

## **Robert Baldwin: A Matter of Principle User's Guide**

**Audience: High school history classes**  
**Running time: 31:53**

### **Historical Context**

From the advent of representative government in 1791 until the coming of responsible government in 1848, events followed a parallel trajectory in both provinces of Canada.

In Upper Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie and Robert Baldwin represented two points of view that were mirrored in Lower Canada by Louis-Joseph Papineau and Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine. Both Mackenzie and Papineau took a hard line, which included the use of force; Baldwin and Lafontaine were moderates, who insisted on the fair application of constitutional principles.

As head of the Reformers since 1824, Mackenzie had lived through stormy days in the House of Assembly. In 1834, he presented a document which has come to be known as *The Seventh Report*, outlining the grievances of Upper Canadians.

The report was to have an immediate political effect. Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Edmund Head became actively involved in the next election campaign, and succeeded in having Mackenzie lose his bid for re-election.

Defeated on the political battlefield, Mackenzie organized an armed struggle and attempted a coup, which failed. Some of the Rebellion's participants would be hanged. For others, like Robert Baldwin, it was a call for further political action. Baldwin returned to active politics after the Union Act of 1840 and was part of a Reform alliance with the French-Canadian Liberals. The alliance would lead to the Lafontaine-Baldwin government, formed under Governor-General Bagot in 1842, and to a final, decisive victory: the granting of responsible government by Lord Elgin in 1848.

### **Synopsis**

The events portrayed in this film take place during the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837, when Baldwin was on the margins of political life while the far more influential Mackenzie held centre stage. Baldwin's heart was with the rebels, but his principles bound him to the cause of constitutional reform. Although he was a reform leader, he withdrew in the midst of armed revolt to fight a lonely battle with himself.

### Research, Discussion and Writing Topics

- Summarize the arguments made by rebels Samuel Lount and Peter Mathews when they try to convince Baldwin to go to Montgomery's tavern.
- Research Sir Francis Edmund Head's actions before and after the death of Colonel Moodie. What differences are there?
- What event took place during the truce that held from the first attack on December 4<sup>th</sup> until troops clashed again on the 7<sup>th</sup>?
- What arguments does Dr. Baldwin use in trying to convince his son to return to politics?
- What would your own position towards armed rebellion have been if you were alive in 1837? Give reasons.
- Compare Baldwin's ideas on liberty with those of the rebels.
- It has been said that great politicians are solitary people who are alone with their secrets. Do you believe that Baldwin was all alone in his struggle? Why or why not?