

# Canada's Dominion Police Force

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## Rationale for Creation

The Dominion Police lasted for 52 years; but, very few Canadians today are aware of its existence. And yet, members of the Dominion Police were, in their own way, pathfinders for the Mounted Police in the development of federal law enforcement in post-confederation Canada.

Why was the Dominion Police force created? And why, in 1919, did the government of Sir Robert Laird Borden decide to disband it rather than the Royal North-West Mounted Police (RNWMP)?

In May, 1868, Sir John A. Macdonald had expressed in the House of Commons the need for a police force under the control of the federal government. The Opposition argued against it on the basis that it was an unnecessary expense and that existing forces like the Militia were sufficient for that purpose. However, on May 22, the government won out and the Governor-General gave Royal assent to an *Act Respecting The Police of Canada*. The government established the first post-confederation police force — five years before the creation of the RNWMP — and it became known as the Dominion Police.

From a small force of fewer than 20 men, the Dominion Police grew to over 500 by 1918, including a special wartime force, with responsibilities encompassing general police and secret service work. Their regulations stipulated that all appointments must

be at least five feet ten inches tall and between 21 and 35 years old.

The Dominion Police never caught the imagination of the general public. There was no kicking down of an Indian chief's tent pole in the face of angry warriors, no relentless pursuit of a criminal across the frozen tundra, nor even a Blackfoot chief to speak of how the police had "protected them as the feathers protect the eagle." Instead, clad in inconspicuous business suits, Dominion policemen went about their day-to-day investigative duties, which covered a wide range of federal laws. Their fellow uniformed officers, who were more visible to the public, performed their policing duties with respect to guarding federal government property dressed in relatively plain, workaday police uniforms. The uniform consisted of a dark blue tunic and trousers, topped off by a spiked helmet of similar hue, styled after that of the British police. As well, they, like the British force, also went unarmed.

## The Fenians are coming!... The Fenians are coming!

The Fenian scare was partly responsible for the creation of the Dominion Police. The Fenian Brotherhood was a revolutionary, secret society dedicated to the establishment of an Irish republic, independent of Great Britain. Based in the United States of America, their growing numbers presented a serious threat to the fledgling