

THE GERMAN CONTRIBUTION TO CANADA

Germans have been in Canada since the 17th century and have made significant contributions to the economic, scientific, social and political affairs of Canada ever since. Over three centuries of almost continuous immigration have made Canadians of German origin the third largest ethnic group in Canada (after the English and French).

It is an ethnic group united by a common language and many common traditions, but not by a common nationality or religious denomination. Indeed, the majority of today's 1.3 million German Canadians trace their origins back to lands that once made up the Holy Roman Empire -- present-day Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria and parts of Russia -- rather than the Federal Republic of Germany. And while German Canadians are predominantly Protestant (Lutheran, United Church, Mennonite) one quarter are Catholic.

In colonial times, German immigrants were favoured as it was believed they would be well suited to the rigours of pioneer life. Early German settlers did prove to be excellent farmers. United Empire Loyalists of German descent and Mennonites who immigrated from Pennsylvania helped turn the forested country of eastern Canada into richly productive agricultural land. In the latter half of the 19th century, Mennonites from southern Russia were the first to demonstrate that large-scale prairie farming was possible.

The German contribution to Canada's economic life by no means ends with agriculture. Many German immigrants have been highly skilled craftsmen who, over time, have established successful enterprises in furniture production, tanning, breweries, textiles, shipping and other businesses.

Today, the names of many Canadian products testify to the German origin of their founders: Heintzman pianos, Knechtel and Krug furniture, Schneider meats and Breithaupt leather products, to name but a few.

Among the early successful Canadian business people of German origin was Sir Samuel Cunard (1787-1865), a Nova Scotian merchant and shipbuilder who founded the Cunard Line. In more recent times, especially the 1950s and 1960s, an influx of highly educated German immigrants have made their mark in a host of professional, technical and scientific disciplines.

Like their counterparts in Germany, German Canadians have made important contributions in the world of science and medicine. Dr. Gerhard Herzberg, who emigrated from Germany in 1935, directed the division of pure physics at the National