

The London and Middlesex

2017

HISTORIAN

Volume 26



Official Journal of
The London and Middlesex Historical Society



Canada's Golden Jubilee Celebrating July 1, 1917 in London, Ontario

Jennifer Grainger

One might suppose that the residents of London, Ontario had no heart to celebrate the golden jubilee of Confederation on July 1, 1917. After all, Londoners, like other Canadians, had endured nearly three years of the Great War by that date and nearly every person in the city had been touched by the European conflict in some way.

Certainly the *London Advertiser* saw little reason for Londoners to celebrate. In an editorial on June 30, 1917, the paper declared:

*Canada is at present cumbered with so much serving and with such bitter difficulties as to the manner of serving, so distressed in many ways, that she has hardly time or even a hearty will to celebrate her semi-centennial jubilee.*¹

Despite the war, however – or perhaps because of it - Londoners still celebrated Canada's golden anniversary in a variety of ways.

July 1 was a Sunday that year and neither of London's major newspapers, the *Advertiser* and the *Free Press*, had a Sunday edition. Nevertheless, both newspapers observed Dominion Day with a history lesson on Saturday, June 30. The *Tizer* included an article entitled "London of Fifty Years Ago Would Regard City of Today as a Place Made by Fairies." The anonymous reporter described the London of 1867, when Victoria Park was a barracks site, no "white gloved traffic officer" stood at Dundas and Richmond streets, and the city was almost entirely British in origin,

except for "a flourishing colored community as a foreign element." The article reminded Londoners that old businesses such as E. Leonard & Sons, J. & O. McClary, Thos. McCormick, D. S. Perrin, and Hyman & Dunnett, all in existence in 1867, were still in business 50 years later. Dry goods stores and oil refineries were also described as prominent businesses at the time of Confederation. Nevertheless, the author concluded that in certain ways London was a better city in which to live in 1917 than in 1867. The London of the Confederation period was "a London of less than a third of the present population, a city in which pavements, electric street lights and shop signs, motor trolley cars, motor trucks and automobiles were still fairy tales and fantastic dreams."²

The history lesson provided by the *Free Press* was more general than local. An editorial entitled "Confederation Characters" stated that "the men who framed the Dominion of Canada belong to the immortals" and proceeded to relate how the exploits of such men as Charles Tupper, George Brown, George Cartier, and Sir John A. Macdonald brought about the union of the first four provinces.³

The *Free Press* did manage to provide a Confederation article with a local connection that Saturday, however. The item was a memoir written by an anonymous daughter of Sir John Carling, famous London brewer and politician. The daughter explained how she travelled to Quebec with her parents at the age of seven in 1863, after her father had become receiver-general in the Macdonald-Cartier government. Based on her age in 1863, the daughter must

have been Louisa M. Carling, born 1856 in London. In her article, Louisa describes how she became a “pet” of her father’s political friends and states that “*Sir John Macdonald ...used to play with me nearly every evening. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.*”⁵ She also recalled D’Arcy Magee and George Brown, but less well. Apparently they were not such good playmates!

The fiftieth Dominion Day being a Sunday, many Londoners went to church and the sermons to which they listened were summarized in the following day’s newspapers. The sermons expressed the themes of Confederation, war, and a variety of social issues. Since ministers were among the most important authority figures of the day, many parishioners and reporters must have taken their comments to heart. The statements of the ministers were likely to be a reflection of the concerns of many Londoners that summer.

One of the most respected of the city’s clergymen, Bishop David Williams of the Anglican Diocese of Huron, preached that day at St. Paul’s Cathedral.

If there is any failure of the British people in North America it is their failure to multiply,” stated Williams. *“There is a danger of the British being crowded out of this land because they have refused to multiply ... Canada has escaped the sin of some of the states of the United States in the prevalence of divorce to fall into the sin of the limitation of the birth rate.”* The Bishop also worried about immigrants: *“The people who will fill the Dominion will not be Canadians ... in the past 10 years the people who have filled Canada have not been native-born Canadians. Woe to the people who are guilty of this sin.”*⁶

Rev. J. D. Richardson of Empress Avenue Methodist Church told his congregation that he was an Imperialist as well as a Canadian. *“There are, however,”* he said, *“two things which we do not want transferred to this new country of ours – one is the drink custom and the other is a titled, hereditary aristocracy.”*⁷ It seems that Rev. Richardson was a temperance advocate as well as a democrat.

