

# DAVID LAIRD OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

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THE stage of Canadian history has displayed many brilliant actors whose names are milestones in our Dominion's progress. Their work has been recognized and their achievements have been honoured. But all too frequently public life is so dazzled by the bright lights that the supporting cast have not had sufficient recognition and their contributions have often been left in the pigeon-holes of the past. David Laird, a son of Prince Edward Island and prominent political figure in that province, a Minister of the Crown in the federal government, and the first Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest Territories, is one of the secondary figures of Canadian history whose varied achievements have been almost forgotten. He had the unique experience of contributing in considerable measure to the political development of both the eastern and western parts of the Dominion. His story is that of the entry of Prince Edward Island into Confederation and the establishment of government in the Canadian West. This paper is an attempt to review the public life of this man, and to recall his achievements in the light of the history of his time.

## I

David Laird was born in New Glasgow, P. E. I., on March 12, 1833, one of the eight children of Honourable Alexander Laird and his wife Janet Orr. The parents were closely associated with the early history of the Island, the father being one of the sturdy Scottish pioneers who did so much to develop a thriving colony from the wilderness, and the mother a member of one of the landlord families whose influence was a large factor through many years of difficulty. Alexander Laird, a native of Renfrewshire, Scotland, had emigrated to the Island in 1819 and become one of the most successful farmers in Queen's County. As an official of the Royal Agricultural Society of Prince Edward Island, he did much to further the development of agriculture. As a member of the local legislature, he gave sixteen years of service to active politics, during four of which he was a member of the government. He was one of the participants in the long struggle for responsible government in the province. In all these activities his son David took a keen interest, and it

was thus natural that the younger Laird should look forward to following his father's footsteps into public life.

During his childhood years, David Laird was undecided as to what he wished to pursue as his profession. After his early education in West River, he attended the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Truro, Nova Scotia, with a view to entering the ministry. But, on graduation, he turned aside from theology to enter the field of journalism. In 1859 he returned to Charlottetown and founded the *Patriot*, of which he was to be editor for almost forty years. Soon afterwards he entered upon his first public office as a city councillor.

From the day he published the first edition of his newspaper he became a power in local politics. He was a supporter of the Liberal party, and by means of his editorial columns campaigned vigorously for the Liberal cause. But almost at the beginning of his career he showed that party lines would not deter him from supporting what he thought to be in the public interest, for, during a brief period, he opposed his colleagues on "the Bible Question" which for several years was the subject of bitter controversy. He was closely connected with the proceedings in the legislature in his capacity of reporter for the House of Assembly. In 1870 he made his first electoral bid when he ran in the first district of Queen's, but he failed to gain the seat because a technicality in the counting of election returns had not been observed by the sheriff.

Like most public men of the day, Laird was a participant in the spirited Confederation controversy.<sup>1</sup> The developments which gave impetus to the union movement had culminated in the Charlottetown Conference of 1864. Originally called to discuss Maritime Union, the Conference ended in the general realization that a union of all the British North American colonies was a good possibility if suitable terms could be arranged. Terms were drawn up at another Conference which was held in Quebec in the same year. The Quebec terms were ratified in the legislature of the Province of Canada, but were received with hostility in the Maritimes. Prince Edward Island felt she was getting on very well by herself, and that she would not benefit by becoming part of a larger unit. Laird was one of the strongest opponents of the Quebec terms as far as they concerned the Island, the main reasons being that they did not provide any remedy for the land question which had for many

(1) In this paper we deal only with the later events connected with the Island's entry into Confederation. The earlier details will be found in J. A. Maxwell, *Prince Edward Island and Confederation*, DALHOUSIE REVIEW, April 1933.

years retarded the development of the province, and that adequate compensation was not provided to take the place of direct taxation. He adhered to this opinion in his editorial columns until 1872. In the meantime the Island refused to participate in the Confederation of 1867, as she found it more in her interest to remain a separate colony. But railway building, that ever-present *motif* in Canadian history, finally brought her to terms.

