

# THE 1920s: A DECADE OF ADJUSTMENT

## TIME LINE

- 1920– Formation of the Maritime Rights movement  
 Founding of the Group of Seven  
 First scheduled radio broadcast in North America takes place in Montreal
- 1921– Liberals come to power under William Lyon Mackenzie King  
 Newly-formed Progressive Party wins 65 seats in federal Parliament  
 Agnes Macphail becomes the first woman elected in a federal election  
 Canadian Authors Association (CAA) founded  
 The *Bluenose*, under Captain Angus Walters, wins the trophy for the first of three consecutive years of the International Fisherman's Trophy  
 Founding of the Communist Party of Canada
- 1922– Founding of the Canadian Historical Association  
 Insulin made available for the treatment of diabetes
- 1923– Canada, not Britain, signs the Halibut Treaty with the United States  
 Federal government bans Chinese immigration  
 James B. McLachlan leads coal miners in Nova Scotia in a strike against the British Empire Steel Company (BESCO)
- 1924– Laurentide Air Services begins Canada's first regular air-mail service in the North
- 1925– United Church of Canada established
- 1926– Balfour Declaration signed recognizing the dominions, including Canada, as autonomous nations in the British Commonwealth of Nations  
 King–Byng controversy  
 Arthur Meighen forms a three-day government
- 1927– Canada celebrates its Diamond Jubilee  
 Federal government introduces old age pension program  
 National Museum of Canada created  
 Emily Carr's work included in an exhibition of West Coast art in Ottawa
- 1928– Percy Williams wins two gold medals at the Amsterdam Olympics, making him "the world's fastest runner"
- 1929– The Privy Council's decision in the Persons Case recognizes women in Canada as "persons" for legal purposes



The 1920s were a decade of adjustment to new postwar conditions. In politics, both major federal political parties chose new leaders, and regional protest movements surfaced in the Maritimes and the West, as these hinterland regions demanded a stronger voice in the “new Canada” of the postwar era. In foreign affairs, Canada continued to move toward autonomy. Economically, Canadians looked increasingly to the United States rather than to Britain for both financial needs and foreign trade. Major changes occurred in transportation and communications as well. Socially, during this era of general prosperity, and as a result of the aftermath of war, reform declined. Women still fought for recognition and rights, but in the economic and legal, rather than in the political, spheres. Labour unions struggled for recognition and increased membership. Cultural activities flourished in English-speaking and French-speaking Canada, but because of the language differences few points of common contact existed.

## NEW POSTWAR POLITICAL LEADERS



As the 1920s began, new men replaced veteran national leaders from the prewar era in the two major parties. William Lyon Mackenzie King succeeded Wilfrid Laurier, who died in February 1919, as Liberal leader, while Arthur Meighen became the Conservative leader and acting prime minister after Robert Borden’s resignation in July 1920.

The Liberals chose King at a leadership convention, the first in the country’s history, in August 1919. King’s loyalty to Laurier during the conscription crisis put him in good favour in the party, especially in Quebec. As well, King appeared to represent change. The grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, leader of the Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada, saw himself as a reformer. After graduating from the universities of Toronto, Chicago, and Harvard, with a Ph.D. in political economy from the latter university, he first served as deputy minister of labour. Then in 1908, shortly after his election to the House of Commons, he became Laurier’s minister of labour. Defeated in the election of 1911, King returned to the United States to work for the Rockefeller Foundation as a labour conciliator. On the basis of his experiences in the civil service and in industrial relations he wrote *Industry and Humanity* (1918), a discussion of the labour question in Canada. Although convoluted and moralistic, the book did address the pressing problem in the postwar era of the impact of industrialism on society. It established King as an authority on contemporary social and economic issues, and assisted in his winning the leadership of the Liberal Party.

The Conservatives met in caucus, rather than in convention, to choose Arthur Meighen as Borden’s successor in July 1920. Meighen had attended the University of Toronto at the same time as King. Upon graduation, Meighen moved west to Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, to practise law. He entered federal politics in the election of 1908, the same year that his future rival, King, was first elected. Meighen, an outstanding parliamentary debater, became solicitor general in 1913 and minister of the interior in 1917.

Meighen had, however, by the time he gained leadership of the party, become identified with several of the Conservative and, after 1917, the Union government’s controversial policies. He had drafted the conscription bill, which lost him support in Quebec and among farmers in English-speaking Canada. Farm youth, who had been exempt from conscription immediately before the election of 1917, suddenly became eligible after its passage. Meighen also introduced the Wartime Elections Act, which denied the vote to Canadians who had emigrated from enemy countries after 1902 — thus losing him part of the ethnic vote. In 1919, he intervened against the workers in the Winnipeg General Strike, angering this political group. That the Conservative caucus still chose Meighen as their leader attests to his influence in the party, but also reveals the party’s loss of touch with political reality.

These two leaders had completely opposite approaches to politics. King sought the road of least resistance and the middle path of compromise. To him, right answers did not exist in politics, only answers that seemed better because they offended fewer people. As a result he often spoke in ambiguities and in generalities. Meighen, by contrast, stated his position clearly and unequivocally. He upheld principles over compromise and believed that Canadians should be made to see the truth as he saw it. To him, every problem had a solution, and he clearly articulated solutions often without regard for the possible political repercussions. Each man despised the other.

## REGIONAL PROTEST: THE PROGRESSIVES AND THE MARITIME RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In 1920, both new party leaders faced the problem of regional protest movements in eastern and western Canada. In eastern Canada, the Maritime Rights movement arose in an effort to obtain greater Maritime regional voice in national politics, while in the West, farmers created their own third party, the Progressive party, to deal with regional complaints.

### THE MARITIME RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In the 1920s, Maritimers witnessed a dramatic decline in their region's influence in Confederation. Politically, their number of seats in the House of Commons fell by one-quarter (to 31) between 1882 and 1921, as a result of the relative depopulation of the Maritimes, as thousands left the region in search of work. Given that the size of the House of Commons increased substantially during this period, as other regions grew in population, the percentage drop was even greater. Economically, manufacturing companies in the region re-established themselves in the larger markets of central Canada in order to become more competitive. Both Canadian Car and Foundry of Amherst, Nova Scotia, and the Maritime Nail Company of Saint John, New Brunswick, for example, transferred operations to Montreal in 1921.

A decline in demand for Cape Breton coal and steel hurt that regional industry. The conversion to oil for heating and power had lost markets for Cape Breton's coal. Shipbuilding also went into decline as Britain, the United States, and Canada all competed for international sales. The vital Canadian rail market for steel rails collapsed when railway construction ceased in the postwar era. Unemployment became widespread in Cape Breton's heavy-steel industry. The British Empire Steel Company (BESCO), created from a merger of Nova Scotia's coal, steel, and shipbuilding industries, verged on bankruptcy. It responded by attempting to cut miners' and steelworkers' wages. This touched off in 1921 one of the most intense labour disputes in Maritime history. The provincial government had to call in troops to keep order in New Waterford, Cape Breton Island.

The Maritimes also suffered from tariff reductions throughout the 1920s that had formerly protected its industries. A rise in freight rates, of 200 percent or more, on the Intercolonial Railway equally hurt the region's economy. When the Canadian government nationalized the Intercolonial Railway as part of the Canadian National Railways (CNR), it moved the Intercolonial's head office from Moncton, New Brunswick, to Montreal. The railway thus ceased to promote regional interests and became part of a national system.

Individually the Maritime provinces seemed powerless to stem the economic decline, but Maritime leaders believed that collectively their chances were better. A.P. Paterson, a grocer from Saint John, New Brunswick, led a group of influential business and professional people in launching the Maritime Rights movement. He offered a rationale for the movement in a pamphlet, *The True Story of Confederation*, in which he put forward his version of the compact theory



of Confederation. He argued that all Canadians should bear the extra economic costs experienced by any region as a result of its disadvantageous geographical location. Convinced that a study of history would reinforce his argument, Paterson helped to fund the establishment of a department of history at the University of New Brunswick.

The Maritime Rights movement demanded increased federal subsidies for the Maritime provinces, more national and international trade through the ports of Halifax and Saint John, and improved tariff protection to strengthen the region's steel and coal industries. The movement's promotion of the tariff separated it completely from discontented Prairie farmers. It also differed from the West in working for change within the traditional two-party system rather than through a third party.

In the election campaign of 1921, the movement pressed Maritime Liberal candidates to swear "to advocate and stand by Maritime rights first, last and all the time." Although taking this pledge helped the federal Liberals to win all but six of the Maritime constituencies, the Maritime members of Parliament could not keep their promises. Mackenzie King's Liberal minority government depended too much on Prairie support to be able to cater to Maritime needs, and especially to raise the tariff.

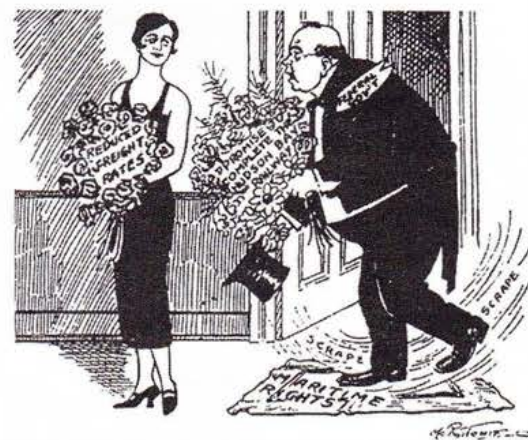
Disillusioned, Maritime voters switched to the Conservatives in the next federal election in 1925, giving the party all but three of the 31 seats. Unfortunately for Maritimers, the Liberals returned to power in 1926. King diffused the Maritime Rights movement by establishing a royal commission to investigate the group's complaints. The Duncan Commission (headed by British jurist Sir Arthur Rae Duncan) recommended major changes for the Maritimes, such as a 20 percent reduction in all rail rates, aid to the steel and coal industries, and increased federal subsidies. The Liberal government, however, agreed only to minor changes. In the meantime, the Maritime Rights movement had disbanded.

## THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

At the turn of the century, western farmers attacked the two traditional parties for neglecting western demands. They wanted reduced freight rates comparable to those in central Canada, an end to the eastern-owned grain-elevator companies' monopoly of the grain trade, an increase in the CPR's boxcar allotment for grain trade, a railway to Hudson Bay to rival the CPR, and most of all, a reduction in the tariff.

During the Laurier era (1896–1911), western farmers had gained some of their demands. The Liberal government passed the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement in 1897, by which the CPR reduced eastbound freight rates on grain and flour and westbound rates on a list of manufactured goods. In return, the CPR obtained a government subsidy to build a branch line from Lethbridge through the Crow's Nest Pass to Nelson, British Columbia. The new line enabled the CPR to exploit southern Alberta's and British Columbia's mining fields. Ottawa also passed the Manitoba Grain Act in 1900, which improved grain storage at loading platforms and warehouses. Then, in 1902, in the famous Sinaluta case, named after the town in Saskatchewan where the legal challenge arose, the Territorial Grain Growers' Association won its fight against the CPR for failure to provide adequate boxcars for grain shipment at peak periods.

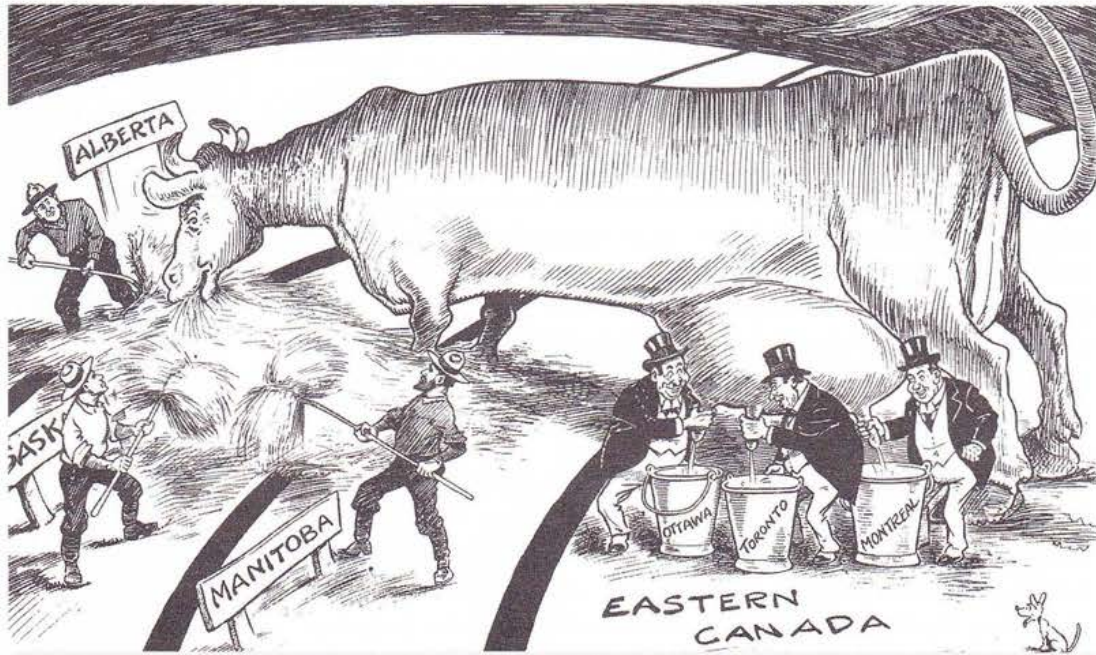
These victories still left the western farmers' fundamental problem unresolved. The same economic structure — most notably the tariff, which for western farmers symbolized the



"Wooing the West." Cartoonist Donald McRitchie echoes the Maritimers' complaints that the Mackenzie King government favoured the West's regional demands over their own. From the *Halifax Herald*, October 3, 1925.

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Arch Dales's cartoon in the *Grain Growers' Guide* in 1915 conveys western farmers' views of Canada's political and economic reality.

Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Canada/NA 3055-24.

inequity of Confederation — remained in place. Farmers resented having to buy their agricultural implements and materials in a closed, protected market and to sell their wheat in an open, competitive one. The tariff, they felt, worked against their best interest, and they demanded that Parliament repeal it. After the Liberals' defeat in 1911 on the question of reciprocity with the United States, many farmers talked openly of creating a third party.

Then the war intervened. Out of loyalty, farmers rallied behind the traditional parties. With the election of a “non-partisan” Union government in 1917, farmers hoped that it would remove the tariff. When it failed to do so, Thomas Crerar, a Manitoba farmer, one-time president of the Grain Growers' Grain Company and minister of agriculture in the Union government, resigned from the cabinet in June 1919. Nine other western Unionist MPs followed. They formed the nucleus of a new National Progressive party.

Farmer candidates did well in the provincial elections held immediately after the war. In Ontario, where rural depopulation posed a serious problem, the dissident United Farmers of Ontario won the election of 1919, much to their surprise. Neither the premier, E.C. Drury, a farmer from Simcoe County directly north of Toronto, nor most of his party members had had any previous legislative experience. In Alberta, in the provincial election of 1921, the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) swept out the incumbent Liberal party, which had been in office since 1905. The UFA won considerable support in southern Alberta, where farmers experienced extreme drought conditions, as bad as they would experience during the Great Depression of the 1930s. In Manitoba, a “Progressive” group of United Farmers formed the government in 1922 under John Bracken.

The Progressives also ran farmer candidates in many constituencies across the country in the 1921 federal election. The results of that election revealed the political divisions within the country. No party secured a majority, and the three largest parties — the Liberals, Conservatives,



and Progressives — each held the majority of its seats in one or two regions of the country only, with a very poor showing elsewhere. The incumbent prime minister Arthur Meighen suffered a humiliating defeat by winning only 50 seats, two-thirds of them in Ontario. Mackenzie King and the Liberals won 116 seats, two short of a majority. They won every Quebec riding and did well in the Maritimes, but west of the Ottawa River held only 26 seats. The Progressives won an amazing 65 seats. They swept the West, winning 39 of the 56 seats, and also gained a significant 24 in Ontario, but the new party had no seats in Quebec and just one in the Maritimes. Five independents were elected, of whom two agreed to work together to represent labour interests. At the opening of the parliamentary session, Alberta's William Irvine informed the House of Commons: "I wish to state that Mr. Woodsworth is the leader of the labour group ... and I am the group." For the first time in Canadian history, the Canadian public elected a House of Commons divided along regional lines.

## THE PROGRESSIVES IN DECLINE

Despite its impressive political strength, the Progressive party was weakened by a split between a Manitoba-based wing under Crerar and an Alberta-based wing under Henry Wise Wood, an American populist farmer who came to Alberta in 1905 and became president of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) in 1916. Crerar wanted the Progressives to act as a pressure group to force the minority Liberal government to implement policies favourable to farmers. He hoped the Progressives would vote in unison, in essence as a party. Wood, in contrast, seeing political parties as inherently evil, wanted to abolish them altogether, in favour of "group government" based on all occupational groups in society. Wood argued that society naturally divided into several economic interest groups, of which the farmers constituted one — the largest on the Prairies. If each group obtained representation in Parliament, then the laws passed would reflect the interests of all rather than those of the particular group that happened to control the party. In this way, group co-operation would replace party competition. The women's section of the UFA — the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) — which was particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of co-operation, helped, with their leader, Irene Parlby, to secure the election of a UFA government in Alberta in 1921.

Unable to resolve their differences, the divided Progressives proved politically ineffective. They declined the role of official opposition even though, as the second-largest party in the House of Commons, they warranted it. Then, in 1922, Crerar resigned as leader, claiming he could not work with Wood. Robert Forke, Crerar's successor, had no better luck at uniting the party. One of his alleged followers commented that Forke "does not control one Progressive vote other than his own, and he is not always sure about that."

The divisions revealed the Progressives as little more than a loose federation of regional groups with insubstantial roots in British Columbia, Quebec, and the Maritimes, and with deep divisions within their two regions of strength — the Prairies and Ontario. The party continued to lose political strength throughout the 1920s. By the election of 1930, they had become a spent force.

In many respects, the Progressives attempted the impossible: to base a party solely on farmers at a time of rural depopulation. They wanted to preserve the family farm, to uphold rural values, and to ensure the political dominance of agricultural interests in an increasingly urban and industrial society. Still, the spirit of the Progressives lived on in the philosophy of populism and in the tradition of western protest. Two new western-Canadian-based parties in the 1930s — the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the Social Credit movement — succeeded them.

