



# Bulletin

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## DOMINION BUREAU OF STATISTICS GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

On May 24, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics celebrated its fiftieth birthday. The history of statistics in Canada is a long one. In the days of New France, the clergy kept records of vital statistics, which were made available to posterity for the years 1608 and 1621 in the writings of Champlain and Sagard. In 1666 the Intendant of New France, Jean Talon, took the first systematic census of modern times when he personally carried out a considerable part of the door-to-door enumeration. This form of census was repeated 36 times during the French régime.

Whatever else may have resulted, the changes which followed the cession of Canada to the British in 1763 did not include an improvement in statistics. Census-taking diminished, and did not again assume a regular form until well into the nineteenth century. By the 1840s however, most of the colonial areas that were to become provinces of Canada had conceived some regular form of decennial census so that by the time of Confederation in 1867 they had all had regular censuses every ten years since 1851. The first census commissioner after Confederation, J.C. Taché, was in charge of the censuses of 1871 and 1881. He was responsible for bringing together, in Volume IV of the census of 1871, a summary of the results of all the preceding censuses over a period of more than two centuries, including the vital statistics of New France.

For the remainder of the century statistical activity was characterized by the development, under various titles, of a statistical abstract for Canada (the forerunner of the present *Canada Year Book*), by the beginning of the census of Western Canada in 1886, and by expansion of statistical activities in addition to the census. Until the turn of the century, however, this expansion took place in the departments of government concerned rather than in a central agency, and included such areas as

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banking and insurance, crime, and statistics of merchant shipping, postal services, trade, inland revenue and immigration. The formation of the Department of Labour in 1900 accelerated the development of labour statistics.

### STATISTICS ACT

Recognition of the need for co-ordinated development was reflected in the passing of the Statistics Act in 1918 and the establishment of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics. In the years that followed, Doctor R.H. Coats, the first Dominion Statistician, laid the foundations for the present statistical system.

Purely statistical operations in other federal departments were transferred to the new agency. The Bureau then turned to the task of filling in gaps in the system and creating a co-ordinated system in areas as basic as vital statistics, external trade and the census of industry. A system of classification of commodities and industries was introduced. Three federal-provincial statistical conferences in 1918 and 1920 - on agriculture, education and vital statistics - paved the way for co-operation between governments at various levels.