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Reading II

Canada Prior to 1850

The Division of Upper and Lower Canada

"The Canadas" was the collective name for Upper and Lower Canada. These were two British historical colonies in present-day Canada. Upper and Lower Canada were both created by the **Constitution Act of 1791** and removed in 1841 with the union of Upper and Lower Canada. The names of Upper and Lower Canada reflected their positions relative to the headwaters of St. Lawrence River.

Province of Canada

The **Act of Union 1840** was passed on July 23, 1840 by the British Parliament. It merged the Colonies of Upper Canada and Lower Canada by abolishing their separate parliaments and replacing them with a single one with two houses, a Legislative Council as the upper chamber and the Legislative Assembly as the lower chamber.

The **Rebellions of 1837 - 1838** were two armed uprisings that took place in Lower and Upper Canada in 1837 and 1838. Both rebellions were motivated by frustrations with political reform. A key shared goal was responsible government, which was eventually achieved in the incidents' aftermath.

The goal of the **Act of Union 1840** was to re-instate peace throughout the colonies. Lord Durham was sent by the British government to investigate the cause of the rebellions and troubles. It was under his belief that peace could be best achieved by ensuring a loyal English majority in British North America. The union was proposed to also solve pressing financial issues in Upper Canada. The debts experienced in Upper Canada were the result of poor investments in canals.

Upper Canada was growing more rapidly than Lower Canada. Upper Canada was made up of a British and Protestant majority and Lower Canada was made up of a French-Canadians and Catholic majority. It was hoped that by merging the two colonies, the French-Canadian cultural presence in North America would gradually disappear through assimilation. The Act also contained measures banning the French language from official use in the Legislative Assembly.

Division into Canada East and Canada West

The Province of Canada was divided into two parts: Canada East and Canada West. **Canada East** was what became of the former colony of Lower Canada. **Canada West** was what became of the former colony of Upper Canada.

The first capital city of the Province of Canada was Kingston from 1841 - 1844. In 1844 it moved to Montreal until 1849. In 1849 the capital city moved to Toronto.

Government of the Province of Canada

The Crown was at the top of the government in Canada. Since the Crown was not physically in the Province of Canada, they assigned a Governor General. The Governor General was aided by the Executive Council and the Legislative Council.

In 1849 the **Baldwin Act** was passed and it replaced the local government system based on district councils in Canada West by government at the county level. This Act granted more autonomy to townships, villages, towns, and cities.

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The Burning of the Parliament Buildings

The burning of the parliament buildings in Montreal took place on the night of April 25th, 1849. At the time, the co-prime ministers of the united Province of Canada were Sir Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine and Robert Baldwin.

In 1849 the **Rebellion Losses Bill** was enacted. It was enacted to compensate Lower Canadians who lost property during the Rebellions of 1837. It was modelled on similar measures which provided compensation in Upper Canada. Those who had participated in the Rebellion were to be compensated with taxpayer's money except for those who had been tried and convicted of high treason.

This Bill enraged some of Montreal's citizens and provoked the burning of the parliament buildings. When the governor exited the Parliament building he was met with a crowd of protesters blocking his path. Some of the protesters began throwing eggs and rocks at him and he was forced to climb back into his carriage.

Not long after the attacks on the governor, alarm bells sounded throughout the town. A horse-drawn carriage traveled through the streets to announce a public meeting to denounce the governor's assent to the Rebellion Losses Bill.

A crowd of protestors followed a leader to the Parliament Buildings. Along the way, they broke the windows of the offices of the *Montreal Pilot*, which was the only English-language daily supporting the administration at that time.

When they arrived, the rioters broke the windows of the House of Assembly, which was still in session. After other attacks and acts of vandalism, the room of the Legislative Council

was set on fire. The fire spread rapidly due to the gas pipes being broken both inside and outside the building. The St. Anne's Market building burned very rapidly. The mob did not allow firefighters to fight the flames devastating the parliament buildings, but did not intervene against those who were trying to save the other structures.

LET'S THINK . . .

What does the burning of the Parliament Buildings indicate about the relationship between the French and the English in the Province of Canada?

The Economy and Industries

In Canada East, the most important farm products were potatoes, rye, buckwheat, maple sugar and livestock. Much of the land was taken up by the 1850s of Canada West and the next frontier was west of Lake Superior. This land was owned by Hudson's Bay Company.

In Canada East, much of the St. Lawrence River was full of ice for half of the year. For this part of the year, goods had to be transported on American railways.

Canada West had a population of about 480,000 including Aboriginal people, Loyalist migrants and British settlers. Canada West generally prospered and developed due to a rising population.

LET'S THINK . . .

Why do you think the population of Canada West increased more quickly than the population of Canada East?

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First Nations in the Province of Canada

It wasn't long after the incoming Loyalists caused the non-First Nations population to outnumber the settler population in the Great Lakes basin of Upper Canada. Land was surrendered to provide new land for settlers' farms.

As settlers demanded more and more property, they began to pressure the colonial administration for the lands held by First Nations. The First Nations populations were now regarded as an impediment to growth and prosperity. In the decades following the War of 1812, the British administrators began to regard First Nations as dependents, rather than allies.

By the 1830s only pockets of First Nations lands remained in Upper Canada. First Nations lost access to hunting grounds and became a dispossessed people on their former lands. An 1836 treaty established Manitoulin Island in Georgian Bay as a reserve for the dispossessed First Nations population. The goal was to encourage these peoples to relocate to the island where they would be removed from the more harmful aspects of colonial society and where they would adapt to the new colonial reality at a more controlled pace.

LET'S THINK . . .

Why were the First Nations populations looked at as an impediment to colonial growth by settlers?