

Historica Canada Education Portal

The Confederation Debates: Manitoba Intermediate Mini-Unit

This [mini-unit](#) for intermediate/senior-level classes helps students to understand and analyze the key ideas and challenges that preceded the creation of Manitoba. The first section deals with the debates in the provincial and/or federal legislatures, while the second section addresses more specifically founding treaty negotiations with the First Nations. Each section can be taught independently.

The activities and attached materials will help students understand the diversity of ideas, commitments, successes and grievances that underlie Canada's founding.

By the end of this mini-unit, your students will have the opportunity to:

1. Use the historical inquiry process—gathering, interpreting and analyzing historical evidence and information from a variety of primary and secondary sources—in order to investigate and make judgements about issues, developments and events of historical importance.
2. Hone their historical thinking skills to identify historical significance, cause and consequence, continuity and change, and historical perspective.
3. Develop knowledge of their province/region within Canada, minority rights and democracy, and appreciate the need for reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.



Primary Source: Louis Riel's Views on Confederation

When the Red River Resistance debated joining Confederation, Louis Riel said the following points:

SUMMARY STATEMENT

"We must not expect to exhaust the subject. If we have the happiness soon to meet the new Lieutenant-Governor, we will have time and opportunity enough to express our feelings. For the present let me say only one thing—I congratulate the people of the North-West on the happy issue of their undertakings (cheers). I congratulate them on their moderation and firmness of purpose; and I congratulate them on having trust enough in the Crown of England to believe that ultimately they would obtain their rights (cheers). I must, too, congratulate the country on passing from under this Provisional rule to one of a more permanent and satisfactory character. From all that can be learned, also, there is great room for congratulation in the selection of Lieutenant-Governor which has been made. For myself, it will be my duty and pleasure, more than any other, to bid the new Governor welcome on his arrival (loud cheers). I would like to be the first to pay him the respect due to his position as Representative of the Crown (cheers). Something yet remains to be done. Many people are yet anxious and doubtful. Let us still pursue the work in which we have been lately engaged—the cultivation¹ of peace and friendship, and doing what can be done to convince these people that we never designed to wrong them (cheers), but that what has been done was as much in their interest as our own (hear)."



Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia, 24 June 1870, pg. 119.

"There are, I know, some differences between the residents of different localities—and perhaps the easiest way to dispose of them would be that each side should concede something. A spirit of concession, I think, ought to be manifested on both sides; and if it is, we will be cordial and united. If we were so united,—as was said long ago,—the people of Red River could make their own terms with Canada. We have had here already three Commissioners from the Dominion; and now, perhaps, we have another come among us, in the person of His Lordship the Bishop of St. Boniface,—one who is generally beloved and esteemed in the land, and to whose mission, I doubt not, the highest attention will be paid. For my part I would certainly like to see in the person of His Lordship a Commissioner, invested with full power to give us what we want (cheers). But we have to be careful: for we do not know what that power is; and we must not rush blindly into the hands of any Commissioners. Let us act prudently²—that is all I urge,—if we do so, we will be safe enough (cheers)."

Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia, 9 March 1870, pg. 8.

¹ Cultivation = the process of growing

² Prudently = carefully

[The mini-unit contains primary documents from prominent historical figures who contributed to the debate, such as Louis Riel.](#)

Alexander Mackenzie in Brief



This summary borrows from the Dictionary of Canadian Biography entry listed in the "Additional Resources" section of this mini-unit.

Alexander Mackenzie was born on the 28 January 1822 in Scotland as the third of ten sons to a family that was not well off and which consequently moved frequently. At the age of 13, with his father's health failing, Mackenzie began working fulltime as an apprentice stonemason and subsequently emigrated to Canada with the rest of his family in 1842 with only 16 shillings to his name. Mackenzie served as a contractor and foreman on major canal and building sites in southern Ontario and settled in Port Sarnia in Upper Canada in 1846 with his family. Mackenzie was also a Protestant who advocated for the separation of the Church and State in order to encourage personal freedoms, and he showed little interest in activities unrelated to self-improvement. He was also thrifty and, even after he became Prime Minister of Canada, complained about spending \$128 on a political banquet in 1876.

Mackenzie started his political career in 1851 as a campaigner for George Brown's Reformer Party. During the 1861 election, Mackenzie won the seat for Lambton in the province's Legislative Assembly and quickly rose to become one of Brown's lieutenants supporting representation by population, government retrenchment and fiscal responsibility, and the supremacy of the Parliament over financial interests. He was a strong speaker and a good parliamentary tactician, but often lacked the flair to inspire those around him.

