

A Concise History of CANADA

Margaret Conrad



A Concise History of Canada

MARGARET CONRAD

Professor Emerita, University of New Brunswick



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521744430

© Cambridge University Press 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Conrad, Margaret.

A concise history of Canada / Margaret Conrad.
p. cm. – (Cambridge concise histories)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-76193-2 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-74443-0 (pbk.)

1. Canada – History. I. Title.

F1026.C6868 2011

971-dc23 2011021842

ISBN 978-0-521-76193-2 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-74443-0 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and
does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate
or appropriate.

A Concise History of Canada

Margaret Conrad's history of Canada begins with a challenge to its readers. What is Canada? What makes up this diverse, complex, and often contested nation-state? What was its founding moment? And who are its people? Drawing on her many years of experience as a scholar, writer, and teacher of Canadian history, Conrad offers astute answers to these difficult questions. Beginning in Canada's deep past with the arrival of its Aboriginal peoples, she traces its history through the conquest by Europeans, the American Revolutionary War, and the industrialization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to its prosperous present. As a social historian, Conrad emphasizes the peoples' history: the relationships between Aboriginal and settler, French and English, Catholic and Protestant, and rich and poor. She writes of the impact of disease, how women fared in the early colonies, and the social transformations that took place after the Second World War as Canada began to assert itself as an independent nation. It is this grounded approach that drives the narrative and makes for compelling reading. In the last chapter, the author explains the social, economic, and political upheavals that have transformed the nation over the last three decades. Despite its successes and its popularity as a destination for immigrants from across the world, Canada remains a curiously reluctant player on the international stage. This intelligent, concise, and lucid book explains just why that is.

Margaret Conrad is Professor Emerita at the University of New Brunswick in Canada. Her publications include *Atlantic Canada: A History*, with James K. Hiller (2010); *History of the Canadian People*, with Alvin Finkel (2009); *No Place Like Home: The Diaries and Letters of Nova Scotia Women, 1771-1938*, with Toni Laidlaw and Donna Smyth (1988); and *George Nowlan: Maritime Conservative in National Politics* (1986).

CAMBRIDGE CONCISE HISTORIES

This is a series of illustrated "concise histories" of selected individual countries, intended both as university and college textbooks and as general historical introductions for general readers, travelers, and members of the business community.

Other titles in the series are listed after the index.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to almost every historian of Canada, living and dead, whose research made this book possible. A *Concise History of Canada* is dedicated to their hard work and scant acknowledgement in this and in many other publications. I owe more than I can adequately express to Alvin Finkel and James Hiller, coauthors with me of survey textbooks on Canadian and Atlantic Canadian history. Their wisdom and even their words are embedded in every chapter. In a lifetime I would be lucky to have had one happy collaboration; to have had two is nothing short of a miracle. It is also a miracle that I answered the life-changing e-mail that arrived on 24 September 2007 from Marigold Acland, Senior Commissioning Editor for Cambridge University Press. Given the unfamiliar name, I came mightily close to deleting it as just another piece of unwelcome spam. Her invitation to write the Canadian volume in the Cambridge Concise History series clinched my decision to take early retirement and get on with various writing commitments. It was the best decision I have ever made, and working with Cambridge University Press has been yet another happy collaboration. I am especially indebted to Janis Bolster, who saved me from embarrassing errors and bad writing, and what's more, agreed to everything I asked of her. It was a great pleasure to work with such an experienced and generous editor. Diana Witt, who developed the index, Joe LeMonnier, who drew the maps, and Joy Mizan, who pursued permissions for illustrations, endured with great patience my endless tinkering. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, who read it so carefully.

As my friends can attest, I describe producing a history of Canada in ninety thousand words as akin to writing haiku. Sometimes the sentences are so freighted with nuance that an editor's change of one word throws everything off. Like aging, writing national history is not for wimps.

