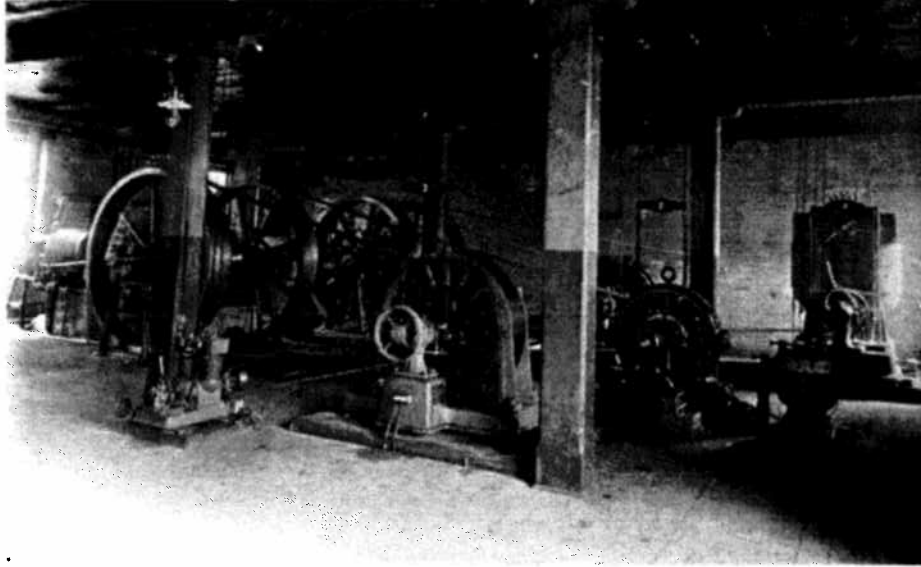


Dominion of Canada: 1911



A steam-driven plant for generating electricity, Ontario, late 19th century
(Ontario Archives, S2998; ID #20362)
<http://www.canadianheritage.ca/reproductions/20362.htm>

Economic conditions

By 1911, British North America and the great North West had been transformed into Canada. In 1815, most people spent their days doing much the same thing – farming, working as an unskilled labourer, and completing a range of tasks that would provide food and shelter for the family. By 1911 the work, like the entire Canadian economy, had become more complex. Canada's economy was no longer limited to exporting raw materials within a colonial system of trading. It had developed a thriving manufacturing economy, at the same time exporting fish, timber and wheat in a competitive international market. The majority of Canadians, recent immigrants and non-immigrants alike, continued to live in rural areas, but seasonal jobs were increasingly important. Agricultural technologies like tractors, seed drills and harvesting machinery were transforming the way work was done.

Rural areas were linked to urban areas in Canada and the United States through railroads which brought hundreds of thousands of immigrants to settle remote areas, and it allowed for products to be shipped to and from the farms, forests and factories across the country. Telegraph lines linked cities, towns and rural areas, increasing social and economic contacts across the country. Life for immigrants who settled on the prairies was often difficult, and hard work seldom resulted in great wealth.



D.G.E. Dragan, Ukrainian pioneer wedding, 1911
(National Archives of Canada, PA-088572)
http://www.archives.ca/05/0509/050951/05095120_e.html

In Canada's growing cities, regular waged work gradually replaced seasonal and part-time work. Thousands of men and women worked on machines in factory settings, earning wages that allowed them to buy a growing variety of consumer goods. Unmarried women were beginning to find work as secretaries and sales clerks, using the new technology of the typewriter and cash register. Professional jobs like nursing and teaching were also available for women, at least until they married. Professional jobs like medicine, law and accounting were expanding and employing more men. Thousands of others found new kinds of work in the "white collar" sector, working within the growing business and finance sectors. The best jobs, however, continued to be reserved for British immigrant men or for white, male and English speaking Canadians.

Quebec had a strong industrial economy, but agricultural production lagged behind Ontario, and Quebec remained a relatively poor province in spite of the considerable wealth generated in the industrial and business centres of Montreal and Quebec City. With the exception of a small but wealthy middle class, French Canadians, like immigrants, Aboriginal peoples and any non-Caucasians, tended to be employed in the poorest jobs, with the least access to power or improvement, as factory workers, unskilled labourers, loggers or agricultural 'help'. By 1911, French Canadians comprised 30% of the Canadian population, but only 2.4% of the business people in the country.

