“From One British Island to Another:”

Imperial Federation, Colonial Nationalism, and the Pacific Cable Telegraph, 1879-1902

by

Claire Oliver

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation entitled:

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submitted by Claire Oliver in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History

Examining Committee:

Heidi J.S. Tworek, History Co-supervisor

Robert Brain, History and STS Co-supervisor

Supervisory Committee Member

Laura Ishiguro, History Additional Examiner
Abstract

This essay traces the development of Sir Sandford Fleming’s Canadian campaign for the Pacific Cable submarine telegraph line from 1879 to 1902. Fleming envisioned a globe-encircling communications network that supported both Canadian economic and political expansion as well as increased inter-colonial partnership between Canada and the Australasian Colonies.

Supporting the project through ideologies of nationalism and imperialism, Fleming maintained a broad public discourse in order to encourage funding for the expensive and unpopular telegraph line. The Pacific Cable’s construction during a period of growing political independence across Britain’s white settlement colonies reveals the institutional legacy of the British imperial system within emerging modes of early twentieth-century national development. Fleming’s criticism of rival corporate telegraph networks highlighted the moral utility of public ownership over Britain’s worldwide ‘all-red route.’ In his twenty-year push for the Pacific Cable, Fleming successfully synthesized a new mode of colonial self-determination based in British imperial kinship and global economic integration, elevating telegraphy into the nervous system of “the new Empire.”

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1 Lawrence J. Burpee, Sandford Fleming, Empire Builder (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), 269.
Lay Summary

How did long-distance communications technology encourage economic and political partnership between Canada and the Australasian Colonies during the late nineteenth-century? Tracing Sir Sandford Fleming’s campaign for a Pacific Cable submarine telegraph line, this thesis explores the rise of an inter-colonial consensus between Canada and Australasia in support of completing Britain’s worldwide telegraph network. Officials from both nations believed the Pacific Cable would elevate the nations of the “outer Empire” through direct diplomacy and preferential trade agreements. Building the network without assistance from the British government, the Pacific Cable encouraged a new mode of colonial imperialism across Canada and Australasia. This sensibility of Anglo-Saxon cultural unity would influence the path of federal development even as both nations continued to pursue greater political independence from Britain.

Preface

This thesis is entirely the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Claire Oliver.
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I. Introduction

It was a line from nowhere to nowhere – or at least that was how late nineteenth-century British colonial officials viewed the request for a trans-pacific submarine telegraph line between Canada and the Australasian colonies.³ Beginning in 1879, Canadian engineer and public intellectual Sir Sandford Fleming fought a decades-long public campaign for a Pacific Cable telegraph that would complete Britain’s telegraphic circuit of the globe and bind together the colonial nations of the outer empire.⁴ Fleming’s plans for this ‘all-red route’ were borne out of a wider set of late nineteenth-century discourses on national sovereignty, imperial federation, and international communications circulating across the British world. The archaeology of Fleming’s Cable campaign reveals the critical interdependency between colonial state formation and British imperial consolidation at the end of the century, as well as reformers’ historical reliance upon communications technology in the quest to establish and perpetuate an idealized British world order.

Initially unpopular with officials in both Ottawa and London, Fleming eventually succeeded in selling the project through an imperialist discourse encouraging cultural and political cross-development between Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Through his advocacy, Fleming elevated the Pacific Cable into a medium capable of stabilizing inter-colonial kinship and national political independence within the shifting international structure of Britain’s late-nineteenth empire. Colonial officials saw the Cable as a way to establish new flows of trans-

³ In discussing Britain’s late nineteenth-century colonies in the South Pacific, this paper follows the historical use of ‘Australia’ to refer to the provinces on the Australian mainland, and ‘Australasia’ to refer to all the provinces of modern-day Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand.
⁴ Pacific Cable enthusiasts often quoted Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream to hint at the metaphysical potential of a British all-red route, including Puck’s promise to “Put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes” and “encircle the earth with crimson threads of kinship.” Maureen Ann McEnroe, “‘The Crimson Thread of Kinship’: The Pacific Submarine Cable, 1877-1902, A Study in British Imperial Communications” (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 1999), 194.
colonial trade and diplomacy based upon the sovereignty of colonial self-government.\(^5\) Imperial reformists supported the project as well, envisioning worldwide imperial telegraphy as an extension of colonial self-government that might yield a more equitable level of colonial power in matters of British international policy.\(^6\)

Given contemporary criticisms of the project, then, it becomes necessary to determine exactly how and why the Pacific Cable was built despite an overall lack of demand. Fleming’s overarching goals for the Cable were rooted in the preservation of British colonial cultural identity and the expansion of Canadian international trade. As an engineer, Fleming viewed scaled-up long-distance telegraphy as the best possible means to preserve the special relationships between Britain’s former white settler colonies.\(^7\) Years of participation in the Canadian Imperial Federation League strengthened Fleming’s belief that British colonists shared a unique sensibility rooted in a common cultural identity. However, Fleming also viewed overseas telegraphy as the key to Canadian economic development. As former engineer-in-chief of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Fleming adamantly believed in the power of shipping and communications networks to annihilate distance:

\(^5\) Colonial self-government, also called responsible government, was a nineteenth-century term for the representative federal system used in Britain’s white settlement colonies. This system stood in stark contrast to the modes of political control employed in non-white and volatile colonial regions such as India and Ireland. Canadian self-government grew out of the Crown colony system used in British North America before the American War of Independence; uniform Australasian self-government gradually expanded from New South Wales’s representative parliament over the course of the mid-nineteenth century. Colonial self-government was often a first step towards the increased domestic political autonomy of Dominion status, however both designations created a “hybrid status as both nation and colony” in remaining subordinate to “Downing-street's conceptions of prudence and expediency” in all international matters. Margaret Conrad, *A Concise History of Canada* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 216; Keith A. Berriedale. “The Development of Colonial Self-Government in The Nineteenth-century,” Journal of the Royal Society of Arts 56, no. 2883 (1908): 332.

\(^6\) For the purposes of this paper, I will use ‘imperial’ in reference to the entire British global community, ‘colonial’ in reference to territories outside the British Isles, and ‘international’ in reference to countries across the globe, both within and without the empire.

No scheme of Imperial organization is likely, however, to be readily and generally acceptable unless and until some effective means be taken by and through which the people of every portion of the Empire are made better acquainted than at present with each other, and with all matters concerning their mutual well-being. This points directly to … the establishment of an adequate service for disseminating useful knowledge throughout the Empire for the mutual advantage of all … such a service, established under Imperial authority … would prove a powerful and effective educating influence. I believe there is nothing which would more speedily tend to bring about the harmonious union of all British communities … the circumstances require not simply that lectures or post-prandial speeches be heard by a few on special occasions, but that the millions be reached frequently … unless the consolidation of the Empire is to be indefinitely postponed.8

Through an expansive vision for imperial communications, Fleming promoted the Pacific Cable as a comprehensive initiative for securing political, economic, and cultural federation between the colonial nations of the British empire.

The political historiography of late nineteenth-century relationships between Britain and its former settlement colonies is extensive.9 Within Canadian history, scholars such as Harold Innis and A.A. den Otter have documented the significance of continental railway and telegraph networks in the construction of the post-Confederation nation state.10 However, few studies have

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8 Sandford Fleming, as quoted in Lawrence J. Burpee, 


10 Following the early work of Harold A. Innis, this paper uses ‘communication networks’ in reference to both physical transportation and electric media. Among historical and theoretical works on the influence of communications in North American history, this paper takes inspiration from Harold A. Innis, _A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway_ (London: P.S. King, 1923); A.A. den Otter, _The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Ideal in British North America_ (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Marco Adria, _Technology and Nationalism_ (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010); Robert Collins, _A Voice from Afar: The History of Telecommunications in Canada_ (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1977); Jean-Guy Rens, _The
traced the relationship between domestic state development, international communications networks, and the inter-colonial mode of imperialist discourse circulating among bureaucratic officials in the white settlement regions of the British empire. The present study seeks to expand the traditionally national scope of Canadian technological history by detailing the influence of internationalist imperial discourse and inter-colonial economic expansion in Fleming’s Canadian initiative for a Pacific Cable network. Previous works have established the powerful influence of domestic resource extraction and continental communications networks in Canadian history; however, the impact of late nineteenth-century British imperial telegraphic expansion upon Canadian technological nationalism remains unexplored.\(^{11}\) Contextualizing the specific case of the Canadian Pacific Cable within broader, trans-colonial trends of self-government and preferential trade agreements opens up new pathways in our understanding of the lasting

structural influence of the British empire upon the emerging political landscape of the late-imperial world.¹²

Throughout the long, difficult process of building the Cable, Fleming used an ideological framework of peripheral civic imperialism to counteract the British government’s clear disinterest in building the network. Situating the imperial agenda for international communications in the hands of colonial representatives, Fleming displaced the core-periphery dynamic of centralized imperial governance in favour of a representative and multi-lateral model of empire – one in which the priorities of the metropole became incidental to the project of global imperialism. This vision of decentralized colonial authority expands upon previous historical studies of technology, empire, and national development, situating Canadian and Australian objectives within a larger political discourse of settler colonies as “complementary yet distinct” within the empire.¹³ Within the colonial sensibility of British worldwide community, large infrastructural projects like the Pacific Cable came to embody this new mode of peripherally oriented imperialism. Taking it upon themselves to build the Pacific Cable, Canadian and Australian imperialists forged a new diplomatic relationship based upon preferential trade and a common desire to construct an “Anglo-Saxon Commonwealth.”¹⁴

Following the development of this inter-colonial consensus reveals the shared ideological

¹² Within the scope of this paper, I use ‘late-imperial’ to refer to the declining influence of British imperial governance on the political decisions of the self-governing settlement colonies at the end of the nineteenth-century.

¹³ Bell, Greater Britain, 109.

