

to (or accommodated) “non-puritan” values.

Perhaps, the endless quibbling about whether Menzies was a liberal or a conservative might be characterized as a dispute about his *political* thought, whereas Chavura and Melleuish provide us with an account of the cultural puritanism and idealist philosophy that characterize his *social* thought. Ultimately, the political thought needs to be situated within the social thought, which has hitherto been neglected. In reminding us of this forgotten dimension of Menzies, *The Forgotten Menzies* not only helps us recover a better understanding of Australia’s longest serving prime minister, but also a better understanding of the party that he founded and the nature of its commitment to liberty and conservatism today. ॐ

Well-Earned Obscurity

James W. J. Bowden

Sir Mackenzie Bowell: A Canadian Prime Minister Forgotten by History. Barry K. Wilson. Loose Cannon, 2021.

From the outset, Barry Wilson, a veteran of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, presents his *Sir Mackenzie Bowell* as a counterweight to the prevailing mid-20th century scholarship on Canada’s second and last Senator Prime Minister. The character assassination of Bowell provides a fascinating case study in the perils of ignoring the mass of primary sources in favour of relying almost exclusively (as others have done) on two contemporary but biased accounts and contaminated secondary sources. Instead Wilson combs through Bowell’s papers and the original Dominion records.

Wilson has produced a meticulously researched and properly cited biography on Bowell. He has read all the relevant primary

sources, namely Bowell’s papers and many of the newspaper columns which he wrote over a half-century as editor and proprietor of the Belleville *Intelligencer*. He devotes the first two chapters to deconstructing and refuting the presumptuous and lazy treatment of Bowell by mid- and late-20th-century historians like Peter Waite, Bruce Hutchison, and Maggie Siggins, who relied on only two contemporary primary sources which both appeared in the 1960s, Lady Aberdeen’s Canadian diary and Sir Joseph Pope’s memoir. Wilson then traces Bowell’s life from when he first emigrated from England to Belleville, Upper Canada at the age of 9 in 1833 to his death at the age of 93 in December 1917. Wilson has demonstrated that Bowell formed an integral part of Sir John A. Macdonald’s comeback ministry from 1878 to 1891 and proved himself a competent, able, and stalwart Minister of Customs who implemented the National Policy, the Macdonald ministry’s signature economic program of protective tariffs.

Yet, in my view, the evidence which Wilson has brought to bear shows that Bowell’s conduct as Prime Minister throughout his inadvertent and fleeting premiership of 21 December 1894 to 27 April 1896 doomed him to suffer his later anonymity and to languish in obscurity for decades. Canadian history is replete with politicians who made far better cabinet ministers than prime ministers or party leaders; Bowell started a trend which continued in the 20th century with Arthur Meighen and, arguably, Lester Pearson, and culminating in Joe Clark, Stockwell Day, and Paul Martin.

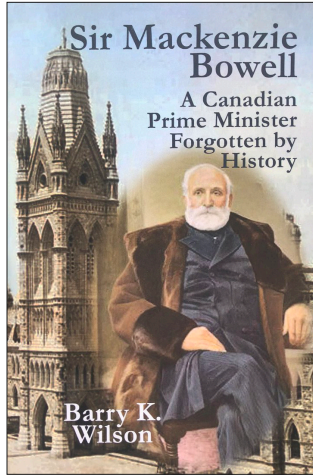
Bowell’s Personality

WILSON’S BIOGRAPHY also highlights the paramountcy of sectarian identity politics in 19th-century Canada. Historians of the 20th century treated Bowell’s active membership in the Loyal Orange Order as suspect and as a front for raving anti-Catholic bigots. In fact, while Bowell’s Methodism led him to temperance, many of his Roman Catholic contemporaries, including Prime Minister Sir John Thompson and prominent Senators like Auguste Real

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Anders, vowed that Bowell remained fair-minded and steadfast in his commitment to the rule of law and Canada's constitutional settlement between Protestant and Catholic, English and French. Bowell even at times invited the scorn of his fellow Orangemen for what they regarded as his "surrender" to popish ways over his opposition to invoking the federal power to disallow Quebec's *Jesuits Estates Act* in 1889. In this respect, he serves almost as a Protestant analogue to Thomas D'Arcy McGee, who frequently drew the ire of other Irish Catholics because of his commitment to the same ideals, though Bowell's detractors never went so far as to assassinate him.

