

## **John A. Macdonald, the Young Non-Politician**

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JOHN A. MACDONALD,  
THE YOUNG NON-POLITICIAN

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The public career of Sir John A. Macdonald has already been studied at length by Canadian historians and the results of their research have appeared as theses, in numerous scholarly articles, and most notably, in a major two volume biography. It has been of course his public career which has aroused the most interest. Obviously there is nothing surprising about that since he held a pre-eminent public position in Canada for over forty years. But there are other, less well known aspects of Macdonald's life which have received very little attention, aspects of his life which are at least interesting and possibly of some importance to a genuine understanding of his life as a whole.

A list of some possible minor areas for extended studies of Macdonald might include an investigation of Macdonald as soldier, standing on guard for Upper Canada in 1837-38, of Macdonald as tourist, visiting the fashionable American watering holes in the 1840's and 50's, or even of Macdonald as lady's man, arousing the tender passions of a young Peterborough widow.<sup>1</sup> One major area of considerable potential significance may be Macdonald as administrator, busily piling up mountains of paper work (much of it still in existence) as the head of a long series of government departments between 1847 and 1891.

This paper, which is concerned with only a portion of Macdonald's life, from roughly 1840 to 1870, deals with still another John A. Macdonald. With John A. Macdonald as businessman.

It is not customary to think of John A. Macdonald as a businessman. On the contrary it is customary to think of him as anything but a businessman. The numerous studies of Macdonald's career which have been published in the past leave the impression of a man unusually divorced from business considerations, of a man who practised his true vocation of politics while standing a little apart from his money grubbing, speculating contemporaries, of a man who, in Professor Creighton's words, found the business of making a living, the business of working on "a mass of humdrum, prosaic matters" something which "probably irked him profoundly".<sup>2</sup> Yet it can be argued that this view of Macdonald is too narrow, and that it may in fact be misleading. For

Macdonald was a businessman, a businessman on a surprising scale, interested in a surprising variety of business enterprises.

It has not been customary to think of John A. Macdonald as a land speculator. Professor Creighton, in Volume II of his biography remarks in passing that Macdonald during his entire life, only acquired one piece of property of any consequence.<sup>3</sup> But Professor Creighton's statement is too modest and needs a little modification.

On July 14, 1842, a Sheriff's sale was held in Kingston of the property of John McLean, debtor to the Commercial Bank of the Midland District. One of the purchasers was John A. Macdonald, then a twenty-seven year old local lawyer. He bought twenty building lots on the west side of the Cataraqui River, for which he paid £179-15-0.<sup>4</sup> This is the first such purchase of which there appears to be any record, but one thing is certain — it was by no means the last. Throughout the 1840's, 1850's and 1860's he speculated widely in land, branching rapidly out from his original Kingston base. The surviving evidence of his activities of this kind, while undoubtedly incomplete, is nevertheless impressive. In 1844 he bought, again at Sheriff's sales at Kingston, a farm lot for £35-0-0<sup>5</sup> and another property of unspecified size for £204-2-0.<sup>6</sup> A similar purchase of 1845 in the amount of £500-0-0 was made in partnership with a close friend, Charles Stuart. This transaction, which is particularly well documented in Macdonald's papers, provides some insight into his *modus operandi* as a young real estate speculator, and also into the difficulties which a young, but persistent, speculator faced in the then "deserted village"<sup>7</sup> of Kingston, seriously depressed after the removal of the Capital to Montreal.

When they bought this property on January 4, 1845, Macdonald and Stuart did not have £500-0-0 in cash, but fortunately Sheriff Thomas A. Corbett, another friend and fellow *bon vivant*, did not press the point unduly. In April of that year the young partners gave Corbett a joint note for £500-0-0 plus interest. Three months later the note became due and for the next three months was overdue. At this point Macdonald made a part payment of £117-5-8 (which he had actually borrowed from the Sheriff) and Macdonald and Stuart gave the Sheriff a new note for £400-0-0. Macdonald's portion of that note was not finally discharged until February of 1847 and to do so he had to borrow money three more times, from two Kingston banks and from Charles Stuart.<sup>8</sup> Money was scarce in Kingston and land easily acquired was not so easy to resell at a profit, but Macdonald was not easily discouraged. The times could only get better.

