

1867

1896

DIPLOMATIC BEGINNINGS

The union of the four British North American colonies—Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick—into the new Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867, created a country best described as a semi-autonomous member of the British Empire. Canada's founding constitution, the *British North America Act*, said nothing about the conduct of international relations except to affirm Canada's duty, "as Part of the British Empire," to fulfill the obligations incurred under treaties between the Empire and foreign countries.

However, as the country's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, quickly discovered, advancing Canada's national interests required representation abroad, starting in Britain itself. Macdonald wanted an independent voice in London, since all correspondence between Canada and the "Motherland" passed through the hands of the governor general, who was at that time an official named by the British government. Consequently, in 1869, Macdonald appointed his former finance minister, Sir John Rose, who had become a London banker, to the informal position of a "gentleman . . . with whom Her Majesty's Government may properly communicate on Canadian affairs."

Rose promoted emigration to Canada, lobbied British officials on behalf of Canada, and reported on matters of interest to Ottawa. The Prime Minister wanted more. In 1878, Macdonald tried to appoint a "resident minister" in London, but the British objected to the quasi-diplomatic connotation of the title. Instead, the position of Canadian high commissioner was created in 1880, and Sir Alexander Galt appointed to the post.

Ottawa added a second overseas post in 1882, after the Province of Quebec appointed Hector Fabre as its representative in Paris. The federal government soon named him as its commissioner responsible for emigration and trade matters, even though the office in Paris spent a good deal of its time promoting cultural contacts between French-speaking Canadians and France.

Nevertheless, trade and immigration remained the main reasons for most Canadian diplomatic activity in the final years of the 19th century. The high commissioner in London took part in commercial negotiations with European countries and also represented Canada at international conferences, though without full diplomatic status. Trade was given even greater prominence with the creation of the Department of Trade and Commerce in 1892, followed by the appointment in 1894 of John Short Larke to Sydney, Australia, as Canada's first trade commissioner.



² Sir Alexander T. Galt served as Canada's first high commissioner to London from 1880 to 1883. (Source: Library and Archives Canada, PA-013008)

³ Though he served as the Province of Quebec's official representative in Paris, Hector Fabre also acted for the federal government on trade and emigration matters. (Source: Library and Archives Canada, PA-026613)