

The Hundred Years to Confederation

The Peace of Paris in 1763 formally ended the war and, after a period of military occupation, the Quebec Act of 1774 confirmed French traditions. French civil law was retained, but English criminal law was introduced. The earlier system of land tenure continued and the Roman Catholic church was granted recognition.

The next year the American Revolution began. There were overtures made to Canada, especially to the French colonists, and even military forays across the border—but without success; the country remained British. Indeed the connection was strengthened by the arrival of forty thousand United Empire Loyalists, refugees who had refused to join in the revolution. These steadfast people, many of them shopkeepers, government officials or professional men, established new settlements in what are now the Provinces of New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario.

Slowly these people and other immigrants who had come seeking free land began to change the political structure of the nation. Their demand for representative government was recognized in the Constitutional Act of 1791 establishing elected legislatures. Canada was divided into two provinces, Upper and Lower Canada, now Ontario and Quebec. The provincial governors still retained control through their appointed executive councils, but the first faltering step toward self-government had been taken—and once taken there was no looking back. The political history of Canada from that time on is the story of a people moving toward self-government and

choosing to achieve it by peaceful methods.

While all this was going on, the west and the north were alive with fur-capped men in canoes, as trade and exploration progressed. Furs were the prize and after 1763 the competition for them grew fierce; the well-established "Governor and Company of Gentlemen Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay" now had to contend with the North West Company, an energetic coalition of Montreal fur trading houses, who eventually were to combine with the Hudson's Bay Company. Many of these men were Scots. One of them, a Highlander of great tenacity, Alexander Mackenzie, paddled north from Great Slave Lake in 1789, down a great unknown river now bearing his name which led him to the Arctic Ocean. But Mackenzie was bitterly disappointed, for he was seeking the "Western Sea". He knew no rest until in 1793, after a journey of "inexpressible toil", he reached the shores of the Pacific, becoming the first to cross the new continent.

The settlers followed slowly behind the explorers, and industry followed the settlers. A Scottish nobleman, Lord Selkirk, envisaged the possibilities of permanent settlement in the west and, although bitterly opposed by the fur traders, succeeded in establishing a small colony in the Red River Valley near the modern city of Winnipeg. And, with European timber supplies cut off from England by the Napoleonic wars, the North American provinces, especially the Maritimes and Quebec, developed a logging

Sir Alexander Mackenzie reached the shores of the Pacific in 1793, the first white man to cross the new continent

