Parties Long Estranged
Introduction
Francine McKenzie and Margaret MacMillan

The great northern land and the huge southern island; the Big Dipper and the Southern Cross; pine trees and eucalyptus; beavers and kangaroos; the mental images reflect a difference in place and land. If Australia must come to terms with its convict settlements, Canada has its French fact, both past and present. Then there are the similarities: the dominance of the English language, English legal institutions, parliamentary government, the Queen (still), Native issues, a largely urban people who think of themselves as pioneers. So much of the history has been parallel. Canada and Australia were both explored and settled as part of the British Empire. Both fought, with pride, in world wars as British subjects.

In both countries, the achievement of nationhood has been a gentle process, one of gradual detachment from a mother country and a quest for adult identity. The growth of nationalism has followed much the same path in each country: the gradual differentiation from the parent society, the awakening sense that the land was creating a different sort of person, the tension between loyalty to the old and to the new, even a similar missing element. As Gérard Bouchard points out in a perceptive recent book, there is not, in either Australian or Canadian history, a great founding myth or act, like the American War of Independence or the conquest of the French in Canada.

Canadians and Australians are separated by an immense physical distance but are close in ways that are difficult to quantify. They understand something about the other in ways that, for example, an American would not. They pay attention, as they have always done, to what the other is doing, whether it is to disapprove or to imitate. When the colonies in Australia debated federation at the start of the last century, Canada was used as an example. When the Australian Supreme Court wrestled with Native land rights, Canadian legal precedents were cited. When Canadian and Australian universities arrange faculty and student exchanges, they think of the other country. In international organizations, the United Nations for example, Australian and Canadian diplomats cooperate regularly because they
often share the same viewpoints and the same values. Australians read Canadian fiction. Canadians wish that their filmmakers made more films like the Australians do, with a truly Canadian flavour. Inevitably the stereotypes creep in: at one extreme, the straitlaced Mountie hero of Due South; at the other, Dame Edna or Crocodile Dundee. Australians see Canadians as prissy, priggish even. Canadians, perhaps with a trace of envy, see Australians as outrageous and daring.

If there has been a sense of familiarity, relations have not been easy to cultivate and, once established, not always comfortable. In 1893, a Canadian trade minister, Mackenzie Bowell, sent to the Australasian colonies to study the possibility of increasing their mutual trade, returned to Canada empty-handed and disillusioned with the Australians. “The parties,” he said bitterly, “with whom we have been so long estranged can scarcely be brought into a close relationship at a moment’s notice.” That relationship has ranged from rivalry to resentment to partnership, and even to indifference. In the nineteenth century, within the British Empire shared legal and political institutions, a common ethnic composition, and similar problems of settlement, development, and nation-building, at once created similarities and rivalries between the two. In the formal organizations of the Empire, statesmen from both countries worked together and against each other in a process that helped to define and clarify national interests and goals. In the twentieth century, participation on the same side in wars, from the Boer to the Korean, and in the evolving British Empire produced a similar pattern of cooperation and competition.

This has not gone entirely unnoticed by historians and political scientists. John Hilliker and Greg Donaghy, two historians employed by Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, have completed short studies of Australian-Canadian relations, but Hilliker’s piece is limited to a study of the years from 1939 to 1945, while Donaghy’s publication covers more than 100 years of interaction in twenty-five pages. On the whole, however, it is fair to say that scholars have been more concerned with comparisons than connections, and with the post-1945 period. Public policy, political structures and practices (federalism, the constitution), immigration, women, culture, education, legal systems, the environment, trade, the private sector, intelligence communities, the military, and Native studies are some of the areas of comparison. Several scholars have taken up one of the main themes of this volume: the comparison and relations of Canada and Australia as middle powers in international affairs. Annette Baker Fox was a pioneer in the comparative study of Australia and Canada as middle powers in the late 1970s. Richard A. Higgott, Andrew F. Cooper, and Kim Richard Nossal have since followed in her footsteps in their analyses of two self-proclaimed middle powers. As with all good scholarship, this work raised new questions and pointed to other areas that might profitably be explored.
It occurred to the editors of this volume that there was much interesting work being done concerning both the intersections and the parallels between the two countries that could help to define further the development and nature of each. With the end of the overwhelming presence of the Cold War and its division of so much of the world into two armed camps, it was also a good moment to look at other, less dramatic relationships – such as the one between these two white dominions of the British Empire. While geography – and this was truer in the past than the present – made direct contact difficult and fitful, Australia and Canada were brought together by a common membership in the British Empire and later the British Commonwealth. In its great crises – the Boer War and the two World Wars – they fought side by side. They learned to deal with the British as much as with their enemies, and they worked together to make sure that dominion voices were heard in the making of imperial and then commonwealth policy. In peacetime, they worked with and against London on a whole range of issues, from international communications to defence and trade. During the Cold War, the two countries shared a common perception of the threat from the Soviet Union and its allies, although they frequently differed on how to contain it. Even today, in the post-Cold War world, Australia and Canada remain linked by a shared past and by a common set of values.