¹⁴ Thomas MacFarlane, Within the Empire: An Essay on Imperial Federation (Ottawa: James Hope & Co, 1891), 80. Canadian and Australian government officials often discussed imperial federation in reference to the shared experience of settler colonialism, including white British emigration, continental isolation from the metropole, and the use of industrial communications networks to overcome the limits created by internal geography. Innis’s later work was particularly concerned with the idea that “the effective government of large areas depends to a very large extent on the efficiency of communications.” Harold A. Innis, The Bias of Communication (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 9.
foundations of imperialism and technological expansionism that supported the growing political and economic independence of Britain’s former settlement colonies.

Archival records of Fleming’s Pacific Cable advocacy encompass thousands of pages of correspondence, articles, pamphlets, parliamentary proceedings, and colonial conference minutes. Despite his abundant personal works, however, Fleming never fully elucidated the philosophical nature of his belief in industrial communications. In the absence of any such ideological treatise, this essay follows the evolution of Fleming’s ideology of international telegraphy through public archives of his correspondence, editorials, journal articles, and conference speeches. Fleming’s early writings on the Pacific Cable grew out of a general interest in techniques of global standardization, as well as his membership in a number of international amateur societies concerned with Canadian scientific collaboration and British imperial federation. As he began to publicly campaign in favour of the Cable in the early 1880s, Fleming drew from a broad set of potential symbolic and utilitarian benefits to address the particular policy concerns of Canadian, Australian, and British officials. Frustrated by the project’s reliance on landing rights approval from the British government, Fleming chose to overhaul the network’s layout in 1885 in favour of a direct route between Canada and Australia. This new scheme required unanimous support from the South Pacific colonies, leading Fleming to pitch the Cable as a solution to Australia’s widespread frustration with private telegraphy by emphasizing the moral imperative of public utility ownership.

For over twenty years, Fleming used ideologies of British cultural unity, inter-colonial partnership, and technological developmentalism to support his vision for a Pacific Cable. Framing the network as a collective undertaking, Fleming united Canadian and Australian officials through a decentralized mode of colonial civic and economic imperialism. Fleming and
his fellow Cable supporters saw submarine telegraphy as an essential tool for enacting preferential economic partnerships and securing colonial state agency within the international sphere. Using telegraphy to close the gap between national and imperial authority, Cable advocates successfully reorganized the traditional economic and cultural ties of empire to construct a collaborative and representative communications network. In so doing, telegraph reformers drew upon the political and economic precedent of centralized British imperialism to construct a new set of culturally bounded diplomatic and economic relationships between the emerging nations of Canada and Australia.
II. Kaleidoscopic Conjunction: Scientific Internationalism and Civic Imperialism

From the start, Canadian and Australian calls for a publicly owned Pacific Cable were met by an overwhelming ambivalence. Government and corporate critics objected to the unnecessary expense and lack of demand for what would become the world’s longest and most expensive telegraph line. Yet over the course of two decades, Fleming successfully sold the Pacific Cable by situating the network’s expected symbolic and utilitarian benefits within an evolving and comprehensive set of ideas regarding technology and empire. Promoting the Cable through international societies like the Royal Canadian Institute and the Imperial Federation League, Fleming was able to shape the cultural and global aspects of the network according to the sensibilities of a wider imperialist milieu. By posing the Cable as a technique for inter-colonial economic expansion, Fleming created a wide base of support for the project among Canadian and colonial officials, laying the diplomatic groundwork for the 1887 and 1894 Colonial Conferences.

Born in Kirkaldy, Scotland in 1827, Sandford Fleming was first drawn to Canada by the wealth of career opportunities in surveying and industrial engineering. After emigrating with his brother David in 1845, Fleming worked on several regional railway routes before being hired as chief engineer of the Intercolonial Railway in 1863. Fleming expressed interest in building a national railway from Quebec to British Columbia as early as 1853, characterizing the project as “a great and intricate engineering problem; but even more so as a matter of national and imperial significance.”

Buoyed by his success with the ICR, the Canadian government appointed Fleming engineer-in-chief of the continental Canadian Pacific Railway project in 1871. Through

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15 Describing Fleming’s expansive vision for the CPR, his admiring biographer goes on to note that “he has dreamed dreams and formulated projects that were sometimes in advance of his times ... they have looked always to the knitting together of the scattered members of a world-wide empire by creating and improving the means of communication.” Burpee, Empire Builder, 107.
his involvement with the CPR, Fleming gained national recognition and befriended a number of fellow administrators who would go on to positions at the highest levels of government. Fleming was forced to retire from the CPR in 1880 due to allegations of financial mismanagement, but managed to maintain his status as a public figure within Canada. Throughout his life, Fleming frequently expressed pride in his background as a British emigrant to Canada, viewing his government works as a lifetime of service to both Canada and Britain.

Fleming’s imperialist philosophy of telegraphy developed throughout the early 1880s through extensive correspondence with Canadian and colonial government officials, as well as his avid participation in a number of intellectual societies concerned with science, engineering, and imperial federation. Many of his contacts were themselves imperialists and shared his open-ended faith in the unifying force of both empire and communications networks. Drawing upon his background in engineering and an open-ended faith in long-distance communication networks, Fleming’s campaign for the Pacific Cable was heavily informed by his involvement with late nineteenth-century colonial imperial federalism as well as his career in state-funded


17 Fleming was dismissed from the CPR due to rumours of financial embezzlement but received a handsome settlement and remained close with many top administrators. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Debates, 4th Parl., 3rd sess., vol. 11 (1881): 1012. See also Sandford Fleming, “Letter to the Secretary of State, Canada, in Reference to the Report of the Canadian Pacific Railway Royal Commission” (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1882).

18 LAC MG29B1 vol. 133 fo. 8, Vera Fidler, “Sir Sandford Fleming: Pioneer in World Communications,” Canadian Geographical Journal 66, no. 3 (1963): 93. In an interview shortly before his death, Fleming reflected that “it has been my great good fortune to have had my lot cast in this goodly land, and to have been associated with its educational and material prosperity. No one can deprive me of the satisfaction I feel in having had the opportunity and the will to strive for the advancement of Canada and the good of the Empire.” Burpee, Empire Builder, 278.

19 Fleming’s correspondence network included Charles Tupper, John A. MacDonald, Mackenzie Bowell, F.N. Gisborne, Canadian Prime Minister Lord Strathcona, Canadian High Commissioners in London Alexander Galt and Wilfred Laurier, British Premier Lord Rosebery, British Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain, Canadian Postmaster General William Mulock, and Alexander Siemens, president of the firm behind the 1858 Trans-Atlantic Cable.
“high modernist” infrastructural expansion. Fleming’s targeted advocacy successfully sold his fellow imperialist reformers on the Pacific Cable’s ability to loop the self-governing colonies together into “a non-contiguous representative polity that straddled the planet.”

Fleming’s emphasis upon the progressive political and cultural effects of submarine telegraphy aligned the Pacific Cable project with a number of widely held, yet loosely defined concepts of late nineteenth-century scientific and political progress. This conceptual mutability proved essential in maintaining a wide pool of support amidst specific national and regional policy goals. Fleming successfully deflected criticism on the Cable’s practical drawbacks by appealing to the technological inclinations of his support base, leveraging the emblematic power of a globe-encircling British network against the unreasonable cost of construction. In this way, Fleming maintained a simultaneous appeal to both the utilitarian (building to strengthen connections) and symbolic (building in response to present connections) functions of the Cable, framing the project as an inevitable outgrowth of imperial development. Despite his own monumental efforts to keep the project alive, Fleming’s calls for telegraphic imperial unity downplayed the tremendous amount of labour required to construct the Pacific Cable’s network, maintaining a view of global technological expansion through submarine cables as the next ‘natural’ stage for the empire.


Anna Tsing observes that the modernist logic of global capitalism seeks to insulate the view of worldwide consolidation as a ‘natural’ process from the intentionality exposed by the actual effort required to create such markets, noting that “scalability is not an ordinary feature of nature. Making projects scalable takes a lot of work.” Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins (Princeton University Press, 2015), 38.
Late Victorian internationalist discourse on the progressive effects of technological development was rooted in both the epistemological and methodological traditions of nineteenth-century science. Significant discoveries between the Enlightenment and early nineteenth-century combined with disciplinary specialization and mechanical advancement to endow practitioners with a self-concept that “equated the progress of science with the progress of civilization.”

Amidst rapid professionalization, scientific collaboration transformed from correspondence networks of amateur “armchair naturalists” into “a genuinely self-conscious professional community based on science pursued according to strictly naturalistic premises.” By the 1870s, this attitude had expanded into a view of science as both the cornerstone of human progress and a stopgap measure against social decline, leading one British practitioner to declare that “the full and earnest cultivation of Science – the Knowledge of Causes – is that to which we have to look for the protection of our race – even of this English branch of it – from relapse and degeneration.”

Victorian views of science as both the objective pursuit of knowledge and the collective improvement of human society inspired corresponding admiration for the objective power of industrial machines. This widespread sensibility of a ‘technological sublime’ projected a metaphysical dimension onto the expansive possibilities of steam and electricity.

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By the late nineteenth-century, elite interest in both science and political theory had inspired a wide array of international academic and amateur societies. Many of these associations attracted a diverse set of members from across the globe, hosting broad debates over popular issues of national and international development. Amidst heightened geopolitical competition, the cooperative structure of these amateur societies nurtured a cosmopolitan intellectual culture unrestricted by national boundaries. Throughout the 1880s, Sandford Fleming used his membership in a number of associations, particularly the Royal Canadian Institute and the Imperial Federation League, to popularize his vision for a trans-Pacific telegraph line. Through his efforts, Fleming also advanced his personal relationships with fellow high-ranking British, Canadian, and colonial members in order to advocate for the Pacific Cable.

