



INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA, CANADA

No. 66

(Revised May 1950)

THE CANADIAN INDIAN

At the time of the first settlements in North America about four centuries ago, the land a population of what is now Canada was peopled by the best of the aboriginal ethnologists, about 200,000. Originally they were hunters and the Europeans, the Indian population started to decline, and continued to decline until it reached a common belief that the Indians were extinct. In the last half century, however, there has been a steady increase and today the Indian population of Canada is over 170,000.

There are nearly six hundred separate Indian communities, known as "bands". With the exception of certain nomadic groups inhabiting the northern and northern regions, these bands are located on more than 2,000 "reserves", varying in size from a few acres to more than five hundred square miles set aside by the Canadian Government for the use and benefit of Indians. A number of Indians in all parts of Canada have chosen to live off their reserves as members of the general community.

Among the Indians are to be found successful farmers, ranchers, lumbermen, fishermen and trappers, while others are pursuing careers as doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, nurses, clerks, soldiers, industrial workers, stenographers, mechanics, salesmen and firemen. The Canadian Indian has proved himself quick to learn and in all fields to secure a place beside his fellow Canadians of non-Indian stock.

Although the origin of the Indians remains uncertain, anthropologists believe that they came to America in successive migrations in prehistoric times from northern Asia, probably by way of Bering Sea.

The Indians are not a single race, but are divided into a number of large language groups that are in turn subdivided into tribal groups with many local dialects. There are ten linguistic groups, of which four are found east of the Rocky Mountains - Algonkian, Athapaskan, Iroquoian and Siouan - and six in British Columbia - Kootenayan, Salishan, Wakashan, Tsalilian, Haida and Tlingit.

These groups are further subdivided into many tribes with widely different physical and cultural characteristics. The Indians of Algonkian stock are the most numerous, covering an area from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rocky Mountains and including well-known tribes as the Huron, Ottawa and Shawanese. The Siouan and Iroquoian stocks are the most numerous of the tribes and include the Cree and Blackfoot of Ontario and the Prairie Provinces.