

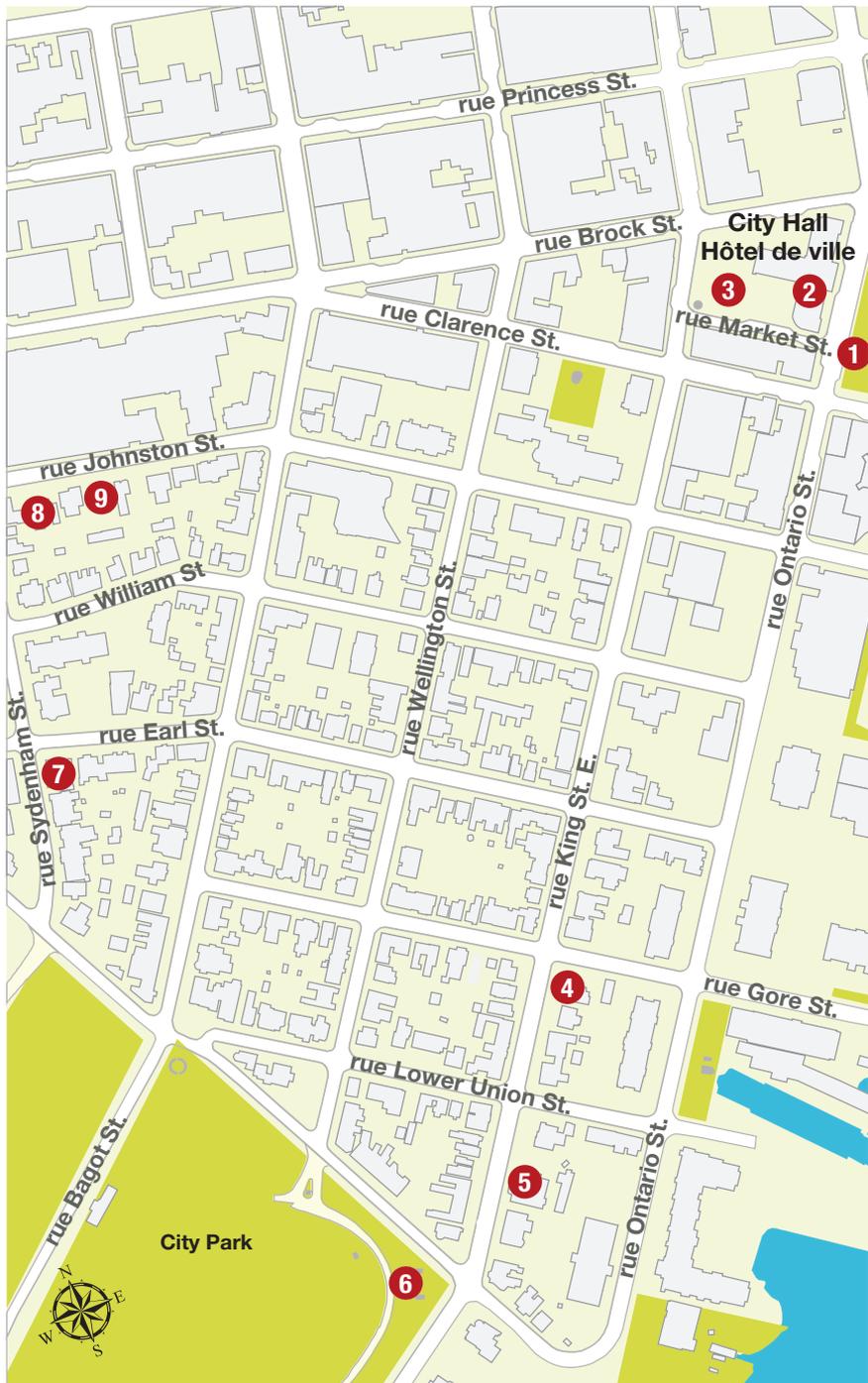
# 02

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## SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD WALKING TOUR

No Canadian leader is more closely identified with a community than Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. To discuss the Kingston of the 19th century is impossible without invoking Macdonald's name.

**APPROXIMATELY 1 HOUR** *Please be respectful of private property.*



rue Princess St.

rue Brock St.