Wilson's research also reveals aspects of Bowell's personality and behaviour that did not endear him to his contemporaries and which probably contributed to the negative impressions that he apparently left on Lady Aberdeen and Sir Joseph Pope in the 1890s. By his own admission, Bowell lacked rhetorical prowess and never took relish in public-speaking. Wilson's descriptions point toward an introvert and a perpetual scribbler who preferred to put his thoughts to paper in *Intelligencer* editorials rather than make speeches at community events and campaign rallies.



even in opposition) would accept today. Bowell also bucked the trend on patronage and the spoils system and believed that fairness flowed from the consistent application of rules and laws. As Minister of Customs from 1878 to 1892, he stood his ground even against Macdonald himself and pushed back against his Conservative ministerial colleagues who pressured him in accepting the egregious patronage appointments of unfit and unqualified Conservative supporters. He sought to make appointments based on merit, though he would still favour Conservatives over Liberals amongst comparably qualified candidates. He refused to give special treatment to smugglers with ties to the Conservative Party attempting to circumvent the tariffs and duties of the National Policy and faithfully executed the laws under his department's purview. Furthermore, he cracked down harshly on drunkards in the employ of the Department of Customs, making him a killjoy in the boozy 19th century, the terror of slothful civil servants. Bowell's independence of mind reveals a moral rigidity uncommon in politics. These traits made Bowell something of a maverick, and mavericks do not make ideal party leaders.

Minister of the Crown

WILSON PRESENTS A convincing case that Mackenzie Bowell distinguished himself as a reliable and competent administrator from 1878 to 1894. Macdonald and Thompson frequently entrusted Bowell with additional acting portfolios and saw him as a versatile "minister of everything," perhaps like C.D. Howe.

The Dominion of Canada in the 19th century did not possess all the attributes of an independent, sovereign state, but rather self-government and autonomy in its internal affairs within a larger British Empire over which

Bowell embraced the voluntary temperance of his Methodist church and abstained from drink in direct defiance of the prodigious consumption of alcohol in 19th-century Canada. While he did not support prohibition and kept alcohol on hand for guests, Bowell's reticence made him less sociable than his colleagues. He also demonstrated a fierce independent streak throughout his career, voting against government bills and the Macdonald ministry on several occasions from the backbenches between 1867 and 1873 in a manner which no leader of a parliamentary party in government (or

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the Imperial Parliament and Her Majesty's Government in London still exerted a strict span of control, especially in defence and foreign affairs. The Dominion could therefore best exercise its suzerainty over British North America primarily through trade and economic policies.

As Minister of Customs from 1878 to 1891, Bowell implemented and enforced the National Policy, a comprehensive protective tariff designed to insulate Canada's fledgling manufacturing industries and to prevent them from being squeezed out of the market by coercive American practices in the wake of a protracted recession that took hold in the mid-1870s. The United States had also abandoned Reciprocity with the Province of Canada in 1866 and extended its own tariff walls to British North America. The Department of Customs therefore enforced tariffs, collected tax revenue, and combated smuggling, primarily by way of the United States, combining what the Canada Revenue Agency and the Canada Border Services Agency do today. In an era before income tax and sales tax, these tariffs brought in the majority of the Dominion government's revenues each year, which therefore made Bowell one of the most important ministers in cabinet. I would add to Wilson's analysis that Bowell earned the unique distinction as the only minister who occupied the same portfolio for the entire thirteen years within the Macdonald Ministry of 1878 to 1891, a testament to Macdonald's confidence in him. Most of the other departments saw at least three ministers within this same period.

MACDONALD DIED IN office on 6 June 1891 and took the Third Ministry with him. Governor General Lord Stanley appointed Senator Sir John Abbott, a minister without portfolio from 1887 to 1891, as Macdonald's successor after John Thompson declined his invitation. Bowell continued as Minister of Customs until January 1892 before becoming the Minister of Militia and Defence until Abbott's resignation in November 1892. Gov-

ernor General Lord Aberdeen then appointed Sir John Thompson as Canada's first Catholic Prime Minister in December 1892. Thompson nominated the Methodist Bowell to the Senate and appointed him Government Leader in the Senate and Minister of Trade and Commerce to provide some sectarian balance in cabinet.