In the 1850's Macdonald continued to acquire Kingston property. To Kingstonians of the day both the properties and the names of his several associates in land enterprises were no doubt perfectly familiar. In conjunction with A. J. Macdonell, Alexander Campbell, Maxwell W. Strange, David Shaw, O. S. Gildersleeve and other local men of business, Macdonald became possessed of land "on Nelson Street", of some "College lots", of part of a "Macpherson lot", a "Macaulay lot" a "Mowat lot" and part of the "Atkinson property".<sup>9</sup>

What got bought eventually got sold. Prospective Kingston buyers were invited to inspect "the situation of the range of lots laid out on Collingwood, Nelson, Princess, Johnson and Union Streets, the property of Hon. John A. Macdonald and David Shaw Esq., to be sold by auction on Monday, 5th July, 1862."<sup>10</sup> Macdonald's private map of these lots shows that there was a total of seventy-nine of them, running from King Street near the waterfront, back to Princess Street. The map also shows, from notes pencilled in at the appropriate places, that the lots sold for prices ranging from \$505.00 to \$115.00, or an average of \$308.00 per lot.<sup>11</sup>

At least as early as 1849 Macdonald had branched out beyond Kingston and its suburbs to the neighbouring counties of Lennox and Addington and Hastings. The case of a piece of property in Sheffield township about fifteen miles north of Napanee, provides a further illustration of his scope and his methods. "Dear Sir", he wrote to S. M. Benson, the owner of the land:

I have today received a letter from a gentleman residing in Sheffield to whom I wrote for some information respecting lot No. 13 in the 6th concession of Sheffield. I find that contrary to your assessment, the lot is not nearly worth ten shillings an acre, and is in fact a very inferior piece of land. There are about 50 acres of arable land 100 acres are for the most part of the year under water, and the remaining 50 are only valuable for the fire wood, which in the Township of Sheffield is no value at all. This information has been given me after the lot having been thoroughly examined.

I must therefore decline having anything to do with the proposed arrangement. . . .<sup>12</sup>

This was what Macdonald called "a good bunkum argument". He did buy the land, and obviously at a good deal less than 10 shillings an acre. He drove a hard bargain and he had patience. Thirteen years later he still had not sold that lot in Sheffield because he hadn't yet got his price. "My plan thro life is never to give up" he once told an impatient correspondent "if I don't carry a thing this year I will next".<sup>13</sup> Patience was necessary while waiting for swamps to increase in value.

It would serve no useful purpose to describe in detail all of the property which passed through Macdonald's hands in the first thirty years or so of his professional career, but a few additional examples will help to establish the range of his operations. He sold a town lot in Napanee in 1850 for £75-0-0.<sup>14</sup> An 1853 list of his lands in Richmond Township, Lennox and Addington County, includes five lots totalling 362 acres.<sup>15</sup> (These too were kept for many years, though he tried to sell them to Alexander Campbell). A 235 acre farm near Napanee known as "the Lucas Farm" which Macdonald at first rented out, was sold in 1854. Asking price £1250-0-0. Selling price £1100-0-0.<sup>16</sup>

By 1854 Macdonald's empire reached the town of Lindsay and surrounding Victoria County. His practice was to retain a knowledgeable local man to manage his holdings in each region. At Napanee it was John Benson, in Lindsay and Peterborough it was the lawyer (and later judge) Robert Dennistoun. In 1856 Dennistoun was able to report the sale of some of Macdonald's property in the area, two farm lots in Ops Township and four town lots in Lindsay.<sup>17</sup> Dennistoun also acted for Macdonald in the purchase and management, during the ten years that Macdonald owned it, of "Beavermead" the Peterborough estate of Macdonald's friend and colleague, Judge George B. Hall, who died in 1858.<sup>18</sup>

The real estate holdings so far described (except perhaps those at Kingston) hardly indicate the operations of a big time speculator, operating on a provincial scale. Still there are a good many more examples which could be cited of relatively minor buying and selling, and added all together, they make quite an imposing total. A list which Macdonald drew up in 1864 for example, shows additional small properties in such places as Owen Sound, Madoc, Gananoque, and the village of Queensboro in Hastings County with a minimum estimated value of \$30,000.<sup>19</sup> But Macdonald could think bigger than that. He could also move in more impressive business company than that of a David Shaw or a John Benson or a Robert Dennistoun.

There are at least four examples of Macdonald's land speculation which were on a scale sufficient to put him into the big leagues of his day as a real estate wheeler-dealer, all stemming from beginnings in the palmy days of the early 1850's. One of these was land at Guelph, the land which is mentioned in Professor Creighton's biography. There was nothing particularly impressive about his local agent at Guelph, James Webster, though he had been a Member of the Legislative

Assembly and was (on Macdonald's recommendation) Registrar of Wellington County, which must have been helpful. What is impressive about the Guelph scheme is its size. It was essentially a replica of the earlier Macdonald-Shaw subdivision at Kingston, but this one was more than twice as big and was also entirely owned by Macdonald. A piece of land which had originally belonged to the Canada Company was divided by Webster for Macdonald into 175 city lots.<sup>20</sup> As a subdivision it was not very successful — he managed to sell only about forty of the lots between 1855 and 1868<sup>21</sup> — but it again illustrates his capacity for patience as well as his growing ambition to succeed.

