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How London, Ontario, Celebrated the Birth of Confederation from 1867 through 1907

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While many important announcements have appeared in London's newspapers throughout the course of Canadian history, undeniably one of the most important was published on June 6, 1867, when the *London Free Press* reprinted the following material from a supplement that had appeared on May 21 in the *London (England) Gazette*.

By the Queen, A Proclamation

*Whereas, by an act of Parliament, passed on the twenty-ninth day of March, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven, in the thirtieth year of our reign, intituled "an Act for the union of Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and the government thereby, and for the purposes connected therewith," after divers recitals it is enacted that "it shall be lawful for the Queen, by and with the advice of her Majesty's Most Honorable Privy Council, to declare, by proclamation, that...on and after the first day of July, 1867, the provinces of Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick shall form and be one dominion under the name of Canada."*¹

During the months that preceded the Proclamation many articles appeared in both the *Free Press* and the *London Daily Advertiser* in anticipation of this event. Whereas both papers were strongly in favor of

the Proclamation, the announcement itself set the stage for considerable and often prolonged debate within the city. This article will review the nature of that debate. The Prelude will focus on the newspaper coverage before and after June 6, 1867, to reveal how informed the citizens of London were about the significance of the Proclamation. The Aftermath will review the many political decisions along with the preparations (or lack thereof) that were made for the celebrations held after 1867 through 1907. Finally, in the Epilogue we will examine several probable causes for these decisions.

Prelude

Although the population of London in 1867 was only around 13,000² both newspapers provided their readers with a considerable amount of local, national and international news. Thus it is not surprising that the citizens of London were well informed about the details of the negotiations taking place in England as well as the overall implications of the Queen's Proclamation. Much of this information was conveyed through printed versions of the speeches made by the Canadian Parliamentarians who were in England at the time and were involved in the negotiations. Perhaps the best summary of the overall future implications of the Proclamation, however, was contained in the words of George-Etienne Cartier on his return from England in May of that year.

...The consummation of Confederation is a measure which has raised Canada from a mere Province into a Nation. Hereafter Canada will comprise not merely the comparatively insignificant Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, but Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Hudson's Bay and British Columbia in addition. When all of the Provinces mentioned in the great scheme have come into the Union as members of the great Confederacy, the Dominion of Canada will extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean...that by this great union of the Provinces, we shall rank as the third commercial power in the world. We shall in this respect stand only behind England and the United States. When we come to think that we have obtained such a result without violence or bloodshed, without political trouble or dissension such as has been witnessed in other countries, we have reason to be proud.³

Although there was no disagreement in the local press with Cartier's overall future evaluation of the proclamation, the initial debate in the London local papers centered largely around the date on which the proclamation was to be enacted as well as the nature of the celebration that would take place on that date.

While the *Free Press* did not disagree with the selection of July 1, the *Daily Advertiser* considered this date a most unfortunate choice.

We cannot help thinking the day and date of the birth of Confederation rather unfortunate. Our

readers will remember how earnestly we recommended the selection of the Queen's Birthday for the natal day of Young Canada. Had this been done we should have had one grand day of annual rejoicing and to all time Confederation would have been associated with the name and memory of Victoria. It cannot be helped or changed now, but we fear it will be found practically impossible to keep two great public holidays with full zest within five weeks of each other.⁴

The *Free Press* approached the matter in a very different way when it issued a rebuttal to an earlier editorial in the *Ottawa Times*, which also advocated holding the celebration on the Queen's Birthday.

Our contemporary thinks that the Queen's Birthday should suffice. Now what would be thought of a man who objected to keep his own birthday because his mother had one? People would think him slightly "spooney," because they would see that in the course of time, in the current of events, his own birthday became of more personal importance than even that of his mother. And when a man celebrates his own birthday, he exhibits an individuality which is respected. It may be that he has not yet left the paternal home, but still he has an individuality...But will the parent frown because he assumes the responsibility of recognizing himself as distinct from his parents? Far from it... such exhibitions of coming manhood are most gratifying; and in the case of Canada, some slight evidence that we appreciate the new condition that is upon us would be especially gratifying to England...⁵

What is interesting about this issue is that it suggests an apparent lack of information on the part of the press concerning the many factors that led to the selection of July 1 as opposed to May 24. To appreciate the rationale behind the choice of July 1 it is important to understand the events that preceded the Queen's Proclamation.

By March, 8, 1867 the British North American Bill had passed the third reading in both the House of Lords and the House of Commons. At this point "*England had finished all that she was to do for the union of British North America...The (Canadian) Delegates could (now) go home. The task of bringing the new Dominion of Canada into existence was now theirs and must be carried out in British America.*"⁶ Given these marching orders, what did the task to be carried out in Canada consist of and how long would it take to complete?

