1 Canada in 1867

Confederation

Just after midnight on July 1, 1867, a great roar of cannons was heard in Ottawa. The shots were not fired in anger. They marked the birth of a new nation: Canada. As day broke, church bells rang. People flocked into the streets. It was the first Dominion Day.

Everywhere, the summer weather was perfect for celebrating. Bands played. Town mayors gave speeches. People rejoiced under a cloudless sky. Many new Canadians met in churches to pray for their young country.

The process of uniting Canada was called *Confederation*. Only three colonies had joined: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Province of Canada (which was immediately divided into two provinces, Ontario and Quebec). No one could be sure the country would stay together. It was good that the young nation's first prime minister was one of its greatest: Sir John A. Macdonald. He spent the rest of his life working to make Confederation succeed.

AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT

- what Canada was like at the time of Confederation
- how the British North America Act set up the new country's government
- the differences between Canadians in 1867 and today
- what plan the country's leaders had for the country's future

Confederation almost never happened. In 1866, the people of British North America lived in the colonies of Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Province of Canada. Far to the west was British Columbia.

The colonies had no great desire to unite. In Nova Scotia, a politician named Joseph Howe even said, "A more unpromising **nucleus** of a new nation could hardly be found on the face of the earth." In the Maritimes, many people agreed with Howe. They feared losing their independence to the much larger Province of Canada. They wanted a union of the Maritime colonies, leaving the Province of Canada out of it.

Why, then, did Confederation happen at all?

One reason was that the British government wanted the colonies to take greater responsibility for themselves. The way Britain and its colonies acted was much like parents with their children. British North America's move from **colony** to nation was part of "growing up."

A second reason was the American Civil War. This terrible war, which began in 1861, was fought between the northern and southern states. The British did not join the war. They did, however, help the Southerners by selling them things such as ships. When the North won the war in 1865, some Americans wanted to attack British North America in revenge. By joining together, the British colonies could better defend themselves.

A third reason was to build a strong **economy**. Supporters of Confederation saw a great nation joined together by the steel

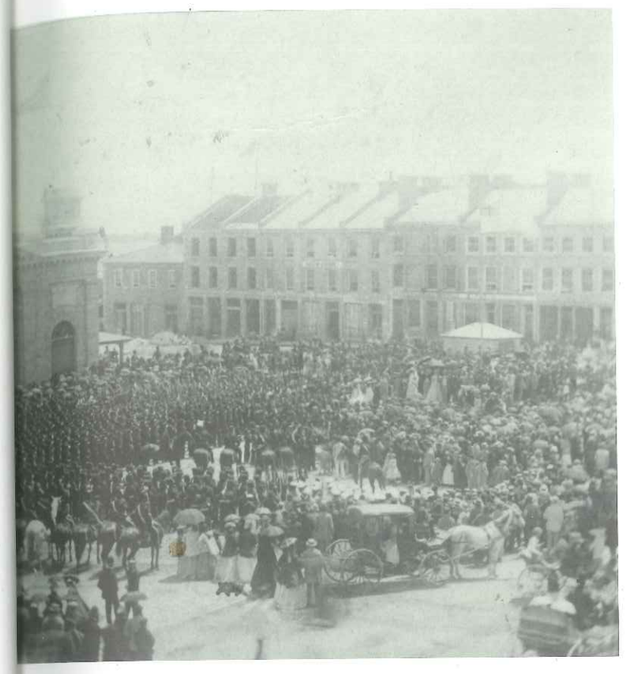

Figure 1.1 The Proclamation of Confederation was announced, at noon July 1, 1867, in the Market Square of Kingston, Ontario. Celebrations continued with sporting events and a night of fireworks.

of railways. Trade would flow across the country, bringing greater riches. They even saw the country growing westward, all the way to British Columbia.

Still, Confederation had not been easy. It had taken many months of planning to bring Canada together. Even then, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland stayed out. British Columbians waited until work began on the railroad. Aboriginal peoples had not been a part of the meetings that led to Confederation. They worried about what Confederation might mean for them.

DID YOU KNOW? Canada became the first of Britain's dominions in 1867. Other British colonies, including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Newfoundland, also became dominions in time.

Sir John A. Macdonald (1815–1891) PM

Canada's first prime minister was not born in Canada. John A. Macdonald came from Glasgow, Scotland. He moved to Kingston, Upper Canada, with his family in 1820. He was an amazing young man. He had his own law practice by the time he was 19. In 1844, when he just 29, Macdonald was **elected** to the Parliament of Canada. He later became leader of a new political party, the Liberal-Conservatives. Then, in 1856, he became co-premier of the Province of Canada. Macdonald led the push for Confederation. He also wrote the first draft of the British North America Act (see p. 18). In 1867, after Confederation, Macdonald became the first prime minister of Canada.