Senatorial Prime Ministers

MY ONE CRITICISM of Wilson's biography is that he does not address a significant question: whether or how Bowell's being a Senator inherently weakened his premiership and



made it seem like a transitional caretaker tenure between Macdonald and Laurier. He does not delve into the contemporary reaction to this constitutional and political question. Wilson also shows that Lord Aberdeen only appointed Bowell after Thompson's sudden death at the age of 49 at Windsor Castle because Bowell had already been serving as Leader of the Government in

the Senate and, additionally, as Acting Prime Minister during Thompson's trip to European capitals by way of New York City.

From 1867 to 2013, cabinets have included one to four Senators, with, at minimum, a Government Leader in the Senate. This followed in the tradition of the bifurcated cabinets of the Province of Canada, which usually also included some Legislative Councillors from the 1840s to Confederation. But Legislative Councillors and Senators only filled a supplementary role to Members of the Legislative Assembly and House of Commons because Responsible Government can only work when cabinet remains accountable to the elected lower house where the great majority of ministers sit as MPs.

Perhaps none of Bowell's contemporaries in 1894 saw Aberdeen's appointment of a Senator Prime Minister as unconstitutional *per se*. Lord Stanley had already set the operative precedent in June 1891 by appointing Senator Sir John Abbott. This may explain why Wilson never touches upon the Senator Question.

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Yet the fact that no Prime Minister of the Province or Dominion of Canada from 1847 to 1891 had sat in the Legislative Council (apart from Sir N. F. Belleau, Macdonald's co-premier from August 1865 to June 1867) or Senate, and that no Prime Minister since Bowell came from the upper chamber, shows how anomalous — even by 19th-century standards — the spectre of a Senator Prime Minister stood then and remains now. Even the Conservative Party at the time loathed the arrangement and ousted Bowell in favour of Tupper. The notion of an appointed Senator as Prime Minister also seems farcical during a general election where Canadians elect members to the House of Commons, where the incumbent Prime Minister will remain a Senator irrespective of how well or how poorly he leads his party. Doubtless, no one would ever accept a Senator Prime Minister today as legitimate, not least because Stephen Harper banished senators from cabinet altogether in 2013 in the wake of the Senate Expenses Scandal. Trudeau has entrenched that banishment by gradually turning the Senate into a non-partisan chamber since 2015.

Failed Premiership

WILSON'S WORK SHOWS that Bowell throughout his ill-fated premiership shirked responsibility at every turn, lurched from one disaster to the next, and dithered on issues great and small. But his failure to resolve the Manitoba Schools Question, his unilateral inaction to reverse cabinet's decision to advise the Governor General to dissolve parliament for March 1895 (of which more below) and his handling of Valentine Shortis's commutation (likewise), stand out most egregiously. Louis Riel's execution in 1885 revealed bitter and protracted sectarian and linguistic divisions in Canada and perhaps made Macdonald loathe to disallow or remedy Manitoba's repeal of separate Roman Catholic schools in 1890. He fell back on the *sub judice* convention and died before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council issued its final ruling in 1895.

Bowell inherited a poisoned chalice, as Wilson aptly calls it. The Dominion Parlia-

ment established Manitoba as a province with the *Manitoba Act* in 1870, which became the province's *de facto* constitution, though it remained under the control of the provincial legislature. It originally made Manitoba bilingual and guaranteed separate schools until the legislature repealed those provisions under Thomas Greenway's ministry in 1890. The *Manitoba Act* also allowed — but did not obligate — the Dominion Parliament to pass remedial legislation restoring these linguistic and civil rights.

Bowell initially opposed separate schools in the 1870s, but his stout devotion to the rule of law and statutes enacted by parliament made this Methodist and Orangemen an unlikely defender of Catholic schools and the French language — except that Bowell still refused to table remedial legislation to restore the repealed provision of the *Manitoba Act*. He also initially agreed, after consulting his cabinet, to advise Lord Aberdeen to dissolve parliament around March 1895 for an election in May, around 4 years after the previous general election. But here Bowell presaged British Prime Minister and fellow ditherer Gordon Brown, who infamously, as the British press remarked, “bottled” a snap election that he should have called in 2007 after signalling repeatedly that he could call it, only to bail out of it at the last possible moment. “Bottler Bowell” even provides the same tabloid alliteration as “Bottler Brown.”

