

WHAT LED TO THE IDEA OF CONFEDERATION?

The colonies in British North America had been developing quickly. But between the colonies in eastern and western British North America was the vast expanse of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory. This region was not a British colony, but it was controlled by the British through Hudson's Bay Company.

A LAND DIVIDED

By 1864, Hudson's Bay Company was looking to sell its interests in Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory, due to a steep decline in the fur trade. This area was home to thousands of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Look at the map in Figure 2.1. Who might be interested in gaining control of the region from Hudson's Bay Company?

How does the map in Figure 2.1 differ from a map of Canada today?

FIGURE 2.1 In 1864, British North America was made up of the regions shown in green on this map. **Analyze:** How might the expanse of British North America pose challenges to unifying it?

British North America and Surrounding Areas, 1864



SEPARATE COLONIAL GOVERNMENTS

Although the colonies remained part of Britain, they operated independently of one another. They pursued policies that reflected their own best interests. Each colony had its own government of locally elected representatives, and each was dealing with political, economic, and military issues. Leaders in some of the colonies began to consider whether **Confederation**, a union of the colonies, was a possible solution to the issues. Read the speech excerpt from Thomas D'Arcy McGee in Figure 2.2. McGee was an Irish immigrant and member of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada. What obstacles might need to be overcome to make McGee's vision for Confederation a reality?

Confederation a union of, or an alliance among, colonies in British North America

"I see in the not remote distance, one great nationality ... all bound together by free institutions ... and free commerce. I see a generation of industrious [hard-working], contented, moral men, free in name and in fact—men capable of maintaining, in peace and in war, a constitution [law and principles of a government] worthy of such a country!"

— Thomas D'Arcy McGee, *Father of Confederation*

THREATS FROM THE UNITED STATES

Geographically, British North America was very large, and its system of defence was inadequate for its size. This made the colonies and territories an easy target if the Americans decided to push north across the border. Many American settlers were already claiming lands south of the Great Lakes that were populated by First Nations such as the Potawatomi and Cheyenne. The Americans displaced these nations in pursuit of more land and resources. In what way was this similar to what was happening in British North America at the same time?

FIGURE 2.2 Excerpt from a speech by McGee promoting Confederation in 1860. **Analyze:** Why do you think McGee repeats the word *free* in his speech?

MANIFEST DESTINY

As they succeeded in advancing west, many Americans believed it was their **manifest destiny**, or obvious right, to take over all of North America. Examine the painting in Figure 2.3. What is the main message the artist is trying to convey about manifest destiny?

manifest destiny American belief in a clear right and duty to expand throughout North America

