

"We figure to select as immigrants those who will have to change their ways least in order to adapt themselves to Canadian life. . . . This is why entry into Canada is virtually free to citizens of the U.K., the U.S. and France. . . ."
MINISTER OF IMMIGRATION, 1955

An Evolution of Attitudes

[A CONTINUING SEARCH FOR TOMORROW'S PERFECT CANADIAN]

Regulations under the Immigration Act of 1906 and 1910 set a basic tone — Canada welcomed immigrants from the British Isles. It did not particularly welcome those from Asia. Its acceptance of other folk fell somewhere in between.

In 1911 the American Commission on Immigration confirmed the Canadian suspicion: the "old immigrants", the ones who came to the New World in the 18th and 19th centuries from Great Britain and northwestern Europe, were the "best" immigrants. "New immigrants", from eastern and southern Europe, had a harder time fitting in. They were, for example, apparently reluctant to become citizens.

"Other things being equal, therefore," a Canadian commentator said, "immigrants from those countries and of those stocks which are readily naturalized are to be preferred as settlers to those among whom naturalization is unduly delayed." In 1927 these principles were consolidated into law. It was some time before studies began to show that the Commission conclusion on the desire for naturalization was almost exactly the reverse of what was the case. The "new" immigrants were the ones who did take out citizenship papers as soon as possible. And indeed the immigrants from eastern Europe, notably those from the Ukraine, would prove a major and lasting part of Canada's multi-cultured mosaic. The Ukrainians came first in small numbers at the turn of the century, then in two great migrations. Between 1907 and 1916, 59,861 immigrants arrived; then there was an ebb — between 1917 and 1925 only 3,670 arrived; but between 1926 and 1930 there was a great expansion, with 45,361 landing. Almost all of them went west to the Prairie Provinces. The early comers were true pioneers, turning forests into farms. They have retained their cultural identity to a remarkable degree to this day.

Selection by origin remained the cornerstone of policy through the thirties, forties and fifties. The Depression and World War II cut the number of immigrants sharply, but after World War II a new flood began.

In 1947 immigrants were eager to come and Canada was eager to have them, particularly those from the favoured nations.

"The policy of the Government is to foster the growth of the population of Canada by the encouragement of immigration," the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King, told Parliament that year, and he added that "the people of Canada do not wish to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population." But the post-war world was more complicated, and the unscathed nations had a new sense of obligation. Canada maintained its preference for the U.K., the U.S. and France, but made an effort to open its mind, and to some degree its ports, to deserving survivors of the battlefield. In July, 1946, it was decided that single men who were ex-members of the Polish armed forces could be admitted from their stations in the U.K. and Italy if they agreed to work on Canadian farms for at least two years. Over 4500 did. An arrangement was worked out to admit Dutch farmers who wished to buy farms in Canada but who were hampered by their country's currency regulations. Some 15,000 of them were permitted to enter Canada as farm labourers who would become farm owners as soon as they could extract their money from home. Canada also made a commitment to the International Refugee Organization to accept displaced persons — in the next five years 166,000 would be given refuge. After 1948 the ban against immigration by citizens of recently enemy countries was lifted; Italians began to come in sizable numbers in 1950, Germans in 1951.

In 1950 the Government broadened the admissibility base: the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration could admit any person who, he felt, was "a suitable and desirable immigrant having regard to the climatic, social, educational, industrial, labour and other conditions." The favoured nations were still favoured; persons from the U.K., the U.S., France, Ireland, Australia and South Africa were excluded only if they had criminal records or serious contagious diseases. Persons from Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland could come if they were skilled in certain trades. Farmers and farm workers, domestics and nurses were admitted from the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Greece and Finland. A gesture was also made