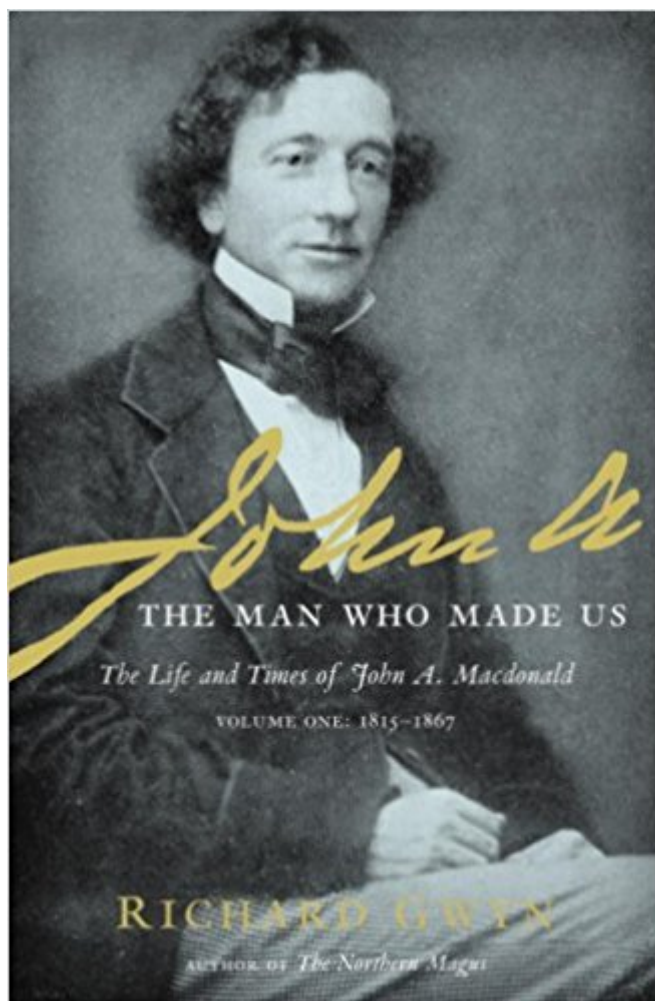


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# John A: The Man Who Made Us (Life And Times Of)



## Synopsis

The first full-scale biography of Canada's first prime minister in half a century by one of our best-known and most highly regarded political writers. The first volume of Richard Gwyn's definitive biography of John A. Macdonald follows his life from his birth in Scotland in 1815 to his emigration with his family to Kingston, Ontario, to his days as a young, rising lawyer, to his tragedy-ridden first marriage, to the birth of his political ambitions, to his commitment to the all-but-impossible challenge of achieving Confederation, to his presiding, with his second wife Agnes, over the first Canada Day of the new Dominion in 1867. Colourful, intensely human and with a full measure of human frailties, Macdonald was beyond question Canada's most important prime minister. This volume describes how Macdonald developed Canada's first true national political party, encompassing French and English and occupying the centre of the political spectrum. To perpetuate this party, Macdonald made systematic use of patronage to recruit talent and to bond supporters, a system of politics that continues to this day. Gwyn judges that Macdonald, if operating on a small stage, possessed political skills "of manipulation and deception as well as an extraordinary grasp of human nature" of the same calibre as the greats of his time, such as Disraeli and Lincoln. Confederation is the centerpiece here, and Gwyn's commentary on Macdonald's pivotal role is original and provocative. But his most striking analysis is that the greatest accomplishment of nineteenth-century Canadians was not Confederation, but rather to decide not to become Americans. Macdonald saw Confederation as a means to an end, its purpose being to serve as a loud and clear demonstration of the existence of a national will to survive. The two threats Macdonald had to contend with were those of annexation by the United States, perhaps by force, perhaps by osmosis, and equally that Britain just might let that annexation happen to avoid a conflict with the continent's new and unbeatable power. Gwyn describes Macdonald as "Canada's first anti-American." And in pages brimming with anecdote, insight, detail and originality, he has created an indelible portrait of "the irreplaceable man," "the man who made us." Macdonald hadn't so much created a nation as manipulated and seduced and connived and bullied it into existence against the wishes of most of its own citizens. Now that Confederation was done, Macdonald would have to do it all over again: having conjured up a child-nation he would have to nurture it through adolescence towards adulthood. How he did this is, however, another story. "He never made the least attempt to hide his vice," unlike, say, his contemporary, William Gladstone, with his sallies across London to save prostitutes, or Mackenzie King with his crystal-ball gazing. Not only was Macdonald entirely unashamed of his behaviour, he often actually drew attention to it, as in his famous response to a heckler who accused him of being drunk at a

public meeting: "Yes, but the people would prefer John A. drunk to George Brown sober." •  
There was no hypocrisy in Macdonald's make-up, nor any fear. "from John A. Macdonald