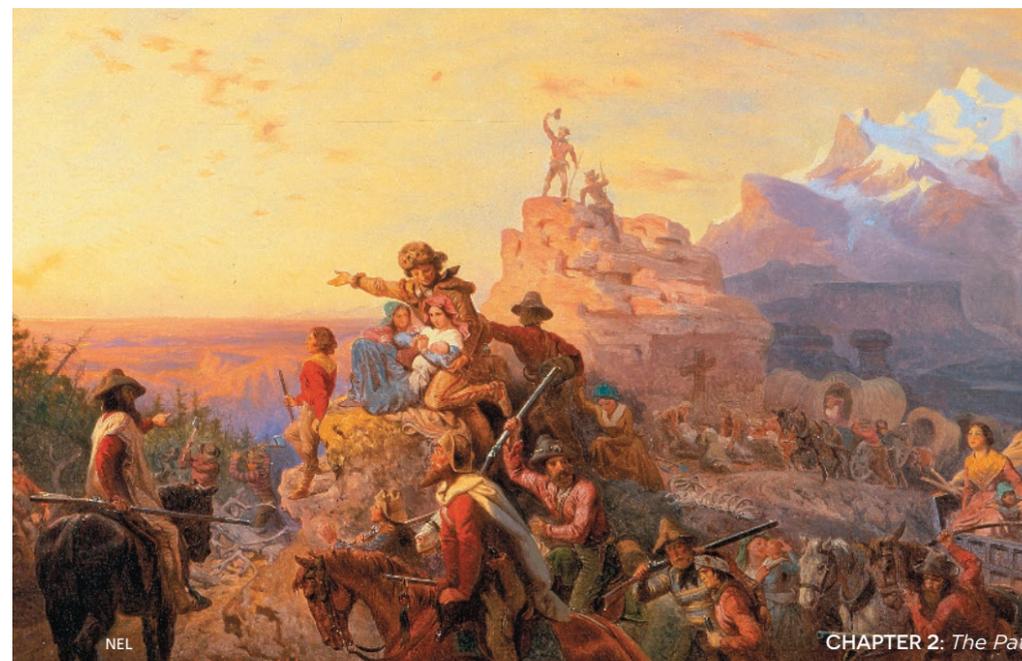


FIGURE 2.3 Artist Emanuel Leutze produced this painting in 1861. It was the basis of the mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* on display in the United States Capitol where Congress meets. **Analyze:** What situations, symbols, and techniques does the artist use to represent manifest destiny?

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

From 1861 to 1865, the United States was engaged in a civil war. It was a war of **secession**: a number of southern states wanted to break away from the rest of the United States. The main reason for this separatist movement was a disagreement about slavery. Most of the northern states had abolished slavery. But the southern states relied heavily on enslaved labour for their economic growth. The southern states tried to form a separate nation where slavery would be legal.

Britain declared itself neutral in the war. Neutrality meant Britain could continue to trade with both the northern and southern states. Britain strongly condemned slavery, but it also took measures to ensure the South did not cut off the supply of cotton to British textile mills.

The large army of the northern states won the war, keeping the United States together and ending slavery. This war caused the death of more than 600 000 Americans. It also increased American resentment toward Britain, and therefore toward British North America, for its divided support during the war. Examine **Figure 2.4**. What American threat is implied?



HOW THEY WENT TO TAKE CANADA.

secession withdrawal from a larger group, such as a country

FIGURE 2.4 In this 1861 cartoon, John Bull, the symbol of Britain, asks “Brother Jonathan,” a reference to the Americans, where they are running to. The Americans respond, “Just gwine [going] to take Canada.” **Analyze:** How would this cartoon increase fears of a United States invasion of British North America?

annexation incorporation of a territory into another territory

FIGURE 2.5 This is an excerpt from the July 2, 1866, Annexation bill, calling for the colonies of British North America to be incorporated into the United States. **Analyze:** What American attitude toward British North America does this bill convey?

“Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America ... that from the date thereof, the States of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada East, Canada West, and the Territories of Selkirk [Red River area], Saskatchewan, and [British] Columbia ... are constituted and admitted as States and Territories of the United States of America.”

— *United States Annexation bill*

ANNEXATION BY THE UNITED STATES

After the American Civil War, the very large and well-trained American army had no battles to fight. Should it choose to, it could easily dominate the colonies in British North America where its borders were not well defended. British North Americans also feared that the American pursuit of manifest destiny would put them at risk of being taken over by the United States. Being taken over by another territory is known as **annexation**. Fear of American annexation grew when, in 1866, Massachusetts Congressman Nathaniel Banks introduced an Annexation bill in the United States Congress. A bill is the first step in creating a new law. Read the excerpt from the Annexation bill in **Figure 2.5**. How might this bill be used to support the idea of Confederation in British North America?

THE UNITED STATES PURCHASES ALASKA

The Annexation bill did not pass. But the threat of annexation by the United States had been steadily increasing since 1859. It was then that Russia offered to sell Alaska to the United States. Russia lacked the financial resources to protect its interests in the region. Rather than sell Alaska to its European rival Britain, Russia approached the United States. The American Civil War delayed the sale, but the transaction was eventually finalized in March 1867 at a cost of \$7.2 million (about \$165 million in current Canadian dollars).

Why would the United States owning Alaska be a cause for concern in British North America?