A second deal which in terms of acreage was even more ambitious and in which Macdonald was clearly looking for a quick profit, was the purchase and resale of the so-called "Pickersgill Lands". The "Pickersgill Lands" are an interesting case of continuous 19th century land speculation on a large scale. Macdonald was by no means the first nor the last speculator to have them pass through his hands during their tangled history. Much of this package of land was amassed originally by the wholesale merchant firm of James Holmes and Company, a Toronto satellite of a Montreal firm. They were farm lands of varying quality scattered through twelve townships in Canada West, from Leeds County in the west to Essex County in the east. James Holmes and Company went bankrupt in 1845. The lands were then bought at auction by the firm of W. C. Pickersgill and Company, a New York mercantile concern with extensive connections in Great Britain and in British North America. Some of Pickersgill and Company's Canadian business was handled by John Rose of Montreal, then a rapidly rising young lawyer. In 1852 Rose negotiated the sale of 9700 acres of Pickersgill land to his old friend John A. Macdonald, for the bargain price of £2,530-0-0.<sup>22</sup> In this case Macdonald again had a business partner, who turns out to be the Hon. W. B. Robinson, Member of the Legislative Assembly, sometime Inspector-General and Commissioner of Crown Lands, Commissioner of the Canada Company and brother of the great Chief Justice.<sup>23</sup> The partners invested £250-0-0 a piece in a down payment and sold the entire package within a year to two other speculators, John Ewart and George Lount, for £4700-0-0, a profit for Macdonald and Robinson of almost £1200-0-0 each.<sup>24</sup>

The "Pickersgill Lands" are a good example of Macdonald's main method of land speculation at its most successful. The method was simply to buy land at as cheap a price as possible with as small a down payment as possible, and then to sell out at a profit as quickly

as possible, before having to make additional cash payments on the principal and interest. When it worked it could be extremely profitable, but if it didn't work he could be in trouble. "The fact is," he once confided to Samuel Thompson, who was looking for some financial help for the Conservative paper, the Toronto *Colonist*, "that I like others last year speculated too heavily in real estate. The lands are on my hands and the purchase monies are falling due and I am put to my wit's end to make my pay<sup>ts</sup>."<sup>25</sup>

Another enterprise in which Macdonald was trying to make his method produce a quick profit and in which he again had some high powered associates concerned a piece of swampy ground in the neighbourhood of Sarnia. Again the story is complicated. In 1853 the firm of C. S. Gzowski and Company received a contract to build the eastern portion of the Grand Trunk Railway which was to have its terminus at Sarnia. Macdonald, who was for some years legal adviser to Gzowski and Company, negotiated the sale to the Company of "the marsh and shoal at Point Edward in Sarnia". The land was ordnance land, the property of the British government. Besides acting as the company's solicitor Macdonald also had what he later called "a silent interest" of his own in the property.<sup>26</sup> When the transaction was completed, after deducting the land actually needed for railway purposes and land still reserved for military reasons, there were almost 600 acres left over, enough, according to one British officer to build a city of 30,000 people on.<sup>27</sup> This land had become the property of a select little syndicate which included C. S. Gzowski, David L. Macpherson, Luther Hamilton Holton, A. T. Galt and John A. Macdonald, who, to quote Macdonald, "being all mutual friends" had decided that since Sarnia was expected to be the terminus of both the Grand Trunk and the Great Western Railways, "it might be a good place for those speculatively inclined to invest in".<sup>28</sup> On his own Macdonald also bought for £5050-0-0, 2008 acres at Sarnia from the Hon. Malcolm Cameron (another indefatigable speculator)<sup>29</sup> all of which he subsequently sold to his former partners, Gzowski, Holton, Macpherson and Galt.<sup>30</sup>

The fourth major area in which Macdonald invested heavily in real estate was Toronto. It is difficult to summarize his Toronto activities because his holdings tended to come and go and because they were scattered in the 1850's and 60's through at least four Toronto wards.<sup>31</sup> Two main business ventures however will serve to illustrate the nature of his Toronto operation. The first of these was part of the large estate of the Hon. George Crookshank, which was bought by A. J.

