

From Sea to Sea: The Road to Confederation

Course Overview

Establishing a border between what would eventually be Canada and the United States took from 1713 to 1846. Done piecemeal, the process was driven not only by conquest, revolution and diplomatic negotiations, but also by ignorance of the geography and some world-class surveying. In the 1850s and 60s deadlocked politics in Britain's North American colonies, fear of American annexation and London's unwillingness to pay for the colonies' defense or fund their railways were all factors that led to Confederation. Completion of the border now created the opportunity to forge a nation, the Dominion of Canada, out of colonies divided by language, religion and culture. Join us as a panel of expert historians share their insights.

September 22: The Growth of British North America (1713-74)

Britain acquired Acadia (the French Maritimes) and Quebec from France, but little British settlement took place whereas the American colonies had a population of two million. Would Protestant Britain, where the Church of Rome was seen as a security threat, allow Catholic worship and permit French civil law in her North American colonies? After the brutal expulsion of the Acadians, the British adopted a more enlightened policy (the Quebec Act of 1774), laying the foundations for a bicultural Canada.

By Garrett Polman (PhD/Chicago) who pursued graduate studies in Classics and History at Chicago, Berlin and at Oxford. Garrett is a former member of the Department of External Affairs and teaches at Elder College and SFU.

September 29: The American Revolution and the Coming of the Loyalists

The Peace of Paris of 1783 concluded the War of American Independence. Britain now resettled three groups of refugees: British-American colonists who wanted to remain loyal to the Crown; blacks, mostly slaves who had been freed by the British for fighting on their side during the Revolutionary War; and Iroquois who had sided with the British. The coming of the Loyalists led to the creation of two new provinces (New Brunswick and Ontario), but poorly treated, many blacks left for Sierra Leone in Africa.

By Garrett Polman

October 6: Establishing a Border for British North America (1794-1846)

The Treaty of Paris (1783) had defined the border of the new USA from the Atlantic up to Lake of the Woods, but owing to errors in the maps, ambiguities in the treaty and various disputes, actually agreeing on the border took decades. In 1818 Britain and the US agreed to extend the border from Lake of the Woods up to the Rockies along the 49th parallel. Dividing up the Pacific Northwest, the unresolved territory between the Rockies and the Pacific, was finally settled in the Oregon Treaty of 1846. With the transcontinental border completed, the geographic conditions were now in place for the Confederation of the eastern provinces to forge a nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

By Garrett Polman

October 13: The War of 1812: Securing British North America

The Anglo American War of 1812-1814 was sparked by trade and territorial conflicts between Britain and the United States. As military history, the farcical and ultimately desultory effects of the campaigns are obscured in the aftermath of the Treaty of Ghent (1814) and the revised governance models for the British American colonies. In the United States the war made a national hero of Andrew Jackson, vindicated the policies of Jefferson and Madison and confirmed the dominance of the Democratic-Republican Party over the Federalist Party.

Eric Nellis (PhD/UBC), Associate Professor of History Emeritus at UBC. Eric is an expert in American history and the author of a number of books.

October 20: The United States and Canadian Confederation

The United States was both a threat and a promise to British North America as politicians in Canada and the Maritime colonies debated Confederation in the 1860s. As the Civil War progressed, key American politicians and military officials saw numerous incidents involving Britain and her northern colonies as a justification to invade and annex British North America. Powerful members of Abraham Lincoln's Republican Party succeeded in abrogating the Reciprocity Treaty that seemed to have brought prosperity to BNA over the previous decade. Irish veterans of the Union Army formed the Fenian Brotherhood with the goal to invade BNA to obtain a bargaining chip to win independence for their oppressed countrymen in Ireland. How did these events influence the debates over Confederation? It will be demonstrated that the looming menace of the Americans was a significant factor in moving BNA politicians to achieve Confederation in 1867.

Bob Fuhr (MA/McGill) is an instructor in History at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Bob is an expert in post-colonial American history.

October 27: Colony to Nation: The Confederation of Canada

In 1867 the eastern British North American colonies fought through both internal and external conflicts to achieve confederation and went on to achieve a transcontinental nation in 1871. As established in 1841 by the British government, the union of Upper and Lower Canada eventually proved politically unworkable and led to endless conflict between the French and English components of the union. The solution was a federal system of government which combined the Maritime colonies and Canada. Urgency for Confederation was due to threats which emanated from the United States because of Britain's support of the Southern confederacy. Political leaders faced down these external threats and considerable Maritime resistance. British support for Confederation led to a successful conclusion. The purchase of the Rupert's land and the North West from the Hudson Bay Company and the promise to the Pacific colony of British Columbia to build a transcontinental railway completed the national vision.

By Allan Orr (MA/UBC), a retired teacher of history.

Sessions:

New Delbrook Rec Centre, 851 West Queens Road, North Vancouver
Fridays, 10-11:30 am
September 22 to October 27