

Alexander Campbell (1822-1892) The Travails of a Father of Confederation

Ged Martin

Volume 105, numéro 1, spring 2013

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050744ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050744ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Martin, G. (2013). Alexander Campbell (1822-1892): The Travails of a Father of Confederation. *Ontario History*, 105(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050744ar>

Résumé de l'article

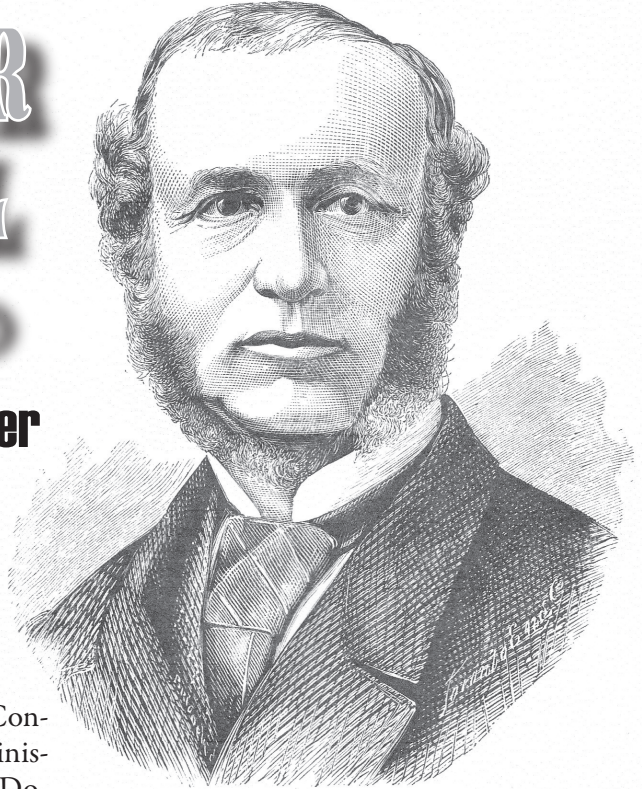
Quoique Père de la Confédération, Alexander Campbell est généralement éclipsé par John A. Macdonald, dont il a été le partenaire de 1843 à 1848 dans un cabinet d'avocats, et avec qui il a collaboré en politique, notamment comme leader du parti conservateur au Sénat jusqu'en 1887, quand il est devenu lieutenant-gouverneur de l'Ontario. La participation de Campbell à la vie publique n'était pas facile, puisqu'il souffrait d'une mobilité diminuée et d'attaques d'épilepsie. Son mariage avec Frederica Sandwith (en Angleterre en 1855) a pris fin en 1871, quand elle est retournée en Europe. (Plus tard elle a été déclarée folle et a passé plusieurs années dans des asiles.) À cause de la réticence victorienne, la vie privée de Campbell n'a guère été discutée publiquement. Mais la mort accidentelle de son fils cadet en 1886, soupçonnée initialement d'avoir été un suicide, a poussé quelques journalistes à soulever un peu le voile, nous laissant des indices qui nous permettent de remonter jusqu'aux maigres sources archivales.

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

(1822-1892)

The Travails of a Father of Confederation*

By Ged Martin



Although he was a Father of Confederation and a cabinet minister in the early years of the Dominion of Canada, Alexander Campbell is a shadowy figure, almost a caricature, perennially overshadowed by his fellow Kingstonian and one-time law partner, John A. Macdonald.¹ Campbell invariably saw himself as Macdonald's loyal

if sometimes candid friend; Sir John A. was sometimes impatiently censorious in return, on one occasion in the 1880s telling his secretary Joseph Pope, "Campbell hates me."² As Macdonald's biographer and custodian of his reputa-

* I owe particular thanks to Dr. Barbara J. Messamore of the University of the Fraser Valley for her help in the preparation of this article.

¹ Alexander Campbell is referred to as AC in these notes. A brief collection of tributes was issued after his death as *In Memoriam: Sir Alexander Campbell K.C.M.G.* (Toronto; no publisher given, 1892). The best survey of AC's career is by Donald Swainson in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* [cited as *DCB*], 12, 150-54, supplemented by Donald Swainson, "Alexander Campbell: General Manager of the Conservative Party (Eastern Ontario Section)," *Historic Kingston*, 17, 1969, 78-92. Both concentrate on his political role. A brief sketch in D.B. Read, *The Lieutenant-Governors of Upper Canada and Ontario 1792-1899* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1900), 229-33 avoids his private life. The Campbell Papers in the Ontario Archives are cited as AOC.P. All references are taken from F23-1. Correspondence is arranged chronologically, and a calendar is available on line (http://ao.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/100/LISTINGS_DESC2_INT/REF_ADD/F~2023-1?JUMP, consulted 16 September 2011).

² M. Pope, ed., *Public Servant: The Memoirs of Sir Joseph Pope* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1960), 50. See also R. Cartwright, *Reminiscences* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), 49. AC was knighted

Abstract

Although he was a father of Confederation, Alexander Campbell (1822-1892) is generally overshadowed by John A. Macdonald, whose law partner he was from 1843 to 1849, and whom he served for the first twenty years of the Dominion as Conservative party leader in the Senate, before retiring to become Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario in 1887. In fact, Campbell's participation in public life was an achievement, since he suffered from impairment of mobility and was also subject to epileptic attacks. His marriage in England in 1855 to Frederica Sandwith broke up when she returned to Europe in 1871. She was later certified as insane and spent several years in asylums. Victorian reticence generally prevented open allusion to the difficulties of Campbell's private life. The accidental death by shooting of his younger son in 1886, initially interpreted as suicide, prompted a few journalists to lift the veil and provide clues which this article traces back into the sparse archival record.

Résumé: *Quoique Père de la Confédération, Alexander Campbell est généralement éclipsé par John A. Macdonald, dont il a été le partenaire de 1843 à 1848 dans un cabinet d'avocats, et avec qui il a collaboré en politique, notamment comme leader du parti conservateur au Sénat jusqu'en 1887, quand il est devenu lieutenant-gouverneur de l'Ontario. La participation de Campbell à la vie publique n'était pas facile, puisqu'il souffrait d'une mobilité diminuée et d'attaques d'épilepsie. Son mariage avec Frederica Sandwith (en Angleterre en 1855) a pris fin en 1871, quand elle est retournée en Europe. (Plus tard elle a été déclarée folle et a passé plusieurs années dans des asiles.) À cause de la réticence victorienne, la vie privée de Campbell n'a guère été discutée publiquement. Mais la mort accidentelle de son fils cadet en 1886, soupçonnée initialement d'avoir été un suicide, a poussé quelques journalistes à soulever un peu le voile, nous laissant des indices qui nous permettent de remonter jusqu'aux maigres sources archivales.*

tion, Pope conducted a vendetta against Campbell's memory, despite having been forced to retract one of his more unlikely allegations within months of the appearance of his 1894 biography.³ Pope, who became Macdonald's secretary in 1881, complained that the "patronising" Campbell "seldom took off his coat or even his gloves" during election campaigns" but he always turned up when the victory was won."⁴ This was doubly unfair: as this article will show, Campbell was physically handicapped. Moreover, he had acted as Macdonald's election manager in Kingston until 1874.⁵ By contrast, Donald Creighton, Macdon-

in 1879. Cartwright's recollection that the prime minister also dragged up the Massacre of Glencoe, a cowardly attack on the Macdonalds by the Campbells in 1692, suggests that Macdonald's reactions were excessive.