Mackenzie supported Confederation because it guaranteed key Reform goals like representation by population, but he disliked the "Great Coalition" because it required Reformers to ignore differences with their Conservative rivals. Mackenzie shared the pervasive thirst in Ontario to "settle" the Northwest, but frequently opposed the Conservative's policies. In the case of Manitoba, Mackenzie shared the prevalent outrage against Thomas Scott's execution and, even though he would later grant amnesty to Riel in 1875 after becoming prime minister, he joined Ontario Liberals in opposing any concessions to the Red River resisters during the early 1870s. When Macdonald's government announced the establishment of Manitoba, Mackenzie opposed its over-representation in Parliament (according to the principle of representation by population).

As one of his party's most outspoken voices, it was not surprising that Mackenzie eventually became Liberal leader in March 1873. Within a month of Mackenzie's election, the Pacific Scandal severely weakened the Conservatives. The following January, the Liberals won the subsequent election and Alexander Mackenzie, with his reputation for honesty, became Prime Minister of Canada. His cabinet, however, struggled to coalesce, and disunity plagued the government. His government, nevertheless, achieved several important reforms, including the establishment of Canada's Supreme Court.

In 1878, Mackenzie called for an election which his government subsequently lost to the Conservative Party. Although he returned to his seat in Lambton, he soon resigned as party leader. During the next decade, he became increasingly isolated and, with his voice failing, rarely spoke in Parliament after 1882. He died on 17 April 1892, after several months of being bedridden following a fall near his home.



Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

[The mini unit provides short biographies of all historical figures](#)



Handout: Treaties 1 and 2

TREATIES 1 AND 2 BETWEEN HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN AND THE CHIPPEWA AND CREE INDIANS¹ OF MANITOBA AND COUNTRY ADJACENT WITH ADHESIONS

LAYOUT IS NOT EXACTLY LIKE ORIGINAL

TRANSCRIBED FROM: EDMOND CLOUTIER, C.M.G., O.A., D.S.P. QUEEN'S PRINTER AND CONTROLLER OF STATIONERY OTTAWA, 1957 92099-1

Treaty No. 1

ARTICLES OF A TREATY made and concluded this third day of August in the year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-one, between Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland by Her Commissioner, Wemyss M. Simpson, Esquire, of the one part, and the Chippewa and Swampy Cree Tribes of Indians, inhabitants of the country within the limits hereinafter² defined and described, by their Chiefs chosen and named as hereinafter mentioned, of the other part.

Whereas all the Indians inhabiting the said country have pursuant³ to an appointment made by the said Commissioner, been convened at a meeting at the Stone Fort, otherwise called Lower Fort Garry, to deliberate upon certain matters of interest to Her Most Gracious Majesty, of the one part, and to the said Indians of the other, and whereas the said Indians have been notified and informed by Her Majesty's said Commissioner that it is the desire of Her Majesty to open up to settlement and immigration a tract of country bounded and described as hereinafter mentioned, and to obtain the consent thereto⁴ of her Indian subjects inhabiting the said tract, and to make a treaty and arrangements with them so that there may be peace and good will between them and Her Majesty, and that they may know and be assured of what allowance they are to count upon and receive year by year from Her Majesty's bounty and benevolence.⁵

¹ Indians = First Nations

² Herinafter = further on in this document

³ Pursuant = in accordance with

⁴ Thereto = to that, to that place

⁵ Benevolence = generosity

[The mini unit also includes Treaty records, such as Treaty 1 and 2 Texts](#)

Curriculum Objectives

This mini-unit has been broadly designed for intermediate/senior-level classes. The activities described in the pages, for example, fulfill the following outcomes listed in Manitoba's "Grade 6 Social Studies: Canada: A Country of Change (1867 to Present)" and "Grade 11: History of Canada: A Foundation for Implementation" curriculum guides.

The mini-unit can be accessed here:

<http://hcmc.uvic.ca/confederation/pdfs/manitoba-provincial.pdf>

Background

Before each province and territory became a part of Canada, their local legislatures (and the House of Commons after 1867) debated the extent, purposes and principles of political union between 1865 and 1949. In addition to creating provinces, the British Crown also negotiated a series of Treaties with Canada's Indigenous Peoples. Although these texts, and the records of their negotiation, are equally important to Canada's founding, as the Truth and Reconciliation Committee recently explained, "too many Canadians still do not know the history of Indigenous peoples' contributions to Canada, or understand that by virtue of the historical and modern Treaties negotiated by our government, we are all Treaty people."

The vast majority of these records, however, remain inaccessible and many can only be found in provincial archives. By bringing together these diverse colonial, federal and Indigenous records for the first time, and by embracing novel technologies and dissemination formats, [*The Confederation Debates*](#) encourages Canadians of all ages and walks of life to learn about past challenges, to increase political awareness of historical aspirations and grievances and engage present-day debates, as well as to contribute to local, regional and national understanding and reconciliation.