In 1871 the Conservative government of J. C. Pope commenced the building of the Prince Edward Island Railway. It was a source of trouble from the start. The Liberals under R. P. Haythorne and the Liberal press of David Laird violently opposed the road as beyond the ability of the province to maintain and as unsanctioned by the electors. When the Honourable James Duncan, a member of the government, sought reelection in the Belfast district on his appointment to be Chairman of the Railway Commission, he was soundly defeated by Laird in the latter's first successful bid for political office. Shortly afterwards charges of corruption were laid in the legislature against the Pope government. It appeared that a "railway ring" had developed, composed of lobbyists and influential politicians who vied with one another in offering bribes to members in return for assurances that the recipients would exert their influence to have the railway pass through certain settlements. The affair became the subject of a fierce debate in the legislature when William Hooper, member for Morell, asserted that he had been offered \$1,000 by Caleb Carleton of Souris if he would vote for a branch line to the eastern end of the Island. Carleton, when summoned to the bar of the House, freely admitted that he had offered money to Hooper, for he knew "parties to the eastward that would subscribe pretty liberally, and help to shove along the branches."<sup>2</sup> Though it was not proved that the government had been implicated in the "railway ring", Pope and his colleagues found that they had lost the confidence of the House. They appealed to the electors and were defeated by the Liberals under Honourable R. P. Haythorne. Shortly after Haythorne formed his new government on April 22, 1872. Laird, who had again been returned for Belfast, became a member of the Executive Council.<sup>3</sup>

A peculiar situation then arose. The new administration which, when in opposition, had so strenuously opposed the

(2) *Debates and Proceedings of the House of Assembly of P.E.I.*, 1872, 1st session, page 59.

(3) *Ibid.*, pages 3-78.

construction of the railroad, immediately proceeded to build costly branch lines to Tignish and Souris. Laird explained in the House that this policy was designed to meet requests for transportation from those parts of the Island not served by the main line. He declared that, since all districts contributed to the expenses of the railroad, all should share its benefits. This policy was immediately censured by the Opposition, but it was followed and the branches were completed.<sup>4</sup>

Both the Conservative and Liberal governments of this period were severely censured for their railway policies. But in fairness to them it must be realized that their hands were forced by a small group of members who were more concerned with the interests of their constituencies than with the good of the province as a whole. The legislature was made up of several factions whose distinguishing characteristic was support of an opposition to confederation, separate schools, or railway building. In order that either of the political parties could form a government, consideration had to be given to the wishes of these factions and various compromises arranged. When the Haythorne government took office, it found that the balance of power among its supporters was held by a group of members who were returned at the polls pledged to the construction of the branch lines. It seems evident that the government did not wish to build the branches, but if it refused, the pledged members would support Mr. Pope whose own party was so dependent on factional support that it would have had to build the lines in order to form a government. In such circumstances the Haythorne administration embarked on what seemed to be the only course open to it.<sup>5</sup>

Further and greater difficulties then arose. Building the railway proved more costly than had originally been expected, the reason being that the contractors were paid approximately five thousand pounds a mile, but without any stipulation as to what the total mileage should be, with the result that an abundance of curves and detours lengthened the line and increased the cost. Then, too, adequate financial provisions had not been made, and it was found that the provincial debentures which had been issued to the contractors to cover the transaction, and which had been placed in the Bank of Prince Edward Island as pledges for loans, could not be sold except at

(4) *Ibid.*, 1872, 2nd session, pages 14-15; also *Ibid.*, 1873, pages 66-70.

(5) *Ibid.*, 1873, pages 78-79.

a loss. The government, the contractors, and the bank (several of the directors of which were prominent in the government) then became alarmed and decided that something had to be done or the Island's position in the money markets would be imperilled and the whole economy of the province would collapse. The political leaders felt that the only way out was union with Canada, if the Dominion could be persuaded to take over the railroad. This became more evident when Charles Palmer, president of the Union Bank and a brother of Honourable Edward Palmer, the Attorney-General, wrote Sir John Rose, the unofficial London agent of the Canadian government, with respect to putting Island bonds on the London market, and received the reply that if there was an assurance that the Island would join Canada, the bonds could be placed at a very good rate.<sup>6</sup> The government immediately commenced to sound the opinion of the Canadian government, and to ascertain if Sir John Macdonald and his colleagues would offer favourable terms.

