

A Canadian wine jug

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You will see by the papers what narrow escape we had. None of the party will again be nearer their graves until they are placed in them. The people behaved well – the women heroically. I am none the worse of the trip.

Letter from John A. Macdonald to his sister, Margaret Williamson, Toronto, 7 July 1859.

While having a pleasant afternoon tea, my hosts showed me a Canadian-made wine jug. Of rather ordinary form and decoration, it has an intriguing inscription relating to the rescue of the steamer *Ploughboy* with a list of names headed by John A. Macdonald – a common name, but that of the beloved Canadian Prime Minister, father of the Confederation, who was voted in for six terms. A short search in *Google* ascertained that John A. Macdonald, then alderman of Kingston and member of the Macdonald/Cartier administration, had indeed been a passenger on the boat.

Presented to B. W. Smith Esquire, Sheriff
Of the County Simcoe in Commemoration of his
Adventurous expedition to Owen Sound which
Resulted in rescuing the Passengers and
Saving the STEAMER PLOUGHBOY from wreck on
The SHORES of LAKE HURON during the tempestuous
Night of 1st of July 1859

BY

Honble J.A. Macdonald	S. Derbshire Esqur.
Honble John Ross	Colonel Prince
Honble P.N. Vankoughnet	Angus Morrison Esqur. M.P.
Honble Sidney Smith	John Duggan Esqur.
Honble John Rose	D.B. Read Esqur.
Honble J.H. Cameron	A. McLean H.J. Gibb Esqur.

The wine jug was made in the late 1850s and is stamped on the upper rim with the pseudo marks of Robert Hendery – a lion passant and a Georgian head – and the retailer's mark of J.E. Ellis, Toronto.¹ Wine jugs must have been popular presentation pieces, presumably because their form allows for big cartouches, where elaborate inscriptions were easily accommodated and seen when used. There are several jugs in the Birks Collection by Robert Hendery, one of them almost identical in form and size to the B.W. Smith jug.² In style it is a typical representative of Rococo revival: chased ornamentation of wine leaves and grapes, beaded rims and foot and equipped with a handle, formed naturalistically as a vine branch. Directly below the spout is a small cartouche showing an engraving of *Ploughboy*,³ a typical side-wheel steamboat.

The events of 1 July 1859 on board *Ploughboy* were related in several short articles in Toronto newspapers. A detailed report in two parts by a passenger, signed 'H.J.G.', was printed by *The Leader, The People's Paper*, on 6 and 7 July 1859. The *Northern Advance*, Barrie, 13



1 Wine jug, R. Hendery, retailed by J. E. Ellis, Toronto, late 1850s. (Private collection)

1 Robert Hendery emigrated to Canada from Scotland before 1837; he established his own business in 1840 and formed various partnerships with Peter Bohle. The firm became one of the leading silversmiths in Quebec, supplying many important retailers. J. E. Ellis came from England in 1848; from 1852 on he carried on a retail watchmaker/jeweller business at 30 King Street, Toronto.

2 Ross Fox, *Presentation Pieces and Trophies from the Henry Birks Collection of Canadian Silver*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1985, pp47–49. This jug, Birks Coll no25135, was given to Mrs James Sadlier by the St Patrick's Literary Association in Montreal when she moved to New

York City. Mrs Sadlier was a well-known author of about 60 novels dealing with Irish life, both in America and Ireland. Her husband was a partner in Sadlier & Co., the leading US Catholic book publisher.

3 The steamer *Ploughboy* was built at Chatham in 1851 by J.M. McDermott: 450 tons, 170ft long, 28ft wide, with a wood hull. In 1864 the ship was sold and renamed T.F. Parks; rebuilt as a wrecking tug 1869; on 3 June 1871 she burned while about 500ft from Sibley's dock, Detroit river. The hull was raised and after boilers and engine were removed she was scuttled in deep water, October 1871. I am grateful to Bill McNeil for this information, email 6 June 2007.



2 Advertisement for pleasure trips in Ploughboy, *The Daily Globe*, 5 July 1859.

July 1859 included a somewhat romantic report of the disaster, written by a female passenger who remained nameless.