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29 Fleming’s success with the Pacific Cable owed a great deal to his insular and overlapping network of highly ranked contacts, many of whom participated in the same societies. See Savory, “Colonial Business Initiatives”; David R. Richeson, “Sandford Fleming and the Establishment of a Pacific Cable” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1972); Guy Robertson MacLean, “The Imperial Federation Movement in Canada, 1884-1902” (PhD diss, Duke University, 1958). Among institutions concerned with science and empire, Fleming maintained membership in the Astronomical and Physical Society, Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, British Association for the Advancement of Science, British Empire League, British Imperial Club, British Union, British Weights & Measures Association, Canada Club, Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, Conservative Club, Constitutional Club, Dominion Alliance, Empire Club, Imperial Colonial Club, Imperial Federation League, Imperial Institute, Proportional Representation Society, Royal Canadian Institute (founder), Royal Colonial Institute, Royal Society of Canada, and the United Empire Club. LAC, MG29B1, vol. 43, fo. 302.

Fleming himself founded the Royal Canadian Institute in 1851 for “the encouragement and general advancement of the physical sciences, the arts and the manufactures.” Modeled after the British Royal Society, members worked to build a uniquely Canadian institution which would “minister to the wants, and to promote the interests of a young, yet enterprising and rapidly advancing people.” Fleming in particular saw the RCI as a way to develop a more cosmopolitan intellectual community within Canada, furthering the nation’s standing within the empire through the encouragement of scientific and mechanical innovation. From the start, the Executive Committee agreed with Fleming’s broad mandate and insisted that the Institute should “embrace a broad a field of practical science … as possible” in order to encourage membership and intellectual collaboration.

In the years leading up to his first proposal for the Cable, Fleming presented dozens of papers and articles at the RCI on a variety of projects concerned with standardization, including worldwide time zones, a global prime meridian, and universal penny postage. In discussing each project, Fleming took care to bracket the practical benefits within a larger moral argument for universalism, presenting the homogenous integration of overlapping regional standards as a powerful tool for human progress. Viewing global integration through an engineer’s perspective, each initiative of universal standardization represented a technique by which

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35 Simon Schaffer, “Late Victorian Metrology and Its Instrumentation: A Manufactory of Ohms” in *The Science Studies Reader*, ed. Mario Biagioli (Routledge, 1999): 459. In this case, the ‘system’ can be read as both the cultural idea of a global British community as well as the specific communications network.
separate communities could be “drawn into immediate neighbourhood and near relationship.”

In a language of technological universalism, virtual community, and imperial progress echoing his later writings on the Pacific Cable, Fleming urged his fellow Institute members to bring their expertise to bear “on objects of universal interest” in order to advance not only Canada, but all of human society. Though the vast majority of the RCI’s scholarship focused on solving pragmatic issues of national industry, Fleming perceived its true value to lie in “the refreshing influence of mind upon mind, in the re-union of those whom separate pursuits or different walks in life tend otherwise to put asunder – in holding up to practice the mirror of theory.”

Reflecting on the Institute in a commemorative article, Fleming praised the association’s influence in “smoothing the path of civilization,” as well its encouragement of Canadian economic development through the utilization of natural resources and the construction of new shipping networks. Fleming’s early involvement with the Institute marked the beginning of a lifelong precedent for “using contemporary institutions to achieve his ends against the odds of national rivalry and officious indifference.”

Fleming was also a founding member of the Imperial Federation League, an informal yet highly influential amateur society focused on the preservation of ties between nations of the British Empire. Created in 1884, the IFL’s membership roster included many high-ranking British and colonial officials concerned over the pace of national economic development and the

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38 Ibid., 12.
uncertain future of the self-governing colonies in the late nineteenth-century world.\textsuperscript{41} Canadian members of the League sought imperial federation as a way to grow the national economy through preferential international trade agreements. Economically minded members like Tupper and Bowell lobbied for the expansion of the CPR’s domestic infrastructure, citing the network’s significance within “the frequently repeated attempts of the British people, ever since American has been discovered, to find a new route to Asia.”\textsuperscript{42} Others, such as Fleming and J. Henniker Heaton, were primarily interested in global reform projects, viewing inter-colonial shipping and communications networks as integral to the continued economic, political, and cultural unity shared by British nations.\textsuperscript{43} Despite a wide range of political affiliations, the majority of the League’s Canadian members sought preferential trade agreements within the imperial sphere out of fear that the British government’s close relationship with the United States would leave Canada open to future economic and political absorption.\textsuperscript{44}

Realizing that formal imperial federation would be unpopular in Canada, and that too narrow a political agenda might alienate key members, the League adopted a broad mission statement “to promote the discussion of means whereby the permanent unity of the Empire may be maintained, and its practical efficiency increased.”\textsuperscript{45} From the start, IFL members did not push for formal political federation within the empire and avoided specific declarations on the

\textsuperscript{41} Other prominent members included George R. Parkin, Donald Smith, Henniker Heaton, G.M. Grant, Lord Rosebery, Wilfrid Laurier, and William Mulock. MacLean, “Imperial Federation,” 84.

\textsuperscript{42} Tupper, as quoted in MacLean, “Imperial Federation,” 112.


\textsuperscript{44} This fear led one League member to declare that Canadian political independence was “but another name for annexation.” Imperial Federation League in Canada, Report of the First Meetings of the League in Canada, (Montreal: W.M. Drysdale & Co., 1885), 20. This attitude of protectionism was based in the ‘National Policy’ of John A. MacDonald’s conservative government, which sought to build up Canada nation through political confederation, the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and increased immigration into the Canadian west. The technology of the CPR was essential to consolidating the federal state envisioned by the National Policy, as the railway made it possible to expand resource extraction, exports, immigration, and federal governance to a continental scale. Innis’s monograph remains the definitive historical work on the CPR.

\textsuperscript{45} IFL, First Meetings, 18.
type of imperial federation the League sought to promote. By deliberately keeping ideology and policy goals vague, members built the association into a catchall for individuals interested in shaping Canadian and colonial economic policy through imperial cooperation.\footnote{MacLean, “Imperial Federation,” 23.} Executives instead emphasized the overall importance of colonial representation in British imperial policy decisions, stating that the present arrangement provided no voice for the wider empire in international matters. Gathering together a host of eminent politicians and public figures, the IFL crystalized an informal extra-governmental agenda within Canada to pursue intra-imperial trading relationships ahead of any other international market. Canadian IFL members in particular sought imperial unity as a means to achieve economic expansion through overseas trade, fortified by the extension of the CPR’s continental telegraph network.\footnote{Canadian members were also keen to expand the CPR’s new international steamship service. Lynne McDonald, “The Tie That Binds: The Pacific Cable and the Men Who Worked On It” (master’s thesis, University of Auckland, 2006), 31.} Reflecting on the benefits of economic rather than political federation, the League’s first chairman noted that “we had better aim at concert among the governments rather than at an imperial parliament. Thanks to the steamship and the telegraph, time and space no longer make such concert very difficult.”\footnote{MacLean, “Imperial Federation,” 23.}

From the very beginning, Fleming’s letters to fellow IFL members expressed his belief that an international submarine cable would effectively stabilize the dynamic relationships between Britain, Canada, and the Australasian colonies. Between 1879 and 1902, Fleming corresponded regularly on the Pacific Cable with a long list of League members, including Charles Tupper, Alexander Galt, J. Henniker Heaton, G.M. Grant, Lord Rosebery, George R. Parkin, and Mackenzie Bowell. Even before the CPR’s railway and telegraph lines were completed, Fleming discussed the merits of an ocean telegraph with F.N. Gisborne,
Superintendent of the Canadian Telegraph and Signal Service and fellow member of the Royal Canadian Institute. In a letter celebrating the national achievement of the CPR, Fleming noted that once the railway was finished, “as a question of Imperial importance the British possessions to the west of the Pacific Ocean should be connected by submarine cable with the Canadian line. Great Britain would then be brought in direct communication with all her greatest colonies and dependencies without passing through foreign countries.” Fleming reiterated this idea in correspondence with Charles Tupper in 1880, describing a Pacific Cable as “the imperial twin of the CPR’s east-west telegraph system.”

Throughout his early writings, Fleming consistently expressed the importance of integrating the CPR’s national infrastructure into Britain’s overseas telegraph system. Importantly, Fleming perceived the national and international dimensions of the Pacific Cable to be inexorably linked; the network’s scalability operated in favour of both federal and imperial goals. In addition, an empire-wide communications system would highlight the imperial advantages of Canadian technological development:

*Canada has already done much towards establishing the new line of telegraph between Great Britain, Australia and Asia. She has, by an enormous expenditure in connection with her national railway, brought Vancouver within telegraphic reach of England, and she has thus rendered it a comparatively easy task to complete the whole connection ... The Pacific cable, is however, in some degree a corollary to the line across the continent.*

Influenced by the IFL’s focus on growing the national economy within the British imperial sphere, Fleming’s early plans for the Pacific Cable drew upon scientific and political discourses framing international communications within a “logic of equivalency between the universal and

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49 Gisborne also worked on the 1866 Trans-Atlantic Cable. LAC MG29B1, vol. 55, fo. 12, Fleming to Gisborne, 11 June 1879.
the particular, the local and the global.”

Early correspondence on the Cable displays the degree to which Fleming shaped his appeals in order to bridge the specific economic and political concerns of his Canadian colleagues. By positioning the Cable as an ambitious project of national advancement within the empire, Fleming situated his platform within a generalized set of political values flexible enough to appeal to Canadian nationalists and colonial imperialists alike. This early approach simultaneously shaped the Cable into both an imperial and domestic endeavour, forging a broad, multilayered ideology of international communications capable of minimizing the project’s vast expense and “practical absurdity.”