## THE ELECTION OF 1925

From 1921 until 1925, Mackenzie King's minority government ruled precariously, relying on the support of the moderate Progressives. To win over the Progressives, King's Liberal government gradually reduced tariffs and restored the preferential freight rates contained in the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement of 1897, suspended during the war years. In terms of other legislation, however, the Liberals did little. Historians John Thompson and Allen Seager note that "it is impossible to point to a single conspicuous legislative achievement between 1922 and 1925,"<sup>1</sup> but in fairness to King on the tariff issue, it must be acknowledged that he had difficulty trying to reconcile the anti-tariff views of the Progressives and the pro-tariff position of the Maritime Rights movement.

The Liberals lost heavily in the election of 1925. Their numbers fell from 116 to 99 in a House of Commons with 245 members. The prime minister lost his seat, as did eight other cabinet ministers. Only in Quebec did the Liberals retain their numbers. The Conservatives more than doubled their number of seats, to 116, doing exceptionally well in the Maritimes and in Ontario. The Progressives, divided into moderate and radical wings, saw their strength decline by almost two-thirds, to 24 seats.

## THE KING-BYNG AFFAIR

Despite his party's setback, King was determined to stay in office, believing he could win enough support from the moderates among the Progressives to win a loss-of-confidence vote. In the throne speech, King made further concessions to westerners by promising a farm-loan program, the immediate completion of a rail link from the prairies to Hudson Bay, the transfer of the natural resources of the three Prairie provinces to their own control, and tariff revisions. To gain the support of J.S. Woodsworth and his followers, King promised an old-age pension plan.

The situation looked encouraging for the Liberals until a customs department scandal broke. Civil servants had received payoffs for allowing liquor smuggling into the United States, where prohibition remained in force. The Progressives, champions of purity in government, could no longer support the Liberals.

Realizing that his government faced certain defeat, King decided to circumvent normal parliamentary procedure. He asked the governor general, Lord Byng, to dissolve Parliament and call an election before a loss-of-confidence vote could be taken in the House. The prime minister had the constitutional right to make such a request, but the governor general, Lord Byng, equally had the right to refuse it — and he did. King promptly resigned as prime minister and announced to a surprised House of Commons on Monday, June 28, that the country was without a government.

The governor general then asked Meighen, as leader of the opposition, to form a government. Meighen agreed. The new Conservative government lasted only three days before being defeated by a single vote, giving Meighen the dubious honour of presiding over the shortest-lived government since Confederation. Now, the governor general had no choice but to dissolve Parliament and call the election that he had denied King a few days earlier.

In the 1926 election, King maintained that the governor general had acted unconstitutionally. By refusing to take the advice of his elected representative, he had tried to reduce Canada "from the status of a self-governing Dominion to the status of a Crown Colony." King's strategy worked; it enabled him to sidestep the customs scandal, which Meighen claimed was the real issue in the election. The collapse of the Progressives allowed the Liberals to make substantial gains in the West. New promises to Ontario and the Maritimes ensured greater success there too. In this way, King won his first majority government.



## Where Historians Disagree

### Causes of Regional Protest Movements in Eastern and Western Canada in the 1920s

Historians have debated the reasons for the rise of differing protest movements on the Prairies and in the Maritimes immediately after World War I. Initially, they explained such protests as indigenous to the regions. As a frontier community inhabited by irascible farmers, the prairie West naturally protested against everything from the weather to railways, grain merchants, and the federal government. Political scientist Walter Young, for example, wrote: “It was thoroughly consistent with the frontier tradition of self-sufficiency and independence that they [the people of the West] should form their own political machines to influence or wrest power from the old and insensitive engines of government in the east.”<sup>1</sup> By contrast, commentators viewed Maritimers as innately conservative, in keeping with long residence in this marginal region. Here, protest arose to fight changes that threatened to undermine their way of life. In short, earlier analysts regarded the West as a region that looked to the future and favoured change, while the Maritimes looked to the past and wanted to maintain the status quo.

This view of the regions as having innate qualities, consistent for all time, has given way to a view of regions as dynamic entities, forever changing as a result of the way they function in the larger Canadian context. In the case of the Maritimes and the West, both regions served as hinterlands for the metropolitan centres of central Canada. This metropolitan–hinterland relationship, as historians and regional economists have labelled it, has benefited central Canada at the expense of the outlying regions of the West and the Maritimes. In the “Bias of Prairie Politics,”<sup>2</sup>

W.L. Morton describes how the initial bias of inequality, resulting from the West’s weak political representation and its lack of control, until 1930, over its natural resources, set off a series of protests that came to include the Progressive movement. Maritimers also felt cheated in Confederation and linked the beginning of their economic decline with their agreement to unite with the Upper and Lower Canadians. Historian George Rawlyk argues that this feeling of persecution in Confederation created a “paranoid style,” in which Maritimers “felt that the hostile and almost conspiratorial world of ‘Upper Canada’ was directed specifically against their beloved Nova Scotia.”<sup>3</sup> Such feelings of regional protest tended to erupt in times of economic crises, as happened in the 1920s.

Recent studies of the prairie West and the Maritimes in the interwar years have seen the Progressive and the Maritime Rights movements as part of a wider reform tradition. Historian Richard Allen has linked the leadership, ideology, and aspirations of the Progressive movement directly to the social gospel movement.<sup>4</sup> Maritime historian Ernest Forbes has tied the Maritime Rights movement to the “progressive ideology of the period, which increased the pressure upon the small governments for expensive reforms while at the same time suggesting the possibility of limitless achievement through a strategy of unity, organization and agitation. Consequently, regional awareness increased sharply in the three provinces.”<sup>5</sup> This broadening of perspective offers a fuller understanding of the complexity and dynamics of regional protest.



- <sup>1</sup> Walter Young, *Democracy and Discontent: Progressivism, Socialism and Social Credit in the Canadian West*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), p. 111.
- <sup>2</sup> W.L. Morton, "Bias of Prairie Politics," (1955) reprinted in A.B. McKillop, ed., *Contexts of Canada's Past: Selected Essays of W.L. Morton* (Toronto: Macmillan in association with the Institute of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1980), pp. 149–160.
- <sup>3</sup> George Rawlyk, "Nova Scotia Regional Protest, 1867–1967," *Queen's Quarterly*, 85 (Spring 1968): 107.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Allen, "The Social Gospel as the Religion of the Agrarian Revolt," in Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook, eds., *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W.L. Morton* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp. 174–186.
- <sup>5</sup> Ernest Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919–1927: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), p. 38.

## FROM COLONY TO NATION

After 1921, King's Liberal government made significant advances in foreign policy. The prime minister wanted greater autonomy for Canada within the British empire. He sought to avoid commitments abroad that might force Canada into imperial wars. To achieve this objective, King delegated himself minister of external affairs and appointed O.D. Skelton, a Queen's University political economist whose outlook on foreign affairs complemented his own, as his undersecretary of state for external affairs, a position Skelton held until his death in 1941.

King's government reduced military expenditures and the size of the Canadian armed forces in the early 1920s. Along with the other western democracies, Canada consistently opposed any attempt to strengthen the military aspects of the League of Nations. Canada, it might be said, was in the league but not of the league. Frequently, Canadian delegates, with King's support, reminded fellow league members of the hundred years of peaceful relations between Canada and the United States. "We think in terms of peace," Senator Dandurand told the league assembly, "while Europe, an armed camp, thinks in terms of war." Canadians, he went on to say, "live in a fire-proof house, far from inflammable material. A vast ocean separates us from Europe." The implication was that Canada could, and should, be isolationist.

## THE CHANAK CRISIS AND THE HALIBUT TREATY

As an isolationist, King reacted negatively to British attempts to establish a common imperial foreign policy. The test case became the Chanak crisis. Under the Treaty of Sèvres, one of the treaties ending World War I, the British government agreed to maintain troops in Chanak, Turkey, to ensure the neutrality of the Dardanelles, the strategic straits linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. In 1922, Turkish nationalists attempted to oust British troops from the region.

British leaders appealed for a concerted imperial response. King replied that only the Canadian Parliament could decide Canadian participation. Parliament happened not to be in session, and he was in no hurry to summon it. In contrast, opposition leader Arthur Meighen, did not mince words. "Ready, aye, ready we stand by you" should have been Canada's answer, he claimed. By the time Parliament met, the crisis had passed. The Liberal government's refusal of automatic support in the Chanak crisis ended the attempt on Britain's part to define a common imperial policy.

The Halibut Treaty of 1923, a Canadian–American agreement relating to fishing rights on the Pacific coast, became the next step on the road to greater Canadian autonomy. By tradition,



only agents of the British government signed treaties affecting the dominions. King resented this “badge of colonialism” and decided to use the treaty to assert Canada’s diplomatic independence. He arranged for Ernest Lapointe, minister of marine and fisheries, to be the sole signatory for Canada. The British reluctantly consented, fearing that opposition would prompt Canada to establish its own diplomatic relations with Washington, which would lead to even greater disruption.

## THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

King and the leaders of other dominions now sought a formal proclamation that would recognize their equality with Britain. That came with the Balfour Declaration, signed at the Imperial Conference of 1926. It recognized the dominions as “autonomous communities within the British empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate to one another in any respect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.”

In keeping with its recognized equality, Canada established legations or embassies overseas. In 1927, Ottawa opened a legation in Washington, and the United States opened one in Ottawa. Canada also exchanged representatives with Paris and Tokyo in 1928. Britain posted a high commissioner in Ottawa, who henceforth replaced the governor general as the British government’s representative in Canada. Canada had already had a high commissioner in London since 1884.

