

People to People

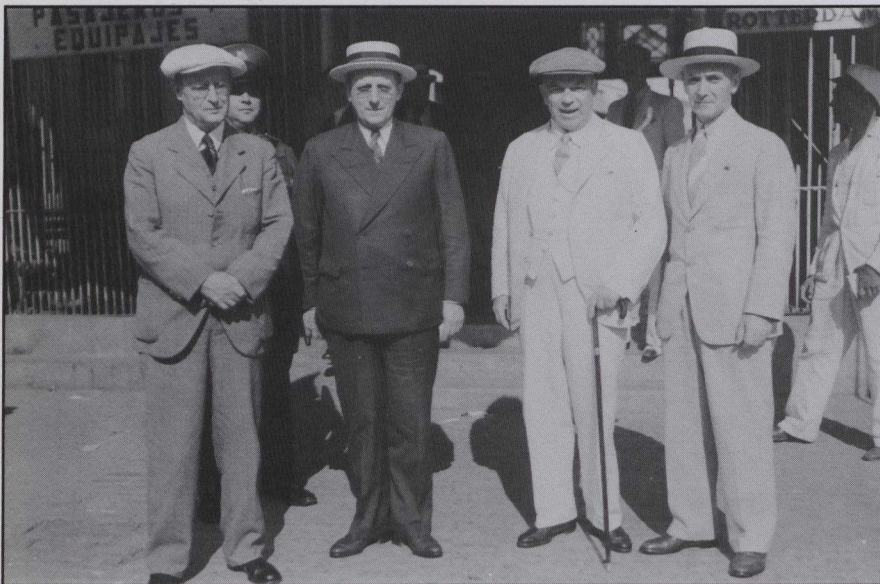
Relationships between governments are inevitably subject to change, but what sustains the relationship between countries are the contacts made between people. The first Canadian of the 20th century to have made a major impact on the Cuban imagination was young Nova Scotian, John A. McCurdy who began his experiments in aviation at Baddeck with Alexander Graham Bell. On January 31, 1911 McCurdy took off in his Curtiss biplane from the sands of Key West in an attempt to win a \$10,000 prize for being the first person to cross the Florida Straits by air. Huge crowds formed along Havana's Malecón, awaiting his arrival. Although a fuel leak forced him to land a few miles short of the Cuban coast, he was deemed to have won the contest and was treated to a hero's welcome in Havana.

Less spectacular was the first visit to Cuba by a Canadian Prime Minister. Canada's longest-serving leader, William Lyon Mackenzie King, arrived in Havana on October 29, 1938 on board the steamship *SS Rotterdam* and stayed for three days. Mackenzie King was accompanied by the founder of Canada's foreign service, Dr. O.D. Skelton. They were greeted at the Havana Pier by the most prominent Canadian in the city, J.K.

Stewart, Supervisor of the Royal Bank of Canada. King's diaries for Havana that day note:

"I think it is the cleanest city I have ever been in and more beautiful than any other. I should have been very sorry to have missed this glimpse of Cuba."

The Canadian climate, alas, is a deterrent for most Cubans to visit Canada for pleasure; but Cuban students have for years been discovering the peculiar pleasures of a Canadian winter. One of the most distinguished Cubans to have studied in Canada is the Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, who



Prime Minister W.L. MacKenzie King
(third from left) arriving
in Havana, 1938