

Introduction

The two volumes of Debates of the House of Commons for 1873 are the sixth and seventh in the series being issued under the project to reconstitute the early debates of the House. They record a memorable year which saw two stormy parliamentary sessions and the fall of a government; and because of the historical continuity between those two sessions, uniquely in the series of reconstituted Debates these two volumes share a common introduction.

The project to reconstitute the early debates of the Canadian House of Commons began in the 1960s as a Centennial undertaking, initiated by the Parliamentary Librarian, Erik J. Spicer, and Professor Norman Ward of the University of Saskatchewan, a leading student of Parliament. Using the accounts prepared by journalists assigned to cover the debates for their newspapers, the editors appointed under the project sought to construct as balanced a report of the debates as possible. Admittedly their sources, notably the *Toronto Globe* and the *Ottawa Times*, were partisan and selective but by combining their accounts and drawing on other newspaper reports where they existed, it appeared possible to reproduce the debates in something like their original form. This has been the continuing objective of the plan to reconstitute the early House of Commons Debates.

It was not until 1875 that the House of Commons, under the prompting of a new Prime Minister, Alexander Mackenzie, authorized the official reporting of its debates, for the Second Session of the Third Parliament and all subsequent sessions. Thus newspapers supply the principal record for the proceedings of the House from 1867 to 1874. At the time the newspaper reports were clipped and pasted into large ledgers by the staff of the Library of Parliament. This record, the "Scrapbook Debates", now yellow with age, has been used extensively by historians of this period. It offers an accessible window through which we can see the formative early years of the Dominion. These are important years, not simply for establishing the procedures of the new House of Commons, but for the larger tasks of nation-building now underway. They witnessed the inclusion of new provinces, both from the west and the east, into the British North American union, the beginnings of prairie settlement and the transcontinental railway, the adoption of tariff and revenue policies and the adjustment of the delicate relationship with the United States following the Civil War.

The "Scrapbook Debates" are largely drawn from two newspapers, the *Toronto Globe* and the *Ottawa Times*. The *Globe*, founded in 1844, the influential voice for the Grits or Reformers of Canada West, was, in the years after Confederation, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Canada. Its attention was naturally focused on the Reform members of the House of Commons from Ontario, especially their leaders, Alexander Mackenzie and Edward Blake. Its coverage of the debates was extensive: 14 columns of closely-printed type each day.

The *Times* was a much younger newspaper, established in Ottawa in 1865, on the eve of Confederation. Its editors, George and James Cotton, hoped to win the contract, when it was awarded, to publish an official Hansard. Thus they were particularly sympathetic to the parliamentary expressions of the party in power, the Conservatives under Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald. In 1870 and 1871 James Cotton published shortened versions of the reports of the debates in his newspaper for the use of members of the Commons. These volumes, the "Cotton Debates", were purchased by order of the House for its members at the end of the 1872