Bowell purportedly did not want to wage an election over a divisive issue that brought up sectarian strife and federal-provincial jurisdiction, but his dithering set off a chain of resignations from cabinet in 1895 and set the stage for his ousting in January 1896. He even begged several ministers who threatened resignation to stay on and thereby both weakened himself yet further and feathered his own “nest of traitors.” Ironically, as Wilson shows, Bowell denies having uttered that phrase for which he became best known even within his own lifetime. Sir Charles Tupper the Younger, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, resigned from cabinet in mid-March 1895, but Bowell allowed him to recant his resignation a week later. On 8

July, Bowell faced three more resignations, though he persuaded two wayward ministers to remain. His Controller of Customs also resigned in mid-December 1895.

On 30 December 1895, Tupper the Younger recommended that the capital sentence of Valentine Shortis, who murdered two of his co-workers, stand and that cabinet not advise the Governor General to commute his sentence under the Royal Prerogative of Mercy. Cabinet debated the issue for hours. Instead of exercising his prime ministerial authority to call the consensus of cabinet and make a decision, Bowell took a vote as if cabinet operated on simple majorities, which produced a tie and deadlock. Bowell then took the extraordinary step of abdicating collective ministerial responsibility, inverting all the precepts of Responsible Government and advising Aberdeen to exercise the royal prerogative at his own discretion. Cabinet advised that it had no advice, and Aberdeen commuted Shortis's sentence.

Bowell's cabinet set a new precedent within the British Empire in January 1896 by endeavouring to oust him as prime minister in a feat that Canada would not see again until 2002, when the Liberal parliamentary party forced Jean Chrétien to set a date for his departure, albeit 18 months later. Seven ministers resigned *en masse* on 7 January 1896 in an attempt to force Bowell's resignation. By 15 January, Sir Charles Tupper the Elder joined a reconstituted cabinet and became Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and *de facto* Prime Minister; under this arrangement, Bowell did not officially resign the premiership until after parliament dissolved at its five-year limit in April. Bowell could not even *resign* whilst commanding dignity and respect.

Wilson has written a compelling biography of Sir Mackenzie Bowell and plucked him out of historical obscurity. Bowell served as an able and competent Minister from 1878 to 1894, especially in his thirteen years as Minister of Customs. Yet the subtitle, "A Prime Minister Forgotten by History," still hangs in the air. Wilson does not convince me that Bowell earned his place in history as an able and consequential Prime Minister. ✎

Uncancelling the Conquistadores

Christopher Shannon

Conquistadores: A New History of Spanish Discovery and Conquest. Fernando Cervantes. New York: Viking, 2021.

There are many old and enduring wounds in the history of race relations in the United States. Protests and riots have targeted public symbols of injustice toward African Americans, most obviously statues honouring heroes of the Confederacy that were conspicuous in many cities. But it is also now common to see specific incidents and news stories broaden into an indictment of "white" European civilization as a whole. English enslavement of Africans appeared a natural extension of the earlier Spanish conquest of Native peoples. Symbols of that conquest, from Catholic churches to statues of Catholic missionaries such as the priest Junipero Serra, became, somewhat improbably, targets of Black Lives Matter protests. It is tempting for some conservatives to mount an almost unapologetic celebration of the West, and this too is probably a mistake if the goal is to preserve a sense of balance.

For those dissatisfied with both the reductive critique of racism and the contrary chest-thumping defence of "the Western tradition," help has arrived. Fernando Cervantes's *Conquistadores* is a breath of fresh air for those seeking clarity on the relation between the Spanish conquest and the West.

CHRISTOPHER SHANNON is assistant professor in the Department of History at Christendom College. He has degrees from Rochester and Yale Universities and is a member of the Philadelphia Society. His most recent book is *The Past as Pilgrimage: Narrative, Tradition, and the Renewal of Catholic History* (Christendom Press, 2014).