

June 9, 1834: "America in 1776 . . . does indeed furnish an excellent and salutary lesson to the statesman . . . that freedom from life legislators, military domination, land jobbing, established priesthoods and irresponsible government must be the result of the continued misconduct of the authorities. . . ."

WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE, in a letter to *The Advocate*.

The British Connexion

[OR THE RISE AND FALL AND RISE OF THE REBELS OF '37]

There is a difference between rebellion and civil war. Canada has known only rebellions. In 1837 it had two.

LOUIS JOSEPH PAPINEAU AND THE PATRIOTES OF QUEBEC

Louis Joseph Papineau was the Speaker of the Assembly of Lower Canada (Quebec). The Governor's Council — men of commerce, inclined to be rich and usually English-speaking — could overrule the Assembly, which was composed of farmers, notaries, lawyers and doctors. Most Assembly members were French-speaking.

In 1834, the Assembly sent Ninety-two Resolutions to Great Britain demanding reform. The reply was "no."

In June 1837, Papineau and his allies staged a peaceful protest. As the Te Deums honouring the ascension of Queen Victoria sounded across the Province, they stood up, as one man, and walked out of the churches.

That summer they met, took the name *Fils de la Liberté*, and talked of revolution. Sympathetic tavern owners began replacing their old signboards

with American eagles.

On November 6, the *Fils* clashed with members of the Doric Club. The Doric Clubmen sacked a newspaper, the *Vindicator*, and beat the *patriote* military leader, T. S. Brown, almost to death.

On November 16, the government issued warrants. Colonel Gore, with four companies of British regulars, unsuccessfully attacked a rebel stronghold at St. Denis, and lost sixteen men. Colonel Wetherall attacked another at St. Charles, killing one hundred and fifty of its defenders. Papineau and Brown fled through the woods to the US in the vain hope of returning to establish a Republic.

In time, Papineau made his way to France and, after tempers cooled, back home. He was elected to the Parliament, where he remained an unreconciled critic of all things British.

WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE AND THE BURNING OF THE CAROLINE

William Lyon Mackenzie's rebellion first had an air of farce. He was a

radical publisher, a member of the Assembly of Upper Canada (Ontario) and the bitterest critic of the Tories. He listed the names of Tory officeholders, pointed out how closely they were related and christened them "the Family Compact."

The Family Compact was not charmed. In 1831, he was expelled from the Assembly. (He had called it "a sycophantic office for registering the decrees of [a] mean and mercenary . . . Executive.") He was reelected and expelled four times. The game ended when the town of York became the city of Toronto and he was elected mayor.

In December 1837, Mackenzie and his followers advanced from Gallows Hill with the riflemen in front, followed by pikemen and farmers with pitchforks, beechroot clubs and thick green willow spears. Mackenzie, a tiny figure bundled in several greatcoats (a precaution against bullets), led on a little white mare. Sheriff Jarvis' advance picket saw them, fired a volley and fled. The riflemen fired in return and then, in keeping with proper military tactics, threw themselves to the ground to reload. The men behind assumed that they had all been shot and, appalled at this sudden slaughter, fled too.

Mackenzie went south and farce became melodrama. The citizens of Buffalo promised him an army, and a young American, Rensselaer Van Rensselaer, became its Commander in Chief. Headquarters were established on Navy Island on the Canadian side of the Niagara River. Mr. Wells, of

Buffalo, provided the *Caroline*, a forty-six-ton supply ship.

On the night of December 29, five boatloads of British soldiers slipped up to the American village of Schlosser, swarmed aboard the *Caroline*, killed a man, captured the ship and, with no one aboard, cut her loose, towed her out, set her afire and let her drift toward the Falls. The invasion of Navy Island and the burning of the *Caroline* engendered years of bitterness.

In 1850, a milder Mackenzie went home under the general amnesty and was elected once more to the Assembly. Now he hoped for the day when Canada would live by the Golden Rule and "her hills, her valleys, her hospitable homesteads, towns and hamlets, [would be] filled with tolerant, kindly citizens."

Burning of the Caroline



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Calendar grid for June 1834 with days of the week (S, M, T, W, T, F, S) and dates (1-30).