Communications scholars Winseck and Pike have noted that “Canada’s position as a crossroads of empire made it a natural starting point for cable reformers and visionaries to pursue what were, at the time, audacious projects to lay cables across the Pacific.” Canada’s early growth along the shipping network of the St. Lawrence established a historical precedent for territorial expansion through long-distance communications networks. However, the extension of Canada’s continental system into a trans-oceanic imperial network did not follow the same continental logic as the CPR. Fleming’s early Cable advocacy through amateur associations and private correspondence reveals the deliberate process of rhetorically constructing Canada into a natural space for global oceanic telegraphy. By working within broad internationalist currents of thought regarding national advancement and imperial unity, Fleming advanced a generalized set of arguments in favour of the Pacific Cable broad enough to address the specific concerns of multiple interest groups. Like his fellow IFL members, Fleming sought to increase Canadian

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52 Goswami, Producing India, 79.
54 Winseck and Pike, Communication, 153.
federal development through preferential trade agreements with fellow imperial nations.

However, Fleming also maintained his internationalist vision for unified imperial communications, working to frame the Pacific Cable within “the kaleidoscopic conjunction between the technologies of the railroad, telegraph, and submarine telegraphy in the overlapping projects of Canadian-nation building and British empire building in the late nineteenth-century.” Throughout the early 1880s, Fleming’s advocacy laid the ideological groundwork necessary to expand the scope of Canada’s technological nationalism into the imperial sphere, effectively posing the Pacific Cable as the solution to a wide range of concerns shared by Canadian officials and communication reformers alike.

56 Thompson, “Sandford Fleming.” 65. Extolling the virtues of the British empire, Fleming later declared that “never since the world’s history began has there been such an example of a country which has expended blood and treasure to establish and strengthen her colonies, and then hand the heirship of them over to their inhabitants.” Fleming, as quoted in “The All-British Trans-Pacific Cable,” BC Provincial Archives CIHM microfiche no. 14016 (1897), 279.
III. A Magical Business: From Asiatic to Pacific Cable

Though Fleming first introduced the Pacific Cable as an outgrowth of informal imperial federation and national economic expansion, early support from his domestic and colonial colleagues faltered in light of the British government’s strong discouragement of the project. Britain’s overall indifference to the Pacific Cable from 1879-1887 presented a critical challenge to the conceptual integrity of building the network as an imperial endeavour. Given the absence of an urgent military or economic demand for the line, British officials were uninterested in navigating the complex process of securing extra-national landing rights from the American and Japanese governments, much less the financial and diplomatic hassle of purchasing foreign islands outright. While Cable proponents like Fleming continued to predict the network’s potential based on the understanding that “time rather than cost” was “the essence of telegraphic success,” members of the British government remained unconvinced that the Pacific Cable would be worth the enormous financial investment.57

In response, Fleming adapted his ideology of technologically mediated global community into a form of colonially-centred imperialism that would uphold the symbolic importance of the project without British approval. Fleming had already positioned the Pacific Cable as an outgrowth of the CPR’s imperial function, mitigating the lack of demand for the Cable by emphasizing its capacity to strengthen British cultural identity across the colonies. As plans for the first trans-Pacific Asiatic Cable stagnated amidst Britain’s silence, Fleming recognized the threat posed by London’s indifference to the symbolic and cultural goals of the network. Rather than abandoning the project, Fleming worked to redirect theories of imperial federalism and worldwide British community into a decentralized model of civic imperialism organized from

57 Emphasis by author. Fleming to Gisborne, 13 June 1879, in “Report and Documents in Reference to the Canadian Pacific Railway,” BC Provincial Archives CIHM microfiche no. 14546 (1880), 358.
the colonial periphery. The Pacific Cable would foster a telegraphically mediated colonial solidarity, enabling Canada to communicate directly with fellow British colonial nations.

Fleming secured further support from colonial officials by framing the Cable’s construction as an act of colonial service, rather than a colonial request for imperial funding. Moreover, by casting the cable as an act of peripheral self-determination, Fleming was able to position the project within existing modes of imperialist and technological developmentalism supported by intellectual associations like the Imperial Federation League.⁵⁸

From the start, Fleming used personal correspondence to tailor his Cable advocacy around the specific priorities of potential supporters. In a letter to F.N. Gisborne, Fleming outlined the inter-colonial benefits of an imperial network, noting that the “continuation of the Pacific Railway line while completely girdling the globe by an electric wire, would connect with the Australian and New Zealand Branch and, without question would extend the most important advantages to the whole outer Empire of Great Britain.”⁵⁹ Gisborne himself agreed with Fleming and expressed his full support for “an enterprise of so much moment to Imperial and Colonial interests.”⁶⁰ Writing to Tupper a few days later, Fleming instead highlighted the explicitly national benefits of the Cable in his claims that the “extension of the Pacific Railway Telegraph to Asia” would “exercise no little influence on the future of Canada.”⁶¹ The letter contained no mention of the imperial sentiments previously discussed with Gisborne. Tupper agreed with

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⁵⁸ Many colonial officials in Britain and Australasia shared Fleming’s support for federal development through imperial economic partnerships, viewing it as an outgrowth of the “elevating properties of colonialism” and further proof the empire’s value as “a politically and morally transformative association.” Bell, Greater Britain, 225.


⁶¹ Fleming to Tupper, 14 May 1880, as quoted in ibid., 681.
Fleming’s plan, viewing the Cable as a boon to the CPR’s shipping business in the west.62

However, in yet another letter to the Canadian Governor General, Fleming suggested both the national and international benefits of the Cable in expanding overseas trade:

A map of the world, setting forth the great Telegraph lines in operation, shows that Canada is situated midway between the masses of population in Europe and Asia, and establishes the peculiarly important geographical position which the Canadian Overland Telegraph Line will occupy ... It would advance the general interests of Canada, by directly connecting the Dominion, telegraphically, with all the other great British possessions in both hemispheres.63

Taking care to fuse the nation’s ‘general interests’ with the geographically advantageous location of Canada within the empire, Fleming’s message adeptly argued for the domestic benefits of imperial telegraphy. Soon after, the Canadian Privy Council granted Fleming exclusive landing rights along the Pacific Coast in June 1880 to increase “cable business on the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway.”64

Though Fleming’s push for the Pacific Cable occurred at the peak of British control over global telegraphy, members of the Colonial Office in London remained sceptical of Fleming’s claims, particularly of the strategic necessity prompting requests for immediate construction of the line.65 Starting in the 1870s, the Colonial Office had tried to avoid additional obligations to the self-governing colonies, viewing the process of self-government as a path to “abandoning the Dominion in a decent, dignified way.”66 Catering to this hands-off perspective, Fleming eschewed any mention of the CPR in his messages to the Colonial Office, instead emphasizing

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62 MacLean, “Imperial Federation,” 358.
63 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 118, fo. 52, Sandford Fleming to the Marquess of Lorne, in “Memorandum: In Reference to a Scheme for Completing a Great Inter-colonial and Inter-continental Telegram System by Establishing an Electric Cable Across the Pacific Ocean” (1882), 6.
64 LAC, Canadian Parliament, Sessional Papers 15 no. 9 (1882), 687.
65 The British government followed a practical policy of encouraging private corporations to build new lines wherever possible, only constructing new lines if they were strategically necessary. Headrick, Invisible Weapon, 28.
the military and economic advantages afforded to Britain by an international line located outside the politically volatile regions of Europe and the Mediterranean.  

Moreover, were Britain’s current east-west international network to be sabotaged by a foreign government in wartime, the Pacific Cable would provide a secondary west-east line of communication. Both Harry Parkes, Her Majesty’s Minister to Japan, and the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, expressed their general support to Fleming, but warned that the Japanese government would likely require formal control over any cable landing site.

Despite Fleming’s vision of Canada as a geographic midway point for imperial telegraphy, officials in London remained reluctant to support any scheme that involved financing a low-priority line across a politically stable region of the empire. The colonial government saw no strategic advantage in claiming remote islands in Asia, particularly to support a network that would benefit the self-governing colonies. Just as Fleming began to contact British officials regarding the Pacific Cable, US and French firms had announced their plans for competing trans-pacific cable schemes, creating an alternative option to Fleming’s request for direct government investment. British colonial officials remained quite content to pursue the project through the slow process of negotiating landing rights through diplomatic channels; were a competing international Pacific cable scheme to be completed in the interim, it would only create less hassle for the Colonial Office. This wait and see approach aggravated Fleming, who viewed competing international schemes as a threat to the strategic benefit of an all-imperial network. Perhaps

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67 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 118, fo. 52, Sandford Fleming, in “Memorandum: In Reference to a Scheme for Completing a Great Inter-Colonial and Inter-Continental Telegram System by Establishing an Electric Cable Across the Pacific Ocean” (1882), 6.
68 LAC, Canadian Parliament, Sessional Papers 15 no. 9 (1882), 694.
69 Since the mid-nineteenth century, Britain had followed an unofficial policy of funding utilities only when they were absolutely necessary for military or commercial interests. Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 41.
71 “Vancouver or Monterey – Which Shall Be the Terminus to the French Trans Pacific Cable?” in The Illustrated Electrical Review, vol. 24 no. 9 (1894), 8.
more importantly, Canada’s commercial advantage would be ruined if Britain chose to lease lines over an international route rather than routing through the CPR’s overland system.