*By the first Dominion Day (July 1, 1867), a large number of important decisions would have to be made. The first senators would have to be chosen, the new lieutenant-governors appointed, and the new provincial governments set up. Of all the tasks, however...the formation of the first federal cabinet was without a doubt the most difficult...It was generally agreed that the cabinet ought not to be any larger than the former Canadian cabinet which was normally composed of twelve ministers...and the first cabinet must represent racial and religious, as well as regional interests...*⁷

On May 16 the following statement appeared in *Free Press*: "*It is rumored that the Queen's Proclamation will fix the date when the constitution of the new Dominion comes into force, about the beginning of July*".⁸ Thus the date of July 1 for the completion of all

of these tasks must have been selected somewhere between March 8 and May 16. Moreover, it is doubtful whether John A. Macdonald, who was largely responsible for the British North American Bill and would become the first Prime Minister of Canada, had any say in this matter "*since he was far away from London when the matter was finally settled.*"⁹ Moreover, according to his diary, Macdonald would have preferred a date at least two weeks after July 1 given the overwhelming nature of the task at hand.¹⁰ Hence, the most that can be said about the possible selection of May 24, is that if this date was even considered in England, it must have been ruled out quite early in the deliberations as simply unworkable.

Unfortunately the rationale for the selection of July 1 does not appear in the minutes of the British Parliament though it might appear in the private correspondence of some members of Parliament, which was a common way of handling certain matters during this time. It could even have been decided during some unrecorded discussions between certain members of Parliament (see chapter four in Martin¹¹). In essence, the actual reasoning behind the choice of this date, at present, is unknown. It is possible, however, that the date may have been selected for at least two reasons.

Since the action to be taken by the British Parliament on July 1 would mean the establishment of new country, for symbolic purposes it might have seemed most appropriate that this action should occur at the start of a new month because it would thereby signify the uplifting nature of the British North American Bill.

Alternatively, by designating July 1 as Canada's "independence day," celebrations held throughout the country on this date could be used to overshadow the normal celebrations held only three days later in the United States

to signify America's Independence Day. Indeed, prior to 1867 it was common for many Canadians in Upper Canada to visit Windsor on July 4 to enjoy the American fireworks in Detroit along with a boat ride on the Detroit River. The Grand Trunk Western Railway often advertised a "Grand Gala Day cheap pleasure excursion" on July 4 from London to Windsor for one dollar return. Passengers could also board at stops in Mount Bridges, Glencoe, Thamesville, and Chatham. Upon arrival in Windsor, the Grand Trunk Western Railway boat was readily available as advertised in a notice that usually appeared in the London papers prior to July 4.

*In order that the Excursionists may enjoy a pleasant time, the Company's splendid Steamer "Union" will be placed at their disposal for the day, and will make a number of trips up and the down the Detroit River free of charge. Excursionists will have an opportunity of witnessing the festivities of the day at Detroit, preparations for which are being made on a magnificent scale. Excursionists desirous of remaining over at Detroit until the following day can return, by any regular passenger train...*¹²

If Canada could mount a celebration of its own "independence day" equivalent to or better than the Independence Day celebrations held in America, it might have been hoped that this would generate a strong degree of patriotism at home and thereby convince many Canadians to view their country as being just as important as the one south of the border. Needless to say, although both of these points are speculative, it could be that reasons similar to these might have been used to justify the selection of the July 1 date.

Aside from this issue over the date, the most pressing matter centered on the best means for launching a celebration of the event. In London the Queen's Proclamation set the stage for a further proclamation that was issued by London's Mayor that June.

*...at a Public Meeting held at City Hall on the 26th of June it was resolved that the day should be kept as a day of General Rejoicing;-- Therefore I, F. Smith, Mayor of the City of London, do hereby request that the Citizens thereof do observe and keep the said 1st day of July next as a Public Holiday by closing all places of business, hoisting flags and other decorations, and doing all in their power to aid and assist in inaugurating the New Dominion.*¹³

How well did London implement the Mayor's proclamation? During the public meeting it was also moved, and unanimously approved, that an immediate special meeting of City Council needed to be called for the purpose of allocating \$400 to "provide the means for the proper celebration of the day of inauguration of the Dominion of Canada."¹⁴ The very next evening City Council met to consider the financial terms in this motion. According to the City Council records,¹⁵ however, the full motion was not placed before Council. Instead only an amended version of the motion appeared in which the request for \$400 was lowered to \$200. Despite this smaller amount only two of the councilors voted in favour of the motion, while four voted against. Thus, the motion was defeated.