Marion Beyea, Gail Campbell, Gwendolyn Davies, Lyle Dick, Gerry Friesen, Don Fyson, Naomi Griffiths, Gregory Kealey, Linda Kealey, and Gillian Thompson – historians all – have helped me at one time or another with answers to questions. So, too, have people involved in several networks in which I participate: Jocelyn Létourneau and everyone associated with the Canadians and Their Pasts project; Penney Clark and others involved in THEN/HiER; my colleagues on the Advisory Board of the LaFontaine-Baldwin Symposium, spearheaded by John Ralston Saul and Adrienne Clarkson; and those working with me on the National Capital Commission Advisory Committee. Canada's History Society, especially the Chair of its Board of Directors, Charlotte Gray, and its President and CEO, Deborah Morrison, have kept me grounded on issues relating to Canada's past. Steven Schwinghamer, Research Coordinator at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, deserves a special thank you for finding the last photo used in this book. Finally, I want to acknowledge my ninety-five-year-old mother, who wonders what exactly it is that absorbs so many of my waking hours. She will not likely read this book, but she will be pleased that I have written it.

January 2012

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
Introduction: A Cautious Country	I
1 Since Time Immemorial	10
2 Natives and Newcomers, 1000-1661	26
3 New France, 1661-1763	51
4 A Revolutionary Age, 1763-1821	80
5 Transatlantic Communities, 1815-1849	107
6 Coming Together, 1849-1885	134
7 Making Progress, 1885-1914	164
8 Hanging On, 1914-1945	194
9 Liberalism Triumphant, 1945-1984	226
10 Interesting Times, 1984-2011	258
<i>Notes</i>	289
<i>Guide to Further Reading</i>	301
<i>Index</i>	305

ILLUSTRATIONS

MAPS

I.1	Canadian provinces and territories in the twenty-first century	page 9
I.1	Aboriginal peoples in 1500	17
3.1	North America, 1713	65
4.1	North America, 1763	82
6.1	Canada in 1867	151

IMAGES

I.1	Ivory maskette from a Dorset archaeological site	13
I.2	<i>Indian Hunters, Pursuing the Buffalo in the Early Spring</i>	21
I.3	Iroquois women preparing corn	24
2.1	The cod fisheries in Newfoundland	33
2.2	Champlain's map of New France, 1632	43
2.3	Missionaries teaching Christianity to Mi'kmaq	45
3.1	Louis XIV	52
3.2	Canadien militiaman	62
3.3	<i>A Plan of the Harbour of Chebucto and Town of Halifax, 1750</i>	73
3.4	<i>The Death of General Wolfe</i>	77
4.1	Cartoon, <i>London Magazine</i> , July 1774	84

4.2	A Moravian missionary meeting with the Inuit in Nain, Labrador	88
4.3	A black woodcutter in Shelburne, Nova Scotia	92
4.4	York, 1804	97
4.5	Interior of a Nootka house	102
5.1	Shanawdithit's depiction of Beothuk culture	110
5.2	Clearing the town plot, Stanley, New Brunswick, 1834	114
5.3	Methodist camp meeting, Grimsby, Canada East, 1859	120
5.4	<i>The Insurgents at Beauharnois, Lower Canada</i> , 1838	125
5.5	<i>The Burning of the Parliament Building in Montreal</i> , c. 1849	129
6.1	Cariboo Wagon Road	144
6.2	Fathers of Confederation, 1864	148
6.3	Louis Riel in the witness box, 1885	162
6.4	Workers driving the last spike on the CPR	162
7.1	Immigrant recruitment poster	165
7.2	Galicians at immigration sheds in Quebec City	171
7.3	Home children arriving in Canada	173
7.4	Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier in Saskatchewan	191
8.1	Canadian soldiers returning from the Battle of the Somme	197
8.2	Miners' houses and family in Glace Bay	205
8.3	Unemployed men joining the On-to-Ottawa Trek	209
8.4	Relocating Japanese Canadians	220
9.1	Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW) demonstration	236
9.2	<i>Walrus Hunters on Sea Ice</i>	239
9.3	Aislin cartoon, <i>O.K. Everybody Take a Valium!</i>	248
9.4	Anti-Vietnam War protest at the Toronto Consulate, October 1968	250
9.5	Signing the Constitution, 1982	256
10.1	St. Patrick's Day harmony	261
10.2	Mohawk Warrior at Oka	282
10.3	Citizenship ceremony at Pier 21	286

Introduction

A Cautious Country

What is this thing called Canada? The second-largest country in the world geographically, it is a loose-jointed construction that seems to lack the cohesion that many other nation-states enjoy. So vast that it is difficult to grasp the whole, some provinces are nations unto themselves. One is at a loss even to establish a founding moment in Canada's past. While 1867 works for the four original provinces in "confederation," it serves less well for other areas of northern North America that were later induced to join the improbable experiment in nation-building.