³ On the death of Sir Narcisse Belleau in 1865, AC had curtly demanded "the leadership," which Pope had interpreted as a bid for the premiership. In fact, it simply referred to the post of Government leader in the Legislative Council. To Macdonald [undated, August 1865] in Pope, *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Sir Macdonald* (2 vols, Ottawa: J. Durie & Son, 1894), i, 287, ii, 355. J. Pope, *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Sir John Alexander Macdonald* (Toronto: Musson Book Company, 1920 ed.), 304-305n. Pope's retraction appeared in *The Week* (Toronto), 15 March 1895. Pope blamed AC's "elliptical style" for the misunderstanding. He was also frustrated by AC's casual attitude to dating letters, a criticism that subsequent historians can endorse. Pope, *Memoirs* (1894), i, 180n.

⁴ Pope, *The Day of Sir John Macdonald* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook & Co., 1920), 150-51.

⁵ Swainson, "Alexander Campbell: General Manager ..."; Ged Martin, *Favourite Son?: John A. Macdonald and the Voters of Kingston, 1841-1891* (Kingston: Kingston Historical Society, 2010), 61-63, 142-44.

ald's major twentieth-century biographer, treated Campbell almost as a figure of fun. "He brooded," Creighton wrote, "He philosophized. His standards were obstinately high; he was rather dourly conscientious; he developed stubborn loyalties." His role was to serve Macdonald "like a stout, serviceable, extremely comfortable pair of boots."⁶ Creighton even underlined Campbell's lesser stature by portraying him as "slight in build"; a contemporary source referred to "his tall, stately figure."⁷

Alexander Campbell was born in 1822 in Yorkshire, where his Scottish father was working as a doctor. The family came to Canada the following year, and settled in the Montreal. Unusually for an anglophone family, the boy was given an education in French, which would make him one of English Canada's few contemporary bilingual politicians, which especially equipped him to conduct Senate business. Speaking in Kingston in 1889, Campbell stated that his family had moved there in 1838, and that he was resident in the city "for thirty years afterwards." He began to study Law with the Tory Henry Cassady, but on Cassady's death became articled in September 1839 to young John A. Macdonald. From 1843 to 1849, he was Macdonald's law partner, while he also



John A. Macdonald

became a lifelong friend of Macdonald's other pupil, Oliver Mowat, despite their divergent political allegiances. "Most of my happy years were spent here," he recalled in 1889.⁸ These were not polite sentiments; his relocation to Ottawa after 1867 contributed to the break-up of his marriage.

⁶ Donald Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: the Young Politician* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1952), 72, 148.

⁷ Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: Young Politician*, 72; *The Empire*, 25 May 1892, in *In Mem.*, 24. Sandra Gwyn's description of AC as "short, slight" probably derives from Creighton. S. Gwyn, *The Private Capital: Ambition and Love in the Age of Macdonald and Laurier* (Toronto: Harper & Collins, 1984), 124.

⁸ Speech reprinted in *Toronto Daily Mail*, 26 May 1892. *DCB*, 12, 150 dates the Kingston move to 1836.

After a brief apprenticeship as a city alderman from 1850 to 1852, Campbell was elected to the Legislative Council for Cataraqui, a division centred on Kingston in 1858, and re-elected in 1864. That year, during the meltdown in Canadian politics, he was seen as a possible compromise premier. He was a member of the Great Coalition and attended the Charlottetown and Quebec Conferences that launched Confederation. His genially tactful success in steering the Quebec scheme through the potentially querulous upper house earned him the role of Government leader in the post-1867 nominated Senate. He led the Conservative party in the Red Chamber for twenty years, serving as “Minister of almost everything”⁹ in the cabinets of Sir John A. Macdonald before retiring to become lieutenant-governor of Ontario. “He was a gentleman of the olden time,” commented the *Ottawa Citizen*. “One of nature’s noblemen,” remarked a fellow Senator.¹⁰ Comments such as these on the “wonderfully mild-mannered” Campbell carry their own sub-text: in the rough-house world of Ottawa politics, to dub a man “aristocrat” is to label him as a loser.¹¹ Loyal ally, cabinet workhorse, senator, lieutenant-governor – Alexander Campbell ticked all the boxes that indicate a second-rank contribution to Canadian political history. No won-

der that his death was marked merely by a slim volume of tributes, that no laudatory Victorian biography was penned, and that Campbell has little more than a walk-on part in modern-day textbooks.

In reality, a wholly different set of reasons explain Campbell’s effacement from the historical record. Problems of health and in his personal life were, by their nature, widely known among contemporaries, but Victorian reticence generally prevented them from being openly mentioned. Alexander Campbell was physically handicapped. Obituaries might have praised his tenacity in overcoming his lameness, but for the fact that Campbell also suffered from epilepsy, a condition that aroused much fear and revulsion; even Campbell asked Macdonald not to “say so much about ill-health” when the prime minister announced his cabinet demotion in 1885.¹² Furthermore, not only was Campbell’s marriage a failure, but his estranged wife spent some years confined to asylums as a certified lunatic. Had it not been for the tragic death of his son Archibald in 1886, there might have been no clues at all in the public record. “Archy” accidentally shot himself in circumstances that initially pointed to suicide, prompting a couple of newspapers remote from central Canadian propriety to speculate about the family’s mental health.

⁹*Mail* (Toronto), 25 May 1892, in *In Mem.*, 25. AC held six portfolios. As Minister of Justice 1881-85, he defended the execution of Louis Riel.

¹⁰*Ottawa Citizen*, undated, *In Mem.*, 29; *In Mem.*, 45, Senator James Miller, 31 May 1892.

¹¹*Daily Colonist* (Victoria, BC), 25 May 1892; Pope, *Day of Sir John Macdonald*, 151.

¹²Library and Archives Canada, Macdonald Papers, [cited as LAC Macdonald], vol. 196, AC to Macdonald, 23 September 1885.

In a rare breach of contemporary reticence, a correspondent of the *Victoria Daily Colonist* stated in 1886 that Campbell was “hampered by incurable lameness.”¹³ Campbell himself rarely alluded to his handicap. He was flattered when Macdonald attempted to recruit him to Cartier’s provincial ministry in 1860, but declined on various grounds, adding: “I am not quite certain that my lameness would permit me to discharge the duties of office.”¹⁴ In 1882 he pleaded that it was “quite beyond my strength” to accede to Macdonald’s request to campaign in Winnipeg during the Dominion general election. “You forget that I cannot stand half an hour nor walk more than three quarters, and either of these tasks done once a day is all that I am capable of the twenty four hours.”¹⁵ Pope ensured that his readers remained unaware of this mitigating factor in his indictment of Campbell.

