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CELEBRATING OUR PAST

BY GREG DONAGHY

When the Dominion of Canada was created in 1867, it was a semi-autonomous part of the British Empire without a voice of its own in international matters.

Quickly, the new country looked for ways to further its own interests abroad. In 1880, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald established a high commission in London, adding a commissioner to France two years later. And in 1892, the Department of Trade and Commerce was established, with Sir Mackenzie Bowell as its first minister.

It was soon clear that this was not enough to handle the country's growing international activities. The lack of resources and the pressures on a small public service prompted Governor General Lord Grey to describe Ottawa as a "swollen impossible cork, the extraction of which almost bursts a blood vessel." The British Ambassador to Washington, James Bryce, was similarly frustrated by the backlog of Canada-U.S. issues that occupied his time and suggested that Canada needed "a sort of foreign office."

This idea, which was taken up by Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, led to the creation of a small Department of External Affairs in June 1909.

Britain, Ottawa demanded that it be consulted on Allied strategy. Borden was consequently made a member of the Imperial War Cabinet, and after the war, in 1919, Canada became a member of the League of Nations in its own right.

In the 1920s, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King sought greater autonomy for Canada. Supporting him was the new Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, O.D. Skelton, appointed in 1925.
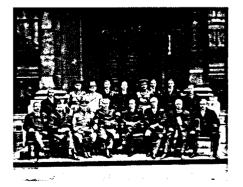
A bigger international role meant that Canada would need a true foreign ministry. Skelton worked to build it by introducing such measures as competitive examinations for the Foreign Service.

In 1926, an Imperial Conference in London gave Canada and the other dominions the right (ratified by the Statute of Westminster in 1931) to establish diplomatic missions abroad. By the late 1930s, as yet another world war loomed, the Department of External Affairs was still only a tiny ministry, with 11 officers at headquarters in Ottawa and seven posts abroad.

Canada made a major contribution to the Allied cause in the Second World War. This meant expanded ties abroad as new posts were opened across the Commonwealth, in

In 1912, Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden assumed responsibility for the Department of External Affairs, a practice followed by his successors until 1946.

Establishing a presence abroad

When Canada went to war in 1914 alongside Great

Latin America, as well as in Europe. The war also brought additional responsibilities for the department at home—for instance, overseeing trade in strategic goods and gathering intelligence.

Canadian diplomats successfully demanded an