But the wary Sir John was fully informed of the difficulties which prompted the overtures of the Island government, and was prepared to play a cat-and-mouse game with the provincial politicians. W. H. Pope had written him saying that "their pockets are far more sensitive than their understanding,"<sup>7</sup> and Colonel John Hamilton Gray had advised that "immediate profit or loss is the only thing that will move them."<sup>8</sup> Sir John Rose had told him of his correspondence with Charles Palmer. Furthermore, the Prime Minister was not disposed to dealing with the Haythorne government. His attitude is clearly revealed in a letter to Sir John Rose:

Governor Robinson of P. E. Island has written privately, and as if off his own bat, to Lord Dufferin, saying that he thought he could bring round his Government to consider the subject of union if Canada were still inclined in that direction. He wrote, beyond a doubt, at the instigation of his Council, and, as we know from experience the style of these men, we answered guardedly. Lord D. answered that, after what has occurred, Canada did not propose to initiate a renewal of negotiations. She would, however, carefully consider any proposition made by Prince Edward Island. He added that Canada had no desire to recede from the offer of "better terms" made by Tilley in '69. Since then, Robinson telegraphed in cypher to know whether he was to understand that the Island Railway debt would be taken into consider-

(6) Rose to Macdonald, November 26, 1872; *Macdonald Letterbook*, Public Archives of Canada, Vol. 119, page 133.

(7) W. H. Pope to Macdonald, September 18, 1870; *Ibid*, page 123.

(8) Gray to Macdonald, January 13, 1871, *Ibid*, page 129

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ation. The answer was that the Railway debt was a proper subject for negotiation and that any proposition with regard to it would be carefully considered here. You may remember how shamefully old Palmer behaved in '65. Haythorne behaved just as badly to us on the "better terms" matter in '69. He then, under pretence of desiring union, humbugged Tilley and our government into making an offer. It proved afterwards that he never had any intention of supporting union, and that his object was by getting a better offer than the terms of the Quebec Conference, to kill our friends Haviland, Col. Gray, W. H. Pope, and others who had agreed to the original arrangement. This treacherous policy was successful, and our friends were for the time being politically snuffed out. Now Haythorne and Palmer are the ruling spirits of the present government, hence our caution. I have little doubt that our policy will be successful and that we will get a proposition before Parliament meets.<sup>9</sup>

When the Haythorne government asked the Dominion to grant "better terms," amongst which was to be the taking over of the railroad, Macdonald refused to negotiate by letter, and suggested that representatives of the provincial government come to Ottawa to consider the matter.<sup>10</sup> Delegates were forthwith appointed, consisting of R. P. Haythorne and David Laird.

The delegates proceeded to Ottawa in January, 1873, and spent several days negotiating with the Dominion Cabinet. Though financial necessity was the motive behind Haythorne and Laird's presentations, they requested the Canadian government to grant better terms "in order to overcome the widespread disfavour of union on the Island." Better terms were obtained, so much better that Lord Dufferin wired congratulations to Lieutenant-Governor Robinson, at the same time indicating that "My Ministers are of the opinion, an opinion in which I fully coincide, that no additional concessions would have any chance of being accepted by the Parliament of Canada."<sup>11</sup> Haythorne and Laird returned to Charlottetown, confident that they had secured the best possible terms, and ready to dissolve the legislature in order to put the terms before the people in a general election.

Unfortunately for the Liberals, the election which followed was confused by the three issues: the terms of union, the government's policy, and the separate school question. The Conservatives attacked the government on all three points, stating that the terms of union were not sufficient, that the sorry state

(9) Macdonald to Rose, December 13, 1872; *Ibid.*, vol. 522, page 321.

(10) Macdonald to Dufferin, April 4, 1873; *Ibid.*, Vol. 523, page 82.

(11) Dufferin to Robinson, March 12, 1873, *Journal of the House of Assembly of P.E.I.*, Appendix A.

of the railway finances were caused by the building of the branch lines, and that action should be taken on the school question. As a result, the Haythorne-Laird party was defeated, and a new government took office under the premiership of Honourable J. C. Pope. Shortly after the election, David Laird became the leader of the provincial Liberal party.

