

ADMINISTRATION

As early as 1670, during the reign of Charles II, instructions were given to the governors of the colonies to the effect that Indians who desired to place themselves under British protection should be well received and protected. Later it was found necessary to establish an office devoted solely to the administration of Indian affairs, and in 1755 Sir William Johnston was appointed Indian Superintendent with headquarters in the Mohawk Valley in what is now the State of New York. The establishment of this office was the genesis of future Indian administrative organization in North America. Following the American Revolution, the Indian office was removed to Canada. From that time on, a continuing administrative organization has been maintained for the protection and advancement of the Indian interests.

Until 1860, the Imperial Government was responsible for the management and expense of Indian affairs, but in that year it was decided that the Province of Canada should assume the charge. Accordingly the management of Indian affairs was brought under the control of the Crown Lands Department on July 1st, 1860, the Commissioner of Crown Lands being from that date Chief Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

By a special provision of the British North America Act of 1867, the administration of Indian affairs, which had been until then under the management of several provinces, came within the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada. At first they were made the responsibility of the Department of the Secretary of State, but, in 1873, a special Indian Affairs Branch was created within the Department of the Interior. In 1880 a separate Indian Affairs Department was established, which continued until 1936, when its functions were assumed by the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources. Since 1950, the Indian Affairs Branch has formed part of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

The primary function of the Indian Affairs Branch is to administer the affairs of the Indians of Canada in a manner that will enable them to become increasingly self-supporting and independent members of the community. Among the important functions of Canadian Indian administration are: the management of Indian reserves and surrendered land; the administration of band funds; education; welfare projects; relief; family allowances; rehabilitation of Indian veterans on reserves; descent of property; Indian treaty obligations; enfranchisement of Indians; and a variety of other matters. Administration is carried on through a headquarters staff at Ottawa and Indian agencies in the field, each agency being responsible for one or more reserves and bands. In addition to the Superintendent, the staff of an agency may include a clerk, stenographer, and assistants according to its special requirements. Medical staff is provided as required by the Department of National Health and Welfare. The work of the agencies is supervised by seven regional supervisors; in British Columbia alone, a commissioner performs this function.

Early in the settlement of North America, the British recognized an Indian title or interest in the soil that could be relinquished or done away with only if the Indians themselves agreed and even then only by transfer to the Crown. In this way the practice grew up of making agreements, or treaties as they were afterwards called, with individual tribes. The policy began during colonial times in what is now the United States and was afterwards introduced into Canada by the British.