In the absence of medical records or informed reminiscences, we cannot know whether Campbell was lame from birth, or because of some later illness or acci-

dent, but his mobility problem spanned his entire career in public life.¹⁶ The combination of Campbell’s own generally cautious attitude to life and his ambivalent fascination with Macdonald’s flamboyance becomes comprehensible once we think of him as someone who limped his way through life. Impairment of mobility probably left Campbell vulnerable to further accidents. “He has had a very ugly fall,” Macdonald reported to the governor-general in 1883. Misjudging the position of a chair, Campbell “fell violently on the floor and jarred his spine.” Macdonald’s report vividly captures the incident, but his next sentence (“With his unhealthy constitution such accidents are dangerous.”) forms part of a private dialogue between two people who were aware of a context denied to posterity.¹⁷ In 1887, a Toronto journalist commented that so talented a public figure had not “plunged boldly in to the open sea of politics,” because “Sir Alexander has not enjoyed the continuous good health that is almost a necessity for the active politi-

¹³ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 18 September 1886, letter from Henry J. Campbell, a schoolmaster who had taught Archibald Campbell at Trinity College School, Port Hope. He does not seem to have been related.

¹⁴ LAC Macdonald, vol. 194, AC to Macdonald, “Thursday morning,” printed in Pope, *Memoirs of Macdonald*, i, pp. 180-81. Pope misdated the episode to early 1858 – before AC’s election to the Legislative Council. AC’s description of the post offered as “the one I should most desire of all others” suggests that it was Solicitor-General West, which would have required court work.

¹⁵ LAC Macdonald, vol. 196, AC to Macdonald, 18 June 1882.

¹⁶ In 1885, Campbell recalled daredevil horse-rides with Mowat over the fallen trees of the Kingston hinterland: perhaps a broken leg explained his handicap. C.R.W. Biggar, *Sir Oliver Mowat: A Biographical Sketch* (2 vols, Toronto: Warwick Bros & Rutter, 1905), i, 25. In negotiations with Macdonald over their law partnership in 1849, AC cited his health as a complicating factor. LAC Macdonald, vol. 194, AC to Macdonald, 1 June 1849.

¹⁷ LAC Macdonald, vol. 83, Macdonald to Lord Lorne, private, 11 July 1883.

¹⁸ *The Week*, 15 December 1887, in *In Mem.*, 9; see also *Montreal Daily Star*, 5 February 1887, *In Mem.*, 12-13.

cian.”¹⁸ Another contemporary spoke of “constant ill health which necessitated his retirement to the upper house.”¹⁹ The mysterious veil was briefly lifted in April 1886 by the *New York Times*. Reporting that Campbell was “seriously ill,” it added: “He had an attack of epilepsy some days ago and has not yet recovered.”²⁰ A New York newspaper was external to the conspiracy of polite Canadian silence that masked Campbell’s health problems, although of course a journalist’s telegram is not a medical diagnosis, and American readers probably required something sensational to make them read a news report from Canada. However, Campbell’s Ottawa doctor quickly announced, “he is not suffering from any organic disease.”²¹ “Sir Alexander Campbell is said to be suffering from a disease of the brain,” an Ottawa correspondent reported.²² In mid-May, Campbell was well enough to write about his plans to convalesce in England, but he was still too weak to dress himself.²³

Campbell was not alone in his affliction. Publication of the multi-volume

history of French Canada by Francois-Xavier Garneau was slowed considerably by the author’s epileptic seizure in 1847.²⁴ Sufferers generally preferred to conceal their problem: tears were reportedly shed at the farewell banquet to Sir Edmund Head when the governor-general alluded to his condition, “before concealed from outside people.”²⁵ There was considerable prejudice against “that most terrible of all infirmities, epilepsy.”²⁶ When Campbell left to seek expert medical attention in Britain after his seizure in 1886, one report cruelly stated that the journey was undertaken “for the purpose of warding off symptoms of insanity.”²⁷ Not only was the condition barely understood, but treatment for it was basic and brutal. “Goulard water,” invented by a French physician a century earlier, was an easily-made mixture of lead monoxide with vine vinegar. Originally intended for external application, it was prescribed for ingestion despite the risks of causing lead poison or stomach cramps.²⁸ Patent versions were available by mail order. “Fits of

¹⁹ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 18 September 1886, letter from Henry J. Campbell.

²⁰ *New York Times*, 20 April 1886, Ottawa correspondent, 19 March.

²¹ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 21 April 1886.

²² *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 5 May 1886 (Ottawa report, 28 April). A month after the attack, Campbell was still too weak to dress himself unaided. LAC Macdonald, vol. 198, AC to Macdonald, private, 14 May 1886.

²³ LAC Macdonald, vol. 198, AC to Macdonald, private 14 May 1886.

²⁴ *DCB*, 9, 301.

²⁵ E.W. Watkin, *Canada and the States: Recollections 1851 to 1886* (London: Ward, Lock [1886]), 503; D.G.G. Kerr, *Sir Edmund Head: A Scholarly Governor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1954), 15-16, 209, 222. Head was governor-general 1854-61.

²⁶ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 10 August 1886, which described the decision of Queen Victoria’s epileptic son Prince Leopold to marry as “almost a crime.” Of the ten entries in the *DCB* (to date of death 1930) that mention epilepsy, three relate to medical practitioners who had charge of “insane asylums.” (<http://www.biographi.ca/index-e.html>, keyword search, 14 May 2011).

²⁷ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 16 September 1886.

²⁸ Alf Fischbein and Howard Hu, “Occupational and Environmental Exposure to Lead,” in William

Epilepsy or Falling Sickness permanently cured—no humbug—by one month’s usage of Dr Goulard’s celebrated infallible powders.”²⁹ In 1883, Campbell was “troubled with dizziness and depression,” and suffering from “fearful headaches... which I apprehend must be from the stomach.”³⁰ Let us hope he was not drinking Goulard water. Campbell’s combination of impaired mobility and vulnerability to epileptic seizure would have constituted a substantial challenge to participation in public life. Moreover, as if these problems were not enough, Alexander Campbell was also unhappily married.

Although he had left England as a child, it was back in the Yorkshire town of Beverley that he found a bride, marrying Georgina Frederica Locke Sandwith there in 1855. We cannot know how well or for how long the couple had known one another before they married in January 1855: Campbell was in Can-

ada during the July 1854 elections, but perhaps there had been an earlier visit to England and a transatlantic courtship.³¹ Her profusion of forenames indicates that Frederica,³² as she was known, had been bred for a genteel life. She probably found adjustment to life in Kingston, a college and garrison town about the size of Beverley, less stressful than Susanna Moodie’s backwoods experience two decades earlier: she was a member of the board of the city’s orphanage, and in 1879 considered returning to Kingston to live.³³ Two daughters and two sons born to the couple survived to adulthood.³⁴ Campbell’s election to the Legislative Council in 1858 required his absence from home during parliamentary sessions, but he was still sufficiently Kingston-based to function as part-time dean of the first Queen’s Law Faculty, which collapsed early in 1864.³⁵ After March 1864, when he became a minister, Campbell was probably away from his young family for lengthy

N. Rom, ed., *Environmental and Occupational Medicine* (4th ed., Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 2007), 955-56.

