

Chapter 2

Post-Confederation Settlement Activities to 1945

Sorting Out the Jurisdictions

Section 95 of the *Constitution Act*, originally known as the *British North America Act (BNA Act)*, conferred concurrent jurisdiction on the provincial and Dominion governments for immigration and agriculture. Therefore, all the provinces were entitled, under the *BNA Act*, to engage in immigration. The 1868 *Canada Year Book*, printed summaries of immigration practices in the three founding provinces:

Canada [Ontario and Québec] has for a long period endeavoured to afford to the emigrating classes in Great Britain and several other European countries, correct information respecting the position and resources of the country, the wages obtainable and the cost of living; to give to emigrants on their arrival, the advantage of official and therefore disinterested advice as to the places where employment is to be found, which information is obtained from officials stationed in the principal cities; also to furnish information as to the quantity, quality, and price of Crown lands open for settlement in the various districts. The tax payable by masters of vessels for emigrants on arriving has of late years been reduced, and it is now \$1 per head for emigrants in ships, under the sanction of British officials, and \$1.50 for others. During 1866 and 1867, it has published and circulated extensively in England, a valuable newspaper called "The Canada Emigration Gazette," filled with the information likely to be required by persons desirous of changing their abode from England to Canada.

Nova Scotia has made no organized efforts in this direction until lately. It now grants passages to Halifax through its shipping agents in England on payment of twenty shillings. No head money or tax is levied on emigrants arriving, and a credit of 3 years is given them on the purchase of Crown lands in a tract set apart for them.

In New Brunswick, the Government has occasionally sent a travelling or lecturing agent to Britain, and has published several admirable essays on the resources of the Province.¹

Clearly, adequate information on immigration was becoming a major settlement tool. While much information was available, promoters and shipping agents tended to paint a far rosier picture than was the reality of immigrating to a frontier country and the government wanted accurate information to be available.

Fig. 2.1 Immigrant shed at Lévis, Québec, c.1860, Library and Archives Canada, A165571



Given the concurrent jurisdiction, it was important to sort out the jurisdictional issues involving immigration and a Dominion-provincial conference took place on October 30, 1868 to that end. It was at the highest level, with Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, heading the Dominion delegation. While many decisions were taken with respect to delivery of the immigration program, the only decisions of consequence to the health and care of immigrants was that the Dominion would assume responsibility for the quarantine stations at Québec, Halifax and Saint John and that national immigration legislation would be prepared for Parliament at the earliest possible date.²

Accordingly, *An Act respecting immigration and immigrants*, was introduced in the House of Commons on May 26, 1869, received second reading three days later and sent to Committee of the Whole which reviewed it on June 2. The bill was given third reading later the same day and received Royal Assent on June 22.³ Beyond reflecting the arrangements agreed to at the conference, its provisions were little changed from the pre-Confederation Province of Canada legislation.⁴ However, the attitudinal change was enormous and is seen in the new title of the legislation. It was about *immigrants*; not *emigrants*. It was about people Canada wanted; not people another country sent to Canada.

Dominion Government Initiatives

While the various colonial provinces had basically seen it necessary to care for emigrants in order to protect the general population, the new Dominion government saw that the way to build a nation and, in particular, to populate the vast western territories that it obtained in 1870 was to ensure that the immigrant got to his eventual place of settlement cheaply, comfortably and safely. To that end, the government began a program of building up the infrastructure of the immigration service in general and its capacity to assist in the settlement of immigrants in particular Figs. 2.1, 2.2.

One of the false starts was the Immigrant Aid Societies Act of 1872.⁵ This act authorized over 70 districts across Canada where the establishment of immigrant aid societies would be supported and the societies would begin to take on the role



Fig. 2.2 Immigrant shed at the Forks, Winnipeg, *Archives of Manitoba*, Bole, Elswood 6, N13803

of attracting immigrants to different parts of Canada and finding work or farmsteads for them. The legislation also empowered the societies to extend loans for passage and to sue for recovery of the funds if they were not repaid. It seems that the legislation, which had been championed by the Ottawa Valley Immigration Aid Society, was only used once, in 1901, and languished on the statute book until repealed over a century after it was enacted. Most immigrant aid societies operated outside the authority of the Act without any problem.⁶