## THE STATUTE OF WESTMINSTER

The final step to securing full Canadian autonomy occurred in 1931 with the signing of the Statute of Westminster. This act prohibited the British Parliament from declaring any law passed by the Canadian Parliament as being *ultra vires*, or unconstitutional, except for laws amending the British North America Act. Canada insisted on continued British approval for these laws because of the failure of the federal and provincial governments to agree on an amending formula among themselves. Some constitutional authorities have viewed the Statute of Westminster as Canada’s equivalent of the American Declaration of Independence because it made Canada constitutionally independent of Britain, except in regard to any laws amending the BNA Act.

## THE ECONOMICS OF ADJUSTMENT

Instability marked the Canadian economy in the 1920s. A volatile international situation and, within Canada, a transition from the old staple economy of fish, timber, and wheat to a new resource economy of pulp and paper, mining, and consumer production meant adjustment. In the first two years of the decade Canada faced a serious business depression. This was followed by a couple of years of slow growth before a five-year boom, beginning in 1925.

The postwar world economy shifted dramatically. Weakened by war, Britain no longer continued as the financial and economic world leader; it devalued its pound sterling. In contrast, the buoyant American economy increased the value of the American dollar. For Canada, the transition proved especially difficult because of its traditional dependency on British markets for trade and on British financial institutions for investment money. Within a brief decade, beginning in 1914, British investment fell to less than 46 percent of the total foreign investment in Canada. In contrast, American investment increased to 51 percent. “Never again,” economic historians Kenneth Norrie and Douglas Owrarn write, “would the mother country come close to the United States in its investment in Canada.”<sup>2</sup>



Canadians had to adjust to the differing approach of American, as opposed to British, investors. The British preferred indirect investment in the form of bonds and debentures, whereas American investors favoured equity investment (purchasing common shares) and direct control through branch plants. At the time, few Canadians questioned American economic intervention, as they welcomed American investment of any kind. Canadians also increased substantially their exports to the United States. In 1923, for the first time, Canadians exported more to the United States than to Britain.

During this transition and as a result of the postwar depression, a number of Canadian banks and companies closed or underwent restructuring to avoid collapse. The Home Bank, with its 71 branches across the country, folded in 1923. The Merchant Bank, the Bank of Ottawa, and the Bank of Hamilton sought mergers or were taken over by more stable institutions to avoid similar failures. (This instability benefited the larger banks because people looked to them for sound investment.) As well, many companies, nearly 4000 in 1922, went bankrupt. Unemployment in the primary sector rose substantially.

## A BRIEF ECONOMIC BOOM

By 1925, the economy had rebounded. The booming American economy and an easing of U.S. protectionist policies increased demand for the traditional Canadian staples of wheat and lumber, as well as the newer staples of pulp and paper and base metals. As freight rates and tariffs declined, prices rose. Farmers increased their hectares of wheat production and established wheat pools to market abundant crops. Annually, western farmers hired more than 50 000 harvesters from eastern Canada. The crop in 1928 proved to be the largest on record — 567 million bushels. Prices also remained high during these years. Vancouver benefited from the wheat boom as prairie farmers increasingly shipped their wheat via Vancouver and the Panama Canal to Europe. By 1925, Vancouver had six storage elevators with a capacity of 6.9 million bushels.

This time the wheat boom of the mid-1920s did not lead to another era of expansion for wheat farmers; rather, it signalled the final phase of the long cycle of nation building based on the wheat economy. Canadian wheat farmers now had to compete with other wheat-growing regions, such as Argentina, Australia, and the Soviet Union, for a shrinking world market as wheat consumption declined.

Pulp and paper became Canada's leading new export. At the beginning of the 1920s, paper mills in Canada produced 938 million tons of newsprint; by the end of the decade, this production increased more than threefold to 2981 million tons — enough to print 40 billion newspapers a year. Much of the demand came from the United States, where mass-produced daily newspapers needed cheap newsprint. American branch-plant mills in Canada produced most of the newsprint. Several factors contributed to this decision: the availability of inexpensive pulpwood; cheap hydro-electric power; good transportation facilities; and lower American import duties. Politics also played a part; provincial governments either placed an embargo on the export of pulpwood from Crown lands within their borders or imposed a stumpage charge on the number of trees cut, an amount that declined if the producers made the pulp in Canada.

Along with increased production came consolidation. By the end of the decade, three giant companies — International, Abitibi, and Canadian Power and Paper — controlled over half of the pulp production, while the next three largest companies controlled another quarter. Americans owned more than one-third of Canada's pulp production.

Mining followed a similar pattern. After a sluggish period in the early 1920s, it revived as a result of an American demand for Canadian-based metals to produce such consumer goods as automobiles, radios, and electrical appliances. In Quebec, mineral production increased nearly



thirtyfold from 1898 to 1929. Whole new areas, such as Noranda (a name combining the words “North” and “Canada”), Rouyn, Malartic, Val d’Or, and Bourlamaque, opened up with the discovery of new lodes of copper, zinc, lead, and precious metals. In British Columbia, Cominco developed new flotation techniques to mill base metals, which revived a dying industry. In Manitoba, a Canadian–American group, incorporated as Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting, refined the ore at Flin Flon, about 100 km north of The Pas, and at Lynn Lake, still farther north. Ontario benefited greatly from the rich mineral deposits in its northland. The nickel companies in the Sudbury area doubled production during the 1920s, thanks in part to the decision of the Canadian government in 1922 to accept nickel coinage. Inco, the International Nickel Company of Canada, controlled more than 90 percent of world production.

Hydro-electric production quadrupled in the mid-1920s, providing power for the pulp and paper industry and for the refineries. This energy source was particularly important for the production of aluminum from bauxite ore, a process that required substantial amounts of electricity. Provincial governments realized the importance of hydro-electric power for industrialization and the high cost involved in building hydro-electric plants. Ontario nationalized private companies and included them in Ontario Hydro. In Quebec, the industry remained in private hands but developed with the provincial government’s financial support.

## A REVOLUTION IN TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Growth in the primary sector — wheat, timber, and minerals — multiplied markets in the secondary sector. The most spectacular secondary growth occurred in the automotive industry. Next to the United States, Canada became “the most motorized country on the globe.” The numbers of cars, trucks, buses, and motorcycles on Canadian roads tripled from 408 000 in 1920 to 1.235 million a decade later, while the total capital investment in the industry more than doubled, from \$40 million to \$98 million.

Initially, Canada produced its own cars. At one time as many as 70 small companies manufactured, assembled, or sold automobiles in Canada. By the 1920s, this period ended as Canadian companies failed to keep pace with their automated American counterparts, that mass-produced less expensive models. Eventually, the Canadian car manufacturers sold out to the American giants. In 1904, Gordon McGregor of the Walkerville Wagon Works obtained a franchise for Canada and the British empire from the Ford Company of America to establish the Ford Company of Canada. Sam McLaughlin used American technology, expertise, and money to begin producing McLaughlin cars in Oshawa, Ontario, and then sold his company in 1918 to General Motors of America. From 1923 onward, the Canadian branch of General Motors oversaw the production of the entire line of GM models, including Chevrolets and Cadillacs, and sold them throughout Canada and the Commonwealth. Chrysler, the last of the “big three” manufacturers to appear in Canada, came when the American automobile tycoon Walter P. Chrysler bought out the ailing Maxwell–Chalmers company of Windsor in 1925 to establish the Chrysler Company of Canada. By the end of the decade, the American “big three” manufactured three-quarters of the cars purchased in Canada.

Canadians had already begun, in the words of historian Arthur Lower, to worship “the great god CAR.”<sup>3</sup> By the end of the decade, one-quarter of all potential owners had an automobile. The car revolutionized the Canadian landscape as the railway had done 70 years earlier. Roads again became important, and in the cities, paved streets became commonplace. In 1925, Canada had 75 200 km of surfaced roads; by 1930, this had almost doubled (128 000 km). Tire companies and factories emerged to produce tires and spare parts, service stations sprang up, and tourism prospered. The car made it easier to get to vacation areas — where there were roads.





Traffic congestion on Yonge Street in Toronto. Street cars had to contend with automobiles in ever increasing numbers.

National Archives of Canada/RD 1004.

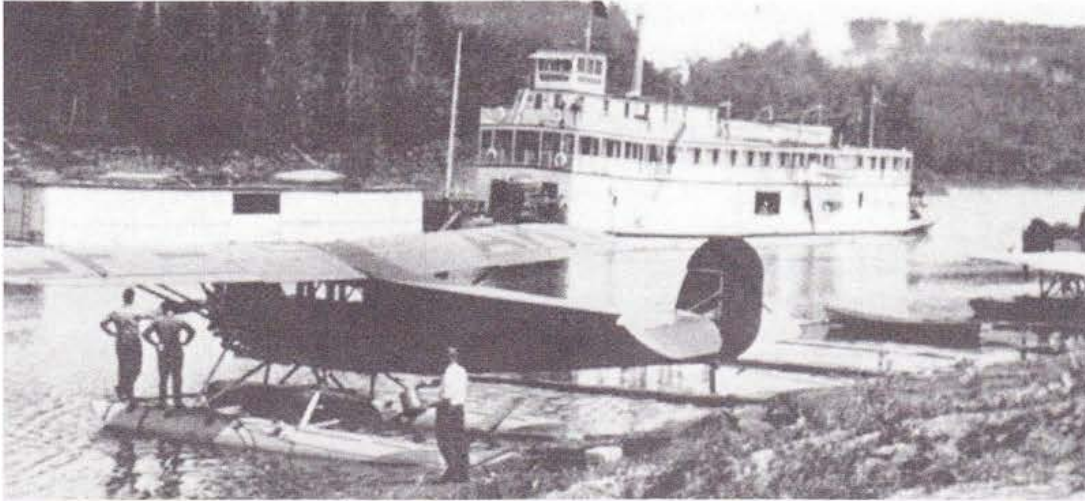
Aviation also expanded greatly in the 1920s. Veteran World War I flying aces, using surplus war planes, opened up the North. They flew geologists and prospectors into remote areas of the Canadian Shield and provided service to isolated northern settlements. These pilots travelled by visual flying; lacking proper maps, they had to stay at low altitudes to spot familiar landmarks. In 1924, Laurentide Air Services began Canada's first regular air-mail service, into the Quebec gold fields at Rouyn–Noranda. Other companies followed, and for several years the Canadian government permitted each company to print and issue its own postage stamps.