In the first decade of the 20th century, the economic and cultural situation for Aboriginal peoples throughout the country reached the bottom of the long decline begun in the 19th century. As more non-native settlers moved into the west, Aboriginal peoples continued to lose their lands, means of support and cultural traditions. While some Aboriginal peoples found well paying jobs in the new industrial economies of rural and urban Canada, most occupied the poorly paid, seasonal and dangerous types of work that characterized Canada's working poor. Aboriginal people, like many non-British peoples, became a clearly identified 'underclass' in these years, deprived of the access to wealth and power that defined life for middle class white and male Canadians.

Social conditions

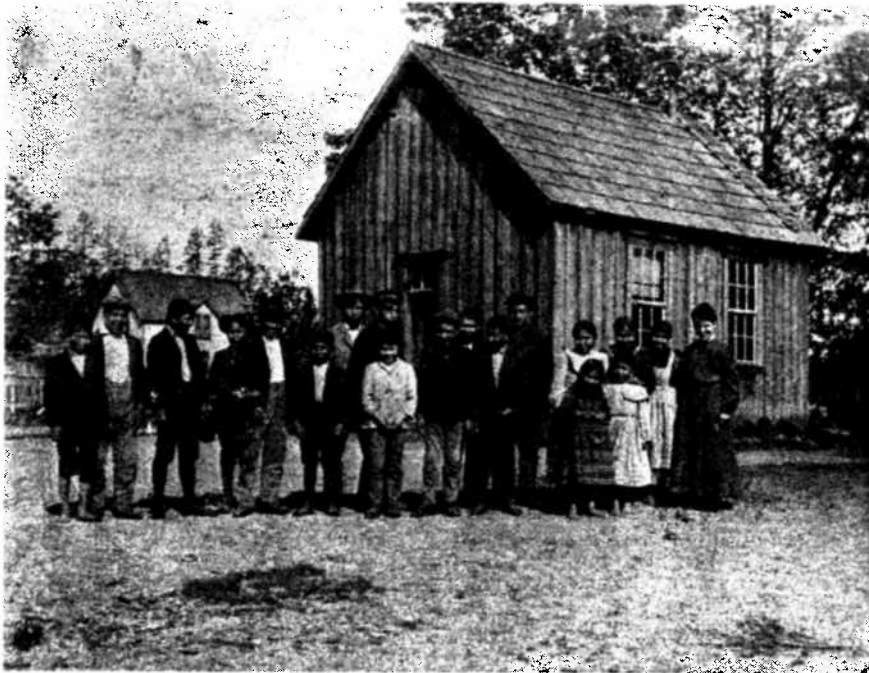
In 1911, the population of the country was over seven million, with people of British and then French descent dominating the multitude of ethnic groups in the country. Aboriginal people, who had comprised a majority of the population a hundred years previously, now accounted for less than 10% of the total. Their political voice, like that of the Metis, was seldom heard. By contrast, while French Canadians had not spread out across the country as the English had, they lived in a province where they had a democratic voice. They had also developed a keen awareness of the political, cultural and social issues they faced as a French speaking culture in an English country, and used these to build a strong sense of their own cultural identity.

Populations in Canadian cities like Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto and Vancouver had increased dramatically. By 1921, more people would live in urban rather than rural Canada for the first time in the country's history. Recent immigrants from similar backgrounds tended to group together in "bloc" settlements in rural areas, and "ethnic ghettos" in the cities. Here they were able to continue some of their traditional cultural practices as they slowly accommodated to life in Canada. Immigrants from Britain found themselves in a culture that was more familiar and accepting of them, but class divisions still kept many of the British working class from positions of power or comfort.

Across the prairies in particular, immigrants arrived on rural lands, and began the difficult task of farming—poverty and hard work their life. Many immigrants, however, arrived first into the cities, where they were among the poorest Canadians. While the wealthy, mainly English people led lives in both rural and urban areas that were increasingly healthy and wealthy, life for the poor, mainly immigrant families, continued to be dirty and unhealthy. From the later years of the 19th century onward, social reformers had been working to improve these conditions. Medical clinics, improved water and sewage systems, and cleaner streets were slowly beginning to improve the quality of life for the poor. For those who had a steady and sufficient income, members of the English or French Canadian middle classes, new technologies like the automobile and electricity were transforming day to day life, just as electrical and gasoline power were transforming industry. A faith that industry and progress would create a heaven on earth had, by 1910, largely replaced a concern for the salvation of souls as the main work of society.

