**Upper Canada, 1837-1838**

The rebellion in Upper Canada is often associated with William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861), a reformer, newspaper editor, mayor of Toronto and fiery orator who, for many years, waged a war of words on the ruling oligarchy in the province. In 1837, having failed in his attempt to achieve reform by political means, Mackenzie rallied both moderates and radicals in an ill-conceived plan to overthrow the existing government.

Inspired by an outbreak of violence and clashes between British Army regulars and Lower Canadian "Patriotes" near Montréal in November 1837, Mackenzie was convinced that the time for action had arrived. Most of his sympathizers were concentrated in the area north and west of Toronto, and from these areas he recruited a force of several hundred malcontents. Mackenzie established his headquarters at Montgomery's Tavern and on December 5, 1837, with about 800 ill-equipped and untrained adherents, the rebels marched south towards the city.

Since British regulars had been sent to Lower Canada, a small number of local militia men were mustered to face the rebel force. In spite of being outnumbered, the militia men succeeded in preventing Mackenzie and his men from reaching Toronto. Two days later, approximately 1,000 militia and loyal volunteers met the remnants of Mackenzie's rebel force near Montgomery's Tavern and routed them in a brief but fierce encounter.

A second rebel force had been organized in the Brantford area by Dr. Charles Duncombe (1767-1862) and Eliakim Malcolm (1801-1874). On December 14, 1837 they met a large force of militia led by Col. Allan MacNab (1798-1862) near the village of Scotland and were easily defeated. Both Duncombe and Malcolm fled to the United States in exile.

With the dispersal of Duncombe's followers, the Upper Canada rebellion was over. Two weeks later, Mackenzie (who had also fled to the United States) occupied Navy Island in the Niagara River with a small number of exiles and American sympathizers. An American supply ship, the *Caroline*, was captured and burned, but the rebels, ill-equipped and poorly organized, were chased from the island.

Most rebel leaders fled the province. Many, like Mackenzie and Duncombe, found safe haven in the United States, but more than 800 of their followers were arrested. While most were eventually released or granted amnesty, two of Mackenzie's key supporters, Samuel Lount (1791-1838) and Peter Mathews (1786-1838), were hanged for treason, and more than two dozen Upper Canadians were transported to an Australian penal colony.

Some exiled rebels and American supporters (known as "Patriot Hunters") threatened the border regions of the province for some months to come and launched a series of raids in 1838 -- the occupation of Navy Island in December 1837 was a precursor. The main incidents were a skirmish at Short Hills, on the Niagara peninsula, in June 1838; the Battle of the Windmill near Prescott in November; and border raids in the Detroit/Windsor area in December. These incidents were far more violent than the rebellious acts that had inspired them, and the military response was rapid and decisive. The border raids were serious -- if not well planned -- threats, and were met with large numbers of British regulars and Upper Canada militia. The invaders were repulsed, and justice was served. Fifteen rebels were hanged and dozens were transported to penal servitude in Tasmania.

**Lower Canada, 1837-1838**

In Lower Canada, the rebellions of 1837-1838 were far more violent than the events in Upper Canada. Throughout the spring and summer of 1837, reform leaders in the province, the most prominent being Louis-Joseph Papineau (1786-1871), drew on long-simmering political tensions to organize a large number of rebels. The situation was so tense that in October 1837, all British regulars were withdrawn from the upper province and transferred to Lower Canada.

It was an unequal struggle. The rebels presented little challenge to the government military forces, which included a sizable loyal militia under the command of General Sir John Colborne (1778-1863). "Patriote" (rebel) forces faced British troops and militia on three occasions: at St. Denis, St. Charles and St. Eustache. The rebels were victorious only once: at St. Denis on November 23, under the leadership of Dr. Wolfred Nelson (1791-1863). Lt. Col. George Wetherall (1778-1868) defeated the rebels at St. Charles on November 25 and at St. Eustache, on December 14. Colborne and some 1,500 troops and militia carried the day against a much smaller number of rebels led by Amury Girod (1800-1837). Both sides recorded a number of casualties -- according to historian Elinor Kyte Senior, approximately 300 insurgents were killed in action or died from wounds; government forces suffered less than 30 fatal casualties.

Martial law was declared and many rebels, including Louis-Joseph Papineau, fled to the United States. Hundreds were arrested, and seven, including Dr. Nelson, were exiled to Bermuda. As in Upper Canada, Patriote exiles and American sympathizers combined forces. Led by Robert Nelson (1794-1873), Dr. Cyrille Côté (1809-1850) and others, the rebels attacked Napierville and other villages, as well as the manor house at Beauharnois in early November 1838. They were no match for the well-armed and trained government troops and the skirmishes were quickly suppressed. As a consequence, twelve rebels in Lower Canada were hanged for their part in the rebellion, and when all the trials were completed in the fall of 1839, approximately 130 rebels were transported to the penal colony in Tasmania. Some Lower Canada rebels, such as Dr. Edmund B. O'Callaghan (1797-1880), remained in the United States, while others returned to Canada when an amnesty was declared in 1843.

What began essentially as a political problem was resolved by a political solution. In May 1838, John G. Lambton, Lord Durham (1792-1840), arrived at Québec to investigate conditions in the Canadas. Less than six months later, he was recalled because of differences of opinion with the British government. Nonetheless, his report was submitted in February 1839 and recommended fundamental reforms in the colonies. Durham died before the British government took action, but his report, controversial because of its anti-French overtones, resulted in the union of the Canadas in 1841 and eventually the advent of responsible government in 1848.