²⁹ This advertisement, in the Fredericton *Evening Capital*, 22 December 1882, assured customers that “Dr Goulard is the only physician that has ever made this disease a special study,” adding that he had been active in 1784.

³⁰ LAC Macdonald, vol. 37, AC to Macdonald, private, 22 August 1883; vol. 196, AC to Macdonald, 28 September 1883.

³¹ LAC Macdonald, vol. 194, Campbell to Macdonald, 8 March 1855, also in Pope, *Memoirs of Macdonald*, i, 140-41.

³² She was probably the daughter of Thomas Sandwith, a Beverley doctor: Dane Kennedy, “Sandwith, Humphry (1822–1881),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004. [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24647, accessed 15 May 2011.] I refer to her as “Frederica” to avoid repetition of surname, and do not imply that she was inferior in status to her husband.

³³ G. Tulchinsky, ed., *To Preserve and Defend: Essays on Kingston in the Nineteenth Century* (Montreal & London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1976), 149; AOCF, G.F.L. Campbell to son Charley, September 1879.

³⁴ A third daughter probably died in childhood, *DCB*, 12, 150. .

³⁵ Hilda Neatby, *Queen’s University I; 1841-1917* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978), 106-107.

periods, although the relocation of the capital to Ottawa the following year would have made commuting easier.

If his absences from Kingston caused strains in the marriage, Campbell was initially unaware of them. Speaking on Confederation in the upper house in 1865, he made a jocular invocation of matrimony: "Let those honourable gentlemen who have had the good fortune of forming unions... say whether any union can be formed either happy or lasting without forbearance on both sides."³⁶ Patriarchal and patronising, no doubt, but it seems unlikely that Campbell would have used the witticism had it been widely known that there were strains in his domestic life. His jovial ribbing of Macdonald in January 1867 on the news that he was to "subside into matrimony" with Agnes Bernard also suggests that there were no problems at home.³⁷ James Romanes, who was "off and on" in Kingston between 1865 and 1867, later stated that "Mrs Campbell was happy and contented in so far as I could see."³⁸ The creation of the Dominion probably increased Campbell's absences from home. Not only was

he now the Government leader in the newly created Senate but, as postmaster-general, he faced a major challenge in integrating the postal services of the component provinces. He seems also to have been disengaging himself economically from Kingston's stagnant economy. On Campbell's death in 1892, a local journalist wrote that he "once possessed much property in this city," but by the time it is possible to form a picture of his business interests, from his private papers in the early 1870s, he was using his Ottawa connections to engage in cross-Canada investments, perhaps funded by the liquidation of his Kingston portfolio.³⁹

Still essentially a primitive lumber town, Ottawa in the late 1860s was notoriously not a family-friendly city, and few politicians brought their families there: Campbell himself complained of "the ennui of my solitary life in the capital."⁴⁰ He tried to combine his cabinet duties with his family responsibilities, rebutting Macdonald's censorious charge of "consulting private interests at the expense of public ones" by insisting that "I wish to get home whenever I can."⁴¹ He dated

³⁶*Parliamentary Debates on the Subject of the Confederation of the British North American Provinces* (Quebec: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1865), 298.

³⁷LAC Macdonald, vol. 194, Campbell to Macdonald, 25 January 1867.

³⁸AACP, James Romanes to AC, 12 March 1879. James Romanes was the son of George Romanes, briefly a Queen's professor, who had returned to Britain after a large inheritance in 1848. A wealthy young bachelor, James was able to travel on the money. His younger brother, George John Romanes, was a leading scientist. For the family, see Ethel Romanes, *The Life and Letters of George John Romanes* (London: Longmans, Green, 1896).

³⁹*Toronto Daily Mail*, 25 May 1892 (Kingston correspondent); Swinson, "Alexander Campbell: General Manager..." 79-81 for his widening business interests. Campbell was involved in promoting the post-1871 Kingston & Pembroke railway.

⁴⁰S. Gwyn, *The Private Capital*, 34-58; undated letter to Macdonald in LAC Macdonald, assigned to 1867-68.

⁴¹LAC Macdonald, vol. 194, AC to Macdonald, undated [assigned to 1867-68].

letters to Macdonald from Kingston until the early 1870s, although some read like the comments of a visitor: “hardly a sign of life about the Old Town—no one in the streets,” as he wrote in 1869. He continued to manage patronage as the local Conservative party boss, but it is noteworthy that it was late in the 1872 election campaign before he grasped that Macdonald’s electoral coalition was coming apart.⁴² The transition was complete by September 1873, when he told the commissioners investigating the Pacific Scandal, “I reside in Ottawa.”⁴³ But by then, his marriage had collapsed.

Emigration distanced Frederica from the usual support networks of female relations that sustained harassed young mothers. She not only bore much of the burden of rearing young children at home in Kingston, but was also required to care for an ageing mother-in-law. In September 1868, Frederica put down markers that embroiled her husband in a humiliating row with Sir John A. Macdonald. The new Dominion’s plans for westward expansion required the absorption of the Hudson’s Bay Company territories, and Campbell volunteered himself for the high-level mission to London that would negotiate the major political, legal and financial issues raised by the transfer. With the delegation about to depart, the prime minister was furious to receive a

telegram from his colleague foreshadowing a letter “saying I could not go at all owing to domestic reasons, much regret it.”⁴⁴ Campbell attempted to defend himself. One of his children was recovering from a serious illness, and his mother was “very low.” Frederica was evidently insisting that “personal and domestic” considerations must constrain her husband’s movements. “My wife cannot cross the Atlantic at this time of year with our young children” and she insisted that

“I should not leave her to face the responsibilities and anxieties of the position alone and I cannot say that this is an unreasonable view and overrule her objections by force of marital will. I therefore yield to circumstances.”⁴⁵

It is evident that there was tension and, at the very least, failures of communication, in the Campbell marriage.

Campbell’s private papers do not survive before 1871 and mainly relate to business and political matters.⁴⁶ However, they show that the couple were living apart. In the summer of 1871, Frederica sailed to Europe, probably to place their two sons with a clergyman-tutor in Sussex: “Archy,” the younger, was barely nine years old. Outwardly, the journey seems to have been mutually agreed. Campbell arranged to transfer money through the Bank of Montreal to “Miss MinnaSandwith, Beverley,” probably Frederica’s sister, while his cousin, James Campbell, a

⁴² LAC Macdonald, vol. 194, AC to Macdonald, 12 January 1869; Ged Martin, *Favourite Son?*, 92-6.

