

Women: always diplomatic and more recently diplomats

By Allison Taylor Hardy

Joseph Pope, Under-Secretary of State and Deputy Registrar-General, appeared in May 1907 before a royal commission on the Civil Service. At that time, he had been with the Canadian Government for about 28 years, including seven as Assistant Clerk of the Privy Council and, more recently, 11 as Under-Secretary of State. His examination by the commission chairman revealed that he had had a great deal to do with "la haute diplomatie", as the chairman called it.

A follow-up memorandum from Pope to the commissioners expressed his views on "the desirability of establishing a more systematic mode of dealing with... the external affairs of the Dominion". The Department of External Affairs was established in 1909 and Mr. Pope, later Sir Joseph, became Under-Secretary of the fledgling department.

Pope had been asked by the royal commissioners about women in the service. It was difficult at that time, evidently, to get qualified young men to enter the Government. Pope felt that the number of women coming into the service was inordinate. Of their employment, he commented: "Speaking generally, I do not think it desirable, though I know of several exceptions. But I am speaking of the general principle, because I find that as a rule women clerks claim the rights of men and the privileges of their own sex as well."

The commissioners questioned several other deputy ministers as well. The Deputy Minister of Labour, W. L. Mackenzie King, suggested that it was doubtful whether the young ladies serving in his department as temporary clerks were worth their \$500 annual salary. The Deputy Minister of the Interior, W. W. Cory, commented that

there were some very able women in the service, but he felt that, in the performance of the useful duties assigned to them, they could not rise to a level worth more than an annual salary of \$1,000.

The commissioners asked Mr. Cory about the likelihood of political pressure if an exceptionally gifted woman were to be promoted. "... Once you promote a woman," he replied, "if you raise her from one class to another, pressure, both from inside and outside the service, and not necessarily political, is brought to promote other women from the subordinate ranks...".

The Deputy Minister of Finance, T. C. Boville, was asked if there was any restriction on the age of female applicants. "There is no restriction in the case of temporary clerks," he said. "... Most of the women we employ are, I should say - one cannot be too curious - between 20 and 30 years of age... Our aim is to get good, intelligent women, of good character, and women whose health is sufficient to enable them to stand the stress of a good deal of hard work." The commissioners interrogated Frank Pedley, Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, on how he planned to replace senior male clerks when they retired. All members of the commission protested their lack of prejudice against women but, according to Mr. Pedley, their views "had been moulded so largely by experience" that they would think of filling superior positions with men only. "Of course," he added, "the proper principle would be if a woman is capable of filling a position she should get it. I do not see why she should be discriminated against because she is a woman."

Before the end of 1909, three young women were working for the Department of External Affairs: Emma Palmer, Grace Rankins and Agnes McCloskey. Miss Palmer had worked in the Secretary of State Department for a number of years and was on loan to the new department. Miss Rankins and Miss McCloskey had

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feared women
would claim
the rights of men*

Miss Hardy recently retired from the Department of External Affairs, which she joined in 1945. During her years in the Department, she served in Rio de Janeiro, New York and Washington, as well as in Ottawa. The views expressed are those of the author.