Life for Canada's Aboriginal peoples, like all non-Caucasian peoples, was very difficult in these years. Both the Indian Act and the Church (that ran most of the residential schools) adopted policies intended to fit Aboriginal peoples into white Canadian society. Most of these met with limited success. Residential schools that separated Aboriginal children from their families also separated them from non-Native society. Consequently, while these children often lost their Aboriginal languages and customs, they did not gain entry into white or dominant society, nor were they encouraged to function within

it as equal members. The government had banned many traditional practices of Aboriginal culture by 1911, including the potlatch and the Sun Dance, in the hope of assimilating these groups. The government system of reserves guaranteed that Aboriginal people would live away from the dominant society, and thus may have assisted native populations in preserving traditional practices. While illegal, many customary practices continued on reserves until the late 1950s when Aboriginal peoples were once again able to practice them without fear of arrest. While government policies made life very difficult for Aboriginal peoples in the early years of the century, and while diseases brought their numbers to all time lows, traditional Aboriginal cultures remained alive, if only underground, to reappear later in the century.



Alberni Indian residential school, British Columbia, 1906
(British Columbia Archives, E-00187)

http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/cgi-bin/www2i/visual/mg_med/dir_78/e_00187.gif

Political conditions

Canada was a single political entity with nine provinces (Newfoundland did not join Confederation until the 1940s), and clearly established international borders. The 19th century had witnessed substantial political change within those borders. In 1911, the majority of adult Canadians continued to be denied the right to vote. Women did not get the vote until the end of World War I at the federal level. Most adult males throughout the country were able to participate in the democratic process. Important exceptions were Asians and Aboriginal peoples, who did not get the vote until after the end of World War II, reminding Canadians of the racist policies that continued to characterize the country well into the 20th century.

Immigrants were a significant percentage of Canada's population, but divisions and prejudices arising from different customs, beliefs, experiences and languages prevented immigrants from voting politically as a single group. They shared a common identity as being among the poorest of Canadians, rural and urban, in these years of massive immigration. In some cases, their poverty and hardship did, however, turn into united political action, both against their employers and the government. Strikes and labour unrest characterized society in the first decades of the 20th century, as immigrants and some Canadians challenged unfair distributions of wealth and dangerous working conditions. Cities with large immigrant populations like Montreal and Toronto had hundreds of strikes in the first decade of the century. Unfortunately, such labour action did little to improve the conditions of life or employment during the early years of the 20th century. In 1911, there was no minimum wage, few safety standards relating to conditions of work or hours of labour, no public health care system, and few regulations relating to garbage, sewage or food safety. It was not until after World War II some three decades later that conditions for Canada's working classes, immigrant and Canadian-born, began to change significantly for the better.

On the prairies, Aboriginal lands were taken by the government, and given to immigrants eager for new land. Although Aboriginal people were not allowed to vote in Canadian elections until much later in the 20th century, they formed their

own political organizations to give voice to their concerns. The Grand General Indian Council of Ontario, for example, challenged the Ontario government's decision to automatically take over all Indian lands neighbouring on non-Native settlements with more than 8,000 residents. Representatives of the Capilano Band of British Columbia travelled to England in 1906 to petition King Edward about the settlement of their land claims. Such acts and political organization would eventually provide the foundation of a movement that, decades later, met more success in recognizing Aboriginal rights. Similarly, while the Métis lost land and cultural rights in the aftermath of the 1885 Rebellion, their continued insistence on their cultural identity helped them to retain a distinctive culture into the 21st century.

In the early years of the 20th century, the governments' objectives were to encourage the growth of industry, bring hundreds of thousands of immigrants to the country and build railroads. French and English Canadians continued to negotiate the terms under which Canada's two founding nations would work together fairly and equitably. Quebec politics continued to focus on the economic, cultural and religious differences between Québec and the rest of Canada. The Catholic Church continued to have a profound impact on political life in the province, fulfilling a role that had been increasingly taken on by the state in the rest of the country. It remained central to the system of hospitals and of public health. The Church helped to prevent the institution of both a system of public schooling over which it wanted to maintain control, and women's ability to vote at the provincial level. Both were seen as issues of a distinct Québécois identity. Compulsory public schooling wasn't implemented until 1942, and Quebec women could first vote provincially only in 1940.