Macdonell in 1853 and by John A. Macdonald about 1856, after Macdonell had become his law partner. This seems to have been a long range investment, made in advance of the expansion of Toronto, for it comprised eighteen city lots in what is now the area of Bathurst Street, between Queen and College Streets.<sup>32</sup> Macdonald thought about selling these lots several times but they were still in his hands, intact as late as 1869,<sup>33</sup> and he was still paying taxes on some if not all of them in 1878.<sup>34</sup>

The other ambitious Toronto scheme was the purchase in 1859 of a half interest in a large four storey office building on King Street, between Bay and York. (The other half was owned by David L. Macpherson). This prestige location attracted such high class tenants as Fleming and Schreiber, engineers, and Cumberland and Storm, architects.<sup>35</sup> In 1860, the only date for which figures have been found, the building was producing a net revenue of about \$860.00 per month.<sup>36</sup>

There are other examples which could be cited of property bought and sold by John A. Macdonald but enough is enough. It cannot be said that all of Macdonald's speculations were successful, quite a few of them were anything but successful, but the point is that he consistently tried to make a profit by the business of buying and selling land. He considered himself in fact an expert at it. "I thoroughly understand that business" he wrote to Isaac Buchanan in 1862 "and can invest without chance or risk of loss".<sup>37</sup>

Macdonald's early business interests were by no means confined to speculation in land, though that was probably the kind of business he felt most qualified to undertake. He was of course by profession a lawyer. What kind of lawyer was he? The answer seems to be that he was primarily a corporation lawyer, for by far the greatest proportion of his firm's business was done on behalf of a single large company, the Trust and Loan Company of Upper Canada, which was in fact (from 1850 on) a British firm. The accounts of the legal firm of Macdonald and Patton are extant for the years 1864-1870. They show that the income from Trust and Loan Company business was always at least two-thirds of the firm's total income. (In some years it was almost all of the firm's income).<sup>38</sup> The Trust and Loan Company of course, dealt largely in mortgages on land, as did in a smaller way, Macdonald's other major corporate client, the Commercial Bank of the Midland District. The law practice thus fitted in neatly with Macdonald's



preoccupation with real estate and beyond doubt threw numerous opportunities in his way.

Still land was not the only commodity which his practice or his own business instincts led him into contact with. As a lawyer he dealt with many different kinds of businesses, including the business of transportation, with steamships, railways and road companies. Quite early in his legal career for instance, in 1847, when he was still in partnership with Alexander Campbell, he became joint owner with Campbell of the steamship *Island Queen*.<sup>39</sup> Macdonald's encounters with ships were always brief. The *Island Queen* was resold the same year.<sup>40</sup> On at least two other occasions Macdonald invested briefly in lake steamers. In 1856 he spent £750-0-0 to help John Shaw and W. G. Hinds launch the S.S. *Monarch* of Montreal. The *Monarch* promptly sank off Toronto, a total wreck.<sup>41</sup> In 1864 Macdonald bought as sole owner, a brand new steam yacht, the *Fairy*, just built at Hamilton, which he resold almost immediately,<sup>42</sup> perhaps before the *Fairy* had time to sink as well.

Macdonald's early railway career is somewhat curious. He was certainly involved in railway promotion; he acquired a reputation as a man who knew a lot about railways, but he does not seem to have ever invested in any large way in railroads — a fact which in the 1850's and 60's could imply more business sense than was possessed by many of his contemporaries. The one major railway scheme with which he was closely connected never got off the ground though not for want of trying on his part. The history of the company known at times as the Great Southern, the Great South Western, the Niagara and Detroit Rivers Railway and mostly just as "the Southern" is more than usually tangled, mainly because it suffered from a great schism. Indeed it had for some time rival and co-existing presidents and boards of directors, known variously as the "Mercer Board," and the "Macbeth Board" (the latter was also sometimes called the "Morton Board"), both of which claimed to be the rightful proprietors of this unbuilt (and never built) railroad.<sup>43</sup> Macdonald belonged to the "Morton" faction, because he was and had been for twenty years, legal counsel to James Morton, a Kingston brewer, distiller, foundry owner and would-be railway contractor. In this case Macdonald's role went far beyond merely representing his client. It was not the lawyer who acted as "front man" for the railwayman but the reverse. Morton's presence in the company only thinly disguised the actual guiding mind of his friend the Hon. Attorney General West. Morton in fact seems never to have had