Although he was a success as prime minister, Macdonald's life was marked with sadness. His first son, John, died as a baby. His first wife, Isabella, died after a long illness. A daughter from his second marriage, Mary, was mentally and physically challenged. Apart from five years (1873–1878) when he was leader of the Opposition, Macdonald was Canada's prime minister until his death in 1891.

Figure 1.2 Sir John A. Macdonald

Canada in 1867

John A. Macdonald became prime minister of one of the largest countries in the world. However, it had a very small population. With an area of one million square kilometres in 1867, Canada was already bigger than the United Kingdom and France combined. Canada's population, however, was just 3.5 million people. The United Kingdom had 30 million people. France and the United States each had 40 million people.

Not only that, the number of people moving to Canada had slowed to a trickle. Thousands of Canadians moved to the United States every month. One thing that made Canada different was the **diversity** of its people. People of British, French, Irish, German, and African background lived together in this new nation with the original Aboriginal peoples.

Figure 1.3 *CANADA IN 1867*

Going to school in the 1860s

At the beginning of the 19th century, only the children of rich families went to school. On family farms, children spent their days working with their parents. In cities, children as young as 10 sometimes worked in mills.

By the 1870s, however, most children aged 5 to 16 had some schooling. Children went to small schools. There, children from all grades learned together in a single room. Students learned to read (often from the Bible), write, and do arithmetic. They were taught Canada's history. Usually, one teacher would teach them. Most students learned by rote – memorizing, memorizing, and more memorizing. Teachers were very strict. They were allowed to hit students who misbehaved.

Children from farm families were often excused from school for the harvest. In many cases, girls went to school for fewer years than boys. This was because many girls in their teens had to stay home to help raise their younger brothers and sisters.

Figure 1.4 A teacher at the doorway of a one-room schoolhouse rings a bell as children arrive at school. George B. Johnston, who was the teacher at Parent Creek School, made this drawing in 1865.

Only a tiny number of students went to university. Usually, only boys were allowed to go. University education was very hard. Students had to speak *five* languages – English, French, German, Latin, and Greek – by the time they finished school.

Everyday life after Confederation

Today, it is hard for us to imagine what life was like in 1867. We live in a world of computer games, televisions, cell phones, and airplanes. In 1867, however, homes did not have electricity. There were only one or two cars in all of Canada. Most Canadians lived on farms or in very small towns. They made their living by producing **staple** products: wheat, fish, and timber.

Population by province, 1871

Nova Scotia	New Brunswick	Quebec	Ontario
387 800	285 594	1 191 516	1 620 851

By today's standards, even the biggest cities in 1867, Toronto and Montreal, would seem like small towns. They had dirt roads. Their tallest buildings rose only a few storeys. People travelled from place to place by horse on muddy wagon trails. Of course, horses left manure everywhere they went – even on city streets.

Science and medicine were far less advanced than today. For instance, doctors had only just discovered that most diseases are caused by germs. Children were especially at risk from diseases. In Montreal, nearly two out of every five infants died of sickness before the age of one.

However, there were signs that things were changing. **Industrialization** was beginning. Cities were growing. **Telegraph** lines and railroads crisscrossed the nation. Canals had been built in the decades before Confederation. They allowed ships to bypass both the St. Lawrence rapids and Niagara Falls. Ships could then sail all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Upper Great Lakes.

Railways were very important. They allowed people to travel quickly from city to city and to faraway areas. They were seen as the only way to open the West for Canadian settlement.

Aboriginal peoples in 1867

In 1608, Samuel de Champlain first set foot in the land that would become Canada. At that time, there were at least 150 000 Aboriginal people living near the Great Lakes and in the St. Lawrence valley. By 1867, their population was less than 30 000 people. This was due to more than two hundred years of war, hunger, and disease that had been brought to North America by Europeans. By 1867, European Canadians outnumbered Aboriginal people by more than 100 to one.

Figure 1.5 Mary Christianne Morris, a noted Mi'kmaq artist, and her son, Joe, in 1865

For years, both the British and French saw the First Nations as important military allies and partners in the fur trade. First Nations had helped the British save Upper Canada from American invaders in the War of 1812. With the end of the war and the fur trade slowing down, the British turned their backs on their First Nations friends. "My heart now fails me. I can hardly speak. We are now slaves and treated worse than dogs," an Anishinabe (Ojibwa) chief said after the War of 1812.

