

Robert Borden

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Not to be confused with his cousin [Frederick Borden](#), Canadian [Minister of Militia and Defence](#) from 1896-1911.

**The Right Honourable
Sir Robert Laird Borden**



8th Prime Minister of Canada

In office
October 10, 1911 – July 10, 1920

Preceded by [Wilfrid Laurier](#)
Succeeded by [Arthur Meighen](#)

Born	June 26, 1854 Grand Pre, Nova Scotia
Died	June 10, 1937 (aged 82) Ottawa, Ontario
Political party	Conservative , Unionist
Spouse	Laura Bond
Religion	Anglican

Sir Robert Laird Borden, [PC](#), [GCMG](#), [KC](#) ([June 26, 1854](#) – [June 10, 1937](#)) was the eighth [Prime Minister of Canada](#) from [October 10, 1911](#), to [July 10, 1920](#), and the third [Nova Scotian](#) to hold this office.

[\[edit\]](#) Early life and career

He was the last Canadian Prime Minister born before [Confederation](#). Robert Laird Borden was born and educated in [Grand Pre, Nova Scotia](#), an agricultural community at the eastern end of the [Annapolis Valley](#) where his great-grandfather Perry Borden, Sr. of [Tiverton, Rhode Island](#) had taken up [Acadian](#) land in 1760. Perry had accompanied his father, Samuel Borden, the chief surveyor chosen by the government of [Massachusetts](#) to survey the former Acadian land and draw up new lots for the [Planters](#) in Nova Scotia. Borden is distantly related to the famous Massachusetts murderess [Lizzie Borden](#).

Borden's father Andrew Borden was judged by his son to be "a man of good ability and excellent judgement", of a "calm, contemplative and philosophical" turn of mind, but "He lacked energy and had no great aptitude for affairs". His mother Eunice Jane Laird was more driven, possessing "very strong character, remarkable energy, high ambition and unusual ability". Her ambition was transmitted to her first-born child who applied himself to his studies while assisting his parents with the farm work he found so disagreeable.

From 1869 to 1874, he worked as a teacher in Grand Pré and [Matawan, New Jersey](#). Seeing no future in teaching, he returned to Nova Scotia in 1874 to article for four years at a [Halifax](#) law firm (without a formal university education) and was called to the Nova Scotia Bar in August 1878, placing first in the bar examinations. Borden went to [Kentville, Nova Scotia](#) as the junior partner of the Conservative lawyer [John P. Chipman](#). In 1880 he was inducted into the [Freemasons](#) - (St Andrew's lodge #1)[1] and in 1882 he was asked by [Wallace Graham](#) to move to Halifax and join the Conservative law firm headed by Graham and [Charles Hibbert Tupper](#). Borden became the senior partner in fall 1889 when he was only 35 following the departure of Graham and Tupper for the bench and politics. His financial future guaranteed, on [September 25, 1889](#), he married [Laura Bond \(1863-1940\)](#), the daughter of a Halifax hardware merchant. They would have no children (Borden does have descendents, namely [Jean Borden](#) and her son [Robert Borden](#)). In 1894 he bought a large property and home on the south side of Quinpool Road which the couple called "Pinehurst". In 1893 Borden successfully argued the first of two cases which he took to the [Judicial Committee of the Privy Council](#). He represented many of the important Halifax businesses and sat on the boards of Nova Scotian companies including the [Bank of Nova Scotia](#) and the [Crown Life Insurance Company](#). President of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society in 1896, he took the initiative in organizing the founding meetings of the [Canadian Bar Association](#) in 1896 in Montreal. By the time he was prevailed upon to enter politics, Borden had what some judged to be the largest legal practice in the Maritime Provinces, and had become a wealthy man.

[\[edit\]](#) Political career 1896-1911

[\[edit\]](#) Backbench MP

He was elected as a Member of [Parliament](#) for the Halifax riding in the [1896 federal election](#), the same election in which Laurier became PM.

[\[edit\]](#) **Leader of the Opposition**

Borden became Leader of the [Conservative](#) opposition in [1901](#). He slowly rebuilt the party, which had lost power and influence after the defeat of Sir [Charles Tupper](#) in [1896](#). Also of note, he is the longest serving leader of the opposition in Canada's history. In the [1911 election](#), he swept to power, campaigning against Sir [Wilfrid Laurier](#)'s plan for [free trade](#) in natural products with the [United States](#). Borden and the Conservatives argued in favour of [Imperial preference](#) which would use [tariffs](#) to diminish imports from outside the [British Empire](#).

