

Old rivals ... new neighbours; Lester B. Pearson and John G. Diefenbaker were opponents in three nasty, mudslinging elections. Now, their names will live side by side in Ottawa's architectural landscape as the old City Hall - distinctly modern beside the stodgier Pearson edifice that houses Foreign Affairs - takes on the name of the Prairie firebrand

Cobb, Chris . The Ottawa Citizen ; Ottawa, Ont. [Ottawa, Ont]20 Sep 2011: A.1.

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT

LeBreton cites the 1960 Canadian Bill of Rights, enacted under Diefenbaker, that laid the groundwork for the Canadian Constitution, his championing of minorities in government, and the much-overlooked foundation he laid for the Canada Health Act through the creation in 1960 of the Royal Commission on Health Services. Diefenbaker brought the Conservatives into the 20th century in terms of embracing the social service state and Medicare and a focus on the economic health of the regions.

FULL TEXT

(From the Ottawa Citizen, September 21, 2011) Clarification: John Diefenbaker and Lester B. Pearson fought four federal elections between 1958 and 1965, three of which were particularly heated. Incomplete information appeared on page A1 Tuesday. *****

They detested each other. And now, in death and in stone, Lester B. Pearson and John G. Diefenbaker will stand together in perpetuity as next-door neighbours on the capital's most prestigious street.

In a plaque unveiling ceremony Monday, the former Ottawa City Hall building at 111 Sussex Dr. was officially named the John G. Diefenbaker Building by Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird and Public Works Minister Rona Ambrose.

The newly-minted Diefenbaker edifice is next door to the Pearson building that houses Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The two titans of Canadian politics fought tooth and nail for 10 years from 1957 in what historians have called the 'decade of discord.'

"There was deep personal dislike between the two," University of Ottawa historian Michael Behiels said Monday. "Both were of British Canadian backgrounds - Pearson by birth and Diefenbaker (Scottish-German) by choice. Pearson was a monarchist but was trying to Canadianize the institution and symbols. That's what set off the warfare between the two."

Pearson and Diefenbaker also fought three nasty, mudslinging elections in 1958, 1963 and 1965. Diefenbaker swept to a huge majority in the first, while Pearson won minorities in the two latter votes.

Diefenbaker, who had defeated Louis St. Laurent in 1957, was in office until 1963 as Canada's 13th prime minister

even though a Harper government announcement Monday referred to him as the 18th PM.

The two men clashed on almost every aspect of significant public policy, said Behiels.

Diefenbaker vehemently opposed the appeasement of French-Canadian nationalists and fought hard against the introduction of the Maple Leaf flag.

"The focus was on the symbols," added Behiels. "The Liberals wanted a Canada that would welcome non-French and non-British and was less intimidating for French-Canadians inside and outside of Quebec. Dief would have none of it. He was a stalwart British-Canadian who wanted the country to remain overwhelmingly British."

Conservative Senator Marjory Le-Breton, who worked in Diefenbaker's office from 1963-1967 when he was in opposition, said Monday that the honour is long overdue.

"He brought a lot of firsts to Canada," she said, "but a lot of it has been air-brushed from history by those who followed."

LeBreton cites the 1960 Canadian Bill of Rights, enacted under Diefenbaker, that laid the groundwork for the Canadian Constitution, his championing of minorities in government, and the much-overlooked foundation he laid for the Canada Health Act through the creation in 1960 of the Royal Commission on Health Services.

Diefenbaker also blazed a trail by selling Canadian wheat to China - the reason, says LeBreton, why he ran afoul of U.S. President John Kennedy. "He also brought the west into the Conservative party and they never left," she said.

The honour is long overdue, agreed Behiels, and is part of the current government's attempt to put a Conservative stamp on the national capital.

"Diefenbaker brought the Conservatives into the 20th century in terms of embracing the social service state and Medicare and a focus on the economic health of the regions. He had a lot to offer, which is why Canadians embraced him, but his ability to manage government was lacking.

"It was a terrible time in terms of the prime minister and the leader of the Official Opposition because neither one had any respect for the other," said Behiels.

The two men were also chalk and cheese as individuals: The erudite, sophisticated diplomat Pearson moved comfortably in the upper echelons of New York and Washington society, but Diefenbaker was more of a recluse, happier in the company of the common man.

"To some degree, Diefenbaker despised Pearson's elitism," said Behiels, "and especially his chumminess with the American elite. Diefenbaker was never part of the Canadian elite and had difficulty relating to people who had a lot of education and a lot of international experience. For him, there were too many Pearsons and not enough common people in charge of Canada."

Despite linking political arms with the United States, Prime Minister Stephen Harper shares much of the Diefenbaker political and regional ethos, added Behiels.

He points to the addition of "royal" to the Canadian air force and navy and the order to place a portrait of Queen Elizabeth in every Canadian high commission and embassy.

"And there are many older Conservatives who want symbolic recognition for that Diefenbaker period," he said. "It has been largely overlooked because the Conservative party has moved on under (former leader) Robert Stanfield and big time under Brian Mulroney. And now under Harper's new-right Conservatism."

We will, of course, never know how the two men would feel about being Sussex Drive neighbours, though if either could have anticipated the honour, they might have included a veto in their wills.

It's true they didn't care for each other, said LeBreton, but she doubts Dief would mind being next door to Pearson.

"Probably he'd be smiling to himself, pleased there is a new Conservative government recognizing the achievements of his."

Credit: Chris Cobb; Ottawa Citizen

Illustration

Jean Levac, The Ottawa Citizen / ; CP / ; Jana Chytilova, The Ottawa Citizen / Monday's unveiling of a plaque

officially renaming the former City Hall building at 111 Sussex Dr. the John G. Diefenbaker Building would have pleased the former prime minister, says Senator Marjory LeBreton. 'He also brought the west into the Conservative party and they never left,' she said.;; Caption:

DETAILS

Subject:	Prime ministers; Canada Health Act; Health services
Publication title:	The Ottawa Citizen; Ottawa, Ont.
First page:	A.1
Publication year:	2011
Publication date:	Sep 20, 2011
Section:	News
Publisher:	Postmedia Network Inc.
Place of publication:	Ottawa, Ont.
Country of publication:	Canada, Ottawa, Ont.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--Canada
ISSN:	08393222
Source type:	Newspapers
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	893696163
Document URL:	http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/893696163?accountid=9894
Copyright:	Copyright CanWest Digital Media Sep 20, 2011
Last updated:	2017-11-18
Database:	Canadian Newsstream

LINKS

[Linking Service](#)

Database copyright © 2019 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)