City Hall  
Hôtel de ville

rue Clarence St.

rue Market St.

rue Johnston St.

rue William St.

rue Earl St.

rue Sydenham St.

rue Wellington St.

rue King St. E.

rue Ontario St.

rue Gore St.

rue Lower Union St.

rue Bagot St.

City Park

rue Ontario St.



# In Sir John A.'s Footsteps

BY ARTHUR MILNES

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## **1** Our Tour starts outside the Visitor Information Centre, 209 Ontario Street, across from City Hall.

Before you enter City Hall – built with the idea that Kingston would permanently be the capital of the United Canadas – pause for a moment and consider what this architectural treasure meant in the life of Macdonald of Kingston.

The beginning.

And the end.

John Macdonald's political life started as an Alderman here in Kingston almost a quarter century before Confederation.

His journey was completed in the building you are about to enter.

At the time of his death in June 1891, when he was still serving as Prime Minister of Canada, his body was brought here by train and lay in state in Memorial Hall.

If you close your eyes for a moment, it's not difficult to imagine Macdonald as the youthful Scottish immigrant, conversing with one of his fellow aldermen — perhaps after a drink at a nearby tavern — laughing, cajoling, convincing. And usually winning the day.

No politician since has mastered his skills of public and private persuasion – except perhaps U.S. President Barack Obama, today.



As the crowds shouted during Macdonald's last election campaign:

“Sir John, you'll never die.”

Here in Kingston, his spirit does indeed live on. It always will.

## **2** Enter City Hall, go up the stairs and turn right and walk into Memorial Hall.

Towards the stage, and on the right, you will see the portrait of Sir John A. that dominates the room, and rightly so.



Macdonald was 76 years old when he died at his Ottawa residence, Earnscliffe, on June 6, 1891. During his final illness, a special telegraph line was installed to carry medical updates to an anxious nation. Thanks to Macdonald, the youthful Dominion stretched from Atlantic to Pacific and was united by a railway — the ‘band of steel’ — a feat of engineering and vision the importance of which is difficult to fathom, even today.

And the thought of Canada without Macdonald’s guiding hand on the tiller, was simply impossible for many to comprehend in June of 1891. All told, he had served 8,624 days in the federal Parliament in Ottawa, the vast majority of them as Prime Minister.

“The life of Sir John A. Macdonald is the history of Canada,” his greatest opponent, Liberal Sir Wilfrid Laurier, told a hushed House of Commons during the eulogy for Macdonald — the most famous oration of its sort in Canadian history.

After thousands of citizens had paid their respects in Ottawa, the funeral train carrying Macdonald’s body rode those bands of steel home

to Kingston. Before his burial in the Macdonald family plot at Catarauqui Cemetery, in what’s now the west end of the City, he was remembered on this spot by those who’d known him since his youth — his fellow Kingstonians.

This magnificent room in City Hall is still the place where Kingstonians — and all Canadians — honour both the past and present. To pay tribute to the special role Kingston and City resident Judge John R. Matheson, who is now retired, played in the design of Canada’s Maple Leaf flag, then-Prime Minister Paul Martin headed Flag Day celebrations here in Kingston in February of 2005 on the 40th anniversary of Canada’s “new” flag.

As we leave Memorial Hall, we move along the hallway towards what still serves as the City of Kingston’s Council Chambers.



↑ Sir John A. Macdonald’s portrait hangs in Memorial Hall, Kingston City Hall.

↗ Views of Kingston City Hall, decorated for the funeral of Sir John A. Macdonald in June 1891.

→ Sir John A.’s body lay in state in Memorial Hall before his burial at Catarauqui Cemetery.

→ Memorial Hall as it looks today.

↓ This desk once belonged to Sir John A. himself.



Before we get there, however, you'll notice on your left the office of the present-day Mayor of Kingston. If you're lucky, the Mayor is in.

Mayor Mark Gerretsen, like many of his predecessors, has been known to show off the desk in the office that once belonged to Sir John A.

No other mayor in Canada can make that claim.

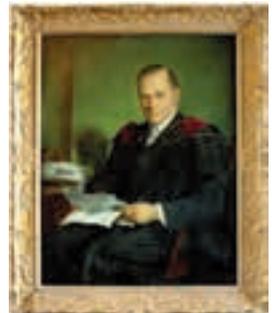
At the end of the hall are the City Council Chambers.