Because this defeat meant that the first Dominion Day celebration would be launched without any financial support, a second motion was then placed before Council. This time it was requested that the committee responsible

for the Queen's Birthday Celebration, which had been held on May 24, be requested "to expend any remaining funds from that celebration toward any incidental expenses that might be incurred during the July 1st celebrations." Unfortunately, that motion too was defeated and the minutes contained no mention of the debate that led to the defeat of both motions.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is quite clear from the council minutes that the city refused to allocate any funds whatsoever in support of the first Dominion Day celebration!

Without funds it is not surprising that the celebration to be held on July 1, 1867, was expected to be extremely meager as summarized in the following words by the *Advertiser*: "The preparations appear to be going on rather languidly, and we doubt if Dominion Day will be up to the mark of an average Queen's Birthday."¹⁷ Indeed the *Advertiser's* prediction proved to be quite correct as shown in their coverage of both celebrations.

The Queen's Birthday on May 24 was a splendid affair that began at 9:00 a.m. and ended some twelve hours later. Every preparation that could be (made) has been made by the Committee of Arrangements for the gratification of sight-seers generally. In London, throughout the day...a continuous chain of amusements will be afforded. At the start of the day a game of Shinty¹⁸ was played on the Cricket Field. At 11:00 a.m. a grand military review then took place which involved Her Majesty's 53rd and 60th Regiments, Royal Artillery, and the Volunteers. The military review was followed that afternoon by more than 20 athletic events (e.g., running high jump, standing high jump, fireman's foot race, three legged race, 100

yard race over six hurdles, wheelbarrow race etc.). The winners of each race were awarded 1st or 2nd class monetary prizes. The day finally ended with a Torchlight Procession mounted by the Fire Brigade that began at 8:00 p.m.¹⁹

In sharp contrast to this all day affair that took place on the Queen's Birthday, on July 1 there was only a single game of Shinty in the morning followed by a military review that ended around noon. Because there were no further activities, the *Free Press* summarized the day in following manner.

Our citizens generally, we presume, will seek some more congenial climate to spend the 1st of July – Dominion Day—than the limits of the "Forest City," and we propose informing them of the many places in the neighborhood of doing so. It is to be regretted, however, that no fitting celebration will be made here, but "what's done can't be undone," or vice versa, and consequently it's of very little use to harp upon this matter. The various railway companies offer tempting inducements to excursionists and pleasure-seekers, and we have no doubt but large numbers will avail themselves of the opportunity.²⁰

Indeed, several days later the paper reported the numbers that left the city on July 1: "We understand that 1,000 were carried over the Great Western Railway to Hamilton...800 by the same railway to Strathroy, and not less than 4,000 to Port Stanley."²¹

Aftermath

The presence of an elaborate celebration on the Queen's Birthday in 1867 coupled with the relative absence of any real celebration on the first Dominion Day apparently set the stage for a similar series of events that characterized London over the next several decades as the following material illustrates. For instance, on June 22, 1869 Council received a report with two recommendations: first, according to a resolution passed at a meeting of the ratepayers in City Hall on Saturday, June 19, "*Council should grant a sum of money (\$200) for the purpose of mounting a celebration on Dominion Day;*" second, "*the mayor should proclaim a half holiday to celebrate Dominion Day.*"²²

In response to these recommendations "*Alderman McBride moved, seconded by Alderman Christie that the first clause be struck out and that the second clause be adopted.*" The motion was carried. Thus, although the day would be officially recognized, once again no funds would be allocated in support of a celebration. Then on June 28 Council received a petition signed by "*Robert Reed and 131 others relative to a grant for Dominion Day.*" Although Council's minutes state that the petition was received, apparently it was not acted upon because it was not mentioned again and the *Advertiser*²³ noted that "*The board of Alderman...have declined to appropriate any sum of money for fire-crackers and sky-rockets (for the Dominion Day celebrations).*" In essence, there was no celebration of Dominion Day that year in London as reported the next day in the *Advertiser*.

...by noon of yesterday the city was almost entirely deserted ...Thousands went, as usual to the Port, and thousands more spread north, south, east and west, as

*their fancy guided them, all bent on enjoyment, for the day, the city was to great extent depopulated. The few who remained for the most part sought amusement in witnessing the cricket match which was...between the Paris and London clubs.*²⁴

In contrast, the Queen's Birthday that year was celebrated with considerable pomp and ceremony.

Business was entirely suspended, over the hotels, public buildings and many private residences, England's blood red banner floated in the breeze; old and young, male and female, dressed in their best, thronged the streets, moving in the direction of the attractions of the day, and things generally were a thoroughly holiday aspect.

Shortly before 12 noon the Volunteer Brigade consisting of Lt-Col. Shanly's field battery, 4 guns, and the 7th Light Infantry, Lt. Col. Lewis, seven companies, appeared on the ground (in front of Hellmuth College)...a feu de joie was fired, and a royal salute was given, followed by three cheers for the Queen...On the way back to the Drill Shed, a company of the Infantry was sent on in advance, deployed as skirmishers...the skirmishers halted, having sighted the imaginary enemy; the artillery and infantry were then brought into position...here, after a brisk infantry fire and a few rounds from the artillery, the enemy was routed. The line of march for the Shed was then resumed, and the review closed.

