

A Concise History of Canada's Cautious Opening of Relations With the Latins

Two hundred years ago almost every country or colony in the Americas was quarrelling with someone.

British North America—Canada to be—was preoccupied with the United States and not very interested in the America to the south.

The first faint stirrings came in 1866. The U.S. was annoyed by British North America's recent pro-Confederacy tilt, and the Fathers of Confederation, who were slowly crafting a new country, feared they might lose their best market for fish, grain and lumber. They dispatched an eight-member mission to "open communications with the West India Islands, with Spain and her colonies (Cuba and Puerto Rico) and with Brazil and Mexico."

The mission split in two. One group went to Brazil and were entertained royally in Rio at Dom Pedro II's Imperial Court. The other went to Puerto Rico, Cuba and Haiti. No one went to Mexico where the brief Empire of Maximilian von Hapsburg was about to fall.

During the next seventy-four years there were other occasional overtures.

In December 1940 James MacKinnon, Minister of Trade and Commerce, and a four-member group made a more consequential effort. They went to Jamaica and Colombia where MacKinnon had an attack of kidney stones and had to return home. They made another try in July, visiting Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and

Brazil. Within four years exports to the countries visited had more than doubled.

MacKinnon led another mission in 1946 and trade agreements were signed with Mexico and Colombia. By 1953—when Trade and Commerce Minister C.D. Howe led a large group to Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Trinidad, Venezuela, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba and Mexico—annual trade between Canada and the Latin American and Caribbean countries had topped \$500 million.

In 1968 External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp led the largest and most prestigious mission south—four ministers and thirty advisors to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Mexico. Business kept on growing.

Last year Canada sold about \$4 billion worth of goods to the Latins and bought back about the same amount.

Why They Call Us Gringos

Mexicans started calling other North Americans gringos during their country's war with the United States in the 19th century. They were, J.C.M. Ogelsby tells us in *Gringos from the Far North*, impressed by the fact that a great many American soldiers were persistently singing a song that began, "Green grow the lilacs." The compacted initial two words were eventually applied to Canadians as well.