In Kingston we call this the *Horseshoe*. Here City Council debates the issues of the day. Sir John A. served as a Kingston Alderman from 1843 until 1846. It was during his term in municipal politics that Kingston City Hall was built. Visitors, staff and Kingston councillors have been thanking Sir John A. and his colleagues ever since.

If you look to your left, you will see the portrait of the Honourable Norman Rogers, a brilliant professor and Rector of Queen's University from 1937 to 1940. It was in 1940, while he was serving as Canada's wartime Minister of Defence that he was killed in a plane crash. His grieving friend, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (you'll be hearing more about him later) unveiled this commemorative portrait. It was widely believed that Rogers would have been King's successor as leader of the Liberal Party and possibly one day as Prime Minister. Rogers remains one

↖ City Council Chambers

→ Portrait of Norman Rogers





of the great “what if?” figures in Canadian history, and it is fitting he is honoured here in this room. Ironically — especially so considering the way he died — Kingston’s airport is named in Rogers’ honour. This twist of fate in naming is rarely mentioned today.

**Let’s proceed down the stairs for a taste of 19th century criminal justice. Stop at the elevator.**

Though we cannot visit the jail cell located in the basement unescorted, this is the perfect time to discuss another part of John A.’s fascinating career. (If you wish to see the jail cell, you can ask one of the City Hall tour guides or take the escorted City Hall tour.)

Before he entered politics, Sir John A. Macdonald was one of Kingston and Eastern Ontario’s leading lawyers. It is no surprise that John A. looked towards a career in this field. As the first Auditor General of Canada, John Langton, once said, “I know of no money-making business in Canada, except the law, store-keeping, tavern-keeping and perhaps I might add, horse-trading!”

Some things never change.

While John A. spent most of his legal career in commercial law, he practiced criminal law, as a de-

fence attorney, for two years, taking on some of the most serious and controversial cases of his time.

Brutality, floggings and capital punishment were facts of life in Canada during the Victorian era.

Sir John A. had some infamous clients. Despite a brilliant defence conducted by John A., one man was convicted and sentenced to a date with the hangman. (Always later called Mr. Ellis by Canadian tradition up to Canada’s last hangings which took place at Toronto’s Don Jail in 1962.) At his execution it turned out that the rope chosen was too long! The man was dropped through the gallows’ trap and landed safely in the coffin laid out for him.

Alive.

Very much alive in fact.

“You see!” he shouted. “I am innocent; this gallows was not meant for me.”

Officials found a shorter rope and tried a second time, the protestations of the condemned man notwithstanding. They were successful this time in their gruesome task.

**3 Leave City Hall and exit through the back door of the building located to the left of the lobby’s reception area. Turn right and walk towards the fountain.**

You are now standing in Springer Market Square. As you look at the buildings around the square you’ll see that not much has changed since Macdonald’s day. If you ignore the cars and other signs of modernity, it is not hard to imagine the

↖ If you wish to see the jail cell, you can take the escorted City Hall tour.

↓ Offices on Clarence Street where Sir John A. Macdonald practiced law.



→ Confederation celebrations in City Hall's market square on July 1, 1867.



thousands of citizens who gathered on this very spot on July 1, 1867, the day Sir John A. Macdonald's dream of one Canada was realized.

While Kingston's most famous son, who became the new country's first Prime Minister, had to attend to duties and celebrations in the new capital of Ottawa, two hours away today by car, the day was also duly marked right here. For John A., July 1 was special in a personal sense as well. It was announced that same day that Queen Victoria had knighted him. From that moment on, he was affectionately known by the name we still call him today.

"Sir John A."

**4 We'll now leave the Square and head west along King Street, turn left at the corner of King Street East and Market Street. Continue along to 191 King Street East (Sir Richard Cartwright House) located at the corner of King Street East and Gore Street.**

As visitors to Kingston interested in the life and times of Sir John A., you've probably already heard a few stories about our first Prime Minister's encounters with alcohol.

Yes, Sir John enjoyed a drink. A bit too much at times. At his gravesite in 1991, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his death, the 18th Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, quoted the late

Senator Heath Macquarrie of Prince Edward Island, who had pointed out that "While the lovable [Scottish bard Robbie] Burns went in for wine, women and song, his fellow Scot, John A. did not chase women and was not musical!"

