

protest from the US. Next, the new colonial secretary, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, insisted that “[u]nnecessary legislation” was “always objectionable,” presumably because it took up too much time in an already busy parliamentary schedule (doc. 31). Hicks Beach preferred a simpler, quicker transfer by means of an imperial Order-in-Council, which the government’s legal advisers assured him was an adequate instrument for the purpose (docs 25, 32).

The Admiralty had produced a map showing a boundary that excluded Grinnell Land (see map 3). The CO, however, did not favour such a definition. CO official Ernest Blake concluded instead that it would be better to leave the boundary “somewhat indefinite” (doc. 31). The transfer was duly made by an Order-in-Council that referred in very broad terms to British territories and possessions and the islands adjacent to them.⁷ This approach certainly had its advantages, and the advantages were understood and appreciated by some later officials in London. As Arthur Berriedale Keith observed in 1911, “Canada can claim all it likes to claim on the ground that it ... was given by the O. in C. of 1880” (doc. 197). However, Canadian officials had no access to the CO minutes in which the terms of the transfer had been worked out. It is possible that the CO’s reasoning was verbally communicated to Sir John A. Macdonald during his visits to London, but if so, Macdonald does not seem to have placed it on record for future reference in Ottawa. The result was decades of doubt among Canadian officials about exactly where the northern boundary was, and about the reasons for the Order’s vagueness.

On the question of administration in the newly transferred territories, both British and Canadian officials agreed that there was no need for it until white settlement reached the archipelago (doc. 39). In the western Arctic, meanwhile, there were a few white inhabitants, most notably Bishop William Bompas, who warned of possible American encroachments across the border with Alaska and pushed for a government presence (docs 2, 48, 51, 72). Bompas’s warnings are well known to historians, as are those of John Schultz, the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba and Keewatin. However, the important roles played by Alexander Mackinnon Burgess (fig. 2), who was Deputy Minister of the Interior from 1883 to 1897, and by Thomas Mayne Daly (fig. 3), the Minister of the Interior from 1892 to 1896, are revealed here for the first time. Burgess was an advocate of a more active northern policy from the mid-1880s on (docs 42, 44, 46, 47). In 1894 his views won the support of Daly and of the Prime Minister, Sir John Thompson (docs 49, 53, 56). Despite the less than enthusiastic attitude shown by the powerful comptroller of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP), Frederick White (fig. 6), and his Minister, W.B. Ives (docs 50, 54, 55), police officer Charles Constantine became the first government agent in the Yukon region (docs 57, 59). The government’s first serious northward move came just in time to prevent chaos during the gold rush of the late 1890s.

⁷ *Canada Gazette*, 9 October 1880, p. 389.