By the time of Confederation, the biggest First Nations were the Mi'kmaq in the Maritimes, the Haudenosaunee [*how-di-ni-SHAW-nee*] (Iroquois) in Ontario and Quebec, and the Anishinabe (Ojibwa) in Ontario.

DID YOU KNOW? John A. Macdonald's second son, Hugh John Macdonald, represented the riding of Winnipeg City in Canada's Parliament in 1896. He later led the Conservative Party of Manitoba. In 1900, for a short time, he was Manitoba's premier before returning to federal politics.

Citizenship in 1867

In 1867, Canadians were not really thought of as citizens. Instead, they were British subjects. As subjects, Canadians had few rights. When Canada's first federal election was held in November 1867, only 20 percent of its population was allowed to vote. There were a number of reasons for this.

Women were not allowed to vote. Neither were Aboriginal or Asian people. Most men could not vote, either. A man had to own land to have voting rights. This meant that political power was in the hands of a small group of rich men of European background.

Today, voters cast *secret ballots*. This means that no one can see who a person votes for. In the 1860s, however, voters cast their ballots in the open for all to see. This made it easier for people to threaten voters. Gangs of thugs were hired to bully people into voting for certain **candidates**. Fights were common on election day.

Slowly, things changed. Governments made laws to stamp out **corruption** in elections. The secret ballot was adopted. By the turn of the century, most men of European background were allowed to vote, even if they did not own property. But women of European background could not vote until 1917. It would be decades before other groups could vote (see page 185).

Race and racism

Race is a word that is sometimes used to describe a certain group of people. The people in the group may have similar skin colour or facial features. Sometimes, race refers to a person's **ancestry**.

Throughout history, people believed that different races had different personalities. They used this idea to say that one race was better than another. This is called *racism*.

In many countries, racism was used to help write laws. Sometimes people were prevented from voting, having jobs, and even going to school.

Scientists today know that physical appearance has nothing to do with what kind of person someone is. They have also learned that there is only one race – the human race – and we are all part of it.

Women's Lives in the 1860s

"Woman's first and only place is in her home," a Canadian writer said in 1874. Her duty, he wrote, is to make the home a "joyful" place in a "busy, heartless world."

In the late 19th century, most Canadians – including women – agreed. They believed that a woman's job was raising children and doing the household work. They did not believe women should take part in politics or work outside the home. They thought that would only take women away from the important job of looking after their families.

This is why women were not allowed to vote or go to university. It also explains why married women did not plan to get jobs. Most women got married in their mid-20s and then had large families. Usually only young women worked for wages outside of the home. In rare cases where a married woman did work, she had to give her wages to her husband. Women who wanted equal rights were seen as strange and even dangerous.

Some brave women, however, proved that a "woman's place" was anywhere she wanted to be. Such women included the missionary Elizabeth McDougall. In the early years after Confederation, she made a dangerous trip across the Prairies with her husband and six children. The family went by wagon, dogsled, and canoe. They made it to Alberta in 1873.

Another such woman was Eliza Ritchie, of Halifax. In 1889, she became one of the first Canadian women to earn the highest university degree, a PhD. She later became a professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax. She was also a **suffragist** [*SUFF-reh-jist*], fighting for women's right to vote.