a very clear grasp of the companies' twists and turns and consistently refused to act on his own. His correspondence with the company is full of declarations that "he could do nothing without the concurrence of the Hon. John A. Macdonald"<sup>44</sup> or that matters must be delayed "so as to enable us to have the privilege of the presence and advice of the Hon. John A. Macdonald".<sup>45</sup> "It is perfectly well known", Isaac Buchanan wrote to Macdonald in June, 1859 "that any life that has been in Mr. Morton's movements in the past has been from you, and that any hope of his doing anything in the future is built on you by the directors and all connected with the railway. Mr. Morton has in fact been viewed a mere automaton in your hands".<sup>46</sup> It was only Macdonald's business reputation which kept Morton in the company at all. When his railroad colleagues began to suspect that Morton did not have sufficient assets to carry out his obligations to the company (he had contracted to build part of the line) Macdonald personally assured the doubters of Morton's solvency and to show his faith in his friend co-signed a bond which made him and his co-guarantor (George Macbeth, M.L.A.) legally responsible to the extent of £16,000-0-0 each, in case of Morton's default.<sup>47</sup> The company was duly impressed for, in the words of its secretary "both these gentlemen are known to possess personal estate to a very considerable amount in bank stock and other securities."<sup>48</sup> Though Morton was far from solvent in fact and never built any of the railroad, Macdonald avoided forfeiting his bond. How this was done is not entirely clear. Perhaps the fact that Macbeth, his fellow guarantor, ultimately became sole president of the railroad had something to do with it.

Road companies in the Kingston area also attracted Macdonald's interest, both as lawyer and private businessman and, it may be added, as politician, for one of his constant election themes was the increased metropolitan dominance of Kingston over its underexploited hinterland through an expanded network of roads. As early as 1845 Macdonald and Campbell were handling the legal affairs of the Midland District Turnpike Trust.<sup>49</sup> Macdonald was a director of at least two other local road companies, the Kingston and Philippsville Road Company and the Perth Road Company,<sup>50</sup> and a stockholder in a third, the Kingston, Pittsburgh and Gananoque Road Company.<sup>51</sup>

He was also active as a director in the affairs of several other kinds of companies. He had been appointed a director of the Commercial Bank in 1839 when he was only twenty four. He was later a director of the Kingston Water Works Company<sup>52</sup>, the Midland District

Building Society<sup>53</sup> and the Kingston Fire and Marine Insurance Company.<sup>54</sup> Before 1860 he was already on the board of directors of two British firms as well, serving on the London board of the Trust and Loan Company of Upper Canada and as trustee and director of the Times and Beacon Assurance Company of London.<sup>55</sup>

Macdonald's highest official status as a businessman was achieved in 1864 when he became president of the St. Lawrence Warehouse, Dock and Wharfage Company of Quebec City.<sup>56</sup> The St. Lawrence Warehouse Dock and Wharfage Company was also in reality a British firm, at least after it was taken over in 1866 (much as the Trust and Loan Company was taken over in 1850) and in fact was closely connected with the Trust and Loan Company.<sup>57</sup> The Company was originally chartered in 1857 with power "to construct a harbour, wharves and other works" . . . "for the mooring, shelter loading and unloading of vessels."<sup>58</sup> Macdonald was president of the company from 1864 to 1889.<sup>59</sup> It may be that his part in the company's affairs was largely that of a useful figurehead but it is worth noting that he survived (and may well have engineered) the take over by British capital in 1866, that the President, by amendment to the company's original charter had a casting vote at meetings of the board<sup>60</sup> and that the Secretary and Superintendent of the Company at Quebec was for many years James Patton Jr. James Patton Sr. was Macdonald's law partner from 1864 to 1878.

John A. Macdonald's well known political style was open, casual and free-wheeling. Yet he was in some ways, a very private man. There were some things about his life that were unknown to his contemporaries and unknown to his many biographers, including his nephew and his private secretary, unknown because he didn't want them to be known. Macdonald's career as a businessman is not of this private character. He operated in public and he left behind a set of papers which provide ample details of his business affairs. The fact that this material has been so little used in studies of Macdonald's life and work implies either very casual examination of his papers or a series of conscious decisions to ignore this side of his life, on the grounds that it is not relevant to his more important political career. Some of Macdonald's contemporaries, even some contemporary politicians, have been described as businessmen. In Professor Creighton's biography for example John Hillyard Cameron, who appears as Macdonald's chief early political rival for leadership carried out "daring and successful speculations in real estate."<sup>61</sup> Francis Hincks "possessed himself a piece of government

