

“Not a Matter of Regret”: Granville’s Response to Seymour’s Death

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Recent research* has brought to light a note written to Queen Victoria by Lord Granville, Secretary of State for the Colonies, at the time of the death of Frederick Seymour, Governor of British Columbia. The letter expresses official misgivings about Seymour’s ability to deal successfully with the important matter of British Columbia’s confederation negotiations with Canada, and also implies some degree of dissatisfaction with Seymour as a colonial administrator. While it was not uncommon for the Queen to be consulted in cases where a change of governor was required, this letter is particularly significant in view of the close relationship between the Court and Frederick Seymour’s family.¹ The document sheds new light on the reaction of the Colonial Office to Seymour’s death, and provides a revealing postscript to two articles recently published in *BC Studies*.²

On Thursday morning, June 10, 1869, Seymour died of typhoid asthenia on board H.M.S. *Sparrowhawk*, as the gunboat lay at anchor off Bella Coola, on the north coast of British Columbia.³ Seymour’s body

* Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, RA P 23/95. This material was made available to Mr. Maier and is published here by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen. Mr. Maier wishes also to express his thanks to Miss V. J. Langton, Registrar of the Royal Archives, who was most helpful to him in his researches at Windsor Castle.

¹ The Queen “took a lively interest in colonial matters” and was particularly interested in the appointment of governors, insisting “that she should be consulted before the final decision was made.” Henry L. Hall, *The Colonial Office, A History* (London: Longman’s Green and Co., 1937), pp. 69, 91.

² Margaret A. Ormsby, “Frederick Seymour, The Forgotten Governor,” and Robert L. Smith, “The Hankin Appointment, 1868,” *BC Studies*, no. 22, Summer 1974, pp. 3-25 and 26-39.

³ British Columbia, Governor (Seymour), Death Certificate, PABC and Hankin to Granville, June 14, 1869, British Columbia, Governor, Despatches to London, PABC (hereafter cited as Despatches to London). Seymour had been ordered to the Northwest coast by the Secretary of State to arbitrate a disturbance among Indians, the success of which caused Sir Frederick Rogers to admit: “Gov. Seymour certainly died in the process of a good work.” Minute by Rogers on Hankin to Granville, June 26, 1869, Great Britain, Public Record Office, Colonial Office 60/36, p. 164 (hereafter cited as PRO mf.).

was conveyed to Victoria and news of his death reached Government House in the second hour of Monday morning, June 14.⁴ Before noon that same morning the Colonial Secretary, Lieutenant Philip James Hankin, R.N., had assumed the government of the colony as temporary Administrator in the presence of Chief Justice Needham and other prominent colonial officials.⁵ The Executive Council met at noon the same day. Hankin took the customary oath of allegiance and oath of office, and at the end of the meeting a telegram was dispatched to the Secretary of State, informing Granville of the death. The wire was received at Charing Cross Station on June 15, and at 4 p.m. on the same day the Colonial Office cabled Hankin in reply: "Mr Musgrave is appointed Governor. You may announce he will proceed to British Columbia immediately."⁶ This message was received in Victoria the same day, June 15, less than twenty-four hours after the news of Seymour's death had reached the colonial capital. On June 17 the identity of British Columbia's new governor was announced in the press.

The telegraph enabled the Secretary of State in London to communicate with British Columbia with extraordinary speed, but in Newfoundland it induced even swifter response. Governor Anthony Musgrave was informed of his immediate appointment as governor of British Columbia by telegram on June 15, the same day the Colonial Office announced his appointment to Hankin.⁷ Musgrave hurriedly wired his reply, requesting permission to visit England first in order to consult at the Colonial Office "for information on public affairs."⁸ The Colonial Office responded the very next day, holding steadfastly to their order that Musgrave should proceed to British Columbia "at once. Question of leave may arise later,"

⁴ *The Daily British Colonist* (hereafter cited as *Colonist*), June 15, 1869, p. 3. Accounts vary concerning the exact time of the *Sparrowhawk's* arrival at Esquimalt. Joseph Trutch, in his "Report of the proceedings in connection with the visit of H. E. the late Governor in H.M.S. *Sparrowhawk* to the N.W. coast," (Manuscript, PABC), states that they arrived at 10:30 Sunday evening and "at once went ashore and took the sad news of the Governor's death to Victoria." The *Colonist* reported their arrival at "about 12 o'clock Sunday night."