The change in government did not mean any diversion from the original policy of union with Canada, for Pope and his colleagues were even more determined than the Liberals to join Confederation. But there was a great change in the personal relationships involved. In Ottawa the Conservative victory was well received. Sir John Macdonald was delighted. To the Governor-General he wrote:—"Pope's party which has triumphed was always in close alliance with us of the Dominion on the subject of confederation."<sup>12</sup>

Pope's confederation policy was to seek still better terms, but Laird insisted that the Island had no ground for seeking further consideration from the federal government. In some quarters it was rumoured that Laird would join in a coalition under Pope, but there is no evidence that Mr. Laird had any intention of doing so. The Canadian Prime Minister heard the rumour, and thereupon advised Lord Dufferin that "I understand that Laird, who was here with Haythorne, will join Pope's administration. I hope this is so for the sake of the cause, although it does not raise Mr. Laird in my estimation. His presence there will shield us from any attempts at still better terms."<sup>13</sup>

But Laird did not join with Pope, and the Ottawa government was not shielded from attempts at still better terms. On May 3, 1873, Pope, together with Honourable T. Heath Haviland and Honourable George W. Howlan, travelled to Ottawa to make a new bargain. They conferred with a committee of the Privy Council, obtained a few added concessions, and returned to the Island to submit the terms for approval. These terms, which were supported by both Conservatives and Liberals, were approved in the legislature by a vote of 28 to 2 and became the basis of the legislation by which the Island became a part of Canada on July 1, 1873. It is significant that when the Governor-General visited Charlottetown that summer, the arch of welcome which greeted him bore the slogan "Long courted, won at last."

(12) Macdonald to Dufferin, April 4, 1873; *Macdonald Letterbook*, op. cit.

(13) *Ibid*, page 83



## II

With the Island's entry into Confederation it became necessary that six members be elected to represent the province in the House of Commons. Laird resigned his leadership of the provincial Liberals to run in Queen's County, while J. C. Pope left the premiership to contest Prince. Both were elected, along with James Yeo (Prince), Peter Sinclair (Queen's), and Austin MacDonald and Dan J. Davies (King's). When they went to Ottawa, these men found themselves the centre of much interest, for, since they came from a new province, it was not known exactly what their political affiliations were. Though they bore the labels "Conservative" and "Liberal" in Island politics before union, they were by no means definitely allied with the federal parties bearing the same names. Ordinarily the addition of six new members would not have caused much concern, but in 1873 Sir John Macdonald and his government were involved in the "Pacific scandals," and every vote that could be counted for or against the government in the House was of the greatest importance. In fact, a canvas of members had shown that party strength on the scandals issue was almost equal. It is not surprising, therefore, that the opinions of the six new members from the Island were awaited with interest. As Sir Richard Cartwright has said: "For some weeks they held the balance of power, and the situation was really dramatic."<sup>14</sup>

Of the six, Laird was expected to wield the most influence, for he was known to command the support of Sinclair, Yeo, and Davies, while Austin MacDonald was associated with J. C. Pope. The Prime Minister made careful enquiries of his friend, Honourable W. H. Pope, who advised him that Laird was a clever, hard-headed fellow, intellectually of the stamp of Mackenzie. "He is a leveller, and all his sympathies are with the Grits. I do not think that you would be safe were you to place any dependence upon him."<sup>15</sup> But Sir Robert Hodgson, the Administrator of the Government of Prince Edward Island, wrote Sir John, praising Laird very highly, and stating "I believe his bias to be in favour of your government."<sup>16</sup> Sir Charles Tupper was able to tell Sir John that Laird had intimated that the Island would support the Conservatives because the federal Liberals had considered the terms of union granted to

(14) Rt. Hon. Sir Richard Cartwright, *Reminiscences*, Toronto, 1912, page 117. Sir George W. Ross, *Getting into Parliament and After*, Toronto, 1913, page 70.

(15) W. H. Pope to Macdonald, September 23, 1873, *Macdonald Papers*, op. cit. Vol. 119, page 157-58.

(16) Hodgson to Macdonald, September 26, 1873; *Ibid*, page 179.

the Island as too favourable.<sup>17</sup> Laird himself was non-committal, and announced that he was pledged to neither of the federal parties.