property . . . close to the junction of the railway"<sup>62</sup>, but no such actions are attributed to Macdonald, by Professor Creighton or by anyone else. He has been portrayed, and it seems safe to say deliberately portrayed, as a man for whom the mere making of money was a secondary, possibly even a distasteful concern. This approach to Macdonald's career has placed some curious strains on his biographers, for whom it has sometimes been necessary to write about the ordinary as if it were the extraordinary. Thus it becomes a surprising fact that Macdonald could devote two-thirds of a speech in Kingston to the business prospects of his home town before getting to "really provincial affairs".<sup>63</sup> Thus a man like David Shaw is introduced to the reader as a shadowy, elusive political go-between<sup>64</sup> rather than as what he really was, just another of Macdonald's business partners. Thus a man like O. S. Gildersleeve, in his political guise as Macdonald's opponent at the polls becomes "an unknown Kingstonian".<sup>65</sup> Unknown in "really provincial affairs" perhaps but hardly unknown as a businessman who headed an old established shipping company on the Great Lakes and who was three times Mayor of Kingston.<sup>66</sup>

No, there is nothing mysterious or extraordinary about Macdonald's pursuit of business wealth. He was a businessman, and whether or not he was a consistently successful businessman (who was in pre-Confederation Canada?) he spent a good deal of time, energy and cash, in the hope of making himself rich. But the question must inevitably be asked, does it really matter? Does it really alter the traditional picture of Macdonald in any important way? Does it have any real bearing on his better known career as a public man?

In a recent series of biographical articles, Professor Donald Swainson has studied the careers of a number of nineteenth century Canadian figures who were both businessmen and politicians.<sup>67</sup> Professor Swainson's subjects, men like J. W. Crawford, Alexander Campbell, Thomas Clark Street and George A. Kirkpatrick, were second or third rank politicians, but businessmen of or near the first rank. Professor Swainson has concluded that to describe these men simply as politicians is misleading, they were businessmen in politics who often had definite business aims and interests to advance through their political careers.<sup>68</sup> He also concludes that "in ways difficult to document" they influenced the formation of public policy<sup>69</sup>, that they were typical of most of their other political colleagues and that this similarity of type "helps to explain much about policy formation in nineteenth century Canada."<sup>70</sup>

Is it possible to extend Professor Swainson's hypothesis to include a first rank politician like John A. Macdonald? It is certainly possible to show that in the period under examination, Macdonald at times gave direct political assistance to particular business concerns in which he had a personal interest and it may be well to bear in mind that throughout most of this period he was at all times a Member of the Legislature, most of the time, (1847-8, 1854-62, 1864-67), a Minister of the Crown, and ultimately Prime Minister of Canada. In what political ways did Macdonald smooth his own business path? A brief look at legislation relating to some of the businesses with which he has been identified yields some direct and some indirect evidence. A sampling of the Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada for the years 1845 to 1865 produces two petitions and seven actual pieces of legislation by which the charters of either the Trust and Loan Company or the Commercial Bank were amended to give those companies increased operating powers. On all but two occasions these petitions and these bills were introduced in the legislature by Macdonald himself.<sup>71</sup> Between 1855 and 1860 when Macdonald was struggling to arrange the affairs of the "Southern" railroad to his satisfaction, the charter of that company was amended in the House no less than six times.<sup>72</sup> These amendments were not introduced by Macdonald but that is not surprising since there were usually plenty of other "Southern" railroad magnates in the House, in fact on both sides of the House, men such as Isaac Buchanan, James Morton, George Macbeth, David Christie, Arthur Rankin and Michael Hamilton Foley. Still it is difficult to see how the railway could have had its charter amended with such ease and frequency without the active co-operation of the joint Premier and Attorney General West.

The St. Lawrence Warehouse, Dock and Wharfage Company provides an even more striking example of indirect political influence. In the period immediately after Confederation the company was re-incorporated in the Province of Quebec under a new provincial charter. The Company's British directors and their lawyers, the powerful London firm of Bischoff, Coxe and Bompas, were anxious that the new charter should pass both houses of the Quebec Legislature without significant amendment, and they wanted a reliable man on the spot to "take charge of the same and do all that is requisite".<sup>73</sup> Obviously Macdonald as president of the company and as Prime Minister could not personally oversee the passage of the act of incorporation at Quebec. But the man who was given that job, who did "all that was

requisite" to persuade members of the Legislative Assembly and Council of Quebec to give the bill an easy passage might as well have been Macdonald himself. He was Hewitt Bernard, who for the previous ten years had been Macdonald's chief assistant and at this time was his Deputy Minister. He was also of course his brother-in-law.