⁵ *Colonist*, June 15, 1869, p. 3.

⁶ Note by E. H. Wedgewood, PRO mf., CO 60/36, p. 20, and Granville to Hankin, #57, June 16, 1869, Great Britain, Colonial Office, Despatches from London, PABC (hereafter cited as Despatches from London).

Private secretaries were generally responsible for handling appointments, transfers and promotions. See Hall, *Colonial Office*, p. 21.

⁷ Hankin to Granville, #16, June 23, 1869, Despatches to London; *Colonist*, June 17, 1869, p. 2.

⁸ Musgrave to Granville, cable message, June 15, 1869, PRO mf., CO 60/36, p. 16.

they added.⁹ The urgency conveyed in this telegram was reinforced in a covering despatch to Musgrave in which Lord Granville affirmed his desire for Musgrave's quick succession by providing him with a Lieutenant-Governor's Commission to enable him to undertake official duties immediately upon his arrival in the colony. Lord Granville considered that the state of affairs in British Columbia made the presence of a governor "very necessary" and he instructed Musgrave to leave "at the earliest moment."¹⁰

The Colonial Office was able to appoint Seymour's successor quickly in part because of groundwork already laid by Anthony Musgrave himself. In February 1869 he had asked Lord Granville if he might be considered for the governorship of British Columbia. He had also communicated his interest to Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, and had even gone so far as to make enquiries of Seymour himself concerning the furniture at Government House.¹¹ By May, with the departure of Newfoundland's confederation delegates to Ottawa, Musgrave was convinced that Newfoundland would enter confederation with Canada; and Sir Frederic Rogers, noting Musgrave's confidence, emphasized less than a week before Seymour's death that once confederation was accomplished, Musgrave had a "fair claim to speedy re-employment."¹²

Seymour's death facilitated Musgrave's early appointment. Musgrave's strong support for confederation in Newfoundland had won him plaudits from Macdonald and placed him in the good graces of Lord Granville. By way of contrast, Seymour had hesitated to give vigorous support to numerous initiatives on the matter of confederation which emanated from within British Columbia and from Ottawa. Locally, there had been agitation since 1867 when the question of union with Canada had first been raised in British Columbia's Legislative Council.¹³ By May 1869 the

⁹ Wedgewood to Musgrave, June 16, 1869, PRO mf., CO 60/36, p. 17.

¹⁰ Granville to Musgrave, # 13 (Newfoundland), June 17, 1869, PRO mf., CO 60/36, p. 25.

¹¹ Musgrave to Granville, February 20, 1869, PRO mf., Public Archives of Canada, CO 194/178, pp. 87-91; Musgrave to Macdonald, June 10, 1869, Public Archives of Canada, Macdonald Papers, MG 26A, volume 253, pp. 115023-115029; *Colonist*, June 17, 1869, p. 3.

¹² Minute by Rogers on Musgrave to Granville, May 12, 1869, PRO mf., PAC, CO 194/178, p. 135.

¹³ British Columbia, *Journals of the Legislative Council* (New Westminster: Government Printing Office, 1867), March 18, 1867, p. 50.

