



SIR SANFORD FLEMING (1827-1915)

In retrospect, it seems appropriate that the name of the ship that brought young Sanford Fleming from his home in Glasgow, Scotland to the shores of the St. Lawrence was “Brilliance”. “Fortuitous” would also have been an appropriate name, as it could be said that Canada, and indeed the world, would have been a very different place if Sanford Fleming had not found his way here. After his arrival in Quebec City in 1845, Sanford, along with his older brother David, made his way by horse drawn cart to Peterborough ON. It was here that the young Sanford began to make a name for himself as a surveyor and mapmaker, and he soon began work as an engineer for the Ontario, Simcoe, and Huron Railway. When the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway was taken over by the Northern Railway, 30 year old Sanford became its chief engineer. Six years later, the Canadian government appointed him chief surveyor of a proposed railway to link Montreal with Halifax and St. John.

When Sanford arrived in Quebec in 1845, Canada was still in the early stages of railroad development. While the government at the time recognized the vital importance of railways to Canada’s economic, industrial, political and social development, what the country desperately needed was a far-reaching vision for an integrated Canadian railroad system. Sir Sanford Fleming was a man with a vision. As early as 1858, he proposed a coast to-coast railway line spanning all of “British North America”. As chief surveyor for the Canadian Pacific Railway, the first Canadian railway to run from coast to coast, Sir Sanford played an integral role in making this dream a reality. His fabled forethought was also evident in his staunch advocacy of iron railway bridges versus the traditional wooden ones, which were susceptible to premature decay and fire.

Sanford Fleming’s impact on the world as we know it extended far beyond the building of railroads. His experience with the planning and construction of a transcontinental railway led him to develop a system for standardizing time, which he tirelessly and vociferously advocated both at home and abroad. The merits of a standardized time system were undeniable, and by the beginning of the twentieth century Fleming’s idea had been adopted throughout the developed world. After standardizing the world’s time, Sanford turned his attention to transcontinental communication, spending a great deal of his own financial resources to establish a trans-Pacific undersea communications cable linking Canada and Australia.

Sir Sanford Fleming’s vision and drive were instrumental in building Canada. Without a transcontinental railway this country would have remained a fragmented, divided land, far less than the sum of its parts. His efforts to link Canada to the rest of the world by undersea cable helped to establish Canada’s place as a nation within the emerging new world order. Today, broadband and highways have managed to shrink the vast distances that separate Canadians, but innovations in transportation and communication continue to play an essential role in ensuring that Canada remains a prosperous, healthy, and connected country.

For More Information:

Websites

[Daylight Savings Time - Sir Sanford Fleming](#)

[Sanford Fleming: Canada's First Renaissance Man](#)

[Fleming College](#)

Books

Grant, George M. Ocean To Ocean: Sanford Fleming's Expedition Through Canada in 1872. September 2002.

Green, Lorne. Chief Engineer Sanford Fleming. April, 1995.