One of the best initiatives was establishing a network of “Immigration Halls” across Canada. These halls not only served as offices for immigration agents but also provided temporary housing for immigrants. In 1872, there were immigration stations with immigration halls in Québec, Montréal, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto and Hamilton and halls were under construction in London and Winnipeg.⁷ The Winnipeg “immigration sheds,” as they were originally called, were built at the Forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers because, before the railway reached Winnipeg, immigrants arrived by riverboat from the United States. The sheds were constructed to accommodate 250 immigrants but this was not enough and the following year, they were doubled in size. With the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), in 1881, the first of several increasingly large immigration halls, as they came to be called, was built in the area of the CPR station and the sheds at the Forks were demolished shortly after. Winnipeg became the hub of the western settlement operations and all immigrants heading west were de-trained in Winnipeg and given the opportunity to choose a final destination and obtain land grants. Therefore, larger facilities were required. In 1890 a more permanent hall was built and in 1906 a magnificent stone and brick immigration hall was built beside the CPR’s grand new station in Winnipeg. The immigration hall not only provided modern accommodation for upwards of 500 immigrants but also served as the headquarters for the immigration service in Western Canada. The older, 1890 structure was moved beside the new hall and provided lodging to “foreign”

Fig. 2.3 Winnipeg immigration hall, near the Canadian Pacific Railway station, c.1890, *Library and Archives Canada*, A046609



immigrants while the newer building was reserved for “British immigrants”.⁸ By 1911, the *New York Times* reported, “There are throughout Western Canada some fifty Immigration Halls ... each a centre of employment and land acquirement information for the new settler, and a comfortable abiding place until he is passed along to his ultimate place of settlement. Beds and bedding are provided for those who must wait overnight ...”⁹ Appendix 1 provides more detail on this largely forgotten Canadian initiative Figs. 2.3, 2.4.

The Dominion government also assigned immigrant agents,

“to travel on immigrant trains, in order to see that the wants of Immigrants are duly cared for, to see that they are sent to their proper destinations, to protect them from imposition on the way, to give advice to them, to explain to them the labour wants of the country and generally to set forth the advantages of Canada as a land for settlement”.¹⁰

From the piers at Halifax, Saint John or Québec to the railway platforms in Toronto and Winnipeg and Edmonton, fast talking swindlers were, everywhere, trying to separate newcomers from their life savings and the government worked assiduously to protect and encourage the immigrants it had attracted.

The Dominion government made arrangements with the railways and shipping agents to recruit immigrants in Europe by means of paying a bonus of about £1 per farmer or farm worker, but in the early years, following Confederation, the results were meagre. The conditions for successfully attracting large numbers to Canada were not yet in place. Indeed a large number of immigrants coming to North America via Canada were taking advantage of subsidized immigrant fares that Canada offered only to move on to the United States. Also, during the slow economic growth in the 1870s and 1880s, many Canadians looked south for a better life.

It was only in the 1890s that all the requisite conditions fell into place. First, the CPR was completed in 1886; second the Department of Agriculture developed faster maturing strains of wheat, reducing the risk of losing crops to frost; and third, the great plains of the United States were more or less full, so emigrants had to look north for free land. Finally, the European economy improved, allowing more people to afford the cost of moving to North America. In the 1893 *Annual Report* of the Department of the Interior for 1893, A.M. Burgess, the Deputy Minister, reported that he foresaw the end of the lean years for immigration:

The rapid increase of the emigration of farmers from the United States to Manitoba and the North-west goes a long way to prove ... that the limit of free land in that country which is

Fig. 2.4 A typical immigration hall, Medicine Hat, Alberta c.1904, *Library and Archives Canada*, A046342



fit for ordinary farming purposes has been reached, and that now the Canadian Northwest contains the only extensive tract of productive land on the North American continent which is open for free homesteading. Not only, therefore, may the stream of land seekers from the United States be expected to grow, but the current of that class of immigrants from other countries who are looking for farming lands will be turned more distinctly towards this country.¹¹

