



January 11th is Sir John A.'s Birthday, but He Remains Largely Unknown to Canadians

Dominion Institute Survey Finds that 42% of Canadians Don't Know who is our First Prime Minister

Toronto – January 9, 2009 – In the lead-up to John A. Macdonald's 194th birthday, a Dominion Institute poll conducted by Innovative Research Group found that Canadians lack basic knowledge about Canada's first Prime Minister.

More than two in five Canadians (42%) could not identify Macdonald as the country's first Prime Minister. However, knowledge levels have modestly improved since 2001 when half (49%) could not identify Canada's first Prime Minister as Sir John A. Macdonald

The survey found that just over one in ten Canadians (13%) were able to correctly identify January 11th as Macdonald's birthday, even if it has been considered a Heritage Day since an Act of Parliament in 2002. The survey was commissioned as part of the Dominion Institute's latest project, the Macdonald-Laurier Days, which celebrates the birthdays of these former Prime Ministers and aims to increase knowledge and appreciation of their life and legacy. The survey also found that the vast majority of Canadians agree (58% strongly agree, 28% somewhat agree) that young Canadians should learn more about Macdonald and Laurier in high school.

The centerpiece of the *Macdonald-Laurier Days* project is a bilingual website www.macdonald-laurier.ca. Visitors can learn more about these former prime ministers, which features information on Macdonald and Laurier, as well as an interactive quiz. Participants in the quiz (over 18 years old) can win a piece of history: portraits and original signatures from Macdonald and Laurier. Those aged 13 to 18 and under can win a trip to Ottawa for themselves and a guardian.

"Canada, as we know it, is the living legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald. It is truly disheartening to see that so many Canadians know so little about one of our greatest nation-builders," said Marc Chalifoux, Executive Director of the Dominion Institute. "If Canadians knew more about what Sir John A. had accomplished, I am certain that we would celebrate his life and legacy with greater pride."

To celebrate Sir John A. Macdonald's birthday, the Dominion Institute is hosting a unique celebration with high school students in British Columbia on January 12th. During the event, the Hon. James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, will host a quiz for students on our first Prime Minister and recognize the 194th anniversary of his birth with a large cake and card. The event will take place at 1pm at Pitt Meadows Secondary School located at 19438 - 116B Avenue in Pitt Meadows, BC.

The survey also found that three in four Canadians (75%) were unable to identify Sir Wilfrid Laurier as the first francophone Prime Minister and that less than one in ten (8%) were able to identify November 20th as Laurier's birthday.

The Dominion Institute acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage Celebrations and Commemorations Program.

For detailed survey results and to learn more about the *Macdonald-Laurier Days*, visit: www.macdonald-laurier.ca.

For more information:

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