A month after Fleming’s initial proposal to Gisborne, Sir Alexander Galt, Canadian High Commissioner in London, met with Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald and the Earl of Kimberley to discuss the possibility of moving forward on the Asiatic Cable. The three men decided against asking the Japanese government to give an island to Britain, as “it seems to be more expedient that the landing of the cable upon such an island should be secured under the concession of the Japanese Government affording the guarantee of that country for its protection.” This diplomatic, non-military approach to landing rights arrangements was in line with the British government’s longer precedent for viewing new technologies as “instruments to stabilize a status quo favourable to their nation.” The Cable’s route not only risked Britain’s diplomatic relationship with Japan, but also threatened the existing layout of international telegraphy that heavily favoured British markets. As long as the global circuit remained incomplete between Canada and Australia, price and trade information travelling in either direction was forced to pass through domestic British wires, giving London markets a privileged view of global price trends. Though individual officials like Kimberley saw the Pacific Cable as promising, no wing of the British government was willing to publicly commit to Fleming’s

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72 Both men were architects of Canadian Confederation. den Otter, Railways, 47.
project without a clearly defined cost-sharing arrangement on terms favourable to Britain. The Colonial Office was content to let the Cable stagnate as Fleming tried to coordinate landing rights and financial agreements between Canada, Britain, Australia, and Japan with no official government authority.76

The British government finally responded to Fleming’s requests in December 1880, a few months after Galt’s meeting with MacDonald and Kimberley. Parkes alerted Galt to several impediments, including the fact that the Danish Telegraph Company had already built a land cable in Japan in 1870 and had been granted a private monopoly over foreign traffic.77 To make matters worse, Cyrus Field, an American who helped lay the Trans-Atlantic Cable in 1866, had secured landing rights from the Japanese government for a rival trans-Pacific cable being built out of San Francisco.78 In addition, all overland domestic telegraphs in Japan were owned and administered by the government, which would hinder the strategic integrity of the proposed all-red route.79 Despite the drawbacks of foreign competition and government control, the Japanese government granted Fleming landing rights in early 1881. However, the contract lapsed as Fleming repeatedly requested a hydrographic survey of the ocean floor from the British government. The Royal Admiralty refused to loan out a vessel in support of the project, and no such ship yet existed in the Canadian naval fleet.80

Throughout the early 1880s, Britain’s lack of enthusiasm for the Pacific Cable overlapped with the public criticism of Sir John Pender, head of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company and chief architect of the company’s private monopoly over international telegraphy in

76 Canada received no financial assistance from Britain to build the CPR, which had nearly collapsed due to construction costs that at one point absorbed 25% of Canada’s annual GDP. Fortner, “Communications II,” 46.
77 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 55, Galt to Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, 30 November 1880, in “Report of a Committee of the Honorable Privy Council.”
78 Ibid.
80 Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 45.
Pender was warned early on about Fleming’s plans by James Anderson, captain of the ship that laid the first and second Trans-Atlantic Cables, who noted that “no doubt a cable from Canada to China, with a reduced tariff, would do the existing companies a good deal of harm.”

Pender himself would quickly become the chief critic of the Cable, claiming that, since his own international network was an inter-colonial system, British support of the Canadian Pacific Cable would unfairly place the imperial government in direct competition with private industry. Denouncing Fleming’s scheme for a government-owned network as an imperialist fantasy, Pender declared that “the agitation for an all-British cable across the Pacific is mainly based on sentiment.”

Pender would go on to wage a public campaign against the Pacific Cable for nearly two decades, following Fleming to international conferences in order to argue in favour of further government investment in Eastern’s private network.

Along with criticism from the British colonial government and John Pender, Fleming encountered additional resistance from the British Admiralty. The British government had severely restricted funding for new telegraph lines after overspending on private contracts in India during the 1850s, and now only considered financing strategically urgent new routes when no private firms were willing to build. In addition, the Admiralty believed shipping routes, not telegraph lines, to be the most vital component of imperial defense. By the early 1880s there was little need for defensive build-up in the tranquil Southeast and Northwest regions of the

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84 Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 47.

85 Ibid., 48. This perspective was formally presented in the Admiralty’s 1882 Carnavon Report on imperial defence.
Pacific, especially given the political instability of India and the Mediterranean region. In an official report on the viability of a Pacific Cable, British Hydrographer-in-Chief Rear Admiral W.J.L. Wharton recommended that the British government decline Fleming’s scheme and instead pay Eastern Extension to triple their existing lines from Australia to Java and South Africa. Highlighting the poor market for direct trade and communications between Australia and Canada, Wharton’s report would be kept from the Colonial Office until 1893 as the Admiralty continued to delay and cancel multiple hydrographic surveys in support of the Pacific Cable. Both contemporaries and scholars have speculated that this deliberate stalling may have been influenced by Pender, who himself stated that a Pacific Cable “would impose increased responsibility upon the navy at a time when it might have to concentrate all its energies nearer home.”

Though there was no overt evidence of collusion between Pender and the British Admiralty, an Australian official would later confide to Tupper that “the influence of the Eastern Telegraph Company is so far-reaching that it might easily penetrate the Hydrographic office.”

Empire-wide interest in the Cable languished between 1881-1884 as protracted responses from the British government held up international negotiations. By 1885, it was clear from the repeated delays that the British Admiralty had no intention of ever lending a hydrographic ship in support of the Cable. In an official statement, Admiral Wharton dismissed any possibility of a line across the Pacific due to the fact that the ocean between Canada and Japan was filled with perilous reefs, shallow atolls, and an uneven seabed of “globigerina ooze.”

86 LAC MG29B1, vol 98, fo. 91, “Report by the Hydrographer,” 28 February 1887.
88 Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 50.
was impossible to disprove without conducting a new hydrographic survey, and with no ships available, Fleming found himself at an impasse.

Writing again to John MacDonald in 1885, Fleming proposed a new cable route. Without the ability to conduct an oceanic survey, Fleming searched through existing Naval hydrographic reports and suggested a new route directly from Canada to Australia, as “the latest bathymetric data … present a sea floor precisely similar to that of the Atlantic, so suitable for marine telegraphy.”90 After carefully adjusting the spatial layout of his proposal to fit within the British Navy’s previously published hydrographic data, Fleming presented his new south-southeast plan as an improvement on the Asiatic Cable, stating “the view is now entertained that it may not be absolutely necessary to follow a northern route” and the new direct line would create additional “political advantages” and “gains to the general commerce of the Colonies.”91

Incidentally, Fleming’s new layout also addressed Australian concerns over poor international communications. Eastern Extension had built the continent’s only international telegraph line in 1872 through substantial financial sponsorship from the South Australian government. Despite heavy public investment, however, a one-way message Port Darwin to London was priced at ten pounds.92 Many Australians felt cheated by Pender, as his monopoly over international news and communication gave Eastern the leverage to extract government subsidies while charging exorbitant rates and providing poor service. Despite widespread disappointment in the network’s practical administration, however, Australian officials still celebrated the distance-annihilating achievement of the network, with New South Wales Premier Henry Parkes characterizing the system as “a magical business … uniting us hand in and as it

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90 LAC, MG29B1 vol. 31 fo. 216, Fleming to MacDonald, 20 October 1885.
91 Ibid.
were with the parent land.”\(^{93}\) Several prolonged outages during the 1870s prompted calls for a duplicate submarine cable, but technical issues continued to plague the network even after Eastern constructed several new international lines into Java and New Caledonia.\(^{94}\) Overall, the Australian public felt stuck with Eastern’s expensive and unreliable network, and, given the overall stability of the South Pacific region, it remained unlikely that the British government would ever intervene.

Canadian and Australasian delegates were united in support for Fleming’s new route at the 1887 London Colonial Conference. In fact, representatives from Australia and New Zealand had organized a similar conference in 1877 to determine the best possible scheme for fixing Eastern’s unreliable international service.\(^{95}\) Much like Canada, Australia was a British colony historically bounded by its small population and challenging continental geography; during the nineteenth-century, both nations had relied upon railway and telegraph networks to overcome the limits of distance. As a result, Australian Conference attendees J. Henniker Heaton, Hercules Robinson, and Alexander Campbell shared Fleming’s belief in the developmental capacity of industrial technology. Harnessing this shared sensibility, Fleming gave a public address on the importance of inter-colonial cooperation for the future of the empire:

>Is it not the duty of the British people scattered around the globe to set about putting their house in order? Is not that one of the main purposes of this Conference? Is it not wise and proper to strengthen the cord of patriotism which runs through Canada and Australasia and every one of the colonies in the two hemispheres? Is not everything else secondary to the obligation resting upon us to attend to vital affairs which concern us in common?\(^{96}\)


\(^{95}\) McEnroe, “Crimson Thread,” 25.

\(^{96}\) Fleming, as quoted in “Proceedings of the Colonial Conference at London in 1887, in relation to Imperial Postal and Telegraphic Communications through Canada,” LAC CIHM microfiche no. 03397 (1887), 25.
Despite the spirited advocacy of Fleming, Galt, Heaton, and Kimberley, attendees of the 1887 Conference ultimately did not possess adequate authority or financial resources to initiate construction of the Cable without British approval. Nonetheless, the 1887 Conference succeeded in uniting Canadian and Australian colonial officials behind the Pacific Cable. Inter-colonial discussions established the diplomatic relationships that would guide the administrative and legislative agreements surrounding the Cable without British involvement.

Originally calling for a north-northwest submarine line through the Aleutian Islands and into Japan, legislative action on the Pacific Cable was impeded throughout the 1880s by the politically ambiguous process of securing international landing rights. Due to the nation’s status as a British dominion, Canadian officials did not possess the authority to unilaterally negotiate the international landing rights treaties that Fleming’s original Asiatic plan required. Lobbying in favour of this first north-northwest cable line through Japan and Hong Kong, Fleming called for the British and Canadian governments to either purchase or claim islands in Japan and the Aleutians as cable landing sites. Though individual officials expressed their support, no wing of the British government would publicly approve Fleming’s request. Despite the fact that the Canadian government had begun to operate with greater diplomatic latitude since Confederation, officials were still unwilling to break from the international colonial agenda determined by the Colonial Office. Without express approval for any forward action on landing rights or oceanic surveys, plans for the Cable reached an impasse.