⁴³ UK Parliamentary Papers, 1874, C.911, 157.

⁴⁴ LAC Macdonald, vol. 75, Campbell to Macdonald, telegram, 19 September 1868.

⁴⁵ LAC Macdonald, vol. 194, Campbell to Macdonald, [7 September], 19 September 1868.

⁴⁶ The sole allusion to the death of Archibald is a non-specific statement of sympathy in a letter from the president of a printing company lobbying for a contract (AOCP, G.E. Desbarats to Campbell, 6 September 1886).

Norfolk clergyman, reported that he had “heard from Mrs Campbell” that “her passage across the Atlantic was the pleasanter she ever experienced.”⁴⁷ However, Frederica soon decamped to France with their daughters and was in no hurry to return. “I am sorry & surprised to hear that your wife & children are still in France,” a business associate wrote in March 1872.⁴⁸ That summer, the two boys joined her for a month’s holiday in Brittany.⁴⁹ The couple had effectively separated, and Campbell now took on the responsibilities of a single parent; in July 1873, he was planning to “take a trip down the gulf [of St Lawrence] with my sons.”⁵⁰ At some stage in the mid-1870s, his daughters returned to Canada. When Campbell was in Ottawa, his children were left in the care of relatives, the Allan family, in Toronto, an arrangement the boys disliked.⁵¹

Perhaps because he was in opposition from 1873 to 1878, Campbell’s papers are thin for the next few years, but an outline of events surrounding Frederica can be established. At some point in the mid-1870s, she was certified as insane. It is possible that the crisis occurred in the summer of 1874, when Campbell made a sudden visit to England. Whether

Campbell instigated her committal cannot be established, but he was almost certainly responsible for the decision to place her at The Priory, a luxury private asylum in Sussex, before being permitted to board in private houses, although her movements remained subject to Britain’s Commissioners in Lunacy.⁵² After lodging with a family at Richmond in Surrey, she moved to the home of the wealthy Romanes family, who lived at a prestige address overlooking London’s Regent’s Park. Isabella Romanes, widow of a former professor at Queen’s, surely did not need the income and the family’s hospitality was probably a courtesy as part of the extended Kingston network, although one that they quickly came to rue. Indeed, the arrangement came to a sudden end when Frederica made a bid for freedom. James Romanes, Isabella’s son, happened to be back in Canada in 1879, and reported the story to Campbell. “Mrs Campbell had obtained some book or other (at ‘the Priory’ probably) from which she got hold of an idea that any certified lunatic who could escape from the care of those appointed custodians by the Commissioners [in Lunacy] and remain in concealed quarters for 3

⁴⁷ AOC, R.B. Angus to AC, 9 June 1871; James W. Campbell to AC, 27 June 1871.

⁴⁸ AOC, Edward Berry to Campbell, 21 March 1872. Frederica was in Tours in June 1872. AOC, J. Horan to AC, 28 June 1872. AOC, J. Horan to Campbell, 27 July, 29 August 1872.

⁴⁹ AO Campbell, F23-1, J. Horan to Campbell, 27 July, 29 August 1872. Campbell’s daughter Hester wrote to him from Roscoff in Brittany, e.g. 11 August 1872.

⁵⁰ LAC Macdonald, vol. 124, AC to Macdonald, 13 July 1873. The holiday was disrupted by the early stages of the Pacific Scandal.

⁵¹ “I suppose the Sherbourne Street house will be occupied by a colony of Allans in charge of Marjorie,” wrote Archy in 1878. AOC, Archy to Charley, 29 October 1878.

⁵² For the visit to England, AOC, T.C. Patteson to AC, July 1874. The outline story is reconstructed from AOC, James Romanes to AC, 12 March 1879. For The Priory, see C. MacKenzie, *Psychiatry for the Rich: A History of Ticehurst Private Asylum 1792-1917* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1993).

or 4 days, became thereby freed from the control of the Commissioners &c, until such time as 'recertified.'" Even with the utmost compassion for Frederica's plight, the theory can only be called bizarre. On establishing her freedom, Frederica planned to cross the Atlantic to be reunited with her daughter Marjorie, a poignant but utterly impractical scheme.

Absurd Frederica's plans may have been, but they were carefully planned. She secretly arranged accommodation with the family of a shopkeeper in Regent Street, about a kilometre away. On the appointed day, Frederica went for a walk in the Park, which is intersected by public roads, escorted by the daughter of the house. Ignoring her protests, she boarded a cab and fended off the younger woman's attempt to climb aboard with her. Miss Romanes hailed another cab and a chase ensued. The two vehicles arrived at the destination simultaneously, where Frederica unconvincingly informed her new hosts that the importunate young woman begging her to return was "an insane person under her (Mrs C's) care and 'not to take notice of her.'" The attempted escape had failed, and the whole episode had taken barely half an hour, but still enough to cause "very great anxiety" among the Romanes family, who instantly determined not to risk any repetition

of the experience.⁵³ A more serious outcome was the decision by the Commissioners in Lunacy to revoke Frederica's permission to live in the community.

In Canada, Campbell was "sadly puzzled" about what to do. Bringing Frederica back to Canada posed practical problems. Having recently returned to political office after the Conservative election victory in the fall of 1878 and also recovering from a serious illness, Campbell was in no position to care for a fragile spouse. Options for institutional care were also limited, for it was not until 1883 that Canada's first private asylum opened. Campbell had been closely involved with political patronage issues surrounding Rockwood, the provincial asylum at Kingston, and he would have known that it operated in squalid conditions and on penal lines.⁵⁴ But, as he wrote to his son Charley, "Mother has been so anxious to change." Late in 1878, he decided that she should travel Boston: "there is a very comfortable asylum there with large and beautiful grounds, where each patient dines &c in her own parlour if she prefers it, and every kindness & attention is shown."⁵⁵ This was the famous McLean Asylum, where Frederica would come under the care of Dr. George F. Jelly, one of the most prominent and progressive mental health specialists in

⁵³ AOCB, James Romanes to AC, 12 March 1879.

⁵⁴ B.S. Osborne and D. Swainson, *Kingston: Building on the Past* (Westport Ont.: Butternut Press, 1988), 265-66. For grim conditions in the early 1870s, J. McKendry, "An Ideal Hospital for the Insane?: Rockwood Lunatic Asylum, Kingston, Ontario," *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, 16, 1993, esp. 15-19. The Homewood Retreat, Canada's first major private asylum, opened in Guelph in 1883: C.K. Warsh, *Moments of Unreason: The Practice of Canadian Psychiatry and the Homewood Retreat, 1883-1923* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

⁵⁵ AOCB, AC to Charley, 8 November, 13 December 1878.