It is one thing to allege that Macdonald, as politician, tried to help out Macdonald, as businessman, when he could. It is quite another matter to show that Macdonald as Party Leader, as Prime Minister, as policy maker, as nation builder, was influenced in significant ways by the habits, the experience, the mentality of Macdonald the businessman. This is the area which Professor Swainson so rightly says is "difficult to document". If it can be documented conclusively at all it can only be done by more extensive research than has so far been undertaken. It can only be done by a careful comparison in depth of the habits of mind, the code of beliefs, the rules of the game under which Macdonald operated in both his private and his public capacities in order to see where, if at all, the two coincide. Yet one of two tentative observations may be in order. There is nothing very novel about the opinion which holds that throughout much of our history, this country has been run by, or for, businessmen. What is being suggested here is that John A. Macdonald should be thought about and studied and written about, not only as one of the politicians who have tried to run the country but as one of those businessmen as well. What is being suggested is that what he did as a public figure should be viewed not only in the light of his long political experience but also in the light of his even longer and equally varied business experience. Think for instance of that famous piece of statesmanship, the National Policy. In his recent admirable book on the period 1874 to 1896 Professor Peter Waite discusses the background of the National Policy and pinpoints its origin or "provenance" to a meeting which Macdonald had in 1876 with a group of influential Montreal businessmen.<sup>74</sup> Undoubtedly in one sense, Professor Waite is perfectly right. It was at that precise point in time that Macdonald made up his mind to go for a high tariff policy, for protection to native industry. But did he really have to make up his mind at all? It can be argued that by 1876 protection was a policy which had the support of a majority of urban Canadian businessmen, and Macdonald, like most of his political contemporaries, was an urban Canadian businessman. Is it not possible that some at least of the "provenance" of the National Policy, some of the "provenance" of Macdonald's public career as a whole, begins on another day, or in

another place? Perhaps on the day in 1839 when he was made a director of the Commercial Bank? Or on the day in 1842 when he first bought a piece of real estate cheap in the hope of selling it dear?

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> These aspects of Macdonald's early life are discussed in part in Johnson, J. K. (ed.), *Affectionately Yours, The Letters of Sir John A. Macdonald and his Family*, (Toronto, 1969) and in Johnson, J. K. "Sir James Gowan, Sir John A. Macdonald and the Rebellion of 1837", *Ontario History*, Volume LX, No. 2 (June, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Creighton, D. G., John A. Macdonald, Volume I, *The Young Politician*, (Toronto, 1956), p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Creighton, D. G., John A. Macdonald, Volume II, *The Old Chieftain*, (Toronto, 1956), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Public Archives of Canada, Macdonald Papers, M.G. 26, A, Volume 543, p. 256970. (Papers relating to the John McLean Estate).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257080.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257296.

<sup>7</sup> PAC, Provincial Secretary's Office, R.G. 5, C 1, Volume 164, no. 11623. (Macdonald to John Counter, September 4, 1845).

<sup>8</sup> PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 543, pp. 257109-257111.

<sup>9</sup> PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 551, p. 259865. (Papers relating to Kingston Property).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259944.

<sup>11</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> PAC, MG 9, D 8-18, Lennox and Addington Historical Society Collection, (S. M. Benson Papers) p. 8497.

<sup>13</sup> PAC, J. G. Moylan Papers, MG 29, G 29. Macdonald to Moylan, December 14, 1864.

<sup>14</sup> PAC, Lennox and Addington Historical Society Collection, (John Benson Papers) p. 3040.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3045.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3058.

<sup>17</sup> PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 545, p. 257881. (Macdonald to Denistoun, October 31, 1856).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258202.

<sup>19</sup> PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 542, p. 256276.

<sup>20</sup> PAC, Macdonald Papers (Accounts) pp. 260734-260909.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260855.

<sup>22</sup> PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 544, p. 257750 (Papers relating to the Pickersgill lands).

<sup>23</sup> Professor Creighton lists Robinson among a group whom Macdonald considered "doubtful friends". Creighton, Volume I, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 544, p. 257782.

<sup>25</sup> PAC, Thompson family papers, M.G. 24, I140. Macdonald to Thompson, January 22, 1855.