Important communications inventions became popular in the 1920s. The telephone became a standard household item by the 1920s. With party lines, eavesdropping (rubbernecking, as it was called then) became a national pastime. Radio, the great communications invention of the 1920s, helped to end isolation and loneliness. The first scheduled broadcast in North America took place in Montreal in May 1920, when station XWA (later CFCF) relayed a musical program to a Royal Society of Canada meeting in Ottawa. Others were quick to realize the potential of this new invention. By mid-decade, there were numerous stations (most of them small and low-powered) across the country.

## SERVICE INDUSTRIES

Service industries grew to meet the demand of the new consumer age. Retailing, wholesaling, insurance, and banking needs meant more offices and a vast amount of paperwork. The number of managerial and clerical positions grew to keep pace. Mass production, thanks to improved





Airplanes sharply reduced travel time. In 1934, travellers from Fort McMurray in northern Alberta to Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories could choose between 30 days by steamboat or 8 hours by plane.

*Canadian Geographical Journal* 10(5) (May 1935): 241.

technology, contributed to lower consumer prices. Effective advertising kept consumer goods in the public mind, heightening the demand. Chain stores became popular, accounting for 90 percent of sales by the end of the decade. Their wide array of material goods appealed to every taste. The Canadian T. Eaton Company competed effectively with such American chain stores as Kresge's, Woolworth's, and Metropolitan. Large supermarkets, such as Safeway, Dominion, Overwaitea, A & P, Loblaws, and IGA, began replacing the small corner-grocery store and offering a larger variety of food items and cheaper prices. Women dominated as retail clerks in these large grocery and department stores, but not at the managerial level.

## DISILLUSIONMENT AND THE DECLINE OF REFORM

The initial euphoria and the hope for world peace following the “war to end wars” died quickly after the armistice. Across the globe many nations, instead of emerging into freedom and liberty, slipped back into tyranny and oppression. The new millennium, embodied in American President Woodrow Wilson's fourteen-point program to ensure world peace forever, never arrived. Canadians' awareness of the failed peace contributed to their disillusionment. On November 12, 1924, the *Varsity*, the student newspaper at the University of Toronto, summarized the Armistice Day address of history professor G.M. Smith, a distinguished soldier and the winner of the Military Cross in the Great War:

The idealism of youth, and its enthusiasm in fighting for what they considered a good cause, the optimistic spirit which filled the people during the war and reached its climax when the Armistice was signed, all this is shattered by the six years aftermath. The fourteen points became the fourteen disappointments and self-determination has become selfish-determination.

After the end of the war, the peace movement gathered strength. League of Nations societies arose across the country in the 1920s, actively supported by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the National Council of Women. Other women pacifists joined the



Canadian Women's Peace Party and, later, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, an organization spearheaded by Violet McNaughton, editor of the women's page of the *Western Producer*. This organization fought to replace cadet training in schools with physical education and to revise curricula and textbooks that glorified war and the military.

Idealism and reform declined. This occurred naturally as each of the reform movements had achieved many of its goals. By 1921, workers had a higher standard of living and had achieved better recognition from employers. Women had the franchise federally and in most provinces. Prohibitionists had succeeded in eliminating legalized drinking. Educational reformers' achievements included better schools, children staying in school longer, and better-qualified teachers. Yet, in a sense, all these groups had failed in their ultimate objective: a new, regenerated, harmonious, and utopian Canada.

## PROHIBITION AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

In some instances, a reaction to reform set in. Prohibitionists, for example, saw the provincial temperance acts removed one by one. By the end of the 1920s, government-regulated outlets sold liquor in every province except Prince Edward Island. Ironically, returned soldiers — the very people prohibitionists had used to fight *for* prohibition during the war years — played a large part in ending prohibition, as they demanded legalized drinking.



The women's suffrage movement had obtained the vote, but the electorate returned few women to either federal or provincial governments. Agnes Macphail became the only woman elected in the federal election of 1921 and was Canada's first woman member of Parliament. She served until her defeat in 1940, and then sat for several years in the Ontario legislature as a CCF member. Only one other woman, Martha Black, sat in the House of Commons in the interwar years, representing her husband's Yukon constituency from 1935 to 1940, when he was incapacitated by poor health. Provincially, women did better at entering politics, although the results were a far cry from their expectations. By 1940, only nine women sat in provincial legislatures, all of them in the four western provinces. Mary Ellen Smith of British Columbia held the distinction of being the first woman cabinet minister in the British empire when she was appointed in 1921 as minister without portfolio. However, she held the position for only nine months before resigning. Even the usually optimistic Nellie McClung expressed the disillusionment of the time: "When women were given the vote in 1916–17 . . . we were obsessed with the belief that we could cleanse and purify the world by law. . . . But when all was over, and the smoke of battle cleared away, something happened to us. Our forces, so well organized for the campaign, began to dwindle."



Women faced continued discrimination. Not until 1929, for example, were women considered "persons" in the act stipulating eligibility for the Canadian Senate and a variety of other privileged bodies. In the famous "Persons Case," five Alberta women reformers — Emily Murphy, the first woman police magistrate in the British empire; Irene Parlby, who became in 1921 the first woman cabinet minister in Alberta; Nellie McClung, a member of the Alberta legislature; and Henrietta Edwards and Louise McKinney, two suffragists and prohibitionists — succeeded in securing a favourable decision from the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council that women were "persons" and thus eligible for membership in all Canadian legislative bodies.

Urban reform languished in the interwar years, in part because the middle-class group most involved in reform began to move out of the city centres and into the suburbs. Suburbanization occurred at an astonishing rate in the 1920s with the development of tramlines and the increasing popularity of the automobile.

Social gossellers within the mainstream churches retreated during the prosperous 1920s, as churchgoers became more concerned with personal prosperity and individual salvation than



with social regeneration. Church reformers within the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist churches did succeed in 1925 in creating the United Church of Canada. They hoped that this new church would rejuvenate the reformers' zeal and challenge the secularization of Canadian society. But when the new church did challenge society, it appeared to some as too radical and reform-minded. They left and joined fundamentalist churches that upheld more traditional values and beliefs, or they became members of conservative sects and cults.

## L'ACTION FRANÇAISE

In the 1920s, conservative elements in Quebec's Roman Catholic community reacted to the growing secularization of society. Abbé Lionel Groulx, the editor of *L'Action française*, which had only 5000 subscribers at its peak (but was widely read by nationalist elites), saw the onslaught of urban and industrial society as anathema to everything French Canadians believed in: the church, the family, and the French-Canadian nation. In his journal, Groulx launched an all-out attack — *l'action française* — on those forces that he believed were contributing to the anglicization and Americanization of Quebec.

*L'Action française* called for greater French-Canadian control of Quebec's modern industrial economy. While contributors to the magazine deplored the economic weakness of French Canadians, most of them still believed that agriculture should be the cornerstone of the French-Canadian economy. They opposed the growing urban migration, especially to Montreal. To *L'Action française*, the migration threatened the very existence of the French Canadians as traditionally rural, agricultural people.

Historian Susan Mann summarized the movement's outlook: "Cities bred standardization, homogeneity, and ultimately, they suspected, assimilation."<sup>4</sup> To counter this urbanization, *L'Action française* stressed the traditional values of the land, the church, and the nation. Groulx placed a special responsibility on women as guardians of the home and the family. In 1922, *L'Action française* flirted with the idea of political independence for Quebec, but it returned by the late 1920s to the position that French Canadians should have more rights within Confederation.

## WOMEN IN THE 1920S

Women made only modest gains in the 1920s. Few had the opportunity for a secondary education; in 1929, only a quarter of the national secondary-school student body were women. Of the few who entered the professions, most became teachers or nurses, while only a handful became physicians, lawyers, or professors, and a very tiny number, engineers. Nursing took on a new importance in the 1920s in light of the tremendous contribution nurses made during the war and the Spanish influenza epidemic that followed it. In 1919, the University of British Columbia offered the first university-degree program in nursing. Similar programs followed at the University of Toronto and McGill University in the 1920s.

Women who worked outside the home in industry or business — 20 percent of the labour force in 1929 — held traditional female jobs as secretaries, sales clerks in department stores, and domestics. Others worked on assembly lines in textile or tobacco factories, canneries, or fish plants. In these jobs, women earned considerably less than men doing the same job. Economic equality, like political equality, remained an elusive goal for women.

Unions did little to organize working women, even in the female-dominated industries. Seldom did they support women on strike. Some union locals included males and females, but even when unions included women, they usually subordinated their interests to men's.





Elsie Hall, class of 1920, first woman graduate of the College of Law, University of Saskatchewan.

College of Law, University of Saskatchewan.

