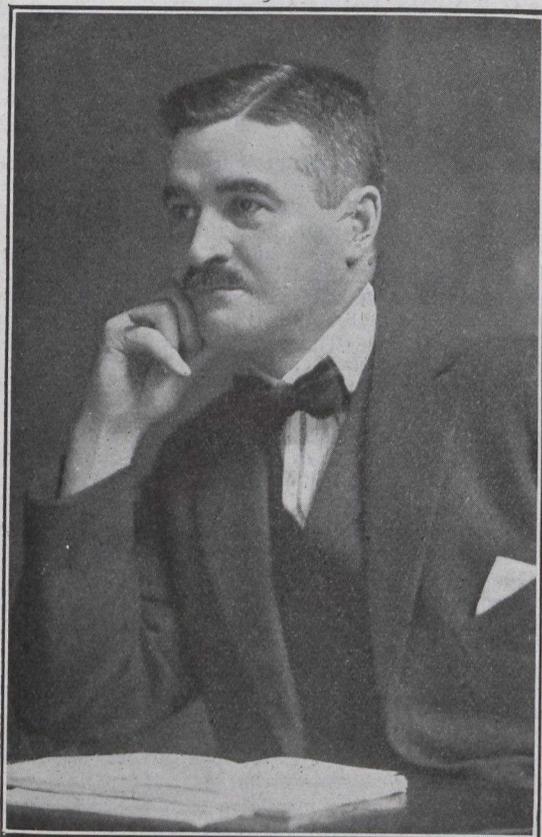


Municipal Statistics in the Province of Quebec

G. E. MARQUIS (Director of Statistics).



In a very able paper given before the Nova Scotia Municipal Convention under the title of "Municipal Organization and Statistics in the Province of Quebec," Mr. G. E. Marquis, the Provincial Statistician after outlining the municipal administration took up the municipal statistics of his province. On this subject Mr. Marquis spoke with authority, for since the creation of the department under his charge Quebec has the most up-to-date Provincial Bureau of Statistics in Canada, so that the following excerpt taken from his paper will serve to show not only the value of statistics in their general application, but in particular to municipal affairs:—

"The Province of Quebec has been gathering municipal statistics for over fifty years, but until 1915 their compass was rather limited; at the most they contained only the elements now to be found in the new form of report.

This enlargement of municipal statistics became possible with the organization of the **Bureau of Statistics of the Province of Quebec**, and the gathering and co-ordinating of several other kinds of information expressed in figures as well as agricultural and dairy statistics; the classification and publication of educational statistics, those relating to the financial position of school corporations; the judicial statistics relating to all courts of justice, to registrars, sheriffs and coroners; those of co-operative people's banks for farmers and for workmen in cities and towns; of insane asylums, prisons, reformatory and industrial schools, hospitals, homes, orphanages and other charitable institutions.

But to return to Municipal Statistics, I think it my duty to observe that our questionnaire rather closely resembles the classification suggested by the **Union of the Canadian Municipalities** which have devoted in the past much attention to a Federal system of municipal statistics. I fully understand that the same form cannot always be suitable for both rural and urban municipalities and seems too elaborate for the former and incomplete for the latter, owing to the many services in cities and towns not to be found in the country parts. But there is a beginning

everywhere, and to seek for perfection at once would be unreasonable and entail the risk of never getting anything at all. On the other hand, we have to reckon with the secretary-treasurers who do not always keep books according to a well detailed and particular system for each service. Therefore, our form is but an outline which can be extended at will, without losing its initial shape and without lack of consecutiveness in gathering information already compiled. It is well known that the value of statistics depends upon their truthfulness and accumulation. In order to ascertain whether progress is being made and to measure stages of development, thoroughly identical landmarks are needed, for, otherwise, no reasonable comparison could be made.

It is, moreover, possible in conjunction with our Department of Municipal Affairs, to draw up, for cities and towns, more extended forms giving detailed information regarding the various urban services, such as waterworks and sewers, firemen, policemen, delinquents, schools, public sanitation, street-cars, light, as well as a more complete statement of the finances of the same municipalities. These changes will not, however, in any way, affect the forms now used by us, they will merely extend them and give them a development which will be the consequence of a municipal condition peculiar to cities and towns.

I shall now pass on to the manner in which the **Bureau of Statistics** proceeds to obtain this information from the 1,242 municipalities of the province and the steps to be taken for assuring the success of this work.

It has often been rightly said that the secretary-treasurer of a municipality is the soul of the corporation, because the permanence of his position gives him an opportunity for acquiring great experience which he can place at the disposal of the local administrators, enabling the latter to better follow the precepts of the law, to prevent certain irregularities from assuming a concrete form and to correct such as might have crept in through inadvertence.

From the standpoint of municipal statistics these officers are the pivot-bolt of the municipal machine. But, with all his good will and zeal, a secretary cannot supply information he does not possess. It is therefore necessary that provision be made, in the municipal laws, for the gathering of statistics. The assessors should be the first to supply accurate and varied information about everything connected with municipal organization, such as: Classification of land, roads, population, separate valuation of lands and improvements. To that end a model of a valuation roll, before being sent out, should be approved by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council; this is the only way to insure uniformity for a same class of municipalities.

The same applies to the yearly statistical report which the secretary has to send to the Provincial Government. It should be compulsory, but rather easy to make out in order that the municipalities may perform this duty. Owing to variety in book-keeping, it is not always possible to answer questions and it is, no doubt, difficult, in some cases, to meet the government's requirements; but, with a little willingness, the secretaries nearly always manage to give the figures asked for, by grouping them in certain ways. In the United States, field agents are employed to help secretaries who find it difficult to make out these statistics. A single lesson from these officers may suffice to enlighten certain secretaries who lack experience and skill rather than willingness.

In Quebec, we send out duplicate report forms to all the municipalities, either in French or in English, according to the language spoken by the secretary, about the 15th December of each year. These forms must be filled out and sent back before the following 1st February, except in the case of some cities and towns whose fiscal year does not correspond to the calendar year.

When received, these reports are checked by a special officer and, if there are flagrant contradictions with previous reports, or if the report is incomplete or erroneous on its very face, it is returned with a request for explanation.