<sup>26</sup> Macdonald, John A., *Address of the Hon. John A. Macdonald to the Electors of the City of Kingston, with Extracts from Mr. Macdonald's speeches delivered on different occasions in the years 1860 and 1861*. n.p. 1861, p. 115.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 29 Macdonald had earlier tried to sell Cameron some of the Pickersgill lands, but without success.
- 30 Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
- 31 PAC, Macdonald Papers, Accounts, pp. 260947-962664.
- 32 PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 542, p. 256584 (Crookshank Estate).
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 256710. James Shannon to Macdonald, November 8, 1869.
- 34 PAC, Macdonald Papers. Accounts, p. 263164.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 261076, 261103.
- 36 PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 247, p. 11037, D. L. Macpherson to Macdonald, June 11, 1860.
- 37 PAC, Buchanan Papers, MG 24, D 16, Volume 41, p. 33225.
- 38 PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 542, pp. 256734-256743.
- 39 PAC, Department of Transport, RG 12, A 1. Shipping Register, Kingston, Volume 205, p. 42.
- 40 *Loc. cit.*
- 41 *Ibid.*, Montreal Register, Volume 178, no. 13.
- 42 *Ibid.*, Kingston Register, Volume 206, p. 819.
- 43 PAC, Buchanan Papers, Volume 41, p. 65922a.
- 44 PAC, Buchanan Papers, Volume 95, p. 66694. (Minutes of the Niagara and Detroit Rivers Railway Company, June 20, 1859).
- 45 *Ibid.*, Volume 49, pp. 37261-37262. Morton to Buchanan, September 9, 1857.
- 46 *Ibid.*, Volume 40, p. 32867. Buchanan to Macdonald, October 30, 1858.
- 47 *Ibid.*, Volume 95, p. 66507. Bond of James Morton, George Macbeth and John A. Macdonald to the Niagara and Detroit Rivers Railway Company, June 22, 1859.
- 48 *Ibid.*, Volume 95, p. 66437. Report to the Board of W. L. Smart, Secretary, December 1, 1859.
- 49 PAC, Department of National Revenue, RG 16, A 2, Volume 21, No. 35.
- 50 *A Directory of the City of Kingston*, (Kingston, 1855) p. 66.
- 51 PAC, Macdonald Papers, Accounts, p. 260229.
- 52 *A Directory of the City of Kingston*, (Kingston, 1855) p. 61.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 54 MacKay, R. S. ed., *The Canadian Directory*, (Montreal, 1851) p. 120.
- 55 *Kingston Daily News*, December 10, 1857.
- 56 *The Quebec Directory for 1864-5*, (Quebec, 1865) p. 493.
- 57 PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 300, Pt. II, p. 137309. Papers relating to the St. Lawrence Warehouse, Dock and Wharfage Company.
- 58 20 Vic. C. 174 (1857).
- 59 *Cherrier's Quebec Directory for 1888-89*, (Quebec, 1889).
- 60 22 Vic. C. 106 (1859).
- 61 Creighton, Volume 1, p. 213.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 336.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 343.
- 66 Young, A. G., *Great Lakes Saga, the Influence of one Family on the Development of Canadian Shipping on the Great Lakes, 1816-1931*. (Owen Sound, 1965), pp. 43-52. O. S. Gildersleeve was also the son-in-law of William Henry Draper.
- 67 Swainson, D., "Business and Politics: The Career of John Willoughby Crawford", *Ontario History*, LXI, No. 4 (December, 1969); "The Public Career



of Thomas Clarke Street, U.E.L.", *The Loyalist Gazette*, Volume VII, No. 1, (Spring, 1969); "Alexander Campbell: General Manager of the Conservative Party (Eastern Ontario Section), *Historic Kingston*, No. 17 (1968); "George Airey Kirkpatrick: Political Patrician", *Historic Kingston*, No. 19 (1970).

<sup>68</sup> Swainson, D., "Business and Politics: The Career of John Willoughby Crawford", *Ontario History*, LXI, No. 4 (December, 1969), pp. 234-235.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>70</sup> Swainson, D., "George Airey Kirkpatrick: Political Patrician", *Historic Kingston*, No. 19 (1970) p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Province of Canada, Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 1844-5, Volume IV, pp. 298, 306; 1846, Volume V, pp. 60, 96, 199; 1849, Volume VIII, p. 197; 1850, Volume IX, p. 165; 1862, Volume XX, pp. 121, 132, 263. Macdonald also served as chairman of at least one select committee which considered an amendment to the Commercial Bank Charter (*Journal*, 1846, Volume V, p. 63).

<sup>72</sup> Dorman, R., *A Statutory History of the Steam and Electric Railways of Canada, 1836-1937*, (Ottawa, 1938) p. 413.

<sup>73</sup> PAC, Macdonald Papers, Volume 300, Pt. II, p. 137269. Bischoff, Coxe and Bompas to Hewitt Bernard, February 5, 1868.

<sup>74</sup> Waite, P. B., *Canada, 1874-1896, Arduous Destiny*, (Toronto, 1971) p. 80.