North America.⁵⁶ At the end of January, Campbell's friend Sir John Rose, a Canadian politician who had made a second career as a London banker, arranged to escort her to Liverpool where she embarked for Boston.⁵⁷

Campbell's domestic worries provide the context for an episode that does not show him at his best, his blunt demand that Macdonald should secure him a knighthood. Campbell believed he had been recommended for imperial honours in 1873, but the fall of the first Macdonald government had intervened. The return to office of the Conservatives in 1878 seemed likely to trigger a batch of knighthoods and Campbell argued that his omission would be an affront to the Senate. Admitting that his demand seemed "egotistical," he told Macdonald "I have got it into my head that, I am fairly entitled to this honor [sic]."⁵⁸ The problem, of course, was that for Queen Victoria to dub him Sir Alexander would automatically make his wife Lady Campbell, undeniably awkward when Sir Alexander was arranging to confine Lady Campbell to a lunatic asylum. Thus to be passed over when his cabinet colleagues were being honoured would seem to censure his domestic misfortunes. Macdon-

ald duly delivered the knighthood, and it is this episode that perhaps explains his sour accusation of Campbell's ingratitude to Pope not long after: "He knows he can never requite me for what I have done in the past, and he hates me for it."⁵⁹

We must be cautious in assessing why Frederica Campbell was regarded as mentally ill. Few historians are psychiatrists. Modern mental health care has moved far beyond the simplistic nineteenth-century diagnoses of "lunacy" and "insanity." It does not help that adjectives such as "manic" and "paranoid," which have precise diagnostic meanings, are also used, loosely and pejoratively, in ordinary discourse.⁶⁰ In a further complication, some scholars challenge the whole concept of "madness," regarding it as a device to suppress inconvenient critics of established values—notably including wives who failed to love, honour and obey their spouses.⁶¹ Yet we should not rush to the extreme of assuming that Campbell was engaged in a campaign of patriarchal repression. Given the contemporary prejudice against mental illness, it was hardly to his social or political advantage to have a wife who was a certified lunatic. Propriety generally excised allusions to his domestic circumstances from

⁵⁶ A. Beam, *Gracefully Insane: Life and Death inside America's Premier Mental Hospital* (New York, Public Affairs, 2001).

⁵⁷ AOCF, Morton, Rose & Co to AC, 8 February 1879.

⁵⁸ LAC Macdonald, vol. 195, AC to Macdonald, private, 8 May 1878; Campbell to Macdonald, 14 May [1881].

⁵⁹ Pope, ed., *Public Servant*, 50.

⁶⁰ Roy Porter, *Madness: a Brief History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶¹ See M. Foucault (trans. Richard Howard), *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967). A major scholarly project, The History of Madness in Canada, is reviewing these issues in Canada: www.historyofmadness.ca.

the public sphere, but we may guess that his marital problems were widely known and, then as now, exaggerated by censorious gossip, as indicated by a rare slipping of the veil—a British Columbia newspaper report in 1886 that Frederica had “been confined to an asylum in England” for “many years.”⁶² In her study of women admitted to British Columbia’s Hospital for the Insane between 1905 and 1915, Mary Ellen Kelm declined to attempt any independent retrospective diagnoses, accepting that “they were deemed ‘insane’ by the cultural, social, and medical standards of the time.”⁶³ However, Kelm was studying 586 cases, while we need to know something more about the specific issues of Frederica’s behaviour and her husband’s response.

Given the particular constraints of evidence and interpretation, all we can do is consider the few surviving comments of contemporaries, bearing in mind that one observer, James Romanes, stressed that his belief that Frederica was not insane was “an unprofessional opinion.”⁶⁴ Dr. George F. Jelly, the specialist who examined Frederica in Boston, had “no doubt of her insanity,” but he did not regard her case as serious. She “came across the ocean unattended and took proper care of herself,” and there was no indication that she was “dangerous to herself or others, annoying though she has been to those with whom she

has lived.” James Romanes had talked to people who had met Frederica “and they were of the opinion that Mrs Campbell was perfectly sane.” He quoted from a February 1878 letter from his mother: “Mrs Campbell is not insane but jealous to a degree: hightempered and strong-willed.” Romanes described her “symptoms” to Campbell as “great loquacity, always about herself and you, and her children—a marked dislike to yourself, combined with an exaggerated idea of your power and influence in, and with, the world at large.” He also instanced the extreme conservatism of Frederica’s politics and the exaggerated “highchurchism” of her religious views. Irritating she may have been (“I felt sincerely glad I was not her husband,” wrote Romanes), but were her monologues evidence of mental instability? It is not unusual for a woman to talk about her husband and children. Finding herself confined to an English asylum presumably at the behest of a husband who was a senior Canadian politician, it was understandable that Frederica might assume that he exercised a sinister authority on a transatlantic scale. Conservative political views were to be expected in the spouse of a Macdonald cabinet minister, and she was hardly alone in her religious enthusiasm. Dr. Jelly reported, “she expressed her delusions very freely” but, on the plus side, in Boston Frederica “apparently does not

⁶² Victoria *Daily Colonist*, 16 September 1886.

⁶³ M.E. Kelm, “‘The Only Place Likely To Do Her Any Good’: The Admission of Women to British Columbia’s Hospital for the Insane,” *BC Studies*, 96, 1992/3, 66-89, esp. 67n.

⁶⁴ This section based on AOCP, George F. Jelly to AC, 17 March, 15 April 1879, and James Romanes to AC, 12 March 1879.

as yet fasten her delusions upon anyone here.” Clearly, her antipathies were fixed on Campbell himself. In contrast to the wearisome monologues that had plagued the Romanes household, in Boston Frederica was “quiet and ladylike.” A rare newspaper comment of 1886 claimed that “at different times during her life,” she had “been afflicted by spells of melancholy,”⁶⁵ but this report formed part of a journalistic attempt to portray her son’s death as suicide. Jelly made no mention of depression, while Frederica had every reason to feel gloomy about her life.

Reporting in April 1879 that Frederica was “very anxious” to get away from the McLean Asylum, Dr. Jelly recommended that his patient “should have her liberty not because she is not insane but because she is dangerous to no one.” A month later, he repeated his advice that “it will be better to give her a trial with some private family,” adding: “I shall feel, after such an opportunity having been given her, that she [will] have had every chance and that we have all done our duty. If then she should be obliged to return to this or some other Asylum no one can be blamed.”⁶⁶ Early in June 1879, Campbell took his daughter Marjorie to Boston to visit Frederica, who had arranged on her own initiative to lodge with a family living in the seaside suburb of Swanscott, “though how she became acquainted with them I do not know.” Campbell remained in Boston for several

weeks.⁶⁷

Just one letter from Frederica Campbell herself survives to provide a glimpse of her mind at this time. Dated September 1879 and addressed to her son Charley, it is hard to decipher and part of it has been crossed out. Of her own health she wrote little. She had been “getting on quite well here until a month ago” when she encountered a setback. “I really thought I was threatened with paralysis. I felt so confined in my head.” Although she was again making progress, “I am very miserable, should so much like to be amongst old friends.” She dreamed of living either in Kingston or back her native town of Beverley, but London seemed a possibility. “I like to be with those who know me. I am too much broken down both in health and spirit to make new friends.” The deleted section of the letter is followed by a *cri de coeur*. “There has been so much deceit about everything connected with me. A little truth & honesty would have made things so different.... Why was I locked up in Lunatic Asylums? I harmed no one, but it is too late now.”⁶⁸ If it was too late in 1879 for Frederica to understand what had happened to her, it is almost certainly impossible to unravel the story more than century later.

