

Sir John A. Macdonald's Taste for Fine Wine

Contrary to popular opinion, Macdonald did not drink spirits exclusively. He actually enjoyed some of the finest wines. At the Quebec Conference of 1864, for instance, guests were introduced to France's much celebrated Champagne, Burgundy and Bordeaux. Canada's seminal constitutional documents were drafted not just under the influence of British, French and American philosophers, but also under the influence of some of Europe's finest wines.

John A. was familiar with wines as early as his teenage years when he attended meetings with local magistrates in the taverns of Picton in Prince Edward County. The Hopkin's Tavern in the Mansion House at Main and Ross was the most popular meeting place for these civic meetings. It was licensed to serve wine as well as spirits. John A. met there often and was known to drink spirits rather than wine during this period in his life. He may, however, have enjoyed an occasional glass of wine with his colleagues from time to time.

As he grew older, Sir John A. seems to have graduated from the bucket-and-cup-whisky of his teenage years to more sophisticated imported liquors, if one judges from the order he placed before the Christmas and New Year's festivities, in November 1881. So imagine how these fine wines influenced the discussions surrounding the planning and construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the project that united Canada from sea to sea:

3 dozen Médoc at \$8
2 dozen St. Estèphe at \$16
1 dozen Château Léoville --
2 dozen Sauterne Suprême at \$14
2 dozen Port C at \$15
2 dozen Vin d'été at \$15
2 dozen Vin des Princes at \$22
2 dozen Sparkling Moselle at \$18
1 dozen Cognac VV --
1/2 dozen Orange Curaçao --
1/4 dozen Maraschino --
1/4 dozen Chartreuse --
3 dozen 1 quart Manzanilla at \$9
2 dozen Porto at \$13
2 dozen Porto Fino at \$18
2 dozen Medeira at \$20
The total bill was \$467.75

[Quetton (Wine Merchant) St. George and Co. 16 King St. Toronto.]

Needs Support

A story often told about Sir John A. concerns the aftermath of a dinner, where he enjoyed the moment perhaps a little too much. Obviously unsteady, he spoke to another dinner guest, a personal friend but an ardent Liberal,

“I have known you for twenty-five years and you’re never given me a vote yet,” and he took his friend’s arm and continued, “but you’ve got to support me now.”

John A. Macdonald – Son of Temperance

John A. actually took the temperance pledge in 1862 according to *The Montreal Star* of July 23:

“The special meeting of Mechanic’s Division, Kingston [of the Temperance Society] on Friday evening last, called for the initiation of John A. Macdonald, was very well attended by members of the order.

The Temperance Hall was thronged by both Sons and Daughters of Temperance....

“On his initiation, the Hon. Gentleman delivered a brief address...explaining the reasons which had induced him to become a Son of Temperance...that for some time past he had been fully convinced of the evils of the drinking customs of society, and had come to a determination to renounce them on his part...We hear that Mr. Macdonald made a very modest speech, saying that he had no political object in view by taking the present course.”

More Fine Wines

A bill dated December 30, 1886, shows that Sir John A. ordered some excellent wines from Frederick Kingston, 25 Hospital Street, Montreal.

Perhaps Macdonald was celebrating the completion of the CPR and his first train-ride across the new Dominion of Canada with his wife, Agnes. This is what he ordered:

3 cases Champagne Verzenay 4 dozen St. Estèphe
1 dozen Château Larose
2 dozen Château Léoville

1/2 dozen VNO Brandy
 3 dozen bottles Vino de Porto 3 dozen bottles Molino
 1 dozen bottles Amontillado 2 cases Carte Rosa
 The total

\$42.00 \$28.00 \$18.00 \$24.00 \$6.60 \$21.60 \$30.00 \$13.20 \$36.00 \$219.40

A later bill dated, May 17, 1887, shows the purchase of one case of Verzenay Champagne pints at \$6.50.

In September 20, 1888, his bill from the Rideau Club shows his purchases of Chateaux Margaux, Sauterne, Apollinaris Water and Brandy.

Les bons choix Monsieur le Premier Ministre! Good choices Mr. Prime Minister! [With notes from *The John A. Macdonald Album* by Lena Newman.]

Prince Edward County Commemorative Wine

To honour the Bicentennial of Sir John A. Macdonald, Huff Estates produced a commemorative sparkling wine released in 2015. It quickly sold out.