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Judging by the first half, his two-volume biography will no doubt be ranked with Donald Creighton's two-book landmark from the 1950s. Gwyn provides a more dispassionate analysis of this complicated man and his times. A welcome addition to the national library." • -The National Post "Gwyn has performed a service to 21st-century Canadians by recreating a man of the 19th so well. This is a book that [Donald] Creighton, and perhaps even Sir John A. himself, could pick up and learn something." • -Winnipeg Free Press "A vivid, multi-dimensional portrait of a fascinating character and his times. Gwyn, his trademark wry wit enlivening his text, brings a lifetime of political punditry to bear on his subject, surely one of the most intriguing political figures Canada even produced." • -Montreal Gazette "Gwyn's book is also a hymn of praise to what he sees as a miraculous country, miraculous in its peacefulness, its diversity, its tolerance and its determined un-Americanness. Those positive national qualities can be traced back unmistakably to its first leader. This is the personal and contemporary insight that distinguishes this biography." • -Toronto Star "Through historical documents, Gwyn gives great insight into this complicated character and his turbulent life. John A comes alive in these pages on many levels, including his most fallible." • HaH - Halifax Chronicle-Herald "In a lively but thorough biography of John A.

Macdonald up to the day of Confederation in 1867, Richard Gwyn brings to life the young Scottish-born lawyer who found himself unexpectedly entering politics in Kingston in 1844. Gwyn writes from a twenty-first century perspective while painting for his readers a vivid image of nineteenth century Canada: its society, customs, characters and politics. Gwyn helps us understand Macdonald's genius and vision, which would shape the nation that grew to the north of the United States."- Charles Taylor Prize Jury

Richard Gwyn is an award-winning author and political columnist. He is widely known as a commentator for the Toronto Star on national and international affairs and as a frequent contributor to television and radio programs. His books include two highly praised biographies, *The Unlikely Revolutionary* on Newfoundland premier Joey Smallwood, and *The Northern Magus* on Pierre Elliot Trudeau. His most recent book, *Nationalism Without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian*, was selected by *The Literary Review of Canada* as one of the 100 most important books published in Canada. Volume two of Gwyn's biography of Macdonald will be published in 2009.

A detailed riveting read about a man who was the main force behind the creation of Canada. Amazing historical detail. Every Canadian needs to read this. Hopefully those who want to know how and why Upper and Lower Canada settlers at the sheer will of Sir John A. McDonald, in his unwavering desire as a Scot to not be - he refused to be American. Canada was created in a reactionist protective drive to not be American. This vision and drive of what it means to be Canadian as articulated and accomplished by Sir John A. McDonald lives on in every Canadian today. We need to know our history to protect our sovereignty still, from America. Canada is a unique diverse experiment going fairly right. We owe that to the determined drive of our founding father.

Why didn't they teach this in school when I was a kid. Hope they are today, every generation needs to know how Canada was born and under the extremely conditions it survived!

So much over history remembers Sir John's drinking that all of the amazing work, and you can tell it was work, he did to bring our country together, I think, was lost. When asked "what was I reading", most often the reply on hearing it was Sir John A. MacDonald biography a remark would be made about his over the top drinking. I wish more people would read this book and talk and write about him and his amazing intellect.

this book was very informative and I learned a lot of things about this man I didn't know previously. It shows him to be a brilliant man but also one who struggled with his flaws. I must say however that I found this book a bit of a slog - lots of dry bits. Worth the read but a bit exhausting.

Wonderful, engrossing account of events leading up to the birth of Canada and led by the unique and indomitable Sir John A. Richard Gwyn has managed to give our first leader a human face and brings him to life brilliantly. As a Canadian long removed from his country, it was wonderful for me to come back home through this book and I am now reading Volume 2. The lesson is simple: history matters.

An excellent read giving one a great perspective on a great Canadian but even more it gives a good insight into the politics of the time and the winds of change that were buffeting NA during the last half of the 18th century

Gwyn's JOHN A. is a superb study of Canada's modern founder, John A. MacDonald, but it is also a very clear and detailed history of the process that led to the formation of the Canadian confederation. A must read for anybody interested in Canada.

Well researched and informative. Reads like a CBC documentary though.

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