*(That afternoon in the cricket field) games of base ball and cricket were in progress...the base ball game lasted around five hours. At night the city was illuminated with bonfires. Every street had its blazing pile around which the boys of the neighborhood congregated, firing off crackers, squibs, torpedoes and all such holiday requisites.*²⁵

In 1870 Council once again refused to grant any funds in support of the Dominion Day celebrations. In commenting on this action the *Advertiser* said the following:

*The city has tacitly refused to aid in a public celebration, such as the Fire Brigade, (which was recommended for support by Council) and consequently the diversions of the day are left entirely to private enterprise.*²⁶

The *Free Press* was equally critical of this action taken by Council.

*This is Dominion Day—which of course everybody knows. It will be a public holiday---the absence of the Mayor’s proclamation to that effect notwithstanding. There will be no public celebration in the city of a national character, no military parade, no fireworks, or anything of that kind, though such a display would be agreeable to many.*²⁷

It is also important to mention that this lack of interest in Dominion Day did not cease in 1870 but continued for many years to come as illustrated in the celebrations of such key events as the 20th, 30th, and 40th anniversaries of Confederation which took place in 1887, 1897, and 1907, respectively.

These anniversary dates are particularly important because Dominion Day was designated a statutory holiday by the Federal Government in 1879. Therefore we should expect to find that Dominion Day would take precedence over, or at least receive equal treatment to, the Queen’s Birthday on all of these occasions. Unfortunately, this was not the case!

Eighteen eighty-seven was a unique year not only for the celebration of Confederation, but also for the Monarchy because it marked the Queen’s Golden Jubilee. It was also important in the history of London because 1887 marked the entry into the city of the Canadian Pacific and the Michigan Central Railways which, together with the Grand Trunk Railway, made London an extremely important commercial rail hub in Southwestern Ontario. In fact, the *Advertiser* even claimed in a headline that “*Its Position as a Railway Center (is) Not Equaled by Any City in Canada.*”²⁸ Although the Dominion Day celebration that year would be held on July 1, it was decided to forego the Queen’s Birthday on May 24 and instead combine the Queen’s Golden Jubilee with the entry of the railways into London in a single celebration. Both of these celebrations were scheduled to take place over a two day period starting on Monday, June 20, with the most important day being Monday in keeping with the Jubilee festivities which were held in England. Contrary to what might be assumed, however, the major focus of the celebration on May 24 was not on the Queen. Instead, it was on the promotion of the city as the “*mercantile, manufacturing and banking center of Western Ontario.*”

To ensure that a large number of potential consumers would visit the city that day arrangements were made with the neighboring towns of St. Marys, St. Thomas, Brantford and Strathroy to forgo any celebrations of their own on Monday so that

their citizens “*will all come to London.*”²⁹ Also to ensure visitors, City Council further arranged special excursion trains with reduced fares that would transport people not only from the surrounding towns but from even more distant locations such as Sarnia, Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto. It was estimated that approximately 3,000 people arrived in London on the Monday.³⁰

To coincide with the arrival of the trains, at one o'clock that Monday the city sponsored a “*Grand Trades Procession and Parade*” hailed in the *Advertiser* as “*An Imposing Industrial Pageant*”³¹ that started on Dundas Street between Market Lane and Richmond Street, then went south on Richmond and through all of the major downtown streets of London. The parade was about two miles in length and was headed by the City Police force, Fire Brigade, and the 7th Fusillers Band.³² To highlight all of the important commercial features that the city had to offer, the parade contained around 200 teams of horse drawn wagons with displays by all of the professions, colleges, trades, shops, and manufactures in London. After the parade many of the stores and shops were open for visitors and the *Advertiser* produced a special “railway edition” of the paper that featured ads from all of London’s major business and manufactures. For the remainder of the day, the visitors were invited to attend a series of athletic games with monetary prizes provided by the city awarded to the winners. In the evening starting at 7:30 a Jubilee concert was held in Victoria Park followed by fireworks at 9:30. Because of the importance of the parade to the city, unlike previous years, City Council had agreed to spend nearly \$3,000 on the entertainment and prizes.³³

Given the splendid nature of these events, how did London commemorate the 20th anniversary of Dominion Day which was held eleven days later?

Tomorrow will be the twentieth anniversary of Canadian Confederation...Twenty years have therefore passed under the existing constitutional conditions, and Friday will be Canada’s natal day. The historical and political aspect of the case will doubtless interest a few, but the great mass of people in London and Western Ontario desire to know where they can best be amused, and accordingly the Advertiser notes a few of the events for its army of readers.