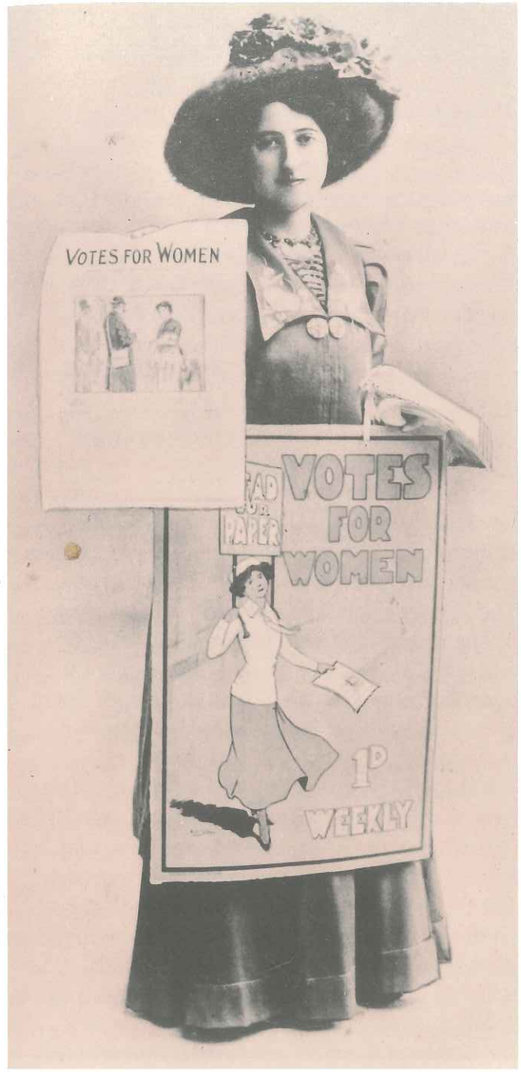

Figure 1.6 Woman campaigning for women's rights around 1900

Another important woman was Henrietta Louise Edwards. Born in Montreal, Edwards started one of the country's first women's magazines: *Working Women of Canada*. She also founded the Working Girls' Association. This group helped give young women the training they needed to enter the work force.

Emily Stowe (1831–1903)

Figure 1.7 Emily Stowe

Emily Stowe was a woman of firsts. She was the first woman to become a school principal in Upper Canada. She was the first woman to practise medicine in Canada. She also helped to set up Canada's first medical school for women.

Emily Stowe decided to study medicine after her husband, John, fell ill in the 1860s. However, no medical school in Canada would let her be a student. It was not considered right for women to learn anatomy, which is the study of the human body. After all, this would mean looking at naked men!

When she was not allowed to study at the University of Toronto, Stowe said that she hoped the school would one day open its doors to women. "Never in my day, madam!" the president of the college replied.

Instead, Stowe went to the United States. There she became a student at the New York Medical College for Women. She graduated the year of Confederation. She began to practise medicine in Toronto, even though Canadian authorities did not grant her a medical licence until 1880. Perhaps inspired by his wife, John Stowe became a dentist after he got better. He set up practice in the same office as Emily. In 1883, Emily's daughter, Augusta Stowe, became the first woman in Canada to graduate with a medical degree. Augusta graduated from the University of Toronto – the same school that had turned her mother away in the 1860s.

Emily Stowe died in 1903. She had spent her life working tirelessly for the rights of women.

Government in Early Canada

In 1865, the American Civil War ended after four years of fighting. Nearly 600 000 Americans had been killed. In part, the Civil War was fought because Americans could not agree about what kind of government they should have. When Canada became a nation just two years later, John A. Macdonald hoped to avoid such conflicts. He wanted Canada to have a strong central government like the one in Great Britain.

The British North America Act

The British Parliament passed the British North America Act in 1867. It made Canada a self-governing country. It gave Canadians their first **constitution**. Today, the BNA Act is known as the Constitution Act of 1867.

The BNA Act gave different powers to federal and provincial governments. When power is divided among different levels of government, it is called **federalism**.

Figure 1.8 The first Parliament of Canada met on November 6, 1867, at the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa.

Macdonald tried to make sure that Canada's federal government was the most powerful one in the new country. For instance, the BNA Act gave the federal government power over things like national defence, trade, and taxation. Provincial governments looked after more local matters, such as education and medical care (see chart, opposite).

The Fathers of Confederation were careful about giving each level of government different powers. They hoped this would prevent problems between them. Of course, this has never worked perfectly. Provincial governments began arguing with the federal government in Ottawa almost as soon as Confederation celebrations ended.

The BNA Act set up Canada's government to be like Britain's. Canada became a *constitutional monarchy*. This means that the British monarch (the king or queen) is officially the head of state. The king or queen can only hold the power he or she is granted in the country's constitution and laws. The king or queen's role is mostly **ceremonial** and is carried out by the governor general. The job of running the country is in the hands of the Parliament.

The BNA Act also established many of the rules for Canada's government. It said that the federal Parliament would be made up of two *houses*: the House of Commons and the Senate. The House of Commons would be elected by voters. Senators would be appointed by the governor general. For new laws to be made, both houses had to vote for them. You will read more about Canada's government in chapter 15.

