

Ottawa Journal: 200th Birth Anniversary of Father of Confederation ? Sir John A. Macdonald

It was 200 years ago on January 11, 1815 that one of Canada's greatest political minds and visionary leaders, Sir John Alexander Macdonald, was born. Not only was he our first Prime Minister, but he played a key role in Confederation. He left a tremendous legacy that we can all be proud of as Canadians.

As a lawyer specializing in commercial law, Sir John A. Macdonald started his political career at the municipal level, acting as alderman in Kingston from 1843 to 1846. A few years following his election at the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada in 1844, he became Receiver General. After occupying various cabinet positions, he was finally appointed the first Prime Minister of Canada after Confederation on July 1st, 1867. In order to underline the historical significance of the moment, Macdonald was proclaimed Knight Commander of the Bath by Queen Victoria the same year.

We should not forget all the hard work Macdonald put in shaping our country. The establishment of the strong, centralized federal government we're so proud of today, can be traced back in part to the views vigorously defended by Macdonald during the Confederation conferences. However, Macdonald did not want to stop after successfully uniting a nation; he went on to develop a comprehensive plan for Canada - a national strategy. He thought of farmers in the West, but did not forget industry people in the East. He surrounded himself with strong, capable colleagues, such as George-Etienne Cartier, but worked hard himself too. After years of struggling with gallstones and other illnesses, Macdonald died while in office at the age of 76. He served as Prime Minister for a grand total of 19 years, a record only broken by William Lyon Mackenzie King.

It has now been 200 years since the birth of Sir John A. Macdonald. We're indebted to him for all of his efforts in laying down the foundations of our great country. If you, like me, appreciate to learn more about this visionary policymaker, I would recommend that you visit his restored office in East Block on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. East Block is only open for tours in July and August of each year.

By David Tilson, MP