Many scholars look to the conquest of Quebec by Major General James Wolfe's army in 1759 as a place to start for understanding a country that, in 1969, was proclaimed officially bilingual – French and English. People living in the Atlantic and Western provinces, with their own distinct historical narratives, would no doubt beg to differ on 1759 as the pivotal point, as would Canada's First Peoples and everyone living in Canada's three northern territories. Nevertheless, so prevalent is the province of Quebec in the nation's political landscape that "the rest of Canada" is now understood by its initials – ROC.

The term "Canada" is itself a slippery concept. Apparently a mistaken interpretation of an Iroquoian word for "village," it was applied by the French to their colony on the St. Lawrence River in the early seventeenth century. This space was enlarged and subdivided by the British Parliament into Upper Canada (Ontario) and

Lower Canada (Quebec) in 1791 and put back together in 1840 to form the United Province of Canada. The name was then affixed to the larger polity that took shape “from sea to sea to sea” in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In coming to terms with Canada, most historians have packaged it in several, essentially political, time periods: Pre-Contact to 1500; Natives and Newcomers, 1500–1661; New France, 1661–1763; British North America, 1763–1863; Confederation and Nation Building, 1864–1945; Modern Canada, 1945 to the present. Scholars have tried to move away from this template, but new turning points tend to fall roughly at the same temporal fault lines as the old ones. Gerald Friesen, for example, constructs his impressive narrative, *Citizens and Nation*, around four dominant communication systems – oral-traditional, textual-settler, print-capitalism, and screen-capitalism – but communications are so inextricably linked to economic and political transitions that it is difficult to determine cause and effect.¹ Economic approaches – hunter-gatherer, agricultural, industrial, and postindustrial – reflect similar overarching time frames. Intellectual and scientific innovations (Darwin’s *Origin of Species* or the birth control pill, for example) have yet to drive a survey of Canadian history, but they, too, are part of a larger matrix of changes that accompany economic and political transformations. In this narrative, the chapters follow the conventional chronological framework with slight adjustments to accommodate my particular and, some may well argue, peculiar understanding of Canada’s past.

No historian of Canada can ignore the tremendous geographical challenge of building a nation-state that spans the northern half of the North American continent. Canada’s history is all about space, lots of it, and about weather, both hot and cold, but it is the winter that, until the twentieth century, determined how many people the land could support. Because Canada’s climate and terrain have historically been inhospitable to human habitation, most immigrants – Aboriginal and newcomers alike – passed it by, preferring more salubrious southern climes.

While natural geological features (Appalachians, Great Lakes, Plains, and Pacific coast mountain chains) suggest that political boundaries might work more efficiently running north-south, other

influences have prevailed. The boreal forest, the St. Lawrence–Great Lakes transportation system, and Aboriginal peoples eager to trade furs drew Europeans into the interior of the continent on an east-west axis. For better or for worse, North America was destined to produce three transcontinental nation-states – Mexico, the United States, and Canada – with Aboriginal nations embedded in each of them.

Space and weather have combined to make Canada a difficult place to inhabit and an even harder place to govern, but they have rarely impeded the exploitation of the area's rich natural resources. In the distant past, First Peoples harvested nature's bounty in their seasonal rounds, sometimes hunting species to extinction. Immigrants from Europe and elsewhere were even less likely to be good stewards of the environment. By the end of the twentieth century, it had become clear that there were limits to growth based on resource exploitation, but the habit was hard to break.

