacerbated by poor growing seasons in 1856-58 and a lull in railway construction. Indeed, the slowdown had begun as early as 1855; with the good lands nearly all settled, fewer immigrants came. There were tales of heartbreak from settlers who had hauled their wagons up along the government colonization road built in Muskoka in the 1850s to promote settlement in the Shield lands between the Ottawa River and Georgian Bay. Once the topsoil had worn away, barren rock lay beneath. Woefully, Ontario watched enterprising farm families move to Iowa and Michigan in search of greener pastures: this gave greater influence to the more cautious and conservative in the society that was left behind. Gradually farm families adjusted to the fact that they could provide only enough land to establish the oldest son, that the others must move away. Demand was so high that in one county on the lake Ontario front, land prices quadrupled between 1840 and 1870. Ontario surveyed crowded townships and barren ones with a newfound sense of limitations.

After a turbulent adolescence in the 1850s, Ontario emerged as a more mature, self-confident province in the 1860s. She set out to make the best of what she had, no longer lured by the gold and dazzle of the southern neighbour who'd gotten into serious family trouble at home— Civil War in fact. Perhaps there was a belated appreciation of the wise old proverb, "Marry above your match and you get a master." In 1867 Ontario would form a prudent liaison with the other colonies of British North America through Confederation. Since they were smaller and less secure, it was a marriage in which Ontario herself would prove the dominant partner. More than one Loyalist — William Smith in the 1790s, John Beverley Robinson in the 1820s, William Hamilton Merritt in the 1850s — had foreseen a union of the colonies of British America. In the 1860s a grown-up Ontario was ready for such a match.

Enter John A. Macdonald, 19th century Canada's best-known politician. It was he who would bring the bride to the altar. John A. began his career as an Ontario politician. With his parents he migrated at the age of five from Scotland. They settled at Kingston, in the heart of the old Loyalist district. There he acquired a taste for English culture and read

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1. John A. Macdonald, Canada's best-known politician, was a leader of destiny whose energy and foresight made possible Confederation in 1867. This view shows him in his early years as a Kingston lawyer; 2. George-Etienne Cartier claimed to be a direct descendent of Jacques Cartier; he was to Canada East what Macdonald was to Canada West. A great political leader, his liberal leanings complemented Macdonald's more conservative inclinations (1, 2© C.J. Humber Collection)

widely in English literature and political thought. He earned his livelihood as a lawyer and a businessman. Elected to the Assembly in 1844, Macdonald became attorney-general of Canada West from 1854 to 1862; by 1856, he was leader of his party for the western half of the province. Macdonald was the master builder of the Liberal-Conservative party which supplanted the crumbling Reform alliance. Relying on the suppor of George-Etienne Cartier and the French Canadian majority Cartier commanded, this was the party most often in power between 1854 and 186

Macdonald's dealings with the shopkeepers and farmers around Kingston, and perhaps the sorrows of an ailing wife and the visions of the drinking bowl, gave him an appreciation of the less rigid side of human nature. Full of humour and *bonhomie*, Macdonald objected to Brown's lon impassioned speeches. He used his own oratory to lighter effect, doubling his audience over with laughter as he parodied the singsong delivery of the local preacher. The Clear Grits claimed to embody "pure sand witho a particle of dirt in it." Macdonald, gleeful as a small boy playing in mud claimed that given a big surplus and a big majority and a weak opposition a committee of archangels could be debauched. After enduring some years of Macdonald and his party, the Grit, Alexander Mackenzie, would throw up his hands and pronounce the heart of the average Tory "deceitful above all things—desperately wicked." Brown said that Confederatio was above questions of mere gain. Macdonald, admitting (privately) tha gain and patriotism were interchangeable, churned out the money and the promises that brought—or bought—the other provinces in.

In those days of shifting alliances and splinter groups (there were thr factions of Reformers alone in the 1850s), John A. developed and taugh complex and fascinating game: the systematic use, to build up party support, of patronage, which rewarded loyal workers and withheld favou for use at the precise moment when they would have the greatest effect. He was careful to distribute to Catholic and Protestant in due proportio He had the detachment needed to play the game well; he seldom made permanent enemies and was capable of working with people he did not like. Leacock said that Macdonald could control two factions "as easily a circus rider goes round on two horses.... He gave Roman Catholic schools to Canada West by the French vote, militia to Canada East by t English vote." He did it all "by having no principle—or rather by being content with one — the allegiance of a contented people under the British Crown." Some may have been less contented than this suggests but few would question Macdonald's skill in squeezing people of seemin incompatible beliefs, backgrounds and interests under the banner when consensus was needed.

When the time came to settle Ontario's destiny in Confederation, Brown proposed and Macdonald disposed. Brown formed the convictio

that federalism would be the best solution to sectional troubles (and a key to economic development as well). As a distinct province within a federal system, Ontario would have "rep by pop" and control over her own school system, as well as a base for expansion into the Northwest. When Brown offered, in 1864, to join a coalition government with his longtime enemy Macdonald on condition that they work for federal union, no doubt he carried much of Ontario public opinion with him. Brown, according to Governor Monck, was the man who made Confederation feasible. He was, however, uncomfortable in coalition with Macdonald, and he saw a proposed Reciprocity extension with the States as too servile. He resigned from the Ministry in 1865 once he was convinced the essential groundwork for Confederation was in place. One contemporary journalist said that the rupture was inevitable, for no cabinet was large enough to hold these two men for long.

Macdonald's cool grace was needed to steer Ontario up the aisle to the altar. The wedding party shifted uneasily in the pews as cannons rumbled in the distance. There had been a number of conflicts with the Americans during the Civil War years, the most serious being the Trent Crisis of 1861 when Britain and the United States came close to war over the abduction of two Confederate agents from a British ship. There was concern that, after the South's surrender, the Union armies might turn towards Canada. The New York *Herald* and the Chicago *Tribune* called loudly for annexation. Fenians raided along the border in 1866, on the very eve of Confederation.

Macdonald's well-honed skills were needed to keep the reluctant bridegroom, the Maritimes, from bolting (Cartier took care of getting the French Canadians to agree to the match). Confederation, it might as well be confessed, was not a romantic marriage. The provinces of British North America did have a few things in common. For example, they were great railway buffs; they had a mutual fear of the Americans and a common desire to please a Britain that had grown tired of defending the colonies and greatly favoured the match. In Halifax and Fredericton, however, there had been hesitations all the way through the courtship. It was whispered that the groom was interested mainly in the bride's rich dowry full of equalization payments and British-backed railway subsidies. The bride, for her part, cast sidelong glances at the groom's markets and his seaside property, so convenient for year-round shipping. But as the old English proverb says, "Who marrieth for love without money hath merry nights and sorry days." A sensible, daytime match this was.

And so, after several more rounds of negotiation at Quebec in

1. The Trent Crisis of 1861 is depicted in The Illustrated London News, *December 7, 1861. The threat of American invasion was strong in Canada West when war appeared possible following a high seas seizure of Confederate emissaries by American Navy officials who illegally boarded the British vessel Trent (NAC/C 18711).*
2. The 1860's also saw a time when Fenian raids caused a general alert throughout Canada West as indicated in this map of 1866 (NAC/NMC/27926).

1865 and London in 1866, the matter was sealed. The seventy-two resolu-
tions passed at Quebec embodied the political conviction that many Loyalist
grandparents had carried, along with the family clocks, across the rivers
into Canada. The people at the conference pledged that the new country