One also has to remember the times. In 1857 police records show that Ontario Street, a downtown thoroughfare in the heart of the old city, boasted 37 taverns, nearby Wellington Street another 9, King Street 14, Princess Street 20, Johnson Street 12, while the market square area had another 19 taverns. And as if that wasn't enough, there were another 61 taverns scattered throughout the town including two taverns located right inside City Hall!

So, Sir John A.'s fondness for drink came naturally in those well-lubricated times. He recognized the dangers of drink as well, once ordering one of his cabinet ministers to abstain, warning him that a Macdonald government couldn't afford two drunks!

You have probably formed the opinion that Sir John A. was beloved by all. Well, that certainly wasn't the case. In fact, that's why we've stopped here at the Cartwright House.

To say that Sir Richard Cartwright hated John A. would be a grand understatement, even by political standards. "Detest" and "disgust" are more accurate words.

Kingston was a small town back in the 19th century, and one suspects there wasn't enough room here for two leading Conservatives — Cartwright and Macdonald. When the ambitious pair had a falling out, presto, Cartwright became a Liberal.

After Sir John A. was removed from office in 1873 due to the mother of all Canadian political scandals — the Pacific Scandal involving John A. accepting bribes to his party from railroad contractors — another man who had lived in Kingston, and a Scotsman and ardent tee-totaller, the aforementioned Alexander Mackenzie, became Canada's second Prime Minister, serving in that capacity from 1873 to 1878. Sir Richard, who wore one of the greatest growths of whiskers in Canadian history, became his Minister of Finance.

Cartwright's feelings for Sir John didn't get any better when Macdonald defeated Mackenzie and Cartwright in 1878 and returned to power, despite the scandal.

Later, Cartwright watched as Sir John A. defeated the Liberals in a national election over a cause dear to Cartwright's own heart: free trade with the United States (called reciprocity back then). "A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die!" Sir John A. shouted during that last campaign of 1891 while Liberals like Cartwright could only weep on their way to defeat.

↓ The Cartwright family has been very involved in the life of Kingston and Canada since the arrival of the Loyalists. This neo-classical stone house was built in 1832-33

for Robert David Cartwright and his bride, Harriet Dobbs of Dublin.

↗ Sir Richard Cartwright



Even in death, Sir John A. was victorious. As a Minister in another Liberal cabinet, Cartwright watched, once again, as Canadians turned down free trade.

## 5 Continue along King Street to Hotel Belvedere at 141 King Street East.

Back in the 40s, *Vogue Magazine* described this boutique hotel as the "the only reasonable place to stay between Montreal and Toronto."

Before that, it was a private residence and here, in October 1925, only days before election day, there took place one of the stranger incidents in Canadian history. Our Prime Minister at the time, William Lyon Mackenzie King, visited two spiritualists before he delivered an evening speech at the Grand Theatre over on Princess Street. He had even sent ahead one of his handkerchiefs without telling them it was from him so they could do their magic! King left history a massive personal diary and thanks to it, we know all about what happened in the Belvedere that day.

"When I sat in the chair opposite to her she asked for something I had been wearing and I gave her another handkerchief which she rolled up in her hands and began speaking very fast and without suggestion from me of any kind," King recorded in his diary on October 20, 1925. "I sat perfectly motionless, not even assisting with an expression on my face in fact; I was quite





↑ Hotel Belvedere,  
14 King Street East

tired and less ‘clairvoyant’ myself than usual.”

And then the spiritualist truly began. Canada’s Prime Minister was told he’d soon marry a younger woman and would live in a big house in California or Vancouver. Sinister figures, who bore uncanny resemblances to his Conservative opponent and the Governor General whom King was angry with, were revealed to him.

King wrote thousands of words about this visit to the other side.

“The influence of that talk with the little woman (his favourite medium, Mrs. Bleany of Kingston)

is strange,” he concluded. “It has brought me very near to the dear ones in the Great Beyond — what seems more like the Great Omnipresent. Here and Now I can never not believe in spiritualism after today’s experience.”

Yes, Prime Minister King was impressed. Too bad the ladies weren’t selling swampland in Florida! But we digress.

Prime Minister King also had an idea after the experience: Driving out to Sir John A. Macdonald’s grave to truly visit the dead. “The grave is a very simple one,” he wrote afterwards. “My grave will be like that ... I would have liked to have seen on Sir John’s monument ‘Prime Minister of Canada’ with the dates, but perhaps that is better for a statue or other memorial.”

