

Confederation and Political Structure



Although there are many key dates in Canadian history, the most important is July 1, 1867, the date of Confederation.

Canada (Quebec and Ontario), Nova Scotia and New Brunswick became the original members of Confederation. A series of conferences of colonial delegates produced a draft federal Constitution which, with a few minor modifications, the British Parliament enacted into law. The new nation took shape under the leadership of John A. Macdonald (who was knighted in 1867). The men who brought this about are referred to in Canada as the "Fathers of Confederation".

British Columbia joined in 1871; Prince Edward Island in 1873. From the Hudson's Bay company territories, acquired in 1870, Parliament created Manitoba in 1870 and Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1905. Newfoundland joined in 1949.

The two territories of Canada, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, do not have provincial status. Each is headed by a federally appointed commissioner, who is assisted by an elected council. In both, the commissioner and council have substantial powers over local affairs.

Constitution

The basic constitutional document is the British North America Act of 1867 (which has been amended several times). The Act sets out Canada's federal structure, parliamentary form of government and the distribution of powers between federal and provincial governments. The provinces are autonomous in several areas of government, such as education and property and civil rights.