

Gift from John A. MacDonald

By L. M. McKechnie
This is a Canadian Christmas story of nearly 100 years ago. It is not the story of jingling sleigh bells, holly wreaths and flaming plum pudding.

It's the story of a lonely man (soon to be prime minister) enjoying a solitary feast of toast and tea in a hotel bedroom 3,200 miles from home and putting the final touches on the blueprint for Canada's nationhood.

Plan for Federation
Three weeks earlier the men we now call the Fathers of Confederation — five Nova Scotians, five New Brunswickers and six from the Canadian Provinces (Ontario and Quebec) — arrived in London to present their plan for a federation of all British North America to the Imperial government.

They all stayed at the Westminster Palace Hotel, at the junction of Victoria and Topham streets (within sight of Westminster Abbey) where a ground floor conference room provided their meeting place.

One Voice
The delegates were far short of agreement on details of the terms. But they wanted to ask with a unanimous voice for the measure which the British Parliament would need to pass to accomplish their purpose.

So they worked steadily with little time for social affairs. New wrangles on December 11, those of the Canadian delegates John A. MacDonald, George Etienne Cartier and Alexander Gait went for a two-day visit to Highclere Castle, Newbury, the home of the Lord of Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary and the man who was to introduce the confederation bill in the House of Lords.

Retired to Read
They spent a pleasant two days and returned to their London hotel late on the evening of Dec. 12. MacDonald said goodnight to his colleagues in their common sitting room and retired to his bedroom with a bundle of Canadian newspapers newly arrived.

It seems he climbed into bed to enjoy the news from home and dozed off. Historians don't agree on whether there was a lamp or a candle beside the bed. But MacDonald himself wrote that he was awakened some time later "by intense heat".

True Version
Here's the story as he told it in a Boxing Day letter to his sister Louisa.

"For fear that an alarming story may reach you, I may as well tell you as it occurred."
"Cartier, Gait and myself returned from Lord Carnarvon's place in the country late at night. I went to bed but continued reading the newspapers of the day, after my usual fashion I fell asleep, and was awakened by intense heat."

"I found my bed, bed clothes, and curtains all on fire. I didn't lose my presence of mind — pulled down the curtains with my hands, extinguished them with the water in my room."

Avalanche of Feathers
The pillow was burnt under my head, and bolster as well. All the bed clothes were blazing and dragged them all off on the floor, and knowing the action of feathers on fire, I tipped open bolster and pillows and poured an avalanche of feathers on the blazing mass, and then stamped out the fire with my hands and feet.

"Least the hair mattress might be burning internally, I then went to Cartier's bedroom, and with his assistance carried all the water in three adjoining rooms into mine, and finally extinguished all appearance of fire. We made no alarm, and only Cartier, Gait and myself knew of the accident."

After it was all over it was then discovered that I had been on fire. My shirt was burnt on my back, and my hair, forehead and hands scorched. Had I not worn a very thick flannel shirt under my nightshirt, I should have been burnt to death. As it was, my escape was miraculous.

"It was found that my right shoulder blade was much scorched. So I got dressed and thought no more of it. In a day or two, however, I found that it would not do, and have been under the doctor's hands for a week."

"The wound at one time took an ugly look. I was kept in bed for three days, and have not left the house these eight days. I shall take a drive today if the doctor allows it when he calls to look at my back. So much for that story."

"On Christmas Eve the Canadian delegates all went off to enjoy the festivities at the homes of English friends — all that is, but John A. MacDonald. The doctor refused to allow him to leave his room."

Alone
He wrote to Louisa:
"I had a merry Xmas alone in my room, and my dinner of tea and toast. I drank all your health in bohea, though you did not deserve it. I was to have gone to Evan McPherson's to dinner, if I did not go down to William Clark, but I could do neither. The town is quite empty, and I have no news to tell."

What he didn't tell his sister was that, before their departure on Christmas Eve, the other delegates perhaps influenced by the season, left the final details of the confederation brief in MacDonald's hands. Unanimity had been achieved.

And so, on Christmas Day, 1866, MacDonald ticked up the final draft, put his signature on the document which history describes as the "London Resolutions" and dispatched it to Lord Carnarvon at the Colonial Office.

Macdonald wrapped up a present to the Canadian people.

Then he sat back to enjoy his Christmas toast and bohea (which, for non-bohea drinkers, is black tea of the lowest quality).

Second Brownie Pack Has Variety Program

Wednesday of last week, the Second Acton Brownie Pack exchanged gifts, enjoyed chocolate milk, cookies and received bags of candy.

The girls arranged a program, which included Darlene Beerman giving a puppet show, Susan Mills, tap dance, Valerie Mitchell reading the Christmas story, Kathy Astley, piano solo, and three girls, Gay Sissett, Nelie Van Der Kooy and Pat Sampson, singing "Silent Night".

Leader is Mrs. A. W. Bryan.

EDEN MILLS

W.M.S., Ladies', Aid, Institute All Enjoy Christmas Meetings

The Christmas meeting of the W.M.S. and Ladies' Aid of Eden Mills Presbyterian Church was held on Monday afternoon with Mrs. R. Wright Sr. as hostess. Mrs. H. Gilbertson opened the W.M.S. with a hymn, with Mrs. E. Perry taking the Scripture and gleanings from the Glad Tidings were given by Mrs. G. MacDougall. Business was kept to a minimum.

