

Celebrate Sir John A. Macdonald's 200th Birthday!

By Hannelore Volpe



Canada's first prime minister and his wife, Lady Agnes, are to be portrayed by Brockville historians Brian and Renee Porter November 14 at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum and Community Centre.

You will get to meet the man behind the man when Sir John A. Macdonald hosts an evening of entertainment and Victorian-era fare at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum and Community Centre on Saturday, Nov. 14.

Canada's first prime minister (in 1867) and his wife, Lady Agnes, are portrayed by Brockville historians Brian and Renee Porter.

The dinner evening centres around a speech made by the original Sir John A. in 1887—the year of the Dominion of Canada's 20th anniversary and Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

"I like to use that year," Mr. Porter noted. Mr. Porter aims to reflect the charisma and magnetism of the first Prime Minister during his speech. Afterwards, he steps out of character to give a fuller picture of this highly-skilled politician with the common touch.

The Macdonalds travelled widely overseas, and had even visited Highclere Castle, where the TV series *Downton Abbey* was filmed.

By the late 1880s, Sir John A. had been instrumental in having the Canadian Pacific railway completed, and Lady Agnes had ridden on a cowcatcher. As one of the key Fathers of Confederation, the first Prime Minister succeeded in having Canada grow to expand across the continent.

A retired teacher, Mr. Porter aims to make the re-enactment of his alter-ego as true to life as possible. He has presented Sir John A. Macdonald to hundreds of people in schools and at various events throughout eastern Ontario. His career as Sir John A. started several years ago when he was part of a military re-enactment at the Brockville Museum. Someone suggested that Mr. Macdonald, then Premier of Canada West (in the 1860s), should review the troops. In short order, Mr. Porter found a

swallow-tailed coat, a top hat and the character was born. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Porter made her first hooped skirt. Mr. Porter had a Kingston military shop make his shirts with stand-up collars. When in character, "we try to do these things as accurately as possible," Mr. Porter said.

That means no modern eyeglasses or wrist-watches showing—especially when firing off an antique musket. Sir John A. "would have a pocket watch," Mr. Porter noted.

Mrs. Porter will read from Lady Agnes' diaries about her life in Ottawa. This was the era when electric lighting and the telephone were being developed.

The Sir John A. Macdonald event starts at 6:15 p.m. at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum and Community Centre. It is at 14732 Woodbine Ave. at Vandorf Road.

Tickets are \$55 plus HST per person. Pre-registration is required. Log on to townofws.ca/museum or call 905-727-8954 for tickets and information.

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