

Foreword

In 1871 Joseph-Godéric Blanchet, an elected member of Canada's first Parliament and future Speaker of the House of Commons, rose in the House and moved that an official record of its deliberations be established. "Some very important debates have taken place since Confederation, and yet it would be a matter of the greatest difficulty to ascertain the views expressed by the leading minds of the country." His motion went down to defeat, and the House would not have an official record of its debates until 1875.

The eight years from 1867 to 1874 were an important period in the history of the young country, and there was much to debate. Manitoba, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island were entering Confederation; an evolving central government was grappling with the emerging issue of provincial rights; a railway to the west coast – as much a feat of politics as of engineering – was being built; efforts to promote immigration were raising uncomfortable questions; proposed tariff measures were putting strains on Canada's relationship with our neighbour south of the border; and, with the imminent departure of the last British garrison troops, there was a sense that Canada would now be on her own in the world.

In the 1960s, with the support of then House of Commons Speaker Roland Michener, the Library of Parliament began addressing this gap in Canada's historical parliamentary record. A detailed record of the earliest deliberations of the House was commissioned, and the project to prepare a balanced version of those debates, based primarily on the extensive newspaper reporting of the day, was begun.

Parliamentarians, academics and lovers of Canadian history will be encouraged to know that our current Parliamentary Librarian, William Young, continues to oversee this important project and that the Library is now publishing the reconstituted 1871 debates of the House of Commons in both official languages.

Many thanks are due the historians, librarians, translators, transcribers and editors who have very carefully consolidated Parliament's first deliberations and presented them here. I would also like to acknowledge the parliamentary staff involved in this project, whose characteristic dedication and persistence were instrumental in its success.

Hon. Peter Milliken, M.P.
Speaker of the House of Commons
Ottawa, 2009