

Four Unveilings of the Macdonald Bust in Celebration of Sir John A. Macdonald's 199th Birthday

***Unveiling # 1: January 10, 2014 Benchers' Reception, Osgoode Hall,
Luncheon***



Left to right: Her Hon. Mrs. Ruth Ann Onley; Treasurer of the Law Society of Upper Canada, Hon. Thomas Conway; Hon. Lt. Gov. Hon. David Onley; Ruth Abernethy; David Warrick; Richard Gwyn. (Photograph: Courtesy of Osgoode Hall)

This event marked the return of John A. Macdonald to the room where he wrote his law examinations at the age of 15. Here he also received his letter of procuration as an attorney in 1835, and as a barrister in 1836. Here he also served for twenty-one years as *ex officio* Benchers in his capacity as Attorney General of the Province of Canada.

This event also marked the beginning of two busy days for the Macdonald bust, its creator -- Ruth Abernethy, Richard Gwyn and the members of the Steering Committee of the Macdonald Project.

John A. first paid this visit to Osgoode Hall where his life and career were celebrated at a luncheon hosted by the Treasurer of the Law Society. Lt.

Gov. Hon. David Onley and Hon. Ruth Ann Onley officiated at the event. Also in attendance were Ruth Abernethy, Richard Gwyn, distinguished members of the Law Society, and Tim Casgrain, David Warrick from the Macdonald Project.

Unveiling #2, January 10, 3:30 p.m. in the foyer of the Ontario Legislature

The second Macdonald bust was placed in a specially designed case to launch a new education exhibit, which tells the story of John A. Macdonald's life and career in Canada. Each year, approximately 175,000 school children and many more visitors pass through the foyer on tours through the Legislature. They will learn about John A. Macdonald's long and eventful career. They will also learn about his early life in the Quinte region and how he won his first court case in Picton.



Ruth Abernethy beside the display case for the young John A. Macdonald
(Photograph: Courtesy of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario)

***Unveiling #3, January 10, 7:00 p.m. in the Great Hall, Hart House
University of Toronto***

At the beginning of a gala dinner in the Great Hall, the Macdonald bust was again unveiled. This time it was featured at the beginning of a sold out dinner hosted by The Friends of Macdonald (Toronto) to mark the 199th Birthday of Sir John A. Macdonald.

Steve Paikin kicked off the evening by introducing celebrated bronze portrait artist, Ruth Abernethy, followed by a flower presentation by Macdonald biographer, Richard Gwyn.

The Honourable David Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Ruth Abernethy and David Warrick kicked off the gala event with the unveiling of the Macdonald bust.



(Photographs: Courtesy of the Friends of Macdonald--Toronto)

Then the fun began when Steve Paikin stirred up a lively debate between Sir John

A. and George Brown, played by biographer Richard Gwyn and publisher John Honderich.

The two rivals entertained the audience with many anecdotes about their frequent confrontations in the House and during their many heated discussions over Confederation. Hon. Bob Rae played the grand piano as guests from all political stripes mixed and mingled in period costume. Historica unveiled their latest history minutes. The first featuring Macdonald at the Quebec Conference and the second highlighted Cartier's pivotal role in Confederation.

Unveiling #4, January 11, 9:00 a.m. Sutherland Hall, Queen's University

The fourth unveiling of the Macdonald bust took place the next day at the beginning of the celebrations of Macdonald's birthday at Queen's University -- one of the many institutions Macdonald helped to create during his lifetime.

Dr. Daniel Woolf (Queen's Principal and Vice-Chancellor), Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration), Arthur Milnes (Commissioner of the Macdonald Bicentennial Commission), and David Warrick (Chair of the Macdonald Project of Prince Edward County) removed the Canadian flag on the bust to mark the beginning of a conference entitled *Sir John A. Macdonald Then and Now 2014*.



(Photograph: Courtesy of Queen's University)

Arthur Milnes reminded guests of the importance of the occasion. “With the bicentennial of the first prime minister’s birth now only a year away, the involvement of leading scholars, lawyers and politicians in bicentennial events is more important than ever. Queen’s deserves full marks for contributing to the Macdonald bicentennial this way.”

That marked the end of the four memorable unveilings in two days: Osgoode Hall, the Ontario Legislature, University of Toronto, and Queen’s University.

At the luncheon at the Law Society of Upper Canada the previous day, Warrick spoke about the formative years in Macdonald’s life and his connections with the County and the Quinte region.

From the age of eleven to twenty, Macdonald called this area his home. He learned how to speak as a North American from the Loyalists of the region and he adopted their ways. Although he travelled constantly -- even in his teenage years - - he nevertheless felt a strong connection with the region. In Picton, he won his first trial and became a lawyer on February 5, 1835 at the age of twenty.

When he returned to the Picton courthouse as co-premier of Canada in 1861, he said:

My early associations are connected with Prince Edward—some of the happiest days of my life were spent here—I here obtained my earliest professional education, and here, in the good old town of Picton, I earned my first fee and made my first speech to a jury in this very Court House.

When he made that election speech in 1861 at the age of 46, he had already served as Premier of Canada West (today Ontario) for five years.

John A. was remembering somewhat wistfully a time when he enjoyed life and the opportunities that lay ahead. By winning his first court case and receiving a license to practice as an attorney, he actually launched his professional career in that very courthouse in the small town of Picton.

His career lasted a remarkable 61 years from the time he began articling to the time he died in office as prime minister in 1891.

Americans are often accused of overusing the word ‘exceptional,’ to describe their accomplishments. Canadians rarely use it to describe one of their own.

But how's this for exceptional:

“No Macdonald. No Canada.”

-- Richard Gwyn.