**6 Continue on and cross at the lights at West Street and gather at the commanding statue of Sir John A. Macdonald, situated in beautiful City Park.**

This statue was erected in 1895 in honour of Kingston’s most famous son. Even today, each January 11 (Sir John A. Macdonald Day across Canada by an Act of Parliament) a hearty group of Kingstontians gather at noon to sing Happy Birthday, O Canada and God Save the Queen in Sir John A.’s honour. A few have been known to sip unidentified liquids from flasks and hoist them in toasts to Sir John A. as well, despite —

**As you walk along King Street, first called “Church Street”, it is interesting to note the many historic buildings designed for prominent citizens by leading architects like Edward Crane William Coverdale (see also Coverdale and Newlands Walking Tour, p.52) and Joseph and John Power (see also Power Walking Tour, p.47).**

**Buildings to note include:**



↑ 264 KING STREET EAST, which is called Gildersleeve House. This neo-classical style stone house was built for the wealthy merchant Henry Gildersleeve and his wife Sarah in 1830.

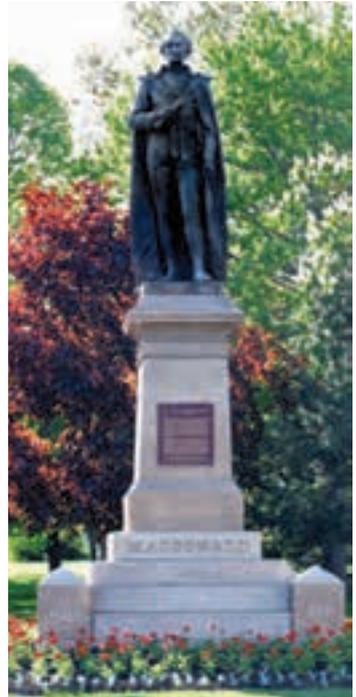
or perhaps because of — the snow and cold.

In 1941, on the 50th anniversary of Sir John A.'s death, thousands of his admirers gathered here to mark the loss of Canada's Father of Confederation. Then-Prime Minister Mackenzie King was joined in speaking that day by a former Prime Minister, Arthur Meighen, while a then-unknown future Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, was also in the crowd.

Even foreign dignitaries — a Prime Minister of Great Britain to boot — have been brought to this statue in the past to lay wreaths in Sir John A.'s honour. Mackenzie King led an obviously reluctant Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin here in August of 1927.

Prime Minister King, the colonial, was not, shall we say, amused — surely thinking ahead to future statues placed in his own honour — at how his British guest handled the whole experience. "It was done in a great hurry," King confided in his diary. "I was a little surprised Baldwin did not proceed less in haste and display more reverence in the act. It was sort of a business affair."

**7 Move north along West Street until you reach Sydenham Street. Turn right, proceed until you reach the intersection of Earl and Sydenham Streets. Stop at 134 Earl Street. Note the historic plaque and stop there.**



↑ Statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in Kingston City Park, unveiled on October 23, 1895.



↑ **225 KING STREET EAST** called the Frontenac Club, was built in classical revival style in 1845-46. It was first used as a bank, then a men's club, and since 2000, an inn.



↑ **221 KING STREET EAST** was built in 1834 for John Solomon Cartwright and his wife Sarah. John was a lawyer, judge, banker and member of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada.

→ 134 Earl Street,  
where Sir John A.'s  
sister Louisa and  
his brother-in-law,  
Queen's professor  
James Williamson  
resided.

↓ Louisa, Sir  
John A.'s sister



As you walk along West Street, the park on your left, City Park, is also important in the history of Kingston. City Park is Canada's oldest municipal public park. It was redesigned by Frederick Todd, then a student of Frederick Law Olmstead who was also the designer of New York City's famous Central Park and Montreal's Mount Royal Park. The property which comprises City Park here in Kingston was purchased by the federal government in 1841 and was originally intended as the site for the Canadian parliament buildings.

After the death of Macdonald's sister, Margaret, his other sister, Louisa, and his brother-in-law now widowed, Queen's University professor James

Williamson, continued living together here, still part of an extremely close-knit family.

Throughout his married life, Williamson often had the unique experience of having his Scottish mother-in-law and his sister-in-law Louisa living under his roof as well.

From 1865 to 1876, the Williamsons and Louisa also shared a home at "Heathfield" at 1200 Princess Street, then a farmhouse outside city limits, and now the home of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, the only religious congregation founded in Kingston.