[\[edit\]](#) **Prime Minister 1911-1920**

[\[edit\]](#) **First World War**

As [Prime Minister of Canada](#) during the [First World War](#), Borden transformed his government to a wartime administration, passing the [War Measures Act](#) in [1914](#). Borden committed Canada to provide half a million soldiers for the war effort. However, volunteers had quickly dried up when Canadians realized there would be no quick end to the war. Borden's determination to meet that huge commitment led to the [Military Service Act](#) and the [Conscription Crisis of 1917](#), which split the country on linguistic lines. The unpopular conscription issue would likely have meant defeat in the [election of 1917](#), but Borden recruited members of the [Liberals](#) (with the notable exception of Wilfrid Laurier) to create a [Unionist](#) government. The 1917 election saw the "Government" candidates (including a number of [Liberal-Unionists](#)) crush the Opposition "[Laurier Liberals](#)" in [English Canada](#) resulting in a large parliamentary majority for Borden.

The war effort also enabled Canada to assert itself as an independent power. Borden wanted to create a single Canadian army, rather than have Canadian soldiers split up and assigned to British divisions. [Sam Hughes](#), the Minister of Militia, generally ensured that Canadians were well-trained and prepared to fight in their own divisions, although with mixed results such as the [Ross Rifle](#), and [Arthur Currie](#) provided sensible leadership for the Canadian divisions in Europe, although they were still under overall British command. Nevertheless Canadian troops proved themselves to be among the best in the world, fighting at the [Somme](#), [Ypres](#), [Passchendaele](#), and especially at the [Battle of Vimy Ridge](#).

[\[edit\]](#) **Borden and Canadian independence**

In world affairs, Borden played a crucial role in transforming the British Empire into a partnership of equal states, the [Commonwealth of Nations](#), a term that was first discussed at an [Imperial Conference](#) in [London](#) during the war. Borden also introduced the first Canadian [income tax](#), which at the time was meant to be temporary, but was never repealed.

Convinced that Canada had become a nation on the battlefields of Europe, Borden demanded that it have a separate seat at the [Paris Peace Conference](#). This was initially opposed not only by Britain but also by the United States, who perceived such a delegation as an extra British vote. Borden responded by pointing out that since Canada had lost more men than the U.S. in the war, she at least had the right to the representation of a "minor" power. British Prime Minister [David Lloyd George](#) eventually relented, and convinced the reluctant Americans to accept the presence of separate Canadian, [Australian](#), [New Zealand](#) and [South African](#) delegations. Not only did Borden's persistence allow him to represent Canada in [Paris](#) as a nation, it also ensured that each of the [dominions](#) could sign the [Treaty of Versailles](#) in its own right, and receive a separate membership in the [League of Nations](#).

At Borden's insistence, the treaty was ratified by the [Canadian Parliament](#). Borden was the last prime minister to be [knighted](#) after the House of Commons indicated its desire for the discontinuation of the granting of any future titles to Canadians in [1919](#) with the adoption of the [Nickle Resolution](#).

[\[edit\]](#) **Post-war government**

That same year, Borden approved the use of troops to put down the [Winnipeg General Strike](#). It should also be remembered that between 1914 and 1917, in response to [xenophobia](#) aimed at citizens of the [Austro-Hungarian empire](#) arising out of the [First World War](#), 8,579 [\[2\]](#)Eastern Europeans were [interned](#).

[\[edit\]](#) **Post-political career**

Sir Robert Borden retired from office in [1920](#). He was the Chancellor of [Queen's University](#) from [1924](#) to [1930](#), and stood as president of two financial institutions. Borden died in Ottawa on [June 10, 1937](#). He is buried in the Beechwood Cemetery, [Ottawa, Ontario](#).

[\[edit\]](#) **Honours**

Borden was one of the last Canadian Prime Ministers to be knighted, since, due to subsequent legislation, no others have been.

Sir Robert Borden is depicted on the [Canadian \\$100 bill](#).

Sir Robert Borden was honoured by having a high school named after him in the Nepean part of Ottawa.

[\[edit\]](#) **See also**

[Conscription Crisis of 1917](#)

[Ross Rifle](#)

[\[edit\]](#) **Supreme Court appointments**

Borden chose the following jurists to sit as justices of the [Supreme Court of Canada](#):

Sir [Louis Henry Davies](#) (as Chief Justice, [November 23, 1918](#) – [May 1, 1924](#); appointed a [Puisne Justice](#) under Prime Minister Laurier, [September 25, 1901](#))
[Pierre-Basile Mignault](#) ([October 25, 1918](#) – [September 30, 1929](#))

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English, John. The decline of politics : the Conservatives and the party system 1901-20. Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1977. [ISBN 0-8020-5386-6](#). Reprinted 1993 [ISBN 0-8020-6956-8](#).

English, John. Borden : his life and world. Toronto : McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977. [ISBN 0-07-082303-0](#). Excellent illustrations.