During the autumn of 1873 the scandals debate raged in the House of Commons. Though it was expected that Macdonald would have to retire, it was not certain whether he would be forced to resign with his government or have the privilege of choosing his successor. A handful of votes would decide his fate. Uncertainty prevailed until Laird rose to speak.

He acknowledged that it seemed "a very difficult position for members from Prince Edward Island who never had a vote here, to give it upon a question of this description," but "they would neither be faithful to their constituents nor to the sacred trust committed to them if they shirked the vote." He denied that he had any party affiliations. He would vote according to his conscience, for upon the decision that was given on this question would depend the future of the country, its intellectual progress, its political morality, and more than all, the integrity of its statesmen. He then expressed his intention of voting with the Opposition, which pronouncement, along with a similar one from Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona), decided the fate of the government and led to the resignation of Sir John Macdonald.<sup>18</sup>

Alexander Mackenzie, the Liberal leader, was then called upon to form a government. In this new administration David Laird was the Minister of the Interior, thus becoming the first Prince Edward Island member to have a seat in the federal cabinet. Two months later the new government was returned to office in a general election with a majority of sixty.<sup>19</sup>

Though a Minister of the Crown, Hon. David Laird took little part in the proceedings of the House of Commons. The most significant reason for this probably lay in the fact that like other Island politicians, he had not yet become sufficiently associated with party interests to take an active part in the hurly

(17) Said Tupper:—"I went over there (P.E.I.) in 1872 to take part in the general election. Laird persuaded me to leave. He said that the Liberals on the Island would give solid support to the Conservatives, because the Liberals in Ottawa had declared the union terms granted the Island were too favourable." Sir Charles Tupper, *Recollections of Sixty Years in Canada*, Page 163.

(18) *Globe*, Toronto, November 7, 1873.

(19) Laird's acceptance of a seat in the cabinet was accompanied by many accusations of bribery. Tupper regarded him as one of the "six of our supporters" who "left us to accept seats in the cabinet." Tupper, *op cit.* page 163. This move he called "the most monstrous corruption that has ever taken place under responsible government." (E. M. Saunders, *Life and Letters of Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Tupper*, Cassell, 1916, Vol 1., page 227). David Laird and Honourable Alexander Mackenzie both denied this charge which nevertheless, was later used to great effect by J. C. Pope in subsequent elections in Prince Edward Island.

burly of federal politics. Though six Liberals had been returned by the Province in the preceding general election, they were not elected as strong party followers, but as supporters of Mackenzie in his opposition to Macdonald's railway policy. They tended to be party men in name only. This situation prevailed for several years after the Island entered Confederation. Even in 1876, during a by-election in Queen's, Laird's own paper, the *Patriot*, was able to say:—"We Islanders own no fealty to Macdonald, and we are not bound by strong party ties to Mackenzie. Both these leaders are to us almost abstractions, and we are in a position to judge them by their acts as statesmen, independent of personal considerations."<sup>20</sup> It was not until the tariff and reciprocity controversies in the years which followed 1878 that Island politicians moulded their party sympathies permanently with those of the federal leaders. J. C. Pope, who became a member of the Macdonald Cabinet 1878, was a firm friend of the Conservative chieftain and supporter of his "National Policy," while Louis Davies, who entered the federal political arena in 1882, was a staunch Liberal and a loyal follower of Mackenzie and Blake.

During the 1870's the Canadian government devoted considerable attention to the opening up of the West. Manitoba had entered the Union in 1870 and British Columbia in 1871. Between these provinces lay a vast stretch of land sparsely settled with Indians and half breeds, an area which, if the statesmen's dream of a Dominion from sea to sea was to be fulfilled, had to be governed and colonized. As Minister of the Interior, Laird had to keep in close touch with the development of the new land.

To aid settlement and build the railway, the government concluded treaties with the Indians in order to purchase the titles to their lands. Two treaties had been signed in 1871 with respect to the transfer of tracts of land in Manitoba. Another was negotiated in 1873 by Alexander Morris, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba and the North West Territories, with a view to obtaining a right of way for the C. P. R. In 1874 it was necessary for the government to secure certain territory from the Crees and the Salteaux in Saskatchewan. This was difficult because of the feuds between the two tribes and their unwillingness to bargain. Laird himself undertook the task, and, accompanied by Governor Morris and a military detachment, jour-

(20) *Patriot*, Charlottetown, October 14, 1876.

neyed to Fort Qu'Appelle to meet the Indians. The negotiations were entirely successful, and treaties were signed with both tribes.