A party of ladies and gentlemen⁴ left Toronto for Collingwood (approximately 95 miles north of Toronto and on the southern coast of Lake Huron at Georgian Bay), where they boarded *Ploughboy* shortly before midnight. A thunderstorm during the night did not disturb or upset the passengers and the next day started merrily enough with jokes, singing and piano playing. What should have been a pleasure cruise soon turned into a nightmare after the steamer's cross-heads⁵ snapped in half and all steam power had to be turned off; without a mast and sails⁶ *Ploughboy* drifted helplessly. The weather worsened, with strong wind and heavy seas. Sheriff Smith and three of the men volunteered to get help from Owen Sound in one of the life boats, which they equipped with a jury-rigged sail made from the ship's awnings. Efforts to evacuate the rest of the passengers to nearby Lonely Island had to be abandoned. Anchors were dropped to slow the steamer's progress towards land, but as night set in *Ploughboy* drifted closer and closer to the rocky shore. '... the terrible communication of the almost certain prospect of impending death'⁷ imparted by the chief officer came as a shock to most passengers, who spent the night and the following morning huddled together in the ladies' saloon. Gentlemen slept on the floor and the piano was lashed for safety. Sounds of quiet crying and the tinkle of the drops of the chandelier striking together with each rolling of the ship contributed to the eerie atmosphere. The coast was about a mile away when 'a man shouted the few magic words that swept an electric thrill of mingled joy and gratitude throughout every soul ... "The anchors have caught!" Such indeed, was the fact, and we were really saved – for the time at least – snatched, as it were, out of the very jaws of death!'⁸

In the morning the ship's new situation was assessed: they were only a few yards from the barren rocky shore. Attempts to land had again to be abandoned but in the afternoon the storm lulled and Capt McLean, Sidney Smith and Angus Morrison set out in a lifeboat and found a suitable landing place. [After a mass held by J.H. Cameron on board *Ploughboy*](#) the passengers were taken ashore with considerable difficulty. Fires were kindled, a screen rigged up for the ladies and dresses changed; make-shift encampments were erected – '... and men known in Toronto, only for their eloquence at the bar and the tribune, discovered an unexpected adaptability of

4 List of passengers given in *Weekly Chronicle & News*, (Kingston) 8 July 1859: Hon John Ross, Mrs Ross, Mrs Baldwin, two children and maid; Hon J. A. Macdonald; Hon John Rose; Mrs Rose, Miss Rose; Hon P. Vankoughnet; Hon Sidney Smith; Hon J.J. Cameron and Mrs Cameron; Col Prince; Mr McLeod and Misses E. and A. McLeod; Mr Angus Morrison, M.P.P.; Col Holdsworth; Sheriff Smith (Barrie) and Miss Smith; Mr R. J. Smith (Collingwood) and two daughters; Mr and Mrs D. Morrison and servant; Miss

Widder; Miss Nickinson; and Messrs Derbishire, Duggan, D.B. Read, H.J. Gibbs, Allan McLean, R. Ogilby, Poley J. Nickenson Jnr and T. Carruthers. Please note that this list is not identical with the list of donors of the B.W. Smith wine jug.

5 A cross-head is a massive piece of wrought iron used to hold up the piston-rod. If suddenly detached from its position a cross-head would probably force its way through the bottom of the vessel and swamp her.

6 Nearly all articles about the incident ventured the

opinion that the disaster could have been averted, had *Ploughboy* been equipped with a mast and sails. I am grateful to Mr Bill McNeil, www.hhpl.on.ca/GreatLakes/ for the following information: 'All early steamboats carried masts and sailors capable of sailing the ship if the engine broke down or was not powerful enough to breach the seas. However with the engineering improvements of the steamboat engines and competent engineers to manage and maintain them, the masts were gradually removed, shortened or became ornaments, in

fact even the sailing vessels had their masts removed or shortened, and were towed from port to port by steamers, this because it was much cheaper to employ on the barges a few labourers who often had no marine experience, and who often could not even raise a sail.

'The Steamboat Inspection Act (1868), required many safety conditions, including, engine and boiler inspections, engineers were trained and licensed. Boats had to carry enough lifeboats and life preservers for all passengers, and to have passenger lists, and so

on. But the safety requirements were only as good as the inspectors, who often turned a blind eye. Incompetence, alcohol and, of course, fire and collisions, were the main problems of steam boating in the 1850s. Expanding railroads, which were much safer, stole many paying passenger from the Lakes, this eventually forced the shipping lines to make their vessels safer.' (Email 30 June 2007)

7 'The late disaster on Georgian Bay', *The Leader*, 6 July 1859.