The Last Best West

In 1896, the Liberal Government under Wilfrid Laurier took power at the most propitious of times, especially for immigration. Laurier appointed Clifford Sifton as Minister of the Interior. Sifton was born in Ontario, but moved to the booming western Manitoba city of Brandon as a young man. He was drawn to politics and became a Minister in the provincial government before moving to federal politics. As Minister of the Interior, he was determined to fill the vast prairies of Canada's west with European and American settlers. His programs and his support of extensive promotion of Canada in the United Kingdom, the United States and in continental Europe as the "Last Best West" resulted in the greatest flood of immigrants Canada has known, peaking in 1913 at over 400,000, drawn by free land and an immigration service that truly believed that it was nation building. Though Frank Oliver, another westerner, became Minister in 1905 and did not approve of the immigration from Central and Eastern Europe that Sifton had encouraged, the surge of immigration continued and grew continuously until brought to a halt in August 1914 by the onset of the First World War. However, American immigrants continued to come in large numbers until the United States joined the war in 1917.

In addition to the very personalized service the Immigration Branch was able to offer, the government also supported a growing number of non-governmental agencies in their work of attracting and helping to settle immigrants. Annual grants were provided to groups such as the Salvation Army, the Ottawa Valley

Immigration Aid Society, the Western Canadian Immigration Association, the Women's National Immigration Society and the Girl's Home of Welcome in Winnipeg. The Western Canadian Immigration Association received \$1,000 in 1897 but by 1904 it received \$10,000 over a two year period.¹² It seems that the multi-year contract for service providers is not a modern innovation after all!

However, not surprisingly, there was concern that the cost of supporting immigrants, who often arrived with very little, was imposing an undue burden on the Canadian taxpayer. Also, the very success Canada was having in attracting immigrants allowed it to set a higher bar. Therefore, the 1906 *Immigration Act* did not provide for a landing fee, as in the past, but introduced a provision allowing regulations to "provide as a condition to permission to enter Canada that immigrants shall possess money to a prescribed minimum amount, which amount may vary according to the class and destination of such immigrant, and otherwise according to the circumstances".¹³ This was the beginning of the requirement that immigrants arrive with adequate funds to settle in Canada that continues to this day. The provision, implemented in 1908, required every adult immigrant arriving in the spring or summer to have \$25 in his possession and, recognizing the greater difficulty to find work or establish on a farm in the winter, \$50 if arriving in the fall or winter.¹⁴

All the investment in infrastructure was now paying off. The Immigration Service established Winnipeg as the "choke point" and distribution centre of immigrants to the west. The *New York Times* reported in 1911 that:

Winnipeg is the distributing centre for Western settlers. They pour out through the great [CPR] station into the adjoining huge Immigration Hall, where they undergo inspection once more. Before they left the ship they had been inspected closely by immigration agents, and again in Montreal they had undergone careful scrutiny, so this is the third time. If they are intending homesteaders, seeking Government farms, the plans and details are all there in the Government land office, with courteous officials to help them understand. If they are workers seeking employment, there has been gathered for their information the latest reports on demand for labor in the various sections. For the small capitalist the Canadian Pacific's huge land grants cut up into sections are for sale in the building on the other side, with various attractions to make them acceptable.

One of the latest, for instance, is the "ready-made" farm. The intending settler can buy, on the installment principle, a quarter or half section already fenced, with the well dug, a temporary farm house and barn built, part of the land already plowed and his crop put in ..."¹⁵

The Immigration Service took an active interest in all immigrants for their first year in Canada, often providing seed to settlers if crops failed and continuing to provide advice and encouragement through its network of immigration halls Figs. 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7.

Between the Wars

Following the First World War and the recession that immediately followed, the Canadian economy recovered and with that recovery, immigration resumed in large numbers. The government had anticipated this and, in 1917, created the



Fig. 2.5 Winnipeg Immigration Hall, No. 1, with CPR tracks in foreground, *Archives of Manitoba*, Architectural Survey-Winnipeg-Maple St/1 28/69 N21668

Fig. 2.6 Winnipeg Immigration Hall, No. 1, interior, *Library and Archives Canada*, C075993



Department of Immigration and Colonization. Though Canada had become an industrialized nation during the war, immigration policy remained focused on bringing in settlers both to open up new land and to take over farms whose owners or their children had moved to Canada's growing cities. However, though their own cities were growing, Canadians watched with a combination of fascination and horror as American cities such as New York and Chicago become infamous for over-crowding, crime and corruption. Canadians and Canadian policy makers assumed that this was due to unchecked immigration to American cities and they were determined to prevent that from happening in Canada. Therefore the focus of recruitment and settlement of immigrants was on the farm.

