

Just Before Confederation

A Time of Change

In the summer of 1820 at Québec City, a five-year-old boy ran down the gangplank of a sailing ship and stepped onto North American soil. The ship had been on the Atlantic Ocean for 42 days. It was carrying new immigrants to Canada. Among them was a poor family from Scotland hoping to find a better life for themselves in the New World. The young boy was John Alexander Macdonald.

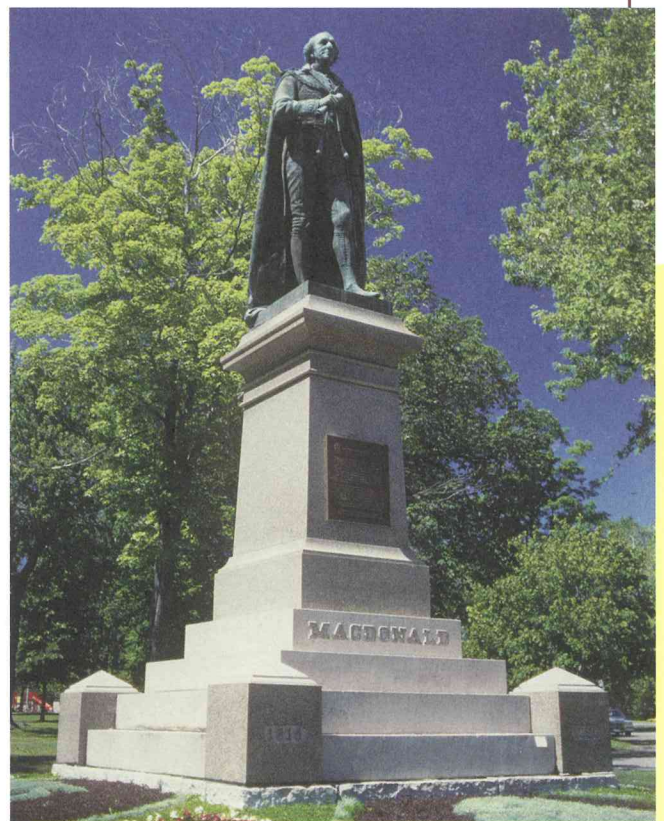
John A. Macdonald was only one of many immigrants who came to British North America in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Many immigrants were from Great Britain. Others were Loyalists from the United States who came after the American Revolution. They were of English, Irish, Scottish, German, Dutch, French, and African origin. British North America was also populated with Aboriginal peoples who had lived on the land for thousands of years.

The mid 1800s were a time of great change in British North America. **Confederation** (the union of the colonies under a central government) was on the horizon. Many individuals stepped forward to play an important role during this period. John A. Macdonald was one of them. Who could have known that this curly-haired boy from Glasgow would one day lead Britain's North American colonies into a union called the Dominion of Canada?

In 1861, Macdonald gave an important speech. He was talking about the united province of Canada, but his words also spoke to the dream of a much larger new nation.

We are a great country, and shall become one of the greatest in the universe if we preserve it;

We shall sink into insignificance and adversity if we suffer it to be broken.



Predicting

1. What advantages do you think the British North American colonies would gain by uniting into one country?
2. What problems do you think they might face as they try to unite?
3. What qualities do you think leaders like John A. Macdonald would have to have during this period before Confederation?