The Ladies' Aid was conducted by the president, Mrs. Beryl Wright, opening with a Christmas prayer and hymn 171. Cards of thanks were read and minutes and treasurer's report were given.

The program committee took over and Mrs. E. Perry conducted a contest. A reading by Mrs. R. Roy was followed by a paper by Mrs. George Aitken entitled "Christmas: Last call for a Moment of Decision". Mrs. Beryl Wright favored with a solo and a reading.

Three presentations were made to the following: Mrs. Sada Gilbertson, retiring secretary of the W.M.S., after many years of faithful work; Mrs. Wallace Lashby, retiring president of the Ladies' Aid; and Mrs. H. Gilbertson, for her extra work pertaining to the Sunday school concert.

Amid a Christmas setting, an exchange of Christmas gifts took place. Mrs. F. Taylor closed with prayer and a social hour followed.

The Eden Mills Women's Institute held their Christmas meeting on Wednesday evening with Mrs. Wallace Lashby as hostess. Decorations carried out the holiday theme. Making the business as brief as possible, Mrs. R. Roy opened with the Mary Stewart Collect and the Institute Ode. The minutes of the last meeting and the treasurer's report were read.

It was decided to hold an auction sale early in January. Mrs. Hene Buchan was elected representative of the Community Club and the roll call was answered with a verse pertaining to Christmas.

Silence was observed for a departed member, Mrs. Bill Wallace.

Mrs. Wallace Lashby, program convener, took over the meeting, starting with the singing of carols. Four members took part in reading the Scripture, pertaining to the birth of Christ, and five candles were lit by the president, Mrs. R. Roy, representing Peace, Joy, Christ, Faith and Love.

A reading followed by Mrs. R. Wright. The exchange of gifts took place, closing with the Queen and Institute Grace. A delicious lunch was served by the hostess and her committee.

Decorated Homes
The people of Eden Mills intend to make this a colorful holiday as most of the homes are tastefully decorated.

Bethlehem Celebrates On Jesus' Birthplace

Those who dream of a white Christmas with Santa Claus pipping down the chimney to the tune of "Jingle Bells" can thank assorted writers and poets and the northern climate. Christmas in the land of Christ's birth, however, is another matter.

What is Christmas like in Bethlehem? There's generally no snow, for one thing, for winters are mild in the Judean Hills around Bethlehem. No Santa Claus listers to children's pleas, for he's an American invention based on a European saint. And there's probably no decorated Christmas tree in the Village square, that custom originated in Germany.

Church Focal Point
Instead, the focal point of Christmas in Bethlehem is the Church of St. Mary of the Nativity, supposedly built over the spot where Jesus was born. Here pilgrims from all over the world gather on Christmas Eve. First there is a singing in the square facing the church. Then all enter

for the solemn midnight mass. After the service, an image of Christ is carried in a procession down the grotto, and is placed in a manger, where it lies until January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany.

After this ceremony, some may wander into the fields outside the town, where perhaps shepherds long ago heard the news of the birth of Christ.

All this takes place, of course, on the eve of December 25. But that's not the end of Christmas

Indian Nativity

Ontario Christmas of 350 Years Ago

It was nearly 350 years ago that Christianity and Christmas first came to the wilderness which is now Ontario.

The Recollets came here from France in 1615. Then, 14 years later, the Jesuits came and portaged their way through forbidding country to Huronia to set up their main mission on the banks of the River Wye just east of present-day Midland.

Pamstakingly the priests, their handful of artisans and willing Indians, erected the palisades pole by pole until some 10,000 of them surrounded the encampment which was later to become "St. Marie Among the Hurons", farthest westerly outpost of the white man in Canada. It was here in 1635 probably saw their first nativity scene and celebrated one of their first Christmases with these missionaries from France.

By 1649, when the Jesuits burned the mission rather than let it fall into the hands of the warring Iroquois, many hundreds of tribesmen apparently from as far away as present-day Florida had come to see and hear the story of the nativity and to partake in the festivities of Christmas.

Today, in the Huronia Museum at Midland, can be seen the Nativity Diorama as created by the National Museum of Canada. It depicts the Indian interpretation of the Nativity with the three Indian Chieftains of the Ottawa tribe, the Cree, and the Tumbucas allegedly from Florida as the Three Wise Men.

The shepherds are wandering hunters of the Naskapi tribe from north of the St. Lawrence River. The "Wise Men" have come bearing gifts of "furs and pelts."

St. Marie Among the Hurons located just a few hundred yards below the twin spires of the Marquette Shrine is at present being completely reconstructed by the Ontario Government with the University of Western Ontario acting as technical agent. The fort site, which drew upwards of 50,000 pilgrims and tourists from all over the world last summer, is

scheduled for completion in time for Canada's Centennial year — 1967.

Work at the site is being carried out by Dr. Wilfrid Jury, honorary curator of the University Museum

of Indian Archaeology and Pioneer Life. The doctor has spent more than two decades in archaeological research at St. Marie and in the varied Ontario holidayland known as Huronia.



Christmastime, and once again we pause to wish good friends all the special joys and blessings of the season. May your Day bring an abundance of happiness and peace.

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Let us share in the wonder and joy the shepherds felt that first Holy Night when angels brought their glad tidings of peace, good will toward men.
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