Canadian Prime Minister was calling for Seymour's recall.¹⁴ In another matter, Lord Granville regretted the inaction of Seymour's government regarding Indian disturbances near Metlakahtlah.¹⁵

Demonstrably, a crisis of leadership existed in the colony, compounded even further, Lord Granville believed, by Hankin's succession to the government of the colony. Opinion in the colony was divided over Hankin's temporary elevation to the highest office in the colony. Most officials viewed the sudden and unexpected promotion of Hankin with cynicism, but the *British Colonist* concluded that Hankin's ability to administer the government deserved fair scrutiny after "so long a period of colonial somnolency."¹⁶ Hankin's lack of popularity with some members of the colonial establishment, Musgrave believed, stemmed from Hankin's lack of standing and influence as a result of "the circumstances of his original connection with the service in a much subordinate appointment & also from his having married into a family not possessing much social status even in a community so little particular at this."¹⁷

Until Seymour's death, Granville appears to have accepted the prevailing opinion that British Columbia's union with Canada was temporarily inexpedient. On June 2, 1869, he promised Sir John Young, the Governor-General of Canada, that "if Confederation is desired by the inhabitants of the Dominion and of British Columbia, Her Majesty's Government will readily do all in their power to further it."¹⁸ It was not any abrupt reversal of public opinion in British Columbia that brought Lord Granville to use the weight of his office to further the cause of confederation. Rather, it was the unexpected death of Frederick Seymour that hastened British Columbia's entry into confederation by permitting

¹⁴ Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: a History* (Vancouver: Macmillan, 1958), p. 229.

¹⁵ Granville to Seymour, March 7, 1869, Despatches from London.

¹⁶ *Colonist*, June 15, 1869, p. 2. Hankin took the opportunity on three separate occasions during his tenure as administrator to emphasize that he had control of the colony's affairs. Confirming his appointment as Colonial Secretary he told Lord Granville on June 18, 1869: "No disastrous consequences have arisen, neither do I apprehend the slightest probability of any arising." When he was asked by cable if Mrs. Seymour would like one of her brothers to meet her at Panama, Hankin, in his cable reply, appended "All quite quiet." Again, on June 26, 1869, he reported "All has been perfectly quiet here, and no inconvenience has arisen to the Public Service from my having assumed the Government of the colony." Hankin to Granville, Despatches to London.

¹⁷ Musgrave to Kimberley, November 7, 1870, Private letterbook correspondence outwards, Musgrave Papers, Duke University.

¹⁸ Granville to Young, confidential, June 2, 1869, RG 7, G 3, Vol. 4, p. 62, PAC.

a pro-confederation governor to assume the reins of government immediately.

The letter that follows indicates Granville's reaction to Seymour's death. It shows the Secretary of State's apprehension about Lieutenant Hankin's position as acting administrator, and it also gives evidence of Lord Granville's desire to see confederation brought about in British Columbia through the appointment of a governor who would champion this cause.

COLONIAL OFFICE

Royal Arms

June 1869¹⁹

Lord Granville presents his humble duty to Your Majesty.

Governor Seymour, (brother of Genl. Albert Seymour)²⁰ died suddenly on the 10th, while on a tour of inspection of the Coast of *British Columbia*.

This sad event is not a matter of regret as regards Your Majesty's service — It is important to fill his place as soon as possible with the best man, for on the future Governor will much depend whether British Columbia will join the Canadian Dominion, or become Americanized.

Mr. Musgrove, Governor of Prince Edward's Island is an excellent man. and the person the Canadian Gov desire to see in British Columbia — If Your Majesty approves of his succeeding to Governor Seymour, he will have to proceed at once, as the Government in the [meantime?] is unluckily in the hands of a young man, who is not popular in the Colony.

¹⁹ The original document contains a pencil note crossing out June, and writing "Oct." This must, however, be incorrect. The most likely date for Lord Granville's communication is June 15, 1869.

²⁰ Lord Granville has used the incorrect Christian name to refer to Frederick Seymour's brother, who was actually General Francis Seymour, a long-time friend and Groom-in-Waiting to Prince Albert. When the Prince Consort died, General Francis Seymour was appointed Groom-in-Waiting to the Queen, and in subsequent years was honoured with a baronetcy and K.C.B. In his note to the Queen, Granville misspells Musgrave's name, accredits him with the governorship of the wrong colony, and omits a word in the final sentence of the letter. These mistakes could suggest that Granville was writing with some haste.