Not all of the rules of Canada's government are written down. Many of them are created by

DID YOU KNOW? *Great Britain* is the name of the island made up of England, Wales, and Scotland. These nations have been united since 1707. In 1801, Ireland was brought into what would then be known as the *United Kingdom*. Today, the United Kingdom is made up of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Balancing powers: The British North America Act

The British North America Act of 1867 set out a plan for a strong central government. That is what Canada's founders had wanted. The Act stated that the federal government had the power to create laws for "peace, order, and good government." It also had *residual powers*. This meant it was responsible for things that had not been decided on yet or that might arise in the future. For example, when the BNA Act was made, there were no such things as airplanes. Once airplanes became common and had to be looked after, the federal government took control over them.

As noted at left, the British North America Act also set out the powers of provincial and federal governments. In general, the federal government controlled national matters. The provincial governments controlled more local concerns. Here is how some of the powers were divided:

Federal Government		**Provincial Government**	
Banking	Marriage & Divorce	Civil Law	Provincial Police
Census	Naturalization	Courts	Public Works
Copyright	Navigation & Shipping	Education	Roads & Highways
Criminal Law	Patents	Electricity	Trade between Provinces
Currency	Penitentiaries	Hospitals	
National Defence	Postal Service	Licences	**Shared Powers**
Fisheries	Taxation	Natural Resources & Forestry	Agriculture
First Nations	Foreign Trade	Property Rights	Immigration
	Weights & Measures		Old Age Pensions

precedent. That means that they are based on what has happened in the past. For instance, the BNA Act does not say that Canada must have a prime minister. Prime ministers hold office because of precedent. For many years before the BNA Act, Britain had a prime minister, who was usually the leader of the largest political party in Parliament. So Canada has a prime minister, too.

Also, the BNA Act did not make Canada fully independent of Great Britain. Canada became a British *dominion*. Canada's federal and provincial governments would take care of day-to-day matters in the new dominion. Britain, however, would continue to handle Canada's *foreign affairs*. This meant that the Canadian government was not able to make its own **treaties** with other countries. In addition, changing or *amending* the Canadian constitution required Britain's permission.

Queen Victoria | Lord Monck | Sir John A. Macdonald

Figure 1.9 In Canada, the British king or queen is the head of state. The governor general is appointed by the king or queen and is his or her representative in Canada. The king or queen and the governor general represent the state publicly but they have little power. The prime minister is the head of government. In 1867, Queen Victoria was the queen, Lord Monck was the governor general, and John A. Macdonald was prime minister.

Canadian political parties after 1867

The British North America Act does not even talk about political parties. Like prime ministers, political parties came about over time. They developed to help governments work in Parliaments where people had different views about important issues. They are an important part of Canada's political system.

The party system in Canada is like the one in Britain. In Canada, however, the system exists at both federal and provincial levels. (There are no provinces in the United Kingdom.)

Nation, country, state

A *nation* is a group of people who share common experiences, such as language, customs, and traditions.

A *country* is the geographical area in which they live.

A *state* is a group of people who are governed under a single government.

John A. Macdonald was head of the Conservative Party. The Conservatives supported ideas such as a strong central government, high **tariffs** (taxes on imported goods), and close ties with Britain.

The other political party was the Liberals. It stood for **free trade** (trade without tariffs) and for greater rights for the provinces. It also stood for a more independent role for Canada in the British Empire.

New political parties came into being in Canada in the 20th century. The Conservatives and the Liberals, however, remain Canada's most important political parties.

Building a Free Press

On New Year's Day, 1835, the *Novascotian*, a Halifax newspaper, printed an unsigned letter to the editor. The writer said **magistrates** [*MAJ-i-strates*] who were running the local government were stealing money from the citizens of Halifax.

Two months later, on March 2, *Novascotian* editor Joseph Howe was in court. He was being tried on a charge of **libel** for publishing the letter. The judge was Brenton Halliburton. (He himself had been criticized several times by the newspaper.) He told the jury to find Howe guilty. Howe spoke for more than six hours. He begged the jury "to judge me by the principles of English law, and to leave an unshackled press as a legacy to your children." He was asking the jury to support his right to tell the truth. The jury took just 10 minutes to find Howe not guilty.

In the mid-18th century, Canada's newspapers needed government money to publish. They mainly reported government statements. By the start of the 19th century, however, newspapers started selling advertising to make money. Since they no longer needed government money, editors could write about whatever they wanted. They could do so as long as the reporting was based on facts and truth.

A free press could criticize government and its leaders. It let citizens know if their governments acted in their best interests. In British North America, newspapers became a **forum** for different political opinions. They often spoke out for democratic causes, such as **Responsible Government**. Freedom of the press let people talk about important issues. It was seen as an important part of a free country.

