

Sir Wilfrid Laurier

EDUCATION GUIDE

TIMELINE

This Timeline is designed to accompany Historica Canada's **Sir Wilfrid Laurier Education Guide**.



▲ Mill and falls, New Glasgow, QC, ca. 1900 (courtesy McCord Museum/MP-1985.31.43).



▲ *Le Défricheur*, 7 March 1867. Laurier was the newspaper's publisher from November 1866 until its demise on 21 March, 1867 (courtesy Google News Archive).

1841 Henry-Charles-Wilfrid Laurier is born on 20 November in Saint-Lin, Québec (then Canada East). At age 10, Laurier is sent to learn English in New Glasgow, Québec, where he learns the value of tolerance between English and French cultures.

1854 Laurier attends the Collège de L'Assomption for a classical education. There he discovers ultramontanism (a clerical philosophy within the Catholic Church that emphasizes the prerogatives and powers of the Pope), which he detests for the rest of his life.

1861 Moves to Montreal to study law at McGill University. He aligns with the Parti Rouge, a radical liberal political group.

1864 Graduates from McGill University. During his valedictory address in French (a bold move at McGill, an English university), Laurier pledges to devote his life "to the cause of conciliation, harmony and concord among the different elements of this country of ours."

McGill University, Montreal, ca. 1890-1901 (courtesy US Library of Congress/LC-DIG-det-4a05369). ▼



1866 Becomes editor of *Le Défricheur* newspaper. He is anti-Confederation, fearing political centralization and the assimilation of French Catholics into an English Protestant nation.

▲ Laurier and his wife, Zoé Lafontaine, in a chauffeur-driven car (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-063517).

1868 Zoé Lafontaine, a piano teacher with whom Laurier has an on-again, off-again courtship for seven years, becomes engaged to another man, as Laurier had refused to marry her on the grounds that he was too poor and sickly. But when their former landlord tells Laurier that Zoé is about to marry another suitor, Laurier rushes to Montreal. The two marry immediately.

1871 Elected to Québec Legislative Assembly as the Liberal member for Drummond-Arthabaska.



▲ Wilfrid Laurier in 1874, his first year as a Member of Parliament, and the same year he first spoke in defence of Riel (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/William James Topley/PA-026430).

1874 Switching to federal politics, Laurier is elected on 29 January.

1874 On 15 April, Laurier gives his first major speech in the House of Commons. Discussing the proposed expulsion of Louis Riel from Parliament, Laurier argues that Riel's rights were being denied. He notes that the Red River rebels "wanted to be treated like British subjects and not bartered away like common cattle." The English Canadian press praises his stance as calm and logical.



1877 Laurier is named Minister of Inland Revenue on 8 October.

1885 On 7 July, Laurier speaks about the North-West Resistance. He suggests that blaming Riel for the rebellion insults Métis grievances. He accuses Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald of being contemptuous toward their demand for title to the lands they already held. Riel was executed for treason on 16 November.



▲ Métis leader Louis Riel, ca. 1879-1885 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Duffin and Co./C-052177).

1886 During a speech on 16 March, Laurier defends French Canadians from accusations by the English Canadian press that they were placing themselves above the law in the aftermath of the Riel execution. He blames the government for Riel's death. The English press labels him the "silver-tongued orator" after this address.



1887 Edward Blake retires as Liberal leader, anointing Laurier as his successor. Laurier is resistant, but eventually decides to accept the position. Sure that he would accept, the *Globe* newspaper had declared Laurier leader before he had finalized his decision.

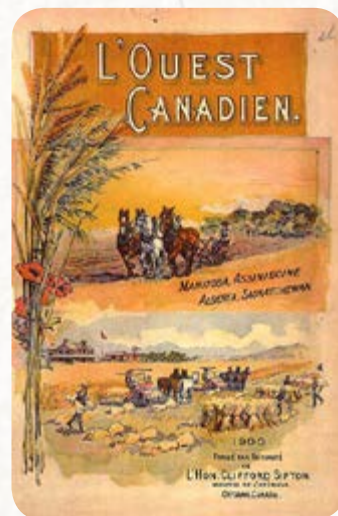
1890 The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba abolishes French as an official language. Bowing to public pressure, it also passes two bills that consolidate Catholic and Protestant school systems into one public system. This leads to the political crisis known as the Manitoba Schools Question.

School near Brandon, MB, ca. 1900-1910 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Canada Dept. of Mines and Resources/C-002074).



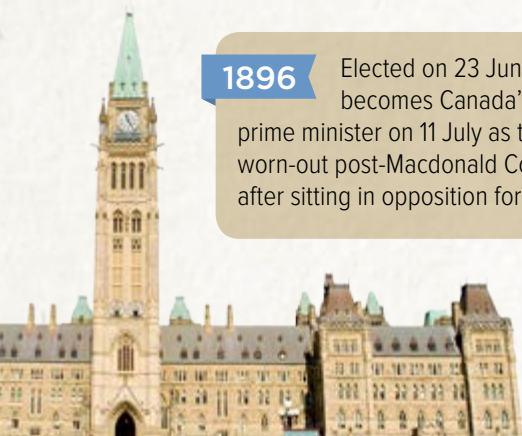
1891 During the federal election, Laurier's platform promotes a freer trade deal with the United States. The deal, known as reciprocity, would lower tariffs between the two countries. Macdonald and the Conservatives win the election, feeding off fears that free trade could ruin Canada's economy, and, more importantly, turn Canada into a colony of the United States.

The Canadian West. Manitoba, Assiniboine; Alberta, Saskatchewan. 1900. Published by the Hon. Clifford Sifton. Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, Canada (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/L'Ouest canadien/AMICUS 2696647/Cover page).



