

haphazardly reported the affairs of Capitol Hill.<sup>6</sup> By the 1830s, private publishers were producing volumes of reconstructed Congressional debates. The most consistent of these was the *Congressional Globe* published by Preston Blair and John Cook Rives. A Virginia-born admirer of Andrew Jackson, Blair championed public access to the political affairs of Washington. Initially the *Globe* was criticized for its partisanship, but by the late 1840s both the Senate and House of Representatives had accorded it official reporter status. Stenographers were trained and put to work. For the first time, the debates appeared in first person form rather than the old, detached third person style. In 1855, Congress agreed to finance the *Globe*'s work.

The years immediately after the Civil War were marked by a new assertiveness by Congress. Described by one historian as “the zenith of congressional power and initiative,” these years saw Congress push back the power of the president.<sup>7</sup> One aspect of this ascendancy was the 1873 decision to bring the *Globe* under the purview of the Government Printing Office. The *Congressional Record* was born. Congress would have an assured line of communication to the voters who elected it.

### **Hansard comes to British North America (1851-1875 and after)**

Dr. Blanchet's contention in 1871 that the young Confederation's House of Commons was “the only Parliament in existence that had no official report” was not precisely accurate. Nonetheless, the parliamentary history of British North America tended to bear Blanchet out. The achievement of responsible government in the 1830s and 1840s had given British colonial politicians reason to broadcast their deliberations to the voters to whom they were now beholden. As elsewhere, newspapers often offered spotty and sometimes partisan coverage of debates in the colonial assemblies. But some legislatures soon felt the urge for a truer record. Nova Scotia led the way. After a decade of newspaper renditions, the Assembly voted in 1851 to finance an official rendering of its debates, the first colonial *Hansard*. Elsewhere in the Empire, the Australian colony of Queensland instituted an official *Hansard* in 1864, followed by New Zealand in 1867.

Not all colonies followed suit. Newfoundland, Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia made no attempt to record their legislative debates. While Prince Edward Island did, New Brunswick only fitfully published its debates. The central Canadian colonies of Upper and Lower Canada, forced by an act of the British Parliament in 1841 into a legislative union, published only “journals” of their sessions, a factual record of reports and statistics submitted to the Legislative Assembly of the united province. Newspapers provided episodic coverage of the actual debates of the Assembly. In the wake of the Charlottetown Conference and the decision to engage in the Confederation project, the Assembly of the two Canadas broke with tradition and decided in the spring of 1865 to record its protracted debate on the terms of the Confederation pact. Some members objected to the putative high cost, but at an actual cost of \$14,490.65 the debates were published, in both English and French – all 1032 pages of a debate that, while it contained kernels of political wisdom, was largely a chronicle of long-windedness. Historian Peter B. Waite has suggested that the desire felt by every member to get on the record

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6. Interestingly, one of these freelance reporters was English pamphleteer William Cobbett, who spent eight years in the new American republic in the 1790s where he wrote under the pen name “Peter Porcupine” before eventually returning to England to take up the same role outside Westminster.

7. See: James L. Sundquist. *The Decline and Resurgence of Congress*. Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1981, p. 26.