That said, there are as many differences as similarities, separate paths taken as well as shared. An important objective of this collection, therefore, is to use the history of one country to better understand that of the other. We deprive ourselves of useful examples and important questions if we treat each country as unique. In the past few years, there has been a real increase in comparative studies in such fields as British Empire and Commonwealth history. Too often, in our opinion, scholars seeking to understand their respective national histories and developments have tended to focus on one country alone. This has led to an intellectual parochialism, as well as a tendency to overlook the ways in which developments in one country were affected by those in another. The comparative approach is shedding new light on the national histories of both countries and stimulating new questions and new research. Discussions of nationalism have usually focused on the crown colonies and their interplay with Britain, while the dominions have been overlooked. This oversight has led to the neglect of an important and complex aspect of the dominions’ histories, from the colonial experience to independence, and has perpetuated ignorance of the impact of their national awakenings on the international relations of the twentieth century.

While all of the contributors have sought to bring out the comparisons between the two countries, we have not tried to force these. Nor have we tried to make more of the relationship than the evidence will bear. And, in cases where one side of the story has already been told, we have not rehashed
that side at length. In Wayne Reynolds’s chapter on Australian nuclear policies and ambitions, the Canadian side has been brought as example and the reader has been referred to the excellent literature that already exists.

Our first section deals with nation-building. Margaret MacMillan and Francine McKenzie look at the evolution in both countries toward nationhood within the British Empire, the former in the period from 1900 to the end of the First World War, the latter from 1931 to 1945. Before 1914 Canadian and Australian statesmen met in London, generally at imperial conferences, where they clashed repeatedly over common imperial defence and foreign policies that Canadians did not want, largely for fear of antagonizing the United States, and the Australians did, for their own security against Germany and other potential enemies, possibly even the United States, in the Pacific. During the war, however, Canada and Australia found a common bond in criticizing the British management of the war. And at the Paris Peace Conference that followed, Sir Robert Borden, Canada’s prime minister, worked with Billy Hughes, prime minister of Australia, to insist on separate dominion representation at the conference and on such bodies as the League of Nations. There were tensions, too; Borden deplored the Australian prime minister’s antagonism to the United States.

The tensions present at the peace talks in 1919 were magnified in the interwar years. The two dominions differed on the Anglo-Japanese naval pact: the Canadians opposed its extension for fear of alienating the United States, while the Australians preferred to see its continuance as a way, in part, of keeping Japan under control. More significantly, as McKenzie points out, they differed on their respective relationships with the British Empire. While William Lyon Mackenzie King – the Canadian prime minister for much of that period – took the opportunity to stake out an independent role for Canada in foreign affairs, the Australians remained convinced that their future lay within a strong British Empire. King so resolutely opposed attempts to centralize imperial military and foreign policies that Richard Casey, one of Australia’s earliest diplomats and later foreign minister, bitterly commented that “surely no one man can claim credit for having done as much as Mackenzie King to damage what remains in these autonomous days of the fabric of the British Empire. His efforts to make political capital out of his domestic nationalism are analogous to a vandal who pulls down a castle in order to build a cottage.” ties. In the years after the Statute of Westminster of 1931, which granted the dominions the right to control their domestic and foreign affairs, the differences deepened. Australians and Canadians were taking different paths as they sought to reconcile their colonial pasts with their independent futures in the years between 1931 and 1945. Australia refused to ratify the Statute of Westminster; Canada, in contrast, welcomed it.
The two nations continued to channel most of their diplomatic relations through London. Though they managed, with some difficulty, to arrange trade agreements after 1918, Canadian attempts – first in 1935 and then 1937-8 – to interest Australia in diplomatic exchanges foundered. Prime Minister Joseph Lyons scotched the first approach, which he expected would be a costly and unnecessary indulgence. Mackenzie King blocked the second attempt, although his Australian counterparts were far from disappointed. In 1939 they did finally agree to exchange high commissioners, but the earlier record of failures left a residue of bitterness.