Frederica’s certification as a lunatic must have been lifted soon afterwards since, by December 1881, she was back in Europe, accompanied by her daughter

⁶⁵*New York Times*, 4 September 1886.

⁶⁶AOCP, George F. Jelly to AC, 17 March, 15 April 1879.

⁶⁷AOCP, AC to son Charles, 6 June 1879; AC drafted a business letter from Boston on 28 July 1879.

⁶⁸AOCP, Frederica Campbell to son Charley, September 1879.

Hester. A letter from Hester, written in the French town of Tours, suggests that she had taken her mother's side and was on cool terms with her father. Campbell had, however, arranged for them to receive the *Toronto Globe*, "which now comes regularly & is very welcome."⁶⁹ Frederica did not make much effort to keep her husband informed of her whereabouts. When Archy visited England in the summer of 1882, it took him several weeks to track down his mother to a village in Sussex where she was "staying in lodgings with Hetty."⁷⁰

The only other surviving letter from Frederica was written, also to Charley, from another holiday resort, the Yorkshire town of Filey, in 1884, although she claimed that she wrote often and she alleged that her letters must have been "stopt." Although she was "*proud&delighted*" that he had qualified as a barrister, Frederica was alarmed that he had celebrated with a canoeing trip: "it is frightful to think of! So many lives are yearly swallowed up in the terrible Canadian lakes & rivers." A "dull" summer at Filey had been enlivened by a feud with "my detestable sister Mrs. McKenzie," who had—in Frederica's opinion, deliberately—descended upon the vacation town to cause "mischief." Mrs. McKenzie had been accompanied by her widowed daughter, Mrs. Stevenson. "She

is very bad tempered, but not deceitful like her mother. They only stayed a week, but contrived to annoy us considerably." Although her living family displeased her, Frederica took pleasure in her forebears. She had taken "a little trip" to the ancestral home of her Sandwith ancestors, only to find that the family chapel had recently been demolished. When the Sandwith vault was opened, their coffins had been discovered stacked vertically, a scene that reminded her of Walter Scott's novels. Her son found this very amusing. "Mother has been visiting the homes of our ancestors & found that their hitherto upright coffins had been carted off to the village churchyard," Charley told Marjorie. "The ancestry on which I pride myself begins with you," he assured his father.⁷¹

The break-up of his marriage took its toll on Campbell. When Macdonald upbraided him in 1881 for failing to pull his weight in government, he replied in humble and revealing terms:

You are quite right, and I take it as a real kindness, to tell me of any indifference or want of 'go'... the truth is, and you will pardon me for alluding to it on this one occasion I hope, I get so dragged down every now and then by domestic trouble that I shrink from public displays—but it is stupid and does no good and I will force myself into better habits...⁷²

He complained of "depression" again in 1883, at a time when his health was poor.⁷³ The couple's separation hurt him

⁶⁹AOCP, H.S. Campbell to AC, 11 December 1881.

⁷⁰AOCP, Archy to AC, 6 August 1882.

⁷¹AOCP, G.F.L. Campbell to son Charles, 18 August 1884; Charley to Madge, 2 September 1884; C.S. Campbell to AC, 6 November 1885.

⁷²This letter in LAC Macdonald, vol. 195 is dated "Saturday evening": it is assigned to 1881.

⁷³LAC Macdonald, vol. 37, AC to Macdonald, private, 22 August 1883.

financially too. “I feel constrained to allow my wife £500 [\$2,000] a year for personal and house expenses in Europe and have other changes on me there,” he explained to Macdonald in 1885.⁷⁴ However, Frederica grumbled that she did not have enough to support Hester in the style she deserved: “if I had a little more money, I w[ou]ld take her to some more lively place,” she wrote from Filey in 1884, “but as my means are straitened I cannot afford it.”⁷⁵ Maintaining Frederica was not Campbell’s only financial responsibility. His two sons were each given an expensive education. His elder son, Charles, qualified as a barrister and in 1884 joined a Montreal law firm headed by the Conservative politician J.J.C. Abbott.⁷⁶ Even then, Campbell offered his son an allowance of \$500 a year to supplement his earnings. “I do not want you to economize any more than you do, indeed not so much so.”⁷⁷ Archibald, the younger son, was more of

a problem. After boarding school at Port Hope, he entered Trinity College at the University of Toronto in 1880, but never shone in his studies.⁷⁸ He attempted to follow his brother into the Law, but by February 1885 he confessed to finding the profession too demanding—and asked his father to find him a post in the civil service instead.⁷⁹ Campbell pulled the necessary strings, and at the time of his death Archy was a clerk in the Supreme Court of Canada.⁸⁰ Campbell’s self-imposed obligations extended beyond the nuclear family. His brother Alfred, who lived in Belleville, was “hopelessly infirm” and “I have had to maintain him and his wife for some years past,” he wrote in 1885.⁸¹ Another brother, Toronto-based Charles, was more active but not more successful: he had fallen into an investment “scrape” and Campbell had paid almost \$10,000 to rescue him.⁸² Given the extent of obligations, Campbell needed the lieutenant-

⁷⁴ LAC Macdonald, vol. 197, Campbell to Macdonald, 26 March 1885.

⁷⁵ AOCF, Frederica Campbell to Charley, 18 August 1884.

⁷⁶ AOCF, Charles Campbell to AC, 24 August 1884. For AC’s pride in his elder son, LAC Macdonald, vol. 96, AC to Macdonald, [25 January 1884].

⁷⁷ AOCF, AC to Charley, 28 August 1884. This arrangement probably ended in 1885 when Charles Campbell became a partner in the Abbott law firm.

⁷⁸ “Letters from “Archy” were preserved, perhaps because of his tragic death. AO Campbell, F23-1, Archibald Campbell to AC, from 25 February 1880. On 24 January 1881, he wrote of his wish to leave.

⁷⁹ AOCF, Archibald Campbell to AC, 14 February 1885.

⁸⁰ *New York Times*, 4 September 1886. Archy also successfully lobbied his father to find a job for his college friend, the poet Archibald Lampman. AC secured him a clerkship in the Post Office, but Archy Campbell pressed for his friend’s transfer to the Parliamentary Library (“I think books are more in his line.”) AO Campbell, F23-1, Archibald Campbell to AC, 29 November 1882, 12, 22 February 1884.