The First Congregational Church minister, Rev. Dr. J. B. Silcox, came out strongly in favour of conscription but urged understanding for the anti-conscription attitude of French Canadians:

*We must learn to be lenient with those whose opinions differ from ours. We must remember that the French were here first. He [sic] loves Canada as much as we do, but he reads French papers, speaks the French language. He has not yet got into the swing of the great world struggle. He does not realize his duty. When he does, he will enter the struggle and that as loyally as any of us.*⁸

The Very Rev. Dean Davis, rector of St. James Anglican Church, mentioned the changing role of women and their contribution to the war effort:

*“Perhaps nothing in modern times has done so much to bring women to the forefront as the war. Everywhere they are turning in to do man’s work to aid in winning the war.”*⁹

Many comments from the clergy reflected the apparent effect of the War upon Canadian nationhood. W. J. Knox of First Presbyterian Church commented in a statement to the *Free Press*:

*In 1867 we were made citizens of a Dominion; to-day we are being made citizens of the world. Through the travail of war we are being born into a larger life, with world-wide interests and responsibilities.*¹⁰

H. H. Bingham of Talbot Street Baptist Church commented:

*We celebrate this 50th anniversary under the cloud of war, but even at this critical hour her brave army has placed laurels of victory upon the brow of Canada.*¹¹

Rev. H. T. Ferguson of Centennial Methodist Church also stated:

*While through the rejoicing there are minor strains of sorrow caused by the war, yet in these days of stress Canada is coming to a national consciousness which might otherwise have taken her years to reach.*¹²

Knox, Bingham and Ferguson's comments may have been fueled by the surge in patriotism experienced after the Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge in April 1917. Nearly three months earlier, on April 10, the front page of the *London Advertiser* announced:

Canadians Clear Foe's Troops From Both Sides of Vimy. Boys From the Dominion Foil Counter-Attack and Hold Safely Ground Won Yesterday.

The article continued:

*"The Canadians, who had one of the hardest bits of the front to contend with, are now in complete occupation of the famous Vimy Ridge, even the eastern Slopes of the ridge having been cleared of Germans. The Canadians also have repulsed German counter-attacks."*¹³
Only one clergyman, the aforementioned

Bishop Williams, mentioned Vimy by name in his sermon on July 1, and only in a list of Canadian victories: "*The Canadians vindicated their strength at Ypres, at Vimy Ridge and at Courcellette,*"¹⁴ he stated. Yet from the comments of the others it appears that Vimy was already being recognized as a nation-building achievement as well as a military victory for Canada.

Another July 1, 1917 event was a lecture given during the evening by Fred Landon at Askin Street Methodist Church. Landon, city librarian since 1916, spoke on the topic "*What Has Confederation Done For Canada.*"¹⁵ He would go on to become director of library services at Western University in 1923 and vice-president of Western in 1946. Unfortunately, his speech does not seem to have been preserved.

London celebrated the golden anniversary of Confederation with a military parade on Monday, July 2. About a mile and a half in length, the parade began at Carling Heights military camp at 9:30 a.m. While many military personnel were overseas, a small number remained at Carling. They were joined by militia, other detachments, and men returned from overseas. The parade consisted of: District Staff; the Band of the 1st Hussars; Brigade Staff; Service Company, Canadian Engineers; Composite Unit, Central Training Depot; No. 1 Special Service Company; Canadian Army Service Corps; the pipe band of the A.M.C.; Army Medical Training Depot No. 1; No. 1 Detachment, Canadian Ordnance Corps; Camp Sub-Staff.¹⁶

At the corner of Adelaide Street and Princess Avenue the 7th Reserve Battalion joined the parade and a detachment of returned soldiers joined at Waterloo and Dundas Streets. The parade marched west along Dundas, north on Richmond and along Dufferin, entering Victoria Park from the east. Upon arrival in the



THE MEANING OF CONFEDERATION



BY the Confederation Act of the British Parliament in 1867, passed as framed by the merging partners, the Dominion of Canada was peacefully formed. It comprised a union, without internal tariffs, of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick under one central Government, with Provincial Legislatures for local affairs.

The four "original firsts" have grown to nine Provinces, by the addition in turn of Manitoba, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Alberta.