For those who do not take advantage of cheap railway rates but remain at home will find the gardens, boulevards, parks and suburban drives as beautiful as ever... The chief item on the programme of amusements for London will undoubtedly be the races on the old Fair Ground track at 2 p.m. under the direction of the London Hunt Club...The London Lacrosse Club will hold their first Canadian Lacrosse Association championship match in Tecumseh Park in the afternoon (and also in the afternoon) the Beavers (baseball team) will play the venerable Maple Leafs of Guelph...³⁴

The *Advertiser* went on to mention the events that were to be held in Ingersoll, Woodstock, Brantford, and Amherstburg. Apparently, there were no musical events, no parade, and no commemoration ceremony in London, nor did the London City Council allocate any funds toward the celebration of this day, at least nothing of this nature appeared in either London newspaper.

Clearly, the events on this Dominion Day pale in contrast to the events that took place on the first day of the Queen's Golden Jubilee. What is also important to keep in mind here is that since the Grand Gala Parade had nothing to do with the Queen, it would seem that the parade could as easily have been held on Dominion Day. To complete the story, consider what happened on the 30th and then on the 40th anniversary of Confederation. On July 1, 1897, which was the 30th anniversary, the Dominion Day celebration was actually cancelled as a result of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebration that was held on June 22nd.

*Tomorrow is the national holiday – Dominion Day – and the present indications are that it will be blessed with fine weather, after the rain storm of Tuesday. People had their jubilation last week, and as there is no public celebration tomorrow most of them will feel like spending the holiday in a quiet manner out of doors. The very thought suggests Springbank, and it is there that the multitude will undoubtedly go.*³⁵

Then in 1907 the Queen's Birthday (which was renamed Victoria Day/Empire Day due to the Queen's passing in 1901), was celebrated once again in an all-day specular manner.

Not for many a holiday have Londoners had such a bill of attractions to choose from as are presented to them to-day...First in interest will be the military review at Queens Park in the afternoon, when in the march past will be seen the 48th Highlanders from Toronto, 650 strong, the First Hussars, 6th battery Canadian Artillery, K Company Royal Canadian Regiment, (etc.)...The march past

*will be followed by a number of military events, including the trooping of the colors by the Highlanders, an officers' steeple-chase...In the evening there will be a grand tattoo...following this will be a torch drill, highland dancing, lantern drill, bayonet exercises, etc.*³⁶

In sharp contrast to the Victoria Day celebrations, for Dominion Day the *Advertiser* summarized the few events that took place on July 1, 1907 in the following manner.

Baseball, Tecumseh Park – 10:30 a.m., Skating, Princess Roller Rink, tonight, Vaudeville at Springbank, matinee and night, Marathon road race, St. Thomas to Queen's Park, starts at 3 o'clock.

*The above list furnishes a few pointers as to the way in which the holiday may be spent pleasantly by Londoners ...Londoners are making very worthy attempts this summer to keep the citizens at home instead of sending them to other cities to spend their money on holidays.*³⁷

Unfortunately, it seems that these attempts to keep Londoners at home were not very successful.

It is remarkable how many people leave their own country to take a trip to the other side on big Canadian holidays," remarked a local ticket agent this morning. "And especially is this so around Dominion Day. We are as busy as we can be selling tickets to Detroit, Buffalo and other American cities just now and have been for several days.

In all of the local ticket offices the same conditions prevailed, and if one were to judge by the number of tickets being sold one would wonder if there were going to be any Londoners left in the city by Monday..."of course, said one ticket agent "we are glad to get the business, but I can't help wondering just why Canadians would be so particularly anxious to leave Canada on national holidays. It is seldom that the Americans come to this side on July 4 or any other holiday, why our people should run across the line on every opportunity is something I can't understand."³⁸

Epilogue

Why did London favor the Queen's Birthday over Dominion Day throughout the first 40 years of Confederation? Although the reasons are not entirely clear several possible explanations come to mind. With regard to the first explanation, at least until 1870/1871 among the citizens of London, there was good reason to ask whether confederation would be successful and whether it was truly a worthwhile venture. In terms of success, on February, 21, 1868, the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia unanimously approved a resolution "*informing Her Majesty that her loyal people of Nova Scotia do not desire to be in any manner confederated with Canada, and praying Her Majesty to revoke her Proclamation and to cause the British North America Act to be repealed, as far as it affects the Province of Nova Scotia.*"³⁹ Although the resolution failed, this action on the part of one of the founding provinces was a clear sign that the success of confederation might very well be in doubt.

Several years later the *Advertiser* addressed this issue in the following way.

