

As practiced from the 15th to 20th centuries in Western societies, a duel was a consensual fight between two people, with matched deadly weapons, in accordance with rules explicitly or implicitly agreed upon, over a point of honor, usually accompanied by a trusted representative (who might themselves fight), often in contravention of the law.

## Dueling

On October 17, 1878, Sir John A. Macdonald became prime minister of Canada for the second time. In 1838 or 1839, Sir John served as the second in a duel and was dissuaded from fighting a duel of his own in 1849. Dueling has a long history:

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- Judicial duels began in 6th-century Burgundy, as trial by combat to learn the "judgment of God." As recently as 1817, an accused murderer in Britain had to be acquitted because he chose the right to "wage his battle" over trial by jury, and no one wanted to fight him.
- On the European continent, the challenger in a personal duel had the right to choose the weapons, usually swords or pistols. In English-speaking countries, the challenged party had this right. In 1843, billiard balls were the weapons in a fatal duel fought in France.
- Duels were fought in New France as early as 1646. The last recorded fight in what is now known as Canada took place in St. John's in 1873. The death toll in the years between: at least nine in New France, two in Lower Canada, five in Upper Canada, two each in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and one in Newfoundland.



Dueling began to fall out of favor in America in the 18th century. Benjamin Franklin denounced the practice as uselessly violent, and George Washington encouraged his officers to refuse challenges during the American Revolutionary War because he believed that the death by dueling of officers would have threatened the success of the war effort.

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- The last legal duel in Canada was fought on the campus of Dalhousie University in 1876. Although such encounters were considered a crime, Canadian juries consistently refused to convict duelists if they thought the fights had been fair.