Where McKenzie and MacMillan look at the relations between Canada and Australia and between the dominions and Britain, Peter Russell looks inward, at the often-troubled relationship between settler societies and Native peoples. In the early period of settlement there was a significant difference between Australia and Canada. Where Australia was treated as a *terra nullius* – a land of no one – in which settlement could proceed without any recognition of Aboriginal rights, in British North America, the British recognized Native nations and would not permit settlement on Native lands that had not been ceded by treaty to the crown. Despite this difference in their colonial beginnings, the treatment of Native peoples in the two countries converged as they became modern, self-governing democracies. In the 1960s increased Native political awareness and mobilization helped to produce recognition of rights. Here the Canadian precedents have been a major influence on Australia.

The role of Australia and Canada as rivals, allies, and models is developed further in the second part of the book. David MacKenzie uses commercial aviation as a case study, which shows how countries facing similar challenges of geography and resources took similar measures that came out, however, to different ends. Both had state-run airlines that were quick to enter the international field; both participated in Commonwealth aviation arrangements before and after the Second World War; and both nations were determined not to be left behind in the development of civil aviation. Where they differed was in their attitudes to the Empire and to the United States. While Australia supported the idea of air links within the Empire in the 1930s, Canada saw itself as a key crossroads between the Empire and the United States. The war and the rise of the United States to superpower status brought fresh differences. The Australians, for example, looked to strong international regulations over aviation as a way of controlling the United States, while the Canadians believed they could hold their own.

Galen Perras looks at relations between the two countries over a wide range of issues during the Second World War. In a period of rapid change, Canada and Australia had more sustained contact and cooperation than ever before. As he indicates, however, this did not always go smoothly. The
formal agreement in September 1939 to exchange high commissioners did not entirely overcome the mutual suspicions left over from previous decades. In 1942 there was a serious crisis when the Canadian high commissioner, Major General Victor Odlum, acting without authority, indicated to Australia that Canada would send a division there to help ward off a Japanese advance, only to have the Canadian government decline to do so. His successor, T.C. Davis, summed up his impressions of his hosts in a scathing assessment; while he found the Australians to be “a kindly friendly people,” they had definitely “lived too long in solitary seclusion and security.” They were, he believed, spoilt, undisciplined, lazy, and deluded.9

Such disturbances should not conceal the fact that, on balance, the two countries had considerable respect for each other. As they had done in the past, they continued to use the other as an example. When it came to acquiring the technology and capacity to manufacture nuclear deterrent weapons, Australia consciously set out to attain the same status that Canada had in the 1950s, as Wayne Reynolds describes in his chapter. Under the agreements reached at the Quebec Conference in 1943, Canada was allowed a limited participation in the Manhattan Project to build the American atomic bomb. When, at the end of the Second World War, it became clear to the British that the United States was not going to fulfil its commitments to share the technology, the British government decided to push ahead with its own bomb. The Australian government saw an opportunity to fill a role as a supplier of uranium, like that of Canada’s with the United States.

Involvement in the Cold War brought with it the unwanted attentions of Soviet intelligence. Both Australia and Canada had major spy scandals with the defections of Vladimir Petrov and Igor Gouzenko. The revelations about Soviet spying in both countries had similar aftershocks, but in Australia there was far more condemnation of Soviet activities and the reactions of bodies responsible for postwar intelligence were different. Frank Cain explores the reasons for that difference, from the previous relations of each country to the Soviet Union to the role of American intelligence.