1896 Elected on 23 June, Laurier officially becomes Canada's first francophone prime minister on 11 July as the Liberals defeat a worn-out post-Macdonald Conservative government after sitting in opposition for 18 years.

1896 Laurier and Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, begin promoting immigration to the West.



Parliament of Canada (Dreamstime.com/Py2000/16339360).

1896 The Manitoba Schools Question is resolved with the Laurier-Greenway Compromise, which allows religious instruction in public schools for a half hour at the end of the day, with certain conditions. Depending on whether there were sufficient numbers of Francophones in a given area, Catholic teachers could be hired and French could be taught.



1896 The discovery of gold along a tributary of the Klondike River in August causes people to rush to the Yukon to seek their fortune.

Prospectors ascend Chilkoot Pass, BC, en route to the Klondike gold fields, ca. 1898-1899 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/ C-004490).

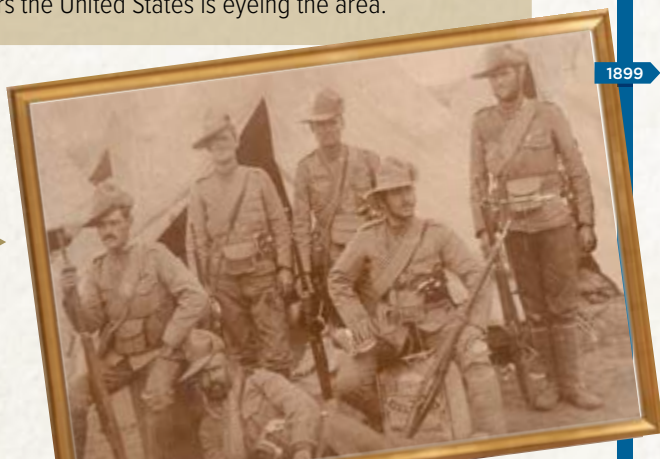
1898 The Yukon Territory Act separates Yukon from the North-West Territories. The move is spurred by the population increase during the Klondike gold rush and fears the United States is eyeing the area.



1897 As part of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, Laurier attends the first large-scale imperial conference in London. On 21 June, Laurier reluctantly accepts a knighthood, becoming "Sir" Wilfrid Laurier.

Queen Victoria in the late 1800s (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/1962-108-1/C-095254).

Canadians on the veldt in South Africa during the Boer War (courtesy Canadian War Museum/CWM 19820205-003).



1899 The South African Boer War begins. Laurier agrees to support volunteers who wish to fight for Great Britain. While English Canadians support the war, French Canadians are wary of imperialism and sympathize with the Boers (Dutch-speaking settlers who had clashed with British inhabitants of South Africa).



▲ Canada in 1906 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Cartographic Materials).

1900 Laurier leads the Liberals to victory in the federal election on 7 November.

1904 Laurier's Liberals win the federal election on 3 November.

1905 The "Autonomy Bills" create Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada's eighth and ninth provinces.

1908 Laurier leads the Liberals to a fourth consecutive federal election win on 26 October.



▲ Sir Robert Borden, Montreal, ca. 1911-1920 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Dupras & Colas/C-000694).

1911 A reciprocity (freer trade) agreement with the United States is drafted, provoking a hostile reaction from 18 prominent Toronto businessmen (known as the "Toronto Eighteen"), who argue it will weaken ties with the British Empire and open the way to economic union, and eventually absorption by the US.

1914 The First World War breaks out in August. As leader of the Opposition, Laurier signals his support and encourages his men to volunteer for service.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, 1911, by William James (courtesy City of Toronto Archives/Fonds 1244/Item 581).

1917 The Military Service Act implements conscription (compulsory military service), provoking a national crisis. Borden creates a Unionist coalition government, bringing pro-conscription Liberals to his party, but Laurier refuses to join the new administration. He leads a much-reduced Liberal Party through the federal election on 17 December, winning only 82 seats, just 20 of which are located outside of Québec.



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1903 The Alaska Boundary Dispute is settled. Canada wanted an all-Canadian route from the Klondike gold fields to the Pacific through the Alaska Panhandle, over which the US claimed sovereignty. A six-man tribunal — Canada had two votes, the US had three, and Britain had one — rules for the US with the support of the British tribunal member, Lord Alverstone, who wanted to avert military conflict. Laurier regrets that Canada lacks the power to make its own international decisions.



▲ Map showing the Alaska boundary between Canada and the United States, ca.1890 (Dreamstime.com/Haveseen/11608023).



▲ Recruitment poster for the naval service of Canada, ca. 1915 (courtesy US Library of Congress/Prints & Photographs Division/WWI Posters/LC-USZC4-12677).

1910 The Naval Service Act establishes the Royal Canadian Navy. Attempting to strike a balance between imperialist pressure and concerns of French Canadian nationalists, Laurier creates a volunteer navy whose fleet could be placed at Britain's use during a major crisis.

1911 Laurier is attacked from all sides during the federal election campaign: in Québec, it is feared that the navy will lead to participation in Britain's military endeavours; in English Canada, fears compound over the freer trade deal. Laurier's long years in power, with their inevitable problems and compromises, contribute to his loss to Robert Borden's Conservatives on 21 September.



▲ Laurier on parade in Simcoe, ON, ca. 1910 (courtesy City of Toronto Archives/Fonds 1244/Item 8224).

Recruitment poster, Toronto Central Recruiting Committee, No. 2 Military Division, 1915 (courtesy US Library of Congress/LC-USZC4-12670).



1919 While rebuilding the Liberal party, Laurier dies in Ottawa on 17 February. More than 100,000 attend his funeral. As his adversary Henri Bourassa wrote, "The private virtues of the eminent statesman, his admirable qualities of the heart, that tireless, modest charity, the great dignity of his life, are reasons for trust and consolation for all those who loved him."