

(OBVERSE)

[cut-out and pasted rectangle of text reads:]

HEAD, Sir Francis Bond Head (1793-1875) (Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada (1835-38). Autograph letter, signed, dated Oxendon, Northampton, April 22, 1850 to R(owland) Hill (first Viscount Hill (1772-1842)). 1 page. 4 ¼" x 3". (small paper repairs at upper & lower left corners, horizontal and vertical folds).

After resigning his position as lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, Head returned to England and devoted himself to literary matters. In this letter he requests the loan of a pamphlet by Hill relating to the Parliamentary Committees of 1838 and 1843. Hill was the author of a controversial and important pamphlet 'Post Office Reform', recommending a uniform low rate and the prepayment of postage. A parliamentary committee studied his proposal from November 1837 to July 1838 and recommended a uniform low postage. After much government opposition, the proposal for penny postage was passed in 1839 by the House of Commons. Hill was involved in the implementation until his dismissal by Peel in 1842. As a result of his petition, a select committee was formed in 1843 to study the state of the post office.

[Below the text are two cut-out and pasted photos. A smaller one on the left side shows a younger looking Sir Francis Bond Head looking to the (reader's) left and wearing a formal coat with some sort of medal on the chest and a light coloured button up shirt. The photo on the right's subject is looking to the (reader's) right and is an older Head with a white beard. He is in less formal clothing and this photo is larger]

(REVERSE)

M4 THE TORONTO STAR

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[Photo or illustration of Government house with the caption:]

GOVERNMENT HOUSE: When he arrived in Toronto in 1836, Sir Francis Head's official residence was this house on King St. W. in 1860 it was demolished and rebuilt where Roy Thomson Hall now stands.

The wrong man in wrong place at the wrong time
Donald Jones, Historical Toronto

ON THE eve of the rebellion of 1837, Britain sent the man who was probably the worst possible choice as the new lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada.

Generations of historians have said that he was largely responsible for the rebellion. And there is a famous legend, recorded in countless history books, that the British government simply made a mistake: instead of sending the distinguished Sir Edmund Walker, who would later be made governor of Canada, it sent his cousin, Sir Francis Bond Head, a soldier and writer with no political experience and no experience in the government of any other British colony.

When the appointment was first announced in Britain, no one was more surprised than Francis Head. He was then 42 and even his friends considered him more of an adventurer than a diplomat. All that is usually recorded in Canadian history books is the story of his two years as a governor in Upper Canada. But, when he left Canada, barely half of his life was over.

He lived to the age of 82 and, at the time of his death, was remembered in England as a relatively famous and successful author. And it will surprise most history students in Canada to

discover that his friends nicknamed him “Galloping Head” after he had ridden twice, with almost record-breaking speed, across the continent of South America from Buenos Aires to the Andes.

In an irony that would appeal to every writer, he was born in 1793, in the very year that John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada founded York (later to be renamed Toronto) that would become the scene of the most calamitous events in Head’s life.

He came from a family that owned a large estate called The Hermitage, at Higham, Kent, in southern England. In the definitive summary of his life (Dictionary of Canadian Biography Vol. X, University of Toronto Press), his biography, S.F. Wise, director of the Directorate of History, Canadian Forces Headquarters, records that the Heads’ true family name was Mendez and they were originally Portuguese.

Their English history began in 1662 when one of the sons, Ferdinando Mendez, appeared in London as the personal physician of Catherine of Braganza, who had arrived to marry Charles II. One of his descendants married a wealthy Kentish heiress, Anna Head and, from that time, the family assumed the name Head.

Francis Head, the future governor of Upper Canada, was born on New Year’s Day, 1793, and at the age of 18 graduate from the Royal Military Academy as a lieutenant. Four years later, he was serving as an officer in Wellington’s army at the Battle of Waterloo and led one of the British divisions in the march on Paris. When he was 32 he resigned from the army to join a group of Londoners who planned to develop gold and silver mines in South America.