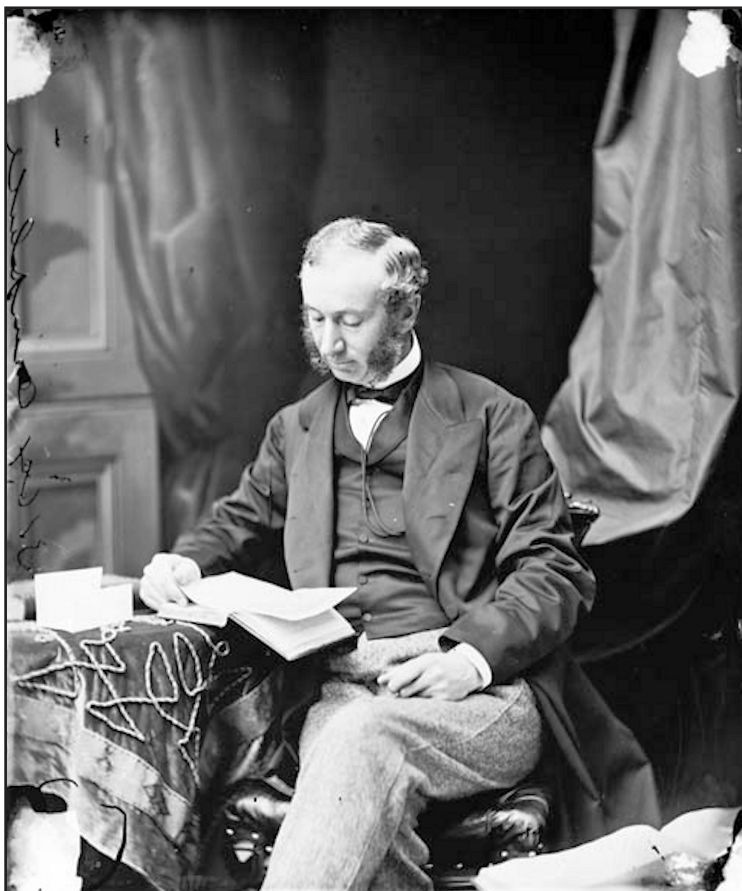
⁸¹ LAC Macdonald, vol. 197, AC to Macdonald, 26 March 1885. Alfred died soon afterwards. His widow gratefully declined AC’s offer to provide her with a home, but she remained on his welfare roll. AOCF, Julia (Mrs Alfred A.) Campbell to AC, 1 May 1886.

⁸² LAC Macdonald, vol. 197, AC to Macdonald, 26 March 1885. Macdonald had suborned brother Charles Campbell into endorsing a \$10,000 loan during the 1872 election campaign. In 1883, AC badgered the prime minister into giving his brother a government job. Swainson, “Alexander Campbell: General Manager...,” 83; LAC Macdonald, vol. 196, AC to Macdonald, 28 October 1883.

Alexander Campbell. Father of Confederation. (Library and Archives Canada A026295)

governorship to enable him to retire from politics.

Frederica simply fades from the record. Rebutting the rumour that she was “confined to an asylum in England,” a family friend insisted in 1886 that “Lady Campbell has been obliged for her health to reside in the south of Europe.”⁸³ In the summer of 1888, mother and daughter were at the Swiss resort of Interlaken when, “after a few days’ illness,” Hester died. Despite his own infirmities, Campbell immediately crossed the Atlantic, although we do not know whether he reached Switzerland before Hester’s death.⁸⁴ Canadian newspapers were circumspect in their reporting. “Miss Campbell ... died recently in Switzerland, where she had been stopping with her mother, who resides perma-



nently abroad.”⁸⁵ There was no mention of Frederica in Campbell’s will, and little is known of her life in Europe until her death in a London (England) hotel in January 1904.⁸⁶ In effect, Victorian reti-

⁸³ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 18 September 1886.

⁸⁴ Death notice in *The Times* (London), 26 July 1888.

⁸⁵ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 August 1888. The only trace of the tragedy in AOCF is a letter from the former governor-general, Lord Lorne, regretting that he had not met AC and expressing (unspecified) sympathy for his journey to Switzerland. AOCF, Lorne to AC, 1 August 1888. There is a gap in the archive from 23 June to 1 August.

⁸⁶ AC’s will was briefly reported in the *Toronto Daily Mail*, 14 June 1892. He left \$81,362-50 – less than half the estate Macdonald had left the previous year, although he was certainly a much more careful financial manager. After three small family bequests totalling \$2,500, the residue was divided between Charles and Marjorie. (For slightly different figures, see *Irish Canadian*, 16 June 1892). I am grateful to Gail Wood for checking UK records. Dr. Michael Poplyansky of York University has very recently uncov-

cence had buried Frederica long before her death.

In his 1900 book on Ontario's lieutenant-governors, D.B. Read discreetly signalled the problem in Campbell's private life by recording his marriage to Frederica in 1855 before adding that, during his term of office, "his daughter, Miss Marjorie Campbell, performed the social duties incident to her position with grace and tact."⁸⁷ Unfortunately, Read's message was so muted that it failed to span the decades. Swainson argues that the fact that Campbell came from John A. Macdonald's home city of Kingston and operated entirely in the upper house meant that his "most serious political weakness was his lack of an independent power base." This left him with no alternative but to operate as Macdonald's loyal supporter, "useful, safe, and able... the ideal political lieutenant."⁸⁸ As an assessment of Alexander Campbell's public career, this judgement stands. However,

it is the forgotten private dimension of his life that in turn explains why his strategic options were so constrained. Physically handicapped and liable to attacks of epilepsy, it was an achievement for him to take part in politics at all.⁸⁹ He was perhaps the first Canadian politician whose marriage did not survive his translation to the Ottawa cauldron. Modern-day students will be divided over his response to Frederica's unhappiness: was he a heart-broken husband who sought to respond compassionately to his wife's mental illness, or an old-fashioned patriarch who manipulated a flawed system of gender values to punish and confine a rebellious wife? As Canada approaches the 150th anniversary of the Constitution Act, here is one Father of Confederation who can descend from the pantheon of caricature grandees to become, once again, a real human being, courageously overcoming physical disability if unable to cope with mental and emotional turmoil.

ered the details of Frederica Campbell's death. Lawyers advertised in the London *Times* on 11 January 1904 in an attempt to trace solicitors or bankers who had acted for her, which suggests she was not in contact with her two surviving children, Charles and Marjorie.

⁸⁷ Read, *Lieutenant-Governors*, 233. On her father's death, "Marge" (as she was known in family letters) was described as "the popular mistress of Government House." *Toronto Daily Mail*, 26 May 1892. After a serious illness in 1888, possibly caused by a broken engagement, Sir John A. Macdonald praised her "whole conduct and demeanor" as "simply heroic." AOCF, Macdonald to AC, 29 December 1888.

⁸⁸ *DCB*, 12, 154.

⁸⁹ Macdonald commented in December 1869 that AC was 'looking well, although using his crutch.' Cartwright recalled in 1912 that AC 'was heavily handicapped by his lameness.' Pope, *Memoirs*, ii, 61; Cartwright, *Reminiscences*, 69.