THREATS FROM IRISH NATIONALISTS

Another threat to the security of the colonies in British North America came from the Irish Republican Brotherhood, also known as the **Fenians**. The Fenians opposed British rule over Ireland. They began forming as a secret society in Ireland in 1858.

In the United States, some Irish soldiers who had served in the American Civil War joined the Fenians. They plotted an armed invasion of British North America. The Fenians believed that the British colonies were vulnerable to attack and planned to take them hostage until Britain granted independence to Ireland. Many colonists feared that sentiments among Fenian immigrants in the United States would spill over into British North America.

Look at the painting in **Figure 2.6**. It shows militia in Orangeville, Ontario, preparing to defend against the Fenian invaders. What does this painting reveal about British North America’s reaction to the Fenian threat?

Fenians an Irish-Catholic organization in Ireland and the United States that turned to violence in an effort to liberate Ireland from British rule

FIGURE 2.6 *Orangeville Volunteers of 1866, Ready to Meet the Fenian Raiders* by Owen Staples, around 1925. **Analyze:** What does this painting suggest about the town’s support of the volunteer soldiers?



HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

To understand the past, historians research evidence of events, people, and developments. But how do they decide which stories to tell? Asking questions about the research they gather helps historians determine who and what might be historically significant and why.

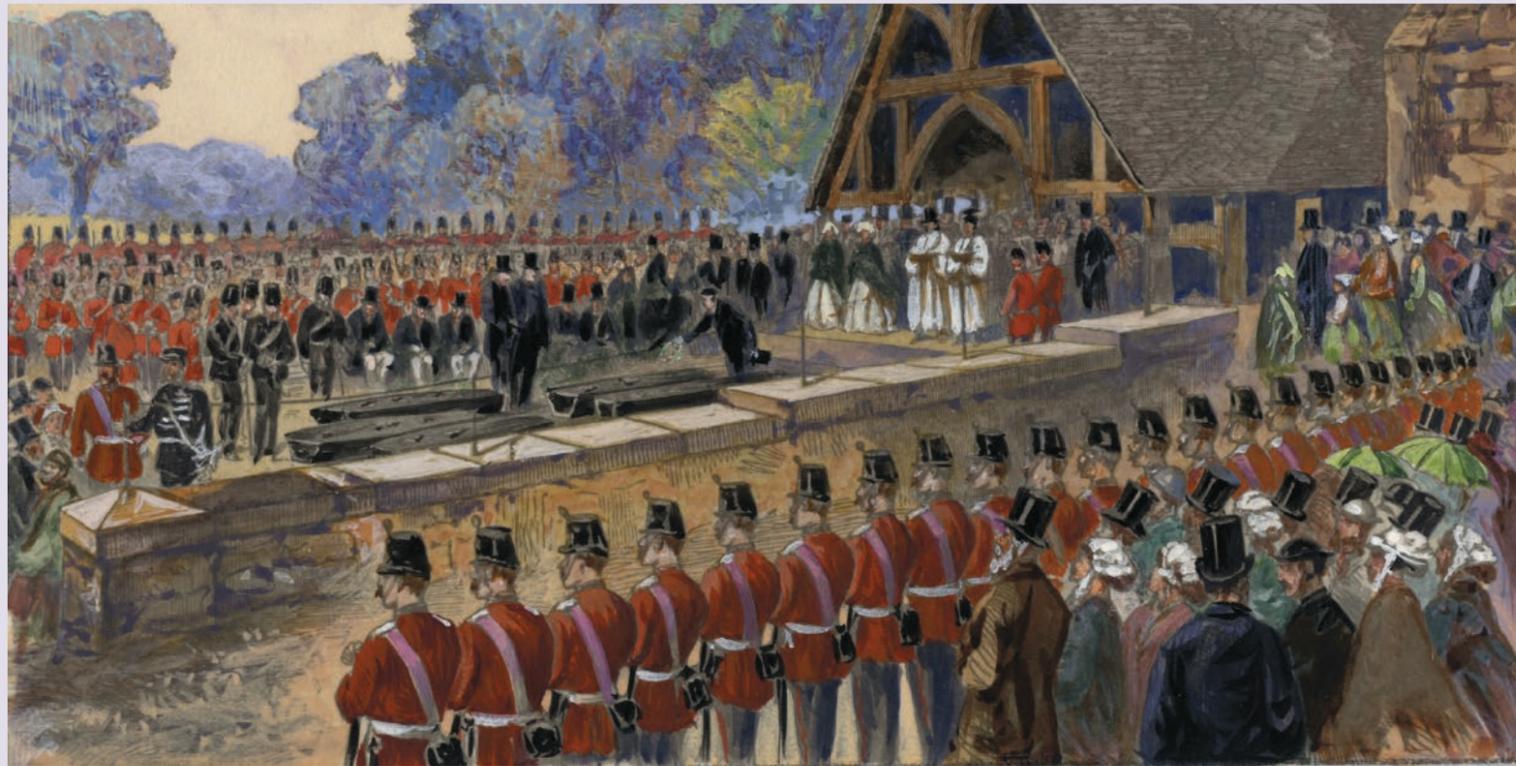
When you think about the historical significance of various events, people, and developments, you can ask yourself the following questions:

- Did the event, person, or development create a long-lasting change?
- If so, how many people were affected, and were they affected profoundly or deeply?
- Was this the first time that an event such as this occurred or an idea such as this was introduced?
- Does this event, person, or development reveal something about the past that is different from the present?
- How did the significance of this event, person, or development vary for different people?
- Has the historical significance of this event, person, or development changed over time?

CASE STUDY: FENIAN RAIDS

The Fenian raids were a series of small, failed invasions into British North America that occurred between 1866 and 1871. They received a lot of attention from people living in the British colonies. Examine the evidence in this case study and answer the inquiry question: Were the Fenian raids historically significant?

The Fenians began their mission in April 1866, targeting Campobello Island, New Brunswick. The colonial government knew about the plan and was able to quickly put down the attack with only a few buildings destroyed. However, the attack raised fear in the people of New Brunswick.



On June 2, 1866, about 800 Fenians attacked farther west, crossing the Niagara River from Buffalo, New York, into Canada West. The Fenians clashed with an inexperienced colonial militia at Ridgeway, near Fort Erie. Many of the colonial soldiers were college students who had learned to fire a rifle only the day before. The Fenians won a victory here and advanced toward Fort Erie. The two sides fought another bloody battle until the Fenians were forced to retreat back into the United States when additional colonial militia and British troops arrived.

In total, 10 colonial soldiers were killed in the battle at Ridgeway. Examine **Figure 2.7**, which depicts a funeral of volunteer soldiers killed at Ridgeway. This image appeared in a British newspaper. What do you think the artist was trying to communicate to his audience?

FIGURE 2.7 This is an illustration by Charles Fuller, based on an original wood engraving. The original engraving appeared in *The Illustrated London News* on June 30, 1866, and is entitled *Funeral of Canadian Volunteers Killed in a Skirmish with the Fenians: Scene in the Cemetery at Toronto*. **Analyze:** What mood do you think the artist was trying to create?

A few days after the battle at Fort Erie, the Fenians captured and stole goods from two small villages in Canada East, near Vermont in the northeastern United States. Their aim was to take control of Montréal. However, colonial troops defeated the Fenians near present-day Saint-Armand, Québec, before they were able to reach the city.

The Fenian raids heightened the colonists' distrust of American authorities. Read **Figure 2.8**. It contains part of a letter written by a young militia soldier about the Fenian raids. What does this excerpt tell you about the relationship between British North America and the United States?

"I ... am satisfied that a deep seated conviction [belief] was in the public mind of the Canadians that the American Authorities were not overly anxious to preserve peace on our borders. When one remarks surely the American Authorities were lax [not strict enough] in preventing the raid Canadians merely remark 'we never expected better of them' and rush on patiently to prepare for war against the Fenians.... They were surprised that the Fenians should have made the raid but scarcely at all astonished that they should have escaped the vigilance [attention] of the American Authorities."

