

When the Dominion came into existence in 1867, there were already representatives abroad seeking immigrants for the new country. In 1894, the first member of what was to become Canada's Trade Commissioner Service was sent to Sydney, Australia. John Larke enthusiastically promoted Canadian goods but it wasn't always clear sailing. From his comments to Canadian exporters we can tell that he ran into issues Canadian Trade Commissioners still deal with today.

"The slowness with which new business can be done must be impressed upon travellers coming here. Some come over, expect to travel four or five thousand miles, do a large trade and get back by the next steamer. When this cannot be done they fret and fume and grumble at things that do not happen to be like those in Canada. They must remember they and their goods are new and unknown to this country. There is a market for many lines of Canadian goods but...it requires time, some money and patience and without this equipment I would not advise any man to come."

(Larke – 1896)

Canada Reaches Out

The First World War hastened the emergence of Canada as a self-governing nation. In 1919, Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden headed the Canadian component of the British Empire delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. When Canada signed and ratified the treaties which ended the First World War, we became a founding member of the League of Nations. Gradually our autonomy increased.

It was not until the 1920s that a substantive Canadian foreign service developed. By that time, the Department was housed in the East Block on Parliament Hill which would be its home for more than fifty years.

Canada's first diplomatic mission to another country opened in Washington in 1927. Other legations opened soon after in Paris and Tokyo. Along with representation abroad, a distinct Canadian outlook on international affairs was emerging.

Under the leadership of Dr. O.D. Skelton, a corps of bright young Canadians was recruited to form the nucleus of Canada's foreign service. In 1929, Prime Minister Mackenzie King noted in his diary that the Department had expanded into the most conspicuous, and in some respects, the most important department in the government.