It cannot be said that up to this time that Confederation has proved all (that) our fancy pictured it (to be). Nova Scotia, the South Carolina of Canada, is still dissatisfied. The recent imposition of taxes on bread and fuel is strongly resented in New Brunswick. The Red River difficulty has not yet been settled. Ontario is beginning to see that the chief burden of Union falls on the shoulders of her citizens.

During the year we have heard considerable talk of receiving into the happy fold British Columbia, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. The first-named colony does indeed appear anxious for union; but the two latter are apparently more stubborn than ever. No wonder. The affairs of the Dominion have been shamefully mismanaged, Ministers being more intent on advancing their own interests than the interest of the country. Let us hope that another election will free us from the incubus of a weak and corrupt administration."⁴⁰

Despite these early difficulties, however, between the 1870s and the turn of the century there was no longer any doubt that confederation would hold. British Columbia had entered the Dominion in 1871, followed by Prince Edward Island in 1873, the Yukon Territory in 1898, and then Alberta and Saskatchewan joined in 1905. Needless to say, by now the outlook had indeed become hopeful that Canada was on its way toward fulfilling the promises suggested by Cartier on his return from England in 1867 (see page 7). Therefore, it would seem unlikely that

the initial concern over the viability of confederation would continue to cause the lack of appreciation of Dominion Day which was so evident during the anniversary celebrations reviewed above.

With regard to the second explanation, there was considerable fear, also during the early years following Confederation, over the likelihood of Fenian raids on London and the surrounding area. The reason for the fear stemmed from one of the stipulations in the British North American Bill that preceded the Queen's Proclamation. It was agreed to by the Canadian Parliamentarians that there would be a gradual withdrawal of British troops from Canada, including of course, the Garrison from London. Prior to the withdrawal and "*At the height of the Fenian raids in 1866, some 900 British regular soldiers of the 16th Regiment, the 60th Rifles, and a battery of Royal Artillery were stationed at London.*"⁴¹ Needless to say, the implication of the withdrawal meant that London would now be forced to rely largely upon a volunteer Home Guard militia in the event of an attack. The question was whether the militia could be depended upon to defend London if it were attacked. Although Southwestern Ontario was never attacked, reports often appeared in the local press that certainly suggested this possibility. For instance, the following material appeared in the *Free Press* in 1867 and in 1868, respectively.

*...a few days ago, an officer, high in command here (Toronto), was informed by General Barry of the United States forces, that it was his opinion the Fenians intended another raid shortly; and urged the Canadians to crush them at once if they should come over because if they were allowed to remain here he would be unable to keep thousands from following.*⁴²

*The Toronto papers refer to precautions that are being taken in the expectation of the possibility of a Fenian raid, (which were) suggested among other matters, by recent movements among Fenian "Circles" in the States. And it would seem that the precautions (taken) were not local merely, but general. Stores are being overhauled, arms put in order, the roll-calls criticized, and such other steps taken as lead to the supposition that still further measures will be adopted in order to be prepared for any emergency.*⁴³

This concern over the Fenians, however, would have been felt only within a few years after Confederation since the Fenian raids were largely over by 1871. Thus although there may have been some initial misgivings due to the departure of the London Garrison, these misgivings would have been short lived and therefore unlikely to have diminished a desire to celebrate the Dominion Days that took place in the later years following Confederation.

Finally, there is a third explanation which could very well apply from 1867 through 1907 and therefore might be the most promising, namely, that the reluctance to celebrate Dominion Day as a holiday on par with the Queen's Birthday may have suggested to many Londoners that Canada could eventually become a country with an identity separate from England and thereby risk the possibility of severing all ties with the Motherland. To understand the nature of this reluctance it is helpful to consider the demographics of Middlesex County in the late 1800s. According to the 1880-1881 census, the number of immigrants from England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales that settled here was

approximately 150,000. The next highest number was only around 8,000 from Germany.⁴⁴ Moreover, those who emigrated from the British Isles to Middlesex did so largely to seek a more financially secure future, rather than to escape persecution, which was the case for those who immigrated to the United States. Thus the ones who settled in this region probably continued to retain a strong sense of commitment to, along with an affection for, the governing features of the land of their birth. Indeed, the impact of the possible loss of this commitment to England was even expressed quite forcefully in the following Dominion Day editorial that appeared in the *London Free Press* on July 1, 1897.