8 Ibid

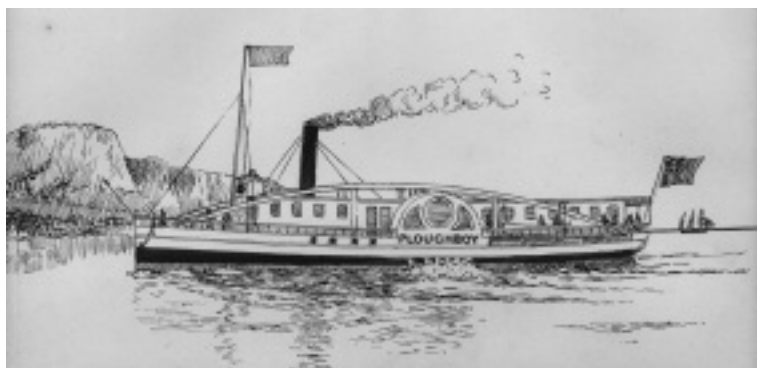
suiting themselves to the circumstances'.⁹ Just when the party had found laughter and a relieved mood, the cry 'All aboard' was heard; the steamer *Canadian* could be seen and with some regrets, for they had enjoyed a few pleasant hours on land, the passengers re-embarked.

Despite horrible weather conditions Sheriff Smith had reached Owen Sound and found Capt Smith of *Canadian*, who immediately determined to attempt a rescue. Since his men were out of town for the day, a crew of volunteers had been quickly assembled. At midnight *Ploughboy* was towed to Collingwood, arriving at noon on Monday.

Votes of thanks were, of course, passed to those who had so nobly helped us, and these will, no doubt, take a more tangible shape at an early day.¹⁰

It is not known if the survivors of this ill-fated trip gave tokens of their gratitude to Capt Smith and Capt McLean. The wine-jug presented to Sheriff B.W. Smith is a substantial piece of silver and it speaks for the patriotism of the donors that they chose a Canadian-made jug, the general custom of the day being to order such pieces from an English firm.

As can be seen from the following biographies, most members of the stranded boating party belonged to the inner circle of John A. Macdonald. They were young, politically active, lawyers with a vision for the country, who participated in building the young nation. One can only speculate how Canada's history would have been different, if the incident on 1 July 1859 had not had such a happy outcome.



3 *Ploughboy*, engraving. (Toronto Reference Library)

9 'The late Disaster on Georgian Bay' [concluded], *The Leader*, 7 July 1859.

10 *Northern Advance*, Barrie, 13 July 1859, p2.

11 Letter John A.

MacDonald, 20 December 1858.

12 He is presumably the author of the report about the incident in *The Leader*, 6 and 7 July 1859, signed H.J.G.



4.1 and 4.2 Sir John Macdonald, (above) circa 1842–43, at the age of about 27, artist unknown; and (below) later in life. (National Archives of Canada C-008447)

The Hon J.H. Cameron (1817–76). Called to the bar 1838. Reporter to the court of Queen's Bench, Upper Canada 1843–46; started the publication *Upper Canada Law reports*. Solicitor General for Upper Canada 1846; 1847 included in the executive Council. A prominent figure in Canadian politics, in and out of parliament between 1851 and 1861; 1859 grandmaster of the Orange Association of British North America; 1860 treasurer of the Law Society of Upper Canada. After Confederation sat in the House of Commons first for Peel and then for Cardwell; a prominent member of the Church of England and a founder of the university Trinity College.

S. Derbshire (1797–1863). Born in London, called to

the bar in England. Came to Canada 1838 as attaché to Lord Durham. 1841 appointed Queen's Printer and sat in the Legislative Assembly of United Canada for Bytown (later Ottawa) 1841–44.

John Duggan. Partner in the Toronto law firm of Duggan and Burns; recommended by John A. Macdonald to be appointed one of H.M. Counsel in Upper Canada.¹¹

H. J. Gibb¹² No biographical information.

Sir John A. Macdonald (1815–91). The only Canadian Prime Minister to win six majority governments; he dominated Canadian politics for half a century. His was the creative mind that produced the British North

America Act and the union of provinces which became Canada. As first Prime Minister he oversaw the expansion of the Dominion; a major proponent of a national railway completed in 1885 linking Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans.

A. McLean.¹³ No biographical information.

Angus Morrison (1822–82). Came to Canada with his parents 1832; called to the bar 1846. The first MP for Simcoe, which county he represented in the Legislative Assembly 1854–63. Represented Niagara in the Legislative Assembly 1864–74 and in the Canadian House of Commons. The thriving lumber and shipping centre first called Pine River, whose magnificent stands of virgin pine provided the masts and spans for the English navy, was renamed Angus in his honour.¹⁴ 1873 Queen's Counsel; Mayor of Toronto 1876–78 when he helped establish Credit Valley Railway; negotiated with Ottawa that the National Exhibition grounds be taken over by the city.

