

The Department of External Affairs was thirty years old when war broke out. It was responsible for seven offices outside Canada, the High Commission in London, Legations in the United States, France, Japan, Belgium and The Netherlands, and the Delegation to the League of Nations. Its total staff in August 1939 numbered 174 people of all ranks. Only ten officers served then in Ottawa, of whom four were classified as temporary. Some expansion of staff clearly was necessary to cope with the varied problems of the early war years. The Department increased its staff by appointing special wartime assistants and engaging a number of highly qualified women as principal clerks, although the pre-war system of recruiting officers through competitive civil service examinations was suspended after 1940, with one exception, for the duration of the war. Not until after the war were women recruited as officers on a basis of equality with men.

Dr. Skelton's death in 1941 meant the end of an era in Canadian external affairs. He had served continuously from 1925 as Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. Prime Minister Mackenzie King immediately named Norman Robertson as Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to replace Dr. Skelton and, in June 1941, he was given the full title of Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. Norman Robertson's appointment and the growing complexity of external relations caused by the war resulted in the first formal reorganization of the Department since its creation. Below the Under-Secretary a fourfold division of the staff occurred under three Assistant Under-Secretaries who were appointed to preside over the following divisions: Diplomatic and Commercial; British Commonwealth and European; and American and Far Eastern, and the Legal Adviser who remained in charge of the Legal Division.

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