Contrary to the view that Natives were bested in the exchange with foreigners bearing trinkets, Canada's indigenous inhabitants were savvy traders and knew how to push their advantage to secure the European commodities – guns, knives, pots, blankets, brandy – that made survival in a cold climate much easier. This advantage disappeared under the assault, not of weapons in most cases, but of diseases to which Aboriginal peoples had little immunity. As microbes spread across the continent, sometimes in advance of European invaders, the population declined precipitously and social cohesion was undermined.

Canada's indigenous peoples have contributed greatly to the development of Canada, so much so that John Ralston Saul concludes that "we are a Métis civilization."² Originally a term applied to the offspring resulting from "country marriages" of fur traders and Aboriginal women, "Métis" captures the hybridity that increasingly defines Canadian society. During the first 250 years of European settlement, Aboriginal peoples dominated much of the Canadian landscape, and as settler populations continue to drift toward cities, it can be argued that they still do. Nearly 40 percent of Canadian territory is currently subject to Aboriginal land claims, and First Peoples are a force to be reckoned with on the Canadian political scene.

Although European nations were initially drawn to the eastern seaboard by the lowly cod, it was the beaver pelt that sustained two empires – French and British – that claimed much of the area now called Canada. Fishers and fur traders were mostly male sojourners, eager to return to their warmer homelands with “new-world” treasures. As one eighteenth-century observer noted with respect to Newfoundland, “Soe longe as there comes noe women,” settler societies were unlikely to take root.³ But women did come because the labour essential to human survival was deeply gendered and performed primarily in family economies before the Industrial Revolution transformed production processes. In colonial societies, women were responsible for preparing food; sewing warm clothing; caring for the young, the ill, and the elderly; and, in the case of communities dependent on the fisheries, managing the shore-based drying of the catch.

Canada as we know it today is the product of European and North American imperial rivalries and of the world wars that punctuated the long eighteenth century from 1689 to 1815. As such, Canada is heir to the Enlightenment and to the political currents that informed the Glorious, American, and French revolutions. Wars and negotiations in this period set the framework for continuing and often troubled relationships among the Aboriginal, French, and British populations of northern North America. Despite periodic efforts to transcend past transgressions, eighteenth-century treaties and parliamentary proclamations are still relevant to Aboriginal struggles for justice, and the legacy of the French regime remains deeply rooted, especially in Quebec and the Maritime provinces. Significantly, the colonies that emerged as “British” North America after the American Revolution consisted mostly of territory initially claimed by France. The thirteen original British colonies, meanwhile, enthusiastically cut the imperial apron strings.

Between the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and Confederation in 1867, British and American immigrants, many of them fleeing demons of poverty, oppression, and war, migrated to British North America. They brought with them modern capitalism, squabbling Christianities, a vigorous civil society, and hierarchical conventions relating to class, gender, and race. By the mid-nineteenth century, when railways made a transcontinental nation more than an impractical

dream, settler societies from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island had much in common, including their governing institutions and political parties that drew heavily on the British parliamentary system.

Political leaders in the colonies, ever mindful of the freedoms experienced by the citizens of the United States, pioneered an evolutionary approach to self-government within the British Empire. After rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada (1837–38) and shabby political manoeuvrings everywhere, British North Americans achieved a limited parliamentary democracy, described as “responsible government” to distinguish it from the notion of full independence and from republican variants in France and the United States. Indeed, cautious colonials developed a whole new vocabulary to describe their ambiguous political condition, speaking of “autonomy” not “independence,” adopting “dominion” instead of “kingdom” as their nation’s status, and emphasizing “evolution” rather than “revolution” in their approach to reform.

The rebellions and responsible government set in motion what the historian Ian McKay describes as “the project of liberal rule.”⁴ In Canada, as elsewhere, the tenets of liberalism – individual initiative, democratic accountability, civil liberties, rule of law, property rights, separation of church and state, and a market-driven economy – have been hotly contested, but they served as the lodestar for many reformers and for the leaders of the Liberal and Conservative parties that have dominated the national political scene. In the twentieth century the social gospel and dreams of a more egalitarian society prompted farmers, feminists, intellectuals, and labourers to nurture a healthy strain of social democracy, still largely liberal in its essence, which is currently expressed most clearly by the New Democratic Party.