Col John Prince (1796–1870). A representative of Essex, a seat where he had a firm hold 'upon the affections of the people. He was a man of independent opinions and most uncertain vote. It was impossible to know exactly where to place him, or to predict what line he would take, for his mental constitution was such that he could never be kept amenable to party discipline.'¹⁵ This attitude probably shortened his political career; 1860 resigned seat in the Legislative Council, where he had represented the Western Division; then appointed Judge of the District of Algoma.¹⁶

D. B. Read (1823–1904). Called to the bar 1844. 1858 elected Mayor of Toronto. A lawyer and historian, served for 30 years as a bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada. Author of *Lectures on Judicature* (1881), *The lives of the judges of Upper Canada* (1888), and various other works on local history.

The Hon Sir John Rose (1820–88). Came from Scotland with his parents in 1836; called to the bar in 1842. John A. Macdonald chose Rose to accompany him to England in 1857, to lobby for the construction of an inter-colonial railway from Riviere du Loup to Halifax. Elected to represent Montreal in the Legislative Assembly 1857; Solicitor General in Macdonald/Cartier administration.

1858 Minister of Public Works; delegate at the London Conference 1866–67, at which the final arrangements for the Canadian Confederation were made; 1868 second finance minister of the Dominion. Left Canada to join the banking firm of Morton, Rose & Co. and became a well-known figure in London Society; 1883 Receiver General of the Duchy of Lancaster. Died suddenly 24 August 1888 while a guest of the Duke of Portland.

The Hon John Ross (1818–71). Born in Ireland, called to the bar 1839 and practiced law in Toronto. Appointed legislative councillor of Canada 1848 and during the 15 years preceding Confederation repeatedly held office in government: Solicitor General for Upper Canada, Attorney General, Speaker for the Legislative Council. Called to the Senate 1867 and in 1869 Speaker of the Senate.

Sheriff Benjamin W. Smith. Councillor of Collingwood 1858–62. An active promoter of the Northern Railroad and became personally responsible for bank loans when the railroad was in financial difficulties.¹⁷

The Hon Sidney Smith (1823–89). Called to the bar 1844, practiced law in Cobourg (Ontario). Postmaster General 1858–62 when he was often negotiating abroad, for example with the USA, France, Belgium and Prussia to have the Atlantic mail service carried by Canadian steamers. Member of the Board of the Railway Commissioners; elected to the Legislative Council 1861, but resigned two years later and retired from political life.

The Hon P.M. Vankoughnet (1823–69). A member of one of the oldest and most illustrious United Empire Loyalist families; intimate friend of John A. Macdonald. Called to the bar in 1844. In 1849 one of the chief organisers of the British American League, formed to oppose the annexation movement. Entered parliament 1856, returned for the Rideau division of Upper Canada to the Legislative Council; Minister of Agriculture in the Taché-Macdonald administration. Resigned office in 1858 but after the collapse of the short-lived Brown/Dorion administration resumed office as chief commissioner of Crown lands until 1862. Later became Chancellor of Ontario.

13 Allan McLean and his wife were personal friends of John A. Macdonald, and were mentioned in a letter to his sister, Mrs Margaret Williamson, 10 March 1861. The McLeans, like the Vankoughnets and Camerons, opened their homes to the Macdonald children when their mother

was ailing.

14 *The history of Angus*: www.realtyguy.com/history.html

15 J.C. Dent, *The last forty years*, Toronto 1881, pii 110.

16 *Historical Plaques of Algoma District*: www.waynecook.com/aal-goma.html. An historical

plaque in Sault St. Marie, Bellevue Park off Queen St. E. reads: 'COL JOHN PRINCE 1796–1870 Here, on a portion of his former estate, is buried Col. Prince who emigrated from England in 1833 and settled at Sandwich, Upper Canada. As commanding officer of the Essex Militia,

he stirred up a violent controversy by ordering the summary execution of four members of an armed force sympathizing with Mackenzie's Rebellion which invaded the Windsor area from Detroit in December, 1838. He represented Essex in the legislative assembly 1836–40 and

1841–54. Prince was appointed the first judge of the Algoma District in 1860. Colourful and eccentric, he became one of early Sault Ste. Marie's best known citizens.'

17 1887 *Jubilee History of the Town of Collingwood*, Collingwood Museum, Acc No X972.119.1.