

Ottawa Journal: 200th Birth Anniversary of a Father of Confederation George-Etienne Cartier

One of Canada's greatest political minds and negotiators, George-Etienne Cartier, was born 200 years ago on September 06, 1814. A Montreal lawyer, Cartier joined the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada in 1848, which was the year of the establishment of a responsible government at the national level ? a government responsible to the electorate, as well as Parliament. As underlined in Alastair Sweeney's biography of Cartier, we ought not forget that the man who is now remembered as John Alexander MacDonald's ?Siamese twin? was an inspiring leader in his own right. I personally believe that Cartier has been underestimated as a father of Confederation.

In the early 1860s, Canadian political institutions were marked by instability. The 1840 Act of Union, which had brought together two distinct colonies (the Province of Lower Canada and the Province of Upper Canada) having both recently faced rebellions, had not convincingly alleviated tensions.

In light of these difficulties, three parties made an alliance to push for constitutional reform, therefore paving the way for the creation of Confederation. George-Etienne Cartier's Bleus from Canada East, John A. Macdonald's Liberal Conservatives from Canada West, and George Brown's Reformers from Canada West put their differences aside, joined their forces and promoted the idea of a confederation among their supporters.

Cartier himself made many significant contributions that shaped the Canada we know and love today. It was he who fathered the Canadian Pacific Railway, arranged for the transfer of the Hudson's Bay Company territories to Canada, and who ensured the entry of Manitoba and British Columbia into Confederation. Furthermore, as Canada's first Minister of Militia and Defence, it was Cartier who was in charge of protecting the integrality of our territory. He also took on most of Prime Minister MacDonald's responsibilities during his illnesses.

It has now been 200 years since the birth of this strong leader. I'm grateful for all of his contributions to the political, territorial, and economic foundations of our wonderful country.

By David Tilson, M.P.