



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 63/12

LESSONS OF AN OLD CONFLICT

An Address by the Prime Minister
of Canada, Mr. L.B. Pearson, at
the Commemorating of the 150th
Anniversary of the Battle of
Stoney Creek, Ontario, June 8, 1963

The 150th anniversary of the Battle of Stoney Creek is a moving occasion for us all. As a Canadian citizen and as the Prime Minister of Canada, I am honoured to take part in the commemoration.

We know that this Battle - a small and confused engagement - was nevertheless a decisive turning point in the War of 1812-1814. I am not going to take your time repeating today that chapter of our history. As a boy, I learned all about it. We "beat" the Americans and Laura Secord became a heroine.

Today, however, it is more appropriate for us to think not about that far-away war but about the results which flowed from it. Canada was successfully defended and our national future assured. A great part of the success lay in the fact that, when we had had our war, relations between Canada and the United States were transformed.

A Radical Change

The peace made in 1814 acknowledged neither victor nor vanquished. Militarily and territorially, the two parties - the United States and Britain - reverted to the status quo ante. But this was an occasion when standing still in form meant great progress in spirit; it meant a radical change in the spirit of the relation between the two countries.

It meant that, at last, Great Britain accepted all the implications and the consequences of the American Revolution. She became willing to deal with the United States on the basis of true equality. And the United States, for its part, accepted the separate existence of Canada. Implicitly, the Americans recognized that, while we in Canada were not going to join them, we might move towards self-government and independence, through a process of evolution.

An Enduring Pattern

In this spirit, it became possible for the United States and Great Britain, with increasingly direct participation by Canada, gradually to find ways and means of solving the many problems and differences which remained between them. There were, in particular, very difficult and contentious problems about the border between Canada and the United States and about international waters and fisheries. The techniques of negotiation, conciliation and arbitration which were then evolved set a pattern which has stood the test of time and remains to this day. So do the problems now more complicated and difficult than ever. For their solution now, goodwill and mutual understanding are needed as never before.

Today, then, we are not only commemorating the 150th anniversary of a military victory. Even more significantly, we are celebrating a century and a half of close, active and mutually profitable co-operation between Canada and the United States. It is a good example of good neighbourhood which is looked at with envy, and could be followed with equal advantage, in many parts of our troubled world. Since 1815 we have had lots of orws - but rows with wars or without a breach in our friendship. That is a real achievement. Let's keep it that way.

You will remember that shortly after the war, in 1817, an agreement was signed which is in force to this day and which provided for naval disarmament on the Great Lakes. This was one of the few disarmament agreements in history that worked.

A Precedent Worth Study

I know, of course, that with nuclear missiles and jet planes, the task of achieving disarmament on a world scale has become immensely more complicated. But I do suggest that the precedent of the Rush-Bagot Agreement could be studied with profit by some countries who are neighbours and who, like Canada and the United States of those days, have reasons to distrust each other but even more compelling reasons for removing that distrust.

There is another aspect of the War of 1812 that has been given less attention than it deserves. The response of Canadians to that War revealed the essential seeds that were later to develop into Canadian nationhood.

The Maritime colonies and the outlying Western garrisons were no less anxious than Upper and Lower Canada to affirm their common identity in the struggle. They showed their common desire to live in North America as part of the British system. Canadians of French descent were no less devoted to this objective than were those of British stock. It is not too much to say that in 1812 the foundations of Canadian nationhood were established.

Two Peoples and Two Cultures

The role of Lower Canada in 1812 showed that this was truly to be a nation of two founding peoples and two basic cultures. Many of the great moments of Canadian history have been moments when people of English and French origins have shown their willingness and ability to co-operate on a basis of true equality. It is that partnership which affirms our Canadian identity and gives it a distinct sense of common purpose and destiny.

That is no less true in the twentieth century. Many of the challenges in Canada that face us today are ones of adaptation to economic and social progress. If, in the course of such changes, either one of the two founding peoples were to feel that it was less able to fulfil its legitimate aspirations, Canada would soon lose its personality, if not its complete existence.

Canadian Fact Matures

But that will not happen. The Canadian personality, the Canadian fact, will continue to grow in maturity and strength through the active and sincere co-operation of English and French Canadians, together with the contribution of more recent Canadians of other origins. I have every confidence that we will find the ways and means of achieving this overriding objective, in the tradition of our forefathers who found, in the years that followed the War of 1812, the ways and means of building the Canadian nation.

I am confident also that this nation will continue to live in friendship, based on mutual understanding and mutual respect, with its great neighbour. We two - as separate and free peoples - are joined together by the facts of geography and economics and by the dangers and necessities of contemporary history. Let no man try to put us asunder.

With these words, I have the great honour of declaring officially open the Battlefield Park, enlarged in commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Stoney Creek.

S/C