The early years of the Cold War also saw a rapid increase in decolonization, and Christopher Waters examines the significance of this for Canada and Australia. The emergence of the new nations of Asia presented new challenges to nations on the periphery of the Pacific, such as Australia and Canada. The decolonization process was marked by wars – in Malaya, for example, and French Indochina – and by international disputes, and was complicated, inevitably, by the Cold War itself. While Australia was much more directly involved in the consequences of decolonization in Asia, Canada was also involved, as peacekeeper and, in the case of Indochina, as a member of the International Control Commission. Australian and Canadian policy makers often consulted and exchanged views on these issues, and
there are particularly interesting and important exchanges between their foreign ministers, Richard Casey and Lester Pearson.

Postwar relations did not always run smoothly. In the early years of the peace, Pearson clashed frequently with the abrasive Australian minister of external affairs, Herbert Evatt. The conflict was not just of personality, as Andrew Cooper demonstrates. Both countries were attempting to become leaders of an emerging constellation of middle powers after the Second World War. More recently Canada and Australia have bickered openly over the form and scope of the Cairns Group, which brings together agricultural producers, and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). While both countries have been prominent and active players in the creation and maintenance of the international trade system, particularly the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its successor, the World Trade Organization (WTO), self-interest, as Ann Capling and Kim Nossal explain, has led them on at least two occasions since 1945 to direct confrontation. During the negotiations over the International Trade Organization immediately after the war, Canada enthusiastically supported the American push for multilateral trade, while Australia, which still held to imperial preference and industrial protection, did not. The second occasion is the case of the often-bitter divergence that occurred some four decades later, when the two countries found themselves engaged in an effort to promote the liberalization of agricultural trade. Both were members of the Group of Fair Traders in Agriculture, or Cairns Group, which was formed in 1986 as the result of an Australian initiative. Canada infuriated Australia and the other members of the Group by its highly selective approach to freer trade in agricultural products. The Canadians wanted simultaneously to protect certain sectors and liberalize others.

Again, as Cooper reminds us, there is another side to the picture. The Canada-Australia diplomatic relationship is marked by multiple channels and contacts. In a variety of ways, this relationship has taken on a formal status, featuring a regular schedule of meetings at the ministerial level; top-level bureaucratic contacts around the ASEAN Regional Forum and a host of other organizations; and the formal Canada-Australia Consular Sharing Agreement. And Canadians and Australians, whether officials or ordinary citizens, tend to get on with each other. The two countries exchange considerable numbers of officials, share information, and operate together in informal working groups.

This book is a small example of that sort of cooperation. When we contacted scholars in Australia and Canada about this project, we found a welcome interest in bringing together a book that explores the relationship both over time and in a variety of areas, from the diplomatic to the legal. Considering the distances involved, we have also been pleasantly surprised
at how many of us have managed to meet, often in the old imperial capital of London, sometimes in the new one of Washington, and in our own countries. Electronic mail has been invaluable for keeping us in touch and for exchanging views. The result of our collaboration is something we hope will, in its turn, lead to further research.

Notes
2 Mackenzie Bowell, quoted in Greg Donaghy, *Parallel Paths: Canadian-Australian Relations since the 1890s* (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1995), 1.
7 Marc Bloch pioneered the comparative method in an article published in 1928 in *Revue de synthèse historique*: “Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes.” We have used J.E. Anderson’s translation of this article in Marc Bloch, *Land and Work in Medieval Europe: Selected Papers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 44-81. He regarded the use of the comparative method, “easy to manipulate and yielding positive results,” as a matter of pressing urgency for historians. Bloch identified two basic applications of this method: to seek universal explanations as well as “the parallel study of societies,” the goal of which is to identify similarities and differences. In this volume, the contributors adopt the second approach to comparison: to examine two subjects side by side for the purpose of better understanding one or both individually.
9 T.C. Davis to N.A. Robertson, 27 December 1945, Saskatchewan Provincial Archives, James G. Gardiner Papers, reel 4210, 41887-90.