97 President Henry Holland observed in his keynote address that “a very strong case would have to be made out to justify Her Majesty's Government in proposing to Parliament to provide a subsidy for maintaining a cable in competition with a telegraphic system which at any rate supplies the actual needs of the Imperial Government.” Ibid., 9.
98 In the months following the Conference, Fleming began corresponding with a number of government officials in the Australian provinces regarding cost-sharing and administration of the Cable. See LAC RG25A7 vol. 463 fo. 85, Federal Council of Australasia, “Journals and Printed Papers of the Federal Council of Australasia” vol. 52 (1889).
Frustrated with Britain’s lack of support and Canada’s limited international bargaining power, Fleming instead canvassed for support from an inter-colonial audience “which eagerly accepted one scheme for improved communication after another within the context of a unified empire.” Fleming’s updated all-British layout between Canada and Australia freed Cable plans from the restrictive process of securing international landing rights, reducing the project’s reliance on Britain and allowing colonial governments to negotiate with each other directly. By reworking the Cable within a discourse of inter-colonial partnership, Fleming was able to popularize the network as an act of service to the empire even as the British government withheld official endorsement. As a result, Fleming’s new Pacific Cable route created a new opportunity for a new diplomatic alliance between the governments of Canada and Australia, allowing two underrepresented nations of the ‘outer Empire’ to set the terms for completing Britain’s worldwide communications network.

100 Fortner, “Communications I,” 28.
IV. A Shapely and Well-Ordered Cosmos: Negotiating Moral Utility

Despite the momentum generated by the 1887 Colonial Conference, Fleming’s campaign for the new Canadian-Australian Pacific Cable network faced additional challenges from private industry throughout the following decade. To maintain demand for the new international line, Fleming sold the colonial public on the advantages of government-owned communications over the pre-existing corporate structure of Pender’s Eastern Extension network. Fleming had long been a critic of corporate utility ownership, a view influenced by his work on the massive federal undertaking of the CPR. Yet even by 1890, appeals to the Colonial Office emphasizing the success of the 1887 Conference and the security advantages of an all-red route still failed to yield sufficient imperial support for the project.

As the new Pacific Cable route began to take shape, Fleming was forced to adapt his platform yet again. In light of the continuing doubts expressed by British officials, Fleming shifted his platform from an empire-wide appeal to address a narrower set of political and economic priorities shared by the Canadian and Australasian colonies. In adapting his previous rhetoric of pan-Britannic unity into a form of economically driven civic imperialism specifically tailored to the colonial periphery, Fleming’s advocacy encouraged direct negotiations between Canada and Australia. Ultimately, this inter-colonial approach guided the Cable’s international agreements into a representative, federal structure, fostering multi-lateral partnership and extending the political authority of self-government to place the colonies on a more equal footing with Britain.

By the early 1890s, officials on both sides of the Pacific were committed to building a new, publicly owned oceanic telegraph line. In Canada, the previous success of the CPR had established a strong precedent for government-funded utilities; in Australia, residents were tired
of suffering under the high prices and exploitative tax subsidies of Eastern Extension’s private system. Working against the entrenched influence of John Pender’s international telegraphy conglomerate, Fleming bridged the concerns of both nations by stressing the moral and pragmatic necessity of universal public utility ownership across the empire. Fleming was particularly adamant that a government-owned worldwide network would create new opportunities for national trade, international diplomacy, and inter-colonial imperial kinship. London’s distance from the project ultimately allowed representatives from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to pursue a publicly owned multi-lateral cable agreement of their own design.

From his first suggestions for a trans-Pacific cable in 1879, Fleming had consistently discussed the network within Britain’s historical precedent for publicly-owned communications. In the eyes of many imperialist reformers, state ownership was an essential aspect of progressive technological development. The unnecessary duplicity, compartmentalization, and competition present in private markets obstructed the global integration of communication networks by prizing individual gain over collective growth.

Fleming never forgot that one of the key blows to the Asiatic Cable project occurred when the British Crown awarded John Pender an exclusive monopoly over telegraph lines to Hong Kong. Pender’s global conglomerate, the Eastern Extension Australasia and China Telegraph Company, was viewed by many as “the greatest multinational company of the nineteenth-century” and controlled forty-six percent of the world’s telegraph cables up to World War I.

103 This aspect of the Pacific Cable followed Fleming’s previous work on time zones.
104 Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 45.
As the Pacific Cable project gained support in Australia, Pender increased his public criticism of the project, claiming that Eastern’s network already provided an imperial telegraph system to the colonies.106 Seeking to distinguish the merits of the Cable over Pender’s existing lines, Fleming’s public response detailing the virtues of state telegraph ownership would become a defining characteristic of both the Pacific Cable project and the politically representative model of empire which it sought to support.

Throughout the 1890s, Pender’s criticism combined with the British government’s tepid support to create considerable opposition to the Pacific Cable. In response, Fleming increased his emphasis on the Cable as an act of inter-colonial service to the imperial community. This benevolent endeavour would enhance the independent political agency of the self-governing colonies through the use of international diplomacy, multi-lateral agreements, and pooled financial investment without supervision from the Colonial Office. United by the moral philosophy of public utility ownership and independent economic partnership, Canadian and Australian representatives responded to Pender’s criticism by developing a multi-lateral colonial agenda for British imperial communications. This newfound solidarity informed the representative structure of the legislative agreements regarding the Pacific Cable, ultimately leading to an informal mode of the imperial federation long supported by colonial officials.

Fleming began campaigning against private telegraphy in 1886, when he publicly condemned competing private trans-pacific cable schemes as monopolistic, self-serving, and anti-imperial.107 He was particularly critical of John Pender’s habit of extracting government

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106 Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 51.
107 Fleming continued to denounce any rival corporate trans-pacific schemes until construction of the Pacific Cable began in early 1901 – even as competing projects from French and American firms mirrored his earlier Asiatic Cable route. George Johnson, The All Red Line: The Annals and Aims of the Pacific Cable Project (Ottawa: James Hope & Sons, 1903), 298.
subsidies to maintain monopolies over geographically remote markets, viewing the practice as an impediment to the free exchange of goods and sentiment across the British world. Throughout the 1870s, Pender had used his institutional connections in the British Home Office and the Western Australian provincial government to grow his Australian continental monopoly. Eastern’s market share was not entirely unreasonable, as the difficulty and expense of building overland lines across the isolated regions of Australia meant that long-distance service often required a monopoly simply to recoup construction costs. However, Pender had used this fact as leverage to force Australia’s provincial governments to subsidize his unreliable overland telegraph network for years. During a particularly bad 1890 outage, Eastern’s cables to India were down for over two months, cutting off Australia from all contact with the outside world. Despite regular network interruptions, Pender regarded backup cables as costly and redundant, declaring at one point that “if the Australian Colonies insist on the luxury of a second cable they should contribute towards the cost of it.” Messages between Britain and Australia remained prohibitively expensive throughout the late nineteenth-century, making international communications inaccessible to ordinary citizens. As colonial representatives began to negotiate transmission fees over the new Pacific Cable line, Pender was alarmed to hear the cost of transmission between Canada and Australia estimated at less than a shilling a word. A government-owned cable between Australia and Canada would ruin Eastern’s artificially inflated

108 Fleming’s strong objection to Pender would continue until the very end of the Pacific Cable’s construction. After Pender’s death in 1901, his more cooperative and pragmatically minded son John Denison Pender assumed leadership of the company and won the contract to lay the cable sections between Vancouver Island, Fanning Island, and New Zealand. Official records recorded the contractor as “The India Rubber and Gutta Percha Company,” a small offshoot of Eastern Extension, thus excluding any mention of a Pender contributing to the project. Fleming must have been pleased. Winseck and Pike, Communication, 230.

109 Headrick, Tools of Empire, 162.

110 Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 54.

111 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 117, fo. 31, Parliament of New Zealand, Papers F-03 “Telegraph Cables: Negotiations and Conference (Further Papers Relating To)” (1877), 34.

112 Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 45.

113 Ibid., 49.
price structure, completely collapsing Pender’s control over international telegraphy in the South Pacific.\textsuperscript{114}

After drawing up several potential routes between Canada and Australia, Fleming decided that the best midway landing site as Necker Island, a small atoll in the Hawaiian Islands’ western tail.\textsuperscript{115} Fleming brought a report on the remote and uninhabited “little lava rock” to the Canadian and Australian governments in 1892, explaining that since Necker remained unclaimed by any government, it provided an ideal solution to the landing rights issues that had defeated the Asiatic Cable route.\textsuperscript{116} Writing to soon-to-be Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie Bowell, Fleming described the island as a “singularly commanding” landing site and stressed “the importance of acquiring such an admirably situated landing-place for the cable – one, too, that had never yet been taken possession of by any nation, and could be had for the mere trouble of taking.”\textsuperscript{117} Fleming received additional support for the Necker Island route from the provincial governments of New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland in 1893.\textsuperscript{118} Given the previous delays caused by the colonies’ dependence upon Britain to negotiate landing rights, as well as “no certainty that one of the Hawaiian Islands could be obtained” through such negotiations, Canadian and Australian delegates agreed to move forward and request a formal claim from the British government.\textsuperscript{119}

Following a successful meeting with the Australian delegation, Fleming traveled to London to request the acquisition of Necker Island from the Colonial Office in person. Fleming

\textsuperscript{114} Thompson, “Sandford Fleming,” 68.
\textsuperscript{115} Fleming also considered using midway points on Norfolk Island, Fiji, the Gilbert Islands, the Cook Islands, and the Solomon Islands. Johnson, \textit{All Red Line}, 107.
\textsuperscript{117} Johnson, \textit{All Red Line}, 126.
\textsuperscript{118} LAC, MG29B1, vol. 117, fo. 31, New Zealand House of Representatives, “Appendix to the Journals,” xiv.
\textsuperscript{119} Burpee, \textit{Empire Builder}, 169.
was impatient for an answer, as the delay of past responses had made it “sufficiently apparent that nothing could be gained by correspondence” with British officials.\textsuperscript{120} Despite a productive discussion with Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Ripon, Fleming returned home without formal approval, and several months passed without further reply. While awaiting word from London, Fleming wrote to Canadian Prime Minister John Thompson to request a claim over Necker as soon as possible. As Fleming continued to wait on Ripon, Thompson forwarded Fleming’s request to the Colonial Office, which decided to negotiate terms of use directly with the Hawaiian government.