During Laird's tenure of office as Minister he took a keen interest in the welfare of the Indians and familiarized himself with their customs and their needs. In the House of Commons he promoted successfully an Act "to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians", and displayed an excellent knowledge of Indian affairs. It was natural, therefore, that, when the North-West Territories were set up as a separate administrative unit in 1876, Laird should be asked by the Prime Minister to take office as its first Lieutenant-Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs. At first he was not disposed to accept, but Mackenzie emphasized the government's view that the new Lieutenant-Governor should be one who was perfectly familiar with the West and on good terms with the Indians. Finally Laird consented, resigned his Prince Edward Island seat, and forthwith prepared for the journey westward.<sup>41</sup>

### III

In the autumn of 1876, when he set out for the North-West Territories, there was no continuous rail or water communication. The most convenient route lay across the Great Lakes by boat, then overland on an American railroad to the Red River, by boat again up to Winnipeg, and then by wagon trail across the prairies. It was a long journey, broken by stops to obtain supplies or the services of guides. To Laird, born, educated, and experienced in the Maritimes, it was a great adventure journeying westward on pioneering trails to set up Her Majesty's government in the vast hinterland of a new nation. He knew the tremendous difficulties involved in treating with the Indians and halfbreeds in order to obtain the rights to their lands for the advancement of the railway and settlement. He knew, too, that firmness, diplomacy and fairness had to be mingled in every action in order to avoid unrest and revolt. Moreover, he was on his own initiative; he was to be the Government of Canada to the North-West, for the contacts with Ottawa would be few and far between. It was not an easy task he had shouldered, and it was evident that he would have

(21) *Patriot*, Charlottetown, October 19, 1876.

For much of his information on Laird's experience in the West, the writer is indebted to the late Mrs. J. A. Mathieson of Charlottetown, a daughter of Laird, who kindly lent private family documents for the purposes of this article.

to draw heavily on his ample stock of courage and determination.

Battleford had been designated as the seat of government for the Territories. But at the time of the new Governor's arrival in November the official buildings were under construction. Consequently, for the winter of 1876-77, Laird made his headquarters at Livingstone, Swan River, not far from the American border and near the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Fort Pelly.<sup>22</sup> He had with him his secretary, Amedee Forget, (who later became Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan), a small staff, and a detachment of Mounted Police. They arrived just in time to settle in their new quarters before winter broke upon them.

In the following spring Governor Laird presided at the initial meeting of the first council of the North-West Territories which convened at Livingstone on March 8. The historic meeting, consisting of the Governor and three members and the clerk, was in the best room of the temporary Government House. The day being extremely cold, they gathered round the fire while the Governor, seated in an ordinary chair, read the Speech from the Throne. The special business of the day was a "Bill for the Preservation of the Buffalo", which was necessary in view of the rapidly approaching extinction of the animal.

During the summer which followed, Laird journeyed to Battleford where the second meeting of the Council was held, and from there to Fort MacLeod in his capacity of Indian Commissioner to make treaties with the Blackfeet, Stoney and Cree Indians. With him as associate Commissioner was Colonel J. F. MacLeod of the Mounted Police and a detachment of policemen. The Indians met them on September 17, and the negotiations lasted a week. It was a picturesque assembly that gathered in front of the Governor's tent. Some four thousand Indians in war paint and full regalia and led by their chiefs were seated in long lines facing the Governor and his colleague, who were flanked by a guard of honour of police in scarlet and gold uniforms. The result of the "pow pow" was the acknowledgement of the authority of the Canadian government in the region, and the transfer of 50,000 square miles of territory to the Crown. In return, the Indians were to retain certain reserved areas, and were given on the spot some \$60,000 in treaty money. On his way back to Battleford the Governor

(22) Norman Fergus Black, *History of Saskatchewan and the Old Northwest*, Regina, 1913, page 192.

held several "pow wows" with other tribes, and commenced negotiations for further treaties.