Fig. 2.7 Men's dormitory, Quebec City immigration hall and port of entry c.1911-WJ Topley, photographer, *Library and Archives Canada*, A010438



This approach was reflected in the report of Deputy Minister W. J. Egan in the 1924–1925 *Annual Report* of the Department of Immigration and Colonization. Egan stated that “Colonization rather than immigration is the most pressing need of the hour and colonization always involves directional effort and after-care; sometimes it necessitates assistance in land purchase ...” The focus was also, increasingly, on immigration “of the right type”¹⁶ and that meant British or American, but not solely. In 1925, the Minister of Immigration and Colonization entered into a joint agreement with both the CPR and the Canadian National Railway (CNR). The “Railways Agreement” authorized the two railways to recruit and select “agriculturalists, agricultural workers and domestic servants” and settle them in Canada with the assistance of the Department of Immigration and Colonization.¹⁷ So, *de facto*, the two railway companies ran Canada’s immigrant selection system, particularly on the European Continent, and took a large part of the responsibility for settling immigrants in the Canadian west for the rest of the decade.

The British government was also actively encouraging emigration from the British Isles in the 1920s and, in 1924, the *Empire Settlement Agreement* was concluded and it provided for enormous subsidies (paid by the Canadian and British governments) for British farmers to relocate to Canada. The arrangements were complicated but the House of Commons Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization, in a 1928 report on immigration, tried to provide a simple summary of the provisions. It reported that while the normal ocean passage for immigrants from England to Canada was \$91.25 (£18 15s), British agricultural workers and their wives needed to pay only \$9.73 (£2). Children under 17 were free and loans were available if the immigrant could not afford even the subsidized fare. Furthermore there were special schemes whereby the British government provided \$1,500 (£300) for stock and equipment and, under one scheme, provincial governments provided free land as well. By contrast, for an immigrant coming from other Northern European countries, there were no subsidies and the minimum ocean passage was \$120. From Central and Southern European

Fig. 2.8 Immigrants at the Canadian National Railway station, Winnipeg, 1920s, *Library and Archives Canada*, C036148



countries only agricultural workers or domestic servants and those with close relatives in Canada were eligible to immigrate to Canada and the minimum ocean passage was \$135.¹⁸

The major group encouraged, other than agricultural workers, was domestic servants and they too, largely, came from the United Kingdom. The department was assiduous in trying to ensure that these, often young, women would not be corrupted in Canada. In 1919, it established a Women's Branch with the express purpose to ensure "that women and children migrating to Canada might receive the necessary advice, care, and protection." The women were interviewed in the UK by a Women's Branch officer (all female) and they attended all embarkations as well. At Québec, Halifax and Saint John, a Women's Branch officer met every ship on arrival and Red Cross nursing stations were located in the immigration buildings at the three ports as well. There were female "conductresses" on the trains too. At major destinations, there was a "Canadian Women's Hostel" to provide safe, accommodation pending placement with a family and assistance was provided by the Traveller's Aid, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Red Cross and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE).¹⁹ There were not to be any fallen women among the immigration movement Figs. 2.8, 2.9 and 2.10!

As a result of the emphasis on agricultural immigration in the 1920s, the focus of immigration was still settlement in the West. To that end, while many immigration halls had closed during the war, they continued to thrive on the Prairies and Winnipeg remained the hub. The second immigration hall in Winnipeg, closed during the war, was renovated and reopened and then a third was built (at the expense of the CNR) to handle the arrivals at its Winnipeg station. The secondary hub was in Edmonton from where immigrants were being directed to the new farm areas opening up to the north of that city. The other halls were located in communities near areas of settlement and this changed over time. The number of people accommodated in the immigration halls, usually for an average of four to 5 days before moving onward, was impressive. The following table provides data