Agreements with employers commonly included lower female wage-scales. In some cases, male-dominated unions demanded equal pay for women and men — not to combat discrimination against women but rather to ensure that employers would have no financial reason to replace male employees with females.

Although many farms were becoming more mechanized in the 1920s, the farmhouses remained basic. Prairie farm wives were also expected to help outside the house at critical times of the year, while they continued caring for the children, cooking, cleaning, laundering, and sewing. According to historian Veronica Strong-Boag, prairie women were not “pulling in double harness” but “hauling a double load.”<sup>5</sup> Rural reform leaders advocated household-science courses, co-operation, and the use of more household appliances as ways of alleviating the burden.

Urban middle-class women enjoyed a higher standard of living than their rural counterparts. Many benefited from modern labour-saving devices such as refrigerators, electric stoves, and vacuum cleaners, and from such luxuries as electricity and running water. Ironically, these “conveniences” increased the amount of time women spent in the home. In many cases conveniences simply raised the standards expected of women in the home.

A battery of “how to parent” books made child rearing more rigorous and scientific in the 1920s. In some of the books, children were viewed as “little machines” to be scheduled routinely for basic activities of eating, eliminating, and bathing. Dr. Helen McMurchy, chief of the newly created Child Welfare Division in 1919, reminded women that “being a mother is the highest of all professions and the most extensive of all undertakings.” To prepare them for

their new role, girls were encouraged to stay in school longer and to concentrate on domestic-science courses. The few women who dared to “break out” and be unconventional — the “flappers” — dressed more freely, smoked in public, and — most daring of all — drank at parties. The birth-control movement began in Vancouver in 1923 with the formation of the Canadian Birth Control League, the idea inspired by the visit of the American birth-control advocate Margaret Sanger. Women, however, had to wait until the 1930s for any birth-control clinics to open.

## THE NATIVE PEOPLES

The experience of the Native peoples in the 1920s varied across Canada. In the northern forested areas, the First Nations and Métis suffered greatly when boom prices for furs led to an influx of non-Native trappers. As well, intensive trapping resulted in a serious depletion in the numbers of beaver. Wage labour, however, partially compensated for the loss of income from trapping, now necessary to buy trade goods and store food. Some First Nations and Métis people worked as tourist guides, in commercial fishing, as miners, railway workers, and loggers. In the south, farming on the reserves declined as heavy expenditures became necessary for the new farm machinery. Among the Iroquois, high-steel rigging, although dangerous work, remained popular and lucrative. On the Pacific coast, Native people could obtain jobs in logging and commercial fishing. A number of independent First Nations operators owned and operated gas-powered gillnetters, trollers, and seine boats.

The federal government’s control over the First Nations reached new heights in the 1920s, particularly in southern Canada. In the North, Treaty Eleven, signed in the Mackenzie Valley in 1921, left First Nations with greater freedom because it did not oblige them to settle on reserves.





Georgina McKay and friends near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, each enjoying a smoke. In the 1920s women flaunted smoking cigarettes as a sign of liberation.

Saskatchewan Archives Board/R-A1259.

## LABOUR IN THE 1920s

Labour unions faced difficult times in the 1920s, as business leaders attempted to limit trade unions' effectiveness. Wage cuts, industrial consolidation, improved technology, and managerial efficiency all weakened the labour movement. Workers retaliated by staging strikes, many of them ending in physical violence. For example, 22 000 coal miners, mainly in Alberta, walked out on strike in August 1922. In 1923, a confrontation occurred in the coal mines of Nova Scotia. James B. McLachlan, the militant Scottish immigrant worker and socialist who had helped found the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia in 1917, led the strike against BESCO, the leading steel company in the region. "War is on us, class war," he proclaimed in one of his fiery speeches. The company's vice-president replied: "Let them stay out two months or six months, it matters not; eventually they will come crawling back." The company eventually mobilized its security force to break up the strike. The workers won some limited concessions, but a legacy of hatred remained. In most other strikes across the country, strikers failed to improve wages or working conditions. As a result, union membership plummeted by more than one-third by mid-decade, reaching a low of 260 000 members.

Unions were also divided. The conservative Trades and Labor Congress (TLC) continued to favour craft unions and to advocate advancement only through conciliation and government intervention. Thus the TLC refused to back the strikers against BESCO. Thus when Samuel Gompers, the founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the inspiration behind the TLC, died later that year, McLachlan, invited to the funeral, replied: "Sorry, duties will not permit me to attend, but I heartily approve of the event." In 1927, a new militant All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) union was established. It favoured industry-wide unions and strike action.

In Quebec, some workers and farmers joined Roman Catholic unions, guided by priests and sanctioned by the church. These unions attempted to isolate their members from the more secular and often socialistic "foreign" — American or English-Canadian — unions. The *Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada* (CTCC) brought 20 000 workers from a variety of industries and occupations into its organization in 1921. The *Union catholique des cultivateurs* (UCC) in 1924 had a membership of 13 000 farmers. By the 1930s, the UCC had



## A Historical Portrait

### Onondeyoh (Fred Loft)

Fred Loft, or Onondeyoh (“Beautiful Mountain”), a Mohawk in the Ontario civil service, sought the improvement of the system of education offered to the First Nations. Immediately after World War I the Mohawk veteran established the League of Indians of Canada, the country’s first pan-Indian political association.

Fred Loft was born February 3, 1861, on the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario. His parents (who spoke English as well as Mohawk) were devoted Anglicans. Fred attended a local school until the age of 12, when he boarded for a year at the Mohawk Institute, an Indian residential school in Brantford. Bitterly, he remembered the horrific experience: “I recall the times when working in the fields, I was actually too hungry to be able to walk, let alone work.... In winter the rooms and beds were so cold that it took half the night before I got warm enough to fall asleep.”

Anxious to get the best education possible, he attended high school in the neighbouring non-Native community of Caledonia. After graduation, he won a scholarship to the Ontario Business College in Belleville. After briefly working as a journalist for a Brantford paper, he obtained a job as an accountant in the bursar’s office at the Provincial Lunatic Asylum in Toronto, where he stayed for 40 years.

In 1898, the Mohawk civil servant met and married Affa Northcote Geare, a lively, energetic woman of British descent, 11 years younger than he. In 1899, Affa gave birth to twins, one of whom died in 1902. Another daughter was born in 1904. For many years the family depended on Affa for extras. She

had a sharp business sense; she bought and sold houses, rented to roomers, and owned stock.

The Lofts had an active life, with season tickets to two Toronto theatres. Fred participated in the Masons and the United Empire Loyalist Association and was active in the militia. Every Sunday he attended church. He also returned regularly to the Six Nations Reserve to visit his family. His daughters spent many summers at the family farm. Unsuccessfully, the Six Nations Council requested the federal government to select him in 1907, and again in 1917, as their superintendent.

As a staunch supporter of Britain, Fred Loft had visited Ontario Indian reserves during World War I to encourage Aboriginal recruitment. Anxious to go overseas himself, he served as an officer in France in the Canadian Forestry Corps.

Upon his return from Europe, the Mohawk veteran founded the League of Indians of Canada. The first annual meetings were held in Ontario, then in Manitoba (1920), Saskatchewan (1921), and Alberta (1922). Problems surfaced immediately. Money was short, and correspondence itself proved difficult. As Fred Loft stated, “The sad want of better schooling is evidenced by the fact that scarcely five percent of the adult population on reserves are capable of corresponding intelligently.... This is a most unfortunate admission to be made after 75 years of school work among Indians of Eastern Canada at least.” The Department of Indian Affairs’ unrelenting opposition to the league, and Loft’s poor health in the early 1930s, further weakened it.



At the time of Fred Loft's death in 1934 the league, apart from its western Canadian branches, had come to a complete stop. But Onondayoh's attempt to form a pan-Indian political organization in Canada would

succeed a generation later: today Canada has the Assembly of First Nations, formerly the National Indian Brotherhood, founded in the 1960s.

joined with the clergy to organize farmers' wives and to compete with the state-sponsored Cercles de fermières. Throughout the 1920s, the CTCC and the UCC together never succeeded, however, in attracting much more than one-quarter of the total Quebec union membership.

## CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Cultural life flourished in the 1920s in both English-speaking and French-speaking Canada. Arthur Lismer, one of the Group of Seven artists, later recalled: "After 1919, most creative people, whether in painting, writing or music, began to have a guilty feeling that Canada was as yet unwritten, unpainted, unsung. . . . In 1920 there was a job to be done." French-Canadian artists, writers, and performers shared the same aspiration, although in their case Quebec tended to be their frame of reference.

## VISUAL ARTS



In English-speaking Canada, the Group of Seven dominated contemporary art. The original members — Frank Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and F.H. Varley — had met before the war. Most had worked for the Grip commercial-art company in Toronto, and belonged to the Arts and Letters Club. Artist Tom Thomson was part of this circle of friends, but he drowned in a canoe accident in Algonquin Park in 1917 before the group formed. In the year of his death, he produced *The Jack Pine* and *The West Wind*, two paintings that have become icons of Canadian art, reproduced on stamps, on posters, and in art books. Thomson became an inspiration and patron saint for the Group of Seven, when it formed officially in early 1920.