During the winter of 1877-78, Governor Laird and his family, together with the families of several of his staff, lived in the partially completed Government House at Battleford. As their equipment had not arrived from the East, they had to make themselves as comfortable as possible with make-shifts of all kinds. It was not until the following spring that the official buildings and residences were completed and the household equipment had arrived. The community life centred around the proceedings of the legislative council, the entertainments at Government House, and the comings and goings of settlers and traders. There were two small churches, one Protestant and one Roman Catholic, which catered to the religious needs of the white settlers and missionary work among the far-flung inhabitants of the territory. As the only schools were for the Indians and half-breeds, a Presbyterian minister acted as tutor for the children of the Governor, who thoroughly enjoyed their youthful experiences as pioneers.

One of the problems which faced the government of the Territories at this time was the disappearance of the buffalo. Indiscriminate slaughter of the animal on which the Indians depended for their prairie existence had led to a scarcity which was rapidly approaching extinction. The Indians were urged to be moderate in their hunting, but it was impossible to persuade them to protect their own interest. The Blackfoot treaty contained provision for the distribution of livestock and implements to the Indians in order that they might have some means of support when the buffalo disappeared. But this was arranged on the expectation that the disappearance would occur after some ten years. The crisis came sooner, for by the end of the winter of 1877-78 the animals had practically disappeared and their hunters were in dire distress. In the spring the Indians journeyed northward in search of food. By June some three thousand of them were camped around Battleford seeking assistance from the Governor, the "Great White Chief." Their presence was somewhat alarming to the settlers, accompanied as it was with pow-wows, war dances and singing. Laird met them on several occasions on the lawn of Government House. Though a bullet flew past his head at one of the meetings, he faced them with courage and listened to their story. They were unable to realize the buffalo had now disappeared, but blamed the Americans, halfbreeds, and hostile tribes for raiding their herds and

preventing the animals from following their usual spring migration to the north. They asked assistance in their stress from their "Great White Mother," the Queen. It was a delicate situation. The government had not been responsible for the difficulty, but it was evident that help had to be given the starving people. Laird assured them that supplies would soon be brought to them from the eastward and that in the meantime, though there was not much food among the white people, they would share what they had. He kept his promise, and ordered that flour, fish, and other food be given to the Indians. He telegraphed to Ottawa urging the federal government to send help immediately. The government was slow in realizing the seriousness of the situation, but Laird pressed them to action. By the end of the summer large stocks of provisions arrived which were distributed among the tribes and helped to ward off a serious famine. Had such a famine occurred, it might have ended in warfare and the destruction of the government's hopes in the West.

During the crisis Laird's courage and justice was in large measure responsible for the peaceful attitude of the Indians. From then on, they trusted him as "the man whose tongue is not forked" and as a wise counsellor and friend in need. His relations with them were not confined to official formality, for he made it a point to maintain personal contact. Prominent chiefs and half breed leaders boasted how they received hospitality at the Governor's dinner table and in his library. After he left the West, they missed this personal touch which had done so much to cement their loyalty to the Crown. During the North West rebellion of later years, Laird was convinced that he had pursued the wisest course in blending friendship with government.

This period, 1879-1881, was marked by steady progress. The Governor met frequently with the Indians and talked to them of solutions to their problems. He urged them to take up farming, and promised that he would send farming instructors to help and guide them in the cultivation of their reserves, a promise he fulfilled to the great benefit of western agriculture. Pursuant to a provision in the North West Territories Act which gave the Lieutenant-Governor power to create an electoral district for each thousand miles of territory which contained a thousand adults, Laird established three such districts in 1880. In one of these the first election to the legislative council was held a year later. This marked the beginning of self-government

in the Territories. Laird aided in the advancement of education among the settlers and Indians, and when, in 1879, a small school grant was provided, he instituted the policy of paying half the salary of the teachers in all schools. Much of the Governor's time was taken up with administrative duties such as the appointment of magistrates and the issue of marriage licenses and liquor permits. Laird's administration in general was on a small scale, though the area involved was large. For instance, the yearly revenue was little more than \$500 in 1877, and the total school grant was only \$2000 per year. It was only the beginning of greater development to come, but it was vital that the beginnings should be established on firm administrative foundation. Laird was convinced that the government could not afford to ignore the problems of the area or the feelings of its peoples. Though the Governor emphasized the importance of this attitude to the federal government and made many recommendations, its significance was not fully realized until after the rebellion of later years.