With Sir John A. off in the political world after the death of his first wife, this Job-like professor and his wife in effect raised Sir John A.'s son, Hugh John. (For those tempted to believe Sir John A. was lucky in the in-law stakes, especially in comparison with Williamson, it should be noted that Sir John A.'s own mother-in-law, and

→ James  
Williamson,  
Sir John A.'s  
brother-in-law





←← Lady Agnes Macdonald, Sir John A.'s second wife, and their daughter, Mary.

← Lady Agnes Macdonald left Canada after her husband's death.

brother-in-law, moved in with him in Ottawa after his second marriage in 1867!)

Despite the inevitable family tensions, Williamson remained a close friend of Sir John A.'s even after his wife's death. Sir John A.'s loyal secretary, Joe Pope, described Williamson in 1891 this way: "A widower who lived in a desolate-looking house with the minimum of comforts of any kind, painfully lacking the evidence of a woman's touch, and [who] was besieged by politicians who thought only of their immediate interests, intent only on extracting from him the last measure of service," Pope wrote.

Sir John A. stayed in this Earl Street house during his final election campaign during the winter of 1891. While in the home, he told Pope something for which every prime minister since has surely felt a certain affinity.

"Joe," said Sir John to me one afternoon as he lay dozing in his cheerless room, 'if you would know the depth of meanness of human nature, you have got to be a prime minister during a general election.'"

**8 Continue walking along on Sydenham Street, about two blocks, then turn right on Johnson Street. Stop at 194 Johnson Street.**

Despite his success in politics, Sir John A.'s personal life was anything but happy. As a lad he had looked on as his baby brother was beaten to death by a drunken servant on a Kingston street.

Macdonald's first marriage to his cousin Isabella, followed in this pattern.

Isabella spent most of their years of marriage in pain and depression, suffering from a series of illnesses that only opium (a common cure at the time) could dull. Sir John A. arrived home from political duties in Toronto on Christmas Eve of 1857. Isabella was on her final journey. She died three days later. Her funeral was held in this home.

Macdonald also lost an infant son to illness, and he had helplessly watched as his daughter, Mary — who was destined to die alone in England in 1933 — struggled to cope with a life-long disability.

**9 Continue down Johnson Street to 180 Johnson Street.**

While Sir John A. and his first wife Isabella lived in this house, Hugh John, the couple's only son to reach adulthood, was born here on March 13, 1850.

Although Hugh John faced a rocky future — the loss of his mother when he was still a boy and his eventual alienation from his father because he married an older woman — he was more than a success in life.

In one of Sir John A.'s last appearances in the House of Commons, he proudly introduced his fellow Conservative M.P. and son to the House, Hugh John having been elected an M.P. from Manitoba in 1891.

Hugh John later became Premier of Manitoba and, like his father before him, was knighted.

→ Macdonald's official portrait hangs in Parliament Hill in Ottawa

↓ Miniature of Mrs. John A. Macdonald inserted in a gold medallion.



← Notice of Isabella Macdonald's funeral (born Isabella Clark).

← Photo of Hugh John, Sir John A.'s son from his first marriage.

**10 Continue along Johnson Street for two blocks to King Street and then turn left on King Street, ending your tour in Springer Market Square.**

It is fitting this Sir John A. Macdonald walking tour ends here at the Market Square, where Confederation itself was celebrated on July 1, 1867. Less than a year before his own death in 1979, former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker penned a tribute to Sir John A. for the book *Macdonald of Kingston*, by the late Professor Donald Swainson of Queen's University.

Canada's 13th Prime Minister wrote the following about the first.

"As was said of Sir Christopher Wren, when someone asked: 'Where is the monument to that great man?'; the reply was: 'If you would see his monument, look about you.' Macdonald's monument is Canada!" ■



Audio versions of this tour are available for free download at [www.cityofkingston.ca/walkingtours](http://www.cityofkingston.ca/walkingtours)

Choose your narrator for the tour from a growing list that includes the Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien, the 20th Prime Minister of Canada along with the Hon. Peter Milliken, 34th Speaker of the House of Commons; the Rt. Hon. Paul Martin, the 21st Prime Minister of Canada along with Arthur Milnes, Commissioner of Sir John A. 2015; and hockey greats Don Cherry with Jim Dorey.

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