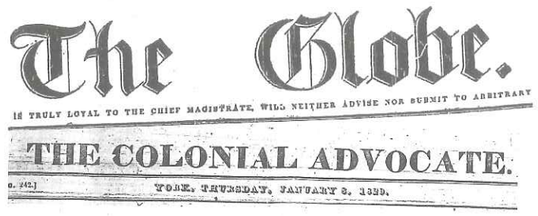
The Globe.
IS TRULY LOYAL TO THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE, WILL NEITHER ADVISE NOR SUBMIT TO ARBITRARY
THE COLONIAL ADVOCATE.
YORK, THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 1835.

Figure 1.10 Early Canadian newspapers

Most newspapers gave the opinions of their editors and the political parties they supported. Reformer William Lyon Mackenzie, for example, used the *Colonial Advocate* to criticize the **Family Compact** that ruled Upper Canada. In Quebec, Étienne Parent defended the rights of French Canadians in *Le Canadien*, then *La Gazette*. George Brown of the Toronto *Globe* was in favour of Confederation and **Representation by Population**.

At the time of Confederation, the country had 291 newspapers. All of them worked with a political party or movement.

Newspapers beyond the borders of the new country had their own ideas about Canada. The *Nor'Wester* newspaper was published between 1859 and 1869 in the Red River settlement. It promoted the idea of joining Canada.

News, especially international news, was sent by ship in the early 19th century. It could take a month or more to cross the Atlantic Ocean. When the telegraph became widely used, news could be sent within hours. Newspapers began to print more world and national news in their pages.

Looking Ahead: National Policy

In the 1878 federal election, John A. Macdonald and his Conservative Party promised Canadians a bright future. Macdonald called his plan for prosperity the *National Policy*. It involved three things:

1. **Protective tariffs.** A protective tariff would make imported goods more expensive. This would make people want to buy Canadian-made goods, which were not taxed. The tariff would only be used on finished goods such as clothing, furniture, and tools. Most raw materials were not taxed. This was to help manufacturers buy raw materials from other countries. Then the manufacturers would make them into finished goods to sell in Canada.

   For example, Canadian manufacturers could buy cotton from the United States. In Canadian factories, the cotton would be spun into cloth and made into clothes by Canadian workers.

   All this manufacturing and selling was supposed to create a strong economy. As industries grew and people became richer, Macdonald hoped that it would help farmers, too. After all, happy and well-off factory workers would have enough money to buy a lot more food.

2. **Transcontinental railway.** Like many politicians of his day, Macdonald believed the key to Canada's future was seeing the West grow. The building of the Canadian Pacific Railway across Canada would let materials get to eastern industries. It would also help fulfill the final part of Macdonald's plan: more people living in the West.

3. **Immigration.** A working railway would bring settlers to the Prairies and farther west. The country would become settled from coast to coast. Immigrants would be the customers of Canadian companies.

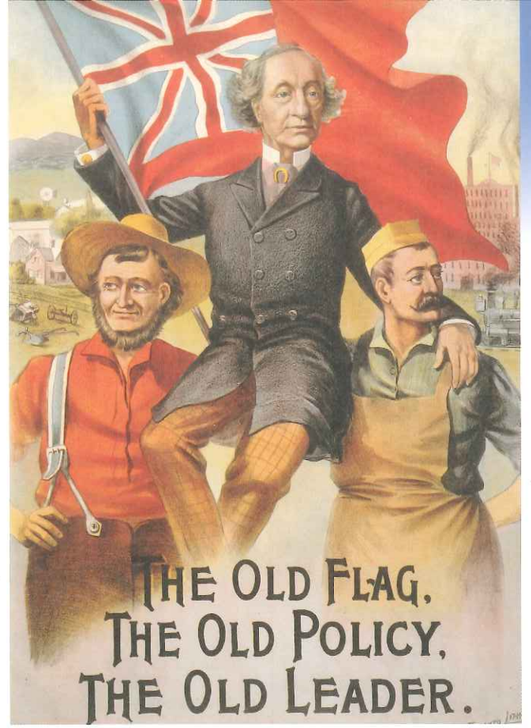

Figure 1.11 Poster for John A. Macdonald's last election campaign. He won the election on March 5, 1891, but died three months later.

Conclusion

In 1867, John A. Macdonald and the Fathers of Confederation realized their vision for a new country. In the years that followed, the Conservative Party used Macdonald's National Policy to make sure that Canada would keep growing into the next century. In the next chapters, you will learn that the process of growing a new country was not always easy.