Fleming interpreted Thompson’s message as evidence that Britain had once again favoured its diplomatic relationship with the Americans over the wellbeing of Canada. The Hawaiian government had been under the control of the United States since a political coup in 1893, and Fleming feared that Britain’s negotiations with the Hawaiian proxy government would reveal Necker Island’s strategic value to US cable firms.\textsuperscript{121} As Fleming had already presented the Necker Island route to Australian and New Zealand colonial delegates, losing the landing site would require a new route and additional international agreements, delaying the project even further.\textsuperscript{122} The project was officially postponed in December 1893, when officials in Ottawa were instructed by the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to “defer action in the matter, pending the establishment of the Government of Hawaii upon a more permanent footing.”\textsuperscript{123} Desperate to have a finalized route to present at the upcoming Colonial Conference

\textsuperscript{120} Burpee, \textit{Empire Builder}, 170.
\textsuperscript{121} Thompson, “Imperial Dreams,” 69. The US appointed Sanford B. Dole as Hawaii’s interim president. Dole was a key figure in the political coup against Queen Liliuokalani and later helped to orchestrate the acquisition of Hawaii by the United States in 1898. See Jeffrey K. Lyons, “The Pacific Cable, Hawai’i, and Global Communication,” \textit{The Hawaiian Journal of History} vol. 39 (2005).
\textsuperscript{122} Burpee, \textit{Empire Builder}, 171.
\textsuperscript{123} Burpee, \textit{Empire Builder}, 170.
in Ottawa, Fleming hired Gardner Buckner, a retired royal navy officer, to sail to Necker and claim the island for Britain.\textsuperscript{124}

Once Buckner departed, Fleming sent a report to Tupper disclosing his instructions to Buckner, explaining that “the decisive moment had come, and not a day to spare, and that circumstances appeared to throw the duty of taking action upon myself, and that I should at once set about it without counting the cost.”\textsuperscript{125} Upon arriving in Honolulu, Buckner was stopped by the British Vice-Consul, who informed him that Britain had already entered into negotiations with the Hawaiian Provisional Government to obtain landing rights rather than ownership of Necker. Amidst the ensuing diplomatic correspondence, undertaken “in their own leisurely fashion,” Britain had formally acknowledged Necker as Hawaiian territory.\textsuperscript{126} Realizing that no legal claim could now be made on the island, Buckner immediately sailed back to Canada. Soon after, Fleming received a cable from Tupper warning that “Rosebury much annoyed at action. Will repudiate. Fears will destroy good prospect of obtaining Necker. Prevent action becoming public, if possible.”\textsuperscript{127} Neither Tupper nor Fleming realized that their chances had already been ruined, however, as the day after Buckner left Honolulu, Necker Island was officially claimed by the Hawaiian Provisional Government.\textsuperscript{128}

Forced to rework the layout yet again, Fleming proposed a new midway point through Fanning Island, a small atoll north of the Cook Islands. Fanning had been formally annexed by

\textsuperscript{124} Under fire from the Colonial Office, Fleming would later claim he sent Buckner to take shallow water soundings, survey the shore, and sketch potential cable landing areas due to the lack of available information on Necker Island. He had only instructed the officer to “leave behind him evidences of his visit,” meaning a British flag, according to naval convention. Fleming’s only direct accounts of the Necker Island incident were recorded by his biographer and the author of a commemorative volume on the All-Red Route. Johnson, \textit{All Red Line}, 129; Burpee, \textit{Empire Builder}, 171.

\textsuperscript{125} Johnson, \textit{All Red Line}, 132.

\textsuperscript{126} Burpee, \textit{Empire Builder}, 178.


\textsuperscript{128} Thompson, “Sandford Fleming,” 69.
Britain in 1888, resolving the issue of landing rights. However, the additional 800 miles of cable required to route through Fanning would considerably delay the network’s transmission speed, adding “something like two and a quarter million dollars in excess of the cost via the Necker Island Route.” Pender seized the opportunity to criticize the growing costs of the Cable. Writing to the Colonial Office, Pender explained that, given the projected savings of extending Eastern’s network versus building the Pacific Cable, he found it “difficult, however, to conceive that either the Home or Colonial Governments would act so unfairly towards the pioneer company, to whom they are so much indebted, as to enter into unnecessary and ruinous competition with it.” Pender intensified his advocacy in the months leading up to the 1894 Colonial Conference, using every possibly opportunity to promote Eastern’s network as a favourable alternative to the rapidly accumulating costs of the Pacific Cable.

In response, Tupper faced off with Pender in a series of letters published in the London Times in May 1894 over the merits of the Pacific Cable. Pender defended himself from Tupper’s accusations of selfishness, claiming that the “description of the existing system as a ‘monopoly’ cannot be justified, seeing that it has never received any exclusive landing rights … but has had to rely upon the business-like and economical principles upon which it has been established and worked for its freedom from competition.” He went on to note that British financial investment in the Pacific Cable aid would overturn the imperial service performed by Eastern in establishing the first telegraph lines in Australia. Therefore, the British government “could not in common fairness adopt such a course without granting similar pecuniary assistance to the

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129 Burpee, Empire Builder, 189.
131 See LAC CIHM microfiche no. 14016, “Correspondence Respecting the Pacific Cable,” (1894).
132 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 125, fo. 58, Pender to Tupper, in “Further Correspondence between Sir Charles Tupper and Sir John Pender on the Subject of a Proposed Pacific Cable,” (1895), 368.
existing system,” especially considering that “as the pioneer of telegraphic communication with Australia [Eastern] is entitled to a large share of consideration at the hands of the Colonies.”133 Pender’s counter-platform was especially notable for his justification of Eastern’s network within the moral and utilitarian parameters of imperial telegraphy first outlined by Fleming. As Fleming’s proposal continued to gather support, Pender was forced to argue in favour of Eastern’s network through the same discourse of imperial service and international community used to popularize the Pacific Cable.

Shortly after Buckner’s failed trip to Necker Island, Fleming and Tupper traveled to the 1894 Colonial Conference in Ottawa. Surrounded by government representatives from across the empire, Fleming highlighted the possibility of additional subsidiary lines from the Cable’s Australian terminus through to Japan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, as well as the network’s potential to expand international trade in the more remote Australasian provinces.134 Ever the public advocate, Fleming used his public address to reiterate the imperial merits of an all-red route, highlighting the threat posed by Pender’s private network:

This is not the first time that a company or individual has been called upon to relinquish a monopoly found to be inimical to the public welfare. Is it for a moment to be thought of that Canada and Australia are never to hold direct telegraphic intercourse because a commercial company stands in the way? Are commercial relations between two of the most important divisions of the British family for ever to remain dormant in order that the profits of a company may be maintained? Are the vital interests of the British Empire to be neglected? Is the permanent policy of England to be thwarted? Is the peace of the world to be endangered at the bidding of a joint stock company?135

133 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 125, fo. 58, Pender to Tupper, in “Report by the Right Hon. The Earl of Jersey on The Colonial Conference at Ottawa,” (1894), 370.
Over the course of his short speech, Fleming characterized Pender as a greedy individualist who sought profits by sacrificing the greater good of the imperial community. Though Pender underlined the economic and cultural merits of Eastern’s network in his own conference presentation, delegates ended the summit by approving all the legislative agreements required to initiate construction on the Cable. This included a formal request to the British government to conduct a hydrographic survey “at the earliest possible moment, and prosecuted with all possible speed.”136 Perhaps most significantly, the Conference’s administrative assembly granted Canada the authority to negotiate all future Cable agreements on behalf of the entire colonial community.

Despite this widespread support, a handful of representatives remained sceptical. F.B. Suttor, an official from the holdout province of New South Wales, reiterated the conclusion of the 1887 Hydrographer’s report that no matter “what the cost of the undertaking may be, it is doubtful whether it could possibly be made to pay.”137 Another representative from the Colonial Office noted that the shared cost structure of the Pacific Cable as outlined at the Conference created additional “burdens to be laid upon the British tax-payer for the convenience of the Australasian Colonies.”138 The General Post Office remained open to the idea of an all-red route, however British Postmaster General Cecil Raikes refused to declare support for either Fleming or Pender.139 Throughout the Conference, statements from the British Admiralty, Colonial Office, and General Post Office all dismissed the Pacific Cable as an impractical boondoggle. Representatives from the Admiralty and Post Office in particular echoed Pender’s objections,

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137 The Pacific Cable was supported everywhere in Australia except for New South Wales, which remained hesitant to alienate Pender given the Pacific Cable’s uncertain status and the upcoming renegotiation of their provincial subsidy agreement with Eastern. Library and Archives Canada, MG29B1, vol. 125, fo. 58, Suttor, as quoted in “Report by the Right Hon. The Earl of Jersey on The Colonial Conference at Ottawa,” (1894), 390.
138 Hozier, as quoted in ibid., 365-66.
139 Horgan, “Pacific Cable,” 49.
noting once again that an additional submarine line would place the British government in direct competition with private industry.¹⁴⁰

