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The U.S. and the Union of Canada - II

Lead: U.S. efforts to annex Canada in the 19th century helped focus the minds of Canadian politicians, often at odds on other matters, on the need to create a single nation state able to assert and maintain Canada as an independent and sovereign nation.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In 1867 Canadian statesman Thomas D'Arcy McGee said, "they [the Americans] coveted Florida, and they seized it; they coveted Louisiana, and purchased it;

they coveted Texas, and stole it... The acquisition of Canada was the first ambition of the American Confederacy, and never ceased to be..." He was not wrong to be so concerned. Throughout the 19th century until the establishment of the Dominion of Canada, there was a real and present danger that the United States with its superior military, financial resources, and population might reach out to absorb Canada into the growing colossus of North America.

During this period Canada was divided between regional interests, east and west, on the issue of fair governmental representation. In addition, there were differences in

culture and language with French and English being spoken in different parts of the country. These matters came to a head in the Rebellions of 1837 during which French-Canadians expressed their bitterness and frustration by destroying the Parliament building in Montréal. As a result, by The Act of Union, 1840, the provinces of upper and lower Canada were united under a single Parliament and the names of the provinces were changed to Canada East and Canada West, respectively.

In the U.S. election of 1844, Democratic presidential candidate James Knox Polk advocated annexation of the entire Oregon territory using the famous campaign

expression, "54°40' or fight!" At this point, the region's boundaries had been in dispute. Polk was now threatening to go to war to grab it all. The matter was settled peacefully with the border established at 49° in the Treaty of Oregon, 1846, but the Canadians got a lesson in just how vulnerable their situation was.

Canada even figured into the dispute over slavery in the U.S. With its strong tradition of opposition to slavery, as a part of the new expanded nation, Canada would have provided additional population, resources, and territory, but also increased representation in Congress for the cause of abolition. This was not dissimilar to the desire of southern

partisans to annex Cuba which then could have been divided into five pro-slavery states.

With the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, the issue came to a head. Initially, Canadians were overwhelmingly sympathetic to the North with whom they traded regularly, but reality became painfully obvious when, first the Union, then the Confederacy, took advantage of Canada in the war. During the Trent Affair in 1861, Confederate diplomats traveling to England on a British vessel were seized by Union ships. Other violations of Canadian territorial waters by the U.S. Navy occurred in 1863 and 1864. The 1864 raid on St.

Albans, Vermont during which Confederate agents crossed from Canada, robbed three banks and then escaped, infuriated Americans. Resentment reached fever pitch when, two months later, the rebels were released by a Canadian court. Canadians came to realize that they did not even have the ability to call out the militia or organize resistance in their own defense.

In 1866 a bill was introduced in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives offering statehood to the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada East, Canada West and territorial status to vast stretches of Western Canada. The bill never

made it to the floor of the full House but it was another stern warning to resistant and sometimes feuding Canadians that they needed to get their act together.

The last straw came in 1867 when the United States purchased Alaska from Russia. Canada was now surrounded, so to speak. Therefore, in July 1867 the British North America Act brought together the provinces and formed the Dominion of Canada. In 1869, with additional changes, Canada stretched from sea to sea, helped in no small measure by its cousin just to the south.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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