In the autumn of 1881 Laird's term of office as Lieutenant-Governor expired, and just before Christmas he left the land to which he had so often affectionately referred as "my parish." His departure was the occasion of regret on the part of the people whom he had served honourably and well for five years. The citizens of Battleford presented him with an address of appreciation which is best described in the words of the *Saskatchewan Herald* of the day:

The respect and esteem of the inhabitants of Battleford for Mr. Laird are but a faint echo of the feelings of all the people of the Territory, and the sentiments expressed therein will be strongly endorsed in every settlement which has had its growth during his wise administration. His name will always be endeared to those who had the privilege of his acquaintance; it will be associated with courtesy, friendship, and with that sympathy which is not expended in words alone, and his tall frame and hearty laugh will be connected with many happy recollections of our pioneering days.

Some years later a western historian was able to write: "There are few men who have given to the West services more characterized by fairness, breadth of sympathy, integrity, and public spirit."<sup>23</sup>

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(23) Ibid.



After leaving the West, Laird returned to his native province with the intention of resuming the editorial chair of the *Patriot* which had been occupied in his absence by Henry Lawson who afterwards became editor of the *Victoria Colonist* of Victoria, B. C.

The spring of 1882 was an active one in the public life of Prince Edward Island, for in May the provincial election was held, and in June a particularly strenuous federal election. Laird had hardly returned home when he became involved in both campaigns. He spoke frequently on behalf of the provincial Liberals in a losing battle which resulted in the return to office of the Conservatives under Hon. W. W. Sullivan. He was nominated along with Mr. (later Sir) Louis Davies to contest Queen's County in the federal election. Davies headed the poll, but Laird was defeated. He made only one more attempt to reenter politics when, in 1887, he unsuccessfully contested a newly-created seat in the North-West Territories.

The defeats suffered by Laird were serious blows to him after a decade of distinguished public service. Unfortunately for him, he reentered politics at a most inopportune time. His party's fortunes were at a very low ebb in the face of Sir John Macdonald's tremendous popularity and the overwhelming strength of the Conservatives. Laird had been away from his home province for almost eight years, so that to a generation of electors he was almost unknown. Then, too, there were many who still resented the fact that his acceptance of the western governorship, which involved resigning his portfolio as Minister of the Interior, had lost Prince Edward Island a seat in the cabinet. Had he waited a few years after returning to the Island before reentering politics, so that he could have reestablished himself in political circles, his great abilities and experience might again have been used as M. P. for Queen's. The same applies to his defeat in the Territories in 1887, for he had then been away from the West for six years and was personally unknown to the many new settlers who had arrived since his administration.

In 1898 Laird was appointed Indian Commissioner for Manitoba and the North-West Territories, with headquarters in Winnipeg. In 1899, though no longer a young man, he journeyed from Winnipeg to the Athabaska country and concluded his final Indian treaty with tribes who had become restless during the Klondike gold rush. In 1909 he took up

residence in Ottawa where he died in 1914 at the age of eighty-one.

The public life of David Laird was one of success and of failure, of achievement and of disappointment. But through it all there ran a love of public service, a devotion to duty, and a strength of character which marked him as a distinguished citizen. In the short space of ten years he had experienced the turmoil of the confederation controversy in Prince Edward Island, taken his place at the council board at Ottawa, and established a new government in the great West. In all these spheres he served his country well and made himself a place among the builders of the nation. But what is probably the most striking impression which David Laird made on public life concerns the quality of heart and mind and the emphasis on service rather than political advancement. The quality of his work and the personal satisfaction which he gained from doing it well meant more to him than the praise and honour which might result from it. Politics in the narrow sense of the word meant comparatively little to him; hence his somewhat insecure hold on political fortune. But distinguished service, whether in public office or in journalism, was the inspiration and success of his life; hence the honour and respect which are due him as a great Canadian.