The first Group of Seven exhibition was held in May 1920. The exhibition catalogue claimed that art must reflect "the spirit of a nation's growth." The Group of Seven believed that "spirit" could best be found in the land — in the trees, rocks, and lakes of the Ontario northland. They depicted the land in brilliant mosaics of bright colours. For the Group of Seven, the Ontario northland symbolized the nation in the same way that the West did in the American tradition — a mythical land that became a metaphor for the Canadian people. As well, the "North" represented a counterforce to the "South," especially the United States, where urbanization, industrialism, and materialism threatened to undermine the Canadian spirit.

Some art critics at the time denounced the group's paintings as belonging to the "Hot Mush School" and its members as "paint slingers." The Group of Seven thrived on the criticism. It indicated that their art challenged the establishment and broke new ground. The group found a strong supporter in Eric Brown, director of the National Gallery in Ottawa, who selected their paintings to represent Canadian art at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. By the time the Group of Seven disbanded in 1931, their members were, in the words of historian Douglas Cole, "elevated to the status of Canadian cultural heroes and their work enshrined as



## Community Portrait



### ✦ The Arts and Letters Club as a Cultural Community



Founded in 1908, Toronto's Arts and Letters Club brought together writers, architects, musicians, artists, and dramatists, with a minority membership of non-professionals "with artistic tastes and inclinations" to promote an appreciation of the arts. The membership, restricted to men, expanded rapidly in the 1910s to comprise a significant number of the Toronto arts community; it also included several wealthy Toronto entrepreneurs, friends of the arts. These entrepreneurs greatly assisted an emerging group of artists, who in 1920 became the "Group of Seven." Art historian Peter Mellen notes that "the friendly atmosphere of the club" provided the members of the Group of Seven "with an opportunity to meet Toronto's wealthy elite, who were to become their first patrons" (p. 19). These entrepreneurs found in the Club a haven from the purely commercial nature of modern Toronto. In the words of Augustus Bridle, a founding member, the Club's president in 1913–1914, and author of *The Story of the Club* (1945), the Club provided for all its members "absolute escape from all that otherwise made Toronto." (p. 10)

The members consciously created a sense of community through the Club's location, its décor, and the members' activities. Members believed that poverty would help to draw them together as a community. Hence, despite the wealth of a number of Club members, they chose very modest locations for their headquarters. Their first locale was a garret next door to the Brown Betty restaurant, which was opposite—not in—the opulent King Edward Hotel. It consisted of

one room and a cubbyhole in which to make coffee. Evicted ten months later, Club members moved to the old Assize Court room behind No. 1 Police Station, "the most impressive, inaccessible room in Toronto." Bridle boasted that "just before the inaugural dinner day we had neither gas in the kitchen nor electricity in the hall" (p. 2). Yet, the event was a great hit as members rallied in support.

In the 1920s, the Club leased St. George's Hall at 14 Elm Street, where it remains today. According to Bridle, each move heightened the mythical belief in the spirit of community that had prevailed in the previous locale, and made Club members determined to create a similar ambience in the new locale. So the first thing Club members did in their St. George location was to build a "collegiate-gothic fireplace." Then they commissioned Club member artist George Reid to paint a mural panel of the Club's Viking crest on the adjacent wall to the fireplace. The crest had been the work of artist J.E.H. MacDonald, who joined the Club in 1911. It consisted of a "Viking ship with the sails full spread before the rising sun to remind us of the open sea and the great adventure."

Club members performed rituals along medieval lines, drawing examples in particular from "the brotherhood of medieval monks" (p. 39), according to Bridle, believing that in medieval times a sense of community and camaraderie existed that was lacking in modern times. Members also purchased a farm to which they could retreat from the stresses of modern life. Camping and canoeing, and other Club activities,



contributed to a life of simplicity and friendship, they believed. As well, Club members got involved in social reform activities in Toronto to enhance the sense of community in the city at large. Of particular importance to members, especially for University of Toronto political economist James Mavor, was the Guild of Civic Art.

Nearly a century after its founding, the Club continues to have a sense of community, but with one notable change: women can now be members. In 1986, the Club finally purchased its current location, St. George's Hall at 14 Elm Street.

### Further Readings

Augustus Bridle, *The Story of the Club* (Toronto: The Arts & Letters Club, 1945).

Peter Mellen, *The Group of Seven* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970).

Charles C.H. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995).

Karen Leslie Knutson, "Absolute Escape from all that Otherwise Made Toronto: Antimodernism at the Arts and Letters Club, 1908–1920," MA Thesis, Queen's University, 1995.



Members of the Group of Seven at 1920 luncheon at the Arts and Letters Club. From left to right: Fred Varley, A.Y. Jackson, and Lawren Harris; Barker Fairley, a strong supporter of the Group but not a member; Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, and J.E.H. MacDonald. Absent was Frank Carmichael.

Photo by Arthur Goss, The Arts and Letters Club, Toronto.

### Website address

<http://home.interlog.com/~artslets/history.html>

national icons,"<sup>6</sup> even though their best-known paintings depicted only one region of Ontario, the Algoma district, a section south of the 49th parallel.

In British Columbia, Emily Carr had begun in 1908 to visit First Nations communities along the Pacific coast and in the interior of the province. She painted scenes of their villages, buildings, and totem poles. Unable to support herself by her painting alone, she ran a boarding house in Victoria. In 1927 she made a trip to eastern Canada where she met Lawren Harris and other members of the Group of Seven. Her contact with the group, particularly Lawren Harris, gave a fresh direction to her work. After first viewing Harris's works, she wrote: "Oh, God, what have I seen? Where have I been? Something has spoken to the very soul of me, wonderful, mighty not of this world."

In 1932, at age 57, Carr launched into the most productive period of her artistic career. She emphasized nature themes over First Nations subjects in her paintings. When she suffered a heart attack in 1937, she turned to writing. Her first book, *Klee Wyck*, described her early painting trips to First Nations communities. It won her the Governor General's award for general literature in 1941. *Klee Wyck*, meaning "Laughing One," was the name given Emily Carr by the Nuu-chah-nulth (formerly known as Nootka) people at Ucluelet on the west coast of Vancouver Island.





*The West Wind*, by Tom Thomson, 1917, one of his best-known paintings. Thomson died in a canoe accident in Algonquin Park in 1917, and thus was not a founding member of the Group of Seven when it formed in 1920. He did, however, serve as an inspiration for the Group.

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Gift of the Canadian Club of Toronto, 1926.

On the Prairies, Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, of Winnipeg, and Illingworth Kerr, from Lumsden, Saskatchewan, captured the region's uniqueness on canvas. In the Maritimes, a group of local artists arranged for their own exhibition and issued their own magazine, *Maritime Art*, which by 1940 had become Canada's first full-fledged art magazine. This Maritime group assisted Jack Humphrey and Miller Brittain, both born and raised in Saint John, New Brunswick, where they spent most of their lives, in becoming internationally recognized Maritime artists.

Sculptors Francis Loring and Florence Wyle, together with Elizabeth Wyn Wood and two male sculptors, established the Sculptors Society of Canada in 1928. Sculptors benefited in the 1920s from the postwar enthusiasm for public memorials.

## LITERATURE

A new literary culture emerged in the 1920s. In English-speaking Canada, two new journals appeared to capture and epitomize the cultural renaissance: the *Canadian Forum* and the *Canadian Historical Review*. In the inaugural issue of the *Canadian Forum* in 1920, the editors promised that the journal would “trace and value those developments of arts and letters which are distinctively Canadian.” Equally, the *Canadian Historical Review* noted in an article on “The Growth of Canadian National Feeling” in the second issue that the “central fact in Canadian history” has been the evolution of a “national consciousness.” The Canadian Authors’ Association



(CAA), founded in 1921 for the purpose of using literature “to articulate a national identity and to foster a sense of community within the country,” aided young English-Canadian writers in publishing their works. The CAA sponsored summer schools and gave literary prizes.

In poetry, E.J. (Ned) Pratt of Newfoundland introduced modernism into Canadian poetry in his *Newfoundland Verse* (1923). A professor of English at Victoria College, University of Toronto, Pratt used familiar Canadian scenes or events, often from his native Newfoundland, as the subjects for his poems and elevated them to mythical proportions. Pratt inspired a younger generation of English-Canadian poets.

At McGill University, a group of young, rebellious poets known as the “Montreal group” — E.R. Scott, A.J.M. Smith, A.M. Klein, and Leo Kennedy — endorsed the modernist movement. They wrote in free verse, discarded the norms of punctuation, and chose their subject material in the modern city. They began two small literary journals, the *McGill Fortnightly Review* (1925–27) and the *Canadian Mercury* (1928–29), as vehicles for their works.

In French-speaking Quebec, a group of young poets challenged the establishment in the pages of *Le Nigog*. The first arts magazine in Quebec, it was founded by architect Fernand Préfontaine, writer Robert de Roquebrune, and musician Léo-Paul Morin. Ironically, although this group and the “Montreal group” resided in the same city, they worked in isolation from one another.

Most novels of the 1920s continued to be romantic and escapist. Mazo de la Roche’s *Jalna* (1927) chronicled the life of the fictional Whiteoaks family. Her romantic depiction of rural Ontario life sold close to 100 000 copies within a few months of publication, resulting in sixteen sequels. Three novels, however, stood out for their realism: Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), in which Grove explored the inner psychic tension of a Norwegian settler on the Prairies; Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* (1925), about the tyrannical patriarch Caleb Gare, who aims to dominate both his land and his family and in the process destroys himself; and R.J.C. Stead’s *Grain* (1926), which describes the tensions that farm boy Gander Stake faces in having to choose between life on the farm and in the city.