In one of his recent speeches in England, Sir Wilfred Laurier declared that Canada was in reality "a nation," so little did he consider the slender thread which connects us with the Empire. And yet we all know that, however slight that tie may appear, in reality it is of vast value to us. We enjoy the moral protection of Britain, and are left free to work out our own schemes of self-government without let or hindrance, so long as we keep within the limits of the constitution under which we live. Sever that thread, and we have at once to face the responsibilities of an independent power, then our real troubles commence. Pressure from the nation to the south of us would at once be applied to whip us into the American Union; the provinces would be torn with faction; and very soon it would become an impossibility to govern ourselves with impartially and maintain our independence as "a nation." The more the question is examined, the clearer does it appear, that

*our true policy is to stick closely to the vast Empire of which we are proud to form a part.*⁴⁵

The fear expressed in this editorial over the possibility that if independence from England had been achieved, Canada might very well have been absorbed into the "nation to the south of us," was certainly not without merit. In the late 1800s several books appeared advocating the establishment of a bond between the British North American Colonies and the United States, referred to as annexation, which meant forming a relationship between the two countries that would be similar to that which existed between Scotland, Ireland and England. In 1894 James Douglas published a book entitled "Canadian Independence: Annexation & British imperial Federation." Two other extremely important books on the same topic were published around the same time by Goodwin Smith⁴⁶ and Samuel E. Moffett.⁴⁷ The message in each of these texts was the same: Canada would be far better off if it became aligned with the governing structure of the United States than if it remained part of Great Britain.

In 1865 the *St. Catharines Post* and the *Galt Reporter* were both in favor of such an approach⁴⁸ and the thought of annexation was probably also on the minds of many Londoners as seen, for example, in an 1869 ad in the *Advertiser* ("Canada won't be annexed but that don't make any difference to the business at W.D. McGlochlons's jewellery store at seventy-seven Dundas Street"⁴⁹) as well as in comments that appeared in both the *Advertiser* and the *Free Press*. Quoting from the *Toronto Telegraph*, the *Free Press* in 1869 inserted the following words in one of its columns.

...when Parliament next assembles, we venture to predict that a clear majority in both Houses will decide

*that the first of July shall be added to the list of statutory holidays; not for the purpose of celebrating a party triumph, but to mark the epoch in our career when British America took the first step on the road to Independence, and when the hated term “annexation” was forever blotted out of the lexicon of political thinkers.*⁵⁰

The *Advertiser* followed suit with these tongue-in-cheek words: “We hereby issue our editorial proclamation, and invite everybody to observe Dominion Day. We would not exclude even those who mean annexation, when they preach “Independence.”...we trust that each succeeding First of July may find the people of Canada more and more prosperous and thankful, and more and more attached to our country and (its) institutions.”⁵¹

In essence, the activities designed to promote the Queen’s Birthday over Dominion Day from 1867 through 1870 as well as during the anniversary dates in 1887, 1897, and 1907, might very well have been inspired to ensure that thoughts of “independence” needed to be subjugated and that what needed to be emphasized instead was Canada’s devotion to the Monarchy. By default this always meant that the celebration of Dominion Day would necessarily remain a secondary event in relation to all of the celebrations that favored the Monarchy and thus, in the minds of many, Canada would continue to be a devoted part of the British Commonwealth. The words from the first and last stanzas in the following rendition of “The Maple Leaf Forever,” which appeared in the *Advertiser* on July 1, 1907⁵² under the heading “Canada’s National Anthem,” clearly convey this message by emphasizing the profound appreciation that Canada would forever owe to the Crown.

*In days of yore, the hero Wolfe,
Britain’s glory did maintain,
And planted firm Britannia’s flag,
On Canada’s fair domain.
Here may it wave, our boast, our pride,
And joined in love together,
With Lily, Thistle, Shamrock, Rose,
The Maple Leaf forever!*

*Our Merry England’s far-famed land,
May kind Heaven sweetly smile;
God bless Old Scotland evermore,
And Ireland’s Emerald Isle!
Then swell the song, both loud and long,
Till rocks and forest quiver,
God Save our King, and Heaven bless
The Maple Leaf forever!*

