

25th Anniversary of Regional Offices

It seems inconceivable today but prior to 1970 the only place you could apply for a passport in person was in the nation's capital. So if you lived in Corner Brook, Nfld., or Abbotsford, B.C., the chances of your making the long trek to Ottawa were practically nil.

Moreover, very few people living in communities much closer to Ottawa felt they could afford the time to make the trip. So unless you lived in the Ottawa area, you probably had no personal contact with the people who would provide you with the documentation you needed to visit foreign lands.

There is no doubt that since the Passport Office first opened its doors, the public has preferred a personalized service. However, few have had complaints about the efficiency of the Ottawa staff in getting passports to them in a relatively short period of time.

The 1960s ushered in many changes to Canada's social and political landscape. Some of these changes had consequences for those who toiled for the Passport Office in Ottawa.

Prior to 1960, few Canadians travelled abroad. Those who did were mostly business people and the well-to-do. But all that was about to change before the decade ended. By 1969, the small Ottawa Passport staff was struggling to meet a workload that had more than doubled in less than 10 years.

Coincidental with the skyrocketing demand for passports was the recognition that something had to be done to prevent them from being obtained by illegal means. The integrity of the Canadian passport depended on an issuing system which ensured that passports would not fall into the hands of those who were not entitled to them.

The assassination of Martin Luther King was one of the incidents that reinforced the need to tighten controls on the issuance of Canadian passports. His killer, James Earl Ray, had successfully avoided arrest while travelling on an illegally acquired Canadian passport.

The federal government established the Royal Commission on Security to examine the issuing process and to recommend improvements. The Commission recommended both more stringent application requirements and the opening of regional offices.



From left to right - Back row: Madeleine Marcotte, Georges Leblanc, Louis-Phillippe Beaudoin, Margaret Szymanski, Lucas Beaudoin, Claudette Hébert, Michel Leduc, Joe Marrone, Sylvain Perreault, Carole Oleachea, Martine Lallouz
Front Row: Ginette Pomerleau, Joy Bodnoff, Ginette Huot, Annie Samoissette, Sylvie Lecompte-Monette, Lorraine Bienvenu, Lois Bourgeois, Laurence Orefice, Johanne Ruel
Montreal Office