The venture ended in a fiasco and, on his return to Britain in 1827, Head published a scathing indictment of all the principals who had engineered the scheme. It was not his first appearance as an author, During his year in South America, he had been fascinated by the legends and customs of the primitive people he had met there, and by the late 1820s, had already published the first of what would be a long list of travel books.

His most popular was the exotically-titled “Bubbles from the Brunnens of Nassau.” It ran to six editions. As recorded in Britain’s Dictionary of National Biography, he was also the author of a unique controversy when he formally proposed to the British government that it introduce the South American lasso as a weapon in the British Cavalry.

By the mid-1830s, he had settled comfortable in Kent, with a knighthood from William IV, and was serving as the assistant poor law commissioner when he was informed he had been chosen by the king as the new lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada.

There have always been questions about why, of all people, Head was chosen. In historian Wise’s view, it was probably because many of his magazine articles had earned him a reputation as an ardent Reformer. The British government was then dominated by Reformers and, to many, the newly knighted Sir Francis must have seemed an obvious choice.

When he arrived in Toronto in 1836, his official residence was a large house on King St. West, known as “Government House” that served as the residence of a succession of governors for more than 50 years. In 1860, when it was demolished, a much grander governor’s home was built at this western outskirts of the town. Today, Roy Thomson Hall stands on the site.

Almost as soon as he arrived in Toronto, Head appointed a number of Reformers to his Executive Council but within weeks all had resigned in fury. Like all previous governors, Head believed he had the right to act without the consent of his council or parliament, and by the summer of that first year he was being branded “a deceitful despot.”

In the elections of that year he openly campaigned on behalf of Tory candidates and antagonized even more of his earlier supporters. But Head can scarcely be called the “cause” of the rebellion that broke out the following year.

Ever since the 1820s, there had been a growing movement towards a more “responsible” form of government, but in the autumn of 1837 when there were rumors of a possible revolt, Head was so convinced that the people of Upper Canada would remain true to the crown that he sent all his government troops to support the government’s forces in Lower Canada where rebels had taken to the streets.

On the night of Dec. 4 when William Lyon Mackenzie, the leader of Upper Canada's most belligerent wing of the Reform Party, learned that Head had [left] Toronto "defenceless," he launched an attack on the city. When Head was informed, he was thrown into a state of panic and ordered his family to be escorted to "a place of safety" on a ship moored in the harbor.

THREE days later, the rebellion was largely crushed when a force of more than 1,000 armed militia marched north and defeated Mackenzie's forces at the battle of Montgomery's Tavern. Those three days of turmoil were not a "comic opera" affair as they have often been described. Hundreds of Mackenzie's men were imprisoned or exiled from Canada.

A few weeks after the battle north of Toronto, Sir Francis received word of from London that the resignation he had offered several months earlier had been accepted. England, too, probably now realized the appointment had been a disaster.

He had not only been an incompetent administrator, he never understood the causes behind the uprising. He left the country, in Wise's words, "convinced that he had helped save it for the Empire." But he was warned that if he attempted to travel across Canada there would be an attempt on his life so he crossed into the United States and sailed from New York.

Lord Melbourne who was one of the first to interview him following his return to London described him as "a damned odd fellow," and Head would never again hold government office.

He later returned to his earlier career as a writer and became a regular contributor to the "Quarterly Review" and published a wide variety of books that included *Hi-ways and Dry-Ways* (1849), *The Horse And His Rider* (1860) and a number of biographies. He was described as "a clever, sensitive, though sometimes inaccurate writer."

He married well, his wife, Julia Somerville, was the sister of Lord Somerville. Until he was in his 70s, he still continued to ride almost daily and on July 20, 1875, died at the age of 82 at his home, Duppas Hall, near Croydon.

Even today, he is scarcely a forgotten or ignored author. The present collection of the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library includes 32 of his books. And his most controversial book, *A Narrative*, his own highly colored version of the events of 1837, has almost never gone out of print.

It was reprinted in 1969 by McClelland and Stewart, and he would undoubtedly be delighted to learn that it is still in the circulating collection of public libraries throughout this city.

[At the end of the article there is a photo of Head with the caption:]

Sir Francis Bond Head a soldier and writer with no political experience and no experience in the government of any British colony