Confederation was a major step in the consolidation of the nation-state and a key factor in pushing the liberal objective of capitalist development. Undertaken in the context of a civil war in the United States, pressure from financial interests in Great Britain, and the rage for industrial growth in the Western world, three “responsibly governed” eastern colonies – Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the united Canadas (Quebec and Ontario) – came together in 1867 as the first “dominion” in the British Empire. By 1880, Rupert’s

Land (the vast territorial domain claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company), the Northwest, and the Arctic, along with the colonies of British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, had been brought under the jurisdiction of Ottawa. The last holdout, Newfoundland and Labrador, joined Confederation in 1949.

This audacious attempt at nation-building by fewer than 4 million people was informed by the transcontinental model of the United States, blessed by the British government, and predicated on a communications network to tie the whole together. In his national policy, Canada's first prime minister, Scottish-born Sir John A. Macdonald, emphasized a transcontinental railway, agricultural settlement in the west, and tariffs high enough to cradle an industrial sector in the St. Lawrence–Great Lakes heartland, dominated by the emerging metropolises of Montreal and Toronto. By 1914 three rail lines spanned the continent and a new flood of immigrants from Europe, the United States, and elsewhere had expanded Canada's vast forest and mining frontiers, settled the "last best west," and contributed to the growth of the nation's industrial cities.

Under Louis Riel's leadership, Métis and First Nations on the Prairies twice (1870 and 1885) mounted unsuccessful resistance to the invading Canadians. The Métis were marginalized in the wake of the 1885 uprising, while First Nations, in the developing west and elsewhere, were controlled by the Indian Act and residential schools.

The challenge of surviving as a child of one superpower and the sibling of another is the key to understanding Canada as we know it today. At the time of Confederation, political leaders were deeply conscious of the role that Great Britain played in providing markets, military protection, and a countervailing force against the "manifest destiny" of the United States to dominate the whole North American continent. Imperial sentiment and self-interest determined that in the twentieth century Canadians would fight two bloody world wars on Britain's side, helping the embattled mother country to hold on until the prodigal sibling finally joined the Allied cause.

In keeping with their cautious approach to political change, Canadians were slow to assert their independence from Great Britain. Canada was a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles (1919)

in its own right, and the Statute of Westminster (1931) confirmed the autonomy of dominions in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Following the Second World War, which greatly enhanced national confidence and productive capacity, the Canadian government began issuing its own passports, and in 1965 the government finally adopted, but not without noisy controversy, a distinctive flag sporting a red maple leaf. As improbable as it seems in retrospect, full autonomy remained elusive until 1982, when, by the Constitution Act, Canadians were able to amend their constitution without resorting to the British Parliament. Nevertheless, the British monarch is still officially the Canadian head of state, and Queen Elizabeth's head graces Canadian currency.

Despite foot dragging on constitutional matters, Canadians managed to reinvent themselves in the three decades following the Second World War. Emerging as a great industrial nation with one of the highest standards of living in the world, Canada embraced policies worthy of its newfound status. The federal government triumphed over defenders of provincial rights to implement a series of nationwide social programs, giving most Canadians a sense of personal security that was the envy of the world. In the 1960s Canada opened its door to immigrants of all cultural backgrounds to provide essential labour in the expanding economy, and in 1971 the country officially embraced a program of multiculturalism. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was attached to the Constitution Act, reflects more than a century of struggle around individual and collective rights in a complicated country.

Canada positioned itself in the Cold War as a "middle power," participating actively in the creation of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and emphasizing peaceful negotiation as an alternative to military approaches to conflict. First and foremost helpful fixers in the dangerous competition between capitalism and communism, Canadian diplomats in the postwar years had their hands full keeping Great Britain and the United States on track. In 1957 External Affairs Minister Lester Pearson won the Nobel Peace Prize for proposing a peaceful solution to the Suez crisis. Thereafter, "peacekeeping" became the brand of the Canadian military until the "war on terror" in the twenty-first century exploded this elaborate fiction.