— Alexander James Christie

FIGURE 2.8 This excerpt comes from a letter Christie wrote to his father from Ottawa on June 6, 1866. **Analyze:** What reason does Christie give about why the Fenian raids caused people in British North America to become more distrustful of their neighbours south of the border?

After the Fenian raids, colonial officials decided to provide the militia with more training and better weapons. Support also grew for uniting the colonies to strengthen defences. In the elections that followed the raid in New Brunswick, voters in the colony elected the politicians who supported Confederation, partly because of the Fenian threat.

TRY IT

1. Are the Fenian raids historically significant? Use evidence in this feature to answer at least two of the significance questions.
2. Are the Fenian raids relevant to us today? Why, or why not?

ECONOMIC ISSUES

North America had been a source of riches for Britain for more than 200 years. To keep control of the land and its valuable fur, fish, and timber resources, Britain had fought many lengthy and costly battles.

DEFENCE COSTS TO BRITAIN

In the 1860s, Britain helped protect the colonies in British North America from a possible takeover by the Fenians and from threats posed by American annexation. In 1862 alone, Britain sent more than 10 000 troops to British North America to defend it from any danger posed by the American Civil War. During the winter months, the St. Lawrence River was frozen, so soldiers could not travel inland by ship. Instead, they had to march a very lengthy distance northwest through New Brunswick to reach their posts in Canada East and beyond. Examine the image in **Figure 2.9**, which depicts this event. What do the details suggest about some of the challenges British soldiers faced protecting British North America?

FIGURE 2.9 This colour wood engraving on woven paper is entitled *British Troops on the March—Canada*. It was created by George C. Leighton and appeared in *The Illustrated London News* on March 15, 1862. **Analyze:** Who is shown with the British soldiers on their mission?



What challenges might soldiers face defending Canada today?

How were Britain's interests in British North America changing at this time?

Read the editorial statement in **Figure 2.10**. What does this source reveal about Britain's attitude toward defending British North America in the 1860s?

“Conscious as we are of our inability to protect these colonies by land in case of war, we must naturally rejoice at any event which seems to place them in a position in which they would be better able to protect themselves.”

— *Editorial, London Times*

FIGURE 2.10 This statement was published in the *London Times* on October 15, 1864. **Analyze:** Why do you think Britain would “naturally rejoice” if British North America were better able to protect itself?

NEED FOR NEW MARKETS

Recall from Chapter 1 that the United States cancelled the Reciprocity Treaty with Britain in 1865. British North America lost the favourable tax rate it had enjoyed on goods exchanged with the United States. This had a negative impact on the economy of the colonies. As a result, they were eager to find new markets for their products and resources. Read the speech excerpt from George Brown in **Figure 2.11**. Brown was the leader of the Liberal Party in the Province of Canada and founder of the *Globe* newspaper. How does Brown explain that Confederation would offer a solution to the economic troubles?

FIGURE 2.11 Excerpt from a speech by Brown given in Halifax, Nova Scotia, September 12, 1864. **Analyze:** What impact does Brown imply Confederation will have on the United States?

“But far in advance of all other advantages would be this, that union of all the Provinces would break down all trade barriers between us, and throw open at once to all a combined market of four millions of people. You in the east would send us your fish and your coals and your West India produce, while we would send you in return the flour and the grain and the meats you now buy in Boston and New York.”

— *George Brown, Father of Confederation*

CHECK-IN

- FORMULATE QUESTIONS** Skim this section and record three to five questions you have about what led to the idea of Confederation.
- COMMUNICATE** Create an image-based message for social media that reflects Britain's desire for its colonies in British North America to look after their own affairs.
- HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** Rank the reasons in support of uniting the colonies in order of significance.
- CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE** What were the intended and unintended consequences of the Fenian raids?