End Notes

- ¹ *London Free Press*, June 6, 1867, 2:3.
- ² D. Brock, *Fragments from the Forks*. London, ON: The London and Middlesex Historical Society (p. 400).
- ³ *London Free Press*, May 24, 1867, 2:3.
- ⁴ *London Daily Advertiser*, June 27, 1867, 2:1.
- ⁵ *London Free Press*, May 30, 1867, 2:1.
- ⁶ D. Creighton, *The Road to Confederation*, 1964, Toronto, ON: Macmillan of Canada, p. 430.
- ⁷ D. Creighton, *The Road to Confederation*, 1964, Toronto, ON: Macmillan of Canada, p. 431, 434.
- ⁸ *London Free Press*, May 16, 1867, 2:2.
- ⁹ D. Creighton, *The Road to Confederation*, 1964, Toronto, ON: Macmillan of Canada, p. 431.
- ¹⁰ D. Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician*, 1952, Toronto, ON: The Macmillan Company of Canada, Limited, p. 466.
- ¹¹ G. Martin, *Britain and the Origins of Canadian Confederation, 1837-67*, London, ENG: MacMillan Press Ltd.
- ¹² *London Free Press*, July 4, 1866, 2:6
- ¹³ *London Free Press*, June 29, 1867, 2:7.
- ¹⁴ *London Free Press*, June 29, 1867, 3:3.
- ¹⁵ London City Council Records, Roll No. 5, Western University Archives.
- ¹⁶ *London Advertiser*, June 27, 1867, 2:1.
- ¹⁷ To understand the reasoning behind Council's decision it is important to consider how a request for \$400 or even \$200 in 1867 year compared with the city's normal expenses. On August 12, 1867 the City Council Minutes reported the following salaries: Chief of Police \$600, City Hall Janitor \$375, Police Sergeant \$349, Individual policemen \$325, City Solicitor \$300. Therefore, despite the importance of the Dominion Day, Council could very well have been reluctant to set aside these sums solely for the purpose of a civic holiday celebration. In short, because the members of Council are elected officials and therefore are responsible to the ratepayers, it is possible that in 1867 when the issue of using public funds in support of a civic holiday arose, Council may not have wished to increase the city's debt.
- ¹⁸ Shinty is a very old, fast moving aerial team game, unique to Scotland and similar to hockey and lacrosse. Each player has a curved stick with a triangular section used to carry a ball and is played with two teams of 12 persons each.
- ¹⁹ *London Free Press*, May 24, 1867, 3:2.
- ²⁰ *London Free Press*, July 1, 1867, 3:2.
- ²¹ *London Free Press*, July 3, 1867, 3:4.
- ²² London City Council Records, Roll No. 5; Western University Archives.
- ²³ *London Daily Advertiser*, June 30, 1869, 2:1.
- ²⁴ *London Daily Advertiser*, July 2, 1869, 2:4.
- ²⁵ *London Daily Advertiser*, May 25, 1869, 2:4.
- ²⁶ *London Daily Advertiser*, June 30, 1870, 2:6.
- ²⁷ *London Free Press*, July 1, 1870, 3:4.
- ²⁸ *London Daily Advertiser*, June 20, 1887, 1:1-2.
- ²⁹ *London Daily Advertiser*, June 18, 1887, 1:1.

- ³⁰*London Daily Advertiser*, June 22, 1887, 1:1.
- ³¹*London Daily Advertiser*, June 21, 1887, 1:1-2.
- ³²*London Daily Advertiser*, June 18, 1887, 1:1.
- ³³*London Daily Advertiser*, June 3, 1887, 6:1.
- ³⁴*London Daily Advertiser*, June 30, 1887, 8:1.
- ³⁵*London Daily Advertiser*, June 30, 1897, 6:5.
- ³⁶*London Free Press*, May 24, 1907, 12:2.
- ³⁷*London Daily Advertiser*, July 1, 1907, 1:3.
- ³⁸*London Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1907, 1:7.
- ³⁹*British Parliamentary Papers*, 1867-1874, Vol. 27, p. 30.
- ⁴⁰*London Daily Advertiser*, June 30, 1870, 2:3.
- ⁴¹Mombourquette, John. The Fenians are coming! London and the invasion scares of 1865-1866. The London and Middlesex Historian, 1993, Vol. 20, p. 45-65.
- ⁴²*London Free Press*, May 30, 1867, 2:1.
- ⁴³*London Free Press*, May 20, 1868, 2:2.
- ⁴⁴History of the Country of Middlesex, Canada, 1889, reprint (Belleville, On, Mika Studio, 1972), p. 210.
- ⁴⁵*London Free Press*, July 1, 1897, 4:1.
- ⁴⁶Berger, Carl, An Introduction. In Bliss, Michael (Ed). The Social History of Canada, Toronto, ON: The University of Toronto Press, 1971.
- ⁴⁷Bliss, Michael (Ed). The Social History of Canada, Toronto, ON: The University of Toronto Press, 1972.
- ⁴⁸Waite P.B. The Life and Times of Confederation 1864-1867, Toronto, ON: Robin Bass Studio, 2001.
- ⁴⁹*London Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1869, 1:4
- ⁵⁰*London Free Press*, June 30, 1869, 2:4.
- ⁵¹*London Daily Advertiser*, June 30, 1869, 2:1
- ⁵²*The London Daily Advertiser*, July 1, 1907, 1:1 (Note: the version of The Maple Leaf Forever in this issue of the Advertiser was composed in 1867 by Alexander Muir. The most recent version, no longer considered a national anthem, but instead a patriotic song, contains the following first and last stanzas as sung during the closing ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympics held in Vancouver.

O, land of blue unending skies,
Mountains strong and sparkling snow,
A scent of freedom in the wind,
O'er the emerald fields below.

Remind us all, our union bound
By ties we cannot sever,
Bright flag revered on every ground,
The Maple Leaf forever!



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.