Official scepticism had come to matter less, however, as Australian dissatisfaction with Eastern’s monopoly had reached an all-time high in the years since the first Colonial Conference. After a particularly bad cable outage in 1890, Pender had attempted to appease the Australian public by duplicating a number of his submarine lines and promising a decrease in cable rates. Yet despite Eastern’s efforts, discontent continued to spread.¹⁴¹ Postal and telegraphic reformer J. Henniker Heaton was a zealous critic, characterizing Pender as “impervious to sentiment – philanthropic, patriotic, or moral considerations – as a leech, a vampire-bat, a Bengal tiger, or a zygaena,” and that Eastern, “like a huge octopus, had fastened its tentacles upon almost every part of the eastern and southern world.”¹⁴² By the 1894 Colonial Conference, Australian delegates were so incensed by Pender’s claims of benevolent imperial service that they threatened to call for the forced nationalization of his entire network. At a Postal Conference the following year in Hobart, Tasmania, delegates from Australia and New Zealand agreed that the colonies could finally “come now to the question of the cost of the [Pacific] cable, after all the bogies which have been raised to deter the different governments from carrying out this scheme have melted and disappeared.”¹⁴³ By the 1896 Colonial Postal Conference, every Australasian province had unanimously voiced their support for Fleming’s Pacific Cable.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Winseck and Pike, Communication, 160.
¹⁴⁴ Cryle, “Peripheral Politics,” 184.
Following the 1894 Conference, newly elected Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain formed a Pacific Cable Committee with representatives from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Chamberlain’s appointment signalled new opportunities for imperialist communication reformers, as Chamberlain himself was an avid supporter of the Cable project. Knowing Britain would never agree to shoulder a third of the cost for the low-priority colonial network, the Committee proposed that New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and New Zealand each pay one ninth of the cable’s construction costs, with Canada and Britain each paying five eighteenths. Shortly afterward, Eastern’s new president, John Dennison Pender, promised to build an alternative line from Western Australia to Britain through South Africa in exchange for an exclusive ten-year public subsidy agreement which would waive the Australian government’s right to build the Pacific Cable. Frustrated with years of ambiguous British responses to the project, Chamberlain brought the Committee’s proposed cost-sharing arrangement before the Cabinet, and the Pacific Cable Bill officially passed in Parliament on 13 August 1901. Britain’s National Debt Commissioners fronted the construction money soon after, with the debt distributed as five eighteenths to Canada, six eighteenths to Australia, two eighteenths to New Zealand, and five eighteenths to Britain.

Throughout the late 1890s, the strong inter-colonial consensus supporting of the Pacific Cable upheld the project in spite of the public criticisms of John Pender, the British Admiralty, and the British Colonial Office. Fleming’s success in framing the Cable as an imperial network led to a shared colonial resentment toward Britain, who it seemed had “unduly favoured the

145 Horgan, “Pacific Cable,” 4; MacLean, “Imperial Federation,” 126.
146 Headrick, Invisible Weapon, 97.
147 BC Provincial Archives, Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, “Correspondence and Documents with Reference to the Pacific Cable,” (1900), 7.
148 Headrick, Invisible Weapon, 97.
[Eastern] monopoly in its opposition to Canada and the Australian colonies." In response to the extended delays created by the Colonial Office, Canadian and Australasian representatives chose to work outside traditional channels of British imperial authority in order to determine an equitable division of administrative control and construction costs. Britain’s absence ultimately allowed Canada and Australia to construct the cable on their own diplomatic terms, forging a new colonial coalition between peripheral nations of the empire.

After ironing out the details of the Cable’s shared ownership structure, ships began to lay cable in late 1901. Throughout the 1890s, John Pender had signalled an interest in winning the bid to build the Pacific Cable, should it became inevitable; as it happened, a wing of Eastern Extension was granted the cable contract in 1900. The final section of the cable was completed in October 1902. Fittingly, Fleming was given the honour of sending the first telegram around the world:

To the Governor General, Ottawa

Congratulations follow the sun around the globe via Australia, South Africa and England on completion of the Pacific Cable initiating new era of freest intercourse and cheap telegraph service throughout the Empire,

Sandford Fleming.

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150 BC Provincial Archives, Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, “Correspondence and Documents with Reference to the Pacific Cable,” (1900), 25.
151 George E. Foster, member of the Canadian Federal Cabinet and fellow member of the Imperial Federation League, described the process in universal terms: “masses of shapeless nebulae lie far out in the regions of space. Age grows into age and cycle into cycle, but at last there springs out into view the shapely and well ordered cosmos. So, from the sentiments and aspirations, living where the old flag waves, is being evolved the splendid idea of Imperial Federation . . . we live now under the consciousness that we are every day walking on the verge of vast possibilities.” Foster, as quoted in Imperial Federation League, Report of the First Meetings, 42.
152 Johnson, All Red Line, 457.
V. Conclusion: A Galaxy of British States

Throughout the decades-long process of building the Pacific Cable, Sandford Fleming worked within the international political constraints of colonial self-government to advocate for a telegraphic network between the distant British colonial communities of Canada and Australia. The difficulty of gathering governmental support for the project amidst Britain’s waning involvement with Canadian and Australasian politics led Fleming to present the Cable as a socially progressive infrastructure that would directly encourage cultural and economic ties between the kindred nations of Britain’s former settlement colonies. As plans for the Cable were repeatedly stalled by diplomatic and imperial deliberations, Fleming waged a tireless public campaign on behalf of inter-colonial economic collaboration and publicly owned communication networks. Weaving together the values of national economic expansion and “pan-Britannic unity,” Fleming envisioned a global network that would elevate Canada into “the keystone in the colonial arch.”

Fleming’s efforts also encapsulated a much deeper debate over the “inner incompatibility of empire and nation.” The late nineteenth-century erosion of the imperial diplomatic and cultural ties between British nations created a new space for inter-colonial self-determination. Supporters framed the Cable as an answer to the uncertainty of self-government in this shifting late-imperial world, where “nationalizing states presented themselves as universalistic within the spatial confines of a particularized national community, but as particularistic without, that is, in relation to other nations and nation-states.”

153 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 27, fo. 197, Fleming to Laurier, 10 Feb 1897.
155 Goswami, *Producing India*, 15.
as part of an emerging bond of diplomatic self-determination and imperial unity between Canada and Australia.

Viewing the Pacific Cable as a logical extension of the CPR’s infrastructure, Fleming used the project to present Canada as an independent and self-determined nation within the international and imperial arenas. Fleming also used the Canadian precedent for government-sponsored infrastructure to advance the idea that large, national utilities such as railways, postage, and telegraph lines should be publicly owned. Denouncing competing cable schemes from private firms like Eastern Extension and Western Union, Fleming characterized corporate ownership as fundamentally antithetical to the British imperial priority of free and open communication, declaring that “no private company, however rich and influential, should be allowed to stand in the way when great Imperial interests are at stake.”

Shifting his platform based on the audience at hand, Fleming never wavered from the view that the Pacific Cable would both reinforce and encourage feelings of cultural unity between Britain’s white settlement colonies. Fleming continued to promote the Cable even as London officials dismissed the project as a slow, expensive, and impractical endeavour that served no strategic purpose to the empire. Carefully avoiding any public acknowledgement of Britain’s disinterest, Fleming continued to describe the Pacific Cable as an “Imperial telegraphic girdle.” In fact, Britain would only begin to view the network as strategically advantageous in the years following the outbreak of the Boer War, when it became clear that international

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157 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 9, fo. 59, Fleming to Chamberlain, 28 October 1898.
158 Boyce, “Imperial Dreams,” 69.
159 LAC, MG29B1, vol. 14, fo. 97, Sandford Fleming, “Our Empire Cables,” in “Address to the Empire Club,” 25 February 1904. This term was used often in Fleming’s pamphlets and public writings on the Pacific Cable and probably referenced ideas from contemporary Canadian imperialist George R. Parkin, a fellow member of the Imperial Federation League.
telegraph lines routed near shallow seas and hostile borders posed a significant risk to wartime communications.  

The global All-Red Route was celebrated as a triumph across Canada and the British colonial world upon its completion in 1902. In fact, the network only became ‘all-red’ in response to Canada’s reliance upon British landing rights negotiations and John Pender’s private monopoly over telegraphy in Australia. Pursued out of practical necessity, Fleming was able to sell the direct Canada-Australia Pacific Cable route as an economic advantage for Canadian markets as well as an act of colonial partnership between Canada and the Australasian colonies. Fleming’s eventual success stemmed from his rhetorical flexibility; his broad, idealistic platform allowed him to frame the Cable as a solution to the political and economic concerns of both Canada and Australasia. In the view of Cable supporter G.M. Grant, Canada had long been “shunted and sidetracked away up a distant back street” by Britain, who refused to recognize its “unique and most important position in that Empire, as its great half-way house.” Meanwhile, Australians were tired of paying subsidies to Eastern Extension to maintain a poor network with unreasonable rates, leading one newspaper to ask its readers:

... to reflect on their experience of large private monopolies ... why should we, with world-wide acceptance of State control of the Post Office, prefer the continuance of a private monopoly to State control of our ocean telegraphy? Why should we carry longer on our shoulders this old man of the sea, who, in fear of being unseated, promises to sit so much more easily upon us, when in fact we can use our own hands instead of his?

In an era of increasingly absent imperial government, the Pacific Cable presented Canada and Australasia with the opportunity to take action outside the traditional top-down

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161 Grant was also a key member of the Imperial Federation League. G.M. Grant as quoted in Horgan, “Pacific Cable,” 174.
administrative apparatus of imperial government – a system which, in the case of both the Colonial Office and Royal Admiralty, sought to protect the domestic interests of Britain over the economic development of the colonies. Speaking on the benefits of empire-wide telegraphy and imperial economic partnership, Fleming believed that “nothing else would so much advance Canada and fit her to take her permanent and proper place in the galaxy of British States constituting the new Empire.”163 Using submarine telegraphy as a panacea for the national and imperial priorities of the outer empire, Sandford Fleming’s Pacific Cable succeeded in forging a powerful inter-colonial partnership “from one British island to another” – a connection which would last “not for a day, but, it is to be hoped, for all time.”164

163 Burpee, Empire Builder, 269.
164 Sandford Fleming, as quoted in LAC microfiche no. 03400, Proceedings of the Colonial Conference (1894), 327.
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