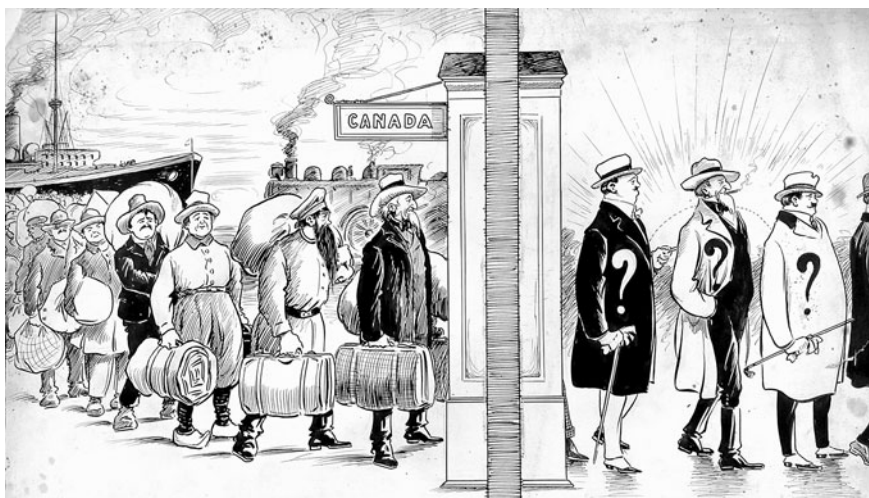


Fig. 2.9 “Immigration and its requirements,” cartoon c 1920 by Arthur George Racey, McCord Museum, Montreal, M2005 23 236

Fig. 2.10 Immigrants arriving at the port of Quebec, c. 1925, *Library and Archives Canada*, C019935



on only the larger immigration halls. Smaller ones operated in places such as Emerson MB, North Portal SK, West Poplar River SK, Athabaska AB, Edson AB and Spirit River AB (Table 2.1)²⁰.

The heyday of the immigration halls was prior to the Great Depression, but many continued to function into the 1950s, providing accommodation for Hungarian refugees, for example, and those in Winnipeg and at the ports of Halifax, Québec and Vancouver continued to operate into the 1960s.

Canada no longer operates immigration halls, staffed by government employees. However, though the *Resettlement Assistance Plan*, Citizenship and Immigration Canada funds several “reception houses” in major centres across Canada, including

Table 2.1 People accommodated at immigration halls 1924–1928

Location	1924–1925	1925–1926	1926–1927	1927–1928
Winnipeg hall No. 1	4,097	5,533	9,232	8,494
Winnipeg hall No. 2	3,328	7,743	6,710	5,718
Winnipeg hall No. 3			1,952	10,973
Edmonton	1,661	2,520	6,830	4,739
Prince Albert SK	227	148	750	745
North Battleford SK	227	<i>Not reported</i>	516	591
Peace river AB	40	34	8	223
Grand Prairie AB	25	50	168	338

Winnipeg, to provide short term accommodation to Government Assisted Refugees when they first arrive in Canada. These reception houses are operated by not-for-profit immigrant settlement serving agencies. So the concept that worked so successfully in Canada's early days is kept alive in modern refugee programs.

The department also followed up regularly with new agricultural workers. This service was known as "After-Care." It was provided by the Land Settlement Branch to all migrants selected for settlement by the department. After-care consisted of:

- (a) Securing employment for the migrant and directing to destination;
- (b) Visiting the migrant during the first year and at least annually thereafter for a period of 5 years from the date of settlement;
- (c) Hearing and dealing with any complaints regarding wages or treatment;
- (d) Investigating grievances and where necessary, finding alternative employment;
- (e) "Developing" a migrant, with a view to his subsequent settlement on a farm.²¹

The department had a clear vision of its settlement role and was "hands on" in carrying it out.

Support of immigrants by the voluntary sector also grew with the increase in immigration. Deputy Minister Egan, in his account, in the 1926–1927 *Annual Report*, noted that:

The organizations continue to increase and they undoubtedly do valuable work in giving the stranger advice and a helping hand after his arrival in Canada and just when he needs help most. An extension of such voluntary effort to all settlers regardless of the country from which they came would be very helpful to the settlers and would undoubtedly provide a new impetus to future immigration.²²

Unfortunately, the Great Depression intervened and immigration declined precipitously throughout the 1930s and then was cut off, except from the United States, during the Second World War. The settlement work continued at a much reduced scale, in proportion to the reduced immigrant flows, and staff were assigned to anti-depression reconstruction activities. As a result, in 1936, the Department of Immigration and Colonization was reduced to a branch within the new Department of Mines and Resources.

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