



DUNDAS  
MUSEUM &  
ARCHIVES

# DISCO

*“I learn!”*

## GRADE 7 HISTORY

### Rebels and Reformers: Dundas and the Rebellions of 1837

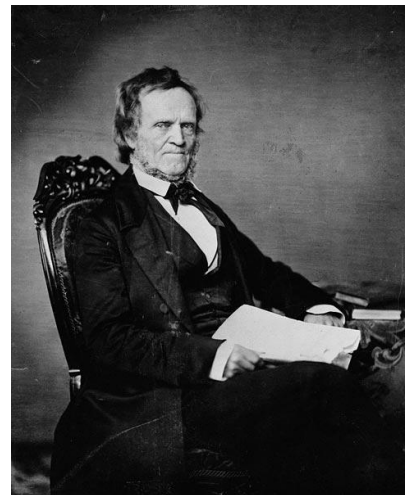
*This education module complements Strand B:  
Canada, 1800–1850: Conflict and Challenges*



Did you know that, for a short time, there was a *Republic of Canada*? With its own flag and currency? Just a few days after his harrowing escape across the border, William Lyon Mackenzie and his supporters seized an island on the Canadian side of the Niagara River — Navy Island, just above Niagara Falls — and declared themselves to be the provisional government of the new Republic of Canada.

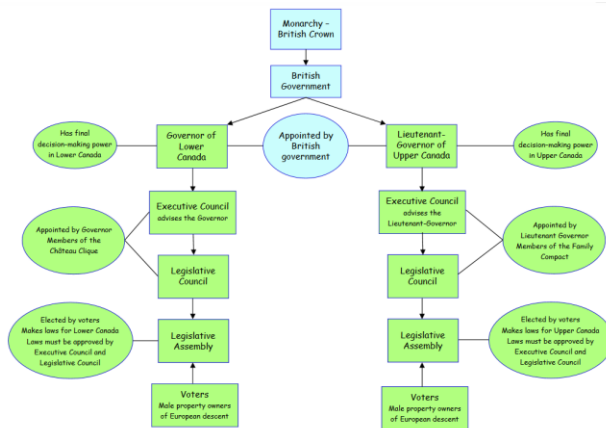
Just two days earlier, Mackenzie was running for his life. His rebellion had failed. It was a disaster. His rebel army was crushed on Yonge Street in what is now the city of Toronto. His headquarters at Montgomery's Tavern was burned to the ground. Some of his men were already dead. Others would soon be hanged for treason. Just a few years earlier, Mackenzie had been the first Mayor of Toronto. Now, he was the city's most wanted fugitive. The Lieutenant Governor was offering a £1000 reward for his capture.

So Mackenzie was forced to flee the city he loved, smuggled westward to Dundas through the countryside by his supporters as gangs of angry Loyalists searched for him. After a cold night (so legend has it) in a cave in the escarpment above Dundas, he secreted himself over the Thorpe Street bridge, right by where Canadian Tire is today, and ran all the way south to Niagara, getting rowed across the river just a few minutes ahead of the men who had come to arrest him. He was lucky to escape Canada with his life. He would spend the next decade living in exile.



But what prompted all this drama? What was the nature of political rumblings so severe as to cause reformers in both Upper and Lower Canada to become rebels, take up arms, and try to force a new system of government?

Through an examination of artifacts and archives of the time period, this grade 8 program immerses your students into the political unrest that led to the Rebellions of 1837. Poring over the rich collection of primary source archival documents at the museum, they will be challenged to think historically about these events and engage in a process of inquiry that will help them discover and evaluate the motivations of the players involved. Even more importantly, your students will discover that the events surrounding the Rebellions of 1837 are not so distant: there are many modern political parallels.



What was Upper Canada's system of government in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and what were its serious shortcomings? What was the *Family Compact* that Mackenzie and other reformers challenged? How was it that peaceful movements by reformers were aggravated into violent acts by rebels? Are there parallels with government in Canada today? What are patronage appointments? Is our government today genuinely responsible to those who elect it? The Rebellions of 1837 were short-lived, only a few days. But what

was their lasting impact? What was the Durham Report? How did it pave the way not only to Confederation but, indeed, to the Incorporation of the Town of Dundas? Was William Lyon Mackenzie a political failure or a political hero? Employing the museum's new iPad technology for research and presentation, these are just some of the questions your students will pursue.

Despite the failed rebellion of 1837, some would argue that Mackenzie helped to define the necessary elements of a democratic society in a fledgling nation and that his radical democratic ideals, including a fair election process, fired public discussion of political issues, and the public's involvement in the democratic process. Such a dynamic remains crucially relevant in the 21st century. Experiencing this exciting program is sure to encourage greater interest and participation in politics among your students!



Proclaiming public will for Responsible Government, this Durham Banner, a precious artifact at the museum, is probably the only one in existence.

*From The Ontario Curriculum, Social Studies Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7 & 8, 2013, this Education Module offered by the DMA addresses the following expectations: B1.1,2; B2.1,2,3,4,5; B3.1,2,3,4,5. (p. 142).*