## MUSIC

The University of Toronto’s Faculty of Music opened in 1919. The university also housed the Hart House String Quartet, founded in 1924 by Vincent Massey, of the influential Massey family. The Masseys also continued to support Massey Hall, the location of many musical performances, including the concerts of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Schools of Music also began at McGill in 1920, and at Laval in 1922.

The radio and the phonograph first brought music directly into Canadian homes in the 1920s. Many Canadian musicians got their start on radio. Radio was used effectively to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation in 1927. Beginning in 1929, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra performed 25 concerts over the radio, the last of which was devoted entirely to music by Canadian composers. The concerts could be heard throughout the country.



Frederick Philip Grove in the early 1920s, rafting on Lake Winnipeg with his daughter, May. He was actually Felix Paul Greve, a German translator and writer who faked his own suicide in 1909 by appearing to throw himself off a boat. Having successfully escaped his creditors, three years later he surfaced as Frederick Philip Grove in Manitoba. In his lifetime no one in Canada knew his real identity. The true story was only revealed 25 years after his death, when D.O. Spettigue published his biography of Grove, *FPG: The European Years* (1973).

University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections, The Libraries/PC 2, No. 10.



## POPULAR CULTURE

English-speaking Canadian popular culture became more Americanized in the 1920s. American-style service clubs such as Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, and Gyro gained in popularity, although the uniquely Canadian organization the Kinsmen, founded in 1920 in Hamilton, Ontario, held its own. (Half a century later, the Kinsmen would become Canada's largest national service organization.)

Canadians who had never set eyes on the *Canadian Forum* or even the mass-circulation *Maclean's* knew about such popular American magazines as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and *Saturday Evening Post*. By 1926, these American magazines had a combined North American circulation of more than 50 million copies of each issue. Canadian newspapers in the 1920s adopted an "American" style: glossy, plenty of advertising, sensational headlines and stories, comic strips, substantial sports sections, and a heavy reliance on American wire services for international coverage. Circulation of the nationally distributed *Toronto Star Weekly* doubled when it acquired the comic strips *Bringing Up Father*, *Barney Google*, and *Mutt and Jeff*.

Canada's first radio program was transmitted in 1920. By 1930, some 60 stations existed across the country. Offerings were sparse, as no station transmitted for more than a few hours a day. Programs consisted mainly of news, lectures, or recorded music, compared with the comedies, drama, and live variety of American programs. English-speaking Canadians fortunate enough to be close to the international border listened to American radio stations, which carried popular programs and had stronger transmitters. Rather than compete, Canadian stations themselves bought the right to broadcast these American shows. By 1930, an estimated 80 percent of the programs Canadians listened to came from the United States.

In 1928, the Canadian government established a royal commission — the Aird Commission — to review public broadcasting. The Aird report recommended that broadcasting become a public monopoly, without competitors and with limited commercial content. The Canadian Radio League, founded by English-Canadian nationalists Alan Plaunt, Graham Spry, and Brooke Claxton, concurred. They hoped, as did the members of the Aird Commission, that public broadcasting would help unite Canadians. Out of their efforts came the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in the 1930s.

Movies also contributed to the Americanization of Canadian culture in the 1920s. Initially, it did not appear that this would be the case; between 1919 and 1923, Canada had a thriving domestic feature film industry that used Canadian settings, casts, and crews. But thereafter, Canadian companies succumbed to the American "Big Five" studios — Paramount, MGM, Warner Brothers, Fox, and RKO. By 1929, these five companies produced 90 percent of all feature films in North America. They made the occasional movie about Canada, but seldom filmed on location.

As a result of large-scale urbanization and industrialization in the 1920s, there was also a return to the past—a reconstructed and highly romantic past. This took the form of a "cult of the folk," a creation of popular sites that idealized a past age. In Nova Scotia, such icons as the Bluenose, Peggy's Cove, and the Scottish bagpiper at the border, recreated a nostalgic "golden age" in the province's history. Folklore became popular. In Nova Scotia, Helen Creighton collected folk songs and stories, while at the National Museum of Canada, created in 1927, Marius Barbeau studied traditional French-Canadian and Native songs, texts, and artefacts. He also founded the Archives de folklore at Laval University, thus helping to make folklore and ethnology a respectable academic discipline. Historian Lionel Groulx created Dollard des Ormeaux, a young victim of French-Iroquois warfare in the 1660s, as a French-Canadian folk hero who had the attributes that Groulx wanted his fellow French Canadians to cultivate. In 1919, the Canadian government created the Historic Sites and Monuments Board to make Canadians aware of their history. One of the first sites reconstructed was Champlain's habitation at Port Royal, Nova Scotia.



## SPORTS

The professionalization of Canadian sports continued in the 1920s. This meant indoor stadiums, artificial ice, and large payrolls. It also meant greater Americanization. At the beginning of the 1920s, professional hockey was solely Canadian. The Pacific Coast League (formed in 1911), the Western Canadian League (begun in 1921), and the National Hockey League (NHL, inaugurated in 1917) alone competed for the coveted Stanley Cup. Then the NHL expanded into the lucrative urban market of the United States. By 1927, the NHL consisted of five American and five Canadian teams. The Ottawa Senators dominated the NHL in the early years of the decade, winning the Stanley Cup four times.

The NHL dominated hockey throughout the 1920s. It paid the average player \$900 a year, with a few exceptional players earning upwards of \$10 000. Although interest in the amateur trophies — the Allan Cup and the Memorial Cup — continued in the smaller centres, the focus remained on the NHL even after the league shrank to six teams, with only two of the teams being Canadian: the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Montreal Canadiens. Almost all the NHL players were Canadians.

New trophies were donated throughout the decade: the Hart Trophy, for most valuable team player; the Lady Byng Trophy, donated by the governor general's wife, to the player exhibiting the highest sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct; the Vezina Trophy, to the goaltender allowing the fewest goals against his team; and the Prince of Wales Trophy, awarded to the season's NHL playoff champion team.

In other sports, a number of Canadian amateurs won international recognition. Track and field athletes Percy Williams and Ethel Catherwood won gold medals at the 1928 Olympics. Williams acquired the reputation of being “the world's fastest human.” George Young made a name for Canada in swimming by winning the 32 km race from the California mainland to Catalina Island. In the Maritimes, Captain Angus Walters won the International Fisherman's Trophy three years in succession — in 1921, 1922, and 1923. His schooner, the *Bluenose* (the nickname for Nova Scotians), which never lost a race, was immortalized on the Canadian dime. The famous Edmonton Grads women's basketball team, formed from students and graduates of an Edmonton high school, dominated world basketball from 1915 to 1940. They set a world record by winning 502 games and losing only 20 during their entire careers. The Grads were recognized as world champions at international tournaments on four occasions.

Throughout the 1920s, Mackenzie King and his Liberal party dominated politics. King succeeded in diffusing the Maritime Rights movement in the East and undermining the Progressive movement in the West. He also moved Canada along the road to independence. Women and labour unions made some gains, but both groups were still far from achieving a position of equality in Canadian society. The First Nations remained very much dominated by the federal government. Culturally, English Canadians and French Canadians made important advances, but in terms of popular culture, both groups, especially English Canadians, came increasingly under American influence. Few Canadians suspected, as the decade came to an end, that it would be followed by the worst depression in world history.



The *Bluenose* in full sail — Canada's most famous ship. Winner of the International Fisherman's Trophy for three successive years (1921, 1922, 1923), the schooner became immortalized in 1937 with its reproduction on the Canadian dime.

Commercial Photo Service (Halifax)/ National Archives of Canada/PA-41990.



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1. John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922–1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p. 112.
2. Kenneth Norrie and Douglas Owram, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Nelson, 2002), p. 322.
3. A.R.M. Lower, *Canadians in the Making: A Social History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1958), p. 424.
4. Susan Mann, *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*, 2nd ed. (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), p. 223.
5. Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 (Fall 1986): 36.
6. Douglas Cole, "Artists, Patrons and Public: An Enquiry into the Success of the Group of Seven," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 13(2) (1978): 76.

## LINKING TO THE PAST

### William Lyon Mackenzie King

<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/primeministers/h4-3175-e.html>

Facts about and a brief biography of William Lyon Mackenzie King, as well as excerpts from his speeches.

### Winged Messenger: Airmail in the Heroic Era, 1918–1939

<http://www.civilization.ca/cpm/courrier/wm00eng.html>

This virtual exhibition from the Canadian Museum of Civilization offers information on early developments in the airplane industry and on the delivery of airmail.

### First Women in Provincial and Territorial Legislatures

<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/2/12/h12-278-e.html>

Biographies of the first women to be elected or appointed to political positions in Canada.

### The Famous 5

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/famous5>

A site about the lives and achievements of Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, and Nellie McClung, who won the "Persons Case," achieving the recognition of women as persons under the BNA Act.

### The Group of Seven and Their Contemporaries

<http://www.mcmichael.com/group.htm>

This site from the McMichael Canadian Art Collection includes biographies of, and reproductions of works by, the members of the Group of Seven and their associates, as well as a brief history of the group.

### History of the Arts and Letters Club

<http://home.interlog.com/~artslets/history.html>

A brief look at Toronto's Arts and Letters Club from 1908 to the present.

## RELATED READINGS

The following articles from R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation*, 6th ed. (Toronto: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2002), deal with topics pertaining to the 1920s in greater depth: Nelson Wiseman, "The Pattern of Prairie Politics," pp. 283–299, and E.R. Forbes, "The Origins of the Maritime Rights Movement," pp. 299–309.



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