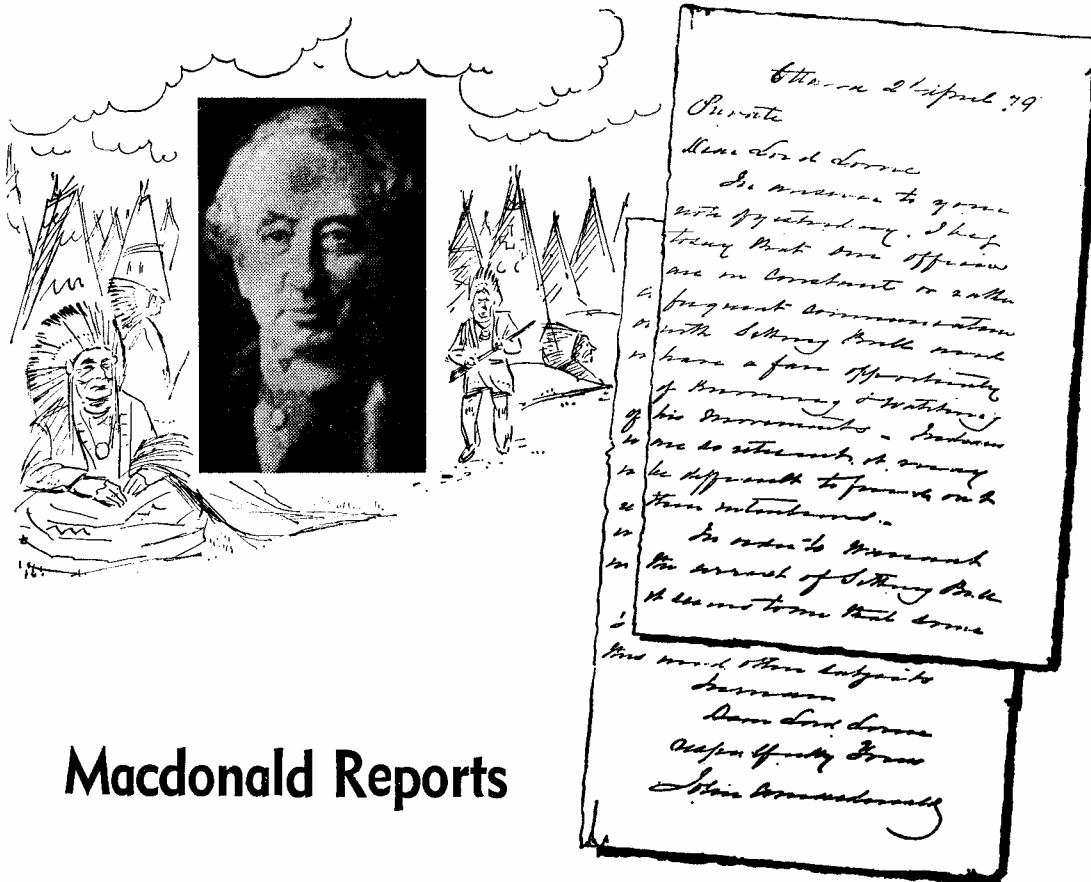


FAMOUS LETTERS IN CANADIAN HISTORY



Macdonald Reports

The Americans were riled up. But, wrote Sir John A. Macdonald, their mere apprehension was not enough to deny the sanctity of Canadian law and territory to even the most desperate man. And, in the eyes of the United States back in the late 1870s, there was none more dangerous or desperate than Sitting Bull, the war chief of the Sioux. He had fled to Canada after wiping out 246 men of the United States Cavalry and

their leader General George Custer near the Little Big Horn River in Montana on June 24, 1876. In this historic letter preserved in the Public Archives of Canada, Prime Minister Macdonald reports to Lord Lorne, the Governor General, on the possibility and the hazards of arresting Sitting Bull who was later to be killed resisting arrest after his return to the United States.

Sitting Bull Subject of Concern

Ottawa, 2nd April, 1879.

Dear Lord Lorne:

In answer to your note of yesterday I beg to say that our officers are in constant or rather frequent communication with Sitting Bull and have a fair opportunity of knowing and watching his movements — Indians are so reticent it may be difficult to find out their intentions.

In order to warrant the arrest of Sitting Bull it seems to me that some evidence must be obtained of a hostile intention on his part. The mere apprehension of the American government would scarcely be sufficient without some evidence of their reasonableness.

The U.S. Government obtains its information from their Indian Agents and scouts in the west who are interested in keeping up the excitement and consequent military expenditure.

Many of these people are unreliable to the last degree.

Our mounted police, 300 men in all, are scattered over a wide region and I think it would be necessary to concentrate them before venturing to arrest Sitting Bull in the middle of his band . . . I propose waiting on Your Excellency today on this